

Hao Zheng PhD thesis abstract

This research examines how international students craft their queer and adult identities in Australia. Specifically, I focus on a critical yet under-represented population in academic, media and political discourses: mobile Chinese queer young females studying and living in Western societies. These young females have been working on adult and queer identity-making while living transnational lives amidst a global health crisis, yet their struggles are often overlooked and under-represented in extant scholarship due to their limited visibility, intersectional vulnerabilities and continuous marginalisation. To address this lacuna, I collect and share the stories of 20 Chinese queer female international students, contributing to this project as an insider researcher. This thesis captures the complexities and maps out the tensions in these young queer females' narratives about their transnational⁸ and cross-cultural experiences in relation to queer and adult identity-making. Research materials were collected from 40 interviews conducted in 2021 with PRC-born queer female students aged between 20 and 34 years who were residing in Australia. Two stages of fieldwork were conducted in-person and online, comprising semi-structured, in-depth interviews, followed several months later by short snapshot scroll-back interviews involving reviewing participants' social media content.

Drawing on, extending and complicating the theoretical frameworks of youth transitions and queer temporality, I argue that Chinese queer female international students' queer and adult identity-making can be continuous, non-linear, uneven and constantly evolving, with no prescribed trajectory and universally acknowledged standards of success. In other words, adult is not a status and queer is not a fixed identity. Rather than adhering to predefined notions of mobility, sexuality, migration trajectories and pathways to adulthood, this thesis explores the ambiguity and indeterminacy entailed in queer and adult identities, emphasising their continual, multidimensional and relational evolution. To encapsulate this

critical and nuanced perspective, I introduce the concept of 'transience' to help unpack the factors influencing, reshaping and facilitating the identity-making process. Three critical dimensions emerged in the analysis: the uncertainty and possibility inherent in the mobility-migration journey, the negotiation of family and societal expectations in relation to gender and sexuality, and the practices and discourses of communication and self-expression on digital media.

By exploring the queer mobile transience of these young people, this thesis aims to break new ground in understanding international students' overseas experiences by taking a methodologically innovative and theoretically important intersectional approach. It also intends to bring non-Western-centric queer and feminist theory into conversation with transnational youth mobility studies. The research presents evidence of Chinese queer female students' everyday experiences and feelings amid the unforeseen precarity in transnational mobile lives to complicate the conventional model of youth transitions and the American-centric conceptualisation of queer temporality.

This thesis contributes to the current understanding of mobile queer youth in queer studies, youth studies and migration/mobility studies, providing insights into the common elements evident in evolving globalisation processes such as transnational mobility while highlighting the importance of the cultural specificity of one's upbringing. By centring the voices of young queer females from a marginal background, the thesis foregrounds the critical and decolonial perspective of de-Westernisation in studies of queer youth. It sheds light on the great diversity in the broader demographics of international students. The implications of this study transcend the borders of Australia and China, contributing to a more inclusive approach to benefit mobile youth navigating the vulnerability of marginalisation.