

LOTE (Languages Other than English) learners' investment in learning languages

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Abstract. This study draws on the model of language learning investment to explore China's LOTE (Languages Other than English) students' learning motivation. Data collected through in-depth interviews with 35 university students were analyzed in an inductive way. The findings show that: (1) the participants invested in learning LOTEs because they had enough affordances (resources applicable to LOTE learning) and/or perceived target language-related benefits (economic, cultural or social ones) from LOTE learning, even though most of our participants were initially involuntary applicants; (2) students were reluctant to invest in learning their target language(s) and merely strove to fulfil their program(s) when they were lacking affordances, perceiving few benefits, or even devalued by the in-context ideologies. These findings provide important implications for LOTE educators to motivate their students, and for policy makers to improve China's LOTE education.

Keywords: Languages other than English; language learning investment; capital; language ideologies

[ch] 非英语学习者的语言学习投资

摘要. 本研究采用语言学习投资框架来探讨中国非英语学习者的语言学习动机。研究数据来自对35名大学生进行的深度访谈，研究分析以归纳的方式进行。研究结果显示：（1）当学生们占有充足的给养（可用于语言学习的资源）和/或感知到与目的语相关的利益（经济、文化或社会利益）时，他们对非英语学习进行了投资；（2）当缺乏给养或几乎感知不到相关利益，甚至被所处环境的意识形态贬低时，学生们则不愿投资于目的语，并以完成学业为唯一目标。本研究能提供重要启示，以帮助非英语教师激励学生，及帮助政策制定者改进中国的非英语教育。

关键词: 非英语，语言学习投资，资本，语言意识形态

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1. Introduction

The globalized world is witnessing a decline in the learning of languages other than English (hereafter LOTEs), accompanied by the longstanding dominance of English (Gao & Zheng, 2019). L2 learning motivation researchers have problematized the increasing English-LOTE imbalance (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017; Ushioda, 2017), and discovered two reasons for it. The first is that the various forms of language attainment are overlooked, and the second is that L2 learning is seen to be directly motivated by the need for social contact and integration, which ignores other contexts like foreign language learning in formal education. Therefore, LOTE-related motivation studies should consider the applicability of existing theories and methods from the English learning contexts.

Moreover, the field of L2 motivation research is experiencing a shift from a focus on the predominant psycholinguistic approach to a focus on sociological and anthropological perspectives (Norton, 2015). Compared with the psycholinguistic construct of motivation, which is criticized as fixed and unitary from poststructuralist perspectives, the construct of investment as conceptualized by Norton aims to capture the interrelationship between individuals and social contexts (Norton, 2013; Norton Peirce, 1995). Further, an expanded model of investment has been developed, wherein language learners' investment is seen to be co-determined by ideologies (which reflect social factors, especially relations of

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power), capital (including learners' own resources and perceived benefits pertaining to language learning), and identity (learners' self-positioning) (Darvin & Norton, 2015). There is a wealth of studies based on the construct of investment or the expanded model (Gearing & Roger, 2018; Gu, 2008; Hajar, 2017; Kim, 2014; Lee, 2014; Nasrollahi Shahri, 2018; Reeves, 2009; Vasilopoulos, 2015), but few have been conducted in LOTE learning contexts.

To enhance its international engagement, China has promoted the 'Belt and Road' Initiative, a comprehensive strategy that involves at least 60 countries and comprises policy dialogue, economic cooperation, and people-to-people exchange (Huang, 2016). Accordingly, LOTE personnel are in demand (Wen, 2016), and tertiary institutions are encouraged by the government to establish LOTE programs (Gao & Zheng, 2019; Han et al., 2019). Against this backdrop, there has been an upsurge in research on LOTE education, mostly conducted from the macro perspective, e.g., the planning of LOTE programs or the employability of LOTE graduates (Chen & Chen, 2018; Ding, 2017, 2018; Han et al., 2019; Lu, 2012; Shen, 2015; Wang & Zhao, 2017). Specifically, research has accentuated the imbalance between the supply and demand of LOTE personnel in China, despite the growth of LOTE programs in tertiary institutions (Wang & Xia, 2019), which motivates further exploration into the process of LOTE learning and teaching, especially of underexplored factors like learner motivation. Although language learning motivation studies have been flourishing, such studies, regardless of their theoretical bases, have mainly focused on the English learning contexts (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017), with only a few investigating LOTE learners' motivation (Chen et al., 2020; Gao & Lv, 2018; Gao, 2013; Gu, 2008; Lu et al., 2019). It is worth probing into the language learning motivation of LOTE learners, since learners take receptive roles in language-in-education policy and thus can partly determine the effects of LOTE education policy (Zhao & Baldauf, 2012). Therefore, drawing on the theoretical framework of investment developed by Darvin and Norton (2015), this study addresses the following questions:

- (1) Why do LOTE learners invest in learning their target language(s)?
- (2) Why do they not invest in learning their target languages?

2. Theoretical Framework

Drawing on the notions of *capital* (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986) and *subjectivity* (Weedon, 1987), Norton has conceptualized the construct of investment to analyze data from female immigrant ESL learners in Canada (Norton Peirce, 1995). 'Investment' has been defined as learners' will and endeavor to facilitate their language learning in order to obtain a good return, i.e., access to 'a wider range of symbolic and material resources which would in turn increase the value of their cultural capital', in contrast to the traditional unitary concept of 'motivation' that ignores the role of socio-historical dimensions (Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 17). In the theorization of investment, Norton emphasizes the significance of the poststructuralist identity approach to SLA, since the multiple, dynamic construct of identity (from the poststructuralist perspective) can complement the psychological construct of motivation by unveiling how learners reframe their relationship with other interlocutors and construct powerful identities to speak (Norton & McKinney, 2011).

Furthermore, in view of the increasing number of studies employing investment to explore learner identity (Norton, 2015; Norton & Toohey, 2011), Norton and her colleagues have developed an expanded model of investment comprising the interrelated notions of identity, capital, and ideology (Darvin & Norton, 2015). In this model, capital can be further classified as *affordances* and *perceived benefits*, social ideologies can engender *systemic patterns of control*, and *positioning* refers to learners' identities pertaining to language learning (see the definitions in Table 1). Learners' investment should be explored considering the interplay of the three components: ideology underlines social structure, wherein the systemic patterns of control function to evaluate the capital that learners already hold and the legitimacy for them to gain access to the capital they strive for; during this process, learners' self-positioning will be co-constructed by ideology, affordances, and perceived benefits.

Table 1. Constructs in the Extended Model of Investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

| Notion | Definition |
|------------------------------|---|
| Capital | A self-reproducible capacity that yields profits, usually in economic, cultural, or social forms (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986) |
| Ideology | A set of heterogeneous and contradictory ideas shaped by power relations |
| Identity | The way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future (Norton, 2013, p. 4) |
| Affordances | The <i>capital</i> that learners already possess and can apply |
| Perceived benefits | The <i>capital</i> that learners endeavor to obtain through language learning |
| Systemic patterns of control | The valuing mechanism, constructed by social ideologies, which privileges some kinds of capital and marginalizes others within a place or site |
| Positioning | a spectrum of dispositions, also shaped by social ideologies, to think and act congruously within the contexts, especially the facets pertaining to language learning |

The construct of investment has been utilized to delve into the English learning motivation of Chinese learners in various contexts. In view of the popularity of English among Chinese citizens, a special issue of *Asian Pacific Communication* in 2008 focused on the investment in English by Chinese students, including the ‘English Club’ joined by a group of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong (Gao et al., 2008), the challenges concerning English speaking confronting Chinese students in EMI classrooms (also in Hong Kong) (Trent, 2008), the identity construction of three female university students in Mainland China (Gu, 2008), the imagined communities pertaining to a mathematical subject among Chinese international students in an Australian secondary school (Arkoudis & Love, 2008), and the negotiation of multiple identities of Chinese students enrolled in a Canadian post-secondary ESL program (Lee, 2008). There are also other studies investigating other types of Chinese learners of English, e.g., adolescent immigrant students and NNEs (non-native English speaking) doctoral students (Chang, 2011; Chang, 2016; McKay & Wong, 1996), and a few studies focusing on Chinese learners of LOTEs at the tertiary level (Chen et al., 2020). These studies indicate that socio-cultural and linguistic factors within the contexts do play a role in shaping learners’ motivation and practices, and reveal the dynamic, multiple nature of identity constructed in language learning. Given the disparity between global English and LOTEs in terms of their international statuses and learners’ perceptions (Chen et al., 2020; Ushioda, 2017), as well as the heterogeneity of so-called ‘LOTEs’ in terms of linguistic and cultural discrepancies, it seems necessary to further explore why and how LOTE learners enhance their investment in the Chinese context.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Background

This study was part of a project on the language learning beliefs and efforts of China’s LOTE learners at the university level. We recruited a group of students from three LOTE programs in a university in eastern China. This university is nationally renowned for its foreign language education and linguistic and literary studies. According to its annual reports, its graduates are very popular in the employment market, many of whom have been employed by government departments, corporations, the media, and other higher education institutions. The employment rates among the graduates of many LOTE programs at this university are even reported to be 100%, although it should be noted that the definition of ‘employment’ in these reports may actually include having signed a contract, going abroad, and engaging in further study.

3.2. Participants

The participants in the study were 35 second-year undergraduates (9 Hindi majors, 11 Persian majors, and 15 Thai majors) from three LOTE departments, i.e., the Department of Hindi (admission on a quadrennial basis), the Department of Persian (admission on a triennial basis), and the Department of Thai (admission on a biennial basis). The three departments were chosen due to the different linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their respective languages, which were expected to generate cross-linguistic and cultural differences and allow comparisons. The chosen languages were also presumed to be representative in Asian contexts.

The three departments all belong to the School of Asian and African Studies, and all the 10 programs were LOTE programs. Students in the school were required to study both their target language (hereafter TL) and English. They had to pass TEM-4 (a national English test for second-year English majors) to fulfil their program study, which means that English was also an important part of their university life.

The reasons why the LOTE students had enrolled in the programs are presented in Table 2 (an individual may have given more than one reason). It can be seen that LOTE students chose their majors for various reasons. Nearly half of the students reported that they chose their programs randomly without knowing much about them, or else they were assigned to the programs. 14 students applied for their program purely due to their preference for the university and/or language programs. 10 students were assigned to their programs, probably because their Gaokao scores did not exceed the cut-off scores for their preferred programs (which were mostly the more commonly taught languages like French, German, Japanese, or Arabic). Six students said their application was a random (or mistaken) choice. Only 3 students’ choices were out of interest in the target languages. For example, T15 was a Malaysian student of Chinese origin, who had begun to learn Thai a year or two before being admitted to the program and who could speak to the foreign teachers when his classmates had just begun to learn the alphabets. Interestingly, 3 students stated that their application was an in-between choice. For instance, H2 said she had enrolled in this program by mistake, and that she was originally interested in ‘pure humanities (纯文科)’ like philosophy and religious studies, but she had decided to choose a language-related program as an ‘in-between (折中的)’ choice considering employment opportunities.

Table 2. Reasons for Enrolling in the Current Programs.

| | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Preferring the university and/or language programs | 14 (Hindi: 1; Persian: 4; Thai: 9) |
| Assigned by the university | 10 (Hindi: 6; Persian: 3; Thai: 1) |
| Choosing randomly or by mistake | 6 (Hindi: 2; Persian: 3; Thai: 1) |
| Recommended by parents or other seniors | 3 (Hindi: 1; Persian: 1; Thai: 1) |
| In-between choice of program | 3 (Hindi: 1; Persian: 1; Thai: 1) |
| Interested in the target language | 3 (Thai: 3) |

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted during the autumn semester of the 2018–2019 academic year. We explained our research purpose to the teachers on the programs and were permitted to observe classes. Three to four weeks later the first author began to contact the students to arrange interviews. The interviews, all conducted in Putonghua, the lingua franca in the Chinese context, lasted for about 40 minutes on average, and were audio-taped with the permission of the students. The interview recordings were transcribed for further analysis, and sent to the corresponding interviewees in case they felt there was anything that needed to be omitted or revised.

The transcripts of the interview recordings were read through repeatedly and coded in an inductive way, rather than being predetermined (Benaquisto, 2008). During the coding process it was found that although the current programs may not have been their first choices, many participants became more likely to invest in the programs as they proceeded. Further, we identified some factors causing or sustaining their investment that corresponded to the theoretical notions from the model put forward by Darvin and Norton (2015), i.e., affordances applicable in investment (see Extract 1), perceived benefits obtainable through investment (see Extract 2), positioning (see Extracts 3 and 4), and systemic patterns of control (see Extracts 5 and 6). The first three notions can serve as the initial or sustaining factors of learners' investment, while the last one, in some cases, may undermine learners' investment.

4. Findings

4.1. Investment in learning LOTEs

The results revealed that LOTE students would choose to invest in their target language learning if they had enough affordances, perceived enough benefits pertaining to the target languages, and/or identified themselves as legitimate speakers of the target language(s). For example, some Thai students saw the similarities between Thai and their mother tongues as their affordances for investment in Thai learning:

Extract 1

[...] I found that Cantonese and Thai have very much in common! There are many final consonants both in Thai and Cantonese, and so are the tones. There are 6 tones in Cantonese, and 5 in Thai, and some tones in the two [varieties] are the same. So, I think I may choose this topic when we are going to write the dissertation, because I think the two are too similar. Whoever can speak Cantonese will find it easy to learn Thai, because s/he can find the exact places of articulation. [...] Well, I didn't notice this when I was just beginning to learn Thai. But after I joined the Cantonese club in our university and began to teach others Cantonese, I came to realize that some pronunciations [in Cantonese] were just like Thai. There are final consonants in Thai, as in Cantonese. And there are some shared phonemes in both languages which don't exist in Putonghua. And I feel//I feel that ... it feels like interlinking [the knowledge chains]. (T3)

The phonological similarities between Thai and Cantonese seemed to serve as affordances for T3, since she believed that her proficiency in Cantonese could facilitate her Thai learning in terms of pronunciation. Through her experiences of Cantonese teaching, she found that 'it is very joyful to teach a language to others, during which you will also find something interesting' (T3). Her 'joyful' experiences of learning Thai and teaching Cantonese made it possible for her to imagine becoming a teacher of the Thai language or a teacher of the Chinese language in Thailand, for which she decided to give up her minor program, international trade, to 'spend more time on Thai' next semester.

T4 and T8, who had originally been interested in English before becoming undergraduates, just 'transferred [their] affections towards Thai' (T4, T8) due to the phonological or lexical similarities between Thai and their mother tongues. T4 planned to participate in the personnel selection process for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and T8 expressed her affection for the Thai language and Thailand itself, because the environment of Thailand was similar with that of her hometown. For these learners, their acquired linguistic skills served as affordances that could benefit

their Thai learning, and the transfer of their affections to the Thai language resulted in their willingness to position themselves as Thai learners and users (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Moreover, when LOTE students perceived benefits from LOTE learning (whether economic, cultural, or social), they would also choose to invest in their programs. Although she chose the program by mistake, H2 identified both economic values (job opportunities) and cultural values (knowledge of myth and religion, which is likely to be transformed into an embodied form of capital) pertaining to Hindi learning (Bourdieu, 1986; Darvin & Norton, 2015). Therefore, she appeared to be a willing investor, hoping to make faster progress in Hindi to benefit her exchange to India the following year. She expected to work in India, or at least to find a job in which she could use Hindi in the future. For her, there were many occupation options available.

Similarly, T1, an unmotivated applicant at first, did not merely discover that Thai was interesting itself, but recognized that it was also useful in exploring a particular research field. Here is her perception of Thai learning:

Extract 2

Well, I think what it means to you to learn Thai just depends on your career orientation. For example, if you want to become a diplomat and contribute to the country, [your proficiency in] a foreign language will certainly become an effective ‘stepping-stone (敲门砖)’ for you. But for me ... if I choose the path of sociology, anthropology, or international relations, the Thai language will enable me to delve into a specific field, because there may be few scholars trying to learn a foreign language when studying international relations, just in order to gain more knowledge of the target country; but if you are a foreign language learner, you can delve deep into the target country on the basis of your proficiency in the [target] language. (T1)

For T1, a good command of Thai was seen as enabling access to the fields she was eager to explore. She found a way to apply her major program to sociological or international relation studies, endeavoring to bridge the gap between her actual self and her imagined self as a sociological researcher (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).

Furthermore, students’ positive self-positioning in language learning could also encourage their investment. Two of the students had previously worked as volunteers in the China International Import Expo (CIIE), which differentiated them from other learners who did not speak the target languages and allowed them to identify themselves as ‘legitimate’ speakers (Bourdieu, 1977). Here are their descriptions of their experiences:

Extract 3

I remember in the CIIE, my partner and I just... My partner is studying in another university and hasn’t learned Hindi before. During these days when I served as a volunteer there, I noticed that they could call me by my [Hindi] name, but they, I mean, those Indian people in the CIIE, couldn’t remember my partner’s name. When I introduced myself to these Indians, I would tell them my Hindi name, because I knew they could never remember a Chinese name. Anyway, they could remember [my name], and tended to be kinder and friendlier to me, maybe that’s just because... Although they [the Indians] all use English at work, you can still get closer to them if you can speak Hindi. (H2)

During her time at the CIIE she had opportunities to speak with Indian people, and found that although she was ‘not able to put her Hindi to good use’ and could only speak English to the Indians most of the time, her Hindi learning experience still differentiated her from non-Hindi learners, since the Indians tended to be friendlier to her. Hindi learning assigned an identity marker to her, i.e., a Hindi speaker, which may have suggested access to the job market in favor of those proficient in Hindi.

Extract 4

When I served as a volunteer in CIIE, I was greatly honored to have worked as the interpreter for the Afghan delegation, especially their Minister of Commerce and Industry. And I was so lucky to be chosen as the interpreter just because I can speak Persian. Many other LOTE learners [who also served as CIIE volunteers] didn’t get such interpreting tasks and could only deal with odds and ends. There were also students of interdisciplinary programs like advertising, journalism, or education, who would never get such opportunities to work as an interpreter [like I did]. Most of them just stayed in the venues dealing with some trifles or having nothing to do. I talked about it with a friend of mine, and he said he learnt from my experience that it was just the fact that I can use this language [Persian] that enabled me to get such a job which seemed so brilliant. I mean, what made a difference between me and other [volunteers] was just that I could speak this language, and they could not get the opportunity like I did. (P6)

P6 mentioned her experience as a CIIE volunteer wherein she got the ‘brilliant’ opportunity to work as an interpreter for the Minister of Commerce and Industry of Afghanistan, while many other volunteers could only deal with ‘odds and ends’ in the venues. Her identity as a Persian speaker was affirmed within this context since her Persian proficiency was recognized as valuable at that time, making her stand out from other student volunteers in her imagination.

Additionally, for the Thai students, more exposure to the target culture in the classroom seem to enhance their self-identification as Thai speakers, and thus facilitate and sustain their investment. They had two foreign teachers, one of whom was responsible for the speaking lessons and usually taught the students traditional Thai handicrafts. During these lessons the teacher used Thai exclusively, telling the students about Thai customs with introductory videos and showing them how to make handicrafts step by step; the students were also supposed to only use Thai, and this did not seem to be a hindrance to the conversations between the teacher and the students. For these students, this exposure to the target culture seemed to have increased their interest and participation in Thai learning to some extent. However, it should be noted that such affective factors may not play a significant role on their own, without affordances and/or perceived benefits, as in the cases of T5, T6, T7, and T11 in the following section.

4.2. Investment in Learning LOTE Undermined

Although some students became more willing to enhance their language learning investment as they gradually discovered their affordances, perceived benefits, and identified themselves as legitimate speakers, there were also other factors impeding their investment. P6, excellent as she was in terms of her academic performance, found it difficult to transform her affordances into economic capital. This was because there were few opportunities for female Persian graduates in China's employment market:

Extract 5

If I could find a job related to Persian, it would be very good, if only I could... But now it seems that the employment of the last graduates ... actually, the boys' chances were not bad, but all the girls... Well, one of the girls was recruited by the Shanghai Foreign Affairs Office, and the other two girls chose to attend graduate school. So did the female graduates before last, or even earlier. Most of them chose to further their study, merely because the employers only hire boys. So I don't know whether I could find a research job. That would be very good if I could find one. [...] Their [government sectors and companies] primary choice is male; they would hire a girl only if they couldn't find a boy, and the girl has to be very outstanding. (P6)

Extract 6

Actually, when I just got the offer of this program, I wanted to become a diplomat, because I was interested in this field and learned a bit about it in high school. I thought it would be a good chance to become a member of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. And then our teachers emphasized more and more the fact that the Ministry only recruits boys. Nothing can be done about it. It feels like having cold water thrown on me. (P6)

P6 had once dreamt of becoming a diplomat, until she was informed by her teachers of the covert male-only policy in the employment market. Since then, she considered furthering her study and participating in academic studies in the future. She also identified the cultural value that Persian could bring to her, but she was worried about the possibility of finding a position in academia and considered other choices irrelevant to Persian learning, since most of the previous female students had already chosen to further their study. Intriguingly, the male-only policy serves as a mode of exclusion in denying the rights of female Persian speakers to enter the employment market, marginalizing them regardless of the affordances they possess (Darvin & Norton, 2015). In fact, most Persian programs also only recruit male students except for the one in the city where this university is located, probably in light of the male-only ideology in the domestic employment market. Fortunately, P6, a metropolitan resident herself, also possessed other affordances (e.g., her English skills) and had access to more material and social resources compared with many of her counterparts.

Compared with their female counterparts, the male Persian learners did not experience the difficulties confronting P6. P2, also one of the top students in the class, planned to participate in the personnel selection for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For him, satisfactory profession choices would be to be recruited by the government sector, or to work for a state-owned or private enterprise. P5, who also wanted to work for either a government department or a company, thought that although he hoped to utilize Persian in his future profession, he would not 'put all his eggs in one basket', because the market demand for personnel proficient in Persian seemed to be fluctuating. Though it might not be easy to seek employment, they could get support from the social networks of their teachers and alumni.

Moreover, some students became demotivated or reluctant LOTE learners. They did not suffer from the same structural impediment as P6 did, but they believed they had little access to better career prospects or seldom possessed the economic, cultural, or social resources pertaining to the target language(s). Some of them (e.g., H1, H5, and H9) thought 'good things are only available for the top students', in light of the limited quota of government-funded exchanges and studentships in their department. Further, they believed their best choice would be finding a job 'suited to one's program training (跟专业对口)', but this expectation would not necessarily be met (e.g., H3). The employment rate of Hindi graduates was 100% in 2017, as stated in the annual employment report of the university, but according to H5, only two of the Hindi graduates that she knew had found jobs related to their program: one was recruited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the other worked as an HR for an Indian company. Most of the Hindi

students had enrolled in a minor program, not only because of the university's 'Multilingualism plus' initiative, but to some extent out of the concern that 'I might not be able to make a living if I only reckon on Hindi' (H4). Additionally, linguistic discrepancy seemed to be another problem. For example, the conjugation of Hindi proved to be difficult for the learners, especially spoken Hindi. Likewise, some Thai learners did not possess the linguistic skills that could serve as facilitators in Thai learning (e.g., T5, T6, and T7); these learners found the 'alveolar trill' in Thai difficult to pronounce.

There were other learners whose pursuit of cultural benefits outweighed their interest in economic benefits, but who were not satisfied by their target language learning. For example, T11 was gifted in writing, and was interested in literature and cinematography. As an intermediate Thai learner, she could not get access to the cultural resources she wanted through her Thai learning, which might explain her reluctant attitude toward her investment in Thai (Darvin & Norton, 2015). P4, another example, was quite interested in humanities and was likely to follow the path of academic research. He decided not to narrow down his choice of research field to those pertinent to the Persian language, since social and cultural issues seemed more appealing to him than the language itself. However, the Persian target language courses focused much more on language items than Persian culture and literature, which was not attractive enough to promote his investment in Persian learning. For him, the pursuit of cultural benefits outweighed his interest in economic benefits, and he might have been more motivated in his Persian learning if the course contained more about Persian history and culture in subsequent semesters.

For these demotivated or reluctant learners, target language learning was merely a task of 'getting higher GPA' (e.g., H1) or fulfilling the program. Therefore, it seems that these students were not highly motivated in their Hindi learning.

5. Discussion

This study draws on the theorization of investment (Norton Peirce, 1995) and its expanded model (Darvin & Norton, 2015) to investigate the factors that motivate or demotivate LOTE learning among Chinese students. The findings reveal that despite their sometimes involuntary initial decisions, some students showed growing interest and motivation as they furthered their target language learning, i.e., becoming increasingly motivated as they discovered that their existing affordances might be applicable to their target language(s) learning, or else that they might be able to obtain benefits pertaining to the target language(s), including economic capital (e.g., employment opportunities) and cultural capital (e.g., embodied cultural knowledge or qualifications as an educator or researcher) (Darvin & Norton, 2015). There were also some demotivated or reluctant learners, who were investing in the target language(s) only for their academic degree. These learners usually had few affordances or limited access to their perceived benefits, and were less likely to consider themselves 'legitimate' speakers.

This study not only manifests the applicability of Darvin and Norton's model of investment in China's LOTE learning contexts, but also the interrelationship between identity, capital, and ideology: the perceived benefits and affordances pertaining to LOTE learning serve as the prerequisites for learners' investment, while systemic patterns of control can demotivate learners' investment by devaluing their affordances or depriving them of their perceived benefits (e.g., job opportunities in P6's case). Furthermore, the affective factors found in the case of the Thai class, which may also sustain learners' investment probably by promoting their willingness to position themselves as bilingual and bi-cultural individuals, are seemingly akin to the notions of integrative orientation (Gardner & Lambert, 1959) and 'leisure' (Chen et al., 2020). Nevertheless, in contrast to Gardner's (2009) assertion that the effects of integrative orientation on facilitating L2 learning are more significant than those of instrumental orientation, the effects of such affective factors would not significantly facilitate learners' investment without the concomitant effects of material benefits, particularly employment opportunities. That is probably because the time-consuming undergraduate program curriculum is usually perceived as an important pre-employment preparation for Chinese university students, for whom the perfect choice is to find an occupation 'suited to [their] program training' (H3) after their four-year program. In our examples, the possession of affordances and the recognition of benefits, and systemic control in some cases, seem to be more significant in facilitating learners' self-positioning as 'legitimate' speakers (Bourdieu, 1977). Therefore, these learners might imagine their identities pertaining to the target language as 'target language utilizers' and/or bi-cultural persons.

We see several implications for China's LOTE education. First, there is scope for facilitating learners' language investment. On the one hand, teachers can help learners to discover the benefits pertaining to their target language(s), which may motivate learners' investment through bridging the gap between their actual selves and imagined identities (e.g., becoming a diplomat or a researcher). On the other hand, a mechanism involving universities, departments, and teachers should be established to build a learner-friendly environment where learners will be able to gain access to abundant learning resources and alumni networks to facilitate their future career development. Second, publicity for less commonly taught LOTEs needs to be improved in order to attract more potential quality students. Students tend to choose the language programs they 'have heard of before', although in fact they may know little about them. Meanwhile, for students already enrolling in LOTE programs, teachers should try to discover more about the capital (whether economic, cultural, or social) they already possess, which may then be converted into capital for target

language investment. Learners can voluntarily enhance their self-positioning pertaining to target language learning, and give themselves the opportunity to become in-demand LOTE personnel.

6. Conclusion

Based on our analysis of observation and interview data collected from Hindi, Persian, and Thai learners in a Chinese foreign studies university and the model of investment put forward by Darwin and Norton (2015), this study examines what motivates or demotivates LOTE students' investment. The findings show that: (1) LOTE students' investment is motivated if they have enough affordances (resources applicable to LOTE learning) and/or perceived benefits (economic, cultural, or social benefits obtainable from LOTE learning), even though most of our participants were initially involuntary applicants; (2) LOTE students are demotivated or reluctant to invest in their target language(s) when they lack affordances or perceive few benefits, or when their learning purpose is merely to fulfill their program demand(s).

This study provides insights on how LOTE learners can be motivated or demotivated in their target language investment, but the study has some limitations. To better capture the development of learners' investment, longitudinal studies may be carried out to track their learning processes, e.g., from their admission to final career choices. Moreover, by integrating individual learners' perspectives with the perspectives of educators, policy-makers, and even parents in future studies, we can explore ways to improve the planning of China's LOTE education.

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