Universiteit Utrecht

Master Thesis

Post-graduation mobility of international students

and the factors influencing it during the pandemic:

a study of Chinese students in the Netherlands

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Abstract: The value of international student mobility in migration studies is increasingly appreciated, and the epidemic period offers the opportunity to revisit the study of international students' post-graduation mobility. This study aims to reveal the impact of macro, meso and micro factors on the post-graduation mobility ambitions of Chinese international students in the Netherlands during the epidemic. This paper uses an online questionnaire (n=151) and semi-structured in-depth interviews, as well as interviews with 12 international graduates for thematic analysis. And the paper analyses the interconnection between factors at the level of epidemic policy, sense of belonging and individual differences and post-graduation mobility. The findings highlight how dualistic structures coupled with macro, meso and micro factors shape to limit or promote mobility and how these influences intersect. The study also highlights how graduate mobility is diverse and dynamic, extending the dichotomy of stay and return. As a result, this research is to better understand the post-graduation migration trajectory patterns of Chinese students in the Netherlands during the pandemic. The findings of this study will not only assist Dutch higher education institutions in improving their international student integration programs and high-quality retention, but will also contribute to national policies that improve policies to better support the management of international students' post-graduation mobility.

1.Introduction

The pandemic of 2019 has had an unparalleled influence on human migration, changing social, economic, and political life. Adey et al., Cresswell et al., Lin & Yeoh et al., Salazar et al. Most nations have kept the outbreak under control by shutting borders, closing schools, and limiting transit. This means that individuals cannot freely migrate from one location to another (Lin & Yeoh, 2021). To minimize staff movement, universities throughout the world have adopted a variety of strategies, including postponing foreign student recruitment, modifying teaching methodologies, and revising degree evaluations (Dhawan, 2020; O'Brien et al., 2020). However, in an increasingly interconnected world, international students' abilities and skills are increasingly acknowledged as a driver of innovation and economic success (Bilecen & Faist, 2015; Gaule & Piacentini, 2013). As a result, numerous researchers have attempted to investigate the reasons and experiences of the international student movement, as well as their impact (Peng, 2016; Van Mol & Timmerman, 2014). The number of foreign students in Dutch higher education is gradually rising, with the majority coming from EU nations, with China accounting for the biggest group of non-EU international students (VSNU, 2021). According to the Dutch Association for International Exchange in Higher Education (Nuffic), there will be 5,338 Chinese students enrolled at major Dutch institutions in 2021. Since 2008, the number of Chinese students has climbed consistently practically every year, with just minor changes in 2014. (Figure 1). Based on Weisser's research, 44 percent of Chinese students stayed in the Netherlands after graduating in 2015. (Weisser, 2015). However, there has been little research on Chinese students, and their individual experiences studying, living, and working in the Netherlands remain essentially secret. During the COVID-19 epidemic, Chinese students in the Netherlands were put in jeopardy. This adjustment allows this study to dig further into the mobility of Chinese post-graduation. A better understanding of the Chinese students will assist the Dutch government in designing strategies and developments for international recruiting during the pandemic.

Figure 1: International degree students from China studying in the Netherlands

Source: Nuffic, https://www.nuffic.nl/en/subjects/facts-and-figures/countries-of-origin
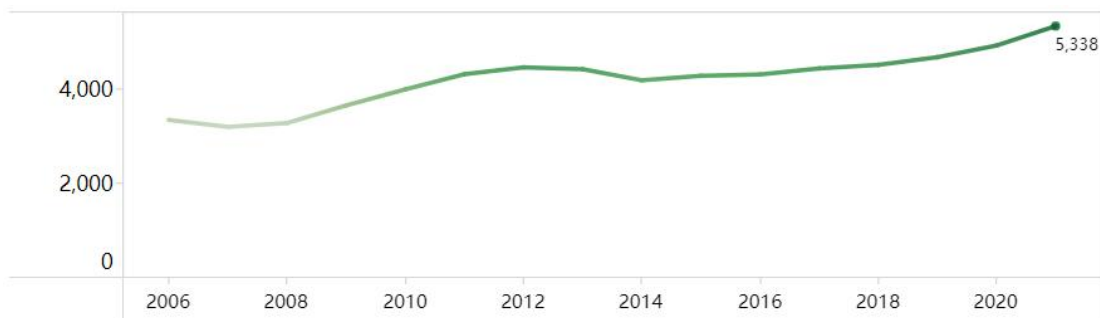
The present literature merely portrays foreign students' post-graduation mobility as a binary strategy of "remaining in the host country-returning to the place of origin" (Arora, 2019; Tharenou, 2015; Yang, 2016). However, following graduation, foreign students have alternative mobility choices, such as the third country. As a result, research on foreign students' post-graduate mobility should be widened. Second, the present "push-pull" variables influencing international student mobility at the postgraduate level differ by

country (Mosneaga, 2014; Plopeanu et al., 2018; Trevena, 2019; Tran et al., 2020; Weisser, 2016; Woodfield, 2009; Wang & O'Connell, 2020). Thus, understanding international student mobility necessitates taking into account national contextual elements. Furthermore, the available literature on the post-graduate mobility of Chinese students in the Netherlands is less widely investigated. There are just a few studies on the movement of Chinese students in the Netherlands circa 2016. (Bijwaard & Wang, 2016). The current study fills a gap in the scholarly literature by examining the post-graduation mobility of Chinese students in the Netherlands during a pandemic.

This study expands on the binary approach of "remain in the host country-return to the source country" by taking into account macro, meso, and micro effects to better understand mobility determinants. This study employs both qualitative and quantitative data to answer one main question and three sub-research objectives. What are the factors affecting the mobility of Chinese students after graduation during the epidemic? To begin, how does the national epidemic policy affect their mobility? Second, how does post-graduation mobility based on a feeling of belonging impact them? Third, what are the individual differences in Chinese students' post-graduation mobility in the Netherlands? This paper's findings benefit Chinese students in the Netherlands during the epidemic in making personal mobility options after graduation. I use Chinese students as an example to explore the elements driving post-graduation mobility during the pandemic since they reside at the crossroads of their city, their desire to mobility, their work prospects, and their cultural integration. This research will help not only Dutch universities build better-recruiting methods to attract a sufficient number of highly educated students from overseas, but also the national government design competitive immigration laws geared at attracting and keeping foreign students. This study also serves as a valuable information foundation for two additional target groups: early-career marketing officers at Dutch higher education institutions and scholars interested in international student mobility concerns.

2.Literature Review

Over 5.6 million overseas students will be studying at the tertiary level globally by 2020, up from two million in 2000. Higher education institutions throughout the world were closed in 2020 to control the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic, which might have a disastrous influence on international student mobility in the future years (OECD, 2021). Because foreign students are frequently seen as valued and talented employees, many governments encourage international education and implement policies to entice international graduates to stay (Mosneaga, 2014; Ziguras & Law, 2006). However, international students who remain in the host country or move back to their native country after graduation have gotten less attention. The existing literature focuses on international student cohorts from various countries, such as the extent to which social capital affects the likelihood of Irish international students staying abroad or returning home after graduation (Wang & O'Connell, 2020); Danish international students' perspectives and decisions regarding the life transition from student to worker (Mosneaga & Winther, 2013); and Finnish international students' first-hand experiences (Alho, 2020). Despite significant advances in the research of foreign student groups, the majority of studies have not

focused on international students in the Netherlands, particularly specific groups of students, such as Chinese students. But Chinese students are the world's biggest and fastest-increasing population of overseas students (UNESCO 2014). This study aims to address this gap by surveying Chinese students in the Netherlands to identify the factors that impact international students' post-graduation destination mobility.

Furthermore, most recent research limits the mobility framework for foreign students to the 'stay-return' dichotomy. This dichotomous strategy is used in a variety of studies, including "Factors Influencing Access to Education and Stay in Australia" (Arora, 2019); "Mobility Pathways for Return and Stay" (Tharenou, 2015); and "The Impact of Binary Choices on Foreign Student Mobility" (Yang, 2016). However, Geddie believes that the traditional 'stay-return' framework is very simple in interpreting students' future mobility. The complexity of international student mobility illustrates the many implications of multi-scale systems (Geddie, 2011). The complexities of foreign students' identity formation across national, social, and cultural barriers have an impact on their mobility (Tran & Gomes, 2017). The analysis of foreign graduates at several levels (micro, meso, and macro) has an impact on their future mobility (Han & Sears, 2022). As a result, there is a need to explore broadening the 'stay-return' dichotomy to account for foreign students' post-graduation mobility goals.

Current research on international student mobility emphasizes push and pull variables. Lee's "push-pull" theory (1996) proposes that push and pull variables impact migration decisions, with push factors deterring potential migrants from remaining in their country of origin and pull factors encouraging migrants to settle in the host nation. Lee (1996) also suggests a migration paradigm in which the decision to move is influenced by macro and micro variables such as ties to the nation of origin, the host country (e.g., geographical distance, policies), and individual characteristics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, education). Push and pull factors do not play a role in mobility decisions alone because mobility spans different countries (Piotrowski & Tong, 2013), and must take into account the macro level of different countries and their institutions, such as how the EU uses policies to successfully attract and retain highly educated talent from around the world (Mosneaga, 2014; Weisser, 2016). International student mobility in higher education is influenced by national plans, policies, and institutional actions (Woodfield, 2009), as well as social variables such as the job market and human networks (Wang & O'Connell, 2020). Meanwhile, Plopeanu et al. concentrate on personal micro-factors such as individual freedom and professional growth that encourage overseas students to stay or return after finishing their degree (Plopeanu et al., 2018).

Most research on international student mobility has concentrated on the push and pull variables of initial destination selection. Cao et al. (2016) identified future career prospects, the quality of higher education, the cost of mobility, and the climatic environment of the host country as important factors pulling Chinese university students' mobility; parental influence, cross-cultural training, and the economic form of the original country were factors driving Chinese university students' mobility. However, foreign students' experiences in host countries frequently lead to modifications in their original mobility. Mosneaga and Winther (2013) explored the factors that impacted their decision to stay or return after graduation. They classified a range of elements into social, economic, and

cultural dimensions and proposed that, while foreign students frequently choose to stay out of attachment to their host country's social networks, they are more inclined to return for personal and environmental reasons. Changes in individual labor markets and marital relationships, according to Bijwaard and Wang (2016), impact foreign students' decisions to stay or move. While the push-pull system promotes international student mobility, it is not without limitations. Because mobility is a complicated and dynamic process, various push and pull variables must be evaluated concurrently (Wu & Wilkes, 2017). Second, the push-pull structure restricts mobility to a predetermined set of options and preferences (Vigh, 2009). Individual variations, of course, might complicate foreign students' mobility goals once they graduate, and mobility plans can vary as individuals develop. Many overseas students, for example, are likely to have less engagement with their host country, which is little more than a brief stopover to obtain their degree and will eventually return to their place of origin. Or that international students who are convinced from the start that they want to work in the host country would select a place where it is easier to get work. Overall, while describing the mobility of foreign students after graduation, it is equally crucial to understand the unique mechanisms that transform the push and pull variables into mobility. As a result, a comparative examination of numerous macro, meso, and micro determinants is required if I am to better comprehend Chinese students' post-graduation mobility decisions.

Indeed, foreign students' mobility after graduation is a dynamic process including various factors such as cultural, economic, social, and political situations, as well as their personal experiences (Basford & Riemsdijk, 2017; Van Mol & Timmerman, 2014). Where foreign students belong and how they construct their feelings of belonging in transnational development explains their mobility. This paper contributes to the current literature in two ways. Previous research on overseas students in the Netherlands has concentrated on the era before the outbreak (Bijwaard & Wang, 2016). However, little attention has been given to Chinese students in the Netherlands during the epidemic.The secondary purpose is to include third-country mobility in the binary framework of post-graduate mobility for foreign students to remain and return, as well as to extend the range of mobility considerations. The third goal is to identify the factors impacting foreign students' post-graduation mobility in various nations at the macro, meso, and micro levels.

3.The Sense of belonging and individual differences

The human migratory journey is rich in diversity. Mobility has always been an unavoidable aspect of the human condition (De Haas, 2014). The mobility quest is a search for a sense of belonging (Kochan, 2016). The sense of belonging is a psychosocial notion that is impacted by how people view and value their connections and their surroundings (Martinez-Callaghan & Gil-Lacruz, 2017). At the same time, other academics contend that belonging is more than simply a word; it is also a collection of feelings, a social relationship, a cultural meaning, or an idea. It is a multifaceted, complicated, and malleable notion (Al-Ali & Koser, 2003; Blunt, 2005; Moskal, 2015; Wu & Wilkes, 2017). Whereas the pandemic was the defining event of the age, the spread of the coronavirus resulted in societal shifts, including social blockades. Investigating how international students' sense of belonging and individual variations influenced their post-graduation

movement plans throughout the pandemic might be useful.

Positive feelings in nature may be especially helpful for international students studying in a host country (Leikkilä et al., 2013). The importance of the natural environment in building a sense of belonging, however, is dependent on a variety of circumstances, including the foreign student's academic and cultural background, country of origin, age, and the resemblance of the natural surroundings in the origin and destination countries (Gustafson, 2009). According to the findings of Singh's study, academic aspects are closely connected to international students' sense of belonging. The academic environment helps students establish a sense of belonging, allowing them to integrate into the university's academic and social context (Singh, 2018). For some foreign students, schooling in the host country provides the opportunity to build local social networks and, in some cases, the possibility to start a family. It also implies that overseas students are more integrated into the host country's social interactions and acquire a sense of belonging to the local society (Korinek et al., 2005). This sense of belonging stems not only from the option of raising a family or having children in the host nation but also from the ability to make numerous friends and engage with locals daily (De Vroome & van Tubergen, 2014). International students are more inclined to consider staying in a host country where they already feel at home if they have formed social and familial links. However, for many foreign students, a sense of belonging comes from their native country. The urge to return home is connected to nationalistic values and social relationships that are missing in the host community (King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). Furthermore, language communication, lifestyle, and family ties in the home country can all have an impact on foreign students' mobility after graduation (Hazen & Alberts, 2006). Constant and Massey's research also emphasizes the significance of social and cultural elements in migration. International students who place a higher value on family, kinship, and friends from their home country are more likely to return to their original country (Constant & Massey, 2003). Many Chinese students prioritize caring for their parents at home, which impacts their judgments on personal space mobility (Zimmer & Kwong, 2003). As a result, international students who feel more connected to their native country want to return home.

At the same time, foreign students educated in the host country know that studying abroad improves their employability in a worldwide job market (Hu & Cairns, 2017). Differences in employment possibilities and remuneration, as well as the working environment, drive foreign students to relocate to nations with better or more secure and well-paying positions (Piotrowski & Tong, 2013). On the other hand, female graduates suffer more difficulties in advancing their careers (He & Wu, 2017). And international educational mobility looks to be a promising instrument for reducing gender risk, challenging gender stereotypes, and empowering Chinese women to be more mobile (Martin, 2017). Age, gender, race/ethnicity, and close relatives all play a crucial role in foreign students' pre-and post-study mobility options (Geddie 2013; Mosneaga & Winther 2013; Tu & Xie 2020). As a result of this brief overview, international students' post-graduation mobility is influenced by the natural environment, academic climate, cultural integration, and social networks, as well as individual differences in age, gender, partner relationship, education level, family relationships, work climate, and income. To

make judgments about post-graduation mobility, foreign students are impacted by social and personal characteristics, as well as push and pull forces from their place of origin and host country.

Hypothesis 1: Post-graduation mobility of Chinese students during the pandemic is connected with differences in Chinese and Dutch senses of belonging.

Hypothesis 2: Individual differences in Chinese students' post-graduation mobility during the pandemic.

4. National epidemic policy

A series of pandemic-related limitations have altered people's activities and lives all throughout the world, turning mobility into a high-risk activity that requires regular evaluations or is even prohibited (Chakraborty & Maity, 2020). International students are increasingly exposed to unclear, unpredictable, and risky circumstances as pandemic policies evolve. This is impacted by macrostructures such as tightening national immigration restrictions and limiting people's movement (Collins, 2018; Gilmartin et al., 2021).

China has started a number of efforts to manage the outbreak since mid-January 2020, including digital technologies for outbreak prevention, a zero-case policy, thorough nucleic acid testing, full immunization, a long-term quarantine system, and government responsibility (Ding & Zhang, 2022). To prevent the outbreak, China has imposed a stringent national ban between January 2020 and March 2020. Many mitigating measures were put in place in early May, but by mid-June, the number of cases had skyrocketed, and China swiftly imposed a strong embargo to halt the spread of the disease (Che et al., 2020). From the 2020 outbreak to early 2022, China advocated a zero new coronavirus strategy, with regional blockades in place to prevent the spread of new outbreaks as they occur in the region. By April 9, 2022, 23 cities in China with a population of 193 million are expected to have imposed complete or partial blockades (Patranobis, 2022). Domestic cities in China have reported mobility restrictions, allowing only people with a "clear necessity" to leave and enter (Rozelle et al., 2020). China's National Immigration Administration also declared that no entrance paperwork would be granted for non-essential, non-emergency departures and that visas would be issued upon approval for individuals wishing to study, work, or do business in the country (Liu, 2021). To curb the spread of the epidemic, China restricted the mobility of its nationals both within and beyond the country throughout the outbreak.

To avoid economic disruption, the Dutch government paid significant public attention to the pandemic in the early stages of the outbreak. To counteract the new outbreak, the government announced an "intelligent lockdown" in mid-March 2020, a smart blockade that is less stringent than in other nations (Wallenburg et al., 2022). Simultaneously, the Dutch government encourages individuals to maintain a physical distance of 1.5 meters and to work from home, with the exception of health care employees, police officers, and logistics workers (de Graaff et al., 2021). The Dutch Parliament approved an amendment to the Public Health Act in October, creating a new law that encourages quarantine measures and the requirement to wear masks in public areas (Bergkamp, 2020). In mid-December, the Netherlands issued a fresh wave of severe restrictions, putting the

nation on "complete" lockdown and closing all non-essential shops in response to a dramatic spike in the number of infected people. Many COVID limitations were lifted under an open plan in June 2021, but with a high surge in new infections, the government reinstalled many restrictive measures (Government of the Netherlands, 2021). The Dutch government suggested implementing the "2G rule" in November 2021, which would restrict entry to hotels, restaurants, cafés, and cultural events to those who have been vaccinated or have recovered from COVID-19 infection (Christine, 2021). The Netherlands went into lockdown mode again in December, with only necessary services remaining open, schools and educational institutes closed, and travel restrictions imposed (Central government, 2021). The Netherlands was virtually totally freed and reopened in February 2022, with no additional mobility restrictions (Government of the Netherlands, 2022).

The change in epidemic policy has hampered Chinese students' mobility plans in the Netherlands, including plane tickets, health code applications, and travel arrangements. This circumstance not only causes temporary disruptions in the daily routines of Chinese students but is also likely to result in the cancellation of their readiness to travel (Wang & Collins, 2020). That is, mobility affected by sudden changes in epidemic policy not only lengthens the current waiting time for graduates but also limits individuals' ability to choose their post-graduation mobility.

Hypothesis 3: The willingness of Chinese students to move after graduation during the epidemic is related to the difference in epidemic policies between the Netherlands and China.

5.Conceptual model

The findings of this literature review and the study of macro, meso, and micro variables help to construct a conceptual model for the factors influencing the post-graduation mobility of Chinese students in the Netherlands.
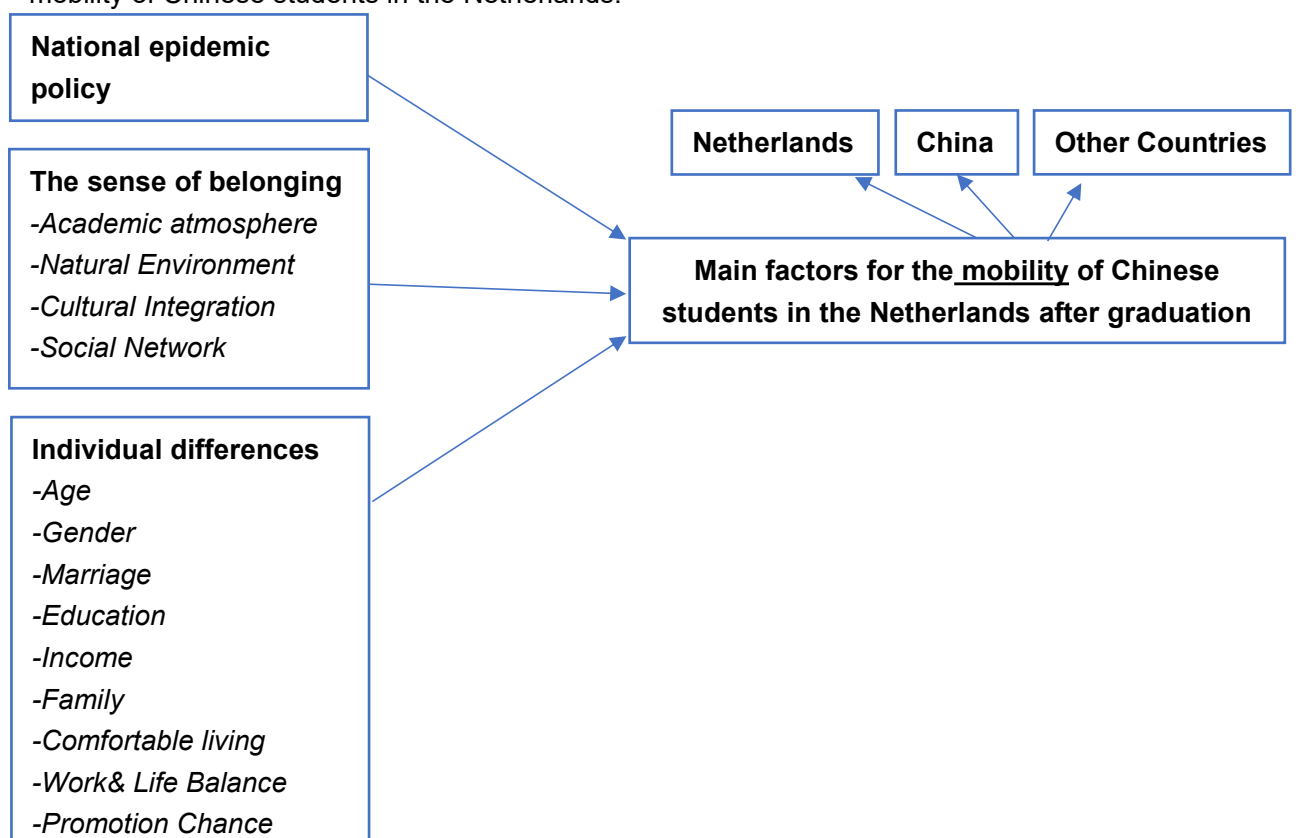
6.Data and Methodology

6.1 Questionnaire survey

An online questionnaire was used to study the research questions from May 27 to July 1, 2022. The online questionnaire explored the participants' fundamental demographics as well as the significance of numerous factors in post-graduation mobility. The questionnaire was distributed through a snowballing effort via student organizations, social media groups, and individual social media platforms, resulting in the receipt of 151 surveys. The snowballing strategy recruits more people than random recruitment, resulting in a better response rate (Jager et al., 2017). Participants include Chinese alumni from Dutch institutions as well as Chinese students presently enrolled at Dutch universities (Table 1). They are between the ages of 18 and 35, with the majority being under the age of 25 (61.59%, n=93). The majority (n = 94, 62.25%) of the 151 participants stated they planned to stay in the Netherlands following graduation. Another 40 participants desired to return to China after graduation, while the remaining 17 grads desired to go to countries such as Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Singapore, and others.The majority of participants (62.91%, n = 95) were female, 35.10% (n = 53) were male, and 1.99% (n = 3) were of the other sex. Due to visa concerns and residency permit time constraints, Chinese students in the Netherlands sometimes begin planning their graduation trajectory before they graduate. In my thesis, I utilized SPSS to conduct a descriptive analysis of the survey data and to determine how various factors impact graduate mobility.

Table 1 Demographics of survey participants (n=151)

Age	18-25	93	61.59%
	26-35	56	37.09%
	36-50	2	1.32%
Gender	Male	53	35.10%
	Female	95	62.91%
	Others	3	1.99%
Mobility	Netherlands	94	62.25%
	China	40	26.49%
	Other country	17	11.26%

6.2 Interviews

During the outbreak, in-depth interviews are only available to Chinese students who have definite mobility following graduation in the Netherlands (face-to-face interviews or social media interviews). Online interviews provide respondents with greater time flexibility and remove the barrier of physical distance, but offline interviews make respondents feel more intimate (Beech, 2018). Furthermore, mentioning the findings of in-depth interviews provides a more thorough comprehension of the questionnaire data (Zhai & Read, 2021).During the analysis phase, qualitative interviews often involve small samples of participants to gather data, categorize, and organize the data into patterns to provide descriptive or narrative reports.The narrative reports provided by data analysis in qualitative research were regarded as detailed and extensive, aiding comprehension of the social reality encountered by respondents (Creswell, 2014). The author recruited

respondents using the WeChat platform and surveys, and all respondents filled out a questionnaire expressing their willingness to participate in the study. To maintain anonymity, respondents were given false names, and information about them is provided in Table 2.

Table 2 Demographics of interview respondents (n=12)

Name	Age	Gender	Education	Marriage	Mobility after graduation
Di	29	Female	Unpaid-Ph.D.	Unmarried	China
Qi	25	Male	Master	Unmarried	Netherlands
Gi	21	Female	Bachelor	Unmarried	Netherlands
Ci	25	Male	Master	Partner	China
Mi	24	Female	Master	Unmarried	Netherlands
Ti	26	Female	Unpaid-Ph.D.	Unmarried	China
Ki	25	Male	Unpaid-Ph.D.	Unmarried	China
Hi	28	Male	Unpaid-Ph.D.	Unmarried	China
Bi	23	Male	Bachelor	Partner	Other country
Yi	26	Female	Master	Unmarried	Netherlands
Zi	26	Female	Master	Unmarried	Netherlands
Xi	26	Male	Master	Partner	Netherlands

*Unpaid Ph.D.s in this study refer to PhD students who do not receive salaries from Dutch universities, but are funded by other institutions, mainly the China Scholarship Council (CSC).

The interviews ranged in length from 30 to 90 minutes. Because sharing experiences in the local language offers more in-depth information, all of these transcriptions were done in Mandarin Chinese (Jon et al., 2014). The accounts referenced in the study were translated from Chinese to English by the author. This study employed a qualitative theme analysis technique, with interview questions ranging from personal/family, educational, and migration histories to learning and living situations during the pandemic, to investigate their emotional experiences and feelings of social belonging in the Netherlands. Respondents were asked to discuss their experience about living in the Netherlands during the pandemic. The interviews focused on why they chose to stay in the Netherlands, return to China, or go to a third country after graduation, and what circumstances impacted their decision. The interviews were semi-structured to allow participants to communicate their opinions and experiences on their own terms (Witzel & Reitor, 2012), while also allowing them to raise topics and concerns that I had not addressed. I used the notion of maximal variety in the sample, incorporating students from various professions and levels (BA, MA, and Ph.D.). Finally, the qualitative data was analyzed partially using NVIVO but mostly in a traditional manner by picking tales from the interview data to show significant themes.

6.3 Scale development

The PSSM scale is an 18-item measure that examines children's sense of belonging at school (Goodenow, 1993). Students' sentiments of acceptance, respect, and support in the school social atmosphere are reflected in their sense of belonging at school (Goodenow and Grady, 1993). School connectivity, school attachment, school

engagement, and teacher and peer relationships are all related themes (Slaten et al., 2016). The SCI scale is based on McMillan and Chavis' (1986) theory that a sense of community is a perception with an emotional component. They offered four dynamic co-working elements to improve community engagement and belonging (Membership; Influence; Integration and Fulfillment of Needs; Shared Emotional Connection). In the social sciences, the Sense of Community Index (SCI) survey is the most often used quantitative measure of a sense of community. According to prior studies on belonging (Abubakar et al., 2016; Ahn, 2017; Fuchs et al., 2021; Lau et al., 2019), I developed a scale based on the PSSM scale and the SCI scale to measure Chinese students' sense of belonging during the epidemic. One hundred fifty-one Chinese students in the Netherlands were polled, and 12 were interviewed about their academic and social experiences in the Netherlands during the outbreak. Excerpts from some of the interviews were used to generate three sets of items to produce a valid and reliable instrument for measuring belonging in the setting of Dutch higher education. Items assessing academic engagement (e.g., "I think my university is a good place for me to live." etc.), social engagement (e.g., "I feel that I'm actively participating in the activities in Netherlands." etc.), and surroundings (e.g., "I feel comfortable with the linguistic and cultural inclusiveness of the Netherlands." etc.) were also included. Each item was rated by Chinese students on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

• The formal Academic Engagement Scale consists of six items

The majority of respondents emphasized the importance of the academic atmosphere in higher education in impacting their sense of belonging, such as school life, involvement and satisfaction in study programs, and getting along with fellow students and professors.

• The formal Social Engagement Scale is measured using four items

Almost all respondents talked about how interpersonal relationships influence their sense of belonging. This scale examines a variety of social networks, including active engagement in local activities, making friends, and seeking aid from friends.

• The formal Environmental Scale (k=4)

Factors in the surrounding environment Some Chinese students have a sense of belonging to their society. Some students, for example, stated that their sense of belonging was impacted by the language environment and cultural tolerance in the Netherlands. Some respondents noted that the locals' attitudes toward Chinese students, as well as their safety, were tied to their sense of belonging.

The authors' construction of the scale was aided by the common replies observed in the pre-surveys and interviews.

7 Results
7.1 Sense of belonging and post-graduation mobility

7.1.1 Descriptive Scales

To assess the reliability and validity of the scale while excluding items not relevant to the study, I conducted Cronbach's reliability analysis and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test (Table 3). In an investigation of the reliability of the sense of Belonging scale, Cronbach's alpha varied from 0.77 to 0.88 in an investigation of the reliability of the scale. The alpha coefficient for all scales is more than 0.70, indicating that the study's data dependability is satisfactory (Netemeyer et al., 2003). Furthermore, all KMO values were larger than 0.6, indicating that the data could be efficiently retrieved for information.

Table 3 Factor structure of the Perceptions of Influencing Factors for a sense of belonging

	Component		
	Cronbachα	KMO	Factor coefficients
Academic engagement			
A1 I think my university is a good place for me to live.			0.844
A2 If there is a problem in this university people who live here can get it solved.			0.873
A3 It is very important for me to live in this university.			0.780
A4 I feel satisfied with my study programme in Netherlands.	0.873	0.867	0.790
A5 I feel comfortable asking a question or volunteering ideas in the class.			0.713
A6 I feel that a teacher/classmates would take time to talk to me if I need help.			0.688
Social engagement			
S1 I feel that I'm actively participating in the activities in Netherlands.			0.748
S2 I have known a lot of friends in Netherlands since I came.	0.861	0.754	0.881
S3 I am with the friends in Netherlands a lot and enjoy being with them.			0.901
S4 When I have a problem, I can talk about it with the friends in Netherlands.			0.828
Environment			
E1 I feel comfortable with the linguistic and cultural inclusiveness of the Netherlands.			0.720
E2 Fitting into the society in Netherlands is important to me.	0.766	0.654	0.835
E3 I expect to integrate into Dutch life.			0.859
E4 I feel that Netherlands is a free country with regard to no discrimination (based on race, religion, gender).			0.660

Table 4 Pearson correlation analysis

	A sense of Belonging		A sense of Belonging		A sense of Belonging
A1	0.306**	S1	0.325**	E1	0.422**
A2	0.267**	S2	0.169*	E2	0.409**
A3	0.163*	S3	0.209*	E3	0.407**
A4	0.254**	S4	0.276**	E4	0.461**
A5	0.180*				
A6	0.138				

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$

Table 4 displays the relationships of strength and link between each aspect and a sense of belonging. According to the findings, academics, aid from professors and classmates, cultural activities, interpersonal interactions, language, cultural integration, and discrimination all have a significant positive link with a sense of belonging. Cicognani's study suggests that international students' mobility options are connected to their sense of belonging, with findings suggesting that students with a lower sense of belonging are more likely to move away, whereas those who return home have a stronger sense of belonging (Cicognani et al., 2011). As a result, research on differences in sense of belonging and post-graduation mobility among Chinese students during the pandemic ought to be focused.

7.1.2 Mobility decision to remain in the Netherlands

Student mobility is socially significant, and it is even taken for granted (Benjamin & Ewa, 2013). Chinese students are drawn to Dutch universities because of their high quality and low cost of education (Hong et al., 2017). Professors and fellow study program students are the primary contacts for students on academic and non-academic matters. As a result, Chinese students' sense of belonging to their study program in the Netherlands impacts their post-graduation mobility options. Ti (26, female, Ph.D. in Computer Science) described the academic atmosphere in the Netherlands,

My supervisors are highly interested in my research and provide me with a lot of support. They even arranged for other individuals to assist me in improving my academic skills. Everyone is focused on their studies, which is far more comfortable than in China. My supervisor even took us shopping for bicycles and other supplies at the beginning of the year to help us adjust to our new life in the Netherlands.

Ti says that after her first few months in the Netherlands, the support of her supervisors and fellow students gave her a sense of belonging, and she hopes to return to China for two years after finishing her PhD before returning to the Netherlands. Ti will explore

moving to a place where she feels at home after completing her CSC study, rather than restricting her 'post-graduation mobility' to one time. Furthermore, the academic atmosphere in the Netherlands encourages Chinese students to continue looking for subjects of study that are relevant to their academic interests. This aspect also affected some respondents' sense of belonging and, as a result, had a significant effect in mobility after graduation. As Xi (26, male, Master in Psychology) showed,

> *During my master's degree at UU, I tried to convey my thoughts in class, and the professors listened to and respected them. This academic environment gave me the impression that I could pursue my Ph.D. in the Netherlands. The supervisors and academic advisers were also willing to talk with me when I needed assistance with my Ph.D. application. Finally, I was successful in my application, and I am grateful to the university staff who assisted me. I am excited to begin my studies at the Eindhoven University of Technology in the Netherlands in September of this year.*

Some Chinese graduates have established a sense of belonging to the Netherlands as a result of engaging in academic activities, while others have obtained a sense of belonging through their participation in Dutch networks and cultural events. If overseas students can create links and ties with local people, they will feel more at home. This is because overseas students learn about the host culture's customs and cultural integration via local networks and then decide to stay in the host country after graduation. Yi (26, female, Master of Theatre Studies),

> *I get along well with my students and have a few regular Dutch friends with whom I get together for dinners regularly. When I encountered a problem with my project, I would enlist the assistance of friends. But during the lockdown, I couldn't merely chat with my friends face-to-face, and the cultural events in the theatre suddenly vanished for me, leaving me feeling helpless. When my friends realized I was having emotional issues, they were eager to assist me, and my Dutch friends were especially kind. Even though I didn't feel like I could communicate in Dutch, I would hang out with my Dutch classmates. I feel like I'm slowly fitting in, yet I can still connect with the Netherlands in a variety of ways.*

Zi (26, female, Master of Gender studies) also mentioned that,

> *I've also made some wonderful Dutch friends. We've always been close, and we'll get together for a drink and a conversation now and then. They also attempted to integrate me into the Dutch community, which assisted me in understanding the local culture and feeling more at ease. Maybe that's why I want to stay in the Netherlands later on because I already have vital friends here.*

Yi and Zi's Dutch friends provide them with a sense of belonging. Tilly believes that students who have a high level of interpersonal trust have a decreased proclivity to move since they are part of a social network of reciprocal trust (Tilly, 2007). Interaction with

Dutch peers boosts Chinese students' sense of belonging to the Netherlands, which determines their post-graduation mobility options. Some respondents acknowledged partnership as well. In some situations, Chinese students preferred to stay in the Netherlands because they had a romantic relationship there, such as Bi (23, male, Bachelor of Finance), who met his partner in the Netherlands and felt "at home" there. He informed me,

> *My partner is a Chinese student whom I met in the Dutch community and with whom I am currently relocating to our new house. We've both decided to continue our education in the Netherlands after finishing our undergraduate degrees, and we'll be living there after graduation. We should then keep our lives stable and consider progressing to the next step.*

Intimate connections influence couples' post-graduation plans (Mosneaga & Winther, 2013). During this time, Bi and his partner used their international education to further their careers while preparing to live in the Netherlands. Some Chinese students who have expressed a wish to stay in the Netherlands want to get a permanent residence card shortly. While studying in the Netherlands, some of them immediately experience a sense of belonging. According to one undergraduate student, Gi (21, female, Bachelor of Culture and Media),

> *I have become more familiar with the country as I have spent more time in the Netherlands, becoming more accustomed to daily routines and establishing new acquaintances. My cousin's family is also there, and I intend to visit her at least once a month. In the Netherlands, I also get the feeling that my family is caring for me. My cousin's husband is Dutch, and his parents are wonderful people who look after me. In the Netherlands, we celebrate significant cultural festivals and exchange presents.*

As a result, for some Chinese students, the sense of belonging provided by family and friends in the Netherlands motivates them to stay in the Netherlands after graduation.

7.1.3 Mobility decision to return to China

Research has shown that people in one culture look forward to another, which may be a driving factor for mobility. Embracing another culture, on the other hand, may cause people to miss the familiar (Teo, 2011). Despite having left their home country, some overseas students frequently bring up the value of social ties at home, which often has an influence on Chinese students who return. Ki (25, male, Ph.D. in Orthopaedic Surgery and Research), who has stated a desire to return,

> *I miss my Chinese relatives. Because I studied medicine, I believe I should remain with them and maximize my value. I hope to monitor their body check every year; perhaps they will become unwell as they grow older and require surgery, and I will be able to assist by being present. I also miss the sense of belonging that Chinese families have when we all sit around the table to eat together.*

Likewise, Di (29, female, Ph.D. in Policy Administration) has a strong attachment to China,

China is my ancestral home, so I believe my true sense of belonging is in China. When I complete my Ph.D., I aim to return to China for work and to contribute to Chinese society.

In China, a sense of belonging derived from social relationships and national sentiment is the primary reason why Chinese students intend to return home. A substantial proportion of foreign students prefer to return home, owing to culture shock in their host country, as the style of life and education in the Netherlands is considerably different from that in China. Because of the language barrier, several Chinese students are uneasy in Dutch society. Ci (25, male, Master of Geography), who detailed his experiences during the Dutch pandemic,

Last December, the Dutch shutdown coincided with the end of the second-semester session. The stress of the end of the semester, mixed with the necessity of completing a group assignment, progressively irritated me. I appeared to be thinking differently than my group mates, but we couldn't communicate openly face-to-face, and my linguistic abilities were limited, so I felt disappointed. When I am confronted with situations that I am unable to handle on my own, I become anxious.

Another Chinese Ph.D. student, Hi (28, male, Ph.D. in Dermatology), also aware of the cultural differences between himself and the Dutch, responded,

I was frustrated when I initially arrived in the Netherlands. Because it was my first time traveling overseas but my English was not very excellent, I would squeal and whine for half a day when I wanted to communicate myself, but I couldn't.

Lueck and Wilson argue that when the source and destination languages are so different, language competency in the host country is one of the most dependable markers of the amount of integration (Lueck & Wilson, 2010). People in the Netherlands will choose to speak in Dutch rather than English. When Chinese students arrive in the Netherlands and do not speak Dutch, they are at a disadvantage when it comes to forming connections.According to the findings, students' experiences in the larger community outside of school may be hampered by a lack of fluency in the host culture and language (Yeoh et al., 2014). Although international students are allowed to walk around the city, they may feel unwelcome at times. This means that students' capacity to adapt to the local culture has a considerable impact on their sense of belonging and, as a result, their desire to move.Despite the numerous options available in the Netherlands, some Chinese students decide to return home since they have faced discrimination in the past. Hi (28, male, Ph.D. in Dermatology) related his discriminatory experience.

I once went to the city center with a companion while wearing a mask. A stranger approached us and purposely coughed at us, saying "virus." I don't like to conjecture,

but one thing is certain: some Westerners were not particularly kind to Asians during the pandemic. This is not the respectful and tolerant Dutch society I expected.

Discriminatory encounters not only make Chinese students feel unrecognized, but also damage their sense of belonging in the Netherlands, preventing them from staying after graduation. Discrimination is especially hard for students who have previously faced cultural and linguistic barriers. As a result, some students prefer to return to their home country since they do not feel comfortable in host country. In other words, "not having a sense of belonging" is one of the most prominent causes attracting Chinese students to return to China.

7.1.4 Mobility decision to go to third country

Global mobility diminishes connections to a single location (Giddens, 2020). In the context of global mobility, a large number of foreign students have moved from one country or region to another (Wu & Wilkes, 2017). While some Chinese students prefer to stay in the Netherlands and others aim to return to China after graduation, some choose to relocate to a third country. When asked if he had permanent residence in the Netherlands, Bi (23, male, Bachelor of Finance) said,

The Netherlands seems like a home to me, and I would be content to stay there. But I wouldn't mind obtaining a residence permit in the Netherlands after graduating and then working in a third country, such as the United States. My partner is also very supportive of my plan, and depending on the circumstances, we will decide on our mobility together.

Bi attended high school in the Philippines prior to beginning his college studies in the Netherlands. During his bachelor degree, he also spent half a year on exchange at the University of California, Berkeley in the United States. He wants a worldwide profession and declares his desire to work in a third nation since he is always open-minded and curious towards the world.Many foreign students have extensive educational backgrounds and international experience and do not consider their post-graduation mobility possibilities as anything other than their original or host country, but rather a third country. According to Mi (24, female, Master of International Business Management),

When I was an undergraduate in Macau, I was surrounded by students who chose to pursue their studies in other nations. My university experiences pushed me to continue traveling, and I was anxious to discover new locations and make new travel plans.

International students are more likely to return if they consider their home country to be their home; they are more likely to stay if they are constructing a home in their host country; and they typically stay open if they know that their home may be found in more than one location. International students who see a feeling of belonging in a third country prefer to let the future define their mobility, and they are more likely to move to a third

country. Nonetheless, these students tend to choose their locations depending on their realities, which include, among other things, relationships, lifestyle, cultural integration, and professional paths. These are all variables that will impact Chinese students' sense of belonging and must consequently be considered when deciding where they will go after graduation.

7.2 Individual differences and post-graduation mobility

Given the large variety of factors influencing participant mobility after graduation during the pandemic, the survey included a factor selection task, which required participants to choose at least five of the 12 factors determining mobility. Previous research on possible variables of foreign students' post-graduation mobility was used (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016; Beech, 2018; Beine & Ragot, 2014; Chapman & Pyvis, 2006; Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2016; Kosztyán et al., 2021; Parey & Waldinger, 2011; Paulino & Castao, 2019). Individual preferences differ, as shown in Table 5. Comfortable living (70.20 %), work-life balance (62.25 %), job income (60.93 %), natural environment (39.74 %), and cultural integration are the top five criteria influencing post-graduation mobility (39.07 %). As a result, the majority of respondents prioritize career-related issues (comfortable living, work-life balance, and job income). I also included an open-ended factor. Others: "Are there any other variables influencing your travel plans after graduation?" Responses mostly addressed cultural issues such as cuisine, LGBT rights, and the growth of the arts and culture areas.

Table 5 Individual choice of factors affecting graduate mobility (choose at least five)
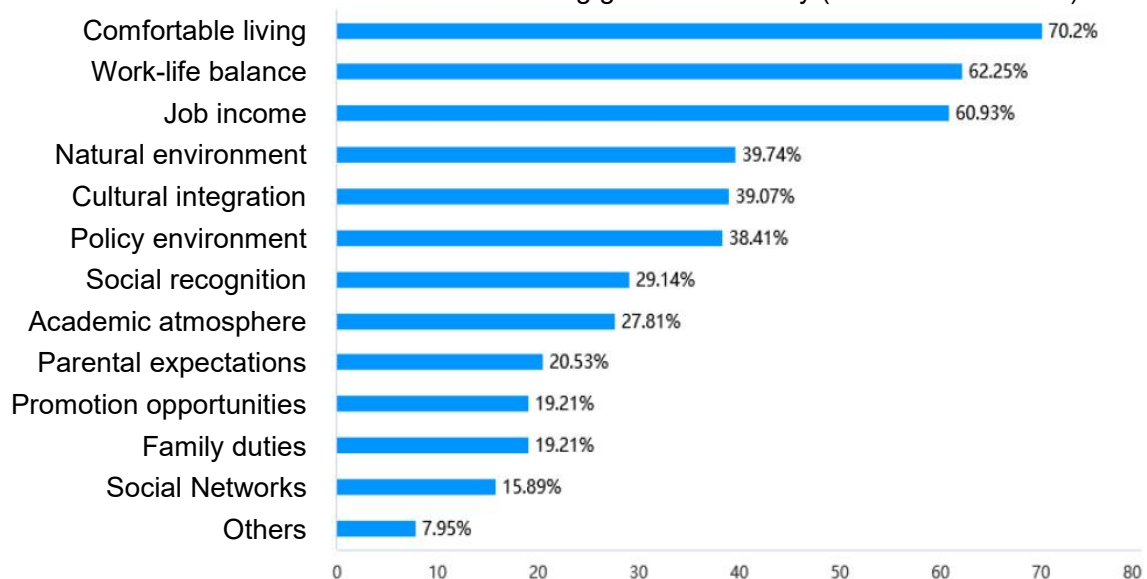
7.2.1 Gender

Male and female students in China have different options when it comes to planning their mobility after graduation. As indicated in Table 6, the mean for men is greater than that for females in terms of social recognition (male 0.396; female 0.232), demonstrating that males typically have a larger expectation of social recognition. Female graduates, on the other hand, prioritize life and work balance (male 0.491; female 0.695) and comfortable living (male 0.585; female 0.768) in their decision to move. Yi (26, female, Master of Theatre Studies) described in detail how gender influences her mobility decision,

When it comes to career planning, men are likely to be more interested in employment that provides them with a high level of social recognition. In my opinion, work-life balance is critical for women. That is why I decided to search for work in the Netherlands. When I publish my CV, I have the option of not including my gender or a photo, which I believe is a wonderful thing. This would not be feasible in my native country, where you must include your gender on your CV and face the risk of not getting an interview due to your gender.

Table 6 Classification Summary Analysis Results (Mean)

Factors	What is your gender?			aggregation
	Male	Female	Other	
Natural environment	0.434	0.379	0.000	0.400
Academic atmosphere	0.321	0.263	0.000	0.290
Job income	0.585	0.632	0.500	0.640
Promotion opportunities	0.226	0.179	0.000	0.200
Comfortable living	0.585	0.768	0.500	0.700
Work-life balance	0.491	0.695	0.500	0.610
Cultural integration	0.415	0.379	0.500	0.400
Social recognition	0.396	0.232	0.500	0.300
Parental expectations	0.226	0.189	0.500	0.220
Family duties	0.226	0.179	0.000	0.170
Social Networks	0.189	0.147	0.000	0.170
Policy environment	0.340	0.400	0.500	0.370

Yi's remarks emphasize the influence of gender on graduates' job searches, which contributed to her decision to stay in the Netherlands after graduation. According to surveys, gender imbalance at work is increasing in Chinese society (Cooke, 2005). The impact of gender disparity on women's job advancement was highlighted by some of the female graduates interviewed, including Zi (26, female, Master of Gender Studies), who stated,

In China, a single woman above the age of 30 is discriminated against and referred to as a "surplus lady." Unmarried and unpregnant older women are not welcomed into the Chinese labor market. This means that for female graduates in China, marriage and pregnancy status might be a barrier to employment. During job interviews, some women are asked private questions about their marital and childbearing intentions. In the Netherlands, maternity leave is equal for men and women, and there is not too much gender discrimination in the labor market.

The information she presented also demonstrates the Chinese job market's bias against single senior women, which deprives women of competitiveness and drives female

overseas graduates to relocate to other nations. When questioned, the majority of male interviewees said they were not discriminated against because of their gender. Gender equality is a challenging notion in China today because of the enormous geographical and labor force, rooted gender biases, and continual fluctuations (Chen et al., 2013). As a result, expanding foreign female graduates' spatial employment mobility as a means of identifying better career prospects would be an appropriate solution to this inequality (Faggian et al., 2007). This section of the study contributes to our understanding of Chinese female graduates who will stay in the Netherlands by studying how gender norms impact their post-graduation mobility.

7.2.2 Work experience
Mobility is viewed as a skill investment that provides foreign students with a competitive advantage in the labor market after graduation (Waibel et al., 2018). According to research, foreign students will benefit from overseas experience in terms of personal growth and awareness of different cultures and ways of thinking. They will appreciate becoming professionals and researchers after graduation, making them valuable to companies (Eder et al., 2010; Lam et al., 2011). However, even with a higher degree in the country, the majority of respondents stated it was difficult to find work in the Netherlands. According to Mi (24, female, Master of International Business Management),

> I don't believe it is any simpler to get work in the Netherlands than it is in China. Although there is less competition for employment in the Netherlands, you are still limited by your status, culture, language, and other factors. Many businesses would like to recruit workers from the EU. Although the Dutch labor market is inclusive and open, each firm has its own set of internal requirements. I'm hoping to find work in the Netherlands.

Employers favor local applicants over international graduates who stay in the host country (Cai, 2013). Thus, earning a degree abroad does not guarantee a certain life path, but rather represents an "essential turning point" that might lead to mobility for foreign students after graduation (Johnson – Hanks, 2002). While the ease of obtaining work influences mobility, differences in the work climate may frequently assist Chinese students in choosing a destination that meets their expectations. Because job markets in different countries cater differently to graduates, Chinese students with an international outlook and more opportunities to work abroad are more inclined to pick countries with a more pleasant way of life. For example, Zi (26, female, Master of Gender Studies) examined working circumstances in China and the Netherlands before deciding to stay,

> I did a six-month internship in Beijing, and it was extremely common for me to work 60 to 70 hours per week, sometimes even 80 hours per week when I was under pressure. If I worked in the Netherlands, I would be able to leave work on time every week, and my after-tax earnings would be comparable to those in China. After a period of intense work at home, I was able to "lie down" when I arrived in the Netherlands. I admire the Dutch mentality of enjoying life; therefore, I'm now focusing

on work-life balance. Because it is difficult to obtain work in my native country during the epidemic, I prefer to stay in the Netherlands after graduation.

Yi (26, female, Master of Theatre Studies) decided to stay in the Netherlands as well due to the minimal job pressure.

In terms of employment, I am extremely comfortable in the Dutch workplace. Unlike the heavy work pressure in China, the system of work pressure and holidays makes me feel like I have a feeling of life. I'm not asking for much; I'm quite content working five days a week and enjoying a full weekend.

As a result, for certain Chinese students, employment-related aspects such as the working environment, working system, and job pay at home and abroad might provide great encouragement to stay in the Netherlands after graduation. Table 7 shows that Chinese students who value work-life balance (76.60 %), a suitable living environment (74.53 %), and a job income (73.91 %) are more likely to stay in the Netherlands.

Table 7 Work-related factors influence post-graduation mobility
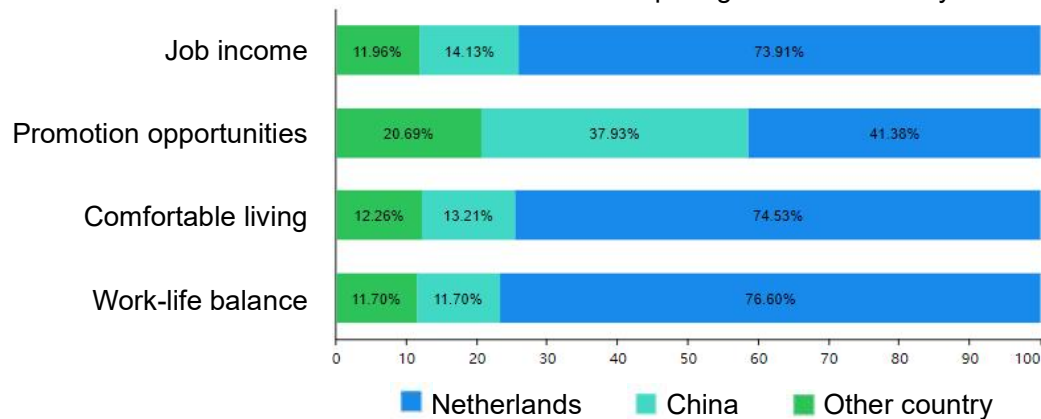
7.2.3 Family

Table 8 Family-related factors influence graduate mobility
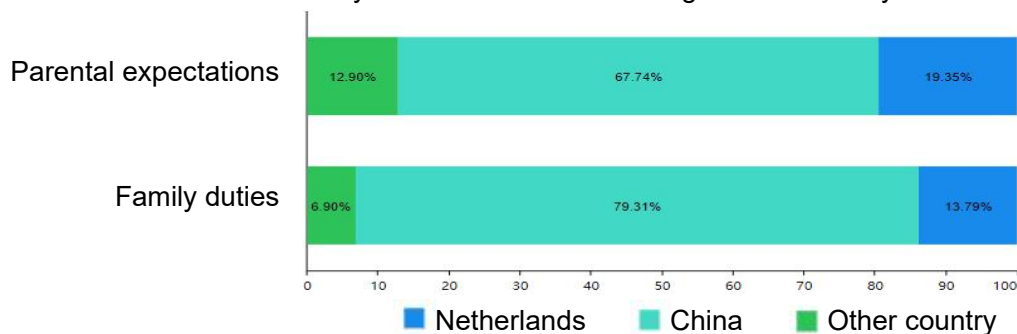
In contrast to job-related criteria, Chinese students who place a higher value on parental expectations (67.74 %) and family duties (79.31 %) would choose to return to their native country after graduation (Table 8). In China, parents' opinions generally have a big effect on their children's eventual decision to move after graduation (Cao et al., 2016). The majority of respondents in this study said their parents were more democratic and open.

They would appreciate their children's decision to relocate and encourage them to pursue a profession overseas. Qi (25, male, Master of International Business Management),

> *My parents would prefer that I return, but they do not limit or influence my decision. My graduation mobility is driven by reality and my practical requirements. For me, family is formed on a foundation of mutual understanding and respect. Families should be encouraging one another's lifestyle choices.*

Some participants stated that family factors would have an impact on their mobility. Although parents support Chinese students' decisions, some of them wish to be more present with their parents. Di (29, female, Ph.D. in Policy Management), who claimed that she became increasingly responsible for caring for her family as she grew older,

> *My parents are both selfless people who have done so much for their children. I am quite appreciative of their assistance and support during my studies abroad. At this point, I need to complete my Ph.D. in the Netherlands while my parents remain in China. During the pandemic, I was more concerned about my parents' physical and mental health. After graduation, I wish to return to China to work and treasure the time I have with my parents.*

Di's interview also provides insight into the views of some Chinese students in the Netherlands. At the same time, this confirms Geddie's stated relationship issues, such as caring for aging parents, which are inextricably linked to graduates' various work and residence choices during this transition phase life period (Geddie, 2013). Family factors are thus a primary factor for some Chinese students to return to their home country after graduation.

7.3 Epidemic policy and post-graduation mobility

Since 2020, changes in pandemic policy have made it harder for Chinese students in the Netherlands. These developments have hampered Chinese students' mobility after graduation. According to Table 9, over two-thirds of participants agreed(41.06%) or strongly agreed (24.50%) that China's pandemic policy will hinder their mobility after graduation. Only 11% of individuals (strongly) disagreed that China's epidemic strategy would have an effect, while the remainder were neutral. The majority of participants (40%) were neutral when asked if the pandemic policy in the Netherlands would affect their mobility after graduation (Table 10). The percentage of participants who agree (strongly) or disagree (strongly) that the Dutch pandemic policy would affect post-graduation mobility is 30% each. A noteworthy conclusion is that the epidemic policy in China has a greater impact on the post-graduation mobility of Chinese students than the epidemic policy in the Netherlands.

Table 9. Participants' answers to the question: The epidemic policy in China affects my mobility after graduation. (n=151)
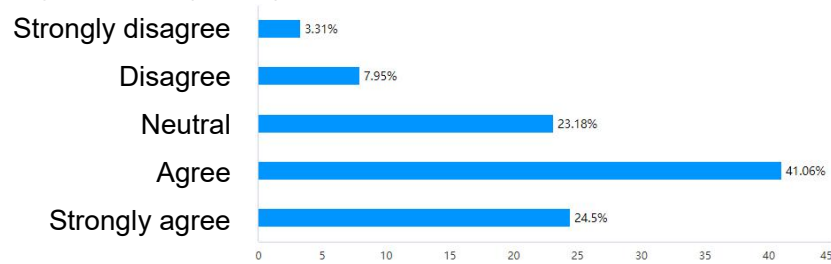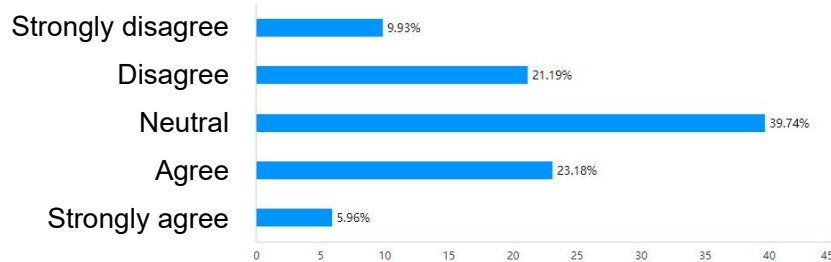
Strongly disagree	3.31%
Disagree	7.95%
Neutral	23.18%
Agree	41.06%
Strongly agree	24.5%

Table 10. Participants' answers to the question: The epidemic policy in Netherlands affects my mobility after graduation. (n=151)

Strongly disagree	9.93%
Disagree	21.19%
Neutral	39.74%
Agree	23.18%
Strongly agree	5.96%

Qi (25, male, Master of International Business Management) responded that China's pandemic policy has changed much too swiftly and frequently in recent years,

I believe that since I arrived in the Netherlands, China's epidemic strategy has shifted from home quarantine to dynamic clearance. The regulatory change makes it impossible for me to plan my future mobility.

Indeed, modifying the pandemic policy causes not only a delay in everyday mobility but also uncertainty about future mobility (Wang, 2021). Yi (26, female, Master of Theatre Studies) also discussed how the epidemic policy affected her post-graduation mobility in terms of segregation policy and financial expenditures. She stated,

Because of the current epidemic policy's quarantine policy, it requires 14 days of quarantine after returning home, which is time-consuming. I also cannot afford to purchase a plane ticket home or pay the isolation expenses. It's not that I don't want to return to my country; it's just that I can't afford to. Staying in the Netherlands after graduation is more cost-efficient in terms of both time and money.

And Gi (21, female, Bachelor of Culture and Media) canceled a high-priced return trip to China she had bought months before,

Since receiving my ticket, I've been alternating between worry, fear, anguish, and annoyance, which has much exceeded the momentary elation and excitement of being able to return home. The worry and panic were caused by my concern that the flight might be canceled at any time, and I was also bothered by the expensive cost of the ticket.

According to Yi and Gi, the high cost of flying back home, the unpredictability of flight cancellations, as well as the quarantine regulations, nearly shattered their ambitions of returning to China after graduation. This is not surprising given that Chinese students frequently face more difficulties in their mobility possibilities after graduation, such as the PCR double exam for return and the application for a health code to the Chinese Embassy in the Netherlands. Pandemic-related measures in China have influenced Chinese students' daily lives and modified their mobility ambitions after graduation.

Zi (26, female, Master of Gender Studies) is a recent graduate seeking work, and her student visa in the Netherlands expires three months after graduation. This meant she could no longer stay in the Netherlands, so she began looking for a job to obtain a work visa. She was certain that,

> *I may stay in the Netherlands after graduation and look for work. Furthermore, China's pandemic policy has resulted in a slowdown in the domestic labor market, with enterprises slashing pay, laying off workers, and so on. If I wanted to return to China, the chances are that I would be unable to find work, so why would I do so?*

Because of the influence of the pandemic on the domestic labor market, Zi chose to stay in the Netherlands after graduation. During the outbreak, the labor market gap between her home country and the host nation allowed her to restart a sensible job search arrangement in an unknown foreign market. Her choice of mobility implies that mobility is associated with other, often surprising, dimensions of international student life, as well as geographical space and pandemic time.

In fact, after learning about the Dutch epidemic policy, Chinese students compare it to China's. In comparison to China's epidemic policy, the Dutch epidemic policy is significantly less stringent and controlled. Qi (25, male, Master of International Business Management) has lived in the Netherlands for two years and believes that the Dutch epidemic policy's period of lockdown will restrict people's free mobility in various European countries, but that people can move as long as they follow the immigration policy,

> *I recall that there were still certain restrictions on traveling to European nations from the Netherlands in the summer of 2021, and each country had distinct admission procedures. When visiting Germany, for example, you must get a quick nucleic acid test within 48 hours after settling into a hotel. However, since the Dutch epidemic policy is open, it has less of an influence on travel and post-graduation mobility than the internal epidemic policy.*

Hi (28, male, Ph.D. in Dermatology) thought that the Dutch lockdown did not affect his mobility,

> *It's not an issue for me because I normally stay in the lab, and life continues as usual.*

I'm not sure how the Chinese pandemic policy will alter in terms of movement after graduation. However, given that the Dutch pandemic strategy has been made public, it should have little effect on mobility.

Because of the pandemic policy, many Chinese students in the Netherlands are concerned about their future mobility. "When will everything return to normal?" This is a frequently asked question (Hawley et al., 2021). In this respect, the pandemic policy may extend to where they go after graduation. It also demonstrates how the variations in pandemic policy between China and the Netherlands, as well as the movement of Chinese graduates, are inextricably intertwined.China's epidemic policy has a significant influence on Chinese graduates' mobility, but the present Dutch epidemic policy has less of an impact on Chinese students' mobility after graduation. Overall, the questionnaire report and qualitative information gathered in this subsection regarding the epidemic policy can help countries better promote graduate mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic.

8.Conclusion

This paper investigates the various factors that influence the post-graduation mobility decisions of Chinese students in the Netherlands during the epidemic, such as the impact of macro-epidemic policies, meso-sense of belonging, and micro-individual differences, using a questionnaire survey (n = 151) and in-depth interviews with Chinese students in the Netherlands (n = 12). According to the statistics, 63 percent of Chinese students plan to stay in the Netherlands, 26 percent will leave, and 11 percent intend to go to a third country. And, during the pandemic, the post-graduation mobility of Chinese students in the Netherlands was affected by a variety of push and pull variables functioning at the macro, meso, and micro levels. This study expands on previous research on the post-graduation mobility of foreign students to better understand the factors driving international students' mobility after completing their education during the pandemic. Furthermore, it investigates the return-stay dichotomy critically and expands mobility options by adding a third-country mobility option. However, the factors impacting foreign students' post-graduation mobility are more complicated and nuanced than those detailed in the existing research. To show the forces impacting international student mobility, this research ends by integrating a push-pull framework with macro, meso, and micro dimensions.

Differences in mobility belonging were examined using measures in surveys and interviews that reflected the post-graduation mobility trajectories of Chinese students throughout the pandemic, validating hypothesis 1. This conclusion is consistent with earlier research, which shows that students' sense of belonging in higher education is primarily demonstrated via academic and social participation (Osterman, 2000; Thomas, 2012). Some Chinese students claimed that their sense of belonging to academic engagement in the Netherlands was impacted by the assistance of classmates, instructors, and even college staff in their study programs, which influenced their mobility after graduation. According to the findings of this study, Chinese students in the Netherlands who have built local relationships have a stronger sense of belonging in the Netherlands, which encourages Chinese students to   stay in the host country after

graduation.Language and communication are seen to be important in helping international students develop a sense of belonging (Antonsich, 2010), but language obstacles can cause anxiety among Chinese students, affecting their sense of social belonging (Chen & Zhou, 2019). Chinese students who faced discrimination during the outbreak are also more likely to return to China. More crucially, national values and a network of family and friends in homeland provide a sense of belonging that the host country cannot provide. This difference in belonging is linked to Chinese students' post-graduation mobility during the pandemic.The dichotomy between foreign students' home countries and host countries hides the complexities of post-graduate mobility. Some Chinese students with a more affluent educational background have a different perspective on post-graduation mobility and are willing to go to a third country. Studying international students' post-graduation mobility trajectories can thus not only help Chinese students in the Netherlands during the epidemic make individualized mobility choices after graduation but also help Dutch higher education institutions and governments develop belonging strategies aimed at increasing the stay of international students.

Individual differences in gender, work experience, and family background impacted Chinese students' post-graduation mobility during the pandemic, confirming hypothesis 2. As a result, family duties affected the mobility of certain students back to their home country as a pushing factor. Job opportunities, on the other hand, were a draw factor for staying in the Netherlands, with most Chinese students preferring to stay after graduation in search of work-life balance expectations. The influence of gender on mobility in this study helped me understand more about the choices of female graduates in the Netherlands during the pandemic, and I believe this might potentially serve as a follow-up extension study.

The findings also reveal how the epidemic policy affected the mobility of some Chinese students. This reflects hypothesis 3, in which the post-graduation mobility plans of Chinese students during the epidemic are connected to differences in epidemic policy between the Netherlands and China. The Chinese pandemic strategy appears to have impacted the mobility trajectory of all Chinese students in the Netherlands during this particular era of the epidemic. In comparison to China's tougher epidemic policy, the Netherlands' epidemic policy is more open and has less of an influence on the mobility of international students after graduation. The questionnaire and interviews on pandemic policies in this study should assist governments in better enabling graduate mobility during the pandemic.

9.Implication
Based on the findings of this study, I propose that Dutch higher education institutions make efforts to modify academic courses for international students or organize local Dutch students to teach international students some of the local everyday language. This method assists Dutch and international students in developing an initial relationship and knowledge of each other's cultures, as well as increases international students' sense of belonging to the Netherlands. Meanwhile, this study discovered that obtaining suitable career prospects was seen as a key retention factor after graduation. This also gives significant information for career workshops for university employees and adds to higher

education institutions' understanding of how to effectively support these foreign students' stay after graduation. Dutch higher education institutions can provide any work-related activities or internships to help foreign students prepare for post-graduation employment in order to improve and maintain international students' academic and social integration.

In addition to making recommendations for Dutch higher education institutions, this study can also contribute to policy development in China and the Netherlands. The study's findings indicate that macro pandemic policies, meso feelings of belonging, and micro-individual differences influence Chinese students' mobility after graduation. The Dutch government must assess if the job prospects available within the policy framework during the pandemic are sufficient to allow overseas students to stay. Furthermore, the Dutch government might investigate how to improve the labor market for overseas students in order to improve their sense of belonging. Finally, understanding the post-graduate mobility of Chinese students in the Netherlands would assist the Dutch government in developing an immigration policy aimed at attracting and retaining international students.Understanding the reverse push and pull forces that lead overseas students to leave can also help developing nations be more focused on implementing initiatives that encourage students to return (Han and Appelbaum, 2016). The Chinese government might work well with the domestic labor market to assist the return of international students seeking employment. Especially during the epidemic's particularly tough era, the government should implement initiatives to encourage overseas students to return to their home countries for careers. It is also suggested that China's pandemic policy be more open in the future to reduce its influence on graduate mobility.

10.Limitation and future research

There are several limitations to this study. First, the three-item scale I developed for this study to measure belonging. The concept of belonging is likely more complicated and varied than I've realized. A future study might focus on further developing the scales of belonging to highlight the influence of belonging on mobility in the setting of higher education.

The low response rate to the questionnaire is the second limitation. Although there are over 6,000 Chinese students in the Netherlands, only 151 answered the questionnaire. The data was collected as part of the research, and the number of responses obtained was small but adequate for validity and reliability testing. According to Johanson and Brooks (2010), research focused on exploratory investigation or scale development should have at least 30 representative participants from the sample of people.The results are just suggestive due to the limited number of participants. Furthermore, the study focused on a group of Chinese students in the Netherlands during a specific epidemic period. While this is consistent with the study's background, this single sample is not indicative of other countries. As a result, future research will require a bigger and more geographically representative sample for validation.

Finally, while the interviews focus on the respondents' experiences of studying and living in the host country, this study does not go into much depth, including the possibility that they have a distinct feeling of belonging based on the location and/or various colleges. Or

that factors such as birthplace and family upbringing in the nation may have an influence on Chinese students' mobility after graduation. Other studies that look at education levels in connection to parents, students' admission into the local labor market after graduation, and so on. These might be requirements for future research and would add to the study's data results.

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