



北京大學
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Effort or Pedigree

Elite Reproduction in the Chinese
Higher Education System

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Introduction



Introduction

Research Context & Research Questions

Context

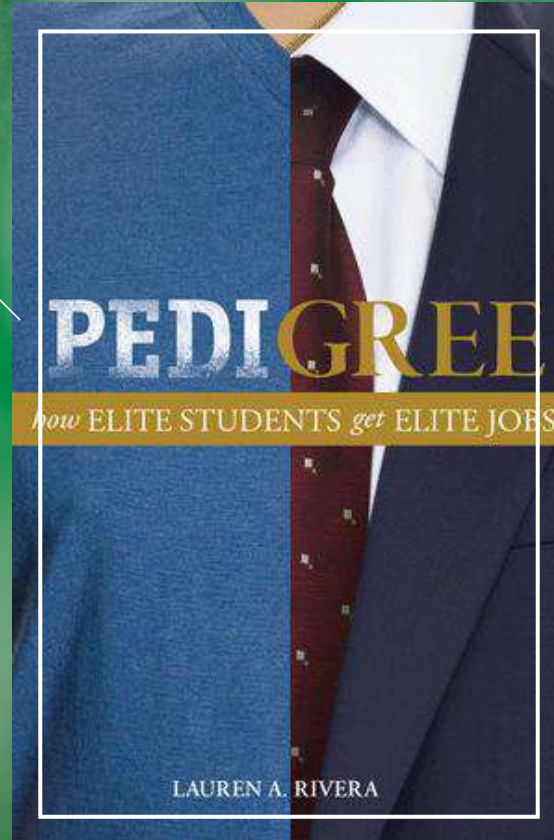
Expansion of global higher education and consequences: social congestion (Breen, 2010)

Employment inequality among elite university graduates:

Internal: differences in organizations & positions

External: differences on industries

Elite reproduction in the US and social circles (Rivera, 2015; Abraham, 2019)



Research Questions

1. During the process of elite reproduction, how do members of elite education circles gain entry into elite job circles?
2. With regard to the transition from elite education circles to the elite job circles, what are the factors causing graduates to have unequal career choices?
3. What is the mechanism behind different career outcomes?

Literature Review

Review

Education and social inequality: positional conflict theory

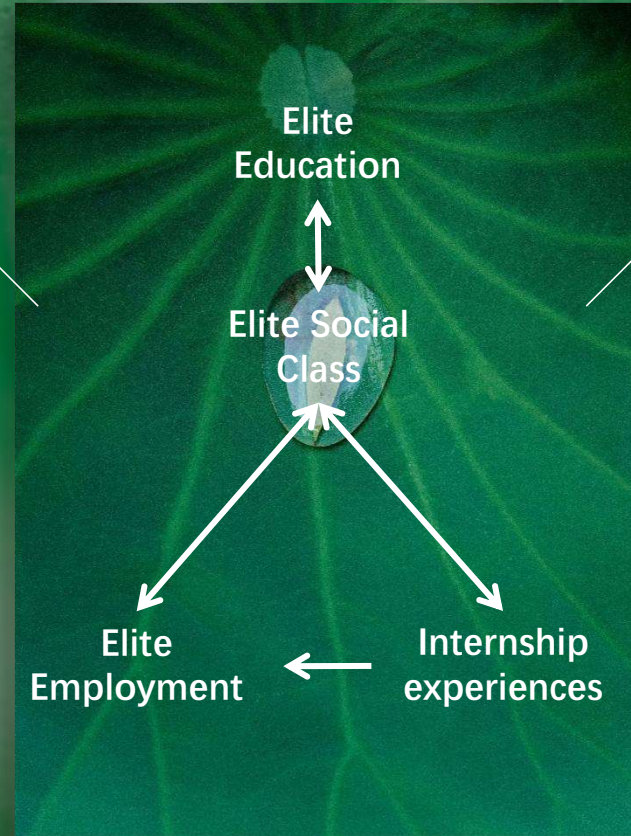
Credential inflation & opportunity inequality

Main strategies in positional competitions:

Ranking: utilization of advantages

Rigging: affect rules and environment

Accumulation of positional advantages based on pedigree



Comments

Social class and university graduates' internships and employment

Social-cognitive career theory: model for development of career interest and career choice

Research questions

1

During the process of elite reproduction, how do members of elite education circles gain entry into elite job circles in China?

2

With regard to the transition from the elite education circles to the elite job circles, what are the factors leading to unequal career choices?

3

What are the strategies for elite reproduction through higher education?



Methods & Findings





Methods: explanatory embedded multiple-case study

Typical case sampling, 6 interviewees, semi-structural interviews, validity

Data analysis: transcript, MAX QDA 2022, 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973)

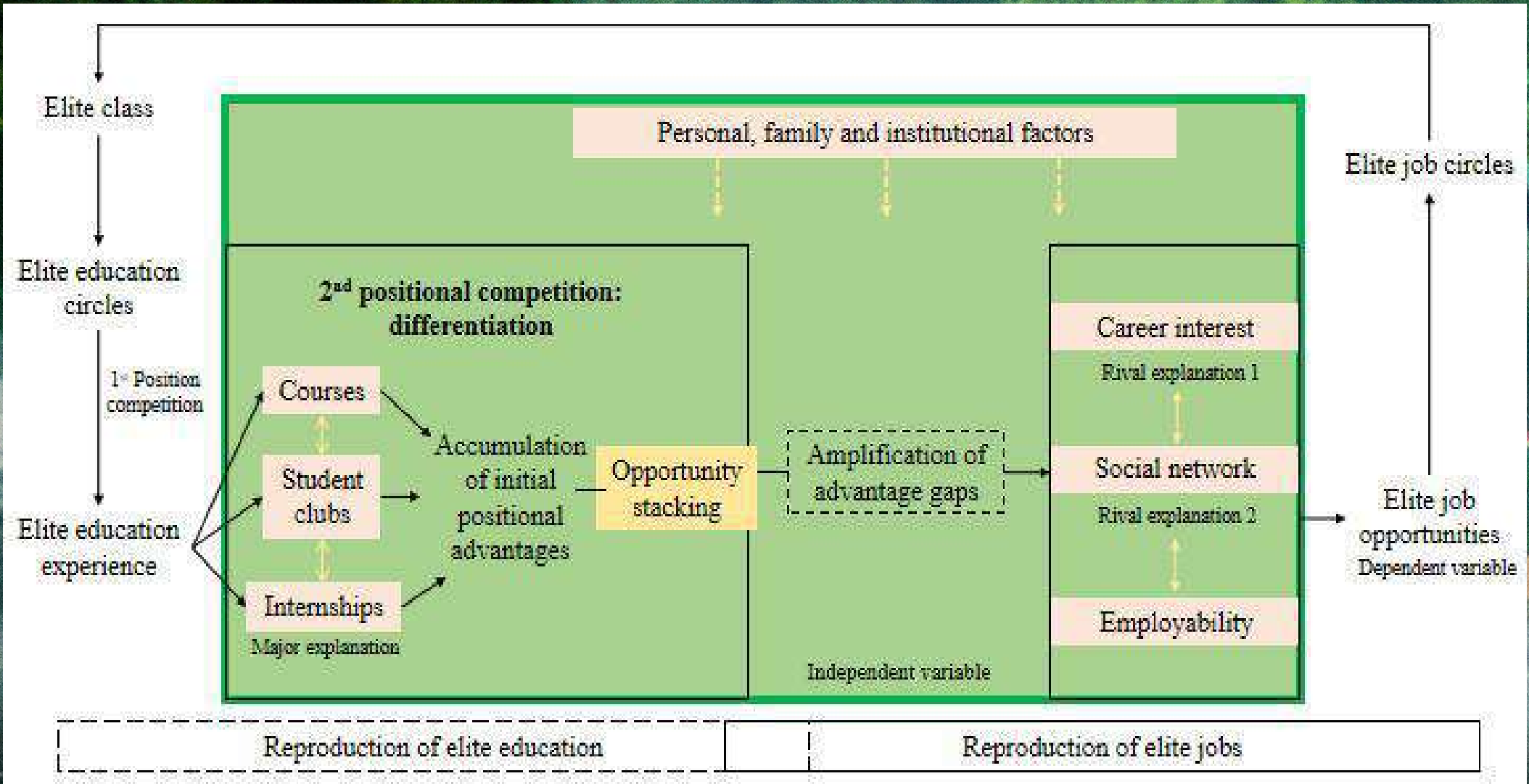
Validity: research design, analysis, coding

Interviewees



Name	Gender	Major	Employment Location	Employment Field	Employment Position
Ana	F	Economics	National	Government	Civil servant (International cooperation)
Beatriz	F	Literature	International	Internet company	Product manager
Ci	F	Economics	National	Consulting	Business analyst
Dylan	M	Politics	Local	Private company	Sales (energy)
Elio	M	Economics	Local	Internet company	Strategy
Fred	M	Law	Local	Law firm	Lawyer

Theoretical Framework



Elite reproduction process and strategies



Entry

Watershed

Reserve

Absorption

Difference

Battle

Process

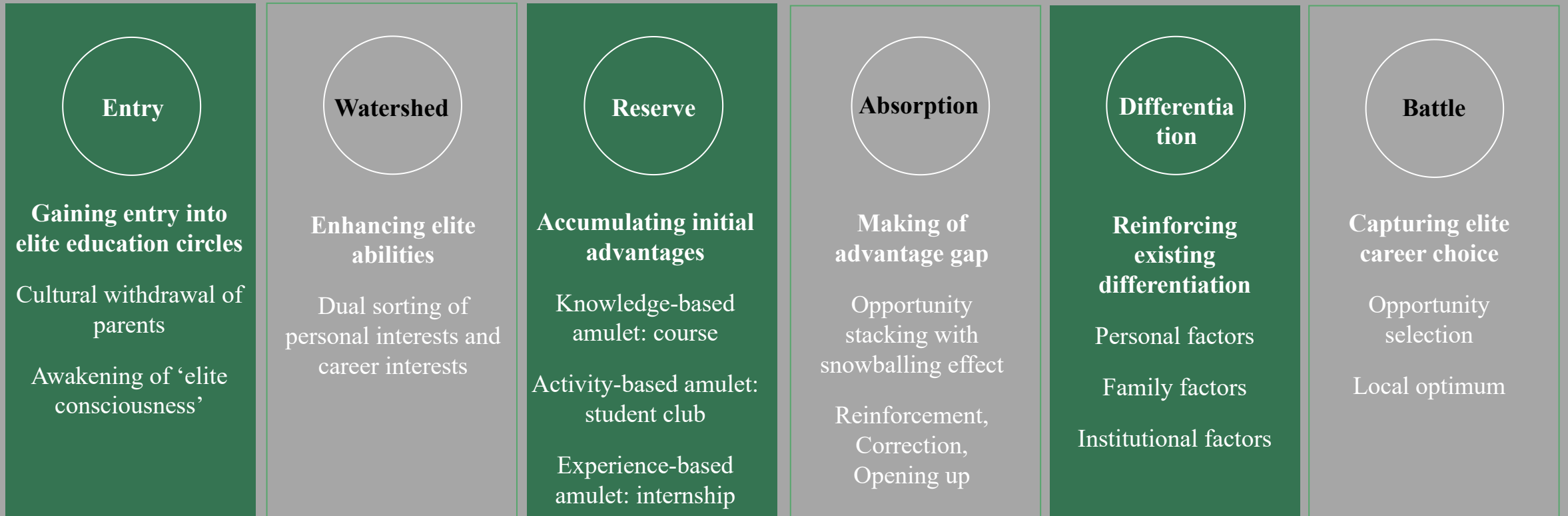
Strategies

Positioning

Ranking

Leaping forward

Six stages of the elite reproduction process



Three elite reproduction strategies



Positioning

A process of career exploration. It relies on career interests in corresponding industries. Individuals establish their career interests, compare internship opportunities, and try to **identify the positional advantages** needed for the said opportunities, which is not entirely consistent with the ‘rigging’ competition notion proposed by Brown (2013).

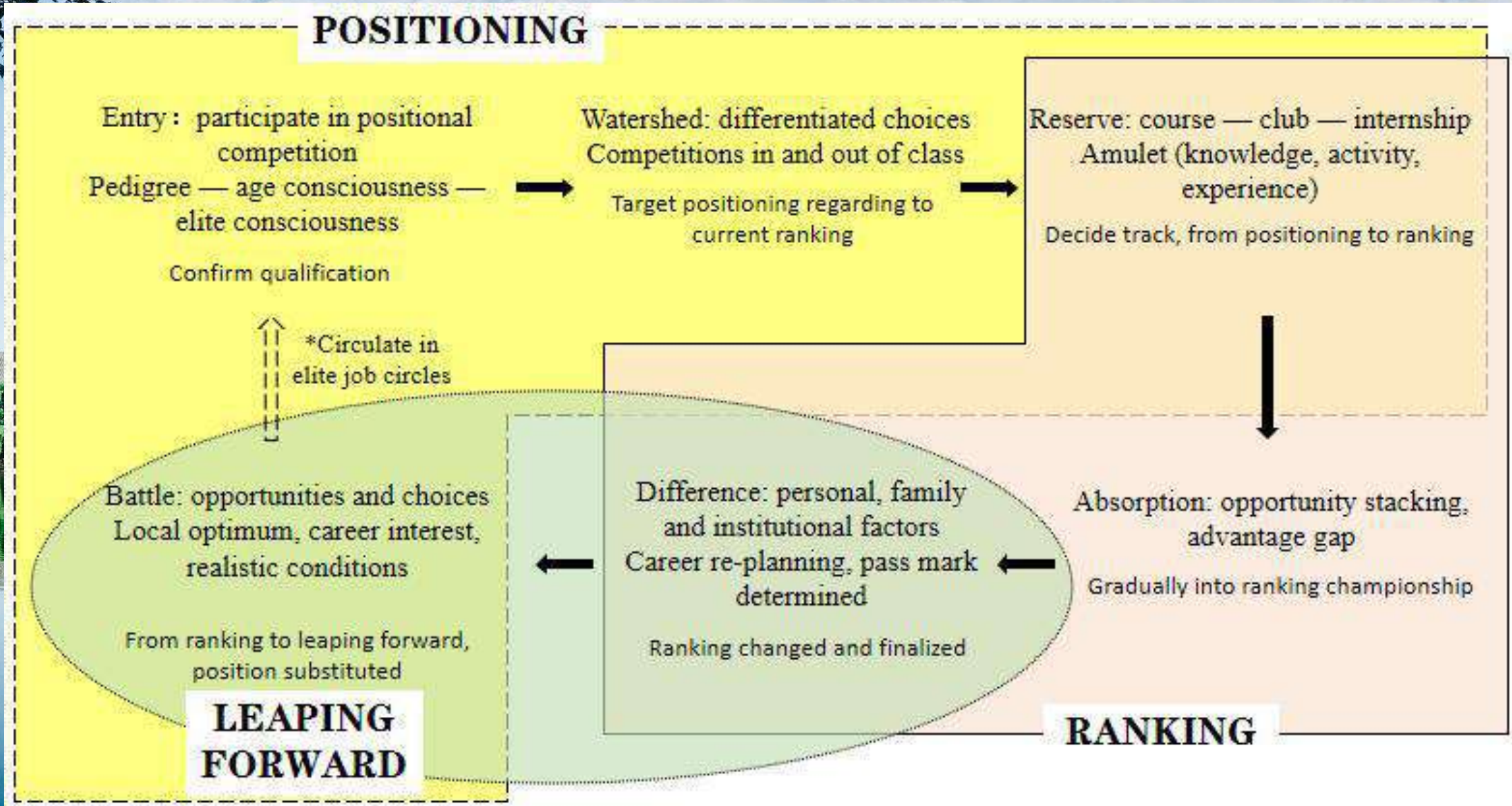
Ranking

It is related to mobilising **resources in elite education and internship circles** to identify career paths and accelerate self development, not focusing on mobilizing resources related to their class.

Leaping forward

It focuses on the capture of positional advantages, including the **building up of own class status** and the accomplishment of own career choices.

Elite reproduction process and strategies



Conclusions

The competitive context and family backgrounds awaken one's elite consciousness, which comes from class confidence and a sense of entitlement, among children from advantaged families in China.

Entry into elite job circles necessitates the application of elite strategies connecting elite education cycle and elite job cycle in China.

As a new source of positional advantages, internships connect elite education and job circles, becoming the crucial step for achieving elite status after college graduation.



THANKS



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Global and national possible selves: Differentiated strategies for positional competition among Chinese university students

Dr. Benjamin Mulvey, RGC Post-doc Fellow, EdUHK

Dr. Ewan Wright, Assistant Professor, EdUHK

Many young Chinese choose graduate school over a grim job market

Escaping out of unemployment

Covid lockdowns and regulatory crackdowns have inhibited demand for graduates



May 26th 2022 | HONG KONG

MARRIAGE, ACCORDING to a French proverb, is immortalised in the title of a novel by Qian Zhongshen. Recently, a similar proverb has been applied to China's graduate schools. As the job market has become grim, 4.6m people tried to storm these fortresses by taking the graduate school admissions exam, an increase of over 21% from the previous year.

慘！中國1076萬大專畢業生面臨「最難就業季」 失業率恐升破20%

2022年6月20日

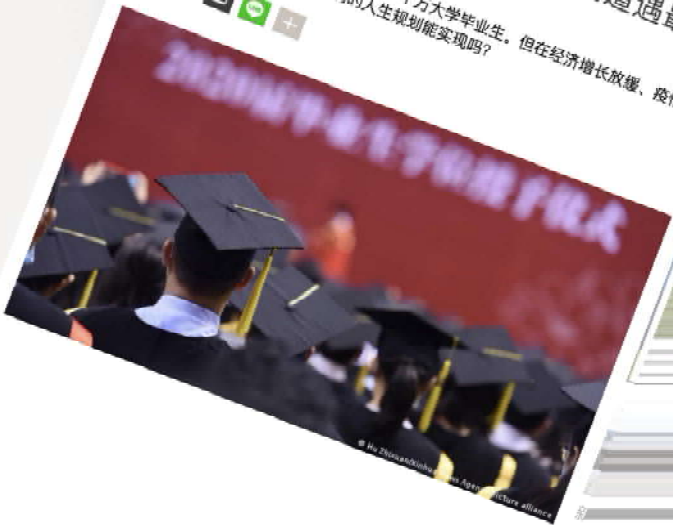


慘！中國1076萬大專畢業生面臨「最難就業季」 青年失業率恐升破20%【圖/姜博傑】

2022年中國上千萬大專畢業生面臨就業困難狀況。 翻攝微博 (王秋燕 / 綜合報導) 反覆異常的新冠肺炎疫情，加上嚴厲的動態清零政策，中國5月16-24日青年失業率升達18.4%，這讓2022年多達1076萬名大專院校畢業生，面臨「最難就業季」。

千万毕业生涌向职场 最大毕业潮遭遇最严峻就业环境

中国就业市场今年夏天将迎来超过一千万大学毕业生。但在经济增长放缓、疫情封控前景不明的阴影下，他们的人生规划能实现吗？



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Context: Neijuan and Chinese higher education

- The paper provides a reading of the term 内卷 *neijuan* (in English 'involution') through positional conflict theory.
- Chinese characters for 'inward' and 'rolling', denoting something spiralling inwards, **trapping those involved**.
- Aim to understand how aspirations in the context of an 'involved' labour market varied along lines of social class.



Persistent inequalities after China's higher education expansion

- Gross tertiary enrolment rate increased from ~8 percent in the year 2000 to ~54 percent in 2019 (World Bank, 2021).
- But growth of participation rates has been concentrated among groups associated with high social status (Li, 2015; Ou & Hou, 2019)
- Social inequalities in higher education are also reproduced beyond the point of access through for example internships and student societies (Niu et al., 2009; Pinto et al., 2021)

Possible Selves

- Ability to gain positional advantage and secure prestigious positions in the graduate labour market not only a function of one's ability to draw on socially classed resources but also of both the nature and clarity of one's vision concerning this possible outcome.
- Key concepts:
 - Possible selves i.e. current perceptions about a range of probable life trajectories resulting from constructions of numerous imaginaries (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Harrison, 2018; Henderson et al., 2019).
 - Probable, ideal, and feared selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986)
 - Elaboration (Oyserman et al., 2004)

Methodology

- Two phase qualitative dominant mixed methods design
- 100 semi structured interviews at two universities in Guangdong
 - One elite
 - One less 'prestigious'
- Divide into three social class groups based on rural/urban *Hukou* and proxy measures of SES:
 - Rural
 - Urban non-elite
 - Elite

Anxiety about the labour market regardless of level of social privilege

'If you don't get a job after you graduate, you have to be supported by your family.

Everyone will know that you are a burden on your parents, both financially and emotionally.

They will worry about your career and your future' (Rural, Politics).

'I worry every night. I feel very nervous about my future...If I don't have a high salary, then I can't buy a house, and I cannot start a family. I don't want my father and mother to have to support me. I think they should enjoy their life after they retire'
(Urban elite, History).

Rural youth: Credential focused and nationally-orientated

'For students from rural areas or small towns, we tend to lack confidence. We have to spend 15 years on schoolwork only, but other students are good at playing piano, playing sports, and organising large activities... They will be more popular among the other students and even among the teachers. It's a kind of culture shock... they seem better than you, and they seem more qualified to be a successful person in society' (Rural, Sociology).

Urban non-elite: Gaining nationally-bound currency in the economy of experience

'I sent a lot of resumes. I hadn't done an internship, so they didn't think I could do the job, so they refused me. They didn't even give me the chance to do an interview. I just kept trying. I applied for more than 70 internships. I felt very down at the moment. But luckily, one company gave me a chance' (Urban non-elite, Language & Literature).

Urban elite: Envisaging and realising globally orientated possible selves

'I want to go to university in Canada after my studies in [Provincial University]... last summer vacation I went to the visiting summer programme at University of British Columbia. I stayed there for one month. I learnt a lot of things... I wanted to experience life in Canada, as I want to study there after my graduation' (Urban elite, History).

Discussion

- Findings highlight stark difference between the aspirations/positional competition strategies of graduates from across the socio-economic spectrum
 - Fear of failure and ‘emotional burden’ (due to familial pressure in Chinese culture?)
 - Differences both the **nature** and **clarity** of ideal possible selves
 - Globally- vs. Nationally-oriented
 - Conditioned vs. True (Oyserman et al., 2004)
- Indicates importance of **the scope of individual aspirations** in shaping actions related to positional competition