# FROM UNIVERSITY GRADUATES TO TEACHERS IN DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF PARTICIPATION IN AN ALTERNATIVE TEACHER RECRUITMENT PROGRAM

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Education

Queensland University of Technology

2018

# Keywords

Exceptional graduates; disadvantaged schools; China; alternative teacher recruitment program; rural teacher recruitment; reasons for program participation; pre-service assumptions; in-service perceptions; recruitment program values; capital; habitus; field; Bourdieu; localized pedagogic capital; sociology of education; exploratory sequential mixed methods design; cluster analysis.

# Abstract

This sociological study investigates the experience of graduates from prestigious universities in China as they become teachers in disadvantaged schools through a program entitled Exceptional Graduates as Rural Teachers (EGRT as pseudonym). As an alternative to China's standard teacher training and employment system, EGRT is a recruitment program for graduates generally from non-Education disciplines which values quality oriented education, educational equality, and teaching as leadership. Framed through Pierre Bourdieu's inter-related concepts of habitus, capital and field, the study adopts an exploratory sequential mixed methods design to examine crucial aspects of EGRT fellows' (recruits') participation experience. The qualitative phase explores: (1) reasons behind fellows' decision to join EGRT; (2) disparities between fellows' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions about teaching in disadvantaged schools; (3) the realization of EGRT values in fellows' involvement in disadvantaged schools. The qualitative phase is an interview study with 14 participants who were purposefully selected EGRT fellows in six placement schools located in a less-developed province of China. The subsequent quantitative phase took the form of an online survey study with 149 convenience-sampled EGRT fellows and alumni. It examined potential relationships between the aforementioned aspects in the qualitative phase.

Key findings of the qualitative phase are as follows. First, fellows decided to join EGRT for socio-personal reasons and reasons consonant with EGRT values. Socio-personal reasons were associated with seeking: (1) an alternative to a stereotyped life trajectory; (2) an opportunity to explore life and fulfil one's self; and (3) an interim sanctuary to escape feelings of being lost. Second, reasons consonant with EGRT values were manifest in fellows' altruistic and entrepreneurial dispositions that match EGRT core values.

In addition, the qualitative phase unveils many disparities between fellows' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions about teaching in disadvantaged schools. Interview participants previously assumed that local students were a group of 'cute kids' who desired to learn. The fellows also assumed the students were innocent and 'simple' due to their relative distance from the hustle and bustle of urban life. Additionally, they assumed local teachers were of poor quality given their traditional

pedagogy, low academic credentials, and severe job burnout. Yet the realities perceived by participants after entering the disadvantaged schools presented a different story. The fellows perceived the knowledge base and learning ability of local students to be even weaker than expected. Perhaps more problematically, local students were perceived to be unmotivated to learn and to misbehave frequently. However, fellows perceived local teachers to be more successful than them in managing misbehaviour, developing content knowledge, preparing students for high stake examinations, and communicating with students in the local dialect. Without local teachers to blame, EGRT fellows commonly attributed students' poor knowledge base and learning ability, lack of learning motivation, and misbehaviour to local parents. In these situations, transformative changes for local students were more difficult to achieve than the EGRT fellows had previously assumed.

What also emerges from the sub-qualitative phase are insights about fellows' involvement in their work in disadvantaged schools as classroom teachers, extracurricular project designers, practitioners of educational equality, and leaders. Within this involvement, some fellows tended to perform in accord with EGRT core values while others did not.

Findings of the quantitative phase reveal relationships among the (1) fellows' reasons consonant with EGRT values; (2) disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions of students in disadvantaged schools; and (3) involvement in accord with EGRT values. Findings indicate that participation reasons consonant with EGRT values have a statistically significant impact on their involvement in accord with EGRT values. However, the disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions of students have no statistically significant impact on their involvement in disadvantaged schools in accord with EGRT values.

The study suggests that the experience of EGRT participation is one of field transition, with a reshuffling of participants' previous capital and habitus. The significance of the study is manifold. In terms of contribution to new knowledge, the study enriches the limited body of research on alternative teacher recruitment programs in a non-western context and in China in particular. Its theoretical contribution is seen in the study's use of the inter-dependent conceptual triad of habitus, capital and field to examine EGRT fellows' participation experiences. Built on Bourdieu's triad, the study proposes a new concept of 'localized pedagogical

capital' to explain local teachers' unique strengths and advantages. Methodological originality is seen in the study's employment of Twostep Cluster Analysis in Bourdieusian research to discover underlying patterns, classifications, and relations within the participation experience of EGRT fellows. At the practical level, the study provides suggestions to alternative recruitment programs for enhancing their recruitment approaches and providing support for the development of elite graduates as teachers in disadvantaged schools.

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EGRT                       Exceptional Graduates as Rural Teachers
SPSS 23                     Statistical Product and Service Solutions 23

# Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

QUT Verified Signature

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Date: _16/07/2018_

# Acknowledgements

I still clearly remember the classroom where I met my principal supervisor Associate Prof. Karen Dooley in Beijing Normal University. She later told me that she thought I was a brave girl to directly ask her whether I could be her student, and it was the little courage that started my PhD journey in Queensland University of Technology. During the almost four years' study, I realized how lucky I am to be her student. Karen is such an insightful scholar and considerate "mummy supervisor". I also have another "critical friend", Associate Prof. Hilary Hughes. Her warm hug and smile took my fear away from both academic study and life in the new land. All the morning tea and afternoon tea having with her were so sweet! Then Dr. Michael Mu joined in the team and became my "brother supervisor". From my perspective, he is an ideal combination of kindness and wisdom. I could not count how many times I was moved by my great supervisors. They are great role models who teach me how to be a good student, an excellent teacher and a real person! The days spent with them was one of the greatest time I will never forget, and motivate me to a better me throughout my whole life.

In addition to my supervisor team, my PhD study was completed with the financial support from both CSC and QUT. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge this scholarship which allowed me to concentrate on my study by taking any financial concerns away.

Colleges and friends who stay with me for almost four years in Brisbane are treasure of me. I was not able to escape from Ms Liwei Liu since we lived in the same unit and studied in the same block. She let me know how hard to stay with another person day by day, but how great it was to have someone who were there for you, even just after a quarrel. Although I often said how much I'd like to taste the life without her, tears had been in eyes when I thought about the moment of saying goodbye. Ms Jen Azordegan is my "academic sister" with whom I could read Bourdieu. We knew each other's study so well and became such imitate friends irrespective of different nationalities, cultures, languages, and ages… This experience was so fantastic for me that she made Bourdieu even cute. I would like to extend my thanks to other dear colleges and friends, Dr. Ngan, Dr. Fatima, Dr. Hui , Dr. Kuma, Dr. Nerida, Cathy,

Michelle, Soyong, Ruijin Yang, Pengfei Pan, Mary, Lyn, Dr. Ping Zhang, Dr. Axia Song, Zizheng Zhang, Zitian Zhang, Dr. Xinxin Fan, Yanan Yang, Dr. Jianwei Liu, Dr. Xiangguo Wang, Dr. Jiajie Lu, Lisha, Melinda, Jon r, Mary, Wendy, Dr.Richard Hui, Jeremey Wong, Kou Kou, Dr. Liang Zhang. Furthermore, Dr. Emma and Dr. Martin helped me, a second language leaner, so much for the academic writing. Dr. Jo Carr helped me to edit my thesis. I was really appreciated for her quality work.

I would like to extend my thanks to other friends who are with me to experience of ups and downs for so many years. The weekly Skype with Dr. Wanlu Li has become part of my life since seven years ago. Because of her, I am able see another girl's growing-up trajectory, and this companionship is invaluable. I could not forget the days we spent together to pursue our dreams no matter how humble we were. She indeed had the magic to make tears not so bitter but happiness more meaningful. The friendship with Ms. Ming Hua has last for 13 years. Because of her, I begin to believe that good friends can become another family member for each other. Although we did not have siblings owing to the One Child policy, her appearance made me no longer feel alone. I am so different from Ms Jin Cui and no one around us thought we could be good friends. But I have to say that she made my life more colourful. She is such a beauty, but the most beautiful part of her is her sincere and care to me. Ms Haixiang Wang is such a nice girl and I am totally relaxed with her. Mr Xianghao Meng is such a diligent and kind person and give me a different perspective as my male friend. Ms Qingyi Zhao has so many funny stories and so much great dishes, and like to share with me for so many years. Ms Luyi Yang made me believe that some people seems to be friends in born since we have so many similarities and nature intimacy. Ms Xiaohong Mou and Ms Luxia Zhang are like my lovely younger sisters, and I really enjoy to have them to talk together, play together and enjoy together. Luckily, time and space do not stop our friendship. Now they work in different cities of China, and I am so happy to receive so many invitations. No matter which city I will go after graduation, they are the persons in my heart.

I also would like to express my sincere gratitude to my interview participants and questionnaire respondents. They spent their extra personal time to talk with me or fill in the online questionnaire. Their serious responses to my questions enabled me to have rich data.

I'd like to thank my parents who did not attended university but consistently supported me to pursue the highest degree for so many years. They did not learn any courses about education, but I thought they gave me the best upbringing. Whenever I meet difficulties and challenges, they are the persons who never give me up and encourage me to try my best. The unconditional love might be the most powerful. I also want to thank my uncle, aunt and cousin. I spent my childhood with my uncle who tended to be my big brother. He likes to make fun of me but really cares for me. In addition, I am really appreciated for my grandpa who leads this family and my grandma who has passed away. My grandma gave me the most intense love which I could never forget no matter how many years she left me. Thank you all so much!

# Chapter 1: Introduction

Educational inequality is a global concern. One of the reasons for existing situations of educational inequality may be the practice of placing the least experienced teachers into the most disadvantaged schools (Burnett & Lampert, 2011). In this situation, socio-economic background has become a predictor of educational (dis)advantage. Compared with their affluent counterparts, children with limited educational access to high quality and experienced teachers are easily left behind in terms of attainment and overall development (OECD, 2012). Many studies have asserted that better staffing of disadvantaged schools is one of the key considerations if school systems are to narrow gaps of educational achievement and break the cycle of disadvantage (Brown, 2014; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002; Sanders, 1998; Tamir, 2014). Yet the reality is that students in disadvantaged schools are less likely to be taught by good quality teachers—irrespective of how "good quality" is defined (Berry, 2004).

Improving staff quality in disadvantaged schools has been a long-standing problem because high achievers from both traditional teacher education programs and non-Education majors avoid such placements and careers. With respect to graduates of traditional teacher education in the U.K., placement in a school with a large population of students from families of low socio-economic status has been seen to be the least popular career choice (Brown, 2014). Similarly in the U.S., research has indicated that less than 6% of student teachers were willing to serve in disadvantaged schools (Quartz Group, 2003). In Australia, high calibre graduates of teacher education programs were much more likely to choose well-regarded rather than disadvantaged schools (Weldon, McKenzie, Kleinhenz, & Reid, 2013). Graduates with non-Education majors, especially those with the highest academic performance and overall capacity, often kept away from the teaching profession when lucrative jobs were available in the labour market (Podgursky, Monroe, & Watson, 2004). Take the prestigious universities in the U.K., for example: only about 2% of the graduates from Cambridge, Oxford, Bristol, and Imperial College chose teaching (Haines & Hallgarten, 2002). Therefore, disadvantaged schools became the least likely choice for

exceptional graduates irrespective of whether they were prepared for involvement in schools as teachers or not.

Many programs, however, have been emerging world-wide to bring together exceptional graduates from prestigious universities and students in disadvantaged schools—two groups who seldom connect with each other. Disadvantaged schools tend to have a large proportion of students mainly from low income families (Ganchorre & Tomanek, 2012; Tikly, 2013). In contrast, exceptional graduates from prestigious universities are much more likely to come from privileged families and secure positions in the middle or upper class after graduation (Lampert, Burnett, & Davie, 2012; Reay, 1998; Straubhaar & Gottfried, 2014). Therefore, these programs intentionally connect members of the most educationally privileged group and the least educationally privileged group.

Generally speaking, most of the programs with this intention happen in developed countries. Some are based on traditional teacher education programs initiated by universities, while others are alternative teacher recruitment programs run by social organizations; some are well paid while others not; and some require two years' service, and others five years or even longer. Despite such differences, these programs for disadvantaged schools share two distinguishing characteristics: (1) these programs prepare teachers for disadvantaged schools. That is to say, general schools and privileged schools are not within the service scope; and (2) the threshold of these programs is much higher than most traditional teacher preparation programs. Hence, participation in these programs is highly selective and competitive.

This study focuses on an alternative recruitment program in China: the Exceptional Graduates as Rural Teachers (EGRT). This program has recruited exceptional graduates for teaching in disadvantaged schools since 2008. EGRT is used as a pseudonym in order to maintain the confidentiality of participants, which usually leads to rich and detailed data (Kaiser, 2009).

Since 2008, more than one thousand EGRT fellows (ie. program teachers) have worked in disadvantaged schools. These EGRT fellows graduated from prestigious universities domestically or internationally, and hence have the potential to place themselves in a favourable social position given their "position taking" (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 312) with privileged cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu,1986) celebrated in the labour market of contemporary China .Cultural and symbolic capital refers to

knowledge (amongst other things) and reputation recognised in a particular social space. The phenomenon of position taking is documented elsewhere. By dint of joining EGRT, the fellows appear to choose against the mainstream trend of acquiring high social status through socially desirable careers and accumulated fortune. There is clearly much to be learnt about the young people of these later decades.

Therefore, this study aims to unveil the experience of graduates from prestigious universities as they become teachers in disadvantaged schools through EGRT. Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory, explicated in Chapter Three, underpins the investigation of EGRT fellows' social experiences. With the theoretical guidance of Bourdieu, this study adopts an exploratory mixed methods design, with the use of interviews followed by a self-designed online questionnaire, which is detailed in Chapter Four. In brief, the combination of qualitative and quantitative research phases, equipped with a powerful sociological perspective, enables systematic investigation that responds to four research questions:

> ***Research Question One (RQ1):*** *Why do elite graduates choose to participate in EGRT?*
>
> ***Research Question Two (RQ2):*** *What disparities are there between EGRT fellows' pre-service assumptions about rural-school teaching and their in-service perceptions?*
>
> ***Research Question Three (RQ3):*** *How do EGRT program values play out in fellows' involvement in disadvantaged schools?*
>
> ***Research Question Four (RQ4):*** *What relationships are there between: (1) EGRT fellows' reasons for participation that are consonant with EGRT values; (2) disparities between EGRT fellows' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions of students in disadvantaged schools; and (3) EGRT fellows' involvement in accord with EGRT values in disadvantaged schools?*

The aim of this opening chapter is to introduce the study reported in this thesis. In what follows, Section 1.1 defines "disadvantaged schools", "exceptional graduates" and "good quality teachers". Section 1.2 depicts the international trend of recruiting exceptional graduates to teach in disadvantaged schools. The overview of this kind of program includes both university-based teacher preparation programs for disadvantaged schools and alternative teacher recruitment programs for disadvantaged schools. Section 1.3 portrays the particularities of the context of alternative teacher

recruitment programs in China. Section 1.4 highlights the significance of this study. Section 1.5 outlines the structure of this thesis.

## 1.1 DEFINITIONS

"Disadvantaged schools", "good quality teachers" and "exceptional graduates" are three key terms used in this study, which are also widely used in social and educational research. They are defined in various ways depending on specific contexts. Therefore, the way these three terms are used in this study is clarified below.

### 1.1.1 Definition of disadvantaged schools

The terminology used to describe 'disadvantaged schools' lacks consistency in the literature (Lampert & Burnett, 2012; Tikly, 2013). For example, the following terms are used interchangeably by different researchers in various countries and regions: "hard to staff school" (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010); "school in challenging circumstance" (Parker, Grenville, & Flessa, 2011); "high risk school" (Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007); and "disadvantaged school" (Burnett & Lampert, 2011; Chiang, Clark, & McConnell, 2017). Although disadvantaged schools may share similar socio-economic circumstances and challenges—for instance, under-resourced communities, highly diverse populations, and undesirable locations whether in rural or urban areas—there is no universally accepted standard for identifying a "disadvantaged school".

In the U.S., 'disadvantaged school' usually refers to the hard to staff school, which tends to present the following characteristics: a high proportion of low socio-economic students with poor academic achievements, a challenging teaching environment in under-resourced urban or rural areas, a shortage of quality teachers, and a high teacher turnover rate (Darling-Hammond, 2010). In the U.K., 'disadvantaged school' frequently means school in challenging circumstance, which mainly emphasizes students' low academic attainments and does so "almost exclusively in relation to socio-economic disadvantage" (Tikly, 2013, p. 8). If more than 75% of students in a school fail to achieve Grade five in the General Certificate of Secondary Education[1], this school tends to be defined as "disadvantaged" (Tikly, 2013). In Australia, Lampert, Burnett, and Comber (2013) have defined disadvantaged schools as those with clear connections between low socio-economic situations and

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[1] Grade 5 or more in GCSE examinations is often a requirement for students to continue advanced level study.

low educational attainments. In short, the definition of "disadvantaged school" varies from setting to setting. Addressing the lack of consistency of definition, the OECD (2012, p. 110) proposed six elements for categorising and assessing schools in a clear and comprehensive way:

- Student outcomes (e.g., grades)

- Physical and human capital (e.g., facilities, staff)

- Student intake characteristics (e.g., socio-economic situations)

- School context (e.g.,violence)

- Geographic areas or regions (e.g., remote areas under-served by schooling)

- Historical or traditional issues (e.g., minority ethnic groups).

It is important to clarify what is meant by the term in the Chinese setting where the research reported in this thesis was conducted. In China, 'disadvantaged school' mainly refers to rural schools in remote areas (Mu et al., 2013). These schools tend to have the following features: (1) a majority of students from low socio-economic families; (2) low education outcomes on average; (3) a severe shortage of teachers, especially good quality teachers; and (4) poor school infrastructure.

In this study, "disadvantaged schools" refers specifically to primary and junior secondary schools located in rural areas of an underdeveloped province in south-west China. The educational outcomes of these schools are far behind those in developed cities; moreover, this 'left-behindness' has been exacerbated by the effects of teachers moving out of the area (Deng, 2014). Further detail about the disadvantage of rural schools is introduced later in this thesis in Section 1.3 about the context of EGRT.

### 1.1.2 Definition of exceptional graduates

Two main aspects define exceptional graduates in terms of personal quality and university background. Personal quality mainly refers to academic performance and generic abilities. More specifically, one of the most universally-recognized indicators for assessing academic performance is the Grade Point Average (GPA). Therefore, one dimension of the exceptional graduates is their higher academic achievement with outstanding GPAs compared to their peers. Generic abilities refer to a package of entrepreneurial traits for employability in the modern economy, such as leadership, problem-solving abilities, and team work, or some personal qualities like resilience

and perseverance, which are often celebrated in the labour market and cultivated mainly through family inculcation and extracurricular activities or internships.

In addition to personal qualities, university background is another criterion. Prestigious universities are higher education institutions which enjoy high positions whether in national or international ranking. These universities are never short of rich educational resources, outstanding outcomes, and high prestige in society. Some universities are universally recognized as prestigious universities, such as those in the Ivy League[2] in the U.S., the Russell Group[3] in the U.K., and the Group of Eight[4] in Australia. There are no universal assessment criteria for a prestigious university, but student selectivity is regarded as one of the most crucial characteristics. A high degree of selectivity is the most noticeable symbol of prestigious universities (Brand & Halaby, 2006; Tamir, 2009). Given their "immense power and resources", prestigious universities play a key role in transforming well-selected students into "society's political, economic, and cultural elites" (Tamir, 2009, p. 529).

In mainland China, the number of degree-awarding four-year universities has increased to 1202 (Ministry of Education, 2016). Amongst these higher educational institutions, structural stratification is notable, with 112 universities being designated as 211 Project universities and 39 as 985 Project universities. To be more specific, the Chinese central government initiated the 211 Project in 1995. This project provided additional financial support to enhance the competitiveness of approximately 100 selected institutions of higher education in the 21st century. The Project name "211" denotes the 21st century and 100 universities. Ambitiously, the Chinese government then announced that it was establishing a selected cohort of world-class universities in the 21st century. These universities were called "985 Project" universities. The project name "985" denoted the year and month of the establishment of the project in May, 1998. The 985 Project universities were further selected from universities involved in the 211 Project, which indicated that universities listed in the 985 Project were the

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[2] Ivy League schools are generally viewed as some of the most prestigious and best universities worldwide, such as Harvard University, Princeton University, and Yale University.

[3] The Russell Group is a self-selected association of 24 prestigious British public research universities. The term Russell Group has connotations of academic excellence and social elitism.

[4] The Group of Eight (Go8) are well regarded as leading universities of Australia, such as Australian National University, University of Melbourne, and University of Sydney.

most selective and prestigious. Universities listed in the 211 Project and 985 Project accounted for 9.3% and 3.2% of China's higher education institutions respectively.

The vast majority of 985 Project and 211 Project universities are located in metropolises (e.g., Beijing) and provincial capital cities (e.g., Hangzhou). The geographical distribution of prestigious universities also points to the unequal distribution of higher education resources in China. Central and local governments allocate large amounts of funding to support these universities in order to help them develop into world class universities. Enjoying a wide variety of privileges and high prestige, all these universities are extremely selective, drawing the most successful students from the College Entrance Examination. Considering the comprehensive overall quality of students and special talents, autonomous enrolment was conducted by 90 universities in 2017. However, this strategy just accounts for a small proportion (5% of the enrolment of each university), and scores on the national examination are the main reference for enrolment. In the epoch of rapid higher education expansion and credential inflation, the prestige of one's university plays a crucial role in competing for lucrative jobs (Li, 2013).

In summary, in this study "exceptional graduates" refers to prestigious university graduates having both high GPAs and outstanding non-academic personal abilities valued in the wider labour market.

### 1.1.3 Definition of good quality teachers

Students in disadvantaged schools are less likely to be taught by good quality teachers no matter how "good quality" is defined (Berry, 2004). However, defining "good quality teacher" is notoriously difficult (Tikly, 2013). Teacher quality is globally emphasized and regarded as the crucial factor to improve student outcomes and wellbeing. A review of international literature locates four most frequently mentioned factors in conceiving teacher quality, especially in the recruitment and retention of good teachers in disadvantaged schools. First, academic qualification has been one of the most widely used criteria to measure teacher quality (OECD, 2012). Whether a teacher holds a university degree has a significant impact on students' academic outcomes (Slater, Davies, & Burgess, 2012). Second, certification is viewed as a mark of teacher quality. Individuals can usually obtain qualified (certified) teacher status through formal teacher education training. However, schools involved in programs delivering exceptional graduates to disadvantaged schools are allowed to

employ staff without teaching certification (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009). Third, pedagogical skills and knowledge play a significant role in the process of delivering subject knowledge to students. Fourth, the number of years of teaching is another vital indicator of teacher quality. Evidence shows that teachers become more effective with increasing teaching experience (Miller & Chait, 2008).

Professional indicators such as pedagogy and teaching experience have been valued for over half a century in cases where education is viewed as a kind of public service funded by public money and for general public good (Olmedo, Bailey, & Ball, 2013). However, education is becoming more open to the private sphere and subject to discourses of neoliberalism (Olmedo, et al., 2013). Influenced by the neoliberalism discourse in terms of privatisation, marketization and individualization, an audit culture has emerged in evaluating teachers (Apple, 2005). Continuing this idea, the generic managerial practices associated with students' academic performances in standardized tests are strongly emphasized. Accordingly, specific expertise such as pedagogical knowledge and skills, as well as teaching experience, tends to be less valued. The good teacher is now often constructed as an entrepreneur with a list of the auditable competencies (e.g., qualifications, leadership) celebrated by neoliberalism.

In addition to the factors mentioned above, in a Chinese context a good quality teacher is usually regarded as the moral role model for students (Peng et al., 2014). Moreover, teacher quality is also related to the work attitude and spirit of a teacher. Good teachers have long been metaphorically portrayed as a silkworm, for being relentlessly hardworking (Boyle, 2000).

In conclusion, the definition of good quality teachers in the discourse of alternative teacher recruitment programs for disadvantaged schools largely corresponds with neoliberal discourse, as discussed in Section 1.3.1. The concept of the good teacher tends to accentuate personal charisma, natural intelligence, outstanding academic performance, excellent personal overall quality, and educational passion.

## 1.2 AN INTERNATIONAL TREND OF DELIVERING EXCEPTIONAL GRADUATES TO DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS

Recent years have witnessed a global trend by which many programs have recruited high academic achievers both from traditional teacher education and non-

Education majors to teach in disadvantaged schools (Burnett, Lampert, Patton, & Comber, 2014; Straubhaar & Gottfried, 2014). In order to have a better understanding of this trend, several typical and influential programs are chosen as examples in this study, including the University of Chicago Urban Teacher Education Program, the University of California Los Angeles Teacher Education Program, the National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools, the Free Teacher Education Program, Teach for America, Teach First and Teach for Australia. Since the first four programs are established in universities, in this study they are defined as 'university-based teacher preparation programs for disadvantaged schools'. In contrast, the latter three programs are influential programs initiated by organizations outside the university or formal education system; hence, they are taken as typical examples of 'alternative teacher recruitment programs for disadvantaged schools'.

Since traditional university-based teacher education programs are initiated by universities, they usually take advantage of the resources available for traditional teacher education. The university-based teacher preparation programs for disadvantaged schools sometimes occur in only a single university, like the University of Chicago or the University of California Los Angeles, or they may be found in several universities that collaborate with each other to cultivate high achieving graduates for disadvantaged schools. The National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools and the Free Teacher Education Program are cases in point. Table 1.1 profiles these four university-based teacher preparation programs for disadvantaged schools.

Alternative teacher recruitment programs differ from traditional university-based teacher education programs in that they are initiated by various non-profit organizations/non-government organizations and supported by social enterprises. Among alternative teacher recruitment programs, Teach for All can be regarded as the most influential, covering 46 developed and developing countries and regions. Despite different local versions, the program in each country and region has a similar mode of recruiting top graduates from prestigious universities to teach in disadvantaged schools for two years. During this process, program participants are expected to contribute to educating children in disadvantaged schools, while cultivating leadership necessary for future social change.

Table 1.1

*The basic information of four university-based teacher preparation programs for disadvantaged schools*

| Program name | Year | Country | Founding University |
|---|---|---|---|
| **University of Chicago Urban Teacher Education Program** | 2002 | U.S. | University of Chicago |
| **University of California Los Angeles Teacher Education Program** | 1992 | U.S. | University of California, Los Angeles |
| **National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools** | 2009 | Australia | Queensland University of Technology University of New England University of Newcastle |
| **Free Teacher Education Program** | 2007 | China | Beijing Normal University East China Normal University Northeast Normal University Central China Normal University Shanxi Normal University Southwest University |

Among Teach for All programs, Teach for America and Teach First are the most developed and influential programs, which are the role model for their sibling programs in other countries (Olmedo, et al., 2013). Teach for Australia, a more recent program established in 2010, is becoming increasingly popular. According to its official statistics, Teach for Australia have had more than 8000 applicants up to 2017. To show the rapid expansion of Teach for All programs, Table 1.2 summarises the official statistics of Teach for America, Teach First and Teach for Australia.

Table 1.2

*The basic information of three typical alternative teacher recruitment programs*

| Scale | Teach for America U.S. | Teach First U.K. | Teach for Australia Australia |
|---|---|---|---|
| **First cohort of teachers (year)** | 384 (1990) | 186 (2003) | 45 (2010) |
| **Total number of teachers (year)** | 46,500+ (2016) | 10,000+ (2017) | 549 (2017) |

Although university-based teacher preparation programs for disadvantaged schools and alternative teacher recruitment programs for disadvantaged schools share the fundamental similarity of delivering exceptional graduates to disadvantaged schools, there are some dissimilarities. To begin with, the scale of university-based

teacher preparation programs for disadvantaged schools is usually much smaller than alternative teacher recruitment programs for disadvantaged schools. Other subtle differences have been identified through their program mission descriptions (See Table 1.3). On one hand, the goals of university-based teacher preparation programs for disadvantaged schools are to cultivate professional teachers and educators. However, most alternative teacher recruitment programs for disadvantaged schools seem much more ambitious, and program participants are expected to become promising future leaders beyond schooling contexts. The mission of Teach for Australia seems to combine those of university-based teacher preparation programs for disadvantaged schools and alternative teacher recruitment programs for disadvantaged schools. Teach for Australia fellows are expected to become both exceptional teachers and inspirational leaders.

On the other hand, most university-based teacher preparation programs for disadvantaged schools clearly identify their target service population, that is, students in low socioeconomic status schools, or disadvantaged schools[5]. In this respect, the missions of university-based teacher preparation programs for disadvantaged schools are viewed as "better staffing disadvantaged schools". In contrast, the description of the service destination of alternative teacher recruitment programs, like "urban settings" and "low socioeconomic status schools", does not appear as explicitly as university-based counterparts. In alternative teacher recruitment programs, "change" is a crucial theme. Participants are expected to bring transformative change not only to the children in disadvantaged schools, but also to the whole education system and even the whole society.

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[5] Free Teacher Education Program does not point it out as noticeably as other programs. However, in its detailed policy, this program requires that all program participants teach in rural areas for at least two years.

Table 1.3

*Program mission of university-based teacher preparation programs for disadvantaged schools and alternative teacher recruitment programs for disadvantaged schools*

| Program Name | Program Mission |
|---|---|
| **University-based Teacher Preparation Programs** | |
| University of Chicago Urban Teacher Education Program | prepare *teachers of highest calibre* for Chicago Public schools while developing a model for *urban teacher preparation* |
| University of California Los Angeles Teacher Education Program | prepare aspiring teachers to become *social justice educators in urban settings* |
| National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools | prepare *highest performing pre-service teachers* to work in *low socioeconomic status schools* |
| Free Teacher Education Program | prepare future *excellent educators* and cultivate social atmosphere to respect teaching career |
| **Alternative Teacher Recruitment Program** | |
| Teach for America | enlist, develop, and mobilize as many as possible of our nation's most *promising future leaders* to grow and strengthen the movement for *educational equity and excellence* |
| Teach First | end inequality in education by building a community of *exceptional leaders* who create *change within classrooms, schools and across society* |
| Teach for Australia | transform outstanding individuals into *exceptional teachers and inspirational leaders*, who will help change the lives of their students, and become *future change makers* in Australian education |

Note: all information in this table was cited from the official website of each program

In brief, university-based teacher preparation programs for disadvantaged schools tend to define their participants as outstanding teachers who strive for educational equality in disadvantaged schools. In contrast, alternative teacher recruitment programs tend to define their participants as future leaders who work in accord with principles of social justice but also pursue personal development. In respect to these missions, many studies have revealed that deficit thinking is embedded in programs which deliberately deliver graduates from prestigious universities to students in disadvantaged schools (Anderson, 2013; Kavanagh & Dunn, 2013). In the discourse of these programs, this deficit thinking frames students in disadvantaged schools as inferior, characterised by "behaviour in pathological or dysfunctional ways—referring to deficits, deficiencies, limitations, or shortcomings in individuals, families, and cultures" (Valencia, 2010, p.14). Students in disadvantaged schools are viewed as born with limited innate intelligence, and their strengths as hard to locate.

Consider several alternative teacher recruitment programs for example. The rhetoric of deficit thinking is pervasive, as shown in official promotional materials (See Table 1.4). In this discourse, students of colour or low SES have already been labelled as low academic achievers. These rhetorical strategies depict poverty as a major challenge associated with students in disadvantaged schools. Poverty is connected with low expectations from families and communities. Consequently, the gap of academic achievement existing between students in disadvantaged schools and their affluent middle class peers is highlighted. These discourses are used to justify why participants of programs such as EGRT are construed as young leaders and are delivered to the disadvantaged school to 'make a difference'.

Table 1.4

*The descriptions of students in disadvantaged schools of alternative teacher recruitment program*

| Program Name | The description of students in disadvantaged schools |
|---|---|
| Teach for America | Children in extreme poverty are **half** as likely to graduate from high school. |
| Teach First | Poorer pupils **have less than half** the chance of going to a high-quality school compared to their wealthier peers. |
| Teach for Australia | By age 15, children from the lowest socioeconomic households are on average almost **three years** behind in school than children from the highest socioeconomic households. |

Note: all information in this table was cited from the official website of each program

This deficit thinking did a lot of harm. Influenced by deficit thinking, the limited academic performance of students was not only linked back to their SES but also used to predict limited possibility of success (Ford, 2008). In this situation, students in disadvantaged schools are more likely to be subjected to excessive discipline, control, and extra interventions (Delipit, 1995; Garcia, 2004). Students are not the only victims of deficit thinking. Disadvantaged communities and children's parents are also blamed. There is a pervasive belief that parents of students in disadvantaged schools do not value education. They are assumed to be unwilling or incapable of taking up their responsibility of collaborating with the school to produce quality education (Alonso et al, 2009; Payne, 2008; Shield et al., 2005, West, 2001). Additionally, research suggests that teachers working in disadvantaged schools often feel helpless and ineffective. They tend to feel disempowered and to believe that "these kids can't be helped" (Fine, 1192, p.121).

Deficit thinking is widely criticised in sociological studies. When programs serving low-income communities fail, students and their communities are further blamed and deficit thinking is more likely to be reinforced (Garcia, 2004). The hallmark of deficit thinking is widely accepted. Thinking is considered deficit when "individual students as well as their families and communities become targeted and blamed for academic underperformance" (Anderson, 2013, p. 32). Some researchers even argue that programs delivering exceptional graduates to disadvantaged schools might intensify educational inequality (Kavanagh & Dunn, 2013).

In conclusion, this section has introduced the efforts and underlying logic of both universities and social organizations to deliver exceptional graduates to disadvantaged schools, especially alternative teacher recruitment programs. The next section considers the Chinese social context of the alternative teacher recruitment program for disadvantaged schools as a newly emerging social phenomenon. It seems that such programs have waded into the landscape of teacher education in China—a setting in which teacher education has long been centrally controlled.

## 1.3 CONTEXT OF ALTERNATIVE TEACHER RECRUITMENT PROGRAMS IN CHINA

Historically, teacher education and the recruitment of teachers in China have long been centrally planned and tightly controlled by the government (Crowley, 2016). The introduction of alternative teacher recruitment programs is the product of global neoliberalism, the urban-rural education divide in China, and the difficulties of staffing disadvantaged schools.

### 1.3.1 Alternative teacher recruitment programs in a neoliberal educational context

Neoliberalism refers to private interests intruding into the public arena through policies and power interests for maximising personal profit (Chomsky, 1998). In the past few years, neoliberalism has increasingly penetrated both schooling and higher education. In the neoliberal discourse, education is no longer construed only in terms of the public good, and hence a sector warranting sole control by governments; rather, it is viewed as a private commodity that can be provided by the private and not-for-profit sectors. The constellation of alternative teacher recruitment programs is one type of program that has flourished under the neoliberal paradigm in school education (Weiner, 2007). It is evident in the following three ways.

First, some researchers argue that alternative teacher recruitment programs are privatizing the public school system (Kretchmar, Sondel, & Ferrare, 2014). Public education has been opened up to private involvement (Kavanagh & Dunn, 2013). By way of justification, alternative teacher recruitment programs depict current public forms of education as terrible in order to make sense of the need for private investment in education (McConney, Price, & Woods-McConney, 2012).

Second, the evaluation of both students and program participants is performative, that is, based on "directives and data monitoring" (Jobs, 2015, p.40). Words and phrases like 'standards', 'accountability', and 'increased student achievement' have high frequency in marketing and recruitment documents (Kavanagh & Dunn, 2013). The measurable academic attainments of students from low SES families are contrasted with those of their high SES counterparts. This gap is then defined as an achievement 'gap'. In this situation, program participants are valued based on how much they can help students close this gap as measured in standardised tests (Winer, 2007, Barber, 2004). The performance improvement of students is thereby used to legitimize the alternative teacher recruitment programs.

The third explicit neoliberal feature relates to deprofessionalization. Alternative teacher recruitment programs have long been criticized for causing a professional crisis in schools, especially in the following aspects: insufficient pedagogical preparation, ineffective student management skills (Anderson, 2013; Wang & Gao, 2013; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005), and inadequate skills in contextualizing curriculum and understanding child development theories (Heilig & Jez, 2010; Weldon, et al., 2013; Labaree, 2010, Xu, Hannaway & Taylor, 2009, Veltri, 2010; Kavanagh, 2010). Moreover, the prerequisite capabilities of teachers are seen to be narrowed down to content knowledge, general intelligence and good will to teach poor children (Anderson, 2013). Successful program applicants are usually depicted as innately gifted, that is as 'born teachers' (Smart, Hutchings, Maylor, Mendick, & Menter, 2009). In sum, most alternative teacher recruitment programs are viewed as a "rescue mission rather than a true profession" (Raymond & Fletcher 2002, p.64).

During this process of the deprofessionalization of teaching, a large amount of business and managerial oriented terminology is introduced into alternative teacher recruitment programs through marketing strategies and training (Thomas & Lefebvre, 2017). Training is often delivered by advocates of corporate culture who equip

program participants with an entrepreneurial and business mind. In this situation, relevant training regarding business and management is usually offered by enterprises and business. Additionally, the teacher is reconceptualised as a leader in the classroom, hence, leadership is highly stressed in these programs and participants are expected to transfer to other settings after a few years (Olmedo, et al., 2013). The overemphasis on leadership can deprofessionalize teaching.

As a result of the globalization of neoliberal educational initiatives and reforms, the central planning model of shifan (师范), or "normal institutions" for teacher education, has been intruded on by the western mode—alternative teacher recruitment— in recent years. Therefore, EGRT, as a typical example, has been able to develop quickly in China, influenced by educational modes of western neoliberalism.

### 1.3.2 The gap in educational opportunity between urban and rural China

Owing to the Reform and Opening-up Policy of 1978, China has experienced an unprecedented transformation from a planned to a market economy (Vickers & Zeng, 2017). In 2011, China surpassed Japan and became the second most powerful economy in the world. Yet the fruits of China's high speed economic development have not been equally shared within the whole country. China has developed an "urban priority and urban oriented" pattern for accelerating modernization and industrialization since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 (Rao & Ye, 2016, p. 10). This urban-biased policy has led to social stratification - even the polarization of society. Consequently, the rural-urban gap has been widening drastically to the point which has been described metaphorically as an invisible Great Wall (Knight & Song, 1999). More specifically, the average urban household income per capita is over three times higher than that in rural areas, with rural residents enjoying much less right to and privilege of social welfare (Knight & Gunatilaka, 2010). Related to this, rural residents are sometimes regarded as inferior or "second class citizens" (Li, 2013, p. 829).

Public education, as one of the most important components of social welfare, cannot escape this urban priority and urban oriented path. Hence, the gap in education quality between rural and urban areas seems almost inevitable. The distribution of educational resources works in accord with both the decentralization and the concentration model. In line with the decentralization model, school funding policy

has shifted the financial responsibility for education from the township to the county, which means that the local education budget tends to rely on the local economy (Rao & Ye, 2016). Since finance in rural areas, especially that in western regions of China, is much less adequate than that of the urban areas in the eastern coastal regions, rural local authorities have less funding to invest in education. In this situation, the education gap between the eastern urban cities and the western remote areas of China has increased significantly. The gap can be seen in the odds of school attendance: rural children are 3.7 times less likely to go to school compared with their peers in urban cities (Hong, 2010).

Another feature of the distribution of educational resources is centralization. The state decided to concentrate the limited available resources on investing in key schools in cities. This approach aims to cultivate talents serving the nation's economic development. Therefore, a hierarchical schooling system has emerged, with 'ordinary' schools receiving much less in the way of financial support and educational resources than key schools. There is also a hierarchy of key schools: county, city, provincial and national level key schools. Therefore, the key schools are the product of concentration. For the purposes of this thesis, it is also crucial to note that most key schools are located in urban areas.

Therefore, rural schools have been doubly affected by decentralization and concentration. Together, these two forces have contributed to the problem of rural children lagging behind their urban counterparts. This structural disadvantage has been a source of national concern: in the media, rural students have long been depicted as children who yearn for knowledge and are keen to learn. Images usually show these school-hungry students with big and shining eyes. As a result, a widely-accepted stereotypical impression of rural students is that these children are eager to learn but are constrained by limited educational opportunities. This easily arouses empathy and notions of social justice in the public. Although many programs and policies have funded rural students and rural schools, the shortage of good quality teachers for rural areas has not yet been solved.

### 1.3.3 Severe shortage of good quality teachers in rural areas

The lack of good quality teachers in rural areas of China is considered a major barrier for educational equity. First, the academic credentials of rural teachers are much lower than those of teachers in urban areas. Based on the national report of the

Ministry of Education (2012), the proportion of teachers with an undergraduate or postgraduate degree in urban cities and rural regions is 48.65% and 15.22% respectively. Second, there is a structural shortage of teachers in English, art, and physical education, as well as science and technology in rural schools (Deng, 2014). Third, as revealed by the statistics of the Research Group of the Curriculum and Research Centre (2010), there is a large number of substitute and part-time teachers, generally unqualified and unlicensed. This is observed in more than 80% of rural primary schools and more than 60% of middle schools. Accompanying the scant flow of good quality teachers to rural areas, experienced local teachers are likely to move to developed cities if they get the opportunity (McQuaide, 2009; Peng & Zhou, 2011). Finally, the knowledge and teaching skills of rural teachers are considered to be out-of-date and inadequate (Dello-Iacovo, 2009).

In response to the problems of teacher quality described above, a university-based teacher preparation program for disadvantaged schools, Free Teacher Education Program, was initiated. Under this program, the tuition fee for student teachers is waived, but with the obligation of teaching for 10 years after graduation in the area from where they had come. However, in a large survey of 1800 FTEP students, four-fifths were likely to break their contract (Zhou, 2010). The reality was actually much worse: in 2011, a mere 4% of the 10,597 graduates of the Free Teacher Education Program went to teach in schools located in rural areas (Wu, Huang, & Yin, 2011). That is to say, the program failed to achieve its aim of delivering exceptional graduates to rural schools.

In addition to efforts made by the university-based teacher preparation programs for disadvantaged schools, non-profit organizations have also contributed in this regard since the 1980s. Within this sector, EGRT, an alternative teacher recruitment program for disadvantaged schools, aims to solve educational inequality by staffing disadvantaged schools with exceptional graduates from prestigious universities. It should be noted that EGRT is not the only program of this type in China: the principles of alternative teacher recruitment have been taken up by more than one program seeking to resolve the problems of teacher quality in rural areas (Crowley, 2016). The next section will further introduce the EGRT program with more concrete details.

### 1.3.4 Alternative teacher recruitment program in China

Alternative teacher recruitment programs originated in countries such as the United States and England. Against the backdrop of global neoliberalism, this mode of teacher recruitment has been introduced into the landscape of teacher education in China. Founded in 2008, EGRT is a typical alternative teacher recruitment program in China. It has registered as a Private Non-enterprise Entity which recruits exceptional graduates to work as classroom teachers for rural areas where educational resources are extremely scant. EGRT fellows are expected to not only impart knowledge to students in disadvantaged schools, but also to have a transformational impact on local students and communities.

The disadvantaged primary and middle schools partnered with EGRT are located in rural areas of several provinces of China. The research reported in this thesis was undertaken in an under-privileged county in China's south-west. Public schools there continuously suffer from a severe shortage of teachers, so that average class size often exceeds 50 students. In addition to lacking teachers, many parents work as migrant labourers in cities far away from their hometowns, leaving their children behind (Zhou & Shang, 2011). In this situation, EGRT began collaboration with local schools for relieving the teacher shortage and educational inequality. Key features of EGRT are described in relation to the following three aspects: core values, recruitment and training, and support of EGRT.

*EGRT core values*

Three core values of EGRT have been identified: high quality education, educational equality and leadership. These values are explicitly demonstrated in slogans for the program, and repeatedly emphasized by various promotional films, reports, and personal stories in promotional materials.

The first core value is high quality education. High quality education does not only refer to academic attainment, but also to the holistic development of students. In the discourse of the current Chinese educational context, high quality education usually refers to suzhi（素质）education, namely, quality-oriented education, as opposed to examination-oriented education. Although the Chinese government began to promote quality-oriented education in 1994, examination-oriented education is still prevalent in both urban and rural areas owing to the limited qualified educational

resources available to a large population (Wu, 2016). Nevertheless, in recent years, quality-oriented education has been ideologically accepted and at least to some degree implemented in urban areas. However, in rural areas, examination-oriented education is still dominant both theoretically and practically.

In this situation, the term high quality education, mainly refers to quality-oriented education, and denotes schooling that makes use of student-centred methods. This education approach aims to form young people who are well-rounded, morally cultivated, rich in skills required by the national economy at a time of intensifying international competition (e.g., higher order thinking, team work, creativity), and nationalistic in identity (Wu, 2012; Wu, 2016). Following this value, the official website of EGRT highlights students' progress of academic attainment led by EGRT fellows. However, this progress arises from quality-oriented approaches rather than their examination-oriented counterparts. Therefore, the high profiled fellows promoted by EGRT are those who successfully advance students' performances while also initiating influential extracurricular projects. This is assumed to reflect fellows' personal passion and talents.

The second core value of educational equality indicates that the single emphasis on high quality education is not enough. From the perspective of EGRT, this high quality education should be equally available for every student irrespective of birthplace, socio-economic situation, gender and race, and current academic outcomes, as all students deserve good education. The emphasis on educational equality works in accord with a discourse of egalitarianism which denotes an aura of absolute equality.

The third core value of EGRT is leadership. The assumption seems to be that attainment of high quality education and equal educational opportunity rely on the application of leadership. Fellows are portrayed as charismatic team leaders, and students as their followers. Influenced by fellows' leadership and personal charms, students ought to follow of their own accord, rather than through fear of authoritarian punishment. Then fellows—that is, the leaders—are expected to bring transformative changes to the students. EGRT fellows are also expected to rise to the challenges that they face in disadvantaged schools. Creating transformative change and rising to challenges, in the long run, is perceived as a priceless opportunity for EGRT fellows to become future leaders in education. This logic can be found also in other high profile

alternative programs of teacher recruitment for disadvantaged schools around the world (e.g., Olmedo et al., 2013).

### *EGRT recruitment*

Towards the end of the academic year, the EGRT recruitment team enters universities to advertise the program and to approach potential participants. Candidates then undergo a lengthy registration and application process involving online and face-to-face selection activities. According to the recruitment criteria, all applicants must hold a bachelor degree at least. In addition, EGRT uses other criteria relating to generic abilities valued in these times of globalisation (e.g., communication skills, personal learning capabilities, thinking skills). Only a small fraction of applicants make it through the selection process to become EGRT fellows. In short, competition is fierce.

### *EGRT Training and support*

After selection, EGRT fellows are required to compulsorily engage in program training before and after their placement in rural schools. Training includes an initial intensive course of several weeks' duration, orientation, in-service professional development, and regular meetings with program managers. Fellows also enjoy access to alumni events. Of all the activities, intensive training seems to be one of the most important opportunities for commencing EGRT fellows to build pedagogic knowledge and to develop teaching skills. Once EGRT fellows enter the classrooms of their placement schools, they enjoy ongoing pedagogic coaching and support by program managers who maintain a schedule of visits and regular correspondence.

During the fellows' obligatory service of two years, they have various forms of support with both finance and personal development. For financial support, based on the average monthly salary of entry-level teachers in the local communities and the recommendation of the regional education ministry, EGRT fellows receive a monthly stipend of about 2000 RMB (less than $AUD 400). As for personal development support, EGRT fellows have access to alumni who are able to provide resources. These include support during the placement period, information about advanced higher education, and skill-building and employment opportunities. EGRT likewise provides resources and opportunities relating to future employment.

## 1.4   SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of the study is manifold. In terms of contribution to new knowledge, the study enriches the current limited body of research on alternative teacher recruitment programs for disadvantaged schools in a non-western context. How this study addresses this gap is detailed in Chapter Two. Theoretical contribution is seen in the study's use of the inter-dependent conceptual triad of habitus, capital and field to examine EGRT fellows' participation experiences, which is discussed in Chapter Three. Built on Bourdieu's triad, the study proposes in Chapter Six a new concept, 'localized pedagogical capital', to grapple with perceived disparities relating to local teachers. Methodological originality is seen in the study's employment of Twostep Cluster Analysis in Bourdieusian research to discover underlying patterns, classifications, and relations within fellows' EGRT experience (See Chapter Four and Chapter Eight). At the practical level, Chapter Nine provides suggestions for elite graduate teacher organisations regarding better recruitment and the development of reflexive knowledge workers for disadvantaged schools.

## 1.5   THESIS OUTLINE

This chapter has introduced the research topic and research questions. Important definitions, including 'disadvantaged schools', 'good quality teachers' and 'exceptional graduates', have been clarified. In addition, the international context of the study has been introduced through a discussion of university-based teacher preparation programs and alternative teacher recruitment programs for disadvantaged schools—EGRT included. Therein lies the significance of this study which contributes to knowledge about participants' experience of an alternative teacher recruitment program beyond developed western countries. Chapter Two offers a review of previous studies regarding reasons for program participation, the experience of beginning teachers, and the experience of disadvantaged schools. Then the research questions are proposed to address identified gaps. Bourdieu's key thinking tools, 'capital', 'habitus' and 'field', are discussed in Chapter Three to establish the theoretical perspective of the study. In Chapter Four, the sequential exploratory mixed methods design is detailed. Findings arising from data analysis of the qualitative phase are presented from Chapters Five to Seven. Chapter Eight provides findings of the quantitative phase. Chapter Nine concludes the thesis with an in-depth discussion of

crucial issues emerging from this study, highlights of important contributions and implications, a report of limitations and future research directions.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

To better understand the nature and purpose of EGRT, a comprehensive literature search of relevant topics was conducted. This involved a wide search through main electronic academic databases, including ERIC, Proquest, A+Education, SAGE journals Online, British Education Index and Google Scholar, using keywords like 'EGRT' both in the title and abstract. EGRT, as established in the previous chapter, is a pseudonym for an alternative teacher program in China. Little literature was found on alternative teacher recruitment programs for China, a notable exception being a study of the Teach for China and Teach Future China programs, both of which bear similarities to internationally influential programs such as Teach for America (Crowley, 2016). A search of CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), China's most authoritative and largest data source, produced the same result. Perhaps this reflects the relatively brief history of such programs in China. EGRT, as a newly emerging alternative teacher recruitment program, is much more recent than its western counterparts like Teach for America, established in 1989, and other earlier Teach for All programs elsewhere. It is not surprising, then, that there is scant published work specifically on EGRT. Therefore, the research scope of this study was expanded.

Other relevant programs were searched which recruit prestigious university graduates to teach in disadvantaged schools, including both university-based teacher preparation programs and alternative teacher recruitment programs for disadvantaged schools. Compared with the latter, the amount of research regarding the former programs is much smaller. Relevant studies were mainly conducted by university professors or research students involved in university-based programs. However, the alternative teacher recruitment programs, mainly referred to as Teach for All in this thesis, have received wide academic attention, especially Teach for America, Teach First and Teach for Australia. At the institutional level, there have been numerous national evaluation reports by the authoritative and relevant organizations. These reports include, but are not limited to, *Teach for Australia Pathway: Evaluation Report (2010)*; *Teach First Initial Teacher Education Inspection Report (2010)*; and *The Effectiveness of Secondary Math Teachers from Teach for America and the Teaching*

*Fellows Programs (2013).* At the personal level, Teach for All has been a rich source of contention for many scholars worldwide who have empirically examined different sibling programs. Since the EGRT program has close ties with Teach for All programs, research relevant to Teach for All is carefully reviewed in this section.

The foci of discussion centre around two areas: (1) evaluation of the effectiveness of the Teach for All model, especially compared with traditional or regular university-based teacher education programs (Clark et al., 2013; Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; Muijs, Chapman, Collins, & Armstrong, 2010; Xu, Hannaway, & Taylor, 2011); and (2) the legitimacy of the Teach for All model (Anderson, 2013; Olmedo, et al., 2013; Smart, et al., 2009).

The model of Teach for All programs differs from the regular or traditional university teacher education programs in that they prepare high achieving graduates to become beginning teachers in challenging environments through an alternative route. The effectiveness of Teach for All programs, along with program legitimacy, attracts much attention. Most studies pay attention to programs at a macro level. However, participants - as the micro level in this alternative teacher recruitment program - have received much less research attention. Accordingly, the current study aims to make a contribution in this regard. This study focuses on EGRT fellows and on their EGRT participation experience. Their journey, full of challenges and opportunities, has a strong potential to impact on the wellbeing of both students and fellows, and hence deserves due scholarly attention.

Since experience of program participation is a broad topic and the literature related to participant experience of EGRT programs was not found, the researcher identified several studies related to participant experience of university-based teacher preparation programs and alternative teacher recruitment programs for disadvantaged schools. Since the number of these studies was limited, this literature review also drew on many relevant studies on beginning teachers who work in disadvantaged schools. Based on examination of these related studies, Section 2.1 examines reasons for choosing to teach in general and for choosing to teach in disadvantaged schools in particular. The reasons why individuals make this choice are important for their subsequent experience. Section 2.2 reviews beginning teachers' experience in disadvantaged schools. Section 2.3 summarises this chapter, and proposes research questions based on the identified gaps. Throughout the chapter, concern is taken to

consider the historical and cultural particularity of the literature reviewed, but also insights that are of interest more widely. The Bourdieusian perspective of the research reported here prompts the researcher to seek universal understandings of social dynamics through richly contextualised studies of particular societies (e.g., Bourdieu, 1991). Thoughtful consideration of the social dynamics around alternative teacher recruitment in diverse settings internationally is therefore useful as the basis for this study which considers an alternative recruitment program in the Chinese setting.

## 2.1 REASONS FOR PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

A large number of studies have focused on the reasons why individuals choose to be teachers, or more specifically, choose to teach in disadvantaged schools. Both small scale qualitative studies and large scale quantitative surveys have been employed for exploring this research field. One problem of these studies is that they consider teachers to be a homogeneous group, disregarding their diverse backgrounds in terms of individual dispositions and academic preparation. An example is that of the programs that make up the international Teach for All network. In Teach for All programs, most of the recruited graduates hail from prestigious universities and experience a highly competitive selection process. As a result, they can be regarded as exceptional graduates among their peers.

Teaching tends to have a low appeal for exceptional graduates in some countries, given the poor perception of the profession that has built up and persisted over many years (Gore & Morrison, 2001; Tye & O'Brien, 2002). However, Teach for All program participants, as members of an elite group of students, make a different choice compared with most of their peers. Most Teach for All participants are likely to have a prosperous career future because they are from middle or upper class backgrounds. The choice to teach might seem irrational because they might suffer a substantial loss of earnings, given that they hold a highly valued degree from a prestigious university, which opens up lucrative career possibilities (Tamir, 2009).

In order to fully understand the reasons behind this 'against the grain choice', this section reviews the reasons why individuals choose a teaching career. Then it narrows down to review the reasons that individuals—both employed teachers and volunteer teachers—choose to teach in disadvantaged schools. The review then zooms

in even more closely on the reasons why graduates from prestigious universities choose to teach in disadvantaged schools (see Figure 2.1).
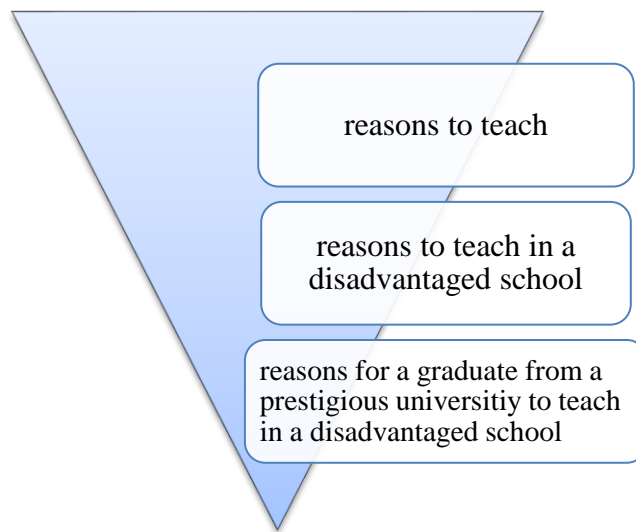


*Figure 2.1.* Review of reasons to teach

### 2.1.1 Reasons for becoming a teacher

From a social psychological perspective, 'motivation' is most often referred to by way of explanation of the reasons why a person chooses to act in a particular way. This is the case also in the literature which probes the reasons why individuals choose to become teachers. The top reasons selected by pre-service and in-service teachers tend to involve intrinsic and altruistic motivation. Intrinsic motivation often means enjoyment obtained from being a teacher. Altruistic motivation often means serving students. However, there is no agreement about either term and scholars tend to use these concepts interchangeably. For instance, "the desire to work with children" has been nominated as "intrinsic motivation" but referred to as "altruistic motivation" in different studies (Watt & Richardson, 2007).

Extrinsic motivation is also referred to in many studies, and it mainly refers to pay, reputation and promotion (Lortie, 1975; Morales, 1994). Interestingly, there is a clear disparity between males and females regarding extrinsic motivation for choosing to teach. Salary, prestige and autonomy are more often cited amongst males, while females tend to pay more attention to flexible time for family and income security (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). In general, intrinsic and altruistic reasons tend to be a stronger predictor for the decision to teach, while extrinsic motivation is a relatively weaker one.

### 2.1.2 Reasons for being a teacher in a disadvantaged school

Among those who choose to teach, some elect to enter disadvantaged schools. In researching this situation, extrinsic motivation such as financial incentive or various preferential policies has been taken into primary consideration by many researchers (Berry, 2008; King, 1993; Wheeler & Glennie, 2007). In one study conducted in the U.S., the number of applications for mathematics (Algebra) teaching positions increased from 7 to 174 after implementation of a new policy whereby an additional $US 2,500 to $14,000 per year would be paid (Ingersoll, 2008). According to the survey of the Center for Teaching Quality (2006), 36% of teachers in three Alabama school districts were willing to transfer to disadvantaged schools when an extra payment of $US 5,000-10,000 was available. Non-pecuniary incentives were also important to attract people to teach in disadvantaged schools. Studies suggested that these included good working conditions with smaller class sizes, more support from colleagues and principals, and an autonomous atmosphere (Boyd, Lankford, & Loeb, 2005; Kelly, 2004; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002).

In China, the traditional perspective of life stability and the high pressure of competition drive many of the young people who elect to teach in disadvantaged schools in rural areas. According to a study of 68 Chinese teachers working in disadvantaged schools, the two main reasons for entering rural education were "the chance to get the so-called iron rice bowl[6]" and the "tough employment market in reality" (Liu, 2011). Different from state recruited teachers with permanent appointments, some voluntary teachers arrive in disadvantaged schools for a short or long term. A qualitative study of volunteer teachers' reasons to teach in rural China identified the following three factors: altruistic motivation, social motivation and utilitarian motivation (Zhou & Shang, 2011). It is interesting to note that the author divides altruistic motivation into two types: emotional reasons (love for children, love for a voluntary job and willingness to make a difference); and rational reasons (concern about the future of the nation's development and obligation in relation to the nation's young people). The two types of altruistic motivation drove most participants to teach in rural disadvantaged schools. A few volunteer teachers reported that social motivation was an important reason because they wanted to make new friends through

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[6] It refers to lifelong security job which was assigned by the government with solid and sufficient salary in China

this experience. A minority of participants admitted to a utilitarian motivation of obtaining more skills and experiences, while also reporting an altruistic concern for rural education. The authors argued that although altruistic motivation was mostly reported, there might be unreported reasons, or volunteers may not know clearly why they engaged in teaching in disadvantaged schools. This is of particular interest to the present research. Bourdieu's theory makes it possible to explore reasons for social actions that are beyond consciousness (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Specifically, the concept of habitus, to be developed in Chapter Three, gives purchase on this type of action.

Some volunteers in disadvantaged schools in rural areas of China come from outside China. Jackson (2014) investigated 29 foreign volunteer teachers in rural schools. Different from the strong altruistic drive of Chinese voluntary teachers, the main reason why they chose to teach in a remote and underdeveloped province involved a sense of heroism and self-fulfilment: these international volunteers sought to challenge themselves and to attain something extraordinary. Therefore, they aimed to gain something personally meaningful while helping others, and their real reasons appeared to be self-serving rather than purely altruistic. This is a point of interest for the current research to see whether such reasons are found among EGRT fellows.

### 2.1.3 Reasons for graduates from prestigious universities to teach in a disadvantaged school

Up to now, four studies have been found to directly explore the reasons behind graduates' participation in programs designed to place elite graduates in disadvantaged schools. All were conducted in Teach for All programs. The first of these studies is reported by Veltri (2010), who has been responsible for training Teach for America participants for more than 10 years. Through long-term interaction with participants, Veltri found four categories of reasons behind the applications for entry into the program. First, many participants were looking for entry into the teaching profession without having the teaching qualifications required for regular teacher accreditation. Second, several pragmatic considerations were reported, including the financial attraction of the salary ($US2500-4000 per month, about $ADU3400-5400), and health benefits (in a nation where these are provided by employers rather than the state). These were the main reasons for 80% of the participants. In addition, some graduates valued the various forms of peer support provided by Teach for America, while others

sought beneficial experiences to assist them to gain entry into a desirable graduate school or corporation. Fourth, altruistic motivation drove some participants to serve the children in disadvantaged schools.

In another qualitative study with 25 Teach for America program participants in Los Angeles, the findings largely echoed Veltri's research. The main reasons for joining the Teach for America program were that participants could get a sustainable income and the opportunity to give back to the community (Straubhaar & Gottfried, 2014). As Labaree (2010) stated, Teach for America participation was a win-win option. Throug this program, participants could do something good without big personal sacrifice, and even promote their future career development with great prestige and relations with potential employers (Maier, 2012). In addition to asking about the reasons for joining Teach for America, this study paid particular attention to demographic characteristics, which indicated that most participants came from privileged backgrounds. It concluded that these young people had idealistic, competitive, high achieving and enthusiastic commitments to closing the education gap (Straubhaar & Gottfried, 2014).

Apart from these studies of Teach for America, relevant studies have also been conducted in the U.K. and Australia. Different from Teach for America, as introduced in Chapter One, Teach First (the UK program) and Teach for Australia provide an employment-based pathway to teacher accreditation. In both cases, program participants become teachers with educational qualifications after two years' service. Therefore, reasons for participation in Teach for Australia and Teach First might be different from those in America.

A large scale investigation applying both qualitative and quantitative methods carried out by the Australian Council for Education Research (2013) showed that Teach for Australia associates could be divided into two groups according to their reasons for participating in this program. For those who considered teaching as a prosperous career, pragmatic reasons for earning money overweighed altruistic reasons related to social justice. In contrast, for those who had little interest in a teaching career, the main reasons for choosing this program were the core values advocated by Teach for Australia, like reducing educational disadvantage and promoting social justice.

Another large scale evaluation with 191 associates in the U.K. showed similar results. However, one reason, referred to by many associates in Teach First in the U.K. was that they expected to attain valuable and transferable knowledge, skills and abilities which could be applied in their future lives. Take leadership as an example. As Teach First advocates, if they were able to lead these students to break through extant barriers and make a difference, this acquired leadership laid a foundation for a promising future career in any sector (Hutchings, Maylor, Mendick, Mentor, & Smart, 2006).

In conclusion, the extant international research indicates that pragmatic reasons for teaching in disadvantaged schools outweigh altruistic reasons in the U.S., the U.K., and Australia. These studies about other alternative teacher recruitment programs are all important in relation to an exploration of the reasons for graduates' participation in such programs in China. Several points are worth noting. First, there are differences between the Chinese and western contexts. Unlike the Teach for America program, participation in an alternative program does not remunerate at a higher rate than traditional beginning teaching programs. Similarly, unlike the programs in the U.K. and Australia, EGRT does not lead to a formal teaching qualification. Second, these empirical studies are limited theoretically; they either have no in-depth sociological theorisation of their approaches or they use the classical social psychological concept of motivation. Intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic motivation alone might not fully explain the diverse and complicated reasons behind the seemingly irrational choice of graduates from prestigious universities to teach in disadvantaged schools. A sociological approach warrants consideration. It is also worthy of notice that the reasons for joining Teach for All programs offered by some studies could be reframed through a Bourdieusian perspective.

### 2.1.4 Bourdieusian perspective

Some against-the-grain choices in social life might not be easy to explain without theoretical instruction. For instance, 180 parents and 67 children from 125 white middle class households were interviewed about their choices against the mainstream in respect to the choice to attend inner-city comprehensive schools in the U.K. The reasons middle class parents sent their children to inner-city comprehensive schools were complex (Reay, Crozier, James, Hollingworth, Williams, & Jamieson, 2008). Despite the complexity, Bourdieu's theory facilitated researchers to understand

underlying reasons for this newly emerging social phenomenon. Parents made this choice to better prepare their children for the increasingly globalized and diverse society, rather than for reasons of social commitment or egalitarian political issues. They expected their children to not merely take advantage of family socio-economic situations; this kind of experience was regarded as capital accumulated by exposure to a social context full of various challenges associated with difference, which might be valued in a socially diverse and multicultural world. In this way, parents were seeking to increase their children's cultural capital. The concept of capital is drawn from the sociological theory of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986).

Similarly, some researchers argued that participants of alternative teacher recruitment programs may seek to accumulate important and different forms of capital, or to perform a kind of investment through the program, expecting potential returns within complicated social contexts. Following the sociological route of Bourdieu, Olmedo, et al. (2013) claimed that alternative teacher recruitment programs could be regarded as "a form of capital, composite of social, human, cultural, symbolic capital which can be employed and invested in, trade and exchange (both in principle and in practice), for returns in the economic field"(p.506). Participants of such programs are sought out for well-remunerated positions by high end employers in the global economy.

Likewise, Anderson (2013) argued that Teach for America is a kind of preparation for fellows to not only attain higher level education and career achievement but also to accumulate knowledge, skills and resources for future development. In addition, social networks developed, through a strong sense of community membership with fellow program members or even affiliation with the programs. Therefore, participants could gradually establish close networks within this organization and extend these to philanthropic foundations or companies (McConney, et al., 2012; Olmedo, et al., 2013). In Bourdieusian terms, these assets and resources represent cultural and social capital respectively. Furthermore, successful involvement in this program means gaining the honour of being selected from among thousands of applicants. Participants described themselves as quite different from regular teachers in disadvantaged schools: they suggested (accurately or otherwise) that unlike other teachers, they were idealistic, ambitious, competitive, high-achieving and committed to ending education inequality (Straubhaar & Gottfried, 2014). This perception of

program participants may function as a kind of resume builder with high symbolic value (Anderson, 2013). Therefore, in light of Bourdieu's concept of capital, working in disadvantaged schools and challenging circumstances seems less irrational for graduates from prestigious universities.

However, 'capital' alone may not be enough, as shown in Tamir's (2009) study of exceptional graduates entering university-based teacher education programs. The combination of 'capital' and 'field' enhanced Tamir's analysis of the decision process to understand the reasons behind the graduates' choice of program. Tamir (2009) interviewed ten University of Chicago Teacher Education program teachers, arguing that these exceptional graduates made up a distinct sub-group in the teaching field. This highly selective group gave up privileged access to lucrative jobs with various forms of capital, and considered teaching in disadvantaged schools to be a promising way to solve education inequality and social injustice. This was somewhat similar to 'altruistic motivation', but teaching in disadvantaged schools became another worthy field for these elites to seek social change and leadership experience, as well as power and innovation. Thus they share similarities with their doctor, lawyer and manager peers, but with a more positive social image generated from their aura of social contribution.

### 2.1.5 Section summary

This section has reviewed research on three topics of relevance to the research reported in this study: reasons for entering teaching, reasons for seeking to teach in disadvantaged schools, and reasons why graduates from prestigious universities apply to teach in disadvantaged schools.

The reason why individuals choose to teach has been well documented in previous research. Altruistic and intrinsic forms of motivation are the main reasons behind the choice to teach. However, when it comes to disadvantaged schools, the reasons become complicated. For those who regard teaching in disadvantaged schools as a job, extrinsic motivation, such as the monetary reward and working conditions, becomes the dominant reason. For those who choose to teach in a disadvantaged school for voluntary experience, the reasons seem to be mixed, with both altruistic and self-serving components at the same time. The reasons why elite graduates choose to teach in disadvantaged schools appear to be even more complicated.

The social psychological notion of 'motivation' does not seem to fully explain this relatively complex social phenomenon: (1) there is a lack of agreement in the definition of terms such as "altruistic motivation" and "intrinsic motivation"; (2) motivation can be both altruistic and egoistic at the same time. Teachers themselves sometimes do not distinguish their ideas, or have no clear ideas why they make this choice; they just choose it. This points to the limitations of the binary typologies of the social psychological school of motivation. (3) The social psychological approach seems to indicate that motivation is a personal trait that individuals may or may not have, or perhaps, have or have not enough. Such an individualistic view of commitment oversimplifies the complex phenomenon of social choice practice in that it fails to address questions like, "Where does motivation come from?", "What nurtures this 'personal trait'?" (4) Many social factors such as life history, impact from family members or role models in society, social expectation, as well as the employment market after graduation, should also be taken into consideration.

Different from the bulk of the motivation literature, some researchers have tried to apply Bourdieu's theory to explain the sociological reasons for teaching in disadvantaged schools. Informed by this sociological line of research, the current study used the whole package of thinking tools of 'capital', 'habitus' and 'field' to conceptualize and underpin its investigation, when most previous studies only chose one or two thinking tools in this regard. Therefore, this study considers EGRT fellows from the perspective of sociologists rather than psychologists. This helps unearth the nature and dynamics behind the sociological reasons for these fellows to choose EGRT.

## 2.2 BEGINNING TEACHERS' EXPERIENCE IN DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS

After making the decision to join an alternative recruitment program, and successfully passing through the highly competitive selection process, graduates from prestigious universities become teachers in disadvantaged schools. Since the literature in this regard was limited, the researcher searched a broad scope relevant to the experience of program participation with regard to two shifts in personal circumstances. First, the fellows' experience might relate to that of beginning teachers with a shift of social identity: from students on campus to beginning teachers in schools. Second, fellows' experience might also be associated with a shift of social context: from developed areas to underdeveloped or disadvantaged areas (see Figure 2.2).

S1: the shift of social identity
S2: the shift of social context
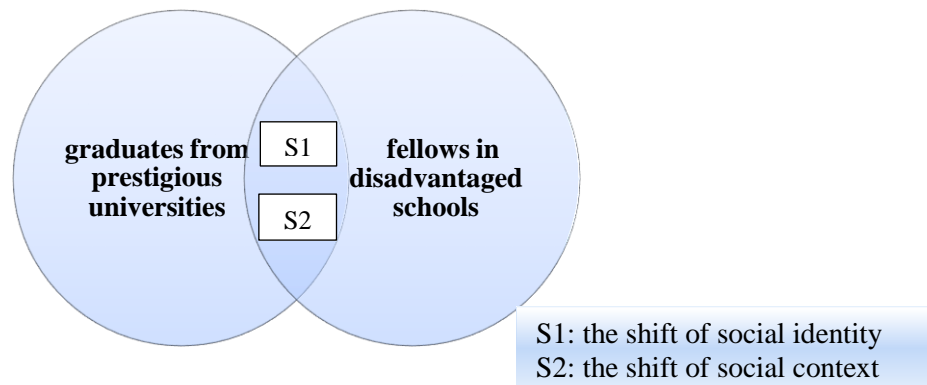
*Figure 2.2.* The shift of social identity and the shift of social context

### 2.2.1 The shift of social identity: from students on campus to teachers in schools

If an individual chooses to be a teacher after graduation, he/she becomes a 'beginning teacher', 'early career teacher' or 'novice teacher' (Ingersoll, 2012; McCormack, Gore & Thomas, 2006; Snyder, 2012). Although the notion of beginning teacher is defined from various perspectives, current definitions mainly depend on years of teaching experience (see Table 2.1). In this study, the requirement of the service period of EGRT is two years, and accordingly the EGRT fellows within these two years are defined as 'beginning teachers'.

Table 2.1

*The definition of "beginning teacher"*

| Beginning teacher in others' studies | Length of service |
|---|---|
| Koehler and Kim (2012) & (McCann & Johannessen, 2004) | ≤ 5years |
| Veenman (1984) | ≤ 3 years |
| Kagan (1992) | ≤1 year |

The first few years are usually regarded as a vulnerable period for most teachers in that there is a high risk of abandoning the teaching profession. Thus, the beginning teachers' turnover rate is very high in the first year compared with other professions. It is as high as 40-50% in the U.S. (Ingersoll, 2003). When beginning teachers leave universities, they tend to lose their social identity as 'student' and become 'teachers' in schools. This can be a dramatic shift for most beginning teachers. Throughout the social identity change, they may have to face many problems and troubles that they have never experienced or even imagined before. To put it colloquially, the transition from "ivory tower to concrete jungle" can feel like being "thrown in the deep end" or

some kind of "trial by fire" (Allen, 2009, p. 651; Candy & Crebert, 1991, p. 570). Many beginning teachers experience severe disappointment and anxiety when they become teachers of students rather than students of teachers (Roulston, Legette, & Trotman Womack, 2005).

The sources of concerns and anxiety active in the shift of social identity relate to a series of unexpected challenges. To begin with, behaviour and classroom management is widely reported as a problem for most beginning teachers (Dicke, Elling, Schmeck, & Leutner, 2015; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). Moreover, a perceived insufficiency of subject knowledge and pedagogical skills is not uncommon among beginning teachers (Haggarty & Postlethwaite, 2012; McGlynn-Stewart, 2015). In addition, beginning teachers are more likely to find it much harder than expected to contextualize subjects and pedagogy to schools and communities where they work (Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006; Meister & Melnick, 2003; Romano, 2007). Another commonly reported challenge is relationships with colleagues in schools, especially when beginning teachers are in need of advice and support. A sense of rejection or isolation causes many beginning teachers to suffer (Harrison, Dymoke, & Pell, 2006; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Chinese studies have reported findings that are both similar and different. Apart from the aforementioned challenges, some other unanticipated difficulties include the large class size, bureaucracy, hierarchical school systems, as well as work burnout (Hong, 2010). In addition, beginning teachers in China are often challenged by new and complicated interpersonal relationships, various examinations and evaluations and trivial tasks assigned by experienced teachers, which were seldom expected before (Yao, 2000).

Based on previous research, several factors influence beginning teachers' capacity to cope with challenges and their performance in schools. First, preparation as a student or pre-service teacher matters. Curricula and courses in pre-service teacher education have gained a great deal of attention (Barnett, 2012). Curricula should equip student teachers with capabilities, foundational knowledge, and the pedagogical strategies and techniques required for real classroom teaching. Components such as classroom management, time management, working with parents, and subject knowledge should be reinforced in the teacher education curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 2006, 2012).

Second, teaching is such complex work that much knowledge and many skills can be attained only in the real context (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ganser, 2002). After examining 15 empirical studies from the 1980s, Ingersoll and Strong (2011) claimed that induction and mentoring programs have a positive impact on beginning teachers' smooth transition from university to schools. Teacher induction covers a wide range of activities for beginning teachers, including orientation, meeting with supervisors, extra classroom assistance and mentoring. The concept of "induction programs" or "inductive teacher education" was not introduced into China until the 1990s. After realizing the importance of this kind of program, the Ministry of Education promoted induction programs in primary and middle schools, which were called 'new teacher training programs' (McQuaide, 2009). Influenced by western training patterns, the modes were quite similar in urban areas. However, there are some serious problems in practice, especially in rural areas. As Yong (2011) pointed out, mentoring is often random and informal in terms of both organisation and evaluation, which causes low efficiency and some irresponsibility. Furthermore, school-based training is largely determined by the personal will of principals rather than by concrete regulations. In addition, the training often concentrates on education law and theory, which lacks innovation and relationship with teaching in real situations. All these factors make the identity shift from student to teacher much harder for beginning teachers in a Chinese context.

The third important factor is the beginning teachers' own experience, mainly referring to their school lives. As beginning teachers, they lack professional teaching experience. When conducting their own teaching, beginning teachers tend to use their own school experience to generalize and interpret their students (Carter & Doyle, 1996). Thus, beginning teachers tend to learn through "a set of biographically embedded assumptions, beliefs, or pre-understandings" (Bullough & Gitlin, 2013, p. 223). Furthermore, beginning teachers tend to be more ambitious than those who have worked for several years in terms of helping students to achieve outstanding academic performances. However, they are also vulnerable through failure to achieve this. This conflict seems to manifest more obviously for those who have been academic high achievers themselves before working in schools. Such teachers may even find it more difficult to support low-performing students, due to their lack of similar academic experience (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Successful academic attainment does not

necessarily mean a successful teacher equipped with subject matter expertise (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Haggarty & Postlethwaite, 2012).

These findings suggest particular challenges for participants of alternative recruitment programs such as those at the centre of this study. Unlike the traditional university-based teacher preparation programs for disadvantaged schools, 'leadership' is highly advocated by alternative teacher recruitment programs. Fellows are expected to be leaders, to bring transformation for students. In the long run, they are expected to become leaders in various sectors of society, who seek constantly to end education inequality. Therefore, the social identity shift of fellows might be similar to, yet more complex than, that of beginning teachers in general. The social identity shift of fellows does not merely refer to the change from being a student who has just left campus to become a teacher in schools. Fellows would seem to become involved in their school as group leaders, who lead their teams out of difficult situations. This interpretation of leadership in alternative teacher recruitment programs mainly concentrates on the students rather than on colleagues and schools. As a result, the emphasis on leadership development may complicate fellows' work experiences. Such experiences as beginning teachers in alternative teacher recruitment programs are investigated through Research Question 2 and Research Question 3 of this study.

### 2.2.2 The shift of social context: from developed area to underdeveloped area

When graduates from prestigious universities leave their well-resourced campus for disadvantaged schools, they may undergo a drastic social context transition. Owing to often less desirable geographic and socioeconomic locations, when working in disadvantaged schools they are likely to experience more and tougher challenges than teachers elsewhere (Tikly, 2013). Consequently, disadvantaged schools are often chronically hard to staff and suffer from higher turnover rates (Rice, 2010). Of teachers in disadvantaged schools in this study, only 20% think that they are well prepared to teach students with diverse cultural and linguistic and low-income backgrounds (Lewis et al., 1999). Therefore, teaching in disadvantaged schools might be a different experience from teaching in other schools. Brown (2014) reviewed studies in the U.K. and concluded that some characteristics, including academic qualifications, teacher certification and teaching experience, might predict teachers' performances. Compared to low poverty schools, the social contexts of disadvantaged schools tend to be much more complicated; hence teachers need an additional set of pedagogies,

experience, knowledge and values, which may not appear in archetypal teacher preparation (Deng, 2014; Helfeldt, Capraro, Capraro, Foster, & Carter, 2009; Irvine, 2003; Zhou & Shang, 2011). Based on previous literature, four challenges have been identified for teachers in disadvantaged schools.

### *Physical discomfort*

Disadvantaged schools are usually located in remote and underdeveloped areas, like remote Indigenous communities in Australia, which makes it hard to recruit good quality teachers and to reduce high teacher attrition rate (Brasche & Harrington, 2012). Owing to the disadvantaged geographical locations, the local infrastructure of accommodation and transportation is relatively under-developed. In China, maladaptation to local food and climate may cause physical discomfort as well (Zhen, 2008). In terms of the socioeconomic context, rural areas have been largely left behind. In China, the traditional education system, and the nature of rural and urban education, have supported and reinforced each other in a mutual-benefit circle (Rao & Ye, 2016). However, rural areas gradually declined and became "trapped in a dark age devoid of intellectuals" since the late Qing Dynasty established the modern education system (Rao & Ye, 2016, p. 5). In contemporary Chinese society, rural and urban civilization have formed a relationship of dualism, with the urban area occupying the privileged position, which has tended to be increasingly prosperous, while the rural area has paid a heavy price for the country's urbanization and modernization (Qian & Liu, 2008). Therefore, this socioeconomic inferiority has been one of the reasons preventing graduates from working in rural schools.

### *Conflict with local context*

Graduates teaching in disadvantaged schools may encounter significant language, cultural and social differences, which result from the mismatch between their backgrounds and those of their students. As is well documented, some particular demographic characteristics and backgrounds make individuals more inclined to enter the teaching profession. For example, in the U.S., these individuals tend to be predominantly white, middle class women (Podgursky, et al., 2004); about 86% of teachers being women with middle class and white European backgrounds (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004). In both university-based teacher preparation programs for disadvantaged schools and alternative teacher recruitment programs for disadvantaged schools, the situation is quite similar.

A study of Teach for America showed that 22 of 25 corps members described themselves as being middle class; only three were of low socioeconomic background (Straubhaar & Gottfried, 2014). Similar to Teach for America, most UK Teach First associates are middle class graduates from prestigious universities (Hramiak, 2014). In Australia, the Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools, a university-based teacher preparation program for disadvantaged schools, the situation is similar: only 5% of the highest achieving undergraduates in the first two years have the opportunity to participate in this program; and all participants are from the dominant mainstream Anglo culture (Lampert & Burnett, 2012). Contrary to teachers' family backgrounds, most disadvantaged schools are located in culturally diverse and under-resourced communities. In the U.S, disadvantaged schools tend to have a large proportion of culturally diverse students (e.g., Hispanic/Latino and black students), mainly from low income families (Ganchorre & Tomanek, 2012).

Since socioeconomic backgrounds might shape both students' and teachers' values and beliefs, the initial cultural shock seems inevitable (Zhou & Shang, 2011), especially in programs which recruit high achieving graduates to teach in disadvantaged schools. Many high achieving graduates reported the 'cultural shock' involved in the transition from prestigious universities to disadvantaged schools, resulting from a lack of cultural understanding of both under-resourced areas and students (Lampert, et al., 2013). Moreover, since high achieving graduates are usually from well-educated families with good educational backgrounds, the different family and education experience make it hard to find a sense of belonging in the low performing communities (Boyd, et al., 2005; Rivers & Lomotey, 1996). Furthermore, students in disadvantaged schools are often regarded as lacking innate merit, with poor behaviour and low achievement (Lampert, et al., 2016), because social members are all inevitably constituted within a variety of social discourses (Shim, 2012). In this situation, program participants are easily positioned as privileged actors of a highly prestigious graduate scheme (Smart et al., 2009), and then impose their own values regarding what is normal and good on the students in the disadvantaged schools (Popkewitz,1998; Barnes, 2016).

In terms of the family backgrounds of Chinese university students, many of them might come from the developed urban areas. Based on 2013 statistics, although about 59.1% of all university students in China are from rural areas, the proportion of those

in 985 Project universities is merely 20.8% (Sun, 2013). That is to say, the prestigious university becomes a venue for students with privileged family backgrounds with regard to this study. Since alternative recruitment programs in China mainly target graduates from prestigious universities, it suggests that most fellows come from families with a high SES level. Despite some fellows originating from rural areas, and some high achieving graduates coming from disadvantaged schools (Lampert, et al. 2016), they are more likely to discard, at least partly, cultures and values when applying for and learning in prestigious universities. Accordingly, their understanding of education could be quite different from that of local teachers and principals. For teaching content, quality-oriented education is widely accepted in developed urban areas of China (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). Students are encouraged to be active learners and knowledge explorers, with similar independent and critical thinking capacity to students in western culture. However, local rural teachers are used to emphasizing examination scores and adopting rote learning. All these differences may trigger misunderstanding, even conflict (Deng, 2014).

In addition to the socioeconomic and cultural distance between students in disadvantaged schools and graduates from prestigious universities, teachers' workload can be so heavy that they need to teach several subjects in one term to large-sized classes across different grades, because of the shortage of teachers in disadvantaged schools in rural areas of China. This large class size and mixed-age teaching might be quite different from graduates' previous elite education experience in prestigious universities, or their own schooling experience in developed urban areas (Campbell & Yates, 2011).

### *Insufficient training and support*

Successful teaching in disadvantaged schools of rural or under-resourced areas also largely depends on whether teachers are able to obtain effective training and sufficient support. Even though the significance of well-prepared training for disadvantaged schools has been commonly recognised, the length, content and methods of training are widely disputed. Some scholars argue that the combination of wide-ranging academic knowledge with practicum is the most effective way (Fitzgerald, 2001), while others advocate short initial training followed by several 'just-in-time training' sessions after entering disadvantaged schools (Baker, Gersten, & Keating, 2000; Belzer, 2006). Despite these disputes, some consensus has been

reached about what should be paid particular attention to in training for disadvantaged schools. In particular, there is a need to address the lack of knowledge related to life experience of students in disadvantaged schools that can jeopardise meeting their learning needs (Deng, 2014; Irvine, 2003; Zhou & Shang, 2011). Moreover, lack of cultural competency might lead to many unexpected difficulties for those teachers who teach in culturally diverse communities, especially in rural areas. (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Klassen, Foster, Rajani, & Bowman, 2009).

Lack of collegial support from principals and colleagues is another major factor which causes teachers to struggle in disadvantaged schools (Tikly, 2013). In the first place, principals with an open mind are crucial for influencing teachers to stay or leave disadvantaged schools (Deng, 2014; Zhou, 2011). Moreover, mentoring is especially significant for beginning teachers in disadvantaged schools. Experienced teachers can help novices understand the main challenges and pedagogical strategies needed to address the needs of students in disadvantaged schools. In contrast, lack of support from senior teachers contributes to the high attrition of teachers in disadvantaged schools (Tikly, 2013).

In terms of the training and support systems of alternative teacher recruitment programs, intensive residential training of basic teacher knowledge and skills is provided. In addition, school-based mentor support and university tutoring and training provide strong support for associates working in disadvantaged schools. Compared with Teach First, Teach for America tends to work less with universities (Hutchings, Maylor, et al., 2006; McConney, et al., 2012). Consequently, studies have shown that programs in the U.K. tend to be more successful in addressing educational disadvantage compared with those in the U.S. (Ofsted, 2008). When it comes to China, 91% of volunteer teachers investigated in China are not teacher education majors; yet they have received little formal training or collegial support while in service in respect to how to teach in the classroom (Zhou & Shang, 2011), which makes them vulnerable when teaching in disadvantaged schools. Hence, effective training and support are both important for coping with challenges in disadvantaged schools.

### *Personal expectations and practice relevant to disadvantaged groups*

Graduates' personal expectations toward disadvantaged schools and relevant work experience in disadvantaged social contexts are quite important in relation to positive responses and adaptations. Graduates tend to be highly idealistic; this does

not prepare them well for the reality of working in disadvantaged communities (Crawford-Garrett, 2017). The mismatch between the expectation of a strong desire for knowledge among innocent students and the reality of students' weariness to learn can cause frustration and depression. This can fail to satisfy teachers' altruistic desire to motivate students in disadvantaged schools (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Ingersoll, 2003; McCann, Johannessen, & Ricca, 2005; Zhou, 2011). Teachers reportedly feel extremely frustrated when their willingness to make a difference in disadvantaged schools seldom receives a positive response from students (Boyd, et al., 2005). These findings suggest that teachers cannot obtain a great sense of achievement and satisfaction when students are less interested in learning and are achieving lower academic performances than the teachers had expected (Lampert, et al., 2012). Consequently, students' lower academic achievement can discourage and exhaust teachers.

Furthermore, a teacher's previous experience of working with a disadvantaged community is one of the most crucial factors in how well they perform in disadvantaged schools (Burnett & Lampert, 2011). Similarly, Ganchorre and Tomanek (2012) found that teachers from the middle or upper classes are more likely to satisfy the needs of students in disadvantaged schools if they have had prior experience of working with under-resourced communities. The more exposure to disadvantaged schools during teacher preparation, the more likely it is for teachers to succeed in teaching in such schools (Petty, Fitchett, & O'Connor, 2012). Through previous experience, these teachers have more knowledge about disadvantaged children and communities, so they are more likely to have a better start when they arrive in a disadvantaged school. In contrast, lack of such relevant experience and knowledge undermines teachers' capacity to meet the needs of students from low socio-economic situations (Irvine, 2003). Personal inaccurate expectations and insufficient working experience relevant to disadvantaged areas might cause many difficulties.

In conclusion, teaching in disadvantaged schools means a social context shift from developed urban areas to underdeveloped rural areas. This kind of transition is not only manifested in changing geographic spaces, but also in negotiating tensions between different cultures and social dynamics. Therefore, this shift might be full of challenges. Challenges mainly caused by a shift of social context include physical

discomfort, conflict with local contexts, insufficient training and supporting systems, and graduates' personal expectations and practice relevant to disadvantaged groups.

### 2.2.3 Bourdieusian perspective

As evidenced in the aforementioned studies, there is a steady stream of research concerning the experience of beginning teachers or teachers in disadvantaged schools. However, few studies take advantage of Bourdieu's thinking tools to examine graduates' transition experience, the seemly unusual choice from prestigious university to disadvantaged schools after graduation. Davey (2009b) applied Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field to explore transition experience from university to workplace with 12 interview participants. According to the narratives of these young people, the new work environment offered them an opportunity for their habitus to be exposed to later changes when confronted with unfamiliarity, especially meeting with unwritten and unspoken rules. Even though habitus accents continuity, its potential to transform can be triggered in the transition between different fields, for example between prestigious universities and disadvantaged schools. The shift of social context can provoke some questions about matters that were formerly taken for granted. Davey found that some graduates may navigate this transition relatively easily, while others find it difficult to adapt to the new social setting. The transition largely depends on whether an individual's habitus responds harmoniously or not to the field.

Bourdieu's thinking tools—capital, habitus and field (as explained in Chapter 3) — are suitable for analysing transition within different social contexts of graduates. These thinking tools "can help to elucidate practice irrespective of the particular capitals that have currency in the field or the nature of the habitus that is well adjusted to that field" (Clark, Zukas, & Lent, 2011, p. 148). For example, Clark, et al. (2011) use Bourdieu's thinking tools (Wacquant, 1989, p. 40), including capital, habitus and field, to deeply understand the IT graduate transition experience from university to employment. In the research undertaken by Clark et al. the work place is viewed as the 'field', where the 'habitus' of the graduates is located, as well as the 'capital' which they can utilize to underpin the transition. Their study showed that those graduates' previous experiences of education and family upbringing impacted on how they developed a feel for the game (Bourdieu, 1994). The concept of habitus is quite useful for understanding why individuals have such a huge difference of transition experiences from university to workplace. Clark et al. (2011) further argued that the

value of capital varies depending on different social fields. The ability to recognize highly valued capitals in new social contexts, and to take advantage of them, depends on how habitus interacts with field.

Although the aforementioned Bourdieusian studies of social transition experience from university to workplace are not concerned with novice teachers, they do shed light on the investigation of alternative recruitment program fellows' transition experiences in the current study. For these fellows, moving from prestigious universities to disadvantaged schools is neither a peripheral nor a normal life experience. Instead, this experience is rife with tensions between the past and the present, the known and the unknown, the notional and the actual. It will be crucial to understand how the fellows perform and negotiate these experiences, and how they make meaning out of their various forms of resources and dispositions when crossing social and cultural borders (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

### 2.2.4 Section summary

Due to limited research on alternative recruitment programs in China, this section has outlined a number of studies related to the experience of beginning teachers more generally and the broader experience of teaching in disadvantaged schools, which indicate possible shared experience with fellows' participation. Broader literature has been examined based on the essence of program participation. On one hand, this literature is relevant to this study because fellows are beginning teachers, owing to their two years of service as graduates; on the other hand, they work in particular disadvantaged schools.

However, studies about beginning teachers were inclined to discuss topics related to the shift of social identity from student to teacher; while research on teaching in disadvantaged schools focused more on experience of the social context shift from developed areas to underdeveloped areas. In terms of the experience of EGRT fellows, these two social shifts happen concurrently. As discussed, Bourdieu's thinking tools, including 'capital', 'habitus' and 'field', have been applied in some studies where social agents experienced transition from one social field to another, which provided a powerful explanation of complex social transition experience. Hence, this study discusses EGRT fellows' experience by employing these thinking tools to explain the dynamic social structures behind the social phenomena.

## 2.3 SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This literature review has identified three important research gaps: (1) Lack of research about alternative teacher recruitment programs in developing countries like China; (2) Lack of research on the personal experience of fellows in alternative teacher recruitment programs compared with topics related to program efficiency and legitimacy; and (3) Lack of theorisation within prior studies.

This chapter briefly examined other similar alternative teacher recruitment programs worldwide. Such programs were initiated in the U.S. and then quickly extended to other western and developed countries. They attracted much academic attention. In contrast, although this alternative teacher recruitment mode has been introduced into some developing countries, it has received less research attention, especially with regard to China. Even though some research in developed countries could be referenced, local versions of alternative teacher recruitment programs vary considerably. Many differences relate to economic returns, potential benefits and working situations of program participation, which might significantly influence participants' experience. To begin with, in terms of economic concerns, Chinese fellows earn 2000 RMB (less than $AUD400), compared to $US2500-4000 per month (about $AUD3400-5400) that their peers in other countries get. Furthermore, unlike Teach First in the UK and Teach for Australia, no teacher certification is issued after two years' commitment to Chinese programs. In addition, the conditions of placement schools located in remote and poor areas of China might be more arduous than those of developed countries. Therefore, the findings relating to such alternative teacher recruitment programs in China might be different to those of programs conducted in developed countries. The present research study is needed to bridge this gap.

Comprehensive reports by relevant organizations, academic institutions or individuals pay close attention to the effectiveness of programs. Other foci of discussion include the legitimacy of program recruitment, market strategies and training modes. Compared with topics mentioned above, the experience of the leading actors, namely the program teachers, seems to have been largely ignored. The extant relevant literature has considered several themes, such as reasons for program participation, personal experience and perceptions while working in disadvantaged schools. Therefore, the present research broadens the scope to relevant areas of teacher education, beginning teachers, and teachers in disadvantaged schools. Inspired by

other research in these relevant areas, this study explores crucial aspects of the transition experience of alternative recruitment program fellows, from prestigious university graduates to teachers in disadvantaged schools. These crucial aspects include why participants choose this program, disparities between their expectations and perceptions in service, and involvement in disadvantaged schools.

Finally, a Bourdieusian perspective has been used to analyse the social and educational phenomenon that prestigious universities' graduates are recruited to teach in disadvantaged schools (see Table 2.2). Bourdieu's theory informed the analysis of these studies, which facilitated the identification of the underlying social dynamics of such programs. However, this research only partly used Bourdieu's theory, rather than combining the three key concepts of capital, habitus and field.

Table 2.2

*Representative programs of recruiting young talents for disadvantaged schools*

| Program | Author | Application of Bourdieu's theory |
|---|---|---|
| Teach for America<br>Teach First<br>Teach for All | Anderson (2013)<br>Alison (2014)<br>Olmedo, et al. (2013) | symbolic capital<br>cultural capital<br>cultural, social, symbolic capital |
| Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools | Burnett, Lampert, Patton, and Comber (2014) | capital and habitus |
| Teach Among UCLA, Centre X Graduates | Tamir (2009) | field and capital |

This study responds to the need identified by this literature review for deeper sociological understanding of alternative recruitment programs, and in particular of the social phenomenon of elite graduates' transition from studying at prestigious universities to becoming teachers in disadvantaged schools. The study addresses a particular research gap related to this phenomenon in China, where rural schools are challenged by significant inequality in terms of limited educational resources and teaching professionals. The following Chapter 3 introduces Bourdieu's thinking tools and discusses how the conceptual triad of capital, habitus and field provides the theoretical framework for this study.

# Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

In previous chapters, it was established that the research reported in this thesis focuses on the participation experience of EGRT fellows. It does so through three research questions, which relate to (1) the fellows' decisions to join EGRT; (2) disparities between the fellows' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions about teaching in disadvantaged schools; and (3) the realization of EGRT values in fellows' involvement. Then a forth research question tests the relationship of the first three mentioned research questions. Review of the extant literature pointed to the potential of a Bourdieusian theoretical framing for this research. The aim of this chapter is to present the study's theoretical framework which adopts this perspective.

Bourdieu's thinking tools provide a comprehensive sociological gaze to account for individuals' social practices (Bourdieu, 1990b). He explains this theory with a classic equation: "[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 101). To put it another way, a person's practice results from relations between their habitus and capital in a field. This equation is of use for understanding the nature of Bourdieu's three key 'thinking tools' (Wacquant, 1989, p. 40): 'capital', 'habitus', and 'field'. It shows that these tools should not be used in isolation, but are necessarily interrelated conceptually and empirically.

For the purposes of this study, a theoretical framework is presented in this chapter so that the thinking tools can be used to explore the experience of graduates from prestigious universities as they became teachers in disadvantaged schools. More specifically, four research questions are addressed as follows:

> ***Research Question 1:*** *Why do elite graduates choose to participate in EGRT?*
>
> ***Research Question 2:*** *What disparities are there between EGRT fellows' pre-service assumptions about rural-school teaching and their in-service perceptions?*
>
> ***Research Question 3:*** *How do EGRT program values play out in fellows' involvement in disadvantaged schools?*
>
> ***Research Question 4:*** *What relationships are there between: (1) EGRT fellows' reasons for participation that are consonant with EGRT values; (2) disparities between EGRT fellows' pre-service assumptions and in-service*

*perceptions of students in disadvantaged schools; and (3) EGRT fellows'*
*involvement in accord with EGRT values in disadvantaged schools?*

## 3.1    THEORETICAL PRELUDE

Bourdieu developed his conceptual and theoretical perspective throughout his whole career. He was born into an ordinary family in a small town and his father was a postal clerk. However, Bourdieu's talent was identified by one of his school teachers, who recommended him to study at the LycéeLouis-le-Grand, a school located in Paris. He was then later successfully enrolled in the Ecole Normale Superieure in Paris, one of the most prestigious universities in France. After graduation, he worked in a school for about a year and then commenced his military service with the French army in Algeria. This military service had a significant impact on his academic journey and was instrumental in the construction of his own sociology. From a position of relative obscurity, Bourdieu turned out to be one of the most cited sociologists in the west, second only to Foucault after his work was translated into English from French. In Algeria, he witnessed drastic conflicts between a local agricultural economy and the western industrial economy, brought about by western colonisation. Experience of a society in profound turmoil exposed Bourdieu to a more complicated social context than he had imagined in France. For example, he noticed a modern salesman who still adhered to the traditional business way by carrying his shop on his own back. This social phenomenon seemed strange but interesting to Bourdieu. Hence, he kept thinking about the reasons behind people's choices, and what they experienced in terms of fundamental social changes (Grenfell & Lebaron, 2014).

China has gone through similarly great social transformation, from a planned economy to a market economy since the Reform and Opening-up policy of 1978. Alongside this huge social reform and the accompanying fast economic development, the post 80s generation university students in China no longer receive guaranteed jobs from the government after graduation, as their parents' generation did in a planned economy. This social change in China might be regarded as just as drastic as what happened in Algeria. Since Bourdieu's theory was produced in a similarly drastic period of social transformation, which explains powerfully some non-normative or seemingly irrational social phenomena, it might also be appropriate for examining the 'against the grain' choice of EGRT participation. Moreover, with the advancement of international academic communication and exchange in recent years, Bourdieu's

theory has become increasingly popular and has been applied to explain social phenomena in Chinese contexts, showing its strong explanatory power (Li, 2013; Mu & Jia, 2014; Sheng, 2012, 2015; Wang, Davis, & Bian, 2006). Bourdieu's theory is now not only applicable in western contexts, but is also robust in a Chinese context. A Bourdieusian perspective, therefore, underpins this study. So Section 3.2 explains Bourdieu's three main 'thinking tools', namely field, capital and habitus; Section 3.3 demonstrates the relationship of these thinking tools; and Section 3.4 summarizes how Bourdieu's thinking tools are applied as a whole package in analysis of EGRT participation experience.

## 3.2   BOURDIEU'S THINKING TOOLS

To help general audiences understand the three key thinking tools he developed, Bourdieu frequently referred to social life as a football game, perhaps because he was once a keen rugby player and knew this sport well. A football field is the place where the game is played, with a set boundary, and players stand in predetermined positions. To score a goal, players cannot run merely according to their own will, but according to their positions on the field and the rules of the game. In order to win, players have to learn and constantly improve their knowledge, skills and strategies. Meanwhile, physical conditions such as the quality of the grass influence the players' performances.

Similarly, a social field is comprised of positions occupied by social agents. As football players practise to acquire the skills of sports stars, in the same way social agents keep struggling for social position through accumulation of what counts as 'capital' in their social fields. The capital defined by Bourdieu includes material things, aesthetically appreciated taste and consumption patterns, prestige, social status and authority in society (Bourdieu, 1986). All these elements represent scarce and valuable resources worth hunting for in a given social context (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2001). Moreover, each player has their own orientation to the game, and their own experience of the field that have been internalised as a set of dispositions. In the social field, this set of dispositions is called 'habitus' by Bourdieu; it refers to the internalization of the external world to shape each agent's internal attitudes, values, perceptions and emotions (Bourdieu, 1977b). Bourdieu's thinking tools of field, capital, and habitus, which can in this way be perceived based on the metaphor of a football match, are now further explained.

### 3.2.1 Field

Field is an indispensable element of Bourdieu's thinking tools. As mentioned above, to help readers understand this abstract concept field is described by him as the place where the football game is played. In addition to the metaphor, through his whole life's work Bourdieu illustrated how social life can be contextualized in terms of 'field'. A lot of his writing was concerned with investigations of specific fields, such as education, culture, television, literature, science, housing, bureaucracy and globalized de-industrialization (Bourdieu, 1988; Bourdieu, 1989; Bourdieu, 1996, 1998b; Bourdieu, Darbel, & Scnapper, 1990; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Though it was hard to define what field is, Bourdieu proposed that it be construed as follows:

> Field is a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation in the structure of the distribution of species of power or capital whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97).

In this definition, individuals are viewed as social agents who constantly struggle to defend and improve their social positions with their various forms of capital in their respective social spaces. In this way, field is both structured and structuring, which means that it is relatively stable but also in flux (Grenfell & Lebaron, 2014). On one hand, each field is stable with its own regulative principles: principles that draw the boundary of a socially structured space where social agents constantly struggle (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). On the other hand, the field is fluid, because its border relies on the existence of other fields, and each field presents a latent open space for change. That is to say, the field has no absolute stable and fixed border (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). As a result, it becomes a dynamic social space when social agents endlessly try to transform or preserve a field with their own intentions (Bourdieu, 1998a). Owing to the aforementioned characteristics of the field, it is hard to answer the question of where the boundary of the field lies. Despite this, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) proposed an effective way to determine a field's boundary. That is, to check what types or "species" of capital are valued. Capital may not represent equivalent values when social agents move to another field:

It is one and the same thing to determine what the field is, where its limits, etc., and to determine what species of capital are active within it, in what limits and so on…in order to construct the field, one must identify the forms of specific capital that operate within it, and to construct the forms of specific capital one must know the specific logic of the field (p.98, p.108).

Enlightened by the above mentioned principle, in this study three fields might be expected to emerge when exceptional graduates from Chinese universities teach in rural disadvantaged schools through their participation in EGRT. More specifically, in China the prestigious university and the disadvantaged school might be two fields, but both belong to the field of education. Prestigious universities are those which have the richest financial resources and take the most privilege to recruit the best staff and students. In recent years, prestigious universities in China have seen an increasing number of students come from privileged families. Therefore, the positions in the prestigious universities are highly competitive.

In contrast, disadvantaged schools in China have long been suffering from a shortage of funds. Applicants can easily get jobs there, but are seldom willing to do so, which causes the problem of difficult to staff disadvantaged schools. As for the students, they do not need to compete with peers to enter a disadvantaged school. A large proportion of them are from low social and economic status backgrounds. In addition, in recent years, prestigious universities tend to emphasize liberality and autonomy, while disadvantaged schools have tended to be constrained by examination-oriented educational ideology. For EGRT fellows, the transition from prestigious universities to disadvantaged schools not only involves changing geographic social spaces, but also negotiating tensions between different cultures, structures and rules regarding two different social spaces. Owing to the different dominant social agents and field principles, the kinds of resources which are valued are correspondingly different, as detailed in Section 3.3.1.

As noted in Chapters One and Two, prestigious university graduates are less likely to come from and then work in disadvantaged schools. However, EGRT builds a bridge and tries to mediate between prestigious universities and disadvantaged schools through providing an opportunity for graduates to teach students in rural areas. EGRT is an alternative teacher recruitment program, which, as discussed previously, originated from developed western countries. Therefore, EGRT shares values and

modes of its western counterparts. In addition, it has built increasingly close connections and collaboration with local governments, influential foundations, enterprises and individuals in China. The field here is just preliminarily defined in this chapter, because field is much more complex than "any game that one might ever design"; and as Bourdieu also argued, the boundary of the field can only be known by empirical investigation. This point is further discussed in the final chapter (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 104).

Section 3.2.1 briefly introduced three fields in this study. As asserted by Bourdieu, the three thinking tools of habitus, capital and field are inseparable in analysing how social agents participate in various social activities. Therefore, Section 3.2.2 and Section 3.2.3 focus on the other two thinking tools: capital and habitus.

### 3.2.2 Capital

Capital is originally an historical invention of capitalism and a term widely used in both economic practice and theory. However, the structure and function of the capitalist social world could not be fully explained if capital were only used as an economic term (Bourdieu, 1986). Accordingly, Bourdieu employed it to describe a wider system of exchanges in social life. From his perspective, capital refers to all material or symbolic resources worth being pursued and possessed. Capital is the potential to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or extended forms within particular social contexts (Bourdieu, 1986). The following forms of capital are highly relevant to this study: 'economic capital', 'cultural capital', 'social capital', and 'symbolic capital'. These forms of capital are clarified in the following section.

#### *Economic capital*

Economic capital refers to various types of financial resources which can be converted instantaneously and directly to money or institutionalized resources such as property rights (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital is one of the most essential and fundamental forms of capital. It is not only a root and basis of other forms of capital, but also a means to enable the acquisition of other desired forms of capital (Davey, 2009a). For example, in China, the volume of economic capital which university students have largely depends on their families' financial situations. In the context of this study, graduates from rural backgrounds and lower classes might be more concerned about economic returns to their families if they participate in EGRT. While

teaching in placement schools, EGRT fellows earn RMB 2000 (about $ AUD400). The subsidy offered by EGRT is only about a quarter of that likely to be earned by participants' peers after graduation from prestigious universities. In 2015, almost all '985 Project' universities were ranked in the top 100 in terms of graduates' salaries (8632.5 RMB, about $AUD 1730)[7]. Compared with their peers, EGRT participation therefore means a financial loss for these two years. Despite this, the limited subsidy can cover basic expenses in rural areas when parents cut off financial support after graduation, or because of disagreement over EGRT participation. Fellows do not need to worry about their survival. They still have the opportunity to invest in themselves by taking advantage of EGRT participation, which might bring a sense of fulfilment and other potential benefits.

### *Cultural capital*

The term "culture" is explored by Bourdieu as a form of capital for its symbolic power of social stratification rather than simple aesthetic values (Wang, et al., 2006). In this sense those who possess cultural capital tend to enjoy high status in society (Anderson, 2013). Bourdieu coined the notion "cultural capital" to understand the (re)production of knowledge, skills, manners, education and academic qualifications, which have enlightened many sociological studies. To further explain the concept of cultural capital, Bourdieu (1986) classified it as existing in three inter-convertible states: objectified state, institutionalized state, and embodied state.

Cultural capital in the objectified state refers to valued materiality, such as reading materials, paintings, and musical instruments. Due to the unequal distribution of educational resources between rural and urban schools, the infrastructures and other learning materials and instruments, such as the library and laboratory of rural schools, are fewer than their urban counterparts. In this situation, the official website of EGRT shares stories such as this: some EGRT fellows initiated activities like raising funds for books online for establishing a library for local students, or sometimes they spent their own money to buy necessary experimental teaching aids for a science class. All similar actions adopted by EGRT fellows are in essence to increase the cultural capital in the objectified state of local students.

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[7] http://edu.163.com/15/0428/14/AO9UO15E00294MP6.html

Cultural capital in the institutionalized state mainly refers to academic qualifications conferred by institutions. EGRT fellows have rich institutionalized cultural capital because not only do they have a bachelor or even a doctoral degree, but those qualifications were conferred by prestigious national or international universities. They are therefore in an advantaged position in the 'legitimate culture' of the nation, that is, in terms of some of the highest levels of cultural capital accrued through education (Bourdieu, 1989). In this situation, credentials of prestigious universities, scarce and valuable cultural resources for which social agents scramble fiercely, endow EGRT fellows with rich cultural capital in the institutionalized state.

Compared with cultural capital in the objectified state, cultural capital in the embodied state is more time-consuming to acquire. This form of cultural capital presupposes the investment of personal time and effort. It is an "integral part of a person", mostly acquired in an unconscious way, such as culturally valued taste and life styles (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 106). For example, take the case of two families having the exact same income per month, and they can each afford to buy a violin for their child. In this situation, these two children have the same cultural capital in the objectified state. However, one couple are musicians, who can teach their child how to play and how to enjoy a beautiful melody; in contrast, the other couple have no knowledge of music; they just give the violin to their child and leave the child alone. In this case, the two children tend to acquire different cultural capital in the embodied state. To some extent, the volume of embodied cultural capital depends on social class, on the society and period of history. That is to say, besides personal effort, the volume of embodied culture capital possessed by an individual depends largely on their social and economic situation as well as on their historical accumulations. Hence, for most disadvantaged school students, even if it were possible to resolve the lack of cultural capital in the objectified state by increased government funding or social donations, the embodied cultural capital needs more conditions of cultivation. Given that most rural parents leave their children behind at home while they are employed as migrant workers in big cities, it makes it difficult for rural children to acquire as much embodied cultural capital from their families as their urban peers.

After analysis of the embodied cultural capital of local students, what about EGRT fellows? There is not much if any research that reports on the socioeconomic backgrounds of EGRT fellows. Even though most of them have similar educational

qualifications, their original backgrounds may be variable. Some of them might come from rural areas and have grown up in similar circumstances to the students in disadvantaged schools; others might have been born and raised in affluent urban families. Although some EGRT fellows may come from unprivileged families, most of them, as constant academic winners, have been cultivated for many years by local key schools and prestigious universities. These social contexts contribute to accruing a large amount of embodied cultural capital. The point here is that learned knowledge, skills and capabilities have been internalized by EGRT fellows through immersion in elite institutions. Therefore, the volume and configuration of their cultural capital in the embodied state may already distance them from their students in disadvantaged schools.

As this study focused on schools in a rural area of an under-privileged county in China's south-west, linguistic capital is a sub-type of cultural capital in the embodied state which needs to be considered (Bourdieu, 1977a). Linguistic capital can be accrued when social agents consistently recognize a particular way of speaking and using a language as legitimate in a given field. For example, Mandarin Chinese is the legitimate language in official settings in China and speakers of regional dialects of Mandarin may be perceived as uneducated (Wei & Hua, 2011). Even within the one language or dialect, different accents work as indicators of social status, economic and cultural background. For instance, rural students in China often have strong provincial accents, but they are required to speak "good" Mandarin; that is, to speak in a legitimatized way when they move to urban schools. Those rural students constitute a minority and a dominated group. When they realize their subordinate position, marked by their unauthorized accent, they may feel nervous or even embarrassed (Mu & Jia, 2014).

Interestingly, although EGRT fellows can speak standard Mandarin, they might face a similar situation in disadvantaged schools to those of rural students moving to urban schools. On one hand, they tend to be a demographic minority group, in contrast to the large number of local teachers and local students. On the other hand, local dialects might be the legitimate language in most situations. It does not mean that local principals and teachers cannot speak Mandarin; however, they have gotten used to speaking the local dialect in both daily life and teaching activities. Therefore, the coming of EGRT fellows might unsettle their previous communication routine. Local

school teachers might speak in Mandarin out of consideration for EGRT fellows who are participating in school meetings or other casual conversations. In another scenario, the local dialect can be taken advantage of to isolate outsiders if EGRT fellows fail to receive respect from local colleagues. Sometimes, local students even use a local dialect as a form of rebellion, to embarrass EGRT fellows if their authority as teacher has not been established. As Everett (2002) asserts, linguistic discourses should not only be taken for granted as what happens naturally, but understood as the representation of power and dynamics of social structures.

### *Social capital*

Social capital is a durable network whereby social agents achieve membership through mutual acquaintance and recognition. Social capital might be instituted and guaranteed in the name of a family, a class, a tribe, or a party. Therefore, social capital is easily found in social life in the form of family connections, friends, alumni, and classmates. These networks of relationships are produced by investment strategies that transform contingent relations into relationships with durable obligations, subjectively felt like friendship or institutionally guaranteed like rights (Bourdieu, 1986). That is to say, social networks and social ties enable an individual to take advantage of resources and support. These resources and support systems constitute a person's social capital. This form of capital is accumulated consciously or unconsciously in initial stages. However, social capital needs effort if it is to function in a given situation. The extent to which it can exert its effect depends on the span of the network connections and the power of the connected person or institutions (Bourdieu, 1986).

Owing to their educational backgrounds, EGRT participants have already accrued a certain amount of social capital. Studying in prestigious universities for at least four years indicates that they might be students of famous professors, or friends of rich peers from influential families. In this way, EGRT is able to bring together these graduates from prestigious universities and integrate their social capital at the institutional level. In addition to the social capital already accrued by program participants. EGRT participation further expands access to a resource-rich platform where they can "have friends in the right places and opportunities for forging partnership and ties of allegiance" (Olmedo, et al., 2013, p. 507). The notion of 'friends in the right places' is important here; this English colloquialism suggests that the individual has powerful and influential friends who can do things for them; this is the

dynamic captured by the concept of social capital. In terms of EGRT, its western background invests it with wide global networks. At the same time, EGRT still constantly builds close domestic connections with various powerful bodies, including many foundations, enterprises and higher educational institutions. Then EGRT fellows will gain access to these networks through their participation. In conclusion, EGRT offers opportunities to make more friends with similar educational backgrounds and aspirations; furthermore, EGRT has a wide partnership and alumni network. Through the network of EGRT, many opportunities endowed by the established social network become readily accessible for EGRT fellows.

Up to now, three fundamental types of capital as defined by Bourdieu (1986) have been introduced and explained: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. Bourdieu realized later that another type of capital was needed to add to his capital constructs to fully understand and explain complicated social phenomena, and that form of capital is symbolic capital.

### *Symbolic capital*

Symbolic capital generally refers to reputation, respectability and honorability (Bourdieu, 1989, 1993a). Compared with the aforementioned three fundamental forms, symbolic capital tends to be the most abstract and intangible concept. Bourdieu defined this form of capital as follows:

> Symbolic capital is any property like any form of capital whether physical, economic, cultural, or social when it is perceived by social agents endowed with categories of perception, which cause them to know it and to recognize it, to give it value. For example, the concept of honour in Mediterranean societies is a typical form of symbolic capital which exists only through repute, that is, through the representation that others have of it to the extent that they share a set of beliefs liable to cause them to perceive and appreciate certain patterns of conduct as honourable and dishonourable (Bourdieu, 1998a, p. 47).

As this definition of symbolic capital indicates, social agents perceive symbolic capital in accordance with collective expectations (Bourdieu, 1998a). When social agents internalize socially legitimated beliefs into their own perceptions with categories, the symbolic values can exert power. Teach for America is a typical example. On the one hand, the program takes advantage of "altruistic authority",

catering to social expectation, and it successfully legitimizes organizations' commitments to students in disadvantaged schools, which contributes to high social prestige (Anderson, 2013, p. 692). This is a distinctive feature of symbolic capital. On the other hand, the competitive selection process makes every program participant a 'winner' in contrast to the numerous other applicants, all of whom are objectively richly endowed with honors. This is an example of honorability, another prominent feature of symbolic capital. The point here is that program participants, as members of such an organization, are likely to enjoy a high level of symbolic capital when they are perceived as altruistic and high achieving young people by the public (Straubhaar & Gottfried, 2014). Accordingly, Teach for America is assumed to be a resume builder with accruing symbolic capital (Anderson, 2013). EGRT, as an alternative teacher recruitment program in China, shares similar values and modes with Teach for America, and it can endorse EGRT fellows' symbolic capital in similar ways.

With a basic understanding of the four forms of capital proposed by Bourdieu, in respect to our social life, it is easy to find that individuals who own a large amount of one form of capital tend to have relatively equivalent amounts of other forms of capital. Take Bill Gates, who holds the title of the richest person in the world, as an example. As one of the top contemporary entrepreneurs, he has a vast amount of economic capital as well as social and symbolic capital. However, it is not always the case. Some avant-garde artists or professors are rich in cultural capital in the artistic or scholarly worlds but poor in terms of economic capital in the material world (Bourdieu, 1977b). It can be said that every social agent has a portfolio of capitals, but the amount and composition of the portfolio tends to vary amongst different individuals in different fields (see Figure 3.1).
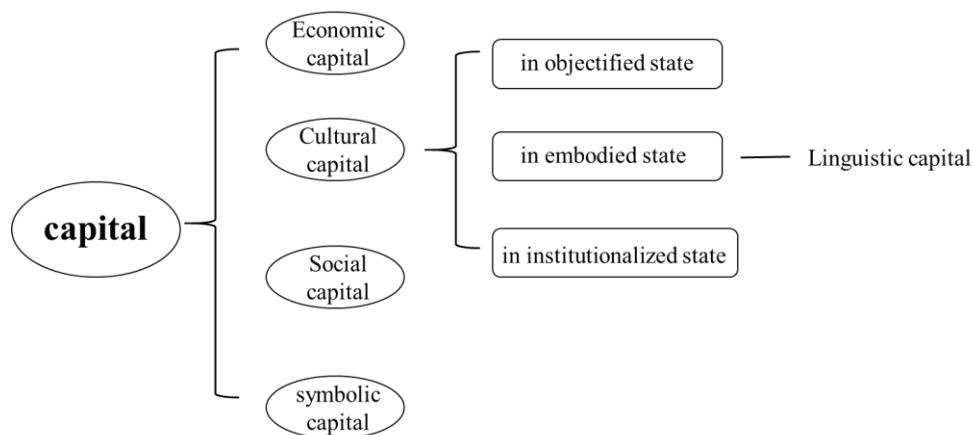


*Figure 3.1*. Forms of capital and capital portfolios

All forms of capital work "both as a weapon and as a stake of struggle" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98); that is, as a set of useable and valuable resources which enable social agents to enter and then act powerfully in a given field. In this field, agents can then wield their capital as a kind of 'weapon' (Bourdieu, 1990a). In other words, they take advantage of their capital in order to accrue more material or symbolic profits for the desirable positions (Mu, 2013). Thus, there is an endless struggle for various resources or positions. Meanwhile, capital includes resources which can be invested to add value to one's existing portfolio; that is, to the 'stake of struggle' in a social space, increasing profitability and enabling upward mobility.

As weapons and stakes of struggle, the forms of capital are not independent of one another. In social life, one form of capital can convert into other forms of capital in given situations. For example, cultural capital can transform into economic capital under certain conditions (Bourdieu, 1986). It is not uncommon that possessing strong cultural capital will bring a significant economic return. Graduates with prestigious university backgrounds have an essential advantage when they hunt for good positions in labor markets with their learned skills and knowledge. Moreover, social capital is not only convertible to economic or cultural capital, but also institutionalized in the form of nobility of one kind or another (Bourdieu, 1986). It is not hard to witness the fact that graduates who have a network of powerful 'people in the right position' enjoy opportunities for fortune and even honors. At the same time, credentials also consecrate the identity of prestigious university graduates, who are easily regarded as elites of their generation. This honor builds differentials in power relations with other graduates without such educational backgrounds (Anderson, 2013), which illustrates the role of symbolic capital.

Symbolic capital is the most flexible form of capital because other forms of capital converted to symbolic capital are able to revert back to their previous state (Bourdieu, 1977b). The only possibility for wealth to constantly exert its power is for it to convert into the form of symbolic capital. This principle is also applicable for cultural and social capital. Therefore, this is why symbolic capital is regarded as the most valuable form by Bourdieu (1986). In this regard, EGRT is a sophisticated process in building the symbolic capital of its participants. EGRT fellows are promoted as talented young leaders with social responsibility. More specifically, an EGRT fellow is seen as being altruistic enough to choose to teach in a disadvantaged school.

This fellow needs to know how to communicate with students effectively, to manage and inspire them, and to involve stakeholders to successfully improve their students' academic performances. All these capabilities hopefully have a transformative impact on students; and then can all be transportable to other professions and sectors. In this case, EGRT participation might be convertible to symbolic capital marked as 'future leader with an altruistic spirit'. This symbolic capital can convert to other forms of capital, such as a good employment positions or further educational opportunities.

### 3.2.3 Habitus

Habitus is not a term created by Bourdieu himself. Many western philosophers and thinkers had discussed similar concepts of habit since ancient times. Aristotle argued that habits are produced by and will incline to similar acts. Many theories about 'habit' tend to be concerned more about psychology than sociology. For example, the philosopher Husserl originally used 'habitus' to describe habitual action (Cockerham & Hinote, 2009). With the foundation laid by these predecessors, Bourdieu developed his own understanding of 'habitus', mainly influenced by Panofsky's ideas of 'mental habits' (Swartz, 1997, p. 102), and inspired by his anthropological fieldwork in Algeria in the late 1950s. Generally speaking, habitus can manifest in internalized cultural codes which are somewhat invisible and untouchable; a system of dispositions such as attitudes, tastes, values, perceptions and beliefs. Nevertheless, habitus can present as the practice of a characteristic style expressed through durable ways of various aspects of life, including an individual's ways of speaking, walking, eating, gesturing, and thereby of feeling and thinking (Bourdieu, 1990a; Nash, 1999). To further explain this seemingly intangible concept, Bourdieu defined habitus as:

> Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively regulated and regular without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestration action of a conductor. (Bourdieu, 1977b, p. 72)

According to Bourdieu's explanation, habitus is durable, transportable but not immutable. Despite entering a new social space, dispositions obtained in the early years retain a durable prominence. The "durable" here means that habitus is not temporary, but has long-lasting effect on individuals and is hard to get rid of. Due to this argument, the concept of habitus has long been criticised on the grounds of its supposed social determinism. However, Bourdieu insisted that habitus is not static nor eternal, but is continuously built in response to different environments (Bourdieu, 2000). The dialectical confrontation between habitus and other social space results in a degree of adjustment, when habitus recognizes the new structure's legitimacy and thus is gradually structured with modifications.

Furthermore, in terms of Bourdieu's definition, habitus is regarded as a "structured and structuring structure" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 81). In the first place, 'structured' means that habitus can become permanent dispositions historically incorporated in each individual (Bourdieu, 1993b). Therefore, when analysing one's habitus, it cannot be separated from personal history. It is a product of individual previous experience, particularly socialization within the family in early childhood. Habitus inherits sociological genetic information of family ancestries, and it is hard to escape the constraint forces of individual origin and history. As the social space of very initial socialisation, the verdicts of the family on the child's behaviour are embodied into successive generations (Bourdieu, 1977b). This habitus is then continually structured after the individual begins to enter the social field, as habitus gradually becomes the whole collective history of both family and the social class one belongs to (Bourdieu, 1990a). In terms of EGRT fellows, prestigious university experience could be viewed as the final layer of habitus for the graduates prior to their entry into EGRT. However, fellows' experience of early years in their families and schooling cannot be ignored. What is acquired from a personal history of growing up, and lasting perceptions of a social position, might influence personal career aspirations and plans at the point of graduation (Li, 2013). Besides, the geographic origin and socio-economic status embedded in the habitus might also influence EGRT participation experience. Therefore, in this study, family backgrounds are taken into careful consideration when exploring fellows' reasons for participation in EGRT and their subsequent experience in disadvantaged schools.

'Structuring' refers to habitus as a product of social conditionings, which is endlessly transformed in response to new experiences (Bourdieu, 2000). It contributes to shaping one's present and future as the exterior social structures and conditions combine with the individual's interior dispositions, inclinations, and preferences. Therefore, habitus is multi-layered. When agents enter another social context, their responses, values, and actions can acquire a new layer built upon the previous layers of habitus. Habitus is therefore an open system of dispositions which enables later personal experience and social structures to modify previous ones (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133). In other words, habitus recognizes the potential of change, and change is most likely realised within transition from different social contexts, because the characteristics and rules are usually different, and -correspondingly- the capitals which social agents struggle for might be different in another field.

'Structure' also comprises dispositions systematically rather than randomly in order to generate a series of perceptions, appreciations and practice (Bourdieu, 1990a). Specifically, habitus comes from early childhood socialization experiences where external structures are internalized, and then the internalized dispositions set the structural limits or boundaries of individual practice within further socialization.

Having introducing the basic attributes of habitus, the remaining section discusses how habitus performs as a cognitive map (Davey, 2009) and classification schemata (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In terms of a cognitive map, habitus routinely guides and evaluates an agent's choice and practice. Against the view that choice is the product of an agent's free will, the choice inscribed in the habitus is seen as limited. More specifically, the choice social agents make not only depends on the range of available options, but also on options which are visible to them. As Reay (2004) argued, habitus is "envisaged as a deep, interior epicentre containing many matrices" (p.435) which demarcates the extent of choices available to social agents. In this way, habitus functions as an internalized framework which makes some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable. In this way, social agents seem to actively make choices, but in fact these choices are the result of "subjective expectations of objective probabilities" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 59); namely the future oriented assessment of likelihood for success or failure. However, this kind of assessment does not emerge out of the void; it originates in perceptions of historical and current conditions. For instance, children from working classes tend to lower their

expectations, even unconsciously, to those aspirations seen as being possible to them. Internalization of negative self-image and self-worth actively lead them fail in school (Reed-Danahay, 2005). In this way, habitus shapes aspirations and expectations into possibilities with perceptual boundaries of dispositions (Cockerham & Hinote, 2009). In conclusion, an agent's expectations and aspirations, perceptions of the possible and impossible, and beliefs are not natural but are rather conditioned in habitus (Maton, 2012; Reay 2004).

To further explain the relationship between invisible habitus and visible social practice, Bourdieu borrowed the term 'investment' from economic language. He proposed that the competition within a game is comparable to an investment because "players agree, by the mere fact of playing, and not by way of a 'contract', that the game is worth playing, and this collusion is the very basis of their competition" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98). Indeed, the game analogy makes sense because players on a sports field compete for applause, victory, and award — the expected returns on their investment of time and effort. Players (agents) have "an investment in the game" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98).

By inviting use of the economic term 'investment', it is clearer that social agents are not only economists, whose investment involves a rational system of overt, explicit strategies, but also sociologists, whose investment engages with a latent set of covert, implicit dispositions. That is to say, the probabilities of economic profit or sociological return become visible and operative only when these possibilities are perceived through "schemes of perception and appreciation which constitute a habitus" (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 344).

In addition to the function of perceiving possibilities, habitus is a system of classification. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), social structures and mental structures are homologous and genetically linked. The objective division and differentiation of society, particularly the grouping of the dominant and the dominated, will inscribe subjective cognitions of social agents. The social agents are constantly exposed to the extant social context, and they internalize its logics of typology. Then the mental scheme is the product that social divisions embody into social agents' dispositions. The classification schemata of habitus is:

> In the form of a system of classification, the mental and bodily schemata that
> function as symbolic templates for the practical activities—conduct, thoughts,

feelings, and judgement—of social agents. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 7)

To put this in other words, classification involves a system of "principles of vision and division" which works in delineating a situation, grouping, and interpreting a social phenomenon (Marom, 2014, p.1909). Social agents usually tend to unconsciously apply these principles into daily life when schemes of thought find instant adherence to "the world of tradition experienced as a natural world" (Bourdieu, 2002, p.164) with the arbitrary possibility. These social realities seem unquestioned and self-evident (Bourdieu, 1977b). Accordingly, socially constituted classificatory schemes are easily legitimated as necessary and natural by the dominant group. Then the social classification produced by the current social structures constructs the internal order of social agents. In this situation, the dominated groups who take the unprivileged social positions with limited resources are easily classified as inferior in the perceptual scheme of classification and stigmatised in the dominant discourse (Bourdieu, 1984).

In this study, the social division between urban and rural areas of current China owing to unbalanced economic development is drastic. As a result, the education of rural areas lags behind its urban counterparts with inadequate funds and lower quality teachers. Rural compulsory education then takes the most subordinate position in the hierarchy of the education system, usually classified as unqualified and inferior. In contrast, the prestigious universities occupy the top position of the education system, with the richest educational resources. Due to this huge disparity, cumulative exposure of students to the external division enables the mental scheme to internalize the external structures, forming a classification in perceiving external social contexts as classificatory schemes of habitus. For EGRT fellows, the classificatory scheme of habitus might set up many assumptions and then influence how they make value judgements and recognize social practices.

Up to now, the three key thinking tools have been individually introduced. However, they are never separate, nor are they exclusive to each other. On one hand, field is a social space where dominant and subordinate groups struggle to occupy position by taking advantage of capital. No capital can exist and function without relation to field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992); meanwhile, field generates and rewards the relevant capital whose value has been recognized in it (Bourdieu &

Wacquant, 1992). Hence, it is meaningless to discuss capital without field. On the other hand, field provides "a particular sector of a world" where habitus is structured and is structuring (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 81); meanwhile, habitus also constructs the meaning of a field. In the same way, habitus cannot be discussed without field. For this reason, the next section focuses on relationships between these three thinking tools.

## 3.3 RELATIONS OF THE THREE THINKING TOOLS

It is not uncommon for a social agent to move across different fields. In a new field, they might need to rework the habitus gained from the original field, as well as the capital valued in the original field. In this study, EGRT fellows experience a transition from the prestigious university to the disadvantaged school. This section discusses the relationship between capital and field; and between habitus and field during this transition.

### 3.3.1 Capital and field

Bourdieu uses 'field' as a means to explain how capital is differently valued across various fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Meanwhile, capital also indicates whether social agents stay in or enter another social space. The entry into another field requires capital. Only applicants who possesses the required form of capital can enter a field. Take EGRT participants, for example, only those candidates possessing a certain amount and configuration of capital can finally succeed in the selective recruitment process.

The value of capital depends on the field. That is to say, the value of capital is not unchangeable. Capital can only function when it has been recognized and acknowledged by the principles of the field. When a social agent enters a new field, two scenarios might happen in terms of their previous capital portfolio. In the first scenario, some types of capital are not as appreciated as in the previous field, while in the other scenario, those types of capital are more valued owing to their scarcity in the new field. For instance, many rural students obtain extraordinarily high scores in the College Entrance Examination and are admitted by prestigious universities. In the field of schooling, the proficient grasp of content knowledge from textbooks and examination skills, as embodied cultural capital, helped them to excel above peers in examinations. This embodied cultural capital is highly valued in the field of schooling.

However, the same resource is much less valued—has less capital value—in the higher education field, where personal abilities as demonstrated in extracurricular activities and internship experience are more stressed in the neoliberal era (Li, 2013). Different values accorded to the same knowledge and skills suggest that rural schools, referred to as disadvantaged schools in this study, and prestigious universities are quite different fields. After being a teacher in disadvantaged schools, examination skills, and corresponding pedagogies of knowledge delivery might be valued again. Therefore, capital depends upon the nature of the rules within the field, which can distinguish different fields (Bourdieu, 1993b).

### 3.3.2 Habitus and field

When social agents travel across different fields, they might experience a re-match between habitus and field. When habitus and field are well-matched, most agents feel like a fish in water as Bourdieu famously put it. However, habitus and field do not always match perfectly, especially when a sudden and dramatic change is involved. Then individuals feel like a fish out of water (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Emotional suffering may subsequently occur, owing to stubbornly resistant or self-depreciating attitudes during the transition. Bourdieu views emotion (bodily emotion) as a part of habitus, a concept used in sociology as well as psychology (Reed-Danahay, 2005). In this situation, bodily emotions such as shame, timidity and anxiety, and sentiments such as confusion, fear and dissatisfaction can emerge in unfamiliar circumstances; and they are not easily controlled by consciousness (Bourdieu, 2000). Therefore, bodily emotion might be more likely to manifest with a mismatch of habitus and new social field (Lin, 2012).

Apart from the emotional experience, transition between different fields brings a series of challenges for habitus when confronted with unfamiliarity. In most situations, the habitus does not necessarily make an immediate response. Immersed within another field, the nature of habitus would show itself to be durable and resistant to change (Davey, 2009b; Maton, 2012). In this situation, "hysteresis" is a term used to describe disruption between habitus and the field structures to which they no longer correspond well. As a result, the hysteresis effect is "necessarily implicated in the logic of the constitution of habitus, and practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that in which they are objectively fitted" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 78).

Although the new environment generally provides a break from the past, which might evoke bodily emotions and incur the hysteresis effect, transition to another field means a chance to encompass the possibility of change and adaptation. When the habitus which represents a former dispositional sense of sentiments, inclinations, and propensities cannot make sense in a new field, social agents tend to internalise the external structures and powers and make corresponding adaptations to the interests and rules of the new field. Recognition of the rules and capital required within a new field enables social agents to better reposition themselves. If agents are committed to achieve a desirable field position, the transformation is necessary to match their habitus with the field structures. Bourdieu argues that "habitus can be practically transformed by the effect of social trajectory leading to conditions of living different from the initial ones", and then an altered habitus will be generated to match the new field structures (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 116). In this study, EGRT fellows might meet many difficulties physically and emotionally when moving from prestigious universities in urban areas to disadvantaged schools in rural areas. However, it is also an opportunity for them to reshape their habitus after recognizing the rules of the new social space.

During field transition, therefore, both capital and habitus might differ from how they may have been if social agents just stayed in one field. Once prestigious university graduates choose to join EGRT, they might experience a shift in terms of their own capital and habitus. This denotes the underlying dynamics of their practice which this study examines regarding (1) the fellows' decisions to join EGRT; (2) disparities between the fellows' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions about teaching in disadvantaged schools; and (3) the realization of EGRT values in fellows' involvement.

## 3.4  A SUMMARY OF THREE THINKING TOOLS APPLICATION

The theoretical framework for this study is based on Bourdieu's sociological theory. Bourdieu himself explains his main theory with the equation: "[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 101). A person's practice results from relations between his/her habitus and capital in a field. This equation is crucial to an understanding of Bourdieu's three main thinking tools (Wacquant, 1989, p. 40), namely field, capital and habitus, which are interrelated conceptually as an explanatory triad to explain social phenomena. Bourdieu's thinking tools provide a comprehensive

sociological gaze to account for an agent's social practice (Bourdieu, 1990b). In this study, the fellows' decisions to join EGRT, perceived disparities between their pre-service and in-service experience of teaching in disadvantaged schools, and the realization of EGRT values in their involvement are considered to be forms of social practice. All these practices might result from the EGRT fellows' capital and habitus within a given field. From this viewpoint, Bourdieu's theoretical insights lay a solid interpretative foundation for this study.

In terms of EGRT participation reasons, there have been many studies focusing on individuals' decision making, exploring how individuals make the choice. Two of the most influential theories are rational choice (action) theory and Schutz's theory (Hatcher, 1998; Schutz, 1962). According to rational choice (action) theory, personal action and practice are brought about by rational choice after calculating the cost, profit and probability of success. The individual utilizes resources to achieve the goal they have set and the decision is made based on evaluation of how to benefit most within current conditions. However, rational choice theory has been criticised on the grounds that there is something beyond rationality involved in decision-making. The individual interprets the world and makes decisions based on the sedimentation of previous subjective experience, combined with aspirations and desires. The two theories mentioned above partly explain the individual's choice; however, when conceptualising decision making as a kind of social practice, Bourdieu's three thinking tools offer a means of transcending objectivism and subjectivism, which might give a more comprehensive understanding of a social agent's choice.

When it comes to the subsequent social practice regarding perceived disparities and involvement as EGRT fellows in disadvantaged schools, habitus and capital might differ owing to the process of field transition. After EGRT fellows enter disadvantaged schools, the forms of capital they have accrued may either be devalued or appreciated in the local schools. In this situation, in order to achieve a desired position in the new field, they might need to recognize the valued capital and then configure the capital appreciated by the new field. In addition, EGRT fellows' responses to the new field with its various practices during the transition from other fields might generate their new "evolving habitus" (Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2009). Their diverse responses and strategies can shed light on how habitus is fashioned and refashioned by objective

possibilities in a material or symbolic way. All these theoretical aspects inform this study as it interrogates the social practice of EGRT fellows.

# Chapter 4: Methodology

In the previous chapter, Bourdieu's sociological theory has been proposed as a source of conceptual tools suitable for theorising the social practice of EGRT fellows as they become teachers in disadvantaged schools after graduating from prestigious universities. The proposed research questions are therefore as follows:

> ***Research Question 1:*** *Why do elite graduates choose to participate in EGRT?*
>
> ***Research Question 2:*** *What disparities are there between EGRT fellows' pre-service assumptions about rural-school teaching and their in-service perceptions?*
>
> ***Research Question 3:*** *How do EGRT program values play out in fellows' involvement in disadvantaged schools?*
>
> ***Research Question 4:*** *What relationships are there between: (1) EGRT fellows' reasons for participation that are consonant with EGRT values; (2) disparities between EGRT fellows' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions of students in disadvantaged schools; and (3) EGRT fellows' involvement in accord with EGRT values in disadvantaged schools?*

To answer these research questions, this chapter articulates the research design of the study. Section 4.1 introduces the exploratory sequential mixed methods design in a Bourdieusian study, and discusses the methodological rationale for using it. Section 4.2 and Section 4.3 detail the initial qualitative phase and the subsequent quantitative phase of the study respectively. Section 4.4 explains how participant objectivation has been applied as a methodological principle throughout this study. Section 4.5 outlines procedures of this study.

## 4.1   MIXED METHODS RESEARCH IN A BOURDIEUSIAN STUDY

Bourdieu, as a scholar in the French academy committed to empirical research, employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches extensively throughout his own empirical studies. Even as an anthropology researcher in his early years, he constantly thought about how to use both statistical analysis (e.g., the statistical analysis of questionnaires) and ethnographic approaches (e.g., observations) in his field work in Béarn and Algeria (Grenfell & Lebaron, 2014). Bourdieu then chose geometric modelling of data by applying correspondence analysis in his studies such as

*Distinction and Homo Academicus* (Robson & Sanders, 2009). In his later work, he began to undertake intensive interviews in *Weight of the World* (Bourdieu & Ferguson, 1999). This indicates that Bourdieu's empirical work is not constrained by a particular methodological approach. Rather, Bourdieu has shown the way to think through the qualitative and the quantitative domains, to realise the full value of both methodological camps, and to better understand the patterns and nuances of social phenomena through a pluralistic methodological lens.

The research methodology of Bourdieu may be described as constructivist structuralism which lays a foundation for his reflexive sociology to break the dualism between subjectivism and objectivism (Fries, 2009). If the basic task of social science is to understand the dialogical interplay of objective social structure with subjective agency, Bourdieu views qualitative and quantitative methods as two "necessary moments" (Bourdieu, 1994, pp. 123-127) in this process. For Bourdieu, these two approaches did not work individually, but in an integrated way to explore social science. His reflexive sociology offers an alternative answer to "the paradigm war" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) for justifying the legitimacy of mixed methods. In this way, Bourdieu shed light on a breakthrough approach which "combines an understanding of how objective social structures pattern human conduct while remaining open to the insight that human beings can and do subjectively act" (Fries, 2009, p. 329). Meanwhile, reflexive sociology is not only for researchers to investigate the research object, but is also a self-referential approach, that "turns methods of constructing the research object back on themselves" (Fries, 2009, p. 329). The method was named participant objectivation, and is detailed in Section 4.4.

In this process, Bourdieusian theory is therefore amenable to both qualitative and quantitative data analysis approaches. What matters is that the approach—qualitative or quantitative—enables the researcher to (1) probe a social field as a field of relations between agents with different portfolios of capital; and (2) identify groups according to their social position in the field—pre-theorisations such as 'the post 80s and 90s generation' cannot be imposed on the data.

There are currently several mixed methods models available to researchers. The selection of one for this study needed to be based on research intent, the appropriate sequence of qualitative and quantitative phases, and decisions about the emphasis on either the qualitative or quantitative phase. Three major types of mixed methods have

been typically adopted in the education field: the convergent parallel design, the explanatory sequential design and the exploratory sequential design (Creswell, 2015). To address this study's research questions, an exploratory sequential design was used.

There were three major reasons for selecting the exploratory sequential design for this study. First, the design is usually used when existing instruments may not be known or available. Chapter Two of this study notes that there is a dearth of extant research and associated research instruments on programs like EGRT in China. Owing to the limited knowledge about EGRT, the exploratory sequential design was appropriate, since this design has been widely used to "explore a phenomenon, identify themes, design an instrument and subsequently test it" (Creswell, 2015, p.546). Second, the exploratory sequential design does not require the quantitative phase to be equally emphasized. Rather, the analysis of qualitative data is more detailed than that of the quantitative data, which was appropriate to address the research problem. Third, this approach requires the researcher to follow the sequence of first collecting the qualitative data and then the quantitative data, which was compatible with the intended sequence of answering the research questions. The instrument of the quantitative phase was constructed on the base of qualitative data analysis and was used to examine the statistical relationships between the findings emerging from the initial phase.

In summary, following Bourdieu' combination of both qualitative and quantitative approach, this study adopts an exploratory sequential mixed methods design to facilitate understanding of the experience of graduates from prestigious universities as they become teachers through the EGRT program. As shown in Figure 4.1, this entailed a qualitative phase, instrument development and a quantitative phase.



*Figure 4.1.* Research design of this study

In accordance with exploratory sequential mixed methods research, the qualitative phase was conducted initially to respond to the first three research questions.

This initial phase informed the instrument design of the subsequent quantitative phase, which further explored the relationship of important findings from the initial qualitative phase. The qualitative phase took the dominant position in this study, with the quantitative component supporting and complementing the qualitative phase. The quantitative phase allowed the testing of the relationship of the main findings in the initial phase, which contributed to a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of the EGRT participation experience.

## 4.2    THE QUALITATIVE PHASE OF THE STUDY

Research about programs like EGRT in China has been quite rare up to now. Therefore, a qualitative approach was used in the first phase, which is regarded as an effective strategy for exploring a new social field (Tian, 1999). In addition to exploring novel social phenomena, qualitative approaches provide opportunities to develop in-depth understanding of processes and relations underlying the social phenomena (Grenfell & Lebaron, 2014). This approach helped to construct the conceptual and empirical basis for the instrument design in the quantitative phase. In qualitative research, the interview is often the main source of data for exploring and understanding the research questions (Merriam, 2014). Hence, interviews were the adopted method in the initial qualitative phase.

### 4.2.1 Interview

Interview is often the preferred method for collecting data in a qualitative study because "it will get better data or more data or data at less cost than other methods" (Dexter, 1970, p. 11). In order to obtain the most useful and valuable information for this study, semi-structured interviewing was adopted. Different from highly structured and unstructured interviewing, questions in semi-structured interviews are relatively flexible and the order of the questions can be adjusted according to responses. This kind of interview not only enables the researcher to prepare interview questions in advance, to guarantee the interview direction, but also embraces unexpected responses from open-ended questions (Tod, 2006). It also allows the interviewer to seek clarification or further detail through prompting questions. In this way, semi-structured interviews contributed to the capture of emergent accounts of the interview participants in this study. Having determined the interview strategy, the next section

addresses the question of how many participants are needed in a qualitative interview study.

### 4.2.2 Sampling

There is no standard or definitive answer to how many participants are required for an effective qualitative study. The number of participants depends on (1) the nature of the investigation and the method used (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Mertens, 2004); (2) the type of study; and (3) the nature of the target population. Bertaux (1981) argues that a sample size including at least 15 participants can be regarded as acceptable in qualitative research. Creswell (1998) argues for 5-25 interviewees for phenomenological research and 20-30 for grounded theory research. Kuzel (1992) (1992) asserts that six to eight interviewees for a homogeneous target population and 12-20 for heterogeneous counterparts will "achieve maximum variation" (p. 41). A sign of a reasonable sample for a research project identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is reaching the point of saturation. Saturation means that further data collection seems to be redundant and unnecessary when similar information begins to largely emerge. Guest et al. (2006) operationalize the term "saturation" in their study and find that the results of analysis reach saturation after the first 12 interviews. In brief, debate about the appropriate number of participants in a qualitative interview study has not reached consensus.

At the time of data collection, EGRT was active across a wide area of rural China. For logistical reasons, data collection in this sole-researcher doctoral study was limited to a single county. Due to the mountainous terrain and underdeveloped economy, transportation in the study area is difficult. Given the limited time and resources available in the current study, it was not practical to visit all placement schools located in the county to invite interviews. In this situation, an invitation was distributed at an EGRT event to participate and a brief demographic survey was undertaken. Since about 20 EGRT fellows were willing to participate in the study, participants were selected by taking account of demographic diversity (e.g., gender, age, educational experience and family backgrounds) in order to obtain relatively saturated information and better prepare for the instrument design in the quantitative phase. Finally, considering the geographic reality in a mountainous area, the researcher recruited 16 participants working in six disadvantaged schools for the proposed interview-based

research. Among those 16 interview participants, two were recruited for pilot interviews and another 14 for the main interviews.

The researcher thanked EGRT fellows who were not selected to participate in the interviews and invited them to participate in the quantitative phase of the research project. After the EGRT event the researcher visited the disadvantaged schools where the interviewees were placed and conducted individual face to face interviews with each interviewee. Face-to-face interviewing is synchronous communication, where the interviewer and participants react directly to each other (Opdenakker, 2006). This method also contributes to building rapport between interviewer and interviewee.

### 4.2.3 Interviewing

One of the keys to successful interviewing is the design of the interview questions. For this study, the interview questions were open-ended and developed with reference to previous relevant studies, the sociological theory of Bourdieu, and the research questions under examination. Open-ended interview questions were used because these tend to yield detailed and descriptive data (Merriam, 2014). In particular, the interview protocols were informed by existing Bourdieusian studies which have used interviews to elicit data about 'field', 'capital', 'habitus', 'investment' and other Bourdieusian concepts (Lin, 2012; Mu, 2013; Tian, 1999). The interview protocol is attached at the end of the confirmation document (See Appendix 1).

Pilot interviews are generally beneficial for trying out interview questions. In the present study, the interview schedules were piloted by skype with two interviewees prior to entering placement schools. In this way, the researcher gained more experience and skills, discovering what kinds of questions might yield ineffective data; and what kinds of questions could spark interest leading to richer data. For instance, experience as students was a good warm-up question because the pilot study interviewees had earned honours and a sense of achievement as prestigious university graduates. The researcher noticed that participants seemed to enjoy talking about this. Accordingly, this interview question was asked earlier, contributing a good warm-up.

The researcher was also able to get some feedback from participants which could be quite useful for later interviews (Merriam, 2014). For example, some words in some questions might cause confusion or be misunderstood; some topics might be recognised as sharp or sensitive, or making interviewees uncomfortable. For example,

when talking about parents' attitudes toward the EGRT participation, an interview participant in the pilot study was very sad and even found it hard to continue the interview. Therefore, when the researcher asked this question in the main study, she paid careful attention to the feelings of interviewees. In this way, interview questions were modified. Questions used in the main interview phase were based on the pilot feedback.

After the pilot interviews, the researcher went to the placement schools of the interview participants and conducted face-to-face interviews. For better communication with the selected interviewees a quiet, convenient and comfortable place was found for confidential communication. During the interview, the researcher tried to establish "non-violent communication" (Bourdieu & Ferguson, 1999, p. 608). That is, she tried to avoid committing symbolic violence by imposing her own understandings on those of the participants. The arbitrary intrusion inherent in the interview relationship may be unwittingly produced. Therefore, the researcher tried to reduce the symbolic violence potentially produced by the asymmetrical interview relationship as much as possible. Two methodical approaches were adopted.

The first was that Chinese was chosen as the language in which to conduct the interview. The researcher could have chosen English to conduct the interviews, which might be more convenient for her subsequent transcription and data analysis. Although interview participants were prestigious university graduates whose English proficiency was assumed to be good, use of a common first language enabled each of the participants to acquire an equal position in terms of linguistic capital. In addition, the researcher paid more attention to her own attitude. Her verbal feedback was designed to include positive comments, such as 'yes', 'right', and 'of course'; body language was designed to include gestures, such as an approving nod and facial expressions such as a smile. The intent was to ensure that there were signs of attention, curiosity, support and recognition, consonant with the researcher's "intellectual and emotional participation" in the conversation (Bourdieu & Ferguson, 1999, p. 610). In this way, the biasing effects of the researcher's "higher place of social hierarchy" referred to by Bourdieu might become weakened.

With permission from the participants, the interviews were audio-recorded. For the sake of ethical integrity, two recorders were used in case one malfunctioned—it was essential to ensure that the participants' generosity in making their time available

and their acceptance of the risks of research participation resulted in usable data. The intent was to check that data had been successfully recorded and stored and then to undertake any required reconstruction as soon as possible. As a further back-up, the researcher continually took notes during the interview in case of recorder malfunction (e.g., forgetting to push the start button or failing to save the documents). This meant that usable data could be salvaged through a written reconstruction of the interview. The interviewees' expression and body language were also written down in the notes so as to provide a richer context for understanding the written transcripts, which tend to be shorn of non-linguistic meaning. In terms of the length of the interview, it usually lasted 50 minutes for each participant. All interviews were then transcribed.

### 4.2.4 Transcription

Given the intersubjective essence of communication, transcription is regarded as an interpretive activity rather than simply the conversion of verbal to written language (Poland, 1995). Transcription can strongly influence how participants' interviews are understood in later data analysis. As a fundamentally methodological component of a rigorous study, however, its trustworthiness seems to be taken for granted when 'verbatim' is widely acknowledged (Patton, 1990). In this situation, the transcript is frequently seen as unproblematic, with given privileged status in the research process (Poland, 1995). Therefore, this was a moment for probing the potential bias that could arise from unthinkingly taking up common data production and analysis methods in the contemporary academic field. For decreasing such potential bias, the transcription principles and rules were carefully set before transcribing.

Transcription practices are divided into two dominant modes: naturalism and denaturalism (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). Naturalism occurs when "every utterance is transcribed in as much detail as possible", while denaturalism removes "idiosyncratic elements of speech (e.g., stutters, pauses, nonverbal, involuntary vocalizations)" (Oliver, et al., 2005, p. 1274). Pure naturalism and denaturalism are seldom chosen by researchers. How to balance the two modes mainly depends on what kind of research problems are to be explored in a given research study (Oliver, et al., 2005). When it comes to this study, the research questions focus on personal experience and perceptions of EGRT participation. It did not require the fine-grained linguistic or interactional detail provided by naturalism. Therefore, the study was inclined towards denaturalism.

This first made it possible to capture the sociological substance of the interviews with a high emphasis on meanings and perceptions evident in the conversations. For this purpose, pursuit of full and faithful transcription was still necessary, but fine details, including the depiction of accents, pauses in the conversation and so forth, were not required. Second, confused phrases or verbal slips were cleaned up for the sake of readability of the transcripts. This process was conducted cautiously so as to remain faithful to the interviewees' accounts as much as possible (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013; Kvale, 2008). Third, even though involuntary vocalizations and response tokens are much more likely to be neglected by denaturalism, both can serve to capture emotions during interviews. These features of communication occurred frequently in these interviews. At the time of transcription, the researcher thought at least of some more or less involuntary vocalizations (e.g., laughing, and crying) that might be useful in the analysis. Accordingly, information about them was noted in the transcripts, for example, *laugh*. Different from involuntary noise, most response tokens were intentional. For example, 'yeah' can express agreement or understanding, while 'Huh?' means a request for rephrasing or repetition (Oliver, et al., 2005). Tokens like these were therefore kept in the transcripts to ensure that premature interpretation did not occur. This was one way in which the researcher sought to manage potential biases arising from similarities of social position with those of the participants or the theorisations available to her in the academic field.

Fidelity and readability, although hard to reconcile, are not mutually exclusive. To better manage the tension, first, the researcher chose to transcribe all interviews herself, which enabled the building of familiarity with the data (Phan, 2015). Second, the researcher listened to each interview recording several times to keep the verbatim transcription as close as possible to the conversations held during the interviews, especially when some words or sentences could not be clearly heard. Third, not everything could be captured by the recorder, and some meanings might have been expressed by nonverbal communication such as facial expressions and other body language observed and perceived by the researcher. Therefore, field notes were used to help record the main nonverbal vocalizations. For better understanding these nonverbal communications, the researcher was required to imagine that she was in the interviewees' positions, and sought their point of view for better perceiving their doubts and thoughts (Bourdieu & Ferguson, 1999).

### 4.2.5 Translation

The study straddles two languages, namely Chinese and English. The project was conducted in a Chinese language context but reported in the English language. In this respect, the language choice for the study was considered from the outset. Since all the participants and the researcher were Chinese, the interviews were conducted in Chinese. During the design phase, the Chinese researcher discussed research questions in English with the supervisory team, which was composed of a Chinese-English bilingual scholar, an Anglophone Australian scholar who is a long term Chinese learner with experience as both teacher and student in China, and an Anglophone Australian scholar who is open to language politics in a time when there is an increasing body of Chinese students in the Australian doctoral education system. Once the design was agreed within the project team, the researcher then collected data in Chinese. Data analysis was also conducted in Chinese because Squires (2009) suggests that data analysis should be initiated with source languages. In this process, the researcher communicated with the supervisory team in both English and Chinese to get the best possible advice on data analysis. The shifts between two languages did not seem problematic, given that the linguistic capacities and dispositions of both the researcher and the supervisors facilitated research design and data analysis.

After finishing data analysis with the source language, Chinese in this case, the report was presented in English. Some researchers recommend that a number of credentialed translators and translation reviewers should be invited during the translation process (Regmi, Naidoo, & Pilkington, 2010). However, as a PhD student in the early stage of a research career, with limited funds and resources, this recommendation was found to be unrealistic. A cross-language researcher is in the best position to undertake the translation (Liamputtong, 2010), considering familiarity with local culture, the source language and target language, as well as with the particular research field.

The researcher herself completed the Chinese-to-English translation and reported in English. In order to guarantee the trustworthiness of the study, most of the translated transcripts were examined by an English speaking proof-reader in order to check the dynamic equivalence (Constantinescu, 2010), which is one of the most well-known ways of identifying equivalence in various translation principles. The purpose of dynamic equivalence was that the target language user could understand the

message and information translated by source language users easily or in a most natural manner. That is to say, the dynamic equivalence guarantees that the accuracy of the translation is evaluated by the ease of comprehension and recognition by the target language users (Sutrisno, Nguyen, & Tangen, 2014). In brief, language choice and shift in the current study were carefully considered and managed in a way that is methodologically sound.

### 4.2.6 Analysis

Deductive thematic analysis of interview data was used in this study. Different from survey or experimental research, the researcher was the chief instrument for interview data collection and analysis. Accordingly, the researcher was particularly important in this stage, as "the very way we conceptualize something shapes not only what we see but what we can see" (Grenfell and Lebaron, 2014, p.117). In this situation, it was necessary to place the research into a "broader context", namely the theoretical framework (Wolcott, 1995, p. 180). The researcher analysed and interpreted the data based on relevant theory, while still keeping an open mind for novelty and contribution to new knowledge. Thematic analysis contributed to this end.

Thematic analysis is regarded as a fundamental method for qualitative data analysis, and even as a sort of "shared genetic skill" among qualitative data analysts (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Holloway & Todres, 2003). This enables themes to emerge, with each theme "captur[ing] something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represent[ing] some level of patterned response or meaning with the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). As a relatively flexible and easy method, it was useful in this study for obtaining key features of numerous collected data and some unexpected insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006). More specifically, guided by Bourdieu's theory, deductive thematic analysis was driven by the researcher's theoretical perspective. The chosen theoretical framework for this study involved a number of assumptions, concepts and perspectives. While it might not provide an abundant account of all data, it can draw attention to specific or significant aspects of the data. As a result, both theoretically informed and emerging codes were used together during the process of data analysis. The original codes were later combined and reduced to eliminate overlap and to generate a logical pattern in the data (Lodico & Voegtle, 2006). However, the analysis was disciplined by constant consideration of

what the themes were revealing, as was relevant given the conceptual tools of Bourdieu within which the study was framed.

To apply deductive thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend a step by step procedure for researchers (see Figure 4.2). The prerequisite for the researcher is to engage in the data in order to become familiar with all the content. After getting familiar with all the data in breadth and depth, decisions on how to code the data depend on whether the themes in the study are more "data-driven or theory driven" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). Coding in this study preferred the "theory driven" approach guided by Bourdieu's theory, but also considering data-driven approach based on the specific Chinese context. For instance, an interview participant talked about how she realized and took advantaged of EGRT alumni network, then her accounts were coded as 'social capital' based on Bourdieu's theory. In another situation, several interview participants mentioned their resistance to the stereotyped life trajectory: graduation-work-marriage-baby. It was hard to directly correspond with Bourdieu's thinking tools as the above-mentioned example and had never appeared in the extant literature based on the knowledge of the researcher. Hence, this account was coded as 'resistance to graduation-work-marriage-baby trajectory'. Then the researcher further explored and analysed this contextual statement from Chinese post 80s and 90s generation combining with Bourdieu's broad theoretical perspectives like *doxa* and *heterodoxy.*

After assigning codes to the data, overarching themes were produced from combining different codes. Not all the codes necessarily fitted a theme, but all codes were kept at this stage. Whilst aware of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Patton, 1990), the researcher checked themes to ensure that they were coherent to both coded extracts and the whole data set. A thematic map was then generated. The names and definitions for each theme were identified at this stage. After finishing all the work, a scholarly data analysis report was presented with extract examples and in-depth analysis.

Nvivo - a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software widely used in qualitative data analysis - was used to assist deductive thematic data analysis. In Step 2, the initial codes were generated when NVivo was applied. . Compared with hand coding, three major advantages emerged. First, the collected data were systematically stored, categorised, and easily accessed. Second, NVivo created user-friendly visual

representations of data. Third, facilitated by NVivo, the researcher could more easily organize and re-organize codes than via traditional paper work (Rademaker, Grace, & Curda, 2012).
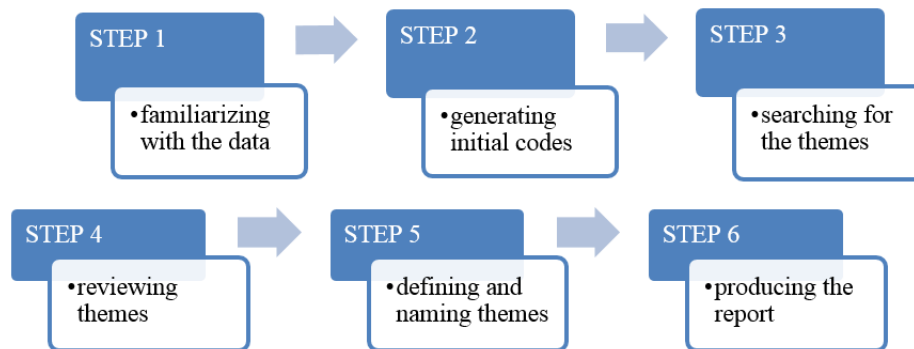


*Figure 4.2*. The process of thematic data analysis

### 4.2.7 Validity and reliability

The researcher addressed validity and reliability issues during the whole life of this study, from conceptualization to data collection, analysis and interpretation. Validity in the positivist tradition represents how truthful the study is (Golafshani, 2003). However, validity is relative in a qualitative study, and has to be assessed with reference to the purpose and circumstance of the study (Maxwell, 2005). Although qualitative study cannot absolutely "capture the objective truth or reality" (Merriam, 2014, p. 215), strategies recommended by scholars and researchers to increase validity have been applied in this study. First, due to the principle of maximum variation, participant selection took account of the demographic diversity of the participants (Eisner, 1991). Second, a supervisory team with bilingual strength guaranteed peer review for the congruency of findings (Merriam, 2014). Finally, the researcher adopted Bourdieu's approach of reflexivity named participant objectivation (Section 4.4), which objectified the account of the researcher's position in the given field, along with her relevant forms of capital and dispositions (Bourdieu, 2003).

Reliability refers to "the extent to which research findings can be replicated" (Merriam, 2014, p. 220). Lincoln and Guba (1985) use consistency to define reliability in qualitative research contexts. For qualitative research, reliability mainly means "whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (Merriam, 2014, pp. 220-221). Instead of requiring other researchers to obtain the same results or findings, consistency expects that the results are consistent with the collected data. Therefore,

for this study, the details of data collection, data analysis, and decision making of the whole research process are recorded and selectively presented in this thesis.

The qualitative phase in this exploratory sequential mixed method design was conducted prior to the quantitative phase. In this phase, experience of graduates from prestigious universities as they became teachers through the EGRT program were explored deeply and analysed. This qualitative phase laid the foundation for the design of the following quantitative phase, which is discussed in the next section.

## 4.3 QUANTITATIVE PHASE

In the quantitative phase of this study, a survey was designed and administered. By definition, survey is a quantitative research method often used for collecting perceptions, opinions, or characteristics of a target population and then statistically analysing trends or testing research hypotheses (Creswell, 2015). The quantitative phase functions as a necessary complement to the qualitative phase. The emerging relationships among important findings in the qualitative phase regarding the three crucial aspects of the EGRT participation experience could thus be tested. This section discusses the research hypothesis, the sampling strategy, instrument design and development, as well as data analysis methods in the quantitative phase.

### 4.3.1 Research questions and hypotheses

The qualitative phase was mainly intended to answer the first three research questions listed at the beginning of this chapter. The qualitative findings indicate possible relationships between (1) reasons consonant with EGRT values; (2) disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions of students in disadvantaged schools; and (3) involvement in accordance with EGRT values. Therefore, the main focus of the quantitative analysis was to test whether the findings related to these three aspects of participation experience were statistically significant. For the purpose of statistical analysis, a set of measures were designed. Accordingly, two hypotheses were proposed:

> $H_01$. *Reasons consonant with EGRT values have no statistically significant impact on the involvement in accord with EGRT values in disadvantaged schools.*

*$H_0$2. Disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions of students have no statistically significant impact on the involvement in accord with EGRT values in disadvantaged schools.*

Measurement design and development are reported in Section 4.3.2 of this chapter.

### 4.3.2 Instrument design and development

A questionnaire is a widely used form of instrument in a survey design. In this study, the researcher designed an online questionnaire. Since other researchers' feedback indicated that QUT Key Survey did not always perform well within the Chinese Internet environment, Sojump, one of the most popular web-based survey creation tools in China, was applied in this study. This tool shared most of the features and functions of QUT Key survey without any of the technical problems that arose when that tool was accessed in China. An online questionnaire was used for several reasons: (1) cost advantages; (2) participant convenience; and (3) the reduced likelihood of data entry errors (Mu, 2013). In addition, compared with a paper version, an online questionnaire with higher confidentiality may enable participants to present more intimate, but less socially desirable, feelings and perspectives in their responses (Tuten, Urban, & Bosnjak, 2000). Even though the infrastructure of disadvantaged schools in rural areas lagged behind that of schools in cities, internet access was guaranteed in all the disadvantaged schools in this study.

There were four parts to the questionnaire. The first part included demographic and background questions (e.g., gender, age, educational background, household income, and parents' occupation and highest education degree). The following three parts corresponded with the main findings of the initial three research questions in the qualitative phase. These indicators were designed on the grounds of findings from the qualitative phase (See Table 8.1 in Chapter Eight).

A 5-point Likert-type scale was adopted to measure how items mapped to these indicators. The Likert-type scale is an ordinal level of measurement; and errors are minimal when a Likert-type scale is treated as an interval level of measurement, which is the case in most educational research. It is widely acknowledged that the Likert-type scale can be used as a proxy interval level of measurement in practice (Creswell, 2008). The major statistical method applied to the data analysis of the quantitative phase was cluster analysis, which is discussed in Section 4.3.5.

### 4.3.3 Target population

At the time of the pilot study in August 2016, the number of EGRT program participants was approximately 800. Among these 800 participants, there were about 400 in-service fellows (2014-2016 cohort and 2015-2017 cohort) and 400 EGRT alumni who had completed their service. The target population of this study included both in-service fellows and EGRT alumni.

### 4.3.4 Pilot study

A pilot study is a small-scale version or trial run of the main study, which is able to function as the pre-testing of the research instrument (Baker, 1994). As mentioned earlier, the instrument used in this study was developed from the findings of the qualitative phase. It was important to conduct a pilot study to check whether the proposed instrument was methodologically sound; to test the face validity of this self-designed instrument. Face validity is used to evaluate whether the designed questionnaire appears to measure what it is assumed to measure (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). Since rapport had been built with interview participants in the qualitative phase, the first 30 pilot online questionnaires were mostly filled in by them and their EGRT friends. Feedback from these 30 participants was carefully considered in order to modify and improve the original questionnaire items. In this process, ambiguous words or sentences were clarified. For example, the initial question was, "what is your family average monthly income?" This question might confuse the participant if they had already married before or during the EGRT service. The term 'family income' was not clear whether it referred to the total income for self and spouse or the total income for self, spouse and their own parents? Therefore, the researcher revised this question, changing it to: "What is your parents' average monthly income?"

### 4.3.5 Main study

*Sample size*

Each statistical method has its own requirements with respect to sample size for producing reliable results. In the quantitative phase, Twostep Cluster analysis was adopted by this study. Therefore, the sample size had to meet the requirement for that particular analytic method. There is no consensus on the sample size required for performing Twostep cluster analysis; for although it tends to prefer a large sample size, the number of variables is also important. According to the rule of thumb, the sample

size should be $2^m$ where m equals the number of variables (Formann, 1984; Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011). Based on findings of the three sub-research questions in the qualitative phase, three domains had been designed. The largest number of indicators of one domain was seven. Accordingly, 128 was the estimated sample size required for cluster analysis in this study.

### Sampling

Once the target population had been identified, the sampling method was carefully considered. There were two main principles for choosing the sampling method. On one hand, the sampling methods should be practically designed to successfully reach the target population. On the other hand, the sample size required for the statistical analysis used in the study should be satisfied (Creswell, 2008). After taking into account the above two principles, this study used snowball sampling.

Snowball sampling is a further development of convenience sampling (Creswell, 2015). The rule of convenience sampling is that individuals become participants of a study because they are willing. Then in the snowball sampling, the researcher could ask the convenience-sampled participants to invite others who also met the criteria. Snowball sampling is commonly employed when participants are hard to access or identify (Nardi, 2006). Since EGRT fellows were placed in more than one hundred schools in rural and mountainous areas, it was not practical for the researcher to personally distribute questionnaires to them. In addition, almost all EGRT participants left placement schools after their two years' service, and they might then work or continue their further education domestically or internationally; it was therefore hard for the researcher to individually contact the EGRT fellows and alumni. After the initial qualitative phase, good rapport had been established between the researcher and interview participants; so that when the researcher invited them to participate in the quantitative phase, all 16 interview participants agreed and also helped to distribute the online questionnaire to other EGRT fellows and alumni. In total, 179 EGRT fellows and alumni responded to this online questionnaire; 30 for the pilot study and 149 for the main study. The number of participants, therefore, met the required sample of 128 for Twostep Cluster analysis.

### Data analysis

The original instrument was refined through the pilot study. The 149 respondents of the online questionnaire collected through Sojump were directly transferred into

Statistical Product and Service Solutions 23 (SPSS 23). Therefore, there was no concern about data entry error, as no manual operation was involved. What is more, there was no missing value in the dataset, as respondents were asked to complete all items in the questionnaire. Once a raw data set was established, the researcher renamed the variables in SPSS 23. Then cluster analysis and Chi-square test were performed.

In the first stage, cluster analysis was performed on the qualitative findings associated with the first three research questions. Cluster analysis is used to demote uncategorized information in accordance with the extent of similarity (Chen, 2011). The basic assumption is that individuals in the same cluster share more commonalities while individuals in different clusters present more dissimilarities. In this respect, cluster analysis facilitated the researcher to categorize EGRT fellows regarding each of the three aspects of EGRT participation.

Cluster analysis was chosen instead of conventional factor analysis mainly for the following three reasons. First, it was not the intention of the quantitative phase to create, validate, and measure a theoretical construct. Rather, the quantitative phase aimed to provide statistical evidence in relation to the key findings from the qualitative phase, with a particular focus on (1) reasons consonant with EGRT values; (2) disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions of students in disadvantaged schools; and (3) involvement in accord with EGRT values. Indicators of each domain, developed on the grounds of qualitative findings, were used to gauge as much as possible interview participants' diverse accounts of an empirical phenomenon (e.g., reasons consonant with EGRT values). These indicators were not reflective of a theoretical concept but represented different aspects of a particular empirical domain.

Second, the quantitative phase functions as a complementary component for the qualitative phase which is the primary component of the thesis. Taking into account the scale of the quantitative phase and the challenge of producing a large-scale quantitative dataset, the research design defined cluster analysis as the target analytical method to offset the limitation of large sample size required by a conventional variable-based factor analysis.

Third, cluster analysis is person-based rather than variable based, which shows respect for individual respondents, and means respondents are grouped based on similar traits. Although correspondence analysis was the quantitative method mostly

used by Bourdieu and Bourdieusian studies, this method aimed to analyse and visualise social field in order to reflect distributions of capital and power (de Nooy, 2003) rather than focusing on individual experience and perceptions. Therefore, Twostep cluster analysis was applied in this study.

Twostep cluster, K-means cluster and Hierarchical cluster are three main statistical methods of cluster analysis. Compared with K-means cluster and Hierarchical cluster, the major advantage of Twostep cluster is that clusters are automatically generated rather than pre-determined (Abraham, Godwin, Sherriff, & Armstrong, 2012). In the current study, the automatically produced membership solution was then saved as a new categorical variable in the data set.

With categorical variables generated from Twostep cluster, the Chi-square test was used to analyse relationships among these categorical variables. Such analysis unveiled the underlying relationships of the three crucial aspects of EGRT participation experience which had been explored in the qualitative phase. The proposed hypotheses were then tested.

## 4.4    PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVATION

Previous chapters discussed in detail the salience of Bourdieu's sociology in the current study. Specifically, the review of literature in Chapter Two showed the usefulness of Bourdieu's work in re-theorising and complementing extant knowledge, while Bourdieu's signature notions of capital, field, and habitus, discussed in Chapter Three, constructed the theoretical frame to this study. Bourdieu's sociology is not only a source of useful resources at the theoretical level, but also has ramifications at the methodological level. In this respect, this chapter explains how this study is framed by Bourdieu's sociology, both theoretically and methodologically, to unveil the experience of graduates from prestigious universities as they become teachers through the EGRT program. It is therefore useful to revisit some of Bourdieu's methodological thoughts, especially the concept of participation objectivation, which was the sociology of sociology, or a reflexivity of sociology. As Wacquant commented, it was participation objectivation that made Bourdieu globally outstanding in contemporary social science (Bourdieu & Wanquant, 1992).

Reflexivity is not only the key factor in the synthesis of qualitative and quantitative methods, but also constitutes the epistemological background of

Bourdieu's work. The reflexivity nurtured by participant objectivation is different from narcissistic reflexivity or ecological reflexivity, which have been advocated by postmodern anthropology and phenomenology. Thus, the researcher is required to engage in self-analysis with the tools of habitus, capital and field to objectify her own position within the research. The aim of participation objectivation is to make the "mundane exotic and the exotic mundane", by taking neither the mundane nor the exotic for granted (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 68). Participant objectivation, therefore, is a strong weapon for the researcher to fight against predispositions and presuppositions by identifying "the implicit in social relations, structures and unquestioned doxic classifications" (Grenfell, 2008, p. 124). To put this more simply, researchers should not take any social existence for granted and should continue to identify unconscious presuppositions. In summary, participation objectivation is not a luxury but a necessity.

In adopting a Bourdieusian theoretical approach, the researcher adopted the method of participant objectivation from the beginning to the end of this study. Many sociologists and scholars, including Bourdieu himself, demonstrated how to conduct participant objectivation (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Everett, 2002; Grenfell & Lebaron, 2014). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argued that there are three essential moments of participant objectivation. One is concerned with social origins and the researcher's personal background with regard to class, gender, and ethnicity. This is a source of bias stemming from the researcher's position in and trajectory through social space. Another source of bias stems from the researcher's position in the academic field, where agents constantly compete for monopoly through particular choices of problem, theory and methodology. A third moment of participant objectivation is concerned with the bias that can arise from the interaction between the academic field and the fields of practice studied by the researcher. This interaction can lead to an intellectual bias through the imposition of theory that does not account for the unfolding of practice.

Drawing on these understandings of participant objectivation developed by Bourdieu and colleagues, the researcher who conducted this study decided to turn these conceptual tools onto herself: to look first at her own personal educational experience and socio-cultural positions, and how these personal historical dispositions related to those of EGRT program participants. Second, the researcher analyzed what was

available to her in the academic field, including available theorization, tools and instruments. Third, the researcher analyzed the interaction between the social world of EGRT and the academic field of intellectual work.

Behind the researcher, I was the person who had made certain choices about the research object and corresponding methods. Indeed, it is I who is located in the academic field and the same I who is also located in certain social spaces (e.g., a certain generation, a certain country, a certain culture). Since the essence of participant objection is to apply the key thinking tools of Bourdieu not only into the research object but also the researcher himself or herself. Therefore, it necessitated a switch in tenor to a personalized voice. In what follows, therefore, I switch to the first person.

The research presented in this thesis was not the study I set out to undertake. Originally, I intended to compare interactions in Chinese and Australian classrooms. The proposed study reflected the types of problems that were prominent in the academic field as I had experienced it up to that point. However, I took a dramatic change of direction a month into my PhD study. I did this because I heard that one of my friends had given up a good job in Beijing in order to work as a rural schoolteacher for EGRT. His choice shocked me at that time—it seemed so inexplicable. However, I recalled that EGRT had been promoted during a recruitment event I had attended at an elite university in Beijing. I was also interested in the program and had even considered applying. However, I received strong opposition from my parents. As the reader of this thesis will learn, parental opposition was experienced by all my interview participants. The difference between EGRT fellows and me was that they seemed to have followed their own hearts whereas I seemed to have followed my parents' advice. I was very curious to understand these different choices—and their aftermath.

Despite having made different choices, I considered that there were some similarities between most EGRT fellows and me. To begin with, I had studied in a famous senior secondary school in my province and graduated from a very prestigious Chinese university; in short, I was a kind of 'trophy child' in the eyes of other parents around me. Moreover, I was born in the capital city of a developed east coast province. Both my parents have official jobs in state-owned companies. Therefore, I did not experience any financial concerns. The brief biographies of the 14 EGRT participants provided at the beginning of the next chapter will suggest that my academic journey prior to my PhD study, and the socio-economic status of my family, are similar in

many ways to those of the interview participants in this research. Hence, it was easy to perceive "proximity and familiarity" between EGRT interview participants and me (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 610). This positioning was complexly implicated in both the data production and analysis phases of this study.

To elaborate, some EGRT interview participants revealed that as they had been in the remote rural areas of the mountainous province where the study was conducted for at least a year, they felt a desire to be heard. This created a situation in which the study involved what Bourdieu himself (1999, p. 615) described as participant desire to "make themselves heard" with "a joy of expression". Most of the participants seemed happy to know that someone was paying attention to them. In this situation, mutual trust and rapport were easily established between us. Although this affinity enabled me to successfully communicate with the participants during the interviews, I had to maintain "epistemological vigilance" (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, Passeron, & Krais, 1991) to escape the potential trap of taking participant meaning for granted throughout the data collection and analysis processes. My supervisory team assisted me in this regard by taking a sceptical stance when discussing my interview schedule, transcripts and analyses.

Despite the proximity and familiarity noted above, it did not necessarily mean that I was a legitimate person to speak about the experience of EGRT fellows. After obtaining my master's degree in China, I decided to pursue a PhD overseas and had the privilege of being sponsored by both my government and my current university. This experience endorsed me with much honour and prestige, namely, symbolic capital. I noticed the respect and even surprise when I first introduced myself to my interview participants. One later told me that she felt kind of nervous in the beginning of the interview, because she thought I must be very talented as a PhD candidate who studied in another country. Another said he had been concerned whether he would be able to answer my interview questions, assuming that questions posed by an overseas PhD candidate might be difficult. These ideas were not unusual. Bourdieu had insightfully identified the asymmetry of relationship between interviewers and interviewees:

> It is the investigator who starts the game and sets up its rules, and is usually
> the one who, unilaterally and without any preliminary negotiations, assigns
> the interview its objectives and uses. This asymmetry is reinforced by a social

symmetry every time the investigator occupies a higher place in the social hierarchy of different types of capitals, cultural capital in particular (Bourdieu & Ferguson, 1999, p. 609).

As the investigator, I might have enjoyed a privileged position due to the unequal distribution of capital between my interview participants and myself, easily leading to a sense of superiority. Bourdieu's participant objectivation woke me up from "complacency". For example, I became very cautious not to impose symbolic violence on my interview participants or through the subsequent process of analysis.

After reflecting on how my personal historical dispositions related to EGRT program participants, then the analysis was conducted in the academic field. The academic field is not a peaceful one, "but a field of forces and a field of struggles to preserve or transform this field of forces" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.254). With the trends of globalization and neoliberalism, the issue of dominance of economic power has penetrated the academic space. The distribution of research on alternative programs of teacher recruitment could be taken as a typical example. As noted in Chapter Two, the vast majority of research has concentrated on such programs in developed countries. As an alternative teacher recruitment program which engages with developments that had their origin in western countries, EGRT has received little attention, either domestically or internationally. Since the program does not belong to the mainstream education system, it is easily overlooked by research projects funded by governments and institutions. Although these studies enlightened me, I needed to distance myself from the established scholastic doxa (Bourdieu, 1990b). When reviewing studies of Teach for America and Teach First in Chapter Two, for instance, I had to keep the differences between the Chinese setting and the U.S. and UK settings clearly in mind so as not to read the Chinese setting through the particularities of foreign settings. The more I read, the more I became aware of the need to protect my study from this source of bias.

In addition to the academic field, other social fields have been influenced by international neoliberalism and domestic reforms. China has witnessed a transformative change over the past 30 years. Similarly to most EGRT program participants, I belong to the post 80s/90s generation. This generation is the beneficiary of the Reform and Opening-up Policy, economically and culturally. However, it is a generation that is also confronted with numerous social pressures, such as family

burdens arising from the one child policy, limited educational resources, fierce peer competition for job opportunities, the high cost of housing, and a limited social welfare system. Against this social backdrop, struggling for upward social mobility seems to be most important for most graduates. Interestingly, EGRT fellows who graduate from prestigious universities deliberately choose to participate in EGRT—a seemingly temporal downward social position shift that is different from the rational choice of their peers. Without a deep understanding of what happened in other fields in contemporary China, I would not fully unveil the experience of graduates from prestigious universities as they become teachers through the EGRT program; but I also needed to guard against hearing those stories from within a 'folk sociological' perspective acquired through my own life experience.

In conclusion, as discussed above, I used participant objectivation consistently in this study to help me to achieve and hold a reflexive stance to escape from unconscious presuppositions. For myself, I kept thinking about questions like, 'what makes me who I am?' and 'how has my own experience impacted on my research?' owing to my own capital and habitus, shaped by family background and educational experience. In relation to the academic field, I stayed alert to the scholastic doxa established by western academic discourse. Finally, I could not ignore the social transformation which my participants and I all experienced, and thought in a broad way when exploring the essence of a social phenomenon of this generation.

## 4.5   CHAPTER SUMMARY

Unlike other alternative programs of teacher recruitment based in western countries, knowledge of EGRT is limited. Therefore, this study aimed to explore a new social phenomenon and further understand its internal relationships. For this purpose, the exploratory sequential mixed methods design is suitable for this study (see  Figure 4.3). In the sub-qualitative phase, 16 EGRT fellows were interviewed (two for the pilot study) to understand (1) the fellows' decisions to join EGRT; (2) disparities between the fellows' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions about teaching in disadvantaged schools; and (3) the realization of EGRT values in fellows' involvement.

Findings from the qualitative phase were used to inform the design of the quantitative phase, which allowed me to develop the measures from responses of

participants rather than from predetermined variables. The sub-quantitative phase, which received 179 respondents (30 from the pilot study) further explored the relationship between (1) reasons consonant with EGRT values; (2) disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions of students in disadvantaged schools; and (3) the involvement in accord with EGRT values. In this quantitative phase, Twostep Cluster analysis and Chi-square were applied. In conclusion, this exploratory sequential mixed methods is conducive to answering research questions.

| Qualitative phase | |
| --- | --- |
| pilot interview (2 participants) | face to face interview (14 participants) |

| Quantitative phase | |
| --- | --- |
| pilot questionnaire (30 participants) | questionnaire (149 participants) |
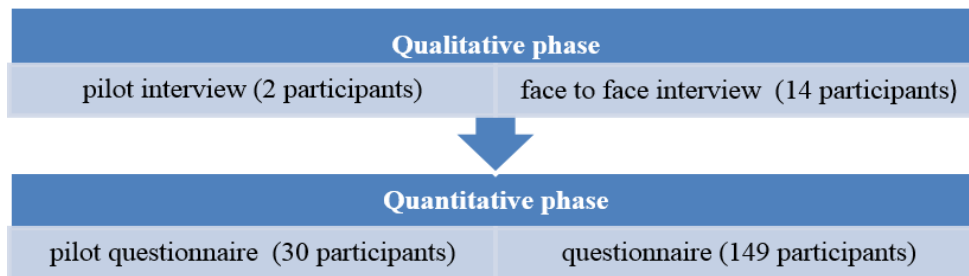
*Figure 4.3.* The overall procedure of this study

# Chapter 5: Exploring Reasons for Participation in EGRT

The purpose of Chapters Five to Seven is to present the interview data analysis and main findings from the study's qualitative phase. This chapter explores reasons behind EGRT fellows' choices to teach in disadvantaged schools in China when they had many lucrative career opportunities available to them upon graduation from prestigious universities. As exceptional graduates, these fellows seemed to make a non-normative choice. As a newly emerging social phenomenon in China among young generations, this choice deserves more scholarly attention. Accordingly, this chapter addresses Research Question 1: Why do elite graduates choose to participate in EGRT? To answer this question, this chapter is organized as follows. Section 5.1 presents an introduction to each of the 14 EGRT interview participants, highlighting their main characteristics. Section 5.2 details the analysis and findings in relation to the fellows' reasons for participation in EGRT. Section 5.3 summarises the social-personal reasons and reasons consonant with EGRT values behind EGRT participation.

## 5.1    WHO WERE THE INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS?

Since social practice tends not to be isolated or accidental, especially at significant and influential turning points of life, the biography and trajectory (life and professional experiences) of agents are gaining increasing attention in Bourdieusian studies (Grenfell & Lebaron, 2014). To enable in-depth understanding of the post-graduation career-choice of EGRT fellows, this section introduces the 14 interview participants, briefly noting their characteristics and life experiences relevant to this study with the following three parts. First, the educational backgrounds of the 14 interview participants is presented. Second, brief biographies of each are provided, regarding family social economic status, important schooling and university experience, some significant incidents in their life related to EGRT participation, and future career plans after EGRT participation. Third, similarities between these interview participants are identified and summarized.

### 5.1.1 Educational backgrounds of 14 interview participants

The 14 interview participants tended to be constant academic winners throughout competitions in school and in tertiary education. While 12 of the interview participants attended a key senior secondary school, one attended an international senior secondary school and one attended a non-key senior secondary school. In terms of higher education, 12 interview participants were graduates from the 985 Project (11 participants) and 211 Project (one participant) institutions. The two exceptions were Shuang and Rui. Shuang graduated from a renowned university in the U.S. and Rui from a highly recognised regional university in China. Nine participants had a Bachelor's degree, four held a Master's degree, and one had been awarded a Doctoral degree. Table 5.1 summarises the main demographic and educational backgrounds of the 14 interview participants.

Table 5.1

*The demographic characteristics of interview participants*

| Name | Gender | Age | Secondary school | University | Degree | Family origin |
|------|--------|-----|------------------|------------|--------|---------------|
| **Wei** | Male | 25 | Key | 985 Project | Bachelor | urban |
| **Zhao** | Female | 24 | Key | 985 Project | Bachelor | urban |
| **Xiu** | Female | 24 | Key | 985 Project | Bachelor | urban |
| **Shuang** | Female | 23 | International | Overseas university | Bachelor | urban |
| **Xiang** | Male | 24 | Key | 985 Project | Bachelor | urban |
| **Feng** | Male | 27 | Key | 985 Project | Masters | urban |
| **Sun** | Male | 30 | Key | 985 Project | Doctorate | urban |
| **Min** | Female | 23 | Non-Key | 211 Project | Bachelor | fringe |
| **Ying** | Female | 22 | Key | 985 Project | Bachelor | rural |
| **Na** | Female | 24 | Key | 985 Project | Bachelor | rural |
| **Rui** | Male | 28 | Key | Non-211/985 Project | Bachelor | rural |
| **Hua** | Female | 27 | Key | 985 Project | Masters | rural |
| **Ren** | Female | 27 | Key | 985 Project | Masters | rural |
| **Long** | Male | 27 | Key | 985 Project | Masters | rural |

Key schools and prestigious universities take advantage of the unevenly distributed educational resources discussed in Chapter One. As a result, competition for admission to key schools and prestigious universities is enormously fierce in China, with its massive education population. The rules of these fierce competitions are that: Junior secondary school students participate in examinations organized by local

administrations. The high score achievers can then be enrolled in key senior secondary schools.  In the last year of their senior secondary school, the similar game is played again. Students participate in the National College Entrance Examination, and the winners can be admitted by higher institutions included in the 985 Project and the 211 Project. These elite universities enjoy priority in terms of recruiting the highest scoring students in the National College Entrance Examination. Therefore, prior to participation in EGRT, these fellows have been selected twice through the current education system of China, and have successfully taken advantage of the highest quality educational resources, owing to their outstanding performance in two decisive examinations.

In contrast to the participants' privileged educational backgrounds of key schools and prestigious universities, the EGRT placement schools are disadvantaged schools located in rural areas. I visited six placement schools in total. Three of them were primary schools, two were junior secondary schools, and one was a nine-year education school (a combination of primary school and junior secondary school). From another perspective, three of them are located in a small village, two of them located in a town, and one of them in an urban-rural marginal area. Based on information collected concerning local education, the six schools could be seen as representative of the main types of local schools. Considering the basic living conditions and needs like Internet access, post, clean water and individual accommodation, EGRT did not allocate its fellows to the most remote and poorest rural areas of China.

### 5.1.2 Brief biographies related to EGRT participation

Wei was born in a capital city and his father was an official governor. Gifted in mathematics, he became one of the winners of the Chinese Mathematical Olympiad. Due to his success in that competition, he was exempted from the National College Entrance Examination and obtained admission to a top five Chinese university. Later, following his father's advice, he majored in materials engineering, one of the most popular majors in recent years. However, he did not like his major at all. He was active in various student societies and associations. He considered himself to be competent as an EGRT fellow because membership of the university debating team made him eloquent. In addition, he had visited a small village for social investigation in a summer vacation prior to EGRT participation; so although he was born and studied in developed cities, rural areas were not totally strange to him prior to his EGRT

participation. He was in his second year of EGRT service at the time of the study, and was considering continuing on in EGRT as a staff member. His father strongly questioned his decision concerning the uncertain prospects of non-profit organizations in China. Opposing his father's opinion, Wei believed that in this newly emerging sector, he would be able to have a broad platform and be promoted much more quickly than in other established industries.

Zhao was born in a rich family of a prosperous southeast city. Her parents once worked together in a well-known state-owned enterprise, but then her father left his job to start his own business, with considerable profit. Zhao was admitted by the same university as Wei after taking the National College Entrance Examination. She could be regarded as an elite graduate, based on her academic outcomes and extra-curricular experiences. In terms of academic attainment, upon completion of university, she received the rare honour of postgraduate recommendation from her faculty; and thereby secured offers of a master's degree from both the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and University College London (UCL). Besides her outstanding academic performance, Zhao was ready to participate in voluntary projects and to offer service to others. She was a member of the Volunteer Centre at her university, where she worked collaboratively on a team project for a provincial museum. The project received a provincial award. In addition, she led a student service project called 'Student Digital Library', in which she and her team members set up an advanced service system to effectively promote the library service. Furthermore, she was responsible for supporting volunteer teachers in a rural area for a month in her summer vacation. All these experiences seemed to pave the way for Zhao's EGRT participation. After finishing her EGRT service, Zhao expected to pursue her education further at the University of Oxford or the University of Cambridge.

Xiu grew up in a developed industrial city. Her parents were both working in the Railways Bureau in her hometown. This stable and tenured position guaranteed comfortable living standards for Xiu's family. She loved reading so much that she chose Chinese linguistics and literature as her major in a well-renowned normal university (985 Project). In contrast to Wei, she had great enthusiasm for her major. During her four years of study, she gradually became aware of her talent for teaching. She obtained a top three place in the Future Teacher Qualification Competition held

by her university. Due to her outstanding achievement in this competition, and her apparent potential in the teaching profession, the senior secondary school where she studied in her hometown gave her an offer and welcomed her back. After she decided to participate in EGRT, that senior secondary school supported her choice and agreed to hold the position for her for two years. At the time of the study, Xiu anticipated re-uniting with her family after living away from home for almost six years (four years during her bachelor degree and two years in EGRT).

Shunag was born in a metropolis of China, where her father operated his own website for finance and security and her mother worked in a bank. Unlike other fellows who studied in public senior secondary schools, Shuang studied in a private international school for two years, and then went to the U.S. as an exchange student for one year. After finishing senior secondary school in the U.S., she studied psychology in an American university. Therefore, she did not have to attend the College Entrance Examination experienced by most of her peers. Due to her own educational trajectory, Shuang spoke of her antipathy to examination-oriented education. Like Xiu, she enjoyed her major and hoped to become an outstanding expert in this field. From the fact of her self-funded overseas study for five years, it might be assumed that Shuang came from an affluent family background. Shuang had a clear career plan for her future, considering EGRT participation to be an opportunity to apply her psychological knowledge to practice through real interaction with rural children.

Feng grew up in one of the metropolitan cities in China and his parents both worked in public schools. According to his description, his learning journey seemed very smooth. He studied in the best local senior secondary school. However, he did not study hard at all until the third year of his senior secondary school. He then entered a good local university with which he felt very satisfied. He chose psychology as his major, the best ranking major of his university, and was successfully recommended to a 985 Project university for his Master's degree. Informed by his previous study journey, Feng's father had high hopes for Feng to achieve a doctoral degree. Feng initially agreed with his father; however, he began to think about questions like why he needed a doctoral degree, apart from his father's expectation. He then changed his mind and joined the EGRT. This did not mean that Feng gave up the pursuit of a doctoral degree. The EGRT seemed to provide him a period like a gap year to better

understand himself, and have more time to be well-prepared for further university education.

Sun has lived for a long time in a developed urban area, from birth to his campus life. He indicated that his father was engaged in his own business and so his family was well off. Sun had studied in a 985 Project university for 10 years, from his bachelor degree to doctoral degree. Living up to his parents' expectations, he was always a good student and was awarded many honours. His major was organic chemistry and he consistently devoted himself to this field from bachelor to doctoral level. Rather than enjoying the dynamic campus life, as did other interview participants such as Wei and Zhao, Sun spent much of his time in the laboratory. According to his description, he seldom communicated with others beyond the laboratory or participated in any campus associations, which made him feel isolated. A one-year extension of his doctoral study sparked him to jump out of his routine life. After EGRT service, Sun hoped to engage in public welfare.

Xiang was born in a rural area but was brought to a developed city by his parents when he was quite young. He soon became a registered citizen with an urban hukou (Chinese household registration system), and he enjoyed public education in the city. Xiang began to realize how lucky he was when his classmate, who did not have an urban hukou, had to go back to his rural hometown in the third year of junior high school[8]. Due to his legitimate urban citizenship, Xiang could continue to study in the city's best high school and was successfully admitted by the Business School of a 985 Project university. When Xiang was a sophomore, he worked as an intern in a big company and was told that he could continue to work there full time after graduation. Accordingly, it was not hard for him to secure a good job in big companies. Unlike the other urban participants, Xiang was not the only child in his family. Up to the time of the study, both Xiang's brother and sister had enjoyed stable jobs and started families. As the youngest child in his family, Xiang did not have to share much family responsibility, as his two elder siblings shouldered most responsibilities to give back to their parents. He confessed that he had almost no financial concerns and less pressure from parental expectations compared to other fellows who were an "only

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[8] Hukou is a prerequisite of enrolment in public senior secondary schools in some provinces of China.

child" of the family. During his first year of service in EGRT, he did not yet have a clear career plan for his future.

Min's home is located in a rural-urban fringe region[9]. Min's father had a trading business and her mother helped with the business to sell products. Compared with the interview participants described above, Min had a unique study trajectory. She failed in the local high school entrance examination and had to study in a vocational secondary school for trainee nurses. She studied extremely diligently in that school and was finally admitted by a well-regarded medical university in her province. She dreamed of becoming a good voluntary teacher and realised that this dream required an outstanding educational background. Therefore, this dream kept motivating Min for many years. Now she felt satisfied, able to teach in a rural school as an EGRT fellow. After the two years' service, Min planned to go back to her hometown as a nurse in a public hospital.

Of the 14 participants, Na was the only one who was local to where her current EGRT placement school was located. She was born in a small town in a rural area. Her parents were both teachers in public junior high schools. Na tried hard for admission by a provincial key high school and then studied in one of the top universities for four years. Her major was English-Chinese Translation, but she declined any job related to translation because she was not interested in her major at all. When Na accepted the interview for this study, she was preparing for a job application for an international school. She was about to take up work first to save up money and then to go abroad for further education.

Although Rui was born in a rural area, his family seemed to be rich. Unlike other interview participants, he had not attended a prestigious university. Another difference is that Rui did not participate in EGRT immediately after graduation. As an IT programmer, he easily found a job in a developed city. Although his university was neither listed in the 985 Project nor the 211 Project, it enjoyed a good employer reputation as a highly recognized regional university. After working for about two years, Rui left his job and set up his own business in Beijing. However, his business failed. He then joined the EGRT and had been teaching in a rural junior high school for almost two years. When he ran his own business in Beijing and then participated

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[9] With the large scale urbanization of China in recent years, some areas located at the border of rural and urban areas are defined as "rural-urban fringe".

in the EGRT, he had no financial burdens and received financial support from his family.

Ying was born in a big county of a rural area with a population of more than one million. She was not the only child in her family, similar to the following three interview participants. Her outstanding academic record earned her the opportunity to study in the best local senior secondary school and then the same normal university as Xiu. Unlike other interview participants, Ying reported that she never considered becoming a volunteer teacher or anything similar before graduation. She hated the examination-oriented education of the senior secondary school, with endless rote learning and test-taking, which made school life a nightmare for her. In addition, Ying previously did not agree with voluntary teaching. She had heard many negative stories and comments on short-term volunteer teacher programs, which mainly benefit the volunteer teachers rather than the local children. Due to this, her decision to participate in EGRT surprised people around her. What made Ying change her mind will be revealed in the subsequent section.

Hua was born in a small town. She had spent all her time in her hometown before her university life. Hua perceived that her vision dramatically changed the moment she stepped into the developed city. This big city represented the urban life she had never experienced in her small town. Hua stayed there for seven years, completing her bachelor and master degrees. Her major was Russian language and she visited Russia for a half year academic exchange. Her voluntary experience in a geracomium[10] seemed the beginning of her involvement in public social welfare. However, her participation in the EGRT was highly resisted by her family due to financial concerns. In terms of her future career plan after EGRT participation, Hua still felt confused at the time of her interview.

Ren was born in a small village and her parents were local farmers when she was young. In recent years, to earn more money, her parents gave up farming and chose to work in local factories or in big cities as migrant workers. As unskilled labourers, they undertook the dirtiest and most labour-intensive jobs. Ren's parents were working in a brickyard operated by her uncle. Ren was always a diligent student throughout all her study journey. Awarded a scholarship, she finished her Master's degree without

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[10] Nursing home is specific for taking care of the aged.

any financial support from her family. She had been dreaming of being a volunteer teacher for many years and the EGRT gave her the opportunity. However, she felt deeply guilty about not being able to "give back" to her family during her two-year service in disadvantaged schools with her limited monthly allowance (around 460 Australia Dollars per month). Ren had a younger brother, and she also felt worried about not contributing to his wedding costs, because she regarded it as one of her family responsibilities. Owing to these concerns, Ren hoped to find a job immediately after her EGRT service.

Long was the youngest of three siblings and grew up in a small village in a rural area. His father was a local school teacher. Long reported his family as a typical example of "knowledge changing fate" (知识改变命运). Both his elder brothers had great educational backgrounds and obtained good jobs in big cities. Like his two elder brothers, Long graduated from a prestigious university with a Master's degree in engineering. In this situation, similar to Xiang, Long bore no financial burden to support the family. When studying in a local key senior secondary school, he participated in the Chinese Chemistry Olympiad and Chinese Biology Olympiad, and was ranked in the top four of three thousand candidates in grasping all the content of tertiary chemistry and biology. With a good knowledge base, he taught in a private training agency in Beijing, which familiarised him with the senior secondary school chemistry and biology curricula. Despite his talent in science, his real enthusiasm lay in economics. He spent five years in self-study and audited relevant courses at Peking University. Owing to the conflict between his major and his personal interests, Long felt rather lost about his future career.

### 5.1.3 The similarities among interview participants

The demographic diversity of the 14 EGRT fellows is noticeable. Yet they share some commonalities. Firstly, they almost all benefited from the highest quality education resources locally, nationally or internationally. For high school education, only Min failed to study at a local key senior secondary school, while Shuang studied in an international school; the others all enjoyed the best educational resources of their hometowns. For tertiary education, only Rui studied in a non-211 Project or 985 Project institution in China; the others were consistently the 'winners' of fierce examination-based competitions and successfully secured a position in the most privileged universities in China or overseas.

Second, most interview participants seemed to come from well-off family backgrounds, irrespective of their urban or rural origin. This relatively favourable condition relieved the participants from the financial burden of giving back to their family immediately after graduation, enabling them to work with limited income in disadvantaged schools for two years. Owing to the Reform and Opening-up policy of 1978, social differentiation has become increasingly obvious in China. However, the boundary of classes has not yet settled, and no consensus has been reached about criteria for grouping people socially - like working class, middle class and upper class as applied in developed western countries (Hong & Zhao, 2015). Based on descriptions of parents' income, occupation, and education level, this study defines most interview participants as being from privileged families, similar to the western definition of middle class. All the urban interview participants were from very affluent families. Although some, such as Rui, Min, Long and Ying, came from rural or fringe areas, it does not necessarily mean that their socioeconomic status was lower than their urban counterparts. However, participants Hua and Ren seemed to be weaker in terms of their socioeconomic status.

Third, these interview participants were limited in knowledge, skills and working experience related to the teaching profession. Based on their descriptions, only Ying, Xiu and Ren graduated from normal universities[11]. In addition, only Ying and Xiu had a university major that matched the subject which they taught in their placement schools as highlighted in Table 5.2. Long and Xiang had some experience of working in a private training agency or teaching as a private tutor respectively. The parents of Na, Feng and Long were reportedly engaged in the teaching profession, which might make them more familiar with the context of schooling than others.

Table 5.2

*Majors studied at universities and subjects taught in disadvantaged schools*

| Name | Major-studying in universities | Subject-teaching in placement schools |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Wei | Engineering | Mathematics |
| Zhao | Classical Chinese Documentation | Geography |
| Xiu | Chinese language and linguistics | Chinese |
| Shuang | Psychology | Chinese, moral education, music, and art |
| Xiang | Business management | Moral education and music |

[11] Higher education institutions where cultivate prospective teachers and provide corresponding teacher trainings and in China.

| Name | Major-studying in universities | Subject-teaching in placement schools |
|------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Feng | Psychology | English |
| Sun | Chemistry | Science and Chinese |
| Min | Pharmaceutics | History and music |
| Ying | Chinese language and linguistics | Chinese |
| Na | English Translation | Chinese, moral education, and music |
| Rui | Information Technology | Geography, biology, and computer science |
| Hua | Russian | Mathematics, science, and art |
| Ren | Biology | English and science |
| Long | Engineering | Biology, history, and physics |

Finally, when talking about the "ideal education" which interview participants desired to promote in disadvantaged schools, participants' answers have been listed in Table 5.3. Four commonalities have been identified, which are compatible with EGRT values, and which promote the aim of quality education for every student.

Table 5.3

*The ideal education*

| Name | The ideal education |
|------|---------------------|
| Min | Make every student enjoy learning and think independently |
| Na | Facilitate students to know how big the outside world is, and thus they have infinite possibilities |
| Shuang | In addition to students' examination performance, education should emphasize students' physical and mental health, and principles of being a man |
| Ying | Students and teachers can communicate in an equal and democratic way, then resonate with each other |
| Rui | Student-centred with passion and initiative |
| Xiang | In addition to subject knowledge through text books, good education can guide every student to find what they want to do in the future, and then try their most to achieve it; can teach students how to communicate with others and appreciate arts like music, painting and novels; can make students feel love and love others |
| Ren | Help every student understand him or herself and find his and her own strengths |
| Feng | Care for every student's holistic development and provide students' with mental and cognitive support |
| Long | Both improve students' examination scores and enhance students' critical thinking |
| Zhao | Make students happy and able to care for each individual |
| Xiu | Bring something interesting and meaningful to students |
| Wei | Teach every student how to lead a better life |
| Sun | Let students see the outside world and live in a more poetic way |
| Hua | Make each student happy, holistic development; bring something novel and interesting from outside to my students |

* These answers listed on the above table are direct quotes.

The first commonality was in the participants' definition of good education, which they often associated with quality education. Opposed to an examination-

oriented education, whose first priority is examination, the core value of quality-oriented education is student-centred: to nurture personal ability and develop character through decreasing excessive schoolwork. It was noted that the ideal education in the minds of interview participants was congruent with quality-oriented education. With this educational ideology, they tended to pay attention to students' holistic and all-round development, beyond textbooks and examinations. The ideas of "student-centred", "holistic development" (Hua, Feng) and higher-order thinking skills – such as independent thinking (Min) and critical thinking (Long) - frequently characterised their defined ideal education.

As a second commonality, many interview participants emphasized individual feelings during learning. From their perspective, learning should be a process of joy and love. More specifically, words like "enjoy" (Min), "happy" (Hua), "a better life" and "passion and initiative" (Rui) were employed to describe the education they hoped to bring to local students. Ways of achieving this included building democratic and equal teacher-student relationships (Ying), offering mental and cognitive support (Feng), and caring for both physical and mental health (Shuang). That is to say, ideal education as identified by participants included an emphasis on personal feelings. Education should bring individuals' happiness rather than the suffering commonly perceived from examination-oriented education.

A third common point was that their definition of good education usually extended beyond the local context. The interview participants believed that a good education should expand the views of local students; that they were responsible for providing "something interesting and meaningful" (Xiu), something novel and interesting (Hua) to help local students to understood the outside world (Na and Sun). Only Shuang, Xiang and Long mentioned "examination performance", "subject knowledge on text books" and "examination scores"; no other participants referred to anything relevant to examination-oriented education.

A final common view was that educational resources and personal care should be equal for every student irrespective of their academic performance or family background. This requires educators to treat each student without any personal bias. The words "each student" or "every student" were mentioned by Min, Xiang, Ren, Feng, Zhao, Wei and Hua. This was quite different from the streaming strategy widely applied in rural schools.

In sum, the ideal education described by EGRT fellows largely echoes with core values of the slogan of EGRT, which promotes every child deserves a good education irrespective of the background. The good education is often associated with quality-oriented and urban-oriented education with an egalitarian perspective. This consistency was not coincidence. The language and discourse used by Teach for America corps members also represented what repeatedly advertised by the organization (Thomas & Lefebvre, 2017).

The participants' biographies point to several questions in relation to their choice of EGRT: Why did Zhao and Xiang decline the offer from overseas universities or big companies? Did their parents' careers as teachers influence their decisions? Why did chemists, engineers, and IT people like Sun, Wei, Long and Rui desert their careers and join EGRT? Why did Hua, Ying, Ren and Na, who had worked so hard to get out of undeveloped areas, go back to teach in rural schools? Why did most of these participants make the decision to join EGRT against their parents' expectations? The fundamental question here is: Why did these fellows join EGRT? The following analysis aims to address this question.

## 5.2    REASONS FOR JOINING EGRT

Previous studies found that graduates from prestigious universities usually avoid teaching owing to its relatively low professional and social status; much less do they typically teach in underdeveloped areas (Haines & Hallgarten, 2002; Podgursky, Monroe, & Watson, 2004). In recent years, approximately 80% of Chinese university graduates have either stayed in or swarmed to big or middle-sized cities (Yue, 2012). Why, then, did the interview participants, with their superior educational backgrounds and relatively privileged family backgrounds, choose to teach in disadvantaged schools in rural areas? This social phenomenon merits scholarly investigation.

As noted, previously, research into the reasons behind graduates from prestigious universities working in disadvantaged schools predominantly emerges from contexts of developed countries. This study continues this line of research, but in a Chinese context. In order to understand why these 14 participants chose to join EGRT, they were interviewed about their decision making. Participants reported multiple, intricate and intertwined reasons for joining EGRT. Despite their complexity,

these reasons commonly straddle two dimensions: social-personal reasons and reasons consonant with EGRT values, as analysed and discussed in the following sections.

### 5.2.1 Socio-personal reasons

In this study, the descriptor social-personal reasons behind participation in EGRT refers to reasons closely related to current social contexts and to individual dispositions emerging from these social contexts. These social-personal reasons were commonly mentioned by interview participants, who indicated three main reasons for choosing EGRT, in that it offered: an alternative way to resist a stereotyped life trajectory; an opportunity to explore other life prospects and to fulfil themselves; and an interim sanctuary to escape a sense of anxiety and of feeling lost.

#### *An alternative to resist a stereotyped life trajectory*

When answering the question "why did you choose EGRT?" interview participants commonly mentioned that they were attempting to escape the typical post-graduation trajectory of finding a good job, starting a family and then soon getting married and having a baby. This typical trajectory tended to be regarded by most of the participants' parents as a socially anticipated and culturally accepted life mode. In contrast, refusal of the 'university-work-marriage-baby' life trajectory was explicitly reported by Min, Xiang, Hua, Long, and Ying. For this reason, EGRT participation appears as an approach employed by these interview participants to resist this stereotyped life trajectory. Min and Xiang were typical examples. See the following accounts from Min:

> If I had not participated in EGRT, I would be very mundane now. I would have got a job for distributing medicine regularly. I would have got married and had babies like others in my hometown. It seemed to be possible to see through to the end of my life. It was terrible. (Min)

From Min's perspective, the life trajectory of graduation-work-marriage-baby was regular and boring. She majored in pharmacy, hence, working in a hospital or pharmacy to distribute medicine was a foreseeable job for her. Since she grew up in a wealthy family in the urban-rural fringe area, the relatively narrow social context made it easy for her to imagine what could have happened if she had worked in her hometown after graduation. Secure and stable life style, as the widely-recognized strength of graduation-work-marriage-baby mode, was less valued by Min. She regarded the feeling of "seeing the end of life" as "terrible". Another interview

participant, Xiang, shared a similar view. However, his attitudes towards this stereotyped life trajectory were much more complicated:

> I started an internship as a sophomore, and that company gave me an offer in my third year of my university. I could work there immediately after my graduation if I chose to. Usually, students in my faculty easily found a good job. However, when I saw the life of my brother and sister, I felt fearful … or maybe not, it is hard to describe, kind of fear or not. I was reluctant to follow their trajectory: they got married soon after graduation, and then had babies, bought a house and paid off the mortgage. I don't want to follow the same path. The lives of both my brother and sister are good. Everything seems so normal but I was just reluctant to lead such a regular life just after graduation. (Xiang)

With a privileged educational background and outstanding performance during the internship, Xiang had been able to secure a good job position before his graduation. Hence, it seemed easy for him to follow the widely-recognized life trajectory. However, as Xiang was from a non-one child family, he had an opportunity to witness closely his brother's and sister's lives. Interestingly, different from Min's disgust towards the stereotyped life trajectory, Xiang considered his siblings' life style to be good. However, he could not help resisting it whenever he imagined himself sharing the same life trajectory. In his description of his siblings' life, words like "normal" and "regular" were used. It means Xiang clearly knew which kind of life trajectory was anticipated in mainstream values of current society. There were some conflicts inside Xiang. On one hand, he tended to be trained by the doxa that the traditional life trajectory was what life was supposed to be (Bourdieu, 2000). On the other hand, he was also inclined to exclude himself from this life mode without explicit reasons.

These views towards the stereotyped life trajectory show that Min and Xiang, and other interview participants too (Hua, Long, and Ying), tried to break through the life trajectory of "university-job-marriage-baby" which was socially and arbitrarily defined as a good life. This was generally recognized by participants' parents' generation as the dominant values. Through a Bourdieusian lens, the stereotyped life trajectory is formulated as doxa - "a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 16). However, this doxa becomes denaturalized and questioned by these interview participants. According to Bourdieu (1992), doxa, as universally accepted truth,

emerges from socialization (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992). The social context where post-80s and 90s grew up is dramatically different from their parents' generation after three decades of Reform and the Opening-up policy in 1978. Post 80s and 90s generations have enjoyed the economic and educational resources which are hard for their parents' generation to imagine. Therefore, their socialization is inevitably different from their parents'. Consequently, the doxa of parents' generation tend to be easily challenged by the new generation.

This challenge of the mainstream life trajectory seems to be social practice as coined by the term *heterodoxy*. Heterodoxy demonstrates a disagreement with mainstream assumptions that define how things should be; and it is most likely to be associated with people who are located neither in the lower nor higher orders of society. Instead, heterodoxy is usually associated with people who are rich in cultural capital but poor in economic capital (Grenfell & Lebaron, 2014). Based on participants' biographies, they are the ideal social agents for creating heterodoxy. Most interview participants were indeed rich in cultural capital, such as receiving a higher education from the prestigious universities of China or abroad, but had not yet fully realized financial independence. They reorganized the possibility of competing dominant beliefs within "a field of opinion" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.168); a field of opinion that was generated when the doxa was challenged. Within the field of opinion, interview participants could jump out of the stereotyped life trajectory; show their interest in pushing back the limits of doxa; and question the taken for granted stereotyped life trajectory. They did not tacitly work in accord with social norms and conventions. Instead, they resisted and said no to socially anticipated life trajectories. Heterodoxy seems to provide epistemological preparation for their choice of EGRT participation, as they step out on the journey of life-exploration and self-fulfilment.

### *An opportunity to explore life and fulfil the self*

As shown in the previous section, many interview participants began to challenge the socially defined 'good life' trajectory. At the same time, they stepped out to explore their own ideal life and personal values even though there was no clear image of the "ideal" at this current stage. In this situation, the appearance of EGRT, from some interview participants' perspective, provided an opportunity for self-exploration and self-fulfilment. Interview participants Hua, Sun, Wei, and Rui aspired to explore what kind of life they wanted to live; while Ying and Zhao hoped to realize

their personal values through EGRT participation. In terms of self-exploration, Rui seemed to suddenly consider what kind of life he deserved to spend after hearing about Steve Job's death.

> I was an IT programmer after graduation. I worked pretty hard. So it was not uncommon for me to work extra time. As a result, my health was not good. Suddenly, I heard the news of Steve Job's death. I still clearly remembered he once said, "You should ask yourself whether it was the life you really wanted every morning when looking at the mirror". These words hit my heart and I wanted to do something different. In my opinion, I thought that behind many EGRT fellows' participation was self–consciousness awaking. (Rui)

Rui seemed to make the decision to participate in EGRT abruptly. He had previously followed a stereotypical life mode, with a good job after graduation in a developed urban city. However, he had been burnt out by his job. The death of Steve Jobs, who was legendary in the IT area, led Rui to reflect on Job's famous remarks. His inside desire and aspirational "self-consciousness", in his own words, was awakened. This unexpected incident drastically changed his life trajectory. While Rui projected another person's sudden death onto himself, he seemed to experience a reflexive moment. Then he commenced a new chapter of life by leaving his job and joining EGRT. Unlike Rui, Wei did not have an apparently sudden incident which influenced him to begin considering the life he hoped to lead, but his thinking about the meaning of life was a prelude to EGRT participation.

> My study experience seemed quite smooth. However, I started to think about the meaning of life. I suffered a lot after having this idea and also began to consider what life I really wanted to lead. Therefore, I decided to try to know the answer through seizing the EGRT participation opportunity. (Wei)

Wei began to think about the meaning of life while at university. Although he suffered from such thinking, he considered EGRT participation to be a way of exploring the meaning of life. That is to say, he commenced a new era of exploring his own aspirational life. Similarly to Wei, prior to EGRT participation, other interview participants asked themselves questions like, "What kind of life do I really want to lead?"(Sun), "What do I really want to have in life?" (Sun), "Is this my ideal life I want now?" (Hua). In this situation, EGRT created an opportunity for all these participants to explore something different from the stereotypical life trajectory.

In addition to exploring what was the ideal life, the choice of joining EGRT was viewed as an opportunity to realize personal values. Like the previously mentioned interview participants, at the end of four years of higher education, Ying developed a totally different perspective towards the stereotyped life trajectory. She desired to choose her own life and discover her own potential. Similarly to Xiang, she tried to escape from a familiar and mundane life. She mentioned her aspiration to explore personal potential:

> When arriving at graduation, I was thinking, how about following my own heart and walking my own way rather than getting a master's degree or becoming a civil servant. I had no interest in that kind of life, and I would like to know what I really love to do and where my potential was. If I had got married and then had babies immediately after I graduated from university, I would have not imagined this life at all! (Ying)

Ying showed no interest in options typically desired by others, such as the stable and secure career of being a civil servant or further education just for a degree. She desired to follow her own heart and walk her own way. Such a desire was common among interview participants (e.g., Feng, Sun, Hua and Rui). These participants did not yield to the stereotyped life mode recognized by their parents' generation; they wanted to explore their own life mode. Furthermore, the exploration of personal potential and values, as mentioned by Ying, was more inclined to individualism, which is less commonly discussed in China with its collective social traditions. Similarly to Ying, Zhao demonstrated the strong appeal of individual value realization:

> At that time, I told my father, I was your daughter, we were so similar that we easily get tired of a stable occupation without any prospects. I did not want to do something comfortable and secure as regarded by others, and I hope to consistently seek my own career and realize my own value. (Zhao)

When talking about how she made the decision to join EGRT, Zhao mentioned how she persuaded her father to agree with her choice. She believed the essence of her participation in EGRT was inherited from her father, because they both easily got bored by a mundane life without challenges. Something "comfortable and secure" regarded by others, like the stereotyped life trajectory, was not her pursuit at all. Zhao made little attempt to please others or to follow social norms. Personal values were her priority when she made her decision.

When interview participants resisted the graduation-work-marriage-baby stereotyped life trajectory, they began to explore what was their ideal life and how to enact their personal values. Their descriptions were of personal autonomy, self-expression and self-fulfilment. This phenomenon did not only happen among EGRT participants. Teach First participants shared very similar aspirations of self-exploration and self-actualization, which was viewed as evidence of how Teach First participants tacitly positioned themselves as middle-class (Smart, et al., 2009). As Skeggs (2004) argued, how to construct the self in self autonomy and self-fulfilment is an indicator of class. As shown in this study's biographies, the phenomenon of class in Chinese society has been forming since 1978, and social differentiation has become increasingly explicit. Most interview participants belong to the privileged social group that is similar to the middle class in western countries. The middle class habitus is well represented in alternative teacher recruitment programs whether in the U.K. or China.

### *An interim sanctuary to escape feelings of being lost*

During the interviews, it was noted that utterances of anxiety frequently emerged, especially on the eve of graduation. Interview participants universally reflected on their sense of anxiety when asked about the reasons behind their choice to join EGRT. The two most common anxieties were: (1) feeling lost at university (2) having limited interest in their chosen major.

The first kind of anxiety related to feeling lost at university. In China, competition in the National College Entrance Examination is extremely fierce. Every summer sees the world's largest student population undertaking this examination that largely determines a person's destiny (Davey, De Lian, & Higgins, 2007). Most attendees have spent a decade preparing for the examination. Resources of higher education are so limited that the National College Entrance Examination has been described as millions of people struggling to cross a narrow bridge to success (千军万马过独木桥). The goal of students might be very clear before the National College Entrance Examination. However, once the goal of entry into a prestigious university had been achieved, there was not the tremendous pressure of examinations; and parents and teachers did not push them as hard as before. A sudden relief from pressure did not always construct a vacuum for participants; instead, it tended to create anxiety. They might feel empty and aimless inside, as they had never ever been given the opportunity to think about the "what else?" or "what next?" questions. Such a sense of

loss and confusion is not uncommon amongst the interview participants. Take Sun as an example:

> I felt lost in my university life, especially the time when I was looking for a job. I did not know what I should do without a clear goal like National College Entrance Examination. Having experienced one year extension of my doctoral program, I felt even more anxious. I just met EGRT at that time and then I participated in it. Although doing some volunteer teaching had been on my to-do list of my life plan, I never considered to commit to it just after graduation. (Sun)

When asked about the decision making process of joining the EGRT, Sun expressed his confusion and anxieties about his future career. He had no idea of any clear goals to pursue when he recalled his university life. National College Entrance Examination was once a clear goal for Sun; however, he did not know where to go when that goal had been achieved. The EGRT appeared for him at an opportune moment, since he never expected to teach in disadvantaged schools immediately after graduation. Similarly, Feng experienced unexpected difficulties in the confirmation of his master's degree. Then he started to suspect that he might have little talent or potential for research, which made him feel that there was no point in continuing further academic pursuit. Since his previous goal was to pursue a doctoral degree, he said, "then I felt overwhelmingly confused at university campus, especially at the point of graduation". As a result, Feng experienced a sense of anxiety and did not know what to do next. The academic obstacles experienced by Sun and Feng created moments of crisis when subjective expectations largely conflicted with objective outcomes. Meanwhile, the sense of anxiety might also incur more critical and reflexive forms of praxis, such as making an 'against the grain choice' (Bourdieu, 1990). In this situation, EGRT seemed to appear in the nick of time, which gave interview participants like Sun and Feng another prospect worth pursuing.

The second kind of anxiety indicates that success in the National College Entrance Examination opened a door to prestigious universities, but not necessarily to personal interest. In most cases, majors were choices imposed by paternal authority and associated with potential returns rather than personal interests. Some majors were more popular and rewarding in the job market, such as engineering, studied by Wei and Long. However, these popular majors might have no relationship with personal interest, which made graduates easily escape whenever they had opportunities. In this

situation, EGRT seemed to satisfy their needs to not work in an area relevant to a major they found uninteresting. When asked to comment on the rejection of their university major, participants considered EGRT to be an opportunity for resistance to family coercion. See Wei's comments as an example:

> I majored in material engineering. I had to choose it under the pressure of my father. Although I did not like engineering at all, he insisted this major was good for my future. It was hard for me to say no to my father at that age. If I could have made a choice by myself, I might have studied history or other humanities subjects. I had not planned to do any job relevant to engineering after I studied it. When I was considering what I would do close to my graduation, I met EGRT. I often thought what I would have done if I had not met EGRT just at that time. (Wei)

The above excerpts illustrate the suffering associated with studying in a useful rather than an interesting major at university. Unlike the general confusion of what to do after graduation reported by Sun and Feng, Wei knew the areas he was interested in; however, he could not major in these subjects owing to family expectations. Wei came from a middle class family in an urban area. His education background was considered by his father as a way to maintain current social privilege rather than a means of developing personal interest. When he was too young to go against his father, Wei chose to obey; and he realized social reproduction through the efforts of his family when he majored in engineering at a prestigious university. However, he took every chance to distance himself from the discipline of his major. This aspiration seemed to be coincidently satisfied by the EGRT program. Similarly to Wei, Long suffered through studying something that he disliked for seven years.

> At high school, I chose science because I followed my family's suggestion. Actually, my scores of liberal art subjects were even higher than my science subjects. My elder brother then helped me choose engineering, however, I did not like this major at all but I still studied it for seven years. If I chose the major I wanted to learn, I would have not joined EGRT. In terms of the two years' service, I actually did not have much of a clear idea. I had not much time to read books I like owing to my major. I **just** wanted to read more in this quiet mountainous area. My parents complained that I made an abnormal choice when I joined in the EGRT. From their perspective, I lost at least

100,000 RMB during these two years from a job I could do if I had found the job I should do. (Long)

As described by Long, his family was more practical in choosing his major. He was born into a rural family. Since certain popular and traditional sciences like engineering were viewed as providing a competitive edge in the job market and a shortcut to a good salary and social status, his family considered education as a tool to realize social mobility. As for Long's career choice, his parents continued to insist that education should be exchanged with potential economic benefit. However, Long suffered. He used the word "just", indicating how much he hoped to escape his disliked major and relevant career. He supposed that if he had chosen the major he had liked, he would not have joined in EGRT. The program therefore met Long's exact need, by providing an interim sanctuary against things he disliked.

The stories from interview participants Wei and Long also reflected transformative social changes in China. They were born in a changing era, as China has witnessed rapid marketization since the 1978 Reform and Opening-Up policy. For the Post 80s and 90s generation, who grew up in a competitive educational context, a utilitarian choice of university majors often wins out over personal interests. In addition to external competition, domestic intervention by parents was powerful, especially at a turning point such as choosing universities and majors (Sheng, 2015). Both schooling and parenting were more likely to impose their single-facet target pursuit of the academic outcomes by constraining children's inner interest, which tended to become the prominent habitus of children of post 80s and 90s. However, different forms of socialisation within this educational experience, whether major or minor, ongoing or intermittent, may have prepared the ground for other habitus, at certain times, in certain situations. These habitus, compared to the prominent habitus, were hidden and dormant, largely constrained by the double pressure from both schooling and parenting. They would not be revealed and become 'visible' until the EGRT fellows left the highly competitive schooling environment and their authoritarian parents, when these habitus might be freed from constraints. However, such relief from external constraints and pressures might give rise to a sense of loss or rebellion, before another field is found that 'welcomes' a certain hidden habitus. EGRT here played the role of an interim sanctuary for some interview participants before they found their real destinations.

In conclusion, the three social-personal reasons discussed above tended to be peripheral and intangible, owing to their contextual-based and personal-based nature. Through the above analysis, interview participants are seen to find it hard to answer in any more detail why they resisted the stereotypical life trajectory. They stepped into the journey of life-exploration and self-fulfilment, but they were still not clear about what life they wanted to have or how to enact personal values. The appearance of EGRT came at the right time. It temporarily alleviated their sense of loss. The EGRT participation seemed to be a trial period, during which they refused the ideal life recognized by their parents' generation while still exploring themselves, after getting rid of the pressure of examination and control of their parents after graduation. However, in addition to these socio-personal reasons, many other reasons emerged from the data, which were more closely related to EGRT. The next section focuses on the reasons consonant with EGRT values, which means why interview participants chose EGRT because of what they believed they could realize through the program.

### 5.2.2 Reasons consonant with EGRT values

Based on the reasons described above, interview participants wanted to resist the stereotyped life trajectory laid out before them; to further explore what life they wanted to lead; and to escape the sense of feeling lost that they were experiencing. This section describes reasons that are particular to the nature of EGRT; and that are defined as reasons consonant with EGRT values. On one hand, the interview participants desired to make a difference for students in disadvantaged schools; those students were expected to enjoy transformative progress because of their service. On the other hand, the participants also aspired to make a difference for themselves. That is to say, as constant academic winners, they were also keen to gain great personal growth and pave the way for further educational opportunities or the future flourishing of their careers. EGRT was designed as a program which can satisfy such desires, because its core values are not only about ensuring every student a high quality education but also about equipping fellows with entrepreneurial qualities like leadership. In this way, participants' altruistic dispositions and entrepreneurial dispositions are both valued by EGRT. In addition, various resources were offered by EGRT to realize these two dispositions through the fellows' placements. Meanwhile, recognition of these resources further promoted the choice of program participation. In summary, the reasons identified as being consonant with EGRT values related to both the desire to

make a difference for students in disadvantaged schools and the desire to make a difference to participants themselves.

### *Making a difference for students in disadvantaged schools*

When asked about their reasons for joining EGRT after graduation, many of the interview participants reported their desire to help students in disadvantaged schools. When their thinking was probed further, these participants attributed that desire to several reasons. These might be organized into three main themes: (1) family inculcation; (2) the influence of role models; and (3) personal educational experience.

First, when interview participants self-analysed their reasons for joining EGRT, family inculcation seemed to play a role in shaping the underlying altruistic disposition. When Min was asked about what she thought influenced the decision-making that led her to join EGRT, she talked about the patriotic atmosphere in her family. Her family placed high value on devotion to the nation, which influenced her decision to join the EGRT:

> My paternal grandfather was an honourable soldier and my father, and my maternal grandfather were members of the Chinese Communist Party. I did not have a clear belief but it seemed that I should join the Party as well and should make a contribution. I had said that I would go to the frontier provinces of my country to impart knowledge and educate children there. When asked why I chose the border areas, I answered it was to address the needs of my country. If others were not willing to go through arduous conditions, I would make it. I had written this decision in my journal when I was in middle school. (Min)

Her strong patriotic education and family tradition - as loyal supporters of the Chinese Communist Party - instilled firm beliefs and values into Min's mind. She expressed communist ideologies that were deeply rooted in her grandparents' generation. These included sacrifice of personal interest to public good, or service for the need of country, as indicated by Min's reference to her grandfather being a martyred soldier. The action of joining the Party and the belief in "making a contribution" were both taken for granted, as what one "should" do. Min's choice reflected past family practice, even across more than one generation, which still reverberated and shaped the choices of later generations (Crozier et al., 2008). Through early and accumulated family inculcation, Min set herself the goal of serving children in a disadvantaged environment, even though she had to take the risk of going through

difficulties which others would commonly avoid. Min's story showed how habitus, as the product of early childhood upbringing and socialization, oriented future social practice.

Similar to Min, Rui recalled that his family kept teaching him moral principles and values and that people should be ready to help the disadvantaged. Rui said, "Those principles were still in my heart even after so many years." Values, beliefs, perceptions, and propensities can be inter-generationally reproduced, though sometimes imperfectly, through family inculcation and domestic social praxis described as "primary pedagogic work" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 42). Primary pedagogic work functions as "a primary habitus, characteristic of a group and class" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 42) from the earliest years of life, and it lays the foundation for shaping basic views and values. In Bourdieu's work, primary pedagogic work is mainly interpreted as a prerequisite of success in school education, when a family can offer academic preparation or support. However, in this study, this concept extended to moral education, which frequently happens in Chinese family education. Chinese families usually believe that it is the parents' failure if they rear children without moral nurture (养不教，父之过). Such family inculcation often occurs on the basis of "internality without intention" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 12)—an effect of disposition laid down in the body through early socialization. It is not surprising then that Wei and Min mentioned their family inculcation in the early years when they recalled their decision to join EGRT.

Second, in addition to family inculcation, significant others like teachers, peers and movie characters can be role models who reportedly influenced participants' choice to join the EGRT. Min's teacher was a role model and had a significant impact on her choice of participation in the EGRT:

> I met a good teacher who had never given up on me. I had been as naughty
> and noisy as some of the boys and hated to study. If my teacher had not always
> cared for me, encouraged me, and tried every way to communicate with me
> and push me, I would not have achieved what I now have. (Min)

Min seemed to attribute almost all her current achievements to one of her previous teachers. According to Min, this teacher played a decisive role in transforming her from a troublesome student to a good one. Therefore, this teacher set a vivid example of how one teacher created an education miracle through constant

striving. This teacher set a good example of how a teacher can change students in a transformative way, which might have sown a seed of inspiration which drove Min to replicate her teacher. It is notable that when talking about her reasons for EGRT participation, Min immediately mentioned this teacher.

Similarly, Ren found an ideal role model in a movie describing a volunteer teacher working in a small village. She was moved to tears while watching the movie. These two examples showed that role models at specific moments can shape personal values and views and play an important role in later decision making. Likewise, Zhao considered one senior university peer to be his role model. She deeply respected this peer, who participated in the EGRT. After hearing how he helped children in remote areas, Zhao began to think about joining EGRT as well. These examples suggest how habitus, as an open system of dispositions, is constantly subject to and affected by different experiences (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.133). Therefore, it can be seen that participants' values of altruism had been constantly shaped by interactions with other individuals in a more extensive social context, whether in reality or in a virtual space (e.g., the cinema).

A third reason consonant with EGRT values was the commitment to educational equality and love for students in disadvantaged schools advocated by EGRT at a particular moment, especially for those interview participants with a rural origin (Na, Xiang and Ying). They appeared to relate students in disadvantaged schools to their own experience of growing up. In this respect, Na's reason for participation in EGRT was typical:

> After arriving in Beijing, I noticed that most of my classmates graduated from foreign language schools and they seemed impressive. Then I realized that the inequality of educational resource distribution resulted in the IQ gap between children in rural and urban areas. In most cases, the huge gap was rooted in the fact that rural children could not get access to the outside world, not in their innate intelligence. I thought it would be good if I could do something to help children in my hometown. (Na)

Na witnessed the drastic educational disparities between rural and urban areas after leaving the rural region where she was brought up. She then realized that the educational achievement gap between rural and urban students should not be generally attributed to personal intelligence, but to the imbalance of the distribution of educational resources. Hence, she wanted to 'give back' to her hometown. Likewise,

Xiang noted how educational resources were unequally distributed when he moved with his parents to a developed city; and so this personal experience made Xiang want to do something for students who had no chance of leaving rural areas. In this situation, both Na and Xiang emphasized the importance of equal access to good education for rural students. According to Bourdieu (1977), some resources are misrecognized as capitals in schooling contexts. The capitals required for school success are both arbitrary and selective values, which are then legitimated and further rewarded by powerful social agents in powerful institutions. Given lack of this capital, students are easily misrecognized as lacking academic intelligence or innate merit. However, owing to interview participants' own experience from rural to urban areas, they noticed some systemic inequality embedded in the distribution of educational resources. The participants' rural-urban transition experience sparked reflection on their part, and stimulated their inner altruistic dispositions of wanting to give back or their sense of social justice, which contributed to their EGRT participation. In addition to realizing that rural students' disadvantage stemmed from maldistribution of educational resources, Ying talked about the lagging behind of educational ideologies in rural schooling:

> I studied in an extremely exam-oriented high school located in a county so the teachers were always pushing us to complete many tests, which made me feel tremendously stressed. So I hated school and teachers and never wanted to be a teacher. However, after learning some education theories and experiencing different pedagogical ways later, I found that there were so many ways and possibilities of education. I felt sorry for myself and wanted to do something for the education of the next generation. The "good quality education" promoted by the EGRT attracted me so much. (Ying)

Ying reported how she had suffered from the pressure of high stakes examinations and the examination-oriented pedagogies in rural areas. She then hoped to draw on what she had learnt at her university to help rural children. She did not allow herself to sit back and see the next generation suffering. Ying's later educational experience hugely expanded her views, and the educational theories and pedagogies she encountered mainly related to quality-oriented education. Therefore, she desired to "save" children like herself from examination-oriented education through EGRT participation. As a victim who had suffered examination-oriented education, the key word of "good education" in EGRT promotion materials drew her in. Once EGRT

proposed this value, Ying grasped the opportunity to give back or make a difference to the rural communities.

In fact, recent years have seen strident debates about examination-oriented education in China. Examination-oriented pedagogies have been widely considered by the public as outdated and harmful, while quality-oriented education has been mandated for national implementation. However, quality-oriented education has mainly been conducted in urban areas of China; rural schools seldom step into the area of quality-oriented education, owing to limited resources and systemic problems (Wu, 2016). Influenced by the quality-oriented educational discourse and practice, Ying seemed to forget that it was the very examination-centric pedagogies she so disliked that had enabled her to gain high scores in the National College Entrance Examinations, and then to enjoy the opportunity to experience and witness education in urban areas.

In the above excerpts, two interview participants connected their personal experience with the destiny of rural children—their younger self—when reflecting on their reasons for participating in the EGRT program. The educational experiences of participants from rural areas resonated with those children they taught in disadvantaged schools. The transition of Na, Xiang and Ying between the rural and the urban triggered sympathy for rural students and a desire for social justice. They chose to participate in EGRT because this program created an opportunity for participants of rural origin to travel across social spaces, from rural schools, through prestigious universities, and then back again to rural schools. During this process, their rural dispositions first encountered a metropolitan milieu and then were reframed when working in rural schools. These participants seemed to travel across time to compensate themselves, as they may have benefited from EGRT if there had been such a program when they were small. They seemed to re-invest in their left-behind identity by helping others become 'wonder students' like themselves.

In conclusion, when answering the question about reasons behind participation in EGRT, interview participants mentioned their desire to make a difference for students in disadvantaged schools. This desire might be generated from their early family inculcation and/or secondary socialization beyond the domestic milieu. It was noted that domestic and school socialisation enculturated participants into a set of values, views and dispositions of altruism. These dispositions, consciously or unconsciously fashioned, had an impact on the choice to be teachers in disadvantaged

schools. At the same time, EGRT valued this altruistic disposition. Since EGRT aims to promote educational quality in disadvantaged schools, with its core value of extending a good quality education to every child without exception, interview participants chose to join this program after graduation.

### *Make a difference for EGRT fellow themselves*

According to the above analysis, some of the interview participants chose the EGRT based on their altruistic reasons of making a difference for students in disadvantaged schools, as valued by EGRT. However, altruistic disposition may not be the only habitus that oriented their EGRT participation. Many program participants were also attracted by the seemingly innovative concept of teaching as a form of leadership, the identity of a teacher being conceptualized as that of a leader in the discourse of EGRT. EGRT participation represents a chance to play out leadership. From the beginning, EGRT participants have been delineated as classroom leaders, able to lead their students out of their current plight. Furthermore, leadership has been conceptualized as a transferable ability which could promote personal flourishing in various sectors of the society and economy. Several of the interview participants (e.g., Shunag, Zhao and Feng) commented that they really appreciated the concept of teaching as leadership when they considered their participation in EGRT. Take Shuang as an example:

> I chose EGRT because I noticed EGRT tried to support fellows to think of their career development and promoted their leadership. I was so attracted by these advanced ideas. I regarded leadership and organizational ability as important competitive asset among peers in future workplaces. I could further develop myself through participating in this program. (Shuang)

Shuang clearly expressed her ambition to take advantage of EGRT to realise her personal potential. She expected that her personal leadership, as an important skill for future career success, would develop with support from EGRT. The analogy of "teacher" with "leader" seemed to be both reasonable and appealing to Shuang, successfully catering to her entrepreneurial disposition. In conventional sayings commonly used in China, teachers are usually compared to lighted candles which enlighten others while burning themselves out, or gardeners who help students grow with relentless effort and sweat. However, in the discourse of EGRT, teachers were innovatively constructed as leaders with personal charisma and power; they were no

longer perceived as candles or gardeners, who were dedicated to their work but stayed in relatively humble social status.

Instead, teaching was reconceptualised as a high-end profession with leadership opportunities and the chance to exert personal influence (Tamir, 2014). While teaching in the classroom, interview participants could take on leadership and acquire transferable leadership skills. That is to say, teaching offers opportunities to shape a pivotal personal capacity like leadership, which contributes to personal development in the current economy and society. This redefined the identity of the teacher or even the teaching profession. Other interview participants, like Zhao and Feng, explicitly stated that they were attracted by the notion of 'leadership' when they considered participating in EGRT. That is to say, they identified values and ideologies underlying this slogan which matched their own entrepreneurial dispositions and so constituted a main reason for their participation.

To facilitate self-development, various resources were advertised by EGRT through its marketing strategies. If EGRT participants identified the underlying value of resources, EGRT participation seemed to be an opportunity to take advantage of these to invest in their own further education and career. Zhao exemplified this way of thinking:

> With the EGRT participation experience, I could apply for higher level universities such as Cambridge and Oxford. I heard there was Teach First in the U.K. which was highly recognized and influential, so I guessed the EGRT participation would be conducive to my future application. (Zhao)

With EGRT participation, Zhao's resume would be better built for the appetite of the most elite university. Prior to EGRT participation, Zhao had received offers from two leading universities, the London School of Economics and Political Science and University College London. However, Zhao was more ambitious. She refused those two offers and participated in EGRT, which she believed would increase her competitive edge in applying for Cambridge and Oxford Universities. Zhao seemed to have a good feel for the game. She clearly knew what a first class university required. Embodied cultural capital, referring to the personal package of capacities, was stressed by the most prestigious universities. This capital could usually be accrued through intellectual family inculcation, extracurricular activities (voluntary experience), and internship (Li, 2013). In addition, Zhao also carefully considered how much EGRT

participation would help her by estimating the social influence of a similar program, Teach First, in the U.K. When she made sure that EGRT participation experience was good for building her resume for her further university applications, she invested her two years' time and effort in EGRT participation. That is to say, she made this decision when she felt it was a game worth playing.

Similarly, another of the interview participants, Shuang, invested in her further career development through EGRT participation. Shuang drew on opportunities offered by EGRT with mobilising the Alumni network:

> My major was psychology and my desirable job is psychological counsellor. I was interested in education, especially international schools. I knew an EGRT alumnus was working there. I planned to work there for a year after my service, and then to go back to America and further study student affairs. (Shuang)

This is about the imagined future, and Shuang was investing in her own future career. Similarly to Zhao, she clearly knew what capital EGRT could bestow on her in her quest to ultimately achieve her goal, step-by-step. The EGRT alumnus, working in her desired international school, was regarded as a key person who might help her achieve her set goal. Through the Alumni networks, social capital was also available to EGRT participants. Shuang's EGRT participation shared the same mechanism that privileged parents used to choose prestigious universities for their children. These parents believed that these universities were more likely to provide sufficient and effective assistance in achieving a flourishing career (Sheng, 2014). With a similar principle, the more social capital EGRT was able to offer, the more popular it would be among applicants. As advertised by EGRT, the official website showed the bright future of its alumni by listing the places where fellows went after two years' service. Many alumni studied in top universities worldwide, or worked in famous companies with manager-level positions after EGRT participation. This might be a growing snowball effect for every fellow, and some might benefit through this social network, especially those having clear career goals. In this respect, participation in EGRT would mean access to powerful and effective social resources. This process was about developing a potentially valuable social network with potential social capital related to the elite alumni resources (Hall, 2011). Such a network can provide EGRT participants with successful assistance "in terms of the careers to which institutions provide access" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 503).

In addition to investing in education or career development, some interview participants also invested in their elite identity. Successful EGRT participation was an indicator that one was an exceptional graduate among peers, owing to the highly selective mechanism; this was the kudos that selection for EGRT brought participants. It was another prize for elite graduates who were already winners of the National College Entrance examination. EGRT aimed to attract the most outstanding group, so participants often use the term "high-end/ aristocratic" (高大上) - which means superb, exceptional, with great taste - to describe the EGRT when they talked about reasons of EGRT participation: in a word, 'distinction'. Joining EGRT means they will be a member of a selective organization and share its reputation and glories. For example, Xiu noted:

> I regarded EGRT as a **high-end/aristocratic** organization. That was an attractive feature of EGRT with high entry threshold, which promotes that EGRT was a place where top university graduates from 985 Project and 211 Project got together. It was attractive because I wanted to stay with exceptional persons wherever I would go. (Xiu)

This elite image was consciously taken up by Xiu, who regards EGRT as an elite club with high selection criteria. The identity of graduates of the 985 Project and 211 Project seemed a ticket for access to this club. Another of the interview participants, Feng, also reported that he would not have been so interested in EGRT without such a high standard of application. Interestingly, Ren and Zhao used exactly the same words "high-end/ aristocratic" (高大上) to describe EGRT when they recalled their participation reasons. The logic behind EGRT's propaganda is similar to that of Teach for America: "overtly stating our goal was selective" (Blumenreich & Gupta, 2015, p. 93). The aura of selectivity gave members' higher self-esteem and the teaching profession a higher-status. Successful application in itself means another triumph in fierce competition. Therefore, being an EGRT fellow would be immediately translated into symbolic capital, which entitled the bearer to much in the way of honours and distinction through membership of an elite group. This strategy of cultivating 'selectivity' endowed EGRT with a large amount of symbolic capital. Participants themselves would feel proud of their elite identity.

In addition to the competitive selection process, EGRT's promotional video seems effective in conveying its symbolic capital. EGRT invited a famous director

with a good reputation who successfully created an image of EGRT fellows as relentless, intellectual and altruistic. As a result, it became another important attraction for graduates from prestigious universities. For example, Shuang reported:

> I checked its official website and the information seemed reliable. There was a documentary made by a famous actor and director in China who has reputation. In that documentary, I saw so many young talents who spared no effort for students in need, and I felt it was a group which I desired to join. (Shuang)

Shuang gained a sense of trust in EGRT after knowing who made a promotional film for it. The latent logic might be like this: if EGRT could invite such a celebrity with high prestige to advertise for it, then this program should be good. That is to say, EGRT accrued symbolic capital by taking advantage of others' great reputations to build its own brand. Other participants, like Feng and Ren, also mentioned how attractive EGRT's promotional materials were. When referring to the capitals provided by the EGRT, the 'against the grain choice' seemed like a pragmatic choice. In addition, EGRT fellows were described as altruistic young talents. Being a member of this program meant that a graduate was not merely of the elite but full of social justice and kindness for the disadvantaged. EGRT created an elite aura with a large amount of symbolic capital in sophisticated ways.

Meanwhile, the above participants also seemed very sensitive to capitals of which they could take advantage. This sensibility indicated tacit and explicit 'know how' of how to package capitals of EGRT into personal potential competency. That is to say, interview participants, especially urban fellows, were more likely to have an internalised understanding of how to acquire and mobilise capitals required for personal success through EGRT participation. They tended to have a feel for the game (Bourdieu, 1990b), as good players at discerning and mobilising capitals associated with EGRT. In addition to the symbolic capital that could be accrued, some interview participants identified other possibilities for investing in their identity. Zhao and Xiu were typical examples: taking advantage of EGRT participation to gain rural life experience helped to re-assure them of their elite identity.

> I regard these two years as a chance for enrichment of my life experience, which would be good in the long run. I could experience rural life style which I had not experienced and probably would not experience again. (Zhao)

For Zhao, participation in EGRT was not so much about giving. It seemed more about how much she could gain as a return on, or reward for her two years' service in terms of broadened life experience. Zhao was from an affluent urban family, and according to her accounts she was fully aware of where she came from and where she belongs. A distinction between rural communities and her origins had been set at the very beginning. EGRT aims to serve students in disadvantaged schools, the life of students in these schools seemed so different from her own; so participation in EGRT for Zhao was an experiential learning opportunity for interacting with individuals in poverty. The skills and experience acquired through this kind of "social mix" (Skeggs, 2004, p. 107) were often viewed against the backdrop of globalization as cultural capital, especially by those from middle or upper class families (Crozier, et al., 2008).

Similar to Zhao, Xiu, who came from a well-off urban family, also commented, "I would like to experience rural life which I never had experienced, and I believed it would be a chance for me to become a better me". Xiu knew that this opportunity for rural experience might not happen again in her life. In this situation, the disadvantages of rural areas were viewed as cultural resources rather than structural deficiencies when they were reflected upon in relation to participation reasons. The instrumental knowledge and skills acquired through interacting with people from different backgrounds were widely celebrated in the current labour market. Compared with Zhao and Xiu, Sun did not have such an overt future-benefits purpose, or much interest in rural life. Instead, Sun was attracted by talented peers he would meet in EGRT:

> I stayed in the laboratory for the whole day and I felt I was trapped within a quite small circle these years, which made me wonder that I know nothing about the outside world. I was keen to know more outstanding young talents with different academic backgrounds and broader visions through EGRT participation. Then when we got together, we could inspire each other. (Sun)

Sun felt isolated in the laboratory and wanted to enrich himself through communicating more with other talented young people. Since the recruitment of EGRT did not set requirements for particular majors, it meant that graduates could only enter this program if they successfully passed the strict selection process. That is to say, Sun sensitively discerned that EGRT fellows constituted an internally culturally diverse environment with rich cultural resources which he could draw on. By participating in EGRT, he perceived that he could enrich his own cultural resources to a higher level through mutual inspiration with other talented young people. Sun viewed

the prospect of meeting other young people in EGRT as something that would be enjoyable; and felt proud of being a member of them. Another interview participant, Rui, also reported his consideration of the quality of his EGRT colleagues.

Although interview participants joined EGRT as an investment in their future and identity, they were social persons in a material world; and another reason for joining was reportedly related to monetary concerns. No interview participant reported choosing EGRT for its financial incentives. Nevertheless, around 2000RMB ($AUD 400) was enough to support their personal daily expenses in rural areas of China, which brought two direct advantages. According to the biographies of the 14 interview participants reported on in Section 5.1, none had come from families in poverty. Overall, the socioeconomic status of the urban fellows was higher than that of their rural counterparts. For rural fellows, like Ren, basic financial concerns were relieved:

> I am not from a rich family. Even though I did not spend any money during my master degree, but I think I should be the economic support for my family. I could not achieve that for these two years. Luckily, EGRT has subsidy of RMB2000 and I think that is good because I have never thought that volunteer teachers can get any money before. (Ren)

The subsidy Ren received from EGRT was able to cover personal expenses in disadvantaged schools but there was hardly any left over to give back to her family. In spite of this, she still thought the subsidy was "good". Since the voluntary system had not been soundly established in China, voluntary teaching was widely viewed as work without pay. Thus, from Ren's perspective, the subsidy was something of an unexpected gift. Since she had felt guilty for not being able to help her family financially, it seemed to be impossible for her to participate in the EGRT if she still needed to ask for money from them. Therefore, despite the limited amount of the EGRT subsidy, it guaranteed her program participation without having to worry about meeting basic needs.

> The reason I came here was obviously not the money I could earn. The subsidy was just an odd shillings of my classmates' average income now. However, this subsidy allowed me to get rid of my parents' financial blockade when they did not agree with my EGRT participation. Compared with other similar programs without financial support, the subsidy was an advantage of EGRT. (Sun)

Unlike Ren, Sun was from an affluent urban family, therefore, he had no concerns about giving back to his family. However, since his parents strongly disagreed with his EGRT participation, the subsidy helped him to escape from the economic sanction imposed by his parents after graduation. Therefore, this subsidy made EGRT stronger when competing with many other programs in China having the same objectives for rural students without any financial support. Although this subsidy was so little when compared with the salaries being earned by his peers from prestigious universities, the subsidy indeed helped Sun realize financial dependence and paved the way for his self-investment and capital exchange through EGRT participation. This is further elaborated in the following stories of Sun.

The subsidy of the EGRT program seemed to play an important role in relieving basic financial concerns of EGRT participants; however, it did not constitute the main reason for their resistance to other lucrative job positions with desirable incomes. Although EGRT participation for two years could not contribute to direct economic capital accumulation, the participation could be an investment; a seemingly risky strategy, for flourishing in the long-run.

Therefore, the disposition of entrepreneurialism could be satisfied through EGRT participation. According to the data, most of the EGRT participants in the study were constant winners of the competitions of key secondary senior schools and prestigious universities. The key secondary senior schools and prestigious universities took up a disproportionate amount of quality educational resources, represented the most advanced educational ideologies, and recruited the most outstanding students in China. Only students with enough cultural capital (mainly referring to outstanding outcomes of high stakes exams/other talents) or sometimes economic capital (a large donation/some special contribution), social capital (family connections with powerful people in the right position) were able to access these limited educational resources. After studying in leading schools and universities, their previous capital would be further reproduced. Their successful entry meant that they needed to consistently beat their peers to keep their superior positions. Therefore, the idiosyncrasy of managing themselves to remain outstanding had been shaped. They seemed to gradually acquire the feel of the game of taking privileged positions, through both managing themselves and mobilizing resources around them.

In this situation, the EGRT seemed to be an extension of their previous privilege. The strict selection criteria means that only a small percentage of applicants - with the

proper amount and configuration of capital - could successfully become involved. The program participants were then conceptualized as prospective leaders, which matched the habitus cultivated in previous fields. The sophisticated marketing strategies of EGRT successfully hunted for the habitus of exceptional graduates, with the use of much material and symbolic attractions. Although many resources were on offer to the fellows as members of EGRT, the habitus made the possibilities visible or invisible, and oriented the individual's tendency to invest or not.

## 5.3    CHAPTER SUMMARY

In recent years, many programs have appeared for recruiting exceptional graduates to teach in disadvantaged schools. Extant knowledge of participation reasons of similar programs largely emerges from the western context (Lampert & Burnett, 2012; Straubhaar & Gottfried, 2014; Tamir, 2009). The current chapter differs, however, in its attempt to explore the reasons behind interview participants' choice of joining an organization-based program in a Chinese context. Their reasons share both differences and similarities with western program participants.

The chapter reveals multiple reasons behind participation in EGRT. Reasons discussed in 5.2.1 are defined as socio-personal reasons. Specifically, interview participants' reasons were associated with (1) resistance to the stereotyped life trajectory which was well-recognized by their parents' generation; (2) the desire to explore their own ideal life mode and further exert personal potential; and (3) escape from a sense of feeling lost. These reasons have received little mention in the extant literature. They are understood as emerging from the contemporary context of China. Thus, this study adds a new social and cultural dimension to findings about voluntary teaching programs. Although these socio-personal reasons were important in constituting interview participants' reasons for EGRT participation, the reasons consonant with EGRT values, discussed in 5.2.2, add another layer to the phenomenon of EGRT participation.

Regarding reasons consonant with EGRT values in general, some interview participants mainly aspired to make a difference for students in disadvantaged schools, while others mainly wanted to make a difference for themselves through EGRT participation. Interestingly, these two reasons reflecting altruistic dispositions and entrepreneurial dispositions were both valued by EGRT. The core values of EGRT

were clearly delivered by its slogans about every student deserving a good education, and teaching as leadership; that is, values of altruism and personal development respectively. In addition to the aforementioned dispositions which could be satisfied by EGRT, the program also offered various forms of capital (e.g., symbolic capital), enabling the participants to further invest in themselves for successful personal development in the future.

Another interesting phenomenon was that most of the participants reported that they began to look forward to their two years' service before they entered a disadvantaged school. These imaginings, expectations and prospects constitute a series of assumptions in their minds. What are these assumptions? Did these assumptions match their perceptions after they entered placement schools? The next chapter addresses these questions.

# Chapter 6: Disparities between Pre-service Assumptions and In-Service Perceptions

The previous chapter has presented an in-depth analysis of 14 EGRT interview participants' reasons for joining EGRT. The analysis found that reasons for program participation were multi-layered and inter-nested, mainly including socio-personal reasons and reasons consonant with EGRT values. The question remains, however, about what happened after participants commenced their EGRT service in placement schools. Prior to their arrival in schools, participants seemed to have had expectations about what their two-year service would be like. After their service commenced in the disadvantaged schools, would they encounter disparities between pre-service expectations and in-service realities? It is this question to which the current chapter turns. The analysis of the chapter aims to unveil any disparities between participants' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions. It addresses Research Question 2:

> ***Research Question 2:*** *What disparities are there between EGRT fellows' pre-service assumptions about rural-school teaching and their in-service perceptions?*

Prior to their arrival in placement schools, participants seemed to have assumptions about various aspects of local schooling. After their service commenced in the schools, they reportedly encountered disparities between their previous assumptions and the realities they experienced. Sections 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 discuss assumption-reality disparities associated with local students, local teachers, local parents and their own personal impact respectively. Section 6.5 concludes with reasons behind these disparities.

## 6.1   STUDENTS I TAUGHT WERE TOTALLY DIFFERENT FROM WHAT I IMAGINED BEFORE

When asked about whether there were any disparities between what they assumed and the actual experience in placement schools, participants spoke of different aspects, with local students most frequently mentioned (11 out of 14 interview participants). The most common account was that local students were

different from how participants had imagined they would be, and this disparity commonly frustrated them. Their assumed image of rural students was built on the grounds of EGRT promotional materials or/and media reports, where rural students were commonly represented as naïve and innocent, with big, shining eyes, seeking knowledge. However, the students participants taught in their placement schools reportedly differed from the imagined image. Four aspects of disparity emerged from the interview data. First, the knowledge base of local students was much weaker than assumed. Second, students had much less knowledge and skills of learning and thinking (intelligence) than assumed. Third, local students often seemed to lack the expected motivation to learn. Fourth, rural students were not as naïve as described in printed and online media.

### 6.1.1 Frustration about local students' knowledge base

Many interview participants felt frustrated when they realized that local students' knowledge base and corresponding academic potential was much weaker than they had previously assumed. Although interview participants clearly knew that the academic performance of students in rural areas of China lagged behind that of their peers in urban schools, the participants generally reflected that they seemed to have underestimated the gap in so-called 'basic knowledge'. Those academically underperforming rural students were who they aimed to serve; however, participants might not have been aware of how big this gap was before they entered their placement schools and interacted with their students.

One scenario happened often, where knowledge regarded as easy or basic for students of a certain age turned out to be difficult or novel. In this situation, points of knowledge had to be repeatedly explained but still could not be understood by local students. Some interview participants began to think about possible reasons behind this struggle. It was students' levels of basic literacy and numeracy skills that hindered their being able to build new knowledge and understand concepts. There were two typical examples. Zhao, working as a geography teacher in her placement school, figured out why students could not respond to her question about the longitude difference between two cities: it was not that students did not understand the concept of 'longitude'; rather, they could not do the two-digit addition and subtraction required to solve the longitude problem. It was hard for her to believe that students of around 13 years of age lacked this basic numeracy skill, which she had assumed was easy even

for primary school students. Similarly, Min's students could not read or write some frequently-used Chinese characters in their history book. This deeply frustrated Min. She recalled:

> Their (local students') knowledge basis is shaky. (I was) helpless because they truly did not know anything. I did not know they could not recognize such simple Chinese characters at their age until I asked them to read the text book aloud. They could not recognize characters in phrases like 戒奢从简 (refrain from luxury and uphold frugality) and 武则天 (Wu Zetian) in the history of China. (Min)

Min explicitly talked about the shaky knowledge basis of her students. "Wu Zetian" is the only Empress in Chinese history. Min assumed that such a famous and unique historic figure would be known to everyone. However, her students failed to name this figure and write her name correctly. Min knew local students lacked mastery of curricular content, however, the small amount of schooled knowledge of the local students was beyond Min's previous imagination. Prior to entry into her placement school, Min had made assumptions about what kind of knowledge her students should have at their age. In Bourdieusian terms, Min seemed to have had a classificatory scheme which led her to assume certain knowledge and skills. Shocked by the reality, she then took up an apparent deficit view on the academic performance of local students by saying that "they truly don't know anything". In the absence of that knowledge, Min credited the students with little value. Although local students might lack content knowledge from textbooks, it did not necessarily mean that they knew nothing, as Min concluded. However, what local students knew, such as how to raise pigs and grow plants in rural areas, was usually ignored by Min.

Similarly to Min, Na also encountered this disparity when she noticed that many students could not follow her at all. Differently from Min, Na seemed to begin to realize that the definition of basic level knowledge for herself and her students might be different:

> In the beginning of the service, I found that many students could not understand what I was talking about. I believed that I was just teaching something easy and basic, but maybe that was my opinion rather than theirs. Despite this, I still felt very sad when I knew how much they had lagged behind. (Na)

Na noticed that many students totally failed to understand what she taught in class. In this situation, Na seemed to look for reasons from both students and herself. On one hand, local students again were blamed for lagging behind. Since the level of school knowledge made available to students was usually designed step-by-step in the curriculum, students' current failure was the result of limited accumulation over time. Therefore, depressed emotions and negative remarks about local students were easily generated, as Na said, she was "very sad". On the other hand, despite a firm belief that she taught curriculum-prescribed content, she described the content as "something easy and basic". In this situation, Na's classificatory scheme worked to define what knowledge belonged to the cluster of "easy and basic". Unlike Min, who explicitly classified some knowledge as common sense which every student should know at a particular school year, Na stood in the shoes of the local students and reflected on the fact that the definition of "easy and basic" might be different through their lens. However, this kind of reflection seemed to be limited to just one glance.

From the descriptions of Zhao, Min and Na, it seemed that the fellows pre-defined which kind of knowledge should be grasped at a certain age or which kind of knowledge was easy and basic. This unconscious classification was self-evident and beyond question to them. Zhao and Min took it for granted without any reflection while Na's reflection was that students' knowledge was far from adequate. As Bourdieu (1984) argued, school was an "institutionalized classifier which itself is an objectified system of classification reproducing the hierarchies of the social world…transform[ing] social classification into academic classification, with appearance of neutrality" (p.387). Since EGRT interview participants were academic winners and beneficiaries of schooling, they were more likely to enable the school to perform the role of social reproduction than of transformation in their placement schools. With the extreme asymmetric cultural capital that existed between EGRT fellows and local students, EGRT fellows easily fell into deficit thinking about local students, as they knew nothing of and seldom located their students' strengths beyond the content knowledge valued in the school system.

## 6.1.2 Disappointed by local students' intelligence

When asked about the disparities between her assumed and actual experience in disadvantaged schools, another concern often raised by interview participants was the intelligence of local students. Intelligence here refers to the capacity of an individual

for logic, understanding, learning, creativity, and problem solving. Some interview participants made complaints in this regard. Long was disappointed that "no critical thinking could be found among local students". Shuang complained about students' lack of independent thinking. See Shuang's comment below:

> Sometimes I was very disappointed because it was so hard to find any independent thinking in my class. Independent thinking was a necessary quality as a person. I was thinking it might be because my placement school extremely emphasized examination scores. If some subjects had no relationship with examination and school ranking such as Music, Art and Physical Education, these subjects would be easily cut off by the principal. Although my students were just little kids in primary school, they were still required to self-study in the classroom to recite the knowledge learnt in the day. Maybe I studied abroad for a long time, so I was against examination-oriented education. (Shuang)

The reason why Shunag felt disappointed was that she did not expect the small amount of independent thinking displayed by local students. Then she attributed this phenomenon to local examination-oriented education evaluation systems and pedagogies. This view perhaps arose from her own educational experience, as she had been educated in the U.S. since the third year of her senior secondary school. Western educational ideologies and values, with a focus on independent thinking, had enculturated her into a habitus which would be remarkably different from that of the examination-oriented education widely accepted in the disadvantaged schools. Because of her personal habitus, shaped by western educational systems, she emphasized independent thinking as an essential ability with which to equip everyone. When the level of independent thinking of her local students could not reach what she assumed, her disappointment seemed inevitable. Interview participant Hua also reported a similar disparity regarding students' independent thinking.

Instead of commenting on students' lack of independent or critical thinking, Na explicitly said, "students here surprised me…(they) surprisingly don't think." Similarly, Sun also stated a generally negative view of local students' learning abilities:

> Students' learning abilities were much inferior to what I imagined before, and I have never expected the gap regarding learning ability between urban students and rural student was so huge. The students I taught were totally

different from what I imagined before. They have formed bad learning habits in their previous years which are hard to get rid of, which seemed to be the biggest challenge in these two years. (Sun)

The use of adverbs of degree (e.g., "much", "totally") indicates a huge perceived gap in learning abilities between real and imagined students. In addition to learning ability, Sun also described students' learning habitus as "bad", apparently failing to recognize any innate value of his students. At the same time, he put local students in inferior positions when comparing rural students with their urban counterparts. Sun's assumptions about rural students appeared to be based on his experience of urban students, because he was from a privileged urban family and had never been to rural areas prior to his EGRT participation. As a result, his deficit thinking about local students extended to the arena of personal learning ability rather than merely about the amount of subject knowledge.

Intelligence, like independent thinking, critical thinking and learning abilities such as effective learning habits, belongs to the scope of embodied cultural capital. The acquisition of embodied cultural capital takes time and effort, and constitutes important employability that is valued in the labour market (Smart, et al., 2009). These EGRT participants mostly came from well-off families, in either rural or urban areas, at least without any financial burdens. Despite the rural origins of some of them, they had all constantly enjoyed rich educational resources in key senior secondary schools and prestigious universities. Cultivated by this selective education for so many years, most EGRT interview participants were therefore rich in terms of embodied cultural capital. When they expected to pass on this kind of capital to their students in their placement schools, they were usually initially surprised by how little capital their local students owned, because they seldom realized how much time, effort and resourcing is needed for cultivation and accumulation of this capital. The reality in fact was that students in these disadvantaged schools had little chance of accumulating this kind of embodied cultural capital.

### 6.1.3 Surprised by local students' low motivation to learn

Another disparity mentioned by interview participants (Wei, Ren, Feng) was related to local students' low learning motivation. The participants tended to believe that local students were probably temporarily left behind or incapable of academic learning, which demonstrated the need for and value of their choice to teach them.

They seemed to find it difficult to acknowledge that local students actually disliked study itself. They commonly thought that their students should have shown greater curiosity and basic respect for knowledge. See Wei's comments below:

> My expectations about the students at the beginning weren't so negative. I knew (local) students were not as good as the urban ones, but they **should** be similar. The students in my imagination were those who were keen to learn with beautiful and big eyes, just like what media described. Although I had read some other reports about rural education, I still believed most students hoped to learn, but I was wrong. (Wei)

Wei assumed local students would be keen to learn. He thought they would be similar to urban students though "not as good". However, his assumed image of students did not appear in reality. The word "should" was used when he explicitly reported this mismatch between what he saw from EGRT media and what he saw in his placement school. Then Wei attributed his previous assumption about local students to EGRT marketing. Interestingly, Wei said that he had read contradictory reports about rural students' willingness to learn, but had believed otherwise when he took up his EGRT position. That is to say, the advertising technique successfully created an image of lovely rural children with "beautiful and big eyes", and this concrete image worked more than any abstract report in shaping Wei's concept of "rural students". In this situation, Wei's habitus functioned as an internalized mechanism to guide him to choose what he wanted to believe. That is to say, this individual's perceptions of the credible and incredible were not rational but conditioned in the habitus. Then Wei had to confess that he was wrong (to believe the media rhetoric) after his entry to his placement school. This disparity was not uncommon in interview participants' commentaries. The image of local students in Ren's mind was similar to that of Wei:

> Regarding the two years of life experience with the program, it was like a picture. I imagined living in a remote and small village. All kids were pretty cute, desperately waiting for learning various knowledge and the big world beyond the small village. However, they (local students) were not like what many fellows imagined, desperately waiting for us to teach them knowledge. Maybe some students were not willing to learn. I tried my most to treat them well but they didn't feel thankful. It was the reality. (Ren)

Ren pointed out that this disparity was not merely an individual assumption but a common perception of EGRT fellows by saying "they (local students) were not like what many fellows imagined". The unexpected disparity between imagination and reality surprised most, if not all, fellows. This disparity in the desire to learn seemed to trigger more negative emotions when Ren believed she wholeheartedly tried to help local students but without any returned gratitude. EGRT legitimated fellows' commitment by foregrounding the good will they bring to help children in rural schools. Due to this, Ren intuitively put herself in the position of helping others; and believed that those who were being helped should be grateful for what she brought to them. If they did not recognize her work, they were viewed as ungrateful and ignorant. In this situation, symbolic violence is happening. As a result, this disparity seemed to be more frustrating for interview participants than the disparities relating to their knowledge base or intelligence.

### 6.1.4 Discouraged by local students' misbehaviours

The disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions were not limited to the academic area, but extended to moral assessment. Some local students' misbehaviours led to another perceived disparity when interview participants compared their pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions. They previously believed that children in disadvantaged schools would be characterised by simplicity and honesty, as village residents in a relatively narrow and quiet environment. However, some students were hard to manage, owing to misbehaviour such as delinquency, disrespect to teachers in class, alcohol abuse, sexual activity and physical violence after class. See Ying's account below:

> When the class began, no matter how you repeatedly issue orders and requirements such as no eating, walking and throwing things at the class, some students still did this. I had to ask one to go out of the classroom to stop the serious misbehaviour. However, some other students followed and went out of the classroom. They did this because they should share happiness and misfortune together as good friends. They did not have the basic understanding to distinguish the right and wrong. I felt awfully angry. (Ying)

As Ying explained, she failed to successfully manage students to follow some basic classroom rules. Misbehaviour often happened despite her repeated orders. In some situations, removing an undisciplined student from the classroom seemed the

only choice for Ying; however, this method was still ineffective when other students joined in the punishment to demonstrate their friendship. Ying found it impossible to understand the students' commitment to "sharing happiness and misfortune together as good friends". Therefore, she could only see students' disobedience. Owing to irreconcilable conflicts in understanding the concept of "friend", Ying seemed to believe that she was right beyond all doubt, and that the local students lacked basic moral views to "distinguish right and wrong". However, the local students were probably testing the boundaries with a new teacher, or they knew this was not acceptable but still played up. Shaped by Ying's own value system, she was blind to other possibilities when she talked about this incident. She was therefore making moral judgments about her students based on mainstream or urban-oriented classifications of the "right" and the "wrong".

Most interview participants (10 out of 14) mentioned how difficult it was to discipline students in class and after class. This view was apparently widespread among EGRT fellows. Interview participants Hua, Zhao, Wei and Ying reported that they had been told how tough local students were by EGRT alumni prior to their placement. Take Wei for example:

> The most I heard about was how difficult to be a teacher here with many big troubles and challenges. The most difficult thing was classroom management. Alumni seemed to warn fresh fellows not to be too friendly to the students. When these fellows became alumni, they passes these ideas to the new kid on the block again. When I was deployed to my current placement school, they (EGRT alumni) told me that students in this school were hard to control or manage, which was well known in this area. (Wei)

So Wei was reportedly informed by senior EGRT fellows of local students' misbehaviour when he commenced his service in his placement school. This deficit thinking had at least in part been shaped by alumni and had then impacted on following fellows. However, this deficit thinking, offered as a caveat, did not seem to decrease participants' expectations of local students. In contrast, their later difficulty in managing the students seemed to prove what EGRT alumni had told them in terms of students' moral behaviours. This deficit thinking weakened the EGRT fellows, which made them more helpless in managing students in class. In Bourdieusian terms, Wei's habitus incorporated this deficit thinking and then oriented his later judgement. In

addition to Wei, Zhao listed several unfortunate events caused by local students when talking about her disparities between what she assumed and what she perceived:

> I could not identify any of the simplicity that the children in this rural area should have had. They were well-known for fighting and vicious campus incidents. Some of my students were terrible, and it was not easy for them to stay in school until the third year without dropping-out. Moreover, they carried knives to threaten teachers, they stole things and they drank. The social and cultural civilization of this village was really rough and rude. (Zhao)

Similarly to Ren, who assumed local students should be highly motivated to learn, Zhao explicitly expressed her view that rural students should have the quality of simplicity. To her surprise, several malicious school incidents showed her how far local students were from the "simplicity" used in promotional materials to describe rural students; and how delinquent some local students in fact were. What is more, deficit thinking even spread to the local community, as seen by Zhao's reference to "social and cultural civilization". The classificatory scheme of habitus easily classified and labelled groups. When the realities were contrasted to some labels, deficit thinking towards the dominant groups then tended to permeate pervasively.

In summary, interview participants were commonly frustrated by the disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions relating to students' knowledge base, intelligence, study motivation and moral behaviour. The participants' pervasive deficit discourse constructed local students as inferior. With regard to knowledge base and personal intelligence, interview participants (Zhao, Min, Na, Hua, Shuang, Long, and Sun) perceived the students' academic outcomes and potential as worse than they had previously assumed. As shown here, deficit thinking further extended to participants' perceptions of students' inadquate learning motivation and misbehaviours beyond the academic arena ( Ren, Wei, Feng, Ying and Zhao).

## 6.2  I NEVER THOUGHT I COULD LEARN THIS FROM LOCAL TEACHERS

Participants' perceptions of local teachers differed markedly from their pre-service assumptions. At the beginning of their service, EGRT interview participants commonly considered local teachers to be "unqualified". Their initial impression included appraisals of monotonous pedagogy (Rui, Sun, Zhao, Xiu), low academic credentials (Ying, Xiang, Wei), and severe job burnout (Min, Rui, Feng). Prior to their

entry into the disadvantaged schools, therefore, participants' deficit thinking was directed not only towards the local students, but also towards the local teachers. This is perhaps not surprising, given that the EGRT fellows were recruited to solve the problems of rural schools. A sense of self-superiority prevailed amongst the interview participants (Zhao, Ying, Sun, Shuang and Feng). With regard to pre-service assumptions about local teachers, opinions from Zhao and Ying were typical:

> I had imagined that although local teachers might be weak in teaching methods, I would control myself to not directly point this out. This was indeed a condescending gesture and belief that I could work much better than them. (Zhao)

> Prior to entering my placement school, I had an attitude of "helping local education". I thought that local teachers were not good and needed my help to correct this. (Ying)

Prior to interacting with local teachers, this negative impression of local teaching methods already existed in Zhao's mind. Accordingly, she was confident that she would perform better than the local teachers, despite having no teaching experience and only five weeks intensive training offered by EGRT. Likewise, Ying had an equally negative image of local teachers before she commenced her service, defining local teachers as a group in need of help. And Ying thought she was the very person who would come and make a difference. Zhao and Ying had privileged positions within their disadvantaged schools because of the amount and configuration of capital they owned (Bourdieu, 1986). Both had graduated from top Chinese universities; hence, they had abundant cultural capital in the institutionalized state that was highly recognized by the whole of Chinese society. Their symbolic capital came from social recognition of EGRT as an altruistic program that had already established its reputation in placement schools. With such capital, interview participants considered themselves to be 'superior', especially prior to and at the beginning of their entry to the schools. As Bourdieu (1977) points out, the rich resources possessed by these exceptional graduates - as the potentially dominant group - are more likely to arbitrarily assign high value and even a monopoly of legitimacy.

Service in rural schools provided interview participants with an opportunity to interact with local educators. Such an opportunity reportedly changed their initial negative attitudes. They gradually realized that their initial unfavourable impression

of the local teachers might be single-faceted, or even wrong. As their service continued, they started to recognize local teachers' particular advantages in the local educational context. Local teachers have been working in rural schools for many years. Some were born and brought up in rural areas. Participants started to recognise attributes and inherent special strengths of the local teachers, which included: (1) familiarity with content knowledge of textbooks; (2) familiarity with local students; (3) familiarity with the examination-oriented education system; and (4) proficiency in the local dialect.

First, some of the interview participants (Wei, Zhao, Ren and Xiang) had to admit the strength of local teachers' familiarity with content knowledge and their interpretation of the knowledge in text books. Many local teachers had been working in placement schools for decades. By repeatedly teaching some subjects for such a long time, they were well acquainted with the subject knowledge presented in the text books. In contrast, some interview participants soon identified their own weakness in terms of the required subject knowledge. When asked about disparities between his pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions, Wei shared a story of one of his EGRT colleagues:

> I previously thought we were more knowledgeable than local teachers, but it might not be the fact in a specific class. Once I audited an EGRT fellow's class, he was teaching primary students how to draw the bar chart. However, the knowledge he taught was wrong. I had to say this kind of situation really existed. A big problem might be the mismatch between fellows' majors in university and subjects in placement schools. That colleague might not have touched some subject knowledge for many years, especially after having a major in university. If he failed to fully prepare for the class, it might happen. However, up to now, I had not noticed similar mistakes made by local teachers. (Wei)

The data here do not contain enough evidence to establish whether or not Wei's colleague did indeed misinterpret the textbook knowledge or whether Wei himself actually mistakenly interpreted his colleague's correct knowledge as inaccurate. Irrespective of whoever is right or wrong, Wei noted the reasons behind the possible misinterpretation of textbook knowledge. He also analysed reasons why inaccurate knowledge was delivered by his EGRT colleague. Although most EGRT fellows graduated from prestigious universities, it did not mean that they were good on every

point of knowledge they had learned previously, especially knowledge learned many years before. When EGRT fellows studied their own majors in universities, their knowledge seemed more generalized and advanced. If the major learned had little or no relevance to the subjects they taught in their placement schools, the incident mentioned by Wei might happen. Indeed, as shown earlier in Table 5.2, the major-subject mismatch was not uncommon among the 14 interview participants. Only two participants' majors matched the subject they taught. In contrast, in terms of familiarity with content knowledge, local teachers showed their advantage by dint of their long-term teaching of the subject to local students.

A second advantageous attribute of local teachers was that in addition to being more familiar with content knowledge in text books, they were more adept at knowing their students. This mainly presented in the following two aspects, namely the use of everyday examples to get the point across and the development of context-appropriate approaches to classroom management. On the one hand, local teachers could interpret content knowledge to achieve a better effect than that assumed by participants, as Xiang indicated:

> In the beginning, I did not know how to teach moral education in junior secondary school, so I audited moral education classes delivered by two local teachers. I noticed that they often gave illustrations of killing a pig or grocery shopping in the market. However, I used Xiaoming as an example in a very official way. I realized that examples employed by me had no relationship with students' life at all, and it was hard for students to understand. When I also used examples close to students like local teachers, the effect was good as well. I never thought I could learn this from local teachers. (Xiang)

According to Xiang's narrative, local teachers knew how to draw on vivid everyday examples closely related to rural life. In contrast, when Xiang wanted to interpret knowledge, he fabricated a figure named Xiaoming (one of the most common names in China) in the beginning of his service. Since this was a name which could be universally applied, local students found it difficult to establish connections between Xiaoming and themselves. Hence, Xiang realized that general and abstract examples provided by him could not have the same good effect as that achieved by local teachers. This episode made Xiang aware of the unexpected advantage local teachers had in interpreting knowledge in the rural educational context and the use of everyday examples in the content teaching and in the context-appropriate student management

strategies. Since most local teachers grew up in similar social contexts to the local students, they shared similar social structures which were constantly embodied in their habitus, their system of dispositions of values, perceptions, and thinking (Bourdieu, 1990; Nash, 1990). This shared habitus created local teachers' "proximity and familiarity" with local students (Bourdieu, 1999, p.610).

Local teachers were also able to develop more effective classroom instructional and management approaches. After working with them in placement schools, interview participants gradually realized that some of these teachers not only better understood students' ways and patterns of thinking and learning, but were also better at reading their psychological and mental characteristics, so that they could achieve better classroom management. See Ying's comments below:

> Some local colleagues knew students so well to an extent I never expected. If students did not obey them in class, they clearly knew where local students' Achilles' heel was located, when was the best time to ask local students to invite their parents to "frighten" students, which type of corporal punishment worked for which type of local students. (Ying)

Ying had not assumed that local teachers could do such a good job in managing students in class. In this respect, local teachers again seemed to have an overwhelming and unexpected advantage. According to Ying's accounts, they achieved more effective management because they were much more familiar with local students' psychological features and local contexts. These teachers then could easily manage or even control students to make them follow their instructions. Such knowledge and skills to manage students, especially the 'wild' ones, and make them obey, required deep understanding of both the characteristics of individual students and the micro culture of students as a group. Without sufficient effort and time to stay with local students, effective management was hard to achieve. Therefore, the EGRT participants, as outsider beginning teachers, found it difficult to compete with the local teachers.

A third advantageous attribute of local teachers was that they tended to be more experienced in improving student examination performance. In the examination-oriented educational context, students' examination scores have become the most prominent and bestl-accepted indicator for assessing educational quality. Some interview participants (Wei, Zhao and Long) reported their surprise at how capable local teachers were at identifying the holes in student knowledge and the patterns of

the examinations, and accordingly preparing students for examinations to achieve desirable scores. See comments from Zhao:

> The advantage of some local teachers was their extreme familiarity with what would be tested in the examination based on their rich experience. They could just point them out and asked students to recite the relevant knowledge, and the scores were good. (Zhao)

Although Zhao complained that local teachers narrowed the scope of students' knowledge by rote learning, she had to recognize the effect of local teachers' traditional pedagogy in helping students survive and succeed in the current education system. Teachers who could lead students to obtaining high scores were regarded as competent and capable, and hence received much respect from principals and colleagues, and even from the whole local community. Exam-based pedagogy was valued and appreciated more than quality-oriented pedagogies in the rural educational evaluation system. As Long commented, "the examination score was a prerequisite to receive local respect". In order to prove his argument, Long took a real example.

> This story about an EGRT fellow is widespread among EGRT fellows and alumni. There was once an EGRT fellow who was very welcomed and respected by her placement school at the beginning because she was the first graduate from a prestigious university to work in this school. However, the respect soon disappeared because she failed to advance students' examination scores. Although she could create a fabulous classroom atmosphere to engage students, organize interesting activities to please students, and implement numerous innovative ways of inquiry-based education, she suffered from intensive anxieties and depression when losing the privileged position gained in the beginning stage. She could not stand it and quit. (Long)

This story of the drastic change of the placement school's attitude towards his EGRT colleague shows how - regardless of how great a learning atmosphere and pedagogic experience his colleague could create - she lost the initial respect she had enjoyed from local teachers because of her failure to advance students' examination scores. That fellow was then anxious and depressed, which could be defined by Bourdieu as bodily emotion. This bodily emotion, including shame, timidity, anxiety and guilt, is socially produced. Accordingly, it can play the role of an empirical index to show how an individual's habitus matches the field where he or she is located (Lin, 2012). The quality-oriented educational ideologies inscribed in the habitus of Long's

colleague could not match up with the examination-centric logic of disadvantaged schools. Therefore, the emotional suffering she experienced seemed inevitable, and finally resulted in her dropping out.

Similarly to Long's colleague, many interview participants experienced anxieties in the high stakes examination context. Hua provided a vivid metaphor, saying that EGRT fellows were "dancing with shackles". The "dancing" represents quality-oriented pedagogies for students' holistic development, and the "shackles" refer to "examination scores and rankings". Although most EGRT interview participants had achieved high scores in their own schooling, it does not necessarily mean that they knew how to 'train' other students to become high achievers. Knowledge and skills likely to improve student academic outcomes were a kind of embodied cultural capital which required both time and practice to accumulate. Therefore, it was more likely that interview participants would lose the game when competing with local teachers in enhancing student examination scores. Their loss in the game further shook their assumed superiority prior to their service in their placement schools.

A final strength of the local teachers was their proficiency in speaking the local dialect. The interview participants had not expected that their standard Mandarin would be a weakness in a local educational context. Mandarin is the only legitimate official language in mainland China. However, in the rural schools in this study, the local dialect was widely used, both in daily life and in the classroom as the legitimate language. In this context, then, local dialect represented linguistic capital, whereas Mandarin lost its symbolic value. Interview participants' incompetence in the local dialect - the linguistic capital - therefore challenged them in the rural education field. When asked about whether he met anything unexpected in his placement school, Rui reported feeling frustrated about being unable to speak the local dialect:

> In the beginning of taking over my class, students preferred to speak local dialect rather than Mandarin in class. The dialect was not so hard to understand but really confusing if they spoke fast. Hence, students took advantage of this to deliberately speak dialect to me when I disciplined them. I was really embarrassed at that moment I did not catch the meaning at all. If I asked them to repeat the sentences, they would not reply to you but other students all knew what they said and even burst into laughter. Mandarin did not function as

powerfully as the local dialect in managing them, but local teachers were not concerned by this at all. (Rui)

Rui clearly experienced embarrassing moments when he could not understand the local dialect. Local students' habits of speaking did not disappear immediately just because of the arrival of a new teacher. What is worse, students could make fun of him by using the local dialect. Unlike the universal recognition and legitimisation of Mandarin as the official language in urban education, in the rural education context, the particular social-historical conditions have legitimated the local dialect as the dominant and common language. It therefore carried greater value. In this situation, local students did not legitimise the EGRT fellows' linguistic competence; they did not grant it capital value in social interactions within the classroom. Since language itself took on a function of discernibility, the participants, as outsiders, easily stood out and might be mistreated or even kicked out of the game (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991), especially in the initial stage of entering placement schools. When interview participant Rui appeared in the classroom, he had been authorized by both EGRT and his placement school, but it did not necessarily mean that he had established his authority with his students. Due to his lack of linguistic capital, he suffered from the power shift and bodily emotion of embarrassment. Similar experiences were mentioned by both Ying and Min.

In contrast, local teachers never had these concerns, due to their proficiency in the local dialect. As the local dialect could be widely applied in the local educational context, it became the teachers' linguistic competence and increased their capital compared with that of interview participants. The term linguistic capital does not only apply to achieving mutual intelligibility between listeners and speakers; it also reflects power relations in this process. As a result, Rui, Ying and Min felt humiliated when their students did not empower them to use Mandarin, the legitimate language in most other fields. Language used by social agents can be regarded as "an instrument of coercion and constraint, as tools of intimidation and abuse, as signs of politeness, condescension and contempt" (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991, p. 1). Therefore, in this context, language was not just itself but also a kind of linguistic exchange; a way to express relations of power (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In other words, language was an object of struggle and capital. When local students used their local dialect in their classes, it usually meant that the participants had not yet established authority or a dominant position from which to exert power over the local students. However, as

noted above, from the perspective of many of the participants, local teachers were described as having unanticipated strengths and advantages in the placement schools, including their familiarity with the subject knowledge of textbooks, with local students, local examinations and local dialects.

These advantages of local teachers have been defined in this study as localized pedagogical capital. Although these advantages were not recognized beyond these disadvantaged schools, they assisted individuals to assume the desired position within the logic of examination-oriented educational ideologies dominant in rural areas. Therefore, they were defined as "localized pedagogical capital". In contrast, interview participants' previous resources, knowledge, skills, and personal capacities, that is, their accrued cultural, social and symbolic capital, sometimes could not work in the way it had worked in prestigious universities. Just as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argued, only empirical investigation can verify the boundary of a social space where capital has lost its effect and power. Accordingly, it was the localized pedagogical capital that was valued in disadvantaged schools, while capital accrued in prestigious universities could not work as well as before. The disadvantaged school was a different social space from the prestigious university. In the disadvantaged schools involved in the EGRT examination-oriented logic dominated, and localized pedagogical capital was valued for achieving success in high stakes examinations.

## 6.3 FAMILY PLAYED SUCH A PIVOTAL ROLE IN EDUCATION THAT I HAD NEVER THOUGHT BEFORE

There were disparities between interview participants' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions regarding local students and local teachers. These disparities were reported to have generated many negative emotions. How to make sense of these reported disparities was another important question. If many of the interview participants had recognized that local teachers were not as unqualified as they had assumed, but had unique advantages in educating local students, then local teachers might not be totally to blame for the observed disparities between participants' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions. Unlike the disparities regarding local students and local teachers, almost all interview participants (13 out of 14) reported that they seldom thought about family upbringing prior to their participation in the EGRT program. That is to say, there was little awareness of an assumed image of local parents in the cognitive schemes of EGRT interview

participants. However, they now considered local parents to be the most crucial factor influencing students' academic outcomes and personal growth. In this situation, local parents seemed to become newly emerging scapegoats, to be blamed for the inadequacies of rural education. When the interview participants re-defined the role of parents, they tended to confess that they had overestimated, at least to a certain degree, the function of school education. See comments from Na:

> The family decides the children's horizon. Since I arrived here, the most pressing feeling was that family education may account for up to 70 or 80% of one's education. School education could give them knowledge but not attributes. I had thought that I could make a difference, but I gradually realized that the quality of a person might have been settled before five years of age. (Na)

Na attributed children's educational outcomes largely to family upbringing, which she had never thought about before. She once believed that she would be the person able to influence her students. However, after working in her placement school for a period, she believed that something regarding basic qualities of a person had already been settled in the child's initial few years. Na's ideas echoed those about learning habits, cognitive mode, and ways of thinking as formed in 'an irreversible process' (Bourdieu, 1990b), especially in early life. During this process, families take the dominant position in shaping an individual's basic dispositions and personality (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). That is to say, primary socialization in families is the foundation of habitus. Interestingly, Xiang made an equation, "5+2=0" (Five days at school plus two days at home equals zero) to vividly describe how he now perceived the role of family upbringing after working in his placement school. The equation demonstrated an apparently extreme opinion: that school education could be much diluted and even collapsed when interacting with family upbringing.

According to their interview accounts, participants tended to attribute students' poor school performance at school to family inculcation, and then gave more specific evidence to support their views. Based on their accounts, some parents paid little attention to their children's education, while others stressed education with a focus only on examination scores. First, parents' own failure of educational achievement can explain their scant support or engagement in their children's education. Consider Sun's comments:

I just realized that there was no real parental engagement in education. Children began to go beyond their parents control in junior high schools. Most parents here had not finished their primary school and had no ideas of junior secondary school at all. Therefore, they tended not to blame their children's academic failures so much and took it for granted. Many parents told me that you had taken over my children, how to treat him totally depended on you. If he did not listen to you, you could beat him directly. I thought that was a tough problem here which I never thought about before. (Sun)

Sun found that local parents tended to easily forgive their children's underachievement, as they accepted their own socially sanctioned inferior positions. They simply asked him to take over their children, and allowed him to discipline their children with corporal punishment. It seemed that in this situation, as described by Sun, rural parents excluded themselves from their children's school education because of their own disadvantaged economic and social status. As a result, children with parents who had low expectations and correspondingly less input into their children's education were trapped in the vicious circle of social reproduction. The social order is then maintained through family upbringing (Bourdieu, 1996). Since Sun came from an affluent urban family, he seemed to have never expected that parents could educate children in this way, which contrasted dramatically with the image of parents in his own mind. In this way, Sun justified attributing most of the blame for students' low academic attainment to parents.

The second reason that rural parents devalued their children's education seemed to relate to their view that education was unnecessary when they had a relatively affluent standard of living. It seemed that they had begun to question the view that 'knowledge can change one's fate' (知识改变命运), and to generate a discourse that 'study is no use' against the backdrop of a market economy. The following comments were from Wei:

Anything grows in this fertile ground where my placement school was located, which means families did not have any financial difficulties and (they were) even affluent, so parents would not have such a strong desire to make children excellent in academic performance because they did not make sense of why their children had to study hard. In general, students in the township were mostly well-off, but generally they did not study hard and study well. I had thought that the relatively good economic condition could lay a solid

foundation for family education, however, it played out in the opposite way.

(Wei)

From Wei's description, education was mainly viewed by local parents as a way of getting rid of poverty. If the main aim of education was to improve their living standard, local parents were unlikely to be motivated to push their children to learn more when they already enjoyed a well-off life. This situation conflicted with Wei's understanding that relief of financial concerns should contribute to better educational outcomes. Although Wei did not explicitly say why he believed that students should work hard, the aim of education for him should not be limited to the material level. Therefore, the very basic difference in values and perceptions toward education between Wei and local parents generated this disparity.

A third factor in parents' lack of emphasis on education seems to be related to urbanization and industrialization, as many parents left their hometown for big cities as migrant workers. They might stay in other cities and only return home during the Spring Festival. Therefore, the issue of left-behind children was frequently mentioned by Rui, Min, and then Wei:

> According to the statistics of my placement school, there were about 200 left-behind children among 1700 students. The left-behind children here means their parents were both migrant workers working in another city. If just father or mother was migrant worker, the student was not defined as left behind child, which took a much bigger number of students. I had not imagined such a severe situation. So these children usually were taken care of by their grandparents or other relatives. According to my knowledge, most parents just came back home once a year. I thought lacking parents' company really did a lot of harm to their children mentally and psychologically. (Wei)

Based on the above data, Wei attributed students' lagging behind to lack of parents' care and company. Parents' chronic absence had a direct and negative impact on such local students. He had never thought that the problem of left-behind children was so severe in terms of the number of affected young people, and the infrequency of parental visits home. Although Wei had heard of this social problem of left-behind children, he only realized how severe it was after his entry into a disadvantaged school in a rural area.

Finally, many local parents were perceived as recognizing the importance of education, but the definition of education for them was narrowed down to the

"examination score"; which means that local parents tended to equate "examination scores" with education. This was how Hua criticized these local parents:

> Family plays such a pivotal role in educating children, which depends on what kind of person their parents are and how they educated their children. If parents just focused on pushing children to study hard for high scores without any basic life values education and habits discipline, I thought it was an incomplete and unsuccessful family education. (Hua)

Hua considered parental influence to be one of the most important components of education. She was strongly against the pure examination-driven educational ideas held by local parents. From her perspective, parents' narrow views on examination scores represented unsuccessful parenting, which might harm students in the long run, neglecting values cultivation and habit formation. These opinions of the interview participants echoed Bourdieu and Passeron: "the success of all school education, and more generally of all secondary pedagogic work, depends fundamentally on the education previously accomplished in the earliest years of life" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 43). They tended to impute educational failure to local parents, and to ignore the structural inequality that has long plagued local families.

In conclusion, almost all the participants became aware of the significant role of family upbringing after working in disadvantaged schools. Unlike their assumptions about local students and teachers, they had seldom had any pre-conceived ideas about local parents prior to their service. However, parents were frequently mentioned when they were talking about the disparities of their pre-service imaginings and their in-service realities, especially concerning local students. Parents seemed to become the newly emerging scapegoats, as local teachers were not easily blamed; the proper candidates for taking responsibility for the lag in students' academic outcomes and other aspects of the situation. Accordingly, vivid examples were presented of local parents' ignorance of the value of their children's education, their long term absence as migrant workers, and their narrow understanding of education.

## 6.4   I WAS ABLE TO ONLY MAKE A SMALL CHANGE

Disparities between assumptions and perceptions relating to local students, teachers and parents have been identified in the previous sections. The final disparity between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions relates to EGRT fellows themselves. EGRT promotional rhetoric claims that fellows are expected to have a

transformative impact on local students within and beyond the academic domain. However, when asked "up to now, to what extent has your impact reached your expectations?", most interview participants (11 of 14) explicitly stated that they were disappointed - sometimes desperate - when they thought about the limited difference they had made, or the durability of such difference. They gradually realized and admitted that the realities mismatched their assumptions. As Zhao confided:

> I racked my brains solving this education inequality but ended up with much disappointment, defeat, and despair. Maybe I really can't solve the problem. I can only make a really small change but can't solve the problem at all. (Zhao)

Zhao generalized her personal perception that she was not able to make as much change as she had thought she would. She previously believed that she could bring transformative change to local students with her constant striving; however, she later realized that her previous thoughts were unrealistic. As a result, she gave up her ambition to make a dramatic difference in the face of entrenched educational inequality. During this process, many negative emotions, such as "disappointment, defeat and despair", were generated. According to research findings, emotion is not only associated with an individual's current situation, but also with perceived possibilities (Lin, 2012). When there was a mismatch between anticipated future outcomes and actual perceptions, Zhao's emotion was generated. Such experience is not uncommon amongst the interview participants. Zhao talked about her helplessness in terms of changing educational equality, a relatively abstract concept, while others described their disparities in a more detailed way, mainly in terms of the scope and sustainability of their impact.

> I previously imagined changing the school, however, I realized how unrealistic I had been after working here. (Wei)

> I indeed had some impact but not to the degree I imagined. The impact I thought at the beginning was to influence not only my students but also all [local] teachers, to help them continuously gain a positive attitude towards learning, to change them. However, I gradually understood local teachers and they had almost tried their utmost. (Ying)

> When I talked with them (local students) about things like responsibility and perseverance, I had to admit the fact that not all of them could be influenced.

My impact might even just reach one or two (students), which was so different from what I had expected. (Hua)

Wei, Ying and Hua had assumed that they could have a wide-ranging impact on local education. Wei's ambition was to have an impact on the whole school. He expected his placement school could be changed because of his coming. Then he realized the reality was far from his expectations. Ying assumed that she could have impact not only on local students but also on local teachers. However, the reality was that her impact might have only been felt to a small degree, to some extent, by local students. For local teachers, she confessed that her impact was negligible. Hua just focused on her impact on local students, expecting to influence the majority of them; but she noticed that maybe just one or two students listened to her words. In short, the fellows gradually realized that the scope of their impact tended to be much smaller than anticipated. Interestingly, Ying was trying to enculturate local teachers with a similar mindset to her own, such as a "positive attitude towards learning"; while Hua was imparting values like "responsibility and perseverance". They seemed to believe firmly that their own attitudes and values should be copied by as many local teachers and students as possible. Their classificatory schemata of habitus categorized local people and themselves into different groups; and the local teachers and students became the group which should improve and change. With these pre-reflexive classificatory schemata, disparities were then created in reality when the fellows' efforts were resisted by local teachers and students.

These pre-reflexive classificatory schemata might be rooted in EGRT fellows' experience in the educational space. Different from local teachers' relatively low academic credentials, EGRT participants first won the fierce battle of College Entrance examination to become members of prestigious universities. They then competed again, with many peers, for successful involvement in EGRT. As exceptional graduates from prestigious universities, they had cultural and symbolic capital which could open access to power and influence. Tamir argued that elite graduates were widely viewed by the public as young talents with potential for leadership, excellence and distinction, which led to a perception that "views elite college graduates as fully entitled to authority and power" (Tamir, 2009, p. 538). This image was accepted by EGRT participants themselves. They firmly believed that they could have impact on others, even change others. In addition to the scope of their impact, the sustainability of their impact was another identified concern. Take Sun as a typical example:

I taught students in Grade Six and now they have entered junior high school. Although some students performed fairly well after they went to study in the town, others did not. I did not know whether it was because I didn't do enough or my impact was not strong enough. They [some students] stay in this [local] secondary school where education quality was very bad. Through chatting with them, I found they've gradually returned to the original point and felt good staying in this small village and playing with people they know. They had made some changes before, but now these changes disappeared after they graduated and left me. I talked to them about the outside world and they felt it not interesting. They were not thinking about something beyond. It was a pity for them, especially those with great potential. (Sun)

Sun revealed his concern about the sustainability of his impact. He believed his students did make some positive changes, brought about by him. Due to his impact, some local students began to study hard and change their attitudes toward the outside world. However, this impact was not sustained. The word "return" was very telling. Some students went back to where they were without any desire for the outside world or for the corresponding diligence they had acquired through Sun's efforts. That is to say, Sun only made a positive difference on local students for a limited period. This made him frustrated. Other interview participants (Feng, Long, Wei, Xiang, Zhao, Long and Rui) expressed similar concerns about the fact that their impact on students was not as sustainable as they had expected. This phenomenon could be explained by the concept of habitus proposed by Bourdieu. Students' views of the world and their dispositions had been formed on the basis of their previous upbringing and learning experiences. These habitual views and dispositions were durable. Although habitus was a system open to change, the previous habitus still had a great influence in orienting individuals' behaviours (Bourdieu, 1993b). Students might participate in some new practice introduced by fellows, but this did not mean that their habitus was changed (Dooley, Exley, & Poulus, 2016).

Initially, interview participants assumed that their main task was to provide an education comparable to, or even better than, that of urban students. They aimed to broaden local students' horizons and to equip them with a whole package of capacities for success in the 'outside world'. By receiving good quality education, their students would then be ready to compete with their urban counterparts, break the vicious cycle of social reproduction and finally realise social mobility. Oriented by this logic, they

focused on increasing students' knowledge, improving their abilities and reshaping their world views' or other values. It seemed plausible for participants to have the confidence needed to achieve these aims, with the amount and configuration of cultural capital which they themselves had gained from prestigious universities or family upbringing, as illustrated in their personal biographies.

After entering disadvantaged schools, these interview participants recognized that the task was much harder and more complicated than they had previously assumed. Unlike the previous target of increasing local students' cultural capital, the reality was that they had to reshape students' habitus, through a "process of counter-training" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 172). The habitus counter-training was demanding, because rural habitus were "inherited from their ancestral heritage, rooted in their cultural history, inculcated through their family upbringing, incarnated in their biological and sociological body" (Mu & Hu, 2016, p. 83). Local students might (unconsciously) consider their institutionalised disadvantage to be socially acceptable, and recognise the existing order of things as naturalised. If such misrecognition continued, the disadvantage would gradually become less questioned but more taken-for-granted. This scenario was much more likely to happen in the reality. Then the existing social order would be further inscribed in the body and mind through the internalization of the external inequalities and social structure. In this situation, the social reproduction easily continued but social change was hard to happen (Mu & Hu, 2016). Therefore, rural children, such as those at disadvantaged schools, perhaps tended to resist what was offered to them by the dominant social group represented by the EGRT fellows, and tended to live happily day by day in their own scope.

In this situation, to achieve the set goals, interview participants were in effect aiming to counter-train local students' habitus, rather than simply increasing their amount of cultural capital. Their main imagined enemy before had been students' minimal quantity and quality of cultural capital; but now they seemed to realise that something deep lay behind the challenges. This counter-training could never be easy because it "consists of relentless workouts and arduous labour, involving repeated exercise" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 172). This points to the difference between temporarily obtaining a new behaviour mode, with assistance from certain programs, and acquiring some actual habitus transformation (Dooley et al., 2016).

## 6.5    CHAPTER SUMMARY

As discussed in this chapter, interview participants had a common assumed image of their students prior to their two years' service in placement schools. Although students lagged behind their urban counterparts in academic performance, participants assumed that they would be a group of cute kids who wanted to learn; innocent and simple, due to being far away from the hustle and bustle of urban life. They believed that local students experienced low quality teaching and poor facilities in rural areas; and that they - the EGRT participants - would both directly improve the quality of teaching in school and introduce resources beyond school. Educational inequality could then be solved through their constant striving and excellent leadership.

However, the realities the participants perceived after their entry into placement schools presented another story. The knowledge base and learning abilities of local students were perceived as being too weak for the fellows to make a difference. Moreover, local students were not keen to learn, and frequently misbehaved. Accordingly, classroom management was reported as the most serious problem for most interview participants. In contrast, local teachers seemed more successful in managing students' misbehaviour, along with skilfully impacting on content knowledge, preparing for high stakes examinations, and having a native-speaker linguistic grasp of the local dialect. Furthermore, interview participants found it harder than they had assumed it would be to make a difference to local students; transformative changes were more difficult to achieve than they had imagined. They found it hard to realize their original ambitions. When they reflected on disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions in placement schools, local parents were widely blamed, identified as a crucial factor which had not been considered to any great degree before their service.

The above summary identifies disparities between interview participants' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions. These disparities tended to generate negative emotions, such as disappointment, depression or even desperation. It became clear that deficit thinking was pervasive in discussion of the emerging disparities. This deficit thinking appeared to be associated with: (1) media promotion; (2) advertisement strategies employed by EGRT; and (3) classification schemata of habitus shaped by unprecedented social changes since the Reform and Opening up Policy.

First, there is widespread belief in China that rural students want to learn but are constrained by unequal opportunities. This view is presented in text books, social media and public awareness campaigns (Zhou & Shang, 2011). For instance, the promotion materials of various social programs and the media keep telling similar stories. These include the Hope Project, one of the most influential anti-poverty educational projects; the Development of the Western Region Initiative, one of the most advocated policies; and the most powerful media like China Central Television and People's Daily. The effect of this media promotion, that arouses emotional empathy and a desire for social justice in the public, seemed most evident throughout recounts from interview participants Wei, Ren and Sun. Meanwhile, a stereotyped impression of rural education had become embedded in the mindset of all interview participants.

Second, deficit thinking seems to arise from mainstream media advocacy, and content of the homepage of the EGRT official website. Children are represented as attentive and enthusiastic, eager to learn, implying that the only problem that these children face is that they are deprived of quality education by the accident of birth into a place of poverty, subject to unequal and unjustifiable structural conditions. The teacher, as the crucial factor of quality education, will be the 'superman' or 'superwoman' who can transform this situation with their talent and commitment. The discourse of EGRT made it hard for participants to see the very real hidden social effects which had already put local students and teachers in a disadvantaged position (Apple, 2001). This was associated with the strategy of creating the illusion that teacher efforts could save children from systemic inequality. EGRT participants, therefore, might easily be seduced into thinking that low achieving students could be fixed by their personal efforts as teachers. The interview participants, including Feng, Shuang, Ren, Hua and Wei, commented that they had been deeply moved when they saw the pictures and video materials on the EGRT official website. It was due in part to these moving pictures and videos that they had decided to join EGRT. They tended to project the images of students featured in the promotional materials onto their own future students. Similarly to the official promotion of the EGRT, the deficit discourse towards local students generated by EGRT alumni was pervasive, and seemed to have also shaped participants' views and perspectives before their entry to their placement schools.

Third, deficit thinking may also stem from the unequal distribution of prosperity produced by the rapid economic growth of the past 30 years, whereby the urban-rural divide has generated a massive income gap and also social contempt towards rurality by classifying rural people as backward and inferior (Li, 2013). Rural areas and rural education were classified as inferior; and their unique cultures, values, and traditions were not even mentioned by any of the interview participants. These prestigious university graduates represented an advanced and superior urban population as the central group, and they tended to consider themselves normal and able, while the rural population became 'others', implying abnormal and disabled (Branlineger, 2009). Following Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), this process might show that the classification schemas of habitus are not simply imposed on the larger population, but are naturalised and taken for granted, (mis)recognised as legitimate by the dominant groups, gradually becoming social consensus, namely, doxa. The classification schemas of habitus work through the judgements of others with a set of distinctive signs. Thus, interview participants, by virtue of their classification schemas of habitus, were able to make judgements about local education (Bourdieu, 1998). As evidenced in the data, the cognitive schemata of classification embedded in the social structure generated shared deficit discourses towards local students, local teachers and local parents. Participants were commonly frustrated by local students' poor knowledge base, learning ability, study motivation, and even moral behaviours. Local teachers were generally underestimated prior to fellows' service, at which point their rich local pedagogical capital and linguistic capital were identified. Then local parents became a new "scapegoat" to blame, bearing the brunt of the deficit model as local students and families become targeted for blame, letting systemic inequities off the hook (Anderson, 2013).

More specifically, the classification schemata of habitus worked to generate a deficit discourse among interview participants regardless of their urban or rural origin. Most interview participants (12/14) had graduated from the most prestigious universities of China, and almost every one (13/14) had received secondary education in local key schools. Therefore, they were regarded as "winners" throughout their careers in the current educational system; and most of them became used to their superior positions amongst their peers. They had rich cultural and symbolic capital, as evidenced in their biographies at the start of Chapter Five, and even economic capital

if they came from affluent families. Although six EGRT interview participants originally came from rural areas, their values and views were produced and internalised through exposure to a privileged culture. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argue, mental schemata are the embodiment of social division, which are "structurally homologous" and "genetically linked" (p.13). Cumulative exposure to certain social conditions instils in individuals an ensemble of durable and transferable dispositions that have internalized the external social environment (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu (2007) himself wrote of having to unlearn the contempt for his own rural origins instilled in him by his glittering educational career. The success of "wonder students" within the education system is "dependent, at least in part, on abandoning their own working class background" (Lampert, Burnett, & Lebhers, 2016, p. 38). Therefore, interview participants with rural origins also tended to share the same deficit discourse with their urban counterparts.

# Chapter 7: Involvement of EGRT Fellows in Disadvantaged Schools: Playing out EGRT Values

Chapter Five has discussed both socio-personal and reasons consonant with EGRT values behind the interview participants' choice made during the graduation season to enter EGRT. Diverse socio-personal reasons were identified at contextual and individual levels. The reasons consonant with EGRT values, however, were congruent, to some extent, with features of the program and advertising itself. Interview participants reported desiring to both help students in disadvantaged schools and develop their own potential. Although not unique to EGRT, these dispositions were celebrated EGRT values, as demonstrated in its two slogans about (1) all students deserving a quality education and (2) the teacher as leader. After leaving campus, participants were given entry to disadvantaged schools through the EGRT program. Many disparities were perceived between participants' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions, especially during the commencement stage. These disparities seemed to be implicated in the challenging experience participants had in the course of their placements. What, would then, happened after the participants entry into disadvantaged schools?

For most EGRT fellows, the career of teacher was seldom taken into their consideration during their university study; moreover, the disadvantaged school was a place they were unlikely to stay for longer than two years. Therefore, the participants were different from general student teachers and local teachers, which means that their work and service in disadvantaged schools might also be unlike that of other teachers, based on their identity as EGRT fellows. In this situation, what did these interview participants do in disadvantaged schools as EGRT fellows? Is there anything that interview participants paid particular attention to in the class while teaching as an EGRT fellow? Did the interview participants ever initiate any other extra-curricular activities as an EGRT fellows? This chapter will focus on these questions, and hence addresses Research Question 3.

*Research Question 3: How do EGRT program values play out in fellows'*
*involvement in disadvantaged schools?*

In order to answer this research question, Section 7.1 introduces how EGRT fellows became involved in classroom life. Section 7.2 presents EGRT fellows as designers of extracurricular activities beyond the classroom. Section 7.3 demonstrates how EGRT fellows performed as practitioners charged with responsibility for attaining educational equality. Section 7.4 shows how EGRT fellows worked as leaders. Section 7.5 analyses how the fellows' involvement in their schools either worked in accord with EGRT values or stood contrary to EGRT values.

## 7.1 EGRT FELLOWS AS CLASSROOM TEACHERS

Although several themes about the involvement of EGRT fellows in the life of their schools emerged from the data, their main identity was that of teacher. According to the reports given by the interview participants, EGRT fellows were typically assigned 20 hours of teaching. This reflected consensus between the EGRT organization and collaborating placement schools. Therefore, the classroom seemed to become the main area in which the EGRT fellows experienced their involvement in their schools. When they worked as classroom teachers, both quality-oriented teaching approaches and examination-oriented teaching approaches were adopted. In some situations, EGRT fellows admitted to resorting to corporal punishment in an attempt to manage students in the classroom.

### 7.1.1 Quality-oriented teaching

When asked about how they performed as EGRT fellows in placement schools, the interviewees often talked about their teaching. First, they desired to not only impart content knowledge to students, but also to cultivate higher order thinking skills and learning abilities in class. Second, they expected that local students' views would be expected to be expanded through participating in the fellows' classes. Third, they also wanted to build desirable personal qualities or instil moral values into local students through their teaching.

#### *Cultivation of learning and thinking ability*

Some interview participants (Sun, Shunag, Xinag, and Rui) designed and conducted their classes for the purpose of not only imparting content knowledge to local students, but also cultivating learning and thinking abilities. As EGRT fellows,

they pre-defined their role as that of bringing local students something other than mere memorization of content knowledge in textbooks. Due to this, they commonly regarded the learning of content knowledge to be a mere carrier for lessons that holistically improved personal learning and thinking abilities; they wanted their students to do more than just obtain knowledge itself. This quality-oriented mindset and corresponding teaching performances were different from the traditional examination-oriented practices widely adopted by local teachers. Therefore, Rui made an effort to cultivate local students' learning and thinking abilities—something they considered to represent a remarkable difference between themselves as EGRT fellows and the local teachers:

> If local teachers worked hard enough, they could also improve students' academic outcomes. However, limited by their [local teachers'] educational backgrounds and personal experience, it was hard for them to update their pedagogies, which made us irreplaceable in promoting students' personal abilities. Both our educational ideologies and life experience were special and scarce resources in local areas, and that was the real meaning of us for placement schools. This was the base on which I designed my class. (Rui)

In Rui's view, EGRT fellows were "irreplaceable" in rural schools because they brought something novel to rural schooling. From his perspective, students' examination scores would not be a problem if teachers only worked harder and used updated pedagogies. However, Rui thought that local teachers had difficulty teaching something other than the content knowledge in textbooks for examinations. He attributed this to the teachers' lower qualifications and narrower visions. Rui's dismissal of examination scores and content knowledge, and his emphasis on personal abilities, reflect his quality-oriented educational ideology. This ideology was ubiquitous in the mainstream media and amongst urban and privileged social agents (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). Accordingly, Rui regarded the teaching method of EGRT fellows as advanced and superior to those of local teachers. His thinking here betrayed a binary classificatory scheme which contrasts the fellows with the local teachers, resulting in an instance of deficit thinking about local educational practice.

More specific curriculum designs and pedagogies featuring quality-oriented ideology are evident in the accounts given by Sun, Shuang and Xiang. According to themes emerging from the data, these participants thought of crucial educational and

personal abilities in terms of such capabilities as higher order thinking, 'logical analytical ability', 'independent thinking', 'critical thinking', and 'presentation and communication skills'. Take Sun as an example:

> In my science class, I always tried hard to train them how to think in a scientific way with rigorous logic. At the same time, I consciously encouraged them to think by themselves. Now, my students could perform much better than those who just recited what was written in the textbooks. (Sun)

Sun's emphasis was not only on imparting scientific knowledge but also on developing students' scientific spirit and method. He contrasted his students to other students taught by a rote method, and believed his pedagogical method was effective in improving performance in class. He asserted that while curricular content could be recited, it was much more important to learn how to think independently, like scientists who obtained results through a set of logical inferences. It meant that students could not only grasp a particular point of knowledge, but also come to understand where that knowledge had come from and how to create such knowledge. In addition to independent thinking, Long tried to cultivate local students' critical thinking through his teaching, regarding it as a significant means of learning and thinking. This mode of thinking was rarely mentioned in disadvantaged schools; and so he consciously trained his students' critical thinking while preparing or delivering classes. Good communication and presentation skills also seemed to be essential learning capacities for the students studying with the EGRT fellows. See the comments below from Shuang:

> I just tried to create more opportunities for them to speak out in my Chinese class. In this way, students' communication skills could be trained. Local teachers tended to ask students to recite what they were taught, which was very boring for both the teachers and the students. I knew scores were important; however if students just repeatedly recited what would be examined, what would be the meaning of education? Perhaps because I had studied abroad before, I thought we should respect children's nature and not press them so much in primary schools. I tried to give my students opportunities in class to express themselves. (Shuang)

According to Shuang's account, her class tended to be student-centered. Extra speaking opportunities were intentionally given to students. Owing to her overseas study experience, Shuang could see no sense in rote learning. Therefore, she

encouraged her students to confidently express their own ideas. Similarly to Shuang, Xiang organized an activity named the "three minute speech" at the beginning of every class. Students were asked to take turns to make a short public speech on a specific topic which lasted about three minutes. Xiang reported that this initiative effected some changes, and that the students gradually shed their sense of shame and nervousness.

In conclusion, the interview participants showed a generally negative attitude towards rote learning and didactic pedagogies. In contrast, they had more enthusiasm for the cultivation of abilities such as critical thinking, independent thinking, and presentation/communication skills. As Anyon (1981) argued, students from different social backgrounds mainly experienced different forms of education based on their social class. For instance, students in working class schools were usually provided with fragmented facts accompanied by rule-governed disciplines; this might be similar to the experience of the local students in the placement schools. In contrast, pedagogy provided to students in middle class schools emphasized conceptual understanding; while affluent professional schools, in contrast, stressed independent thinking, meaning making and construction, discovery and creativity. Due to this differentiated experience, a 'disdain chain' was gradually established and legitimated. Middle and upper class members tended to look down upon the education which the working class received, and misrecognize others as inferior and backward. There was little possibility of them identifying or locating others' strengths (Smart, et al., 2009). Since most interview participants had enjoyed the best education resources throughout their schooling and higher education, coming from privileged family backgrounds similar to those of other alternative teacher recruitment programs, like Teach for America and Teach First (Anderson, 2013; Hramiak, 2014), it was easy for them to believe that their education was superior and more advanced than that offered in their placement schools.

When the participants in this study became involved in classrooms in disadvantaged schools, they distinguished their classes from those of local teachers by judging what they considered to be more valuable through their own classificatory schemes. They were more likely to view a pedagogy that imparted knowledge as fragmented facts to be inferior to one which pursued higher order thinking skills. These classificatory schemes of the habitus represent the internalization of social structures. The valued higher order thinking skills were elements of the embodied cultural capital

usually prioritised by middle or upper class families and elite schools. Emphasis on these abilities, then, was also a reflection of the social class hierarchy whereby students in disadvantaged schools were located in a lower position and their middle or upper class counterparts in higher positions.

### *Expanding local students' views*

As was revealed in Chapter Six, local students were not as motivated to learn as the interview participants had assumed they would be prior to their service in disadvantaged schools. Some participants, like Min, attributed this to students' lack of knowledge of the outside world beyond their small villages. Accordingly, when asked about why they became involved in their schools as EGRT fellows, several – including Sun, Feng, Wei, Xiang, Zhao, Long and Na - mentioned that they were compelled to broaden the knowledge horizons of the local students in their classes; knowledge mainly referring to understandings of the world beyond the rural villages into which these students had been born and where they were now living. When it comes to the translation of these ideas into concrete teaching approaches, the methods described by Zhao and Long were more-or-less representative of what all the fellows reported in their interviews. Zhao spoke of trying to broaden students' horizons while delivering content knowledge in her geography class:

> When I taught geography, I hoped to give them a big view of the world, not just the knowledge itself. If they really want to know where this country is located, then they could directly search on the Internet. Therefore, I did not force students to recite the knowledge but rather sought to make them interested in looking for something exciting in the world. (Zhao)

Zhao encouraged her students to obtain knowledge from the Internet. This is an important learning capability, a 'know–how capacity', embodied cultural capital that Zhao herself had attained as a winner of educational competition. But she seemed unable to see the advantages gained from her privileged background and forgot that rural students may not have this capacity. From her perspective, reciting knowledge was boring and useless; it was the world beyond this small village that was worth exploring. In effect, Zhao conveyed her own view of the world through her geography class. Another participant, Feng, used the metaphor of a 'magic treasure box' (百宝箱) to describe his role with his students. Feng was born in a metropolis and studied in another two metropolises in China for his bachelor's and master's degrees. During his

study, he had been to the University of Oxford and the University of Melbourne on academic exchange. He also had some internship experience in international companies and institutions. Feng regarded his rich personal experience in developed cities nationally and internationally as treasure, a scarce form of cultural capital he could share with local students, who lived in isolated rural and mountainous areas.

Unlike Zhao and Feng, who were from developed cities, Long had grown up in a rural village. Unlike Zhao, who tried to change her students' views of the world by inserting a big world picture through content knowledge, Long introduced the outside world to local students through his own experience:

> I sometimes share my own travelling experience to my students such as my tours to many places of interest, my study experience in Beijing, when there was relevant content in my lessons. (Long)

Long deliberately shared his own tourist experience and urban life in the metropolis with the local students in his class. Although he grew up in a rural area similar to where his students lived, he seemed to have no interest in sharing his own rural experience of growing-up. He tended rather to be more proud of his tourist experience of visiting different places beyond his hometown, and of his urban life in a metropolis. Long valued the world beyond rural areas very highly, and this informed his lessons. Interestingly, based on their particular emphasis on broadening students' horizons by introducing them vicariously to life in developed urban areas, the interview participants seemed to have reached the consensus that city life, beyond rural areas, was what students should be pursuing. See the comments from Min:

> I found their [local students'] knowledge was so limited, namely, their vision was so narrowed. Some of them thought that they knew everything, indeed, they knew nothing about the outside world. What they knew was **just** what happened in this small village, and they did not realize how **beautiful** the outside world was. Therefore, they were more likely to follow others' ideas like "study was useless" and easily dropped out. (Min)

Min attributed the fact of local students' low motivation to learn to their limited understanding of the world beyond their small village. This reflects Min's deficit thinking in relation to her students. Given the fact that they in fact had access to the Internet and other media, like movies and TV programs, it seems unlikely that the students did not know about other places. However, from Min's perspective, they

knew nothing beyond their village. Min's appraisal - inherent in the use of the word 'just'- suggested that she found it hard to value what happened in rural areas. Instead, life outside the small village was 'beautiful'. This view clearly showed Min had a classificatory scheme which contrasted the rural unfavourably with the urban.

The way in which the interview participants tried to expand their students' horizons was to stimulate and motivate them to study hard and leave for developed urban areas. They represented urban areas as developed and beautiful destinations, and rural areas as underdeveloped and ignorant places - which local students should leave. As EGRT fellows, they seemed to believe it was their responsibility to open local students' eyes to the world beyond the village, and that in doing so they might make a difference, enabling them to step out of rural areas.

Owing to the drastic social divide between rural and urban areas after the Reform and Opening-up policy, the whole rural community, the spiritual sanctuary for ancient Chinese, has effectively been devalued in contemporary China. Within this social structure, the classificatory scheme of the habitus displayed by these interview participants has emerged. Alongside this classificatory scheme, the participants in this study became involved in their schools by mobilizing cultural capital that was highly valued in their previous field. They tried to take advantage of their assumed dominance to legitimise that capital in the new field.

### *Shaping local students' moral values*

As established earlier, the classes designed by some interview participants were not merely about delivering content knowledge. Content knowledge became a carrier which enabled them to pursue educational targets such as the development of personal thinking and learning abilities, and an expansion of students' world views. In addition to the aforementioned teaching objectives based on quality-oriented education, some of the interview participants (e.g., Hua, Shuang and Xiu) also instilled their own moral values, which they believed would benefit local students' in terms of character and personality-building. Hua reported that she intentionally designed group activities to cultivate students' awareness of responsibility, because she personally thought that shouldering responsibility is an essential personal strength. She organized her students to plant vegetables such as radishes, with their team members in her biology class. The students took turns in taking care of these vegetables. They observed how a plant grows, at the same time acquiring concepts such as *root, stem, leaf* and *flower* as

required by the biology curriculum. The students also learned how to shoulder the responsibility of looking after other lives on earth.

Instead of organizing extracurricular activities, Xiu reported that she repeatedly emphasized a 'craftsman spirit' in class. She did this whenever she found any connection between content in her Chinese class and the 'craftsman spirit':

> I kept imparting a craftsman's spirit to my students. The craftsman's spirit could be explained like this: even though my job was washing dishes, I would wash my dishes until they were the cleanest ones. No matter how inferior or unimportant this job was regarded by others, I would try my most to make it the best. I often referred to this whenever there was a topic in the class because that was also what I pursued in my own life. (Xiu)

Xiu delivered her characteristic "craftsman's spirit" to her students whenever she could find relevant opportunities in class. She also repeatedly promoted it during our interview, which indicated that this value was a core part of her personal beliefs and morals. In effect, she was imposing her own values and beliefs on the local students, attempting to force them to accept her views on what was important. When she attempted to illustrate the concept of 'craftsman spirit' to her students, she took 'washing dishes' as her example, an 'inferior or unimportant' job. This showed how she classified individuals according to their occupations. Some jobs, like washing dishes, were viewed as inferior to others, such as intelligent office work. Based on current social and economic situations and possible prospects perceived by Xiu, she unconsciously projected this kind of job as the likely career choice of her students. In fact, the craftsman's spirit seemed in her view to be crucial to local students' future careers. As detailed earlier in Xiu's biography, she was the winner in a large-scale competition in her field of expertise. She already had a good job in her hometown, because her employer would rather accept her two years' absence for the EGRT program than lose this talent. Therefore, Xiu in contrast to most local students, she was in a dominant social position. The examples just presented indicate how people in such dominant positions use their dominance to mould those in less powerful positions - the dominated - to accept their domination and their values.

Xiang expressed this notion in a more explicit way. He paid more attention to establishing the 'self-esteem' of local students because he thought it was a necessary characteristic for them, as members located in "the dominated or marginal positions":

My aim of this semester is to cultivate my students' self-esteem. They [local student] needed to know the necessity of making their voice heard whether they were in dominated or marginalized positions. I had heard how migrant workers were exploited by their bosses but they just bore it. I took the subway when I went back home last vacation. When I saw migrant workers standing beside me, I was thinking that some of my students might be like them in the future. I should teach them how to protect their own basic rights. (Xiang)

As revealed in the above excerpt, Xiang had set as his goal for the semester the cultivation of self-esteem and voice. That is to say, his concrete teaching designs and performances were intended to achieve this goal. The reason why he had this goal was that he had supposed his students to be in disadvantaged positions now and even in the future; therefore, in his view, self-esteem was important if they were to make their voices heard. He observed migrant workers located in dominated positions that he feared were also the destiny of his students. When he saw migrant workers in the subway, he linked their situations to the life which his students would lead. His students occupied dominated positions given that they had little in the way of the capitals recognized in the current labour market. Given this, Xiang predicted a bleak and dominated future for these students. He unconsciously situated himself in the dominant position, based on the volume of cultural and symbolic capital accrued through his previous educational experience and family background, while his students occupied dominated positions. As Bourdieu (1984) argued:

Whereas the holders of educationally uncertified cultural capital can always be required to prove themselves, because they are only what they do, merely a by-product of their own cultural production, the holders of title of cultural mobility…only have to be what they are, because all their practices derive their value from their authors, being the affirmation and perpetuation of the essence by virtue of which they are performed (pp.23-24).

These interview participants were wanting to impart their own values, such as a sense of individual responsibility, self-esteem and craftsman spirit, to their local students. As graduates from prestigious universities, they had already taken up privileged positions in the existing social hierarchy. With more symbolic capital on hand, they could symbolically impose their own values on their students. From their perspectives, students were obligated to recognize and accept those values taken for granted by EGRT participants.

In conclusion, the interview participants tried to deliver quality-oriented education to cultivate local students' higher order thinking and abilities and to expand their views while incorporating their own values in their class teaching. As Cochran-Smith et al. (2012) argued, "a teacher's individual life experiences and past personal choices profoundly shape how teacher education is interpreted, curriculum is developed, and instruction is enacted in the classroom" (p.32). Their quality-oriented teaching performances in class were associated with their own privileged family - upbringing and successful education experience. However, some of the interview participants reported that they had to adopt examination-oriented teaching in the classroom, which was at least in part contrary to how they wanted to work in their placement schools.

### 7.1.2 Examination-oriented teaching

While acknowledging the value of quality-oriented teaching, some of the participants did employ the examination-oriented teaching which was dominant in the local educational context in their own classes, as represented in the following three ways. First, the teaching content was narrowed down for the purpose of grasping content knowledge. Min redesigned both the teaching content and pedagogy in her classroom so that it was compatible with her students' current academic level. Initially, she attempted to avoid rote learning, and to encourage students to develop their own opinions about historical events. However, as discussed in Chapter Six, Min noticed that her students could not understand what she had assumed to be 'basic' knowledge. Therefore, she decreased both the volume of content and the degree of difficulty compared with what she had previously prescribed. As she noted:

> I previously planned to improve students' cognitive level through developing
> their own opinions about historical events; however, I had to lower the level
> of thinking, getting the students to listen to me present knowledge. Then the
> students recited the part which I required them to know. I had to do this
> because of the students' current level. I had to firstly guarantee that they [local
> students] could recognize words printed in text books. (Min)

Min's plan to promote independent thinking in her history class was suspended. Instead, she asked students to read the textbook many times to make sure they recognized the Chinese characters, and then required them to repeatedly recite the key content points. Min chose to slow down her pace to cater for the weak knowledge base

that she perceived in her students. Thus Min, at least in part, discarded her expectation of developing students' higher order thinking, and resorted to examination-oriented lower order thinking during her EGRT service. In addition, as Hua reported, she sometimes had to compromise by stopping classes that were irrelevant to exams, such as music and painting, so as to enable students to cover all the content knowledge required by the examinations. Yet Hua had once firmly believed that music and painting were just as important for promoting students' all-round development.

Second, in addition to focusing on content knowledge in class, Xiu used more explicit examination-oriented pedagogies to directly improve students' scores. She described how she adjusted her class design step-by-step, inclining it towards examination-oriented education pedagogies:

> I found that many EGRT colleagues gradually put more emphasis on examination scores, **even** including those who had studied overseas. If the examination score was the only criterion for entering the next higher level school, I adopted an approach specific for improving scores in my class at the final semester of my service. My placement school asked teachers to learn from another school which had effectively improved students' scores with tests following each class. It **really**, **really**, **really** worked. These tests took time from other activities that were designed for cultivating all-around quality, and more time was used for examination preparation, but it was really so helpful for enhancing examination scores. (Xiu)

Xiu described how she paid much more attention to improving local students' examination scores in her class than she had anticipated she would. She commented that she was not alone in making this change. Based on her observations, fellows who graduated from overseas universities started to employ examination-driven approaches. She had supposed that these fellows would have been more quality-oriented, given the influence of the western academic environment and traditions that were familiar to them. The word "even" here might indicate her sense of helplessness. If those fellows with western educational background had to yield to the examination-dominant local education, then Xiu thought she was justified in her partial abandonment of quality education. Despite this, the EGRT fellows seemed to be trapped in a struggle to balance quality-oriented education and examination-oriented educational approaches. More time for examination preparation inevitably meant less time for other activities targeted for holistic development.

Xiu adopted a successful method of follow-up tests at the end of every class to both check and strengthen what had been learned. By using the intensifier "really" three times, Xiu emphasized how effective this approach was in improving students' examination performances. This kind of approach and method for improving students' scores was defined as 'localized pedagogical capital' in Chapter Six. In disadvantaged schools, when outcomes of examinations were the single indicator of good students and good teachers in the local educational evaluation system, localized pedagogical capital was highly valued. Despite the conflict with her previous educational beliefs and EGRT values, Xiu had to accrue this kind of capital if she was to survive and compete for privileged positions in the current social space.

Another interview participant, Long, put it in a more straightforward way. Long used the metaphor of "icing on the cake" to describe the relationship between 'holistic development' and 'examination scores'. After he had actually worked in a disadvantaged school, he had gradually come to realize that examination performance was the 'cake' while other components related to holistic development were the 'icing'. The examination had come to seem even more important than students' holistic development. Therefore, Long began to consciously strengthen the knowledge which was often tested in the exams and imparted examination skills in his class. From the reports provided by Xiu and Long, it seems that quality-oriented teaching was hard to fully implement given the enormous pressure of local high-stakes examinations. Therefore, EGRT fellows had, at least partly, to give up the modes of teaching - predicated on quality-oriented education ideology - which were celebrated in the prestigious universities, the labour market, and by the EGRT. Indeed, it was they who had to accumulate capital valued in the disadvantaged school.

Third, in this examination-oriented situation, the challenge of how to go about acquiring localized pedagogical capital was another question with which the participants grappled. Since many of the local teachers held this kind of capital, the building of a social network was viewed as one way of accessing it. For example, Wei, Min and Ying indicated that they began to actively learn from local teachers. They started to consider how to communicate more effectively with local teachers in order to finally obtain resources that were valued as capital in this field. They tried to build rapport and personal relationships with the local teachers. See the following comments from Min and Wei:

When I noticed that local teachers knew more about how to improve examination scores and how to manage local students, I wanted to learn from them. So I had to force myself to join in their gossip, shooting the breeze with them together. When the talking atmosphere was good, I began to lead the topic to the ones I wanted to know. (Min)

In order to learn from local teachers, I participated in their sports like basketball and table tennis. Sometimes, I also drank with them. If good personal relationships were established, local teachers could easily share their teaching experience and skills with me. (Wei)

According to their accounts, most female interview participants began by chatting with local teachers on topics which interested them. These were not topics that they were necessarily interested in themselves —Min, for example, used the dismissive term 'gossip' to describe these conversations. Her reluctance was clear; in her own words, she had to 'force' herself 'to join in their gossip' for her instrumental purpose. It was easier for male participants; as Wei commented, good relationships with the local male teachers seemed easier to forge through drinking and playing sports with them. This relationship building with the local teachers was a deliberate attempt to accrue localized pedagogical capital. Since outstanding examination performance was so highly valued in these schools, teachers who improved students' scores usually received praise, respect and gained a good reputation. In other words, teachers' symbolic capital relied on their students' examination scores. The EGRT participants gradually realized that acquiring localized pedagogical capital could secure them dominant positions in the local field. Instrumental relationships with local teachers, then, were seen as key to this pursuit of capital.

### 7.1.3 Classroom management

Just as the EGRT participants were critical of examination-oriented education, so too they were likely to hold negative views about corporal punishment. However, in the face of local students' unanticipated misbehaviour in the classroom, Sun confessed that:

After working in disadvantaged school, I gradually realized that corporal punishment was an alternative for dealing with local students' misbehaviour in class. In addition, the local teachers told me to be extremely strict with students in the beginning, even employing some corporal punishment. This

was useful for managing misbehaving students for the benefit of the majority of the students. Honestly, sometimes I had to use the similar simple and rough punishment to control local students, which made me so disappointed and guilty. (Sun)

Sun described how he changed his attitude towards both local teachers and corporal punishment. He had never imagined that he would adopt this so-called 'rough' approach during his service as an EGRT fellow. The ideal image of a teacher in Sun's mind would never force students or control students with a rough management approach. However, from Sun's account, corporal punishment was widely accepted in his placement schools. Local teachers made use of this method of behaviour management when they thought that local students could not be disciplined without resorting to harsh methods. In this view, local students did not deserve to be treated mildly, especially at the outset of a relationship with a new teacher. However, for EGRT fellows, corporal punishment was not something that should be applied, owing to their pre-service training and in-service guidance from EGRT, whose core values support the belief that good quality education for every student should be achieved through charismatic leadership rather than rough punishment. Personally, Sun was opposed to corporal punishment and agreed with the EGRT position. Despite this, he gradually changed his attitude while working in the disadvantaged school. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argued, habitus is "an open system of dispositions" (p.133); endlessly subjected to social experiences and then affected by them. The way Sun adjusted his stance on corporal punishment showed how his habitus was refashioned as he worked as an EGRT fellow in school. When value conflicts regarding corporal punishment arose, Sun felt disappointed by the compromises he made in the course of his service. Two of the other participants, Xiu and Long, reported a similar sense of shame when they adopted some degree of corporal punishment in their classes. Bodily emotions like shame and guilt emerged, but at the same time, they were also getting a 'feel for the game' in a new educational sub-field (Bourdieu, 2000).

## 7.2    EGRT FELLOWS AS EXTRACURRICULAR PROJECT DESIGNERS

In addition to regular class teaching, nearly all of the interview participants (13 out of 14) initiated extracurricular projects for their students after class. These projects were not serving as examination preparation; rather, they were opportunities for students' holistic development, that is, they were consistent with notions of quality-

oriented education. According to information gleaned from data collection in six placement schools, no local teachers initiated any similar extracurricular activities. These projects were a major feature of EGRT, just as similar projects are encouraged by most alternative teacher recruitment programs. Some classic and influential projects were highly promoted on various EGRT marketing materials.

The extracurricular projects were not simply an extension and continuation of regular class activities. Rather, they seemed to have been designed to promote students' holistic development, to enrich their lives outside the classroom, and to provide additional academic or psychological support. The projects certainly extended the teacher's professional role beyond the classroom. The interview participants chose one or more extracurricular projects, mainly based on what challenges they hoped to respond to, and on what personal resources they brought to this initiative, as outlined in Table 7.1 below.

Table 7.1

*Extracurricular projects initiated by interview participants*

| Name | Extracurricular Project |
|------|------------------------|
| Wei | Math interest group |
| Zhao | School library |
| Xiu | Book writing and publishing |
| Shuang | Broadcasting station |
| Feng | School library; Student counselling centre for left-at-home students; Invited external experts to deliver lectures |
| Sun | Summer camp; Post card activity |
| Min | School library; Dream tutor |
| Ying | Career consultation; Dream tutor |
| Na | School library |
| Rui | School library; Interest group for programming; Broadcasting station |
| Hua | Broadcasting station |
| Ren | School library |
| Long | School library |
| Xiang | None |

One of the most popular projects was to establish a school library. Half the interview participants (Zhao, Feng, Min, Na, Rui, Ren and Long) conducted this project in their placement schools. Although their projects shared the ubiquitous name "school library", there were several differences in their manifestations.

First, if few books were stocked in the disadvantaged school, the interview participants were inclined initially to procure books. Feng, Zhao and Min collected 5000 books, 2000 books and 100 books respectively through Internet-based or other charities. From the perspective of EGRT interview participants, books were important cultural resources. If enough books had already been donated by others or bought by schools, they usually introduced an electronic management system. Without such a system, books could not be borrowed or returned efficiently. Therefore, Long, Ren and Zhao manually inputted bibliographic details into their library management system (for 15000, 10000 and 3000 books respectively). Once the details were entered, it meant that students could regularly borrow and return books. This kind of work was usually time-consuming and the interview participants all used their personal time for the establishment of the library in their disadvantaged school.

Another reason why library projects were so popular might be because this kind of project was well-accepted and welcomed by the disadvantaged schools themselves. As Ren reported, her principal invited her to help the school to re-build its library; hoping that students would spend more time reading after school than hanging around in the street. No other evidence emerged from the data about the attitudes of other principals. However, it is worth noting that space for setting up a school library could only be made available with the schools' permission and support. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that having a well-functioning library is of value to the placement schools; and that a library may function as a form of cultural capital for the institution, specifically, objectified cultural capital. As the term suggests, this is a form of capital in which an object (or collection of objects in the case of a library) is endowed with cultural value (and possibly, symbolic value). Objectified cultural capital, however, is notable in that its value depends somewhat on it being activated by agents with the requisite embodied capital. In the case of a library, this means that the value depends to some extent on the use made of the resource by agents with the requisite embodied cultural capital. Some of the dynamics around the library projects are of interest in this regard.

Zhao, Ren and Min organized activities to increase book-reading on the part of their students. They convened reading groups and ran student librarian elections. In these ways, they tried to create more opportunities for reading and for the cultivation of reading and self-management skills. In other words, having a library of books

available, and an electronic system for managing this, was just the first step. The next step involved guiding students to take advantage of these educational resources. However, this kind of extracurricular activity seemed to have less support and recognition from the school. It seemed that 'extensive reading' took time away from the time that the local educators expected students to spend reciting content knowledge or preparing for upcoming examinations. As Zhao reported, her reading group activity was opposed by local teachers for the above reasons.

To clarify, from the perspective of EGRT interview participants, extensive reading was an important practice which promoted personal happiness and growth. As Rui commented, he firmly believed that reading, a habit with life-long benefits, could take students to different times and spaces, on a spiritual and enjoyable journey. The local teachers, however, had other priorities for their students: time resources were to be directed towards examination preparation. This occurred in other schools, too. Hence, all the interview participants reported that no local teachers were willing to participate in the extracurricular projects. Instead, they were often concerned or complained that these activities might squeeze students' study time. Conflict between EGRT fellows and local teachers was inevitable, since reading, as a consumption of objectified cultural capital for the purpose of accruing embodied cultural capital, entails "a labour of inculcation and assimilation… [which], costs time" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 283). In short, the resources that the fellows sought to make available to the local students through extra-curricular activities were not actually accorded much value in disadvantaged schools.

In addition to the school library projects, another popular activity was a broadcasting station. Shuang, Hua and Rui all initiated such a project. The broadcasting station was a classic extracurricular project in the EGRT, regarded as a comprehensive package for benefiting all students through opportunities to work as contributors, announcers and audience members. From the perspective of interview participants, students could be exposed to technologies which they seldom encountered, enhance their organizational ability, improve their oral expression and develop the ability to collaborate. More importantly, students were expected to become more confident and braver about putting themselves in the public eye and sharing with others. The fellows viewed these abilities and skills as important for local students' holistic development.

Except for these two most popular extracurricular projects initiated by EGRT participants, various other activities were also undertaken to provide cultural resources for local students. For instance, Feng invited external experts to deliver lectures (e.g. the President of the Astronomical Association of Taiwan); Sun invited outstanding teachers from other schools to the summer camp to broaden students' horizons; Ying initiated a project named "career consultation", which aimed to set up a bridge between experts in various areas and local students on the Internet for vocational education. Other than experts and teachers, the project "Dream Mentor", initiated by Min and Ying, established a channel between their students and other elite university students who also cared about rural students. When students had some academic or personal problems, they could seek help from their mentors. As alumni of prestigious universities, the fellows had richer access to or intimate ties with professors, experts and other elite university students, which paved the way for them to successfully introduce external resources to local students.

Merely bringing outside cultural resources into placement schools might not be enough to help local students, however. As winners themselves in the education system, participants like Wei and Rui realized that they could take advantage of their personal accrued cultural and academic capital to create extra-curricular projects. Capitalising on their personal expertise and enthusiasm, Wei (National Olympic Math competition winner) and Rui (expert programmer) started interest groups based on their own talents in mathematics and programming respectively. Feng, a Master's degree holder in psychology, opened a student counselling centre to provide psychological assistance to over 300 left-behind students. Xiu, who had majored in Chinese Linguistics and Literature for four years, arranged a project to involve students in writing a book. She trained her students in practical essay writing skills, and then word-processed, printed and bound the essays into a book. She printed 100 copies and sold them online; and quickly ran out of stock.

In conclusion, except for the school library projects, most of these extracurricular projects were usually appreciated by the EGRT program but depreciated by the disadvantaged schools themselves. From the perspective of the EGRT participants, these activities could promote students' holistic development and increase their competencies. Abilities and skills accrued through extracurricular activities are usually viewed as especially valuable embodied cultural capital in urban elite schools.

However, these abilities and skills were not important when examinations were the most important consideration of the local education evaluation system. It was not therefore surprising that no local teachers were reported as working with fellows on any of the extracurricular projects.

Furthermore, based on the above overview of how these extracurricular projects were conducted, on one hand, only fellows with a certain form of capital were able to successfully initiate projects; and on the other, capitals appreciated by EGRT were reproduced through interview participants' service. In terms of these forms of capital, only candidates with the proper amount and configuration of capital could be involved in EGRT. Through studying in prestigious universities for at least four years, participants had accrued social capital and symbolic capital, which could be applied during their two years of service. Then data showed how these accrued capitals worked in introducing outside resources into placement schools by mobilizing previously established social networks and cultural resources. During this process, social capital might be further accumulated, combined with the symbolic capital garnered by engagement in an altruistic service. In addition, various entrepreneurial qualities, such as the ability to plan, organize, and problem solve would be enhanced as embodied cultural capital through initiating an extracurricular project. This capital was widely valued in the high-end labour market and in higher academic institutions. This is a dynamic that has been identified in research on the Teach for All Network (Olmedo et a.l., 2013). Therefore, the initiation of these projects might, in the end, serve EGRT fellows rather than the local schools.

## 7.3  EGRT FELLOWS AS PRACTITIONERS OF EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY

Egalitarian educational values were promoted through the EGRT slogan that argued that every child has a right to an equal and good education; that irrespective of the place of birth, socio-economic situation, gender and race, and current academic outcomes, all students deserve good education. This egalitarian value has successfully attracted many program participants and justifies itself as an altruistic commitment to social justice. In this context, when asked how to get involved as an EGRT fellow in disadvantaged schools, many interview participants referred to how they applied this concept into practice, while others felt confused, and spoke of readjusting their understandings and performance in relation to educational equality.

### 7.3.1 Making educational equality happen in practice

After entry into placement schools, as revealed in Chapter Six, interview participants commonly encountered disparities between their pre-service assumptions and their in-service perceptions regarding local students. Despite these disparities, Min persisted with her EGRT belief that every student should be equally treated and her commitment to not give up on any student. This view was mainly based on her own educational experience:

> My students' dropout rate was so high. In the beginning of this semester, there were 45 students. However, at the end of the first year, there were only 39 left. The students who dropped-out were regarded as hopeless and they also had given up on themselves. But I did not give up on them. Why? Because I myself was once viewed as a member of the "hopeless" group. However, something different happened, and I became who I am now. Maybe I might make some differences for my students. (Min)

According to Min, six students in her class dropped out within a semester. She noticed that schools intentionally kicked out the "hopeless students", but at the same time, these students also excluded themselves from schooling. Nevertheless, Min persisted in maintaining high expectations for every student because she too had experienced the desperation of these students who were dropping-out. Unlike the other 13 interview participants, Min was the only one who failed to study in a key senior secondary school. She also lagged behind during her junior high school, but eventually graduated from a prestigious university. The "something different" here referred to her teacher. Min's own learning experience was turned around by a deep interaction with a particular teacher, a personal experience that propelled Min into EGRT (Chapter Five). In her own time of academic despair and hopelessness, Min met a great teacher who did not give up on her and consistently encouraged her. This personal educational experience made Min believe that everyone had the potential to change with proper guidance. It is not surprising then that she imitated her own teacher in not giving up on her students. She tried to hold on to the EGRT value of educational equality regardless of how difficult it was in practice. She held onto this value because she projected her younger self onto her local students. In a different way, Rui's adherence to the principle of never giving up on any student was more due to the distinction he made between his identity as an EGRT fellow and the identity of local teachers.

> I thought the biggest difference between local teachers and me was that I never gave up on any student. Limited by their knowledge and views, local teachers might easily give up on some students who they viewed as hopeless. But for me, teaching was something related to an individual's soul. Education was like "a tree shakes another, a cloud blows another, a soul awakes another", which was quite different from those who just treated teaching as a job. (Rui)

From Rui's perspective, giving up on some apparently hopeless students was an indicator of difference between local teachers and himself as an EGRT fellow. He treated his work with students as a calling rather than merely a job to earn a living. To encapsulate his ideas, Rui cited the famous German philosopher Karl Theodor Jaspers. The quote from Jaspers means teaching is a great career related to the soul of each individual. In using this quote, Rui displayed his familiarity with classic European literature—a point of distinction, perhaps, from the taste and educational level of local teachers. Through this comparison, he is showing how his classificatory scheme functions here to represent himself in opposition to local teachers. As the data showed, Min and Rui persisted with the EGRT value of pursuing the educational equality desired by the program. Another interview participant, Xiang, also reported trying to adhere to this value when he was asked how he became involved in the life of his disadvantaged placement school. However, he was not sure whether or not he could hold onto that value throughout the full two years of service.

> Up to now, I have tried to persist and apply the EGRT value that every student deserves a good education in my class, but I do not know how long I can hold onto it. To date I have been able to promise that I have not given up on my expectations of consistent efforts to help every student. Nevertheless, I can totally understand why some of the other EGRT fellows have given up on some students. When the pay is hugely disproportional to the harvest, it leads easily to giving up. (Xiang)

According to Xiang's account, he was hesitant about whether or not he could maintain his EGRT value of equality throughout his entire two years of service. His belief was sufficiently strong that he had not given up on any student within the first year. However, his account indicated that some of his peers had not persisted in this belief. In these cases, some interview participants began to adjust their approaches regarding this value or to redefine this value.

### 7.3.2 Reconsidering educational equality in practice

After having worked in disadvantaged schools for a period of time, some participants came to the conclusion that the EGRT value of educational equality was desirable but not achievable. Hua, Zhao, Wei and Ying confessed that they had not truly persisted in applying this value. See Hua's comments:

> Every child deserves an equal and good quality education, but it does not mean that the development of intelligence on the part of every child is equally good. When I taught the same knowledge repeatedly ten times but a certain student still could not understand at all, at the moment, my heart almost collapsed. I told myself, "give up, perhaps my individual efforts did not work". (Hua)

From Hua's perspective, although she still thought the EGRT value of educational equality was right in principle, she was not able to consistently realize this belief in practice. If some students still failed to grasp some point of knowledge, despite her repeated explanation and exercise, then she felt justified in giving up on her efforts to teach these students. She began to consider that some students were born with different endowments of intelligence. As Bourdieu (1977b) argued, school education implicitly requires a set of capitals to succeed in a field. These capitals are arbitrarily and selectively valued, legitimated, and finally celebrated by schools. In the absence of these capitals, students are often misrecognised by most teachers as inherently inferior in ability. In this situation, Hua attributed her failure to persist with EGRT values to the biological 'fact' of students' own intelligence. She did not consider that the problem might have been her own pedagogy or ways of communicating with her students. Owing to the dynamics of misrecognition, Hua was displaying deficit thinking in her work with local students. This was not uncommon in the EGRT experience, when participants had the real experience of actually working with local students. Zhao revealed that when the fellows got together, some complaints were pervasive, like "they do not want to study at all", or "they are really not cut out to study". When fellows had these kinds of ideas, they tended to leave certain students alone and did not spend effort on them.

Some EGRT fellows, therefore, gave up on some local students on the grounds of supposed innate intellectual inferiority. Once this idea was accepted, they believed that they were justified in giving up on students whose intelligence did not deserve their attention. This misrecognition was a key factor in leading the fellows to give up

on treating every student equally, and in beginning to treat different students in different ways. However, no interview participant appeared to reflect on their own lack of preparation for becoming a competent teacher, such as pedagogical knowledge and skills.

Feng and Wei reported an additional factor: that they could not persist with the EGRT value of educational equality due to structural constraints in local schools, such as the class size and streaming policies.

> Since the subject I taught was not listed as the test subject in the local education system, usually it was not taken seriously. For this reason, I was allocated more than 300 students. I could not stand it at all and was so depressed in the beginning. This was totally different from the education in my mind. There were so many students, how could I take care of every one? How could I take every student into account? In checking homework alone, I had over 100 pieces on average per day. (Feng)

> The classes would be rearranged based by examination scores at the end of their [the students'] first year. The top 100 of the 700 students would comprise two or three new "selective classes". Based on previous experience, most students who got the opportunities to proceed to secondary senior school came from these so-called "selective classes"; however, EGRT fellows were not scheduled to teach these classes. Several students in my mathematics class could not catch on to what I was teaching at all. There were about 60 students in my class, I could not care for every one of them and I had to lead the students who hoped to learn to go ahead. (Wei)

According to accounts provided by Feng and Wei, as EGRT fellows they were allocated unimportant subjects and devalued students. Feng taught a subject which was not tested in the local assessment regimen; therefore, he should teach as many students as possible. This allowed more staff and other resources to be saved and concentrated into subjects which influenced school rankings. Similarly, Wei was not allowed to take the 'selective classes' which carried almost the complete load of expectations for attaining senior secondary school enrolment at his placement school. It would seem that the schools were not prepared to trust Feng and Wei with the strategically important classes on which the school's reputation and ranking depended.

As was explained in Chapter Five, the ideal education for Feng and Wei involved "caring for every student's holistic development" and "teaching every student how to lead a better life". Both emphasized "every student". This educational belief was prioritised in the discourse of EGRT and was perfectly compatible with one of the core values of EGRT. As consistent academic winners, Feng and Wei were successfully recruited by EGRT; and this would seem to be because the logic of their prestigious university was similar to that of EGRT. However, according to both Feng and Wei, the logic of the disadvantaged school was one of concentrating limited resources on a small number of students who exceeded their peers; and this occurred at the cost of educational equality. This difference of logic, conflicting with their own and that of EGRT, resulted in frustration for Wei and Feng. They felt like "fish out of water" when they transferred from one field to another.

What was worse, given the large size of their classes, both Feng and Wei confessed that they could not treat every student equally in practice. They began to recognize systemic inequality and felt powerless. Therefore, after working very hard in trying circumstances, they made a compromise with their previous beliefs by giving up their expectations and efforts in relation to some students. Their views on educational equality seemed to change, redefining the meaning of educational equality. See the comments from Ying:

> In the beginning, I believed no matter what happened, students should stay in schools. It was absolutely not good to hang out at their age. However, when I tried to make a disruptive student stay in my class, he tended to upset the whole class. This experience was so depressing. Later, I realized that while I might give an opportunity to this troublesome student, I was feeling sorry for the other students in my class. It would be unequal for them. The vision of "every student deserves a good education" was beautiful and inspired, however, I realized that it was impossible at this stage, or in the future as well. (Ying)

From Ying's account, her perceptions of the necessity of keeping every student in class had changed. In practice, she began to question this EGRT value. Ying gave an example of how one disruptive student upset a whole class. The choice of retaining that student in class did damage to other students' learning. If she kept this student in the classroom, on the grounds of her belief that education should be open and equal for every student, then there would probably be a negative impact on the learning

environment for the rest of her students. In other words, holding onto her belief would be unfair for the other students in the class. Giving up on an individual student, therefore, could be justified by the interests of the majority. Ying's initial insistence on making an effort for every student showed the durability of habitus; however, her later perception change indicated that her habitus was not immutable.

In theoretical terms, the way that Ying redefined educational equality was linked to a new and "evolving habitus" (Reay, et al., 2009, p. 1103). This occurred when she entered a different field, that of the disadvantaged school. From this, it can be seen how habitus is shaped and reshaped in the course of transition between different fields.

In summary, this section has shown how attitudes and perceptions in relation to the ideal of educational equality advocated by EGRT was changed or adjusted owing to the fellows' own misrecognition or to apparent structural constraints. Their previously shaped beliefs and values were compatible with the EGRT value, but not with that of the disadvantaged school. This resulted in feelings of being like fish out of water, and in ongoing evolution of their beliefs and values. These reactions have indicated that habitus is not immutable, but subject to change in the course of constant interaction with the external world.

## 7.4 EGRT FELLOWS AS LEADERS

When asked how they became involved in disadvantaged schools, some of the EGRT fellows mentioned their performance as leaders and their application of leadership skills in their work in disadvantaged schools. Rui directly said, "I tried to be a good leader of my class, and good teachers should be the leaders of their students". That is to say, Rui kept using the criterion of 'good leader' to evaluate 'good' teacher. Since leadership was another important value of the EGRT, this discourse had been inscribed in Rui's mind. Another typical example was Na:

> I had to have my own leadership. That was to say, if I were charisma as a leader, then students would follow my lead irrespective of classroom management, project implementation, and other impacts on students. So I tried to employ my leadership at any opportunity. (Na)

Na believed that leadership was an indispensable quality as an EGRT fellow while serving in her placement school. She even thought that she could not manage students without leadership impact. In other words, leadership was the bedrock value

of Na's sense of what it means to be a teacher. Accordingly, leadership seemed to be the panacea by which Na might cope with the challenges she met in disadvantaged schools. This represents a shift from that which is valued in traditional teacher education, like knowledge of pedagogies, knowledge of children's development, and classroom management skills. Like Na, Shuang provided a detailed account of how leadership was integral to the way she became involved in her placement school:

> I did not know how to lead a group of people in the beginning, especially those lacking thinking ability. They [local students) were children after all. I needed to carefully think about how to give orders and how to organize. When I stood in the classroom, I felt like I was a conductor. I needed to clearly issue my order and express my expectation with proper encouragement and supervision. A leader also needed to keep considering how to work like a role model for them [the students], and how to have impact on them. I had a feeling that I was a leader at that moment. (Shuang)

According to Shuang's description, teachers were conceptualized as entrepreneurs and students as staff. This is consistent with the entrepreneurial thinking that is valued in EGRT and other such programs. Shuang modelled her practice on that of a group leader in business who leads her team out of a difficult situation. This type of practice requires many entrepreneurial capacities, like problem solving, organizational and supervision skills. Shuang tasted the feeling of being a leader through EGRT participation and seemed to enjoy this feeling. It was perhaps unsurprising that she talked so much about leadership in her teaching practice, since it constituted the main reason for her EGRT participation (Chapter Five). In addition to considering leadership as an important task in their involvement in disadvantaged schools, participant Zhao also tried to equip her students with leadership skills:

> When I organized some activities, I consciously cultivated students' awareness of teamwork and leadership. I was the leader of the classroom, but through some activities I designed, some students were expected to learn how to take the leader role and others to learn how to collaborate well. (Zhao)

Zhao described how she extended leadership to her students. She not only regarded herself as a leader in the classroom, but also trained her students to grasp onto leadership through tasks she designed intentionally to that end. Zhao's practice showed her great enthusiasm for, and recognition of the value of teaching as leadership. The identity of a prestigious university graduate, and membership of EGRT, afforded Zhao

access to positions of power and the right to feel like a leader with cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Zhao and other interview participants seemed to take their leadership for granted and then naturally made use of it. They perceived themselves as having been equipped with leadership skills, excellence and responsibility for service through formal prestigious institutions and other personal experience (Tamir, 2009).

From the above analysis, it is clear that a notion of teaching as leadership has taken root in the minds of some of the interview participants. When they performed as EGRT fellows in placement schools, they tended to enact the leadership values espoused by EGRT—a point of distinction from the more traditional notion of teachers. This phenomenon echoed the findings of a study of Teach for America. Teach for America inculcated program participants with its own ideologies, philosophies, and values. Participants usually went on to construct themselves in ways expected by Teach for America. This was evident in the ways that the participants displayed the main characteristics normalized and valued by the organization (Thomas, 2017). Something similar was at work in EGRT.

In conclusion, when asked how they became involved in their schools as EGRT fellows, the interview participants highlighted their work as classroom teachers, extracurricular project designers, practitioners of desired educational equality, and leaders. These multiple forms of involvement in disadvantaged schools indicate that EGRT fellows actually constituted a distinct subgroup of teachers in rural China. First, they had graduated from prestigious universities; and with this educational background they were not expected to be rural teachers after graduation. Second, according to EGRT, fellows were required to serve in disadvantaged schools for two years. That is to say, the teaching job was a short-term trial rather than a long-term career path. In this situation, therefore, they were motivated to practise some seemingly ideal values in some different ways.

## 7.5 INVOLVEMENT IN ACCORD WITH OR CONTRARY TO EGRT VALUES

Throughout the analysis presented in previous sections, the interview participants seemed to automatically link to the core values of EGRT when talking about their involvement as fellows. They repeatedly referred to slogans about good quality education, educational equality and leadership. This is not surprising, perhaps,

because they were being interviewed as EGRT fellows, and so displayed their membership of that group. However, it is suggested that the values of quality, equality and leadership might match their own original values relating to the kind of education they desired to bring to children in disadvantaged schools (Chapter Five); and that these values were further strengthened through the EGRT training. However, as the analyses above have shown, these educational values ran somewhat contrary to those entrenched in the practice logic of the disadvantaged schools.

To reiterate, the first core value of the EGRT program is good quality education. In the discourse of the program, good quality education mainly refers to quality-oriented education which emphasizes students' holistic development. To achieve this end, student-centred pedagogies are usually applied, enabling students to experience more exploration and discovery, to develop independence and autonomy, and further build individual abilities and personalities. Quality-oriented education is thereby different from examination-oriented education which is emphatic about examination scores. To achieve high examination scores, pedagogies such as rote learning, recitation and didactic teaching are commonly adopted by educators. The battle between quality-oriented education and examination-oriented education is still on in China. Despite universal recognition of quality oriented education, in the vast majority of rural areas of China, quality-oriented education is just an aspiration, and examinations still serve as the decisive mechanism of evaluation of the performances of both students and teachers (Wu, 2016). In this situation, EGRT fellows commonly met conflicts between the examination-oriented education mostly dominant in disadvantaged schools and the quality-oriented education that was both compatible with their own ideal education and with what was advocated by EGRT.

The second core value of the EGRT program is educational equality, which means that the aforementioned good quality education should be made equally accessible to every student. No student should be left behind or treated differently, irrespective of their socio-economic status and academic outcomes. This value seemed to denote an idealistic educational egalitarianism, a strong desire for educational equality. However, this equality stands in stark contrast to the emphasis on individual difference and the systemic streaming in disadvantaged schools and the rural education sector.

The third value turns attention from students in disadvantaged schools to EGRT fellows. The concept of leadership was not initiated by the EGRT program. It was originally developed by Teach for America and picked up by EGRT (and indeed other programs of alternative teacher recruitment in China and other countries). When the connection of *teacher* and *leader* is established, EGRT fellows are recruited and trained as leaders who can bring transformative change to students in disadvantaged schools. Meanwhile, EGRT fellows are conceived as having the opportunity to realize their personal development and to flourish through their two years of service. This notion is full of corporate language and equates the teaching profession with business—something which has been documented in the literature about Teach for All in Europe (Olmedo et al, 2013). Meanwhile, disadvantaged schools are described as a challenging social context, and as such, as a fertile ground in which fellows can cultivate and exert their leadership. In contrast, the concept of leadership seldom appeared in the existing discourses of disadvantaged schools.

Throughout the analysis of fellows' involvement as classroom teachers, extracurricular project designers, practitioners of educational equality and leaders, the ways that EGRT fellows acted in their placement was diverse. All applied the notion of quality-oriented teaching in their classroom teaching or extracurricular projects, but several (Wei, Ying, Hua, Long, Min, and Xiu) adopted examination-oriented education approaches. Ren, Min, Rui and Xiang adhered to the goal of achieving educational equality, while Wei, Ying, Hua and Feng had begun to give up, at least partly, this desirable notion of educational equality. Zhao, Rui, Na and Shuang consciously employed the notion of teacher leadership to try to manage behaviour in the classroom. In contrast, Sun, Long and Xiu resorted to corporal punishment.

Some of the involvement of the fellows in their schools, then, was based on core EGRT values while some was not. This study defined involvement in accord with EGRT values as including several elements: quality-oriented teaching and extracurricular projects, translation of the notion of education equality into the classroom, and the notion of teaching as leadership. In the same way, involvement contrary to EGRT values was identified as: resorting to examination-oriented teaching, reconsideration of the value of educational equality, and resorting to corporal punishment. To make this clear, the practices of all interview participants in this regard are presented in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2

*Involvement in accord and contrary to EGRT values*

| Name | Involvement in accord with EGRT values | | | Involvement contrary to EGRT values | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Quality oriented | Desired equality | Leadership impact | Examination oriented | Against desired equality | Corporal punishment |
| Wei | √ | | | √ | √ | |
| Sun | √ | | | | | √ |
| Ying | √ | | | √ | √ | |
| Hua | √ | | | √ | √ | |
| Long | √ | | | √ | | √ |
| Shuang | √ | | √ | | | |
| Ren | √ | √ | | | | |
| Min | √ | √ | | √ | | |
| Na | √ | | √ | | | |
| Rui | √ | √ | √ | | | |
| Zhao | √ | | √ | | | |
| Xiu | √ | | | √ | | √ |
| Feng | √ | | | | √ | |
| Xiang | √ | √ | | | | |

As shown in Table 7.2, some interview participants tended to become involved in their placement schools in ways that were based on EGRT values but did so in ways contrary to those values. Why did these differences appear? Based on the findings in Chapter Five, Chapter Six and Chapter Seven, it is possible to conclude that there are relationships among reasons consonant with EGRT values and fellows' involvement in accord with EGRT values (See Table 7.3).

Table 7.3

*The summary of reasons, disparities and involvement*

| Name | Reasons | | Disparities | | Involvement | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Socio-personal | Consonant with EGRT values | Fours aspects of local students | | In accord with EGRT values | Contrary to EGRT values |
| Wei | √ | | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Sun | √ | | | √ | √ | √ |
| Ying | √ | | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Hua | √ | | √ | | √ | √ |
| Long | √ | | √ | | √ | √ |
| Shuang | | √ | √ | | √ | |
| Ren | | √ | | √ | √ | |
| Min | | √ | √ | | √ | √ |
| Na | | √ | √ | √ | √ | |
| Zhao | | √ | √ | √ | √ | |

| Name | Reasons | | Disparities | Involvement | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Socio-personal | Consonant with EGRT values | Fours aspects of local students | In accord with EGRT values | Contrary to EGRT values |
| Xiu | | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Feng | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Rui | √ | √ | | √ | |
| Xiang | √ | √ | | √ | |

Although no patterns about the disparities and involvement emerge in Table 7.3, some interview participants, like Hua, gave up on EGRT values regarding educational equality owing to perceived disparities between local students' knowledge base and learning abilities. To examine further, survey findings from the quantitative phase of the study are presented in the next chapter. These cast further light on the relationships between reasons consonant with EGRT values, disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions of students, and involvement in accord with EGRT values.

# Chapter 8: Quantitative Data Analysis: Relationships between Participation Reasons, Disparities between Pre-service and In-Service, and Program Involvement

In Chapters 5, 6, and 7, qualitative analysis of the interview accounts provided by the 14 participants revealed the experiences of graduates from prestigious universities as teachers in disadvantaged schools through EGRT. These chapters analysed and discussed (1) the fellows' decisions to join EGRT; (2) disparities between the fellows' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions about teaching in disadvantaged schools; and (3) the realization of EGRT values in fellows' involvement. Reasons behind EGRT participation mainly included two dimensions: socio-personal reasons and reasons consonant with EGRT values. Disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions related mainly to local students, teachers and parents and to fellows' own impact in their placement schools. The interviewees did not report only on their reasons for participation, and pre- and in-service disparities of assumption and perception. They reported also on their involvement in their schools as classroom teachers, designers of extracurricular projects, practitioners pursuing the educational equality desired by EGRT, and leaders manifesting involvement in tandem with or contrary to EGRT values. These findings, emerging from qualitative analysis, provided answers to Research Questions 1, 2, and 3 respectively. The qualitative analyses also indicated relationships amongst the reasons behind EGRT participation, disparities between pre- and in-service assumptions and perceptions, and the fellows' involvement in placement schools. The current chapter takes a quantitative tack; it draws on inferential statistics to test these relationships. The chapter addresses Research Question 4:

> ***Research Question 4:*** *What relationships are there between: (1) EGRT fellows' reasons for participation that are consonant with EGRT values; (2) disparities between EGRT fellows' pre-service assumptions and in-service*

*perceptions of students in disadvantaged schools; and (3) EGRT fellows'*
*involvement in accord with EGRT values in disadvantaged schools?*

In order to answer this research question, Section 8.1 summarises the findings of the qualitative phase of this study, and proposes hypotheses for testing. Section 8.2 presents demographic information about the sample and domains of the self-designed instrument. Section 8.3 shows how Twostep cluster analysis was used to group participants within the three domains. Section 8.4 tests the proposed hypotheses. In section 8.5, the discussion shows consistencies in the findings of the qualitative and quantitative phases.

## 8.1 FOCUS OF QUANTITIVE ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS

As revealed by the findings reported in the previous chapters, the reasons why interview participants chose to join EGRT mainly included socio-personal reasons and reasons consonant with EGRT values. The socio-personal reasons were mainly associated with particularities in the experiences of growing up in the post 80s and 90s generation. Owing to the Reform and Opening-up Policy in 1978, these young people grew up in a context of unprecedented social change and opportunity (Vickers & Zeng, 2017). Consequently, they were more inclined to challenge the life trajectories set by their parents' generation. At a particular moment, at least some of these young people stepped out on a journey of self-exploration and self-fulfilment. Therefore, the socio-personal reasons were related to both social development at the macro level and to diverse manifestations of individual growth at the micro level. In contrast, reasons consonant with EGRT values tended to be based on this program itself. More specifically, participants' dispositions of altruism and entrepreneurialism were compatible with core values of EGRT. Hence, in the quantitative analysis, only reasons consonant with EGRT values are included in the design.

After their entry into disadvantaged schools, the EGRT fellows experienced many disparities between their pre- and in-service assumptions and perceptions about local students, local teachers, local parents, and their own impact - especially at the outset of their service. Since local teachers were widely perceived to be better than EGRT fellows had assumed, this disparity did not constitute a major challenge for the fellows. When local teachers could not be generally blamed for the poor outcomes of schooling, local parents became the new scapegoats to justify difficulties working in

disadvantaged schools. Compared with the above mentioned disparities, the disparities relating to local students in terms of their knowledge base, learning ability, learning motivation, and moral behaviours seemed to be most challenging for most interview participants, whose one prominent shared identity was that of teacher in a disadvantaged school. Therefore, in the quantitative analyses, only disparities relating to local students were included in the design.

When working in disadvantaged schools, some of the interview participants persisted in applying the core values of EGRT programs. These approaches have been defined in this study as 'involvement in accord with EGRT values'. In contrast, EGRT interview participants sometimes tended, at least partly, to discard the principal values promoted by EGRT, a move which has been termed 'involvement contrary to EGRT values' for the purposes of the analyses. It was important for this study to explore what makes the difference between persisting with or abandoning EGRT values.

According to the qualitative analyses of the first phase of the study, reasons consonant with EGRT values and assumption-perception disparities relating to students might have subtle influences on the involvement in accord with EGRT values. For example, as concluded in Chapter Seven, interview participants who joined EGRT with strong reasons consonant with EGRT values tended to follow these values when they reported how they involved themselves as EGRT fellows in disadvantaged schools. A pattern emerged, woven through the qualitative findings, between reasons consonant with EGRT values and subsequent involvement in accord with EGRT values. This pattern required further testing and discussion. Other examples related to disparities between pre-and in-service assumptions and perceptions relating to local students. When the disparities were large enough, some interview participants tended to perform contrary to EGRT values. Accordingly, two null hypotheses were proposed which weave together the three research questions and strengthen the cohesion of the thesis.

> $H_01$. *Reasons consonant with EGRT values have no statistically significant impact on fellows' involvement in accord with EGRT values in disadvantaged schools.*
>
> $H_02$. *Disparities between fellows' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions of students have no statistically significant impact on fellows' involvement in accord with EGRT values in disadvantaged schools.*

## 8.2 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE SAMPLE AND DOMAINS OF THE INSTRUMENT

One hundred and forty nine participants responded to the online survey created through Sojump. Every question was set as 'not allowed to skip' by the researcher. Therefore, all 149 cases are complete. The online survey was designed to gauge four aspects: (1) demographic features of the survey participants; (2) reasons consonant with EGRT values for program participation; (3) disparities in assumption-perception relating to local students; and (4) involvement in accord with EGRT values. The latter three domains were measured respectively by seven items (v1-v7), eight items (v8-v15) and four items (v16-v19) (see Table 8.1). Participants were asked to respond to each item on a five-point Likert-type scale.

Table 8.1

*Item sets and their corresponding domain in the main study*

| Domain | Indicators | Item description |
|---|---|---|
| **Reasons consonant with EGRT values** | v1 | I was attracted by the value of teaching as leadership advocated by EGRT. |
| | v2 | EGRT participation could benefit my further education. |
| | v3 | EGRT participation could benefit my career development. |
| | v4 | I could establish connections with more young talent though |
| | v5 | EGRT participation. |
| | | I could have an opportunity through EGRT participation to become role models who deeply moved me before |
| | v6 | I was attracted by the value of every child deserving a good and equal education advocated EGRT. |
| | v7 | I desired to make a contribution to changing the current social injustice through EGRT participation. |
| **Disparities relating to local students** | v8 | To what extent did you assume local students' grasp of basic knowledge required in the standard curriculum before you arrived in your placement school? |
| | v9 | To what extent did you estimate local students' grasp of the basic knowledge required in the standard curriculum after you commenced service in your placement school? |
| | v10 | To what extent did you assume local students' learning ability before you arrived in your placement school? |
| | v11 | To what extent did you estimate local students' learning ability after you worked in your placement school? |
| | v12 | To what extent did you assume local students' desire for knowledge before you arrived in your placement school? |
| | v13 | To what extent did you estimate local students' desire for knowledge after you worked in your placement school? |
| | v14 | To what extent did you assume local students' moral behavior before you arrived in your placement school? |
| | v15 | To what extent did you estimate local students' moral behavior after you worked in your placement school? |

| Domain | Indicators | Item description |
|---|---|---|
| | v16 | Instead of focusing on exam scores, I put most of my time and effort into local students' holistic development (e.g., independent thinking, critical thinking, and teamwork) while working in my placement school. |
| **Involvement in accord with EGRT values** | v17 | I still firmly believed "irrespective of the background, every child deserves a quality education" while working in my placement school. |
| | v18 | I actively applied the EGRT motto "teaching as leadership" into my service while working in my placement school. |
| | v19 | No matter how students perform, I did not give up my expectation of any of them while working in my placement school. |

Table 8.2 shows the descriptive statistics for the above indicators (v1-v19). The standard deviations of the indicators range from 0.65 to 1.21 on a 5-point scale, which demonstrates an adequate variance. All indicators violate the statistical assumption of normal distribution, which is not uncommon in social science research.

Table 8.2

*Descriptive statistics of indicators*

| Domain | Indicators | N | Mean | | SD | Skewness | | Kurtosis | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Stats | Stats | SE | Stats | Skewness | SE | Stats | SE |
| **Reasons consonant with EGRT values** | v1 | 149 | 3.67 | 0.08 | 1.04 | -0.61 | 0.19 | 0.14 | 0.39 |
| | v2 | 149 | 3.22 | 0.09 | 1.21 | -0.34 | 0.19 | -0.6 | 0.39 |
| | v3 | 149 | 3.38 | 0.08 | 1.05 | -0.43 | 0.19 | -0.04 | 0.39 |
| | v4 | 149 | 3.97 | 0.07 | 0.90 | -1.13 | 0.19 | 1.81 | 0.39 |
| | v5 | 149 | 3.40 | 0.09 | 1.20 | -0.46 | 0.19 | -0.59 | 0.39 |
| | v6 | 149 | 4.09 | 0.08 | 0.98 | -1.12 | 0.19 | 1.04 | 0.39 |
| | v7 | 149 | 4.18 | 0.07 | 0.91 | -1.49 | 0.19 | 2.67 | 0.39 |
| **Disparities relating to local students** | v8 | 149 | 2.58 | 0.06 | 0.71 | 0.36 | 0.20 | 0.28 | 0.40 |
| | v9 | 149 | 2.30 | 0.08 | 0.97 | 0.41 | 0.20 | -0.37 | 0.40 |
| | v10 | 149 | 2.69 | 0.05 | 0.65 | 0.09 | 0.20 | -0.33 | 0.40 |
| | v11 | 149 | 2.52 | 0.08 | 0.92 | 0.35 | 0.20 | -0.61 | 0.40 |
| | v12 | 149 | 3.47 | 0.07 | 0.87 | 0.06 | 0.20 | -0.64 | 0.40 |
| | v13 | 149 | 2.79 | 0.07 | 0.85 | 0.28 | 0.20 | -0.65 | 0.40 |
| | v14 | 149 | 3.58 | 0.06 | 0.68 | -0.19 | 0.20 | -0.11 | 0.40 |
| | v15 | 149 | 3.19 | 0.08 | 0.94 | 0.06 | 0.20 | -0.30 | 0.40 |
| **Involvement in accord with EGRT values** | v16 | 149 | 4.05 | 0.06 | 0.72 | -0.41 | 0.20 | -0.05 | 0.40 |
| | v17 | 149 | 4.14 | 0.07 | 0.86 | -0.92 | 0.20 | 0.66 | 0.40 |
| | v18 | 149 | 3.57 | 0.08 | 0.93 | -0.21 | 0.20 | -0.35 | 0.40 |
| | v19 | 149 | 3.68 | 0.08 | 1.04 | -0.43 | 0.20 | -0.39 | 0.40 |

More than half (57.05%) of the survey respondents were female, with only 42.95% being male. As shown in Figure 8.1, these respondents ranged in age between 22 and 30 at the time of the survey, with a mean age of 25.17 ($SD$ =1.85). Respondents aged 24 and 25 accounted for 51.00% of the sample, indicating that most of the participants were in their mid- twenties.
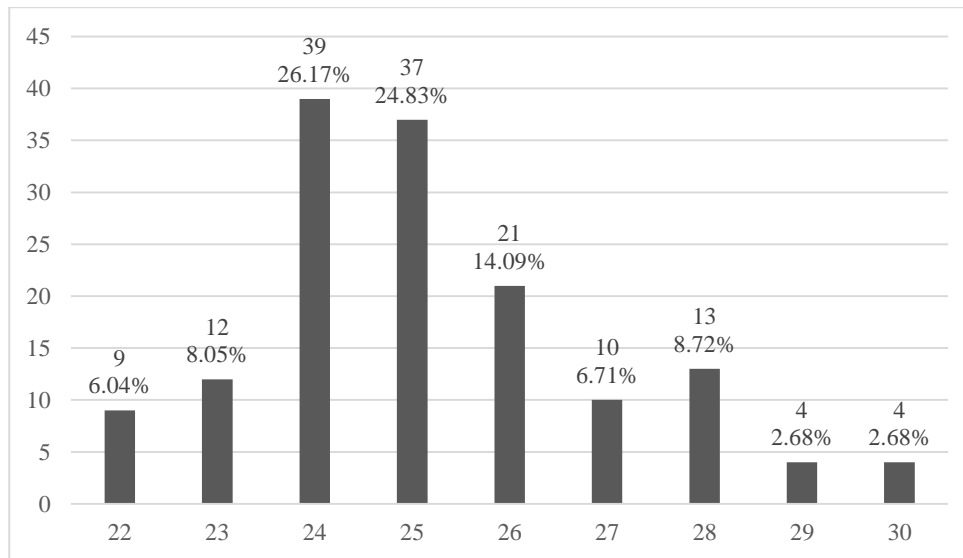


*Figure 8.1*. Age distribution of participants

The location of the participants' primary school was used as an indicator of their place of childhood residence. As shown in Figure 8.2, 88 participants (59.1%) grew up in rural areas including villages (49), towns (25) and counties (14) respectively, while 61 participants (40.9%) grew up in urban areas including cities (48) and metropolises (13) like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong and Shenzhen. The village group (32.8%) and city group (32.2%) constituted the two largest groups in the sample.
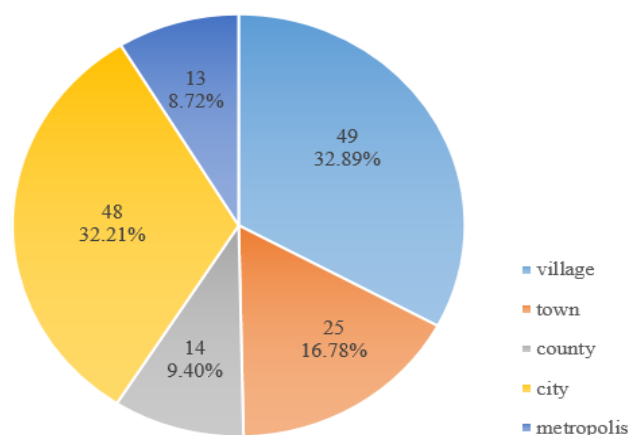


*Figure 8.2*. Primary school location

Types of senior secondary school and university were used as indicators to further explore participants' educational experience. Key senior high schools enjoy the most local resources and have the privilege of enrolling the best performers in local examinations. As indicated in Figure 8.3, only 20 participants (13.42%) did not attend key senior high schools, indicating that most of the participants had been privileged to receive the best available school education.
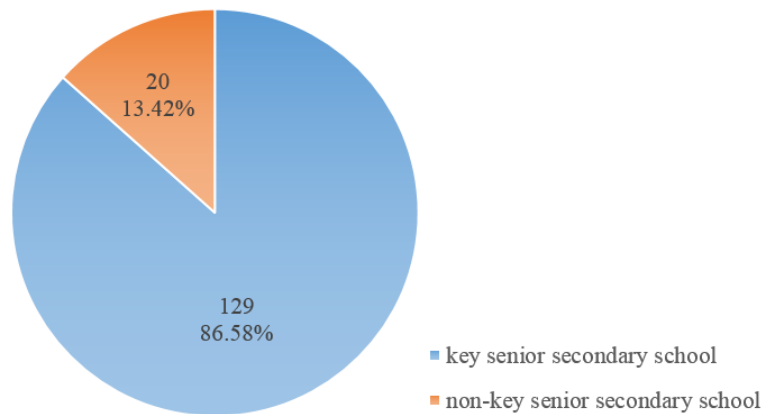


*Figure 8.3.* Types of senior high school participants attended

Universities selected to the 985 Project and the 211 Project were the most prestigious universities in China. As shown in Figure 8.4, 112 participants (75.17%) studied in either a 985 Project or 211 Project university, and 17 participants (11.41%) chose overseas universities. Similar to the data about the types of senior secondary school the participants attended, only 20 participants (13.42%) did not gain admission to a prestigious university in China. Therefore, an overwhelming percentage of the participants were 'academic winners' in high-stakes tests, and consistently enjoyed the best educational resources, both locally and nationally.
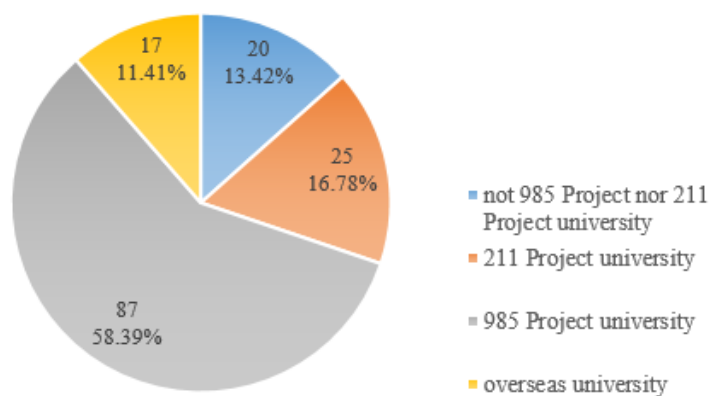


*Figure 8.4.* Types of university participants attended

In addition, 24.2% of the participants had obtained at least a master's degree before they participated in the EGRT (see Figure 8.5). In sociological terms, the vast majority of the participants possess rich cultural capital institutionalised through their secondary schooling and tertiary education.
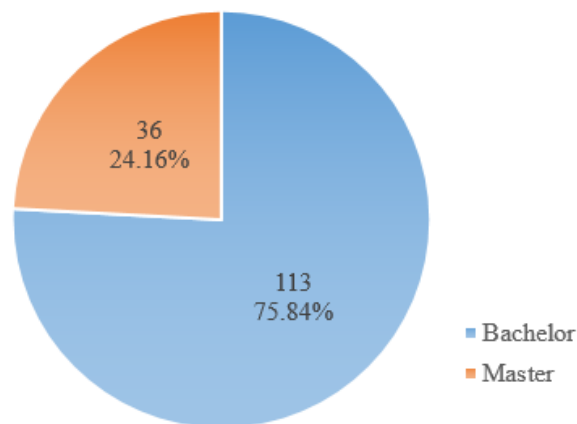


*Figure 8.5.* Highest educational qualification

Only 4.03% (see Figure 8.6) had been student teachers who enrolled in conventional teacher education programs at their universities. In contrast, an overwhelming proportion of the participants (95.97%) had not trained in teaching prior to joining EGRT.
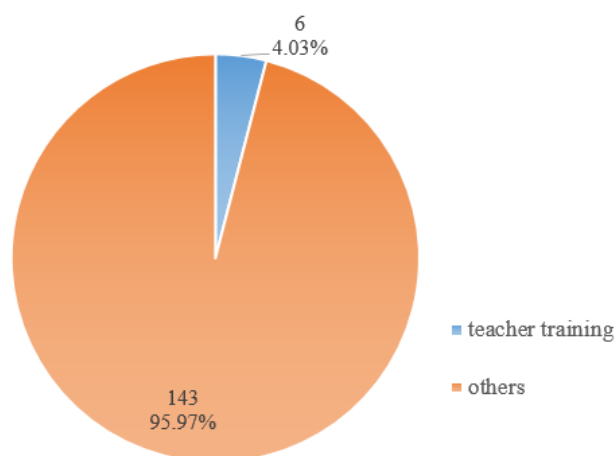


*Figure 8.6.* Types of degrees (teacher training vs others)

Irrespective of having been a student teacher or not, participants' majors did not necessarily match the subject that they taught in their placement schools. As shown in Figure 8.7, only 35.57% of the participants considered their university major to be identical to the subjects they taught (the group of relatively matched and the group of match); 28.19% of the participants considered their university major to be of little

relevance to the subjects they taught; 36.24% considered their university major to be irrelevant to the subjects they taught in placement schools (group of irrelevant and group of not matched). It will be recalled that the qualitative data showed similar results.
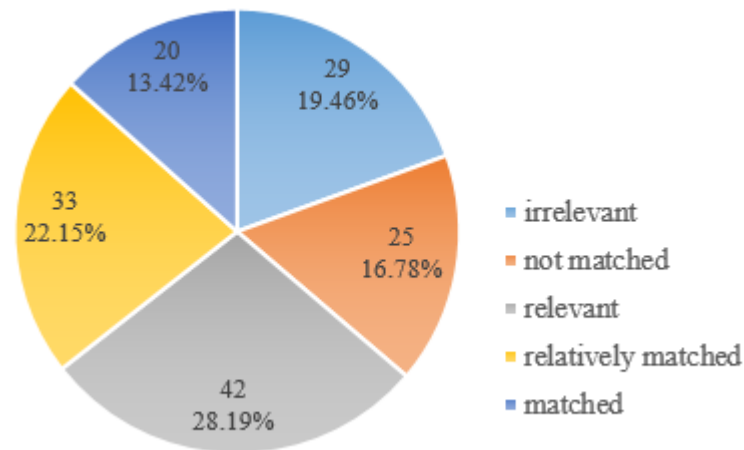


*Figure 8.7.* Degree of match between university major and teaching subject

As shown in Figure 8.8, participants joined EGRT in different years from 2009 to 2016. The 2014 cohort accounted for 42.38% of the sample, constituting the most demographically significant cohort. In the qualitative phase of this study, rapport was mainly built with the 2014 cohort, who helped the researcher to find more interview participants and distributed the online survey link to their friends and colleagues who were also EGRT fellows at the time of this study. Therefore, the high representation of the 2014 cohort is not surprising as the 'snowball' started rolling from this cohort.
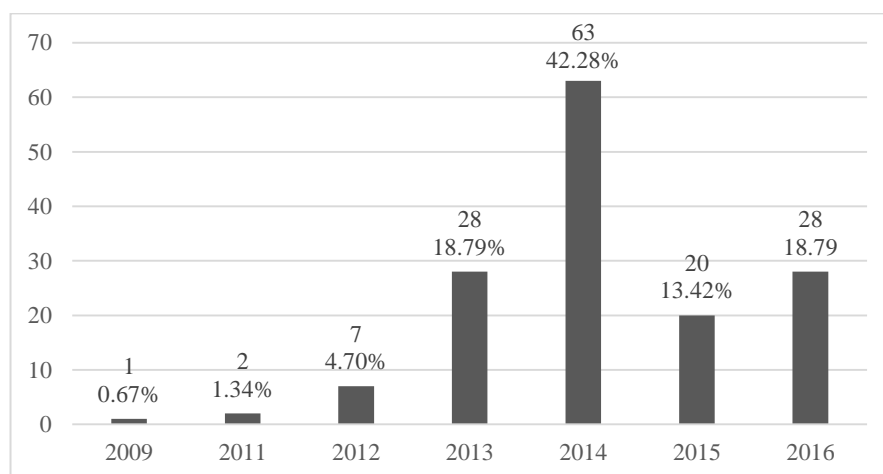


*Figure 8.8.* Year of joining in EGRT

In summary, participants in the quantitative phase who completed the online questionnaire presented several characteristics. First, they were composed of a group of young individuals ranging in age from 22 to 30, with those aged 24 and 25 accounting for more than half of the survey participants. Second, about 60% of the participants came from rural areas, while the others hailed from urban areas. However, whether they were originally from rural or urban areas, most of them had been 'academic winners' in local and national high-stakes tests. Third, only six of the 149 survey participants had received university-based teacher education and only about one out of three of them regarded their majors to be relevant to the subjects they taught in placement schools. The demographic features of the survey participants are largely comparable to those of the interview participants in terms of age, family background and educational experience.

This section has introduced the 149 online questionnaire participants, and identified their main characteristics relevant to this study; the self-designed online questionnaire based on the qualitative analysis results has also been introduced. The next section engages with the cluster analysis used to investigate the relationships between fellows' reasons consonant with EGRT values, disparities of pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions relating to students, and involvement in accord with EGRT values.

## 8.3   CLUSTER ANALYSIS

This section reports on the Twostep cluster analysis used to explore grouping patterns of survey participants (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011; Tkaczynski, 2017) within each of the three domains, namely: reasons consonant with EGRT values, disparities of pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions relating to local students, and involvement in accord with EGRT values. Through Twostep cluster analysis, participants with more similar elements within each domain were grouped together, while heterogeneous participants - with more different elements – were grouped in other clusters. When clusters (categories) were created within each domain, which was the case in this analysis, Chi-square tests were then used to examine relationships between the domains. Two hypotheses would be tested:

> $H_01.$ *Reasons consonant with EGRT values have no statistically significant*
> *impact on fellows' involvement in accord with EGRT values in disadvantaged*
> *schools.*

*H₀2. Disparities between fellows' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions of students have no statistically significant impact on fellows' involvement in accord with EGRT values in disadvantaged schools.*

### 8.3.1 Participant clustering based on reasons consonant with EGRT values

Seven indicators were included when Twostep cluster analysis was applied to the domain of reasons consonant with EGRT values. Design of these indicators was informed by the findings from the qualitative analysis. During the interviews, participants noted reasons consonant with EGRT values for joining in the program. For example, "the slogan about teaching as leadership advocated by the EGRT attracted me so much"; "the slogan about every child deserving a good quality education deeply moved me"; or/and "the Alumni Institution of EGRT offers career development opportunities". Hence, seven indicators (v1-v7 in the Table 8.1) were designed to gauge diverse aspects of reasons consonant with EGRT values.

Twostep cluster analysis was conducted on group participants according to their responses to the seven indicators. Twostep cluster analysis was used to determine the optimal number of clusters with algorithm automatically (Schwarz's Bayesian information criterion) (Şchiopu, 2010). In other words, the number of clusters was not predetermined. Instead, clusters emerged from a person-based analysis through an exploratory process. Twostep cluster analysis performed on the seven indicators germane to reasons consonant with EGRT values yielded a two-cluster solution. As Figure 8.9 shows, the Silhouette measure of cohesion and separation suggests a fair quality of a two-cluster solution.



*Figure 8.9.* Cluster quality of reasons consonant with EGRT values

As shown in Figure 8.10, v3 (this program participation benefits my career development) was the most important predictor, while v7 (I desire to make a

contribution to changing the current social injustice through this program participation) was the least important predictor relatively.
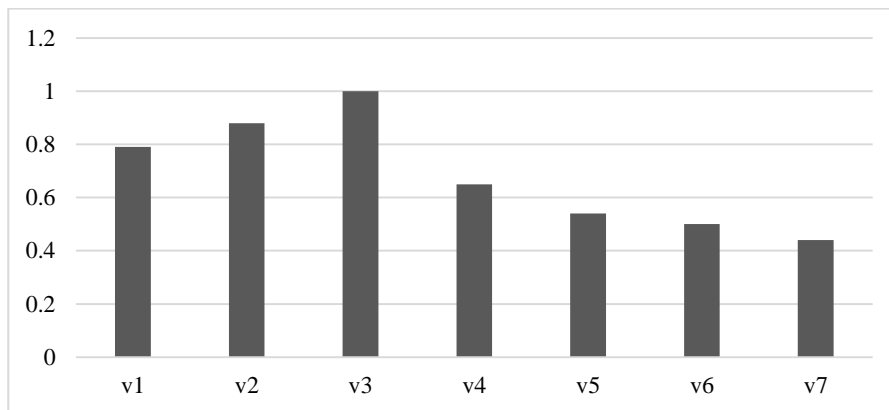


*Figure 8.10.* Predictor importance of seven indicators of reasons consonant with EGRT values

According to the result of Twostep cluster analysis, Cluster 1 was composed of 68 participants with relatively stronger responses (ranging from 3.94 to 4.57) to each of the ten indicators, whereas Cluster 2 was composed of 81 participants with relatively weaker responses (ranging from 2.62 to 3.85) to the indicators. The ratio size (larger cluster to the smaller cluster) was 1.19. The cluster membership was saved as a new categorical variable for subsequent analysis. The two-cluster solution is summarised in Figure 8.11.
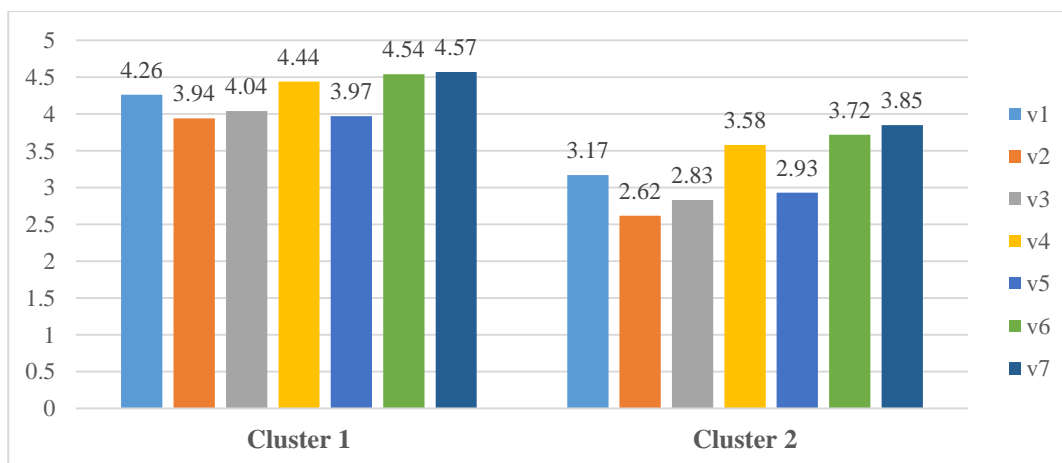


*Figure 8.11.* Twostep model summary of reasons consonant with EGRT values

It was by no means the intention here to oversimplify the reasons behind participation in EGRT; but cluster analysis showed in general that participants were grouped into two clusters depending on reasons consonant with EGRT values.

Participants of Cluster 1 tended to recognize core values of EGRT to a greater extent than those in Cluster 2.

### 8.3.2 Participant clustering based on disparities between pre- and in-service assumptions-perceptions relating to students

According to the findings of the qualitative data analysis, the disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions about local students were marked. These disparities related to the students' knowledge base, learning abilities, learning motivations and moral behaviours. The quantitative phase was subsequently designed based on these emerging themes. Prior to clustering EGRT respondents, the magnitude of the assumption-reality disparities was first analysed with Paired Samples-T test on each pair. Results showed statistically significant difference between the assumptions and the perceived realities across all four aspects. The statistically significant $t$ value ($t$ (148) = 3.35, $p < .001$) indicated that the assumed knowledge base of local students prior to participants' EGRT service ($M$ =2.57, $SD$ = .70, $N$ = 149) was statistically higher than the perceived knowledge base after participants' entry to placement schools ($M$ = 2.29, $SD$ = .96, $N$ = 149). The effect size ($r$ = .27) indicated a small difference between assumptions and realities. The assumed learning ability of local students ($M$=2.69, $SD$=.64, $N$=149) was higher than the perceived one ($M$ = 2.52, $SD$ = .91, $N$ = 149). The $t$ value ($t$ (148) = 1.93) corresponds to a $p$ value of .056, which indicated a non-significant difference between the two. However, the $p$ value of .056 was only marginally higher than the set significance level of .05. The effect size ($r$ =.16) showed the gap was small.

In terms of the desire to learn, the statistically significant value ($t$ (148) = 6.69, $p < .000$) suggested that the assumed desire for knowledge of local students ($M$ =3.46, $SD$ = .86, $N$ = 149) was significantly higher than the perceived desire for knowledge after participants worked in placement schools ($M$ = 2.79, $SD$ = .84, $N$ = 149). The effect size ($r$ = .23) indicated a small difference between assumptions and realities. As for the moral behaviour, the statistically significant value ($t$ (148) = 4.52, $p < .000$) showed the participants' current assessment of local students' moral behaviour in placement schools ($M$ = 3.18, $SD$ = .93, $N$ = 149) was significantly lower than their previous assumptions ($M$ =3.58, $SD$ = .67, $N$ = 149). The effect size ($r$ = .34) indicated a medium difference between expectations and realities. Therefore, these quantitative

findings demonstrated that there were disparities of pre- and in-service assumptions-perceptions about local students.

Four pairs of questions (v11-v18 in Table 8.1) were then designed to measure disparity in each of the four aspects. The gaps were obtained by scores on in-service perceptions minus scores on pre-service assumptions. Then Twostep cluster analysis was applied to group participants based on the four disparities, resulting in three groups featuring positive gaps, large negative gaps and small negative gaps respectively. As Figure 8.12 showed, Silhouette statistics suggested a fair cluster quality with a three-cluster solution.

**Model Summary**

| Algorithm | TwoStep |
|---|---|
| **Inputs** | 4 |
| **Clusters** | 3 |
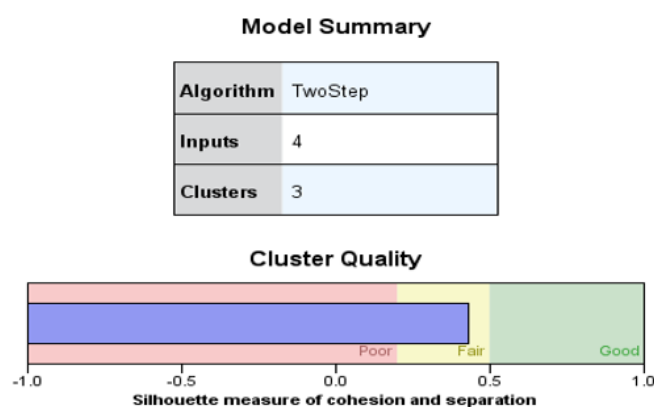
**Cluster Quality**

*Figure 8.12.* Cluster quality of four gaps

In terms of each indicator's contribution to participant grouping, disparity 2 regarding local students' learning abilities (v14 minuses v13) made the most important contribution. Disparity 4 about students' moral behaviours (v18 minuses v17) was relatively the least important predictor in clustering participants (see Figure 8.13).
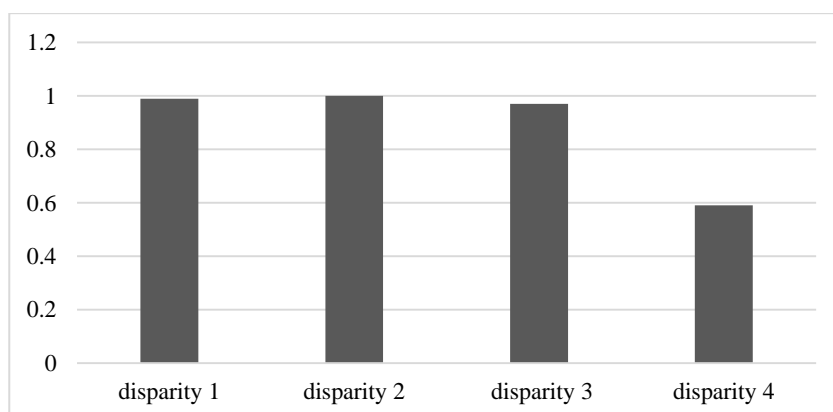
*Figure 8.13.* The predictor importance of four disparities

According to the result of Twostep cluster analysis, Cluster 1 was composed of 30 participants with current perceptions better than previous assumptions towards local students. The value of the four gaps ranged from 0.17 to 1.37. Cluster 2 was composed of 53 participants with previous assumptions about local students better than current perceptions. The value of four gaps ranged from -1.91 to -0.79. There were 66 participants in Cluster 3 whose current perceptions and previous assumptions about local students were associated with a relatively slight difference, ranging from -0.41to -0.08. (Figure 8.14). The cluster membership was saved as a new categorical variable for subsequent analysis.



*Figure 8.14.*Twostep model summary of disparities between pre-, and in-service assumptions-perceptions relating to students

### 8.3.3 Participant clustering based on involvements in accord with EGRT values

Twostep cluster analysis was performed on the four indicators germane to involvements in accord with EGRT values. During the interviews, participants noted involvements based on EGRT values. For example, "up to now, I have not given up any student in my class irrespective of their performances", " I paid much more attention to students' holistic development rather than examination scores", or/and "I consistently applied the principle of teaching as leadership into my interaction with local students". Hence, four indicators (v19-v22 in the Table 8.1) were designed to gauge diverse aspects of involvements in accord with EGRT values. Twostep cluster analysis was conducted with group participants according to their responses to the four indicators. As Figure 8.15 showed, the Silhouette measure of cohesion and separation suggests a fair quality of a two-cluster solution.

**Model Summary**

| Algorithm | TwoStep |
|-----------|---------|
| Inputs | 4 |
| Clusters | 2 |

**Cluster Quality**



*Figure 8.15.* Cluster quality of involvements in accord with EGRT values

As for each indicator's contribution to participant grouping, v19 (No matter how students perform, I do not give up my expectation of any of them while working in my placement school) contributed most. In contrast, v16 (Instead of focusing on exam scores, I put most of my time and efforts into local students' holistic development, e.g. independent thinking, critical thinking, and teamwork while working in my placement school) was relatively the least important predictor in classifying participants. See Figure 8.16.
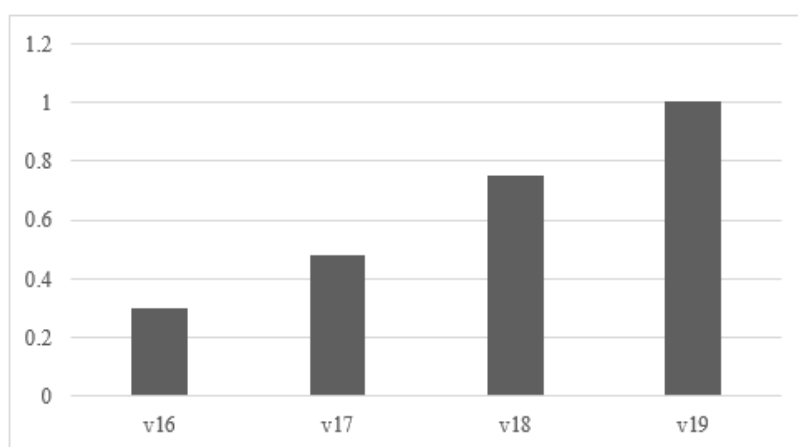


*Figure 8.16.* The predictor importance of involvement in accord with EGRT values

According to the result of Twostep cluster analysis, Cluster 2 was composed of 67 participants with relatively stronger responses to getting involved in accord with EGRT values, with the mean score of each indicator ranging from 4.24 to 4.58. Cluster 1 was composed of 82 participants with relatively weaker responses, with the mean score of each indicator ranging from 3.02 to 3.78. The ratio size (the largest cluster to smallest cluster) was 1.22 (see Figure 8.17). The cluster membership was saved as a new categorical variable for subsequent analysis.

*Figure 8.17.* Twostep model summary of involvement in accord with EGRT values.

### 8.3.4 Validate the cluster solution

Based on participants' responses to reasons consonant with EGRT values, disparities of pre- and in-service assumptions-perceptions relating to local students, and performances in accord with EGRT valu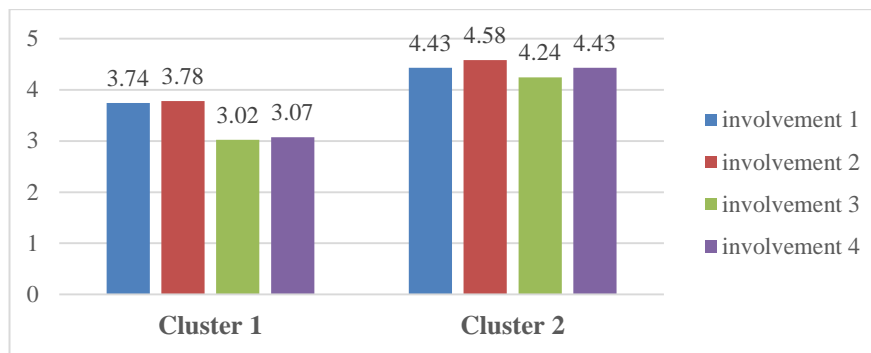es, the participants were grouped into two clusters, three clusters and two clusters in three domains respectively. One index of the good validity of a cluster solution was that segments are distinguishable. That is to say, clusters show significantly different means in the indicator variables (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011). To validate the cluster solution, Independent Samples T-test and ANOVA were employed to compare cluster means in each domain.

As for the domain of reasons consonant with EGRT values (Domain1), two clusters were generated based on participants' responses to seven indicators. Results from Independent Samples T-tests show statistically significant difference between the two clusters in all the seven variables, with the mean scores of cluster 1 significantly higher than those of cluster 2 (see Table 8.3).

Table 8.3

*Independent Samples T-test: Domain1 (reasons consonant with EGRT values)*

| Indicator | Cluster 1 | | | Cluster2 | | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | SD | n | M | SD | n | | | |
| v1 | 4.26 | .70 | 68 | 3.17 | 1.02 | 81 | 7.45 | 147 | .000 |
| v2 | 3.94 | .93 | 68 | 2.62 | 1.08 | 81 | 8.05 | 146.90 | .000 |
| v3 | 4.04 | .70 | 68 | 2.83 | .97 | 81 | 8.86 | 143.86 | .000 |
| v4 | 4.44 | .67 | 68 | 3.58 | .93 | 81 | 6.89 | 132.60 | .000 |
| v5 | 3.97 | .90 | 68 | 2.93 | 1.22 | 81 | 6.00 | 145.55 | .000 |
| v6 | 4.54 | .61 | 68 | 3.72 | 1.09 | 81 | 5.85 | 129.45 | .000 |
| v7 | 4.57 | .53 | 68 | 3.85 | 1.04 | 81 | 5.47 | 122.87 | .000 |

Regarding disparities of pre- and in-service assumptions-perceptions relating to local students (Domain 2), survey participants were divided into three groups. Participants in Cluster 1 (n = 30) perceived that local students were better than they previously assumed regarding knowledge base, learning ability, learning motivation and moral behaviours. In contrast, participants in Cluster 2 (n = 53) and Cluster 3 (n = 66) considered local students to be worse than they had expected. The reported negative disparity was wider in Cluster 2 than in Cluster 3. ANOVA was used to compare the three clusters in terms of the disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions regarding students' knowledge base (Disparity 1), students' learning ability (Disparity 2), students' learning motivation (Disparity 3), and students' moral behaviours (Disparity 4). Results from ANOVA showed in Table 8.4 statistically significant difference between the three clusters in all of the four aspects.

Table 8.4

*One-Way ANOVA: Domain 2 (disparities relating to local students)*

| Indicator | Between groups | | Within groups | | F | Post Hoc Test |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean square | df | Mean square | df | | |
| Disparity 1 | 87.21 | 2 | 68.95 | 146 | 92.33* | Cluster 1 > Cluster 2* Cluster 1> Cluster 3* Cluster 3 > Cluster 2* |
| Disparity 2 | 93.85 | 2 | 72.96 | 146 | 93.91* | Cluster 1 > Cluster 2* Cluster 1> Cluster 3* Cluster 3 > Cluster 2* |
| Disparity 3 | 125.22 | 2 | 101.32 | 146 | 90.22* | Cluster 1 > Cluster 2* Cluster 3 > Cluster 2* |
| Disparity 4 | 65.74 | 2 | 103.90 | 146 | 46.19* | Cluster 1 > Cluster 2* Cluster 1> Cluster 3* Cluster 3 > Cluster 2* |

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

Regarding involvement in accord with EGRT values (Domain 3), survey participants were grouped into two clusters. Compared to participants in Cluster 1, those in Cluster 2 were involving themselves in disadvantaged schools in more accord with EGRT values. Independent Samples T-test was used to compare the two clusters in each of the four indicators for EGRT core values. The two clusters present statistically significant difference in each indicator (see Table 8.5).

Table 8.5

*Independent Samples T-test: Domain 3 (involvement in accord with EGRT values)*

| Indicator | Cluster 1 | | | Cluster2 | | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | SD | n | M | SD | n | | | |
| **v16** | 3.74 | .72 | 82 | 4.43 | .52 | 67 | 7.45 | 147 | .000 |
| **v17** | 3.78 | .90 | 82 | 4.58 | .56 | 67 | 8.05 | 146.90 | .000 |
| **v18** | 3.02 | .74 | 82 | 4.24 | .68 | 67 | 8.86 | 143.86 | .000 |
| **v19** | 3.07 | .89 | 82 | 4.43 | .66 | 67 | 6.89 | 132.60 | .000 |

Since section 8.3.4 shows that the validity of clustering in each domain was good, and since each indicator was significantly different between the clusters under comparison, Section 8.4 proceeds to test the hypotheses posed at the beginning of the chapter.

## 8.4 HYPOTHESIS TESTING RESULTS

To reiterate, Research Question 4 examines the relationships between reasons consonant with EGRT values, disparities of assumptions-perceptions relating to local students, and involvements in accord with EGRT values. Accordingly two null hypotheses are posed:

> $H_0 1$. *Reasons consonant with EGRT values have no statistically significant impact on fellows' involvement in accord with EGRT values in disadvantaged schools.*
>
> $H_0 2$. *Disparities between fellows' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions of students have no statistically significant impact on fellows' involvement in accord with EGRT values in disadvantaged schools.*

In the previous section, participants were grouped through cluster analysis. As for reasons consonant with EGRT values, two groups were created. Compared with Cluster 2, Cluster 1 consisted of participants who were more inclined to recognize core values of EGRT than those in Cluster 2. For involvement in accord with EGRT values, participants were classified into two groups. Participants in Cluster 2 were more inclined to proactively apply EGRT values in their involvement in placement schools. After grouping participants into different clusters, new categorical variables were generated in SPSS 23. Then statistical significance between categorical variables was analysed as follows.

According to the result of the Chi-square test, the relationship between reasons consonant with EGRT values and involvements in accord with EGRT values was significant ($\chi^2$=13.90, df = 1, n = 149, $p$<0.01). Participants with stronger reasons consonant with EGRT values were 3.65 times more likely to apply EGRT values in their involvement in placement schools than those with weaker reasons consonant with EGRT values. Therefore, $H_0 1$ was rejected in favour of the conclusion that reasons consonant with EGRT values had a statistically significant impact on involvement in accord with EGRT values in disadvantaged schools. In other words, participants with stronger reasons consonant with EGRT values were more likely to engage in involvement in accord with EGRT values, and vice versa.

The same method of testing $H_0 1$ was applied in $H_0 2$. In terms of between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions about local students, participants were grouped into three clusters. Cluster 1 consisted of participants whose perceptions of local students were more positive than their pre-service assumptions. Cluster 2 consisted of participants whose perceptions were more negative than their pre-service assumptions. Cluster 3 consisted of participants whose pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions were only associated with a minor gap, with the latter marginally lower than the former. In order to test $H_0 2$, a Chi-square test was performed and no relationship was found between assumption-perception disparities and involvements in accord with EGRT values ($\chi^2$=3.89, df=2, n=149, $p$=.14). That is to say, the disparities between pre- and in-service assumptions-perceptions relating to local students are not associated with their involvement in accord with EGRT values in placement schools. There was not adequate statistical evidence to reject $H_0 2$.

## 8.5 ARE THE FINDINGS CONSISTENT?

For the quantitative results, most findings were consistent with those of the qualitative phase. First, the demographic information of the qualitative phase (14 interview participants) was similar to that of the qualitative phase (149 online questionnaire respondents). It indicated that EGRT participants were homogenous in various aspects, especially with respect to their educational backgrounds. Most of the EGRT participants were consistent academic winners who were successfully enrolled by local key senior secondary schools and prestigious universities of China. In addition, EGRT fellows were from both rural and urban areas. Based on the biographies of the 14 interview participants, it is clear that although none of them had

financial burdens, two rural participants expressed some financial concerns while no urban counterparts did, which might indicate that the SES of urban interview participants was higher than that of their rural counterparts. Then an independent Samples-T test was used to check whether there was significant difference in family socioeconomic status between 88 rural fellows and 61 urban fellows. In terms of how to calculate socioeconomic status, it is well accepted that three factors be used: parents' level of education, parents' occupation and income (Ren, 2010Tamara, Syndall, & Justine, 2009). More specifically, parents' education can be indicated by how many years of formal education they had received. Additionally, a value was assigned to each occupation based on the classification of the *Research Report on Social Stratum in Contemporary China* (Lu, 2002). Three dimensions to scale socioeconomic status of EGRT respondents were all continuous variables. All these continuous variables were standardized through SPSS 23. The socioeconomic status was the mean of standardised family income, standardised father's years of education, standardised mother's years of education, standardised father's occupation and standardised mother's occupation. According to the result of SPSS 23, the statistically significant value ($t_{(147)} = -3.14$, $p = 0.02$) suggests that the SES of urban fellows' families (M =.13, SD = .44, N = 61) was significantly higher than that of their rural counterparts (M = -.09, SD = .40, N = 88). The effect size (r =.06) shows that the difference of SES between rural and urban EGRT fellows was small. That is to say, although the SES of EGRT fellows from rural areas was lower than that of their urban counterparts, the difference was quite minor.

Second, Chapter Six showed that there were many disparities between pre- and in-service assumptions-perceptions about local students, specifically, in respect to knowledge base, learning ability, learning motivation and moral behaviour. When these findings were made into indicators of the questionnaire, the results of the Paired-Sample T-test demonstrated significant prior-after differences of the four aspects. Chapter Six also indicated that the deficit thinking of perceived disparities was common among fellows, even those who originally came from rural areas. In Chapter Eight, three clusters were spontaneously generated through Twostep cluster analysis. EGRT respondents in Cluster 1 were those who assumed students were better than they had assumed in knowledge base, learning abilities, learning motivation and moral behaviours. Respondents in Cluster 2 and Cluster 3 had opposite perceptions, with a

larger and smaller gap respectively. Then the Chi-square was applied to test the relationship between EGRT fellows' family origins and disparities. As the result of the Chi-square test shows, no relationship was found between EGRT fellows' family origins and disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions ($\chi$2=.51, df=2, n=149, p=.78). That is to say, whether EGRT participants were from rural or urban areas of China did not have an impact on the disparities. The results echoed findings in Chapter Six.

Third, the qualitative phase from Chapter Five to Chapter Seven revealed three crucial aspects of participants' experience from prestigious universities to disadvantaged schools through EGRT participation. The three chapters discussed EGRT participation reasons prior to EGRT service, disparities between pre-service expectations and in-service perceptions, and involvement in accord with EGRT values in service respectively. These three aspects unfolded across time and space in the course of EGRT participation. The first aspect emerged when graduates from prestigious universities participated in EGRT. The second aspect mainly emerged during the transition periods when they first arrived in disadvantaged schools. The third aspect emerged during the EGRT service period in rural schools. As revealed in Chapter Seven, a possible relationship presented among reasons consonant with EGRT values, the pre- and in-service disparities of assumptions-perceptions relating to local students, and involvements as EGRT fellows. However, although the pre- and in-service disparities of assumptions-perceptions relating to local students were widely mentioned by interview participants, it was hard to statistically indicate the relationship between these disparities and subsequent involvement in placement schools. These findings were also consistent with results of the testing of the two hypotheses.

# Chapter 9: Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter discusses the study's findings, which were presented in Chapters 5-8. The discussion addresses the social phenomenon of the transition of elite graduates of prestigious universities as they become teachers in disadvantaged schools. The discussion draws upon findings about EGRT fellows' experience with regard to (1) the fellows' decisions to join EGRT; (2) disparities between the fellows' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions about teaching in disadvantaged schools; (3) the realization of EGRT values in fellows' involvement in disadvantaged schools; and (4) relationships amongst reasons consonant with EGRT values; disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions of students in disadvantaged schools; and involvement in accord with EGRT values.

In this Chapter Nine, Section 9.1 provides further theoretical discussion of the EGRT fellows' experiences, drawing on Bourdieu's thinking tools of capital, habitus and field. Section 9.2 emphasizes three main contributions of the study from theoretical, methodological, and practical perspectives. Section 9.3 presents limitations of the study. Section 9.4 offers some suggestions for future studies. The last section concludes the study with a succinct summary of fellows' main participation experience through EGRT, an initiative of an alternative teacher preparation pathway in the landscape of teacher education in China, and reflections on this kind of program that may be of broader interest.

## 9.1 DISCUSSION

Bourdieu's classic formula [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice (Bourdieu, 1989, 101) outlines—in general rather than mathematically literal terms—how social practice is generated. The three critical aspects of EGRT participation experience are viewed as individual social practice which comprises (1) the fellows' decisions to join EGRT; (2) disparities between the fellows' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions about teaching in disadvantaged schools; and (3) the realization of EGRT values in fellows' involvement in disadvantaged schools.

These social practices are then interpreted through Bourdieu's triad of capital, habitus and field. In this chapter, individual social practices are brought together and

revisited through the lens of Bourdieu's equation. The fellows' main EGRT participation experiences are then re-classified as forms of practice based on *connections* between the field of relative educational advantage and the field of relative educational disadvantage; practice based on *divides* between the field of relative educational advantage and the field of relative educational disadvantage; and practice based on *imperfect mediation effects* across fields. To this end, this section first maps the three fields which emerged from the analyses reported in this thesis, and then further explains EGRT fellows' social practices through transition within the three fields.

### 9.1.1 Fields in this study

Bourdieu observed that the limit of a field was hard to pre-define, therefore, he suggested that "the boundaries of the field can only be determined by an empirical investigation" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, 100). In the case of this research, the data analysis conducted in both the qualitative and quantitative phases identified three fields. They were the field of relative educational advantage, the field of relative educational disadvantage, and the field of mediation.

The education system of China has three main sectors: compulsory education (six years of primary and three years of junior secondary schooling), senior secondary education (three years), and higher education. As introduced in Chapter One, a new order of social stratification and even polarization seems to have penetrated the fields of education, owing to the transformation from the plan-oriented to the market-oriented economy. The unequal distribution of educational resources in all three sectors was the result of the combination of decentralization and centralization. As for compulsory education, the policy of decentralization was implemented, which means compulsory schooling mainly relies on local financial support (Dethier, 2000; Yang, Huang, & Liu, 2014). Accordingly, the rural and urban economic dichotomy also shapes a rural-urban divide in education (Wang, 2016); and rural schools lag behind their urban counterparts. Therefore, urban schools generally stand in a privileged position within the compulsory education system.

In terms of senior secondary schooling (Year 9 to Year 12), owing to the limited quantity of quality educational resources available after the massive political turbulence of the last century, educational sectors were reconstructed to serve the country's economic development goals. In order to achieve the goals in an effective

way, available resources were concentrated as an investment in a small number of key schools. Compared with other schools, these key schools were therefore superior in both infrastructure and teacher quality. Therefore, a hierarchical senior secondary education system was established, comprised of key and non-key schools. A few county level key schools notwithstanding, most key schools were located in urban areas. Meanwhile, under the influence of similar guidelines and the logic of educational resource centralization, a small number of universities were selected, by Project 985 and Project 211, for extra resourcing as the prestigious universities of China.

Therefore, with the policy of educational decentralization and centralization as discussed in Chapter One, and in line with the analysis results in subsequent chapters, the field of education in China has come to present a polarized pattern. More specifically, urban schools at the compulsory level, key senior secondary schools, and universities entitled by the 985 and 211 Projects to extra funding, have come to constitute a field of relative educational advantage (top circle in Figure 9.1). This field is a sub-field of the field of education in China. Prestigious universities are located in top position of this field. In contrast, rural schools, non-key secondary senior schools, and universities excluded by the 211 and 985 Projects, constitute the field of relative educational disadvantage (bottom circle in *Figure 9.1*), another sub-field of the field of education in China.
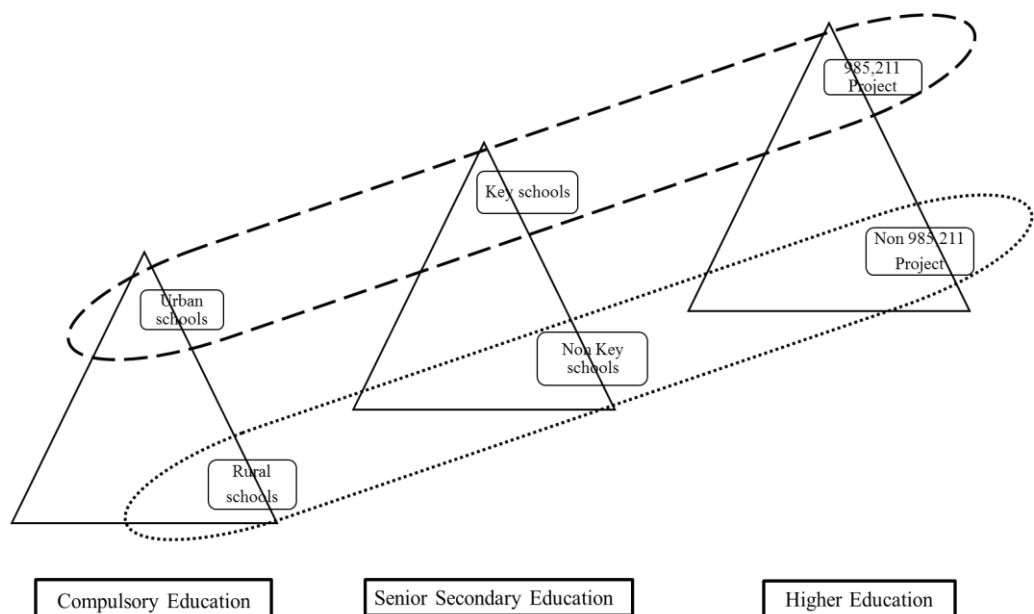


*Figure 9.1.* The sub-fields of field of education defined by this study

Since both the field of relative educational advantage and the field of relative educational disadvantage belong to the field of education, the subfields share some principles of the larger field (Grenfell & James, 1998). To begin with, both sub-fields recognize the value of a higher education degree. Despite diploma inflation, the degrees awarded by prestigious universities are more likely to be prized for their scarcity when employers set university prestige as a mark of distinction and a criterion in the competitive labour market (Li, 2013). Therefore, the prestige of a higher education degree is pursued by social agents in both the field of relative educational advantage and the field of relative educational disadvantage. On one hand, students in the field of relative disadvantage tend to compete hard for positions in the field of relative educational advantage, with the ultimate aim of entry into the prestigious university. On the other hand, for most rural schools, which usually suffer from staffing difficulties, the arrival of graduates from prestigious universities is somewhat unexpected and generally valued as an opportunity for the school and students. These shared similarities might constitute the base of human resource delivery effected by EGRT.

Furthermore, the co-existence of the educational ideologies of examination-orientation and quality-orientation approaches exists across the sub-fields of the larger field of education. Specifically, owing to the limited availability of quality educational resources, the positions occupied in the field of relative educational advantage by institutional and individual agents are very competitive; which means that both rural and urban students have to face fierce competition with peers in order to secure the most advantageous positions. Generally speaking, there are two main opportunities for students to realize a field transition between the subfields of advantage and disadvantage. These occur in the form of two significant high-stakes examinations. The first of these is the entrance examination to senior secondary schools organized by local educational authorities, and the second, the National College Entrance Examination, organized by the central government. The winners of these two examinations are admitted by key senior secondary schools and prestigious universities respectively (see *Figure 9.2*). Examination-oriented education has been traditionally pervasive across the field of education in China, but is even more entrenched in rural areas owing to rural students' more limited chances of entering the field of relative educational advantage.

Quality-oriented education, which is opposed to examination-oriented education, has received wide public support and recognition in contemporary China. Given sweeping curriculum reforms, this educational ideology has gradually filtered into people's mindsets, whether in urban or rural areas (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). In urban areas, quality-oriented education has been implemented to various degrees, but examination-oriented education remains pervasive given the limited educational resources on offer to the population. In rural areas, although examination-oriented education is dominant and schools in rural areas have not stepped into the field of quality-oriented education, it is an approach that is nonetheless very familiar to rural principals and teachers.
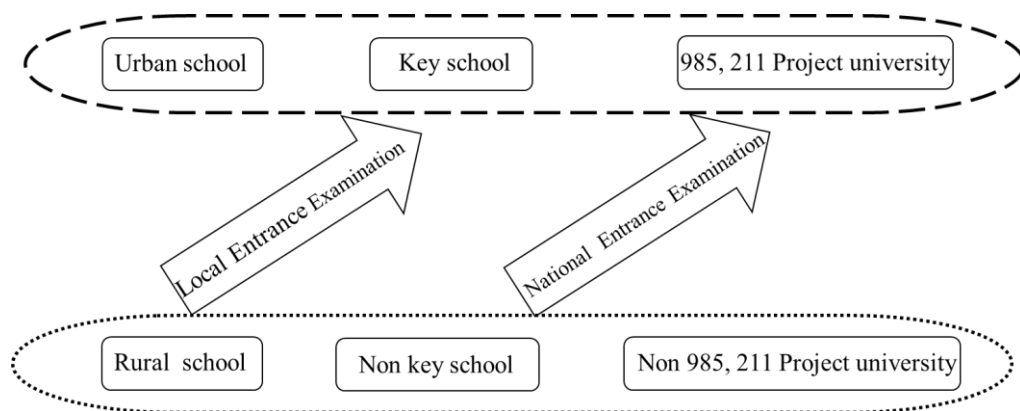


*Figure 9.2.* Field transition through entrance examinations

However, as two distinct subfields, the fields of relative educational disadvantage and relative educational advantage are different in various aspects. Compared with the former field, the field of relative educational advantage has various privileges. First, in terms of geographical location, it mostly exists in urban areas. Second, the largest amount of financial support is put into this field at both local and national levels, resulting in higher quality teachers and superior facilities. Third, priorities in recruiting the highest examination achievers mainly occur in the field of relative educational advantage. That is to say, this field becomes a colony of the best teachers and students. Fourth, graduates from the field of relative educational advantage are more welcome and better positioned in the labour market, which in turn raises the reputation of this educational field. In short, the field of relative educational advantage is part of a virtuous circle. Concomitantly, the field of relative educational disadvantage has become increasingly weakened in a vicious circle. Since the boundary between these two educational subfields has become more explicit,

transition between the fields has become increasingly difficult, even though the entrance examinations of both senior secondary schools and colleges seem to offer every candidate the opportunity for merit-based selection. Evidence from both the extant literature and the data collected for the research reported in this thesis shows that students from the field of relative educational disadvantage are less likely to be enrolled by key secondary senior schools and prestigious universities.

Both the qualitative and quantitative data have shown that most of the EGRT fellows were consistent winners in two significant entrance examinations. Although some might have initially attended rural primary and junior secondary schools, they successfully transitioned to the field of relative educational advantage through outstanding examination scores. That is to say, most of the EGRT fellows had been in the field of relative educational advantage for a long time. For these elite students, with the rich reserves of cultural, social and symbolic capital they had accrued, many lucrative employment opportunities in the high-end labour market were within their reach at the point of graduation; they stood at the top of the field of relative educational advantage. However, they chose to work for the field of relative educational disadvantage (see *Figure 9.3*). They seemed to make an irrational choice, and it is the EGRT as a field of mediation that enabled that to happen.
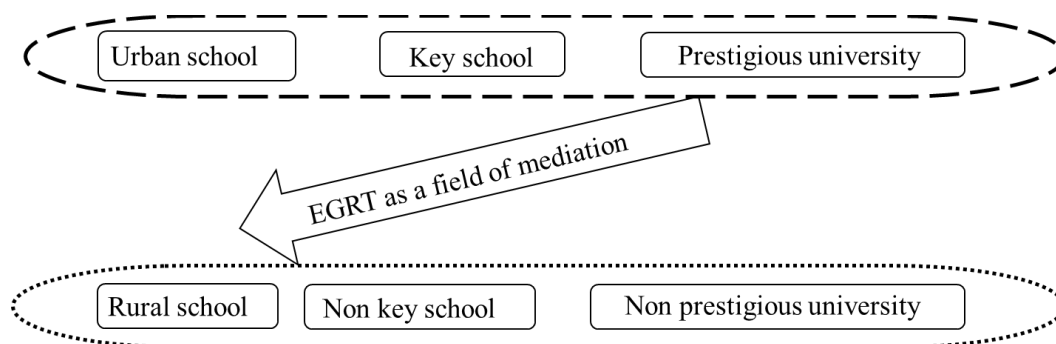


*Figure 9.3.* Field transition through the field of mediation

In this study, EGRT operated as a field of mediation which successfully delivered social agents located at the top of the field of relative educational advantage (graduates from prestigious universities) to the bottom of the field of relative educational disadvantage (disadvantaged rural schools). Without a field of mediation, these two fields would seldom, if ever, communicate with each other in this way. The field of mediation takes advantage of shared commonalities of the larger field and aims to decrease—even eradicate—divides between the two subfields. Thus, in conclusion,

it is suggested that fellows' EGRT participation experiences, can be understood to be productive as practice based on field *connections*, practice based on field *divides*, and practice based on *imperfect mediation effects*.

### 9.1.2 Practice based on field connections

According to the data analysis, since the fields of relative educational advantage and disadvantage both belong to the field of education, the two sub-fields share some commonalities. Hence, on one hand, EGRT fellows are able to mobilise their accrued capitals in the field of relative educational advantage, which could then reproduce in the field of relative educational disadvantage. On the other hand, some of their previous habitus could also fit in the new field, especially that of EGRT fellows from rural areas.

First, the opportunities for EGRT fellows to teach in disadvantaged schools without any teaching training or experience is evidence of the recognition of the symbolic capital of EGRT fellows. Since prestigious universities are often the ultimate target for most students, whether from rural or urban areas, or key or non-key schools, the prestige and high ranking of a university is a powerful form of symbolic capital in the field of education in China. That is to say, the ownership of a prestigious university degree is appreciated in both the field of relative educational advantage and the field of relative educational disadvantage. Therefore, as some EGRT interview participants reported, generally speaking they were welcomed and respected by local principals and teachers—at first, at least. Indeed, EGRT fellows usually enjoyed the sobriquet 'young talents' (高材生). Therefore, EGRT fellows as social agents usually assumed a privileged position, especially on arrival in their placement schools. As Bourdieu and Thompson (1991) argue, social agents "possess power in proportion to their symbolic capital, i.e., in proportion to the recognition they receive from a group" (p.106). Although many disparities were gradually perceived as interactions in disadvantaged schools accumulated, as revealed in Chapter Six, EGRT fellows usually experienced a sort of honeymoon period at the beginning of their service, enjoying local respect and a sense of self-superiority.

Second, some embodied cultural capital, including that relating to quality-oriented education and examination-oriented education, were valued in the fields of both relative educational advantage and disadvantage. More specifically, although

quality-oriented education had not yet been implemented by rural local schools, as reported by EGRT fellows and relevant literature, this educational ideology had been widely accepted (Wu, 2016). Since most extracurricular projects initiated by EGRT fellows were in nature guided by quality-oriented education ideology, permission was granted to the fellows by the local principals to enact those projects, which was a sign of their recognition of quality-oriented education. Therefore, 13 of the 14 fellows successfully conducted various quality-oriented extracurricular activities. Ren's principal even actively invited her to create a library for students' extensive reading, taking advantage of her expertise and resources. Despite the low participation rate of local teachers, these practices were often recognized by the rural schools, in the sense that they could only happen with the explicit agreement of local principals.

In addition to the extracurricular projects, all EGRT interview participants were able to apply quality-oriented teaching pedagogies and methods in their classes, as evidenced in Chapter Seven. In this situation, they were able to mobilise their previous embodied cultural capital, relevant to quality-oriented education, with the intention of cultivating local students' independent thinking, critical thinking and other abilities celebrated by the field of relative educational advantage and the field of the labour market. Among these practices, especially in extra-curricular projects, EGRT fellows introduced external educational resources, including some social celebrities, famous professors and their elite peers into their placement schools. In doing this, they attempted to make full use of their accrued social capital to build connections between elite and rural students. Meanwhile, their own social connections with that elite were further strengthened and reproduced.

Apart from embodied cultural capital regarding quality-oriented education, most of the EGRT fellows were highly skilled achievers in examinations. Through their own experience, they were experienced in obtaining high marks in examinations, both locally and nationally. As Long reported, over the course of a decade's struggle, from primary to senior secondary school, he had accumulated knowledge and skills relevant to coping with examinations. He was therefore able to apply this embodied cultural capital regarding examination-oriented education to his classroom teaching; and did so to good effect. Therefore, owing to the commonalities of the two sub-fields of relative educational advantage and disadvantage, the symbolic capital and embodied

cultural capital previously accrued by the fellows was appreciated and operationalised during their EGRT service.

Third, owing to existing transition opportunities from the field of relative educational disadvantage to the field of relative educational advantage, EGRT fellows of rural origin had transited to the latter field. When they considered students in their placement schools, the proximity of their habitus to that of these rural students was easily sparked. For example, when Na and Ying talked about their reasons for EGRT participation, the desire to give-back to rural education was key; and fellows coming originally from the field of relative educational disadvantage, such as Min, tended to not easily give up on any student. They tended to regard students in disadvantaged schools as being in some way kindred to their young selves.

### 9.1.3 Practice based on field divides

As shown in previous research and in the data analyses presented in this thesis, huge divides have opened up between the field of relative educational advantage and the field of relative educational disadvantage. The lack of fit between habitus and field, and capital and field have been identified in this study. Bourdieu asserted that habitus is shaped through internalization of the structures of external fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Since EGRT fellows were those who mostly stayed in the field of relative educational advantage, their habitus might not match a different field. Although some came originally from the field of relative educational disadvantage, they had successfully transited to the field of relative educational advantage. During this process, new layers had been built into their original habitus. That is, the structures of the field of relative educational advantage had become embedded in their habitus. This phenomenon has been revealed elsewhere, for example in the early teacher career experiences of pre-service teachers of working-class origin (Lampert, Burnett, & Comber, 2013). Despite the sediments of their habitus originally formed in more disadvantaged conditions, such teachers might feel somewhat like fish out of water after entering a different field. Against the pressure of rural schooling, with its emphasis on examination scores, the habitus of EGRT fellows was somewhat out of place; even those of rural origin experienced some sense of disjuncture, feeling in effect like "fish out of water" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

As habitus is "a system of durable, transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu, 1977b, p. 72), educational ideology could be viewed as part of habitus in the field of education.

The habitus of the understanding of good education cultivated through a previous field in this case ran counter to the logic of the new field. Based on their descriptions of an ideal education, the fellows were clearly committed to quality-oriented education and to equality of access to this. However, in the field of relative educational disadvantage, the logic was that of examination-oriented education. Limited resources were concentrated on outstanding examination performers at the cost of other students. Therefore, when their quality-oriented teaching could not statistically improve students' examination scores, or their extra-curricular projects took time that students might have used to prepare for the examinations, the fellows' work and efforts ceased to be valued and respected by their placement schools. It was no wonder that strongly negative emotional words were used by EGRT interviewees as they spoke of being "frustrated" and "disappointed" when their practices were not understood or supported by their placement schools.

In addition to the mismatch between their previous habitus of educational ideology and the new field, the classificatory scheme of habitus contributed to many of the disparities of assumptions-perceptions experienced by EGRT fellows. When the fellows from the field of relative educational advantage entered the field of relative educational disadvantage, their classificatory scheme began to work. Owing to the superiority of the field of relative educational advantage, as previous members of this field, the fellows tended to pre-define the local students as inferior, in terms of both academic outcomes and non-academic abilities, especially compared with their urban counterparts. Meanwhile, they had believed that local students would be innocent children, motivated to learn. With respect to local teachers, the participants (9 out of 14) generally assumed that they would be incompetent and incapable. These assumptions about local students and local teachers were produced by the classificatory schemes of habitus, which pre-set what local students and local teachers 'should' be. As a result, a large amount of deficit thinking was generated and hindered the fellows' transition between different fields.

The disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions were therefore easily generated. The assumptions were habitus sediments, structured by the fellows' trajectories through and positions in another sub-field and larger fields. Therefore, they did not always match the realities of the field of relative educational disadvantage. After they entered their placement schools, the fellows perceived that

the local students' knowledge base and learning abilities were worse than they had assumed. Moreover, the students were not motivated to learn nor well-behaved morally. On the other hand, local teachers' performances seemed to be unexpectedly good. As proposed in Chapter Six, structured by the logic of examination-oriented education in the field of relative educational disadvantage, several unique advantages of the local teachers stood out: they were familiar with the cognitive and psychological development of the local students and local educational contexts; they had developed and accumulated effective pedagogies for improving examination scores; they had strong classroom management skills for disciplining students; they were fluent in local dialects and able to use this to help students better understand content and to better control student behaviour. All this knowledge and these skills were highly valued, informing the positions of the teachers in the field. They constituted what has been named in this study as 'localized pedagogical capital'.

Compared with local teachers, especially those who were outstanding and experienced, most EGRT fellows lacked the localized pedagogical capital valued in the field of relative educational disadvantage. This might have led some of them to gradually lose their initial privileged position, as occurred in the case of the colleague whose plight was described by Long. In this situation, EGRT fellows' own personal impact was far less than they had imagined it would be before entry into the field. Therefore, local parents became a newly emerging scapegoat for EGRT fellows to blame. Many participants reported that they had not thought about the local parents' role in education; however, they now recognized the significance of family education, and concluded that local parents should take more responsibility for students' low academic performances and other undesirable non-academic behaviours. These findings echo previous studies about other alternative teacher preparation programs, like Teach for America and Teach First U.K., where participants struggled to successfully locate local students' strengths. Instead, they ultimately began to blame the locals. This shifting of blame arose as the programs failed to solve what can be understood as systemic inequalities in the field of education (Kavanagh & Dunn, 2013; Smart, et al., 2009).

### 9.1.4 Practice based on imperfect mediation effect

As revealed in sections 9.1.2 and 9.1.3, the practice of EGRT was relevant to commonalities and divides between the field of relative educational advantage and the

field of relative educational disadvantage. In this context, EGRT represented a field of mediation, to successfully negotiate two fields in a reverse transition direction. Through the field of mediation (EGRT), social agents positioned at the top of the field of relative educational advantage voluntarily chose to locate themselves at the bottom of the field of relative educational disadvantage. During this process, EGRT sometimes performed well as a bridge between the two different fields; but not always. Thus, this mediation seemed to be imperfect, as emerged through EGRT fellows' accounts of their experiences.

On the one hand, some positive experiences reported by EGRT fellows could be attributed to EGRT mediation between the field of relative educational advantage and the field of relative educational disadvantage. To begin with, EGRT seemed to negotiate successfully the field of relative educational advantage as it successfully recruited elite graduates from prestigious universities. The participants in this study tended to view EGRT as a "high-end" program because of the strict selection process and fierce competition. Only a small number of applicants ultimately win positions as EGRT fellows. Therefore, being an EGRT fellow itself is a symbol of elite achievement—this was abundantly clear when participants talked about their program participation. In addition to the impact of EGRT's sophisticated marketing strategies, the fellows' altruistic habitus and entrepreneurial habitus could be simultaneously satisfied: through helping students in disadvantaged schools, and through taking advantage of the resources offered by EGRT. When asked whether there was any disparity between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions, interview participants mentioned local students, teachers, and parents. It is notable that they did not identify any disparities of assumptions-perceptions relating to EGRT staff or their EGRT peers. Most reported that EGRT had turned out to be what they had assumed it to be: a field of idealistic and intelligent people who strove consistently to achieve the program goals.

On the other hand, some problems related to EGRT mediation were reported. First, the promotion of the EGRT program had some bias. Students in placement schools were represented by images designed to attract elite graduates of prestigious universities. In these representations, which tug at the heart strings, rural students were cute kids with shining eyes; construed as innocent children, with low academic achievement due to the constraints of low socioeconomic status, but with a strong

desire for knowledge. In contrast, EGRT fellows were represented as exceptional graduates and future young leaders with social responsibilities. These representations deliberately targeted social agents in the field of relative educational advantage. Quite a few of the interview participants (e.g. Shuang, Feng and Ren) mentioned that they were attracted by these promotional materials; however, the material might exacerbate the sense of superiority that had been shaped in the field of relative educational advantage. Therefore, when EGRT fellows arrived in placement schools, they were surprised to find that local students were not like those who had appeared in the promotion materials.

A second problem related to EGRT mediation was that the short training organized by EGRT, lasting five weeks, seemed to impart - or at least reinforce - deficit thinking in the fellows' mindsets. As interview participants like Wei revealed, before the fellows entered their placement schools, some of the EGRT alumni who were involved in the program as mentors told new fellows to lower their expectations of local students, and that those students deserved more severe discipline than EGRT would allow. As shown in the data, this deficit thinking towards local students was pervasive among the fellows. Moreover, their training did not equip them with reflexivity, the capacity to reflect on the relative positioning of institutions, teachers and students in the education system. As Stonebruner (2018) pointed out, limited time was provided for reflection in this short-term intensive training. Furthermore, little in the way of a sociological perspective was provided to enable fellows to understand their own privileges and the social dynamics undermining educational equality. It is not surprising, perhaps, that only one interview participant, Xiang, expressed any degree of reflection on how lucky he had been in contrast to local students. There were no glimmerings of such thinking on the part of other fellows.

A third problem, as reported in both the qualitative and quantitative results, was that some EGRT fellows were inclined to adhere to EGRT values and apply them in their work in placement schools; in contrast, some of the other EGRT fellows discarded - or at least partly discarded - EGRT values in their service. That is to say, EGRT values were not fully or consistently implemented during the two years' service. This suggests that the principles and rules of EGRT were not totally appropriate to negotiating the field of relative educational advantage and the field of relative educational disadvantage. The core EGRT values appeared to talk more to the field of

relative educational advantage, in terms of quality-oriented education and an ideal of educational egalitarianism, but less to the field of relative educational disadvantage. Besides, the originally different field structures, principles and resources made it hard for fellows to apply core EGRT values while involved in their placement schools. Therefore, as noted in Chapter Eight, only those with high recognition of EGRT values as reasons for their EGRT participation could mostly adhere to core EGRT values during their service. It can therefore be said that the proximity of the values of social agents from the field of relative educational advantage to those of the field of mediation significantly influenced practice in the field of relative educational disadvantage.

## 9.2 CONTRIBUTIONS

By dint of the imbalanced distribution of good quality teachers, a global initiative has been emerging recently to recruit exceptional graduates of prestigious universities to teach in disadvantaged schools. In this context, EGRT—a newly emerging and increasingly popular alternative teacher recruitment program in China—has received little research attention. Therefore, equipped with Bourdieu's thinking tools of capital, habitus and field, this study adopted an exploratory sequential mixed method to explore EGRT fellows' experiences of how exceptional graduates of prestigious universities become rural teachers in disadvantaged schools. From this research, three main contributions have been made: empirical-theoretical, methodological and practical. Each is now addressed in turn.

### 9.2.1 Originality and contribution to new knowledge

This study mainly makes three contributions to new knowledge: (1) it increases the limited body of research on alternative teacher recruitment program in a non-western context; (2) it focuses on the experience of program participants rather than on program effectiveness and legitimacy; and (3) it takes advantage of the whole toolbox of Bourdieusian concepts.

First, in recent years, many researchers have investigated the large-scale and influential alternative teacher recruitment programs like Teach for America and Teach First U.K. However, these studies are mainly conducted in the context of western developed countries. Relevant research in non-western social contexts like China has

been sparse. Therefore, this study contributes to the research of alternative teacher recruitment programs in a context of a developing country like China.

The second contribution relates to the investigation of program participants' own experience. Due to differences from traditional university-based teacher preparation programs, alternative teacher recruitment programs inevitably attract controversy. In this situation, studies have been focused more on the efficiency and legitimacy of alterative teacher recruitment programs as reviewed in Chapter Two. However, at the time this study was conceived there had been scant research conducted about program participants' own perceptions and experiences. Moreover, the few studies that had considered this perspective were conducted within developed western settings. To add to the field knowledge, therefore, this study explored EGRT fellows' participation experiences by considering three key aspects to delineate the track from prestigious university graduates to teachers in disadvantaged schools: (1) the fellows' decisions to join EGRT; (2) disparities between the fellows' pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions about teaching in disadvantaged schools; and (3) the realization of EGRT values in fellows' involvement. According to the findings, many unique characteristics of participation experiences were uncovered. For example, EGRT program participants only received a subsidy of about 2000 RMB ($AUD 400) per month—an unattractive income for graduates who might otherwise pick up high-paying jobs in the Chinese labour market. Therefore, interview participants reported little in the way of economic incentives. This contrasts with 'attractive income' as one of the important reasons for Teach for America participation (Straubhaar & Gottfried, 2014). However, the socio-personal reasons identified in this study have rarely been mentioned in previous studies, perhaps because these reasons are rooted in the macro societal transformation of China and the micro personal crises of members of the post- 80s and 90s generations. These unique findings were also noticeable in various comments related to pre- and in-service disparities of assumptions-perceptions and the enactment of EGRT values in placement schools.

A third contribution of this study is the application of Bourdieu's conceptual tool kit. Although several studies have applied Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and field to analysis of the newly emerging social phenomenon of alternative teacher recruitment investigated in this study, these tools have been used somewhat in isolation, as noted in Chapter Two. Unlike previous studies, this study used the inter-

dependent conceptual triad of habitus, capital and field to examine EGRT fellows' program participation experiences. Guided by Bourdieu's theoretical perspective, the EGRT participants have been described as experiencing transition between different fields. During this process, a new concept, that of "localized pedagogical capital", was proposed. In addition, Bourdieu argued that habitus is durable but not immutable (Bourdieu, 1977b), however, he did not clearly explain in what situation habitus tended to be durable and in what situation was not immutable. Through the analysis of EGRT fellows' field transition, it has been found that the durability and mutability of habitus in the field of relative educational disadvantage was influenced by the internal value proximity of the field of relative educational advantage and the field of mediation.

### 9.2.2 Methodological contributions

In addition to the contribution of new knowledge and theoretical extension noted above, this study has also made a methodological contribution by applying an exploratory sequential mixed method to the problem studied. The majority of studies which have adopted Bourdieu's theory to probe programs delivering prestigious university graduates to disadvantaged schools have used qualitative approaches. However, something valuable might be missed if only one mode of research is applied. Bourdieu himself lived an intellectual life of commitment to transcending the dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism. He undertook much ethnographic research in Algeria, but was also interested in examining correlations through correspondence analysis in his later work (Mu, 2013). Following in his footsteps, despite difficulties of qualifying Bourdieu's thinking tools, many researchers developed several sets of instruments regarding capital and habitus (Robson & Sanders, 2009). However, to the best of my knowledge of studies of programs delivering prestigious university graduates to disadvantaged schools, no quantitative approach has been undertaken using Bourdieu's theory.

This study adopted an exploratory sequential mixed method which was expected to combine the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to further explore a newly emerging social phenomenon in China. Unlike factor-based studies to quantify capital and habitus, which aim to validate or challenge the theory, this study adopted a person-based Twostep cluster analysis to further understand relationships between three critical aspects of EGRT participation experiences. Twostep cluster analysis automatically grouped participants based on indicators emerging from the

qualitative findings which had been analysed through a Bourdieusian lens. In this study, Twostep cluster analysis shows more respect for individual people rather than for variables. This contributes to further identification of the deep relationship that exists between different aspects of people's experiences. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first trial of Twostep cluster analysis in Bourdieusian research.

### 9.2.3 Practical contributions

As previously established, programs for delivering prestigious university graduates to disadvantaged schools have emerged in the past twenty years. Compared with traditional university-based teacher education, these emerging programs seem quite young. The EGRT program is even younger; at the time of writing it has been in operation for less than a decade (Crowley, 2016). In this newly emerging program, fellows usually have to face double challenges. On one hand, their social identity shifts from that of students on campus to teachers in schools. Beginning teachers usually experience struggles. On the other hand, the teachers in programs like EGRT are delivered from developed urban areas to remote rural areas, which is often a drastic social context shift. These two shifts were reviewed in Chapter Two. Consequently, through exploration of EGRT participants' experiences, several implications for EGRT are suggested as follows:

First, the disparities of pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions might be better bridged through adjusting several aspects of promotional materials. According to the findings, many EGRT fellows' images of local students and EGRT fellows were shaped through reading and watching paper/media promotional material of EGRT. Within the promotional materials, local students are represented as lovely, simple and innocent children, whose strong desire for knowledge is cruelly constrained by external conditions. Meanwhile, EGRT fellows are represented as being capable of leading these children out of their disadvantage; and harvesting highly advantageous personal growth in the process. However, when EGRT fellows perceive local students and their own impact in a different way in their placement schools, many negative emotions are generated, which can harm both the participants' personal wellbeing and their involvement in the life of their schools. Therefore, this study suggests that elements deliberately designed to tug at the heartstrings might be decreased, and that it is important to attend to deficit thinking in promotional materials.

Second, the selection process of EGRT fellows should pay more attention to reasons why candidates are interested in this program, if EGRT expects its fellows to adhere to their core values while working in placement schools. Based on the findings of this study, whether fellows were able to stick to EGRT values or not is associated with reasons consonant with EGRT values for joining the program. When fellows' choice of EGRT is mainly based on reasons consonant with EGRT values (the seven reasons listed in Chapter Eight), they are much more likely to perform in accord with these values. This might be an important indicator for human resources groups of EGRT-like programs to consider when recruiting fellows. In addition, programs such as EGRT could also consider less "elite" but still high quality graduates. If the prestigious university background criterion is applied, one of the key selection criteria in the recruitment process, EGRT might miss candidates who graduate from general universities with great capacities and potential to be competent teachers in disadvantaged schools. As revealed in this study, an elite educational background does not necessarily guarantee a successful EGRT fellow service in a disadvantaged school. In fact the sense of superiority generated from the classificatory schemes of habitus might intensify difficulties while working in a challenging educational context.

Third, a sociological perspective and local perspective might be introduced into the core values of EGRT, the initial intensive training and subsequent on-going support. Since most fellows come from the field of relative educational advantage, with relatively privileged family backgrounds, their social positions are different from those of their local students. Some sociological educational perspectives would afford them another lens through which to view the students in rural schools, which might go some way to helping them to avoid bias. In addition, an EGRT is a mediation field, yet program values tend to cater for those of prestigious universities and less for those of disadvantaged schools. More local contextual knowledge should be given in advance of fellows' service. Some strengths represented by localized pedagogical capital might usefully be added to the training and support of EGRT fellows.

An increasing number of programs like EGRT are emerging in China and other developing countries. Compared with developed western countries, the social divide within such developing countries may be much wider owing to imbalanced socio-economic development. When programs are designed to deliver talents from

privileged social positions to disadvantaged counterparts to fight against educational inequality, all recommendations mentioned above can be taken into consideration.

## 9.3   LIMITATIONS

While this study has made significant theoretical and methodological contributions, and has proposed practical recommendations for EGRT and similar alternative teacher recruitment programs based on EGRT fellows' experiences, a number of limitations should be acknowledged. These stem from the methodological scope and resources available to me as researcher.

The first limitation is that the questionnaire was designed based on limited interview data. More specifically, I arrived in one county to collect qualitative data in March, 2016 when the 2014-2016 and 2015-2017 cohort fellows were in their service. Therefore, in the initial qualitative phase, 16 interview participants (including two for the pilot study) were recruited for one-to-one interviews in six placement schools located in the county. Of these, nine and seven were from the 2014-2016 and 2015-2017 cohorts respectively. The subsequent questionnaire was then designed based on findings and analysis of data collected in the qualitative phase. That is to say, this online questionnaire was designed based on specific EGRT cohorts working in a specific area; however, the online questionnaire was open for all EGRT fellows and alumni, considering the limited number of 2014-2016 and 2015-2017 EGRT fellows in the county. As discussed in Chapter One, EGRT is an energetic and fast-growing organization. In its first two years, it had only about 20 fellows in one province; but the number of participants now extends to more than 1000 spread across several provinces. It is perhaps inevitable that such rapid and large-scale expansion may induce changes over a short period of time. Therefore, the experiences of fellows of 2014-2016 and 2015-2017 cohorts might be different from preceding or subsequent cohorts. However, since the mission, mode and values of EGRT have not changed, the EGRT fellows' experience could be assumed to share many commonalities. In addition, given the scope and limited resources of a PhD study, it was not feasible to investigate the voices of local students and local teachers. The local voice - which could have provided rich data regarding EGRT fellows' experience from another perspective - was not heard.

The second limitation is related to sampling. Snowball sampling was adopted in the quantitative phase. Despite the rationale of this method, argued in Chapter Four, the representativeness of sample was lowered owing to the non-random property of snowball sampling. However, snowball sampling is an established method in qualitative exploratory research such as this. Since qualitative data were obtained through interviewing fellows of the 2014-2016 and 2015-2017 cohorts, rapport was mainly established with these fellows. Then these interview participants helped to distribute the online questionnaires to their EGRT friends and acquaintances, therefore, these two cohorts accounted for 55.7 % of the total number of questionnaire respondents.

Another limitation is associated with my own experience as researcher. I was once interested in EGRT and during my own graduation season contemplated applying for the program. Hence, I was latently well-disposed to the program. In addition, I also graduated from one of the prestigious universities of China, which enabled me to share similar experience with EGRT fellows. These similarities might have generated a sense of affinity or a potential source of bias. In this situation, I learned how to negotiate this subjectivity by applying participation objectivation as outlined in Chapter Four. I therefore worked reflexively, turning the key thinking tools of habitus, capital and field onto myself.

## 9.4 FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Many disparities of assumptions-perceptions about local students and local teachers have been identified from the perspective of EGRT fellows. But the question is, what are the perspectives of local students and local teachers? What was their experience when learning from or working with EGRT fellows? How might they represent the fellows and the program? This might be a direction for future studies which have similar interest in the EGRT program or other equality-oriented educational programs. The local voice should be heard.

The quantitative phase has the potential to be further extended. Since the quantitative phase played a complementary role, to strengthen this study, more time and effort was put into the qualitative phase. Considering its powerful automatic cluster function and attention to individual participants, this study made use of the Twostep cluster approach to analyse data. Future studies could develop a factor-based

questionnaire based on this study. Structural Equation Modeling could be taken into consideration to explore fellows' experiences from another perspective.

The experiences of EGRT fellows were mainly analysed with Bourdieu's key thinking tools of capital, habitus and field, and the focus was on rural/urban and educational dimensions of these. However, some other important sociological factors, such as gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, might also have had an impact on individuals' social practice. Although some sociological factors mentioned above have been paid attention to, future studies can generate further discussions focusing more closely on these aspects.

## 9.5    OVERALL CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

Globally, quality teachers have long been unequally distributed. In order to solve this problem, both traditional university-based teacher preparation programs and alternative teacher recruitment programs are adopting strategies that look like this: high academic achievers from prestigious universities are deliberately recruited and cultivated for disadvantaged schools. Influenced by this international trend, the Free Teacher Education Program initiated by the Chinese government in six famous normal universities exemplifies the former, while EGRT, with its similarities to programs such as Teach for America,  is one of the most widely known of the latter in contemporary China. The appearance of EGRT is a breakthrough in traditional teacher education, which was previously confined by the patterns of a socialist and planned society, as well as representing a symbol of structural shift from a relatively bounded system to "an open and multi-institutional framework" (Crowley, 2016, p.137). Although alternative teacher recruitment programs have long been promoted in western countries, especially in the United States and England, they are still an emergent novelty in China, or most other developing countries. While the number of EGRT program participants is small compared to traditional university-based teacher preparation programs, this program has successfully stepped into the landscape of teacher education. Despite the increasing popularity of this kind of alternative teacher recruitment program among prestigious university graduates, the experience of EGRT fellows is as yet mostly unknown.

This study has unveiled fellows' experience and the underlying social dynamics which paved the way for further reflection on EGRT and similar programs. As EGRT

program participation is a broad topic, this study has chosen three crucial aspects to delineate fellows' experience as they transition from being elite graduates of prestigious universities to teachers in disadvantaged rural schools: reasons for joining EGRT as the starting point of participation experience (Chapter Five); disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions as one of the main sources of challenge (Chapter Six); and the realization of EGRT values in fellows' involvement in disadvantaged schools (Chapter Seven). Chapter Eight further tested the relationship between reasons, disparities and involvement.

Guided by Bourdieu's theory, three sub-fields have emerged within the field of education. Fellows in the EGRT program experience field transition. On the one hand, field transition seems irrational, against the general upward social climbing. More specifically, the prestigious university is located at the top of the field of relative educational advantage, while the disadvantaged school is at the bottom of the field of relative educational disadvantage. Generally speaking, members of each field are unlikely to communicate, especially in a downward direction from the most advantaged positions to the disadvantaged ones. However, through the sophisticated negotiation of the field of mediation (EGRT), this field transition has been realized. On one hand, graduates who vie for capital provided by EGRT, with compatible habitus of altruism and entrepreneurship, are easily attracted; on the other hand, the discourse of elite graduates, relentless work and actual relief of teacher recruitment problems of hard-to-staff are also favoured by disadvantaged schools. Then the field of mediation makes it possible to deliver prestigious university graduates from developed urban areas to disadvantaged schools in deprived rural areas.

Despite the successful negotiation of two distinct sub-fields，the field of mediation does not necessarily run smoothly. In contrast, the realities shown in this study are that fellows usually feel that they have struggled and been challenged during their service. This seems inevitable owing to the drastic field transition from the most advantaged to the most disadvantaged positions. First, the classificatory schemes of fellows generate disparities between pre-service assumptions and in-service perceptions, and then they further justify these disparities by allocating blame to local students and their parents. Second, owing to different structures and principles of the two sub-fields, the valued capitals are correspondingly different. However, fellows universally lack the localized pedagogical capital that is so appreciated by

disadvantaged schools, and which might result in them losing their initial privileged position in this field. Third, the values of EGRT are more likely to cater for those in the field of relative educational advantage, such as quality-oriented education recognized by urban and middle class culture, the ideal of educational egalitarianism, and the leadership celebrated by neoliberal discourse. However, these values are hard to realize when fellows enter a totally different sub-field which emphasizes examination scores, and does so through widely adopted streaming strategies. Then the fellows struggle greatly in adhering to or discarding, at least partly, EGRT values. These tensions and struggles were frequently reported and were palpable in both the qualitative and quantitative phases of this research project. During this process, the degree of match between fellows from the advantaged sub-field and the field of mediation in terms of capital and habitus strongly influenced the realization of EGRT values in the disadvantaged sub-field.

In conclusion, the above findings indicate that after the seemly irrational choice of EGRT participation, fellows experienced unexpected challenges and difficulties in the transition between two distinct social contexts. However, the 'irrational' choice made by these elite graduates became reasonable after analysis with Bourdieu's thinking tools. Since the fellows' privileged family backgrounds and great academic achievements are in total contrast to those of local students in disadvantaged schools, their unexpected experience seems inevitable from a sociological perspective. In programs with the same objective of recruiting elite graduates to disadvantaged schools, the sense of superiority of fellows and correspondent deficit thinking can easily sprout. The classificatory schemes of habitus might have been shaped by their fortunate birth into privileged families, the constant academic success of subsequent schooling, and other lucrative opportunities of internship/extracurricular activities nationally or internationally. Without reflexivity in relation to these privileges, program participants tend to take their success for granted and attribute it to their own innate superiority; which leads them to blame the local students and their communities for their low educational achievement. Once deficit thinking takes hold, and becomes pervasive and dominant, fellows are more likely to give up their previous values and beliefs, which can be damaging both to the local students and to themselves. The fellows actually experience a drastic field transition; the rules of the game have changed, and capitals need to be re-defined and re-valued. Without reflexivity – the

ability to reflect on the principles and structures of the field - fellows may become depressed and feel powerless. Hence, in the specific context of disadvantaged schools, reflexivity would seem to be the key needed to turn this situation around.

Due to the efforts of Bourdieu, reflexivity is not such an intangible word, as he proposed a relevant systemic method, namely, participant objectivation. I used participant objectivation to analyse myself in Section 4.4 of this thesis, in order to better understand myself, and to comprehend the structures and agencies involved in this study. In a similar way, fellows could also apply participant objectivation to gain a fresh perspective on what happens during their service. This may be only one approach to reflexivity, but Bourdieu left the world an almost step-by-step guide to this process; which can counter the 'conductor' who exists in the individual mindset, consciously or unconsciously directing them how to think and how to do. As Bourdieu asserted, "I am convinced that one knows the world better and better as one knows oneself better" (Bourdieu, 2003, p.289). If EGRT fellows can know themselves better through participant objectivation, then they might understand their students in disadvantaged schools in different ways, and subsequently get involved in the experience themselves in different ways. As Loic Wacquant, Bourdieu's foremost co-author, once commented, "if there is a single feature that makes Bourdieu stand out in the landscape of contemporary social theory, it is his signature obsession with reflexivity" (Bourdieu & Wanquant, 1992, p.36). The difference for both students and fellows themselves might be effected not only through the discourse promoted by EGRT, but also through constantly development of reflexivity.

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# Appendices

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**Appendix A**

**Interview protocol**

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**Warm-up Question**

Could you briefly introduce yourself to me (e.g., educational experience, hometown, and family)?

**Participation Reason**

1. Please tell me why you participated in EGRT?

Probing questions:

- Is there something about your personal beliefs or values that influenced your decision? (childhood, own schooling, family, anything else)

- What aspects of EGRT attracted you?

2. Why do you think EGRT chose you? Are there any commonalities which you find among EGRT fellows?

**EGRT Participation Experience**

1. Have you ever thought about your service before the entry of disadvantaged school?

2. You talked before about your expectations/assumptions before you participated, then

- In what way is it living up to your expectations?

- What surprised you? And why?

- Up to now, to what extent has your impact reached your expectations?

3. Please tell me about your experience of teaching in your EGRT placement school. (e.g., classroom teaching/extracurricular project)

4. What makes you satisfied/disappointed while working in your EGRT placement school? Why?

5. Which aspects of working in your EGRT placement school do you find easy/difficult? Why? Probing questions:

- How do you make sense of difficulties encountered in placement school?

- What kind of support are you receiving? Who helps you most? What additional support would you like?

6. What will you suggest to the next cohort of EGRT fellows? Why?

7. What personal attributes do you think make a successful EGRT fellow? Probing questions: particular knowledge, experience, skills, resources, dispositions?

8. What is your plan after two years commitment?

9. Is there anything else you can tell me about your experience to date?