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# **Escaping the fire for the frying-pan? British teachers entering International Schooling**

## **Abstract**

The arena of ‘English-Speaking International Schooling’ continues to grow, reaching almost 12,000 schools in 2020. The growing teaching arena attracts 30,000 new entrants each year and continues to be dominated by British-trained teachers. Little is actually known about the motives or subsequent experiences of this body. However, the narrative about this ‘brain-drain’ tends to be negative and condescending, referring to teachers ‘fleeing’ Britain and ‘escaping’ neoliberal performativity and accountability, and finding ‘refuge’ overseas. The reality is that many may enter an equally difficult, insecure, and precarious environment. This paper explores the emergent terrain and shows how it has changed over time, revealing the reality of teaching in a new arena of profit-driven activity in mainland China, aimed mainly at local Chinese parents. A resultant new narrative is proposed, based upon positive notions of ‘resistance’ and ‘self-care’, which helps to explain why the exodus tends (at present) to be largely one-way.

## Introduction

It is argued (Connell, 2013 p.99) that schooling ‘has been powerfully affected by the rise of a neoliberal political, economic and cultural agenda.’ As a result, teachers have been placed under performative pressures, and the sector has been commodified, been made more hierarchical and competitive, and has become more insecure. Connell (2013) argues that bases for alternatives do exist, and one such alternative is the growing arena worldwide of ‘English-Speaking International Schooling’.

This now operates as a discernible arena of elite schooling, although it still largely defies sociological debate or critical theorisation in spite of calls for such an advancement of inquiry (Resnik, 2012). Moreover, it has become a definite ‘career’ path, and viable alternative career option, for both novice and experienced teachers in English-speaking nations, and the bulk of entrants continues to be either British or North American.

A bewildering array of schooling options has been created. It has been shown previously in this journal (Wright and Lee, 2014; Bunnell, Courtois, and Donnelly, 2020) that the emergent diversity of provision in areas such as mainland China means that these educators now have alternative viable and seemingly exciting pathways which did not exist two decades ago. They can enter, for instance, international schools offering the programmes of the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) but aimed at serving mainly local children (Wright and Lee, 2014<sup>1</sup>, call them ‘Elite International Schools’). Alternatively, they can enter the growing body of branded and franchised overseas branches of elite private English schools such as Dulwich College Beijing, or Wellington College Shanghai, which first appeared in 1996 and is expected to reach 100 by 2022 (Bunnell, Courtois, and Donnelly, 2020). Our paper

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<sup>1</sup> It has to be noted that Wright and Lee discussed elite international schools for non-Chinese passport holders, although most of the students in these schools had Chinese or East Asia heritage.

adds to this corpus of knowledge by introducing another, similar, yet much larger grouping (of about 600 schools) which we describe as the ‘Chinese Internationalised School’ (Poole, 2020).

However, the motives, reality, and experiences of these teachers, and school leaders, is still at an elementary stage of discovery and discussion, hence the need for a question-mark in our paper’s title. This all seems rather odd, since the recent growth, over the past two decades, of this arena of education has been nothing short of phenomenal. According to data collected and mined by England-based ISC Research, the market’s main gatherer of intelligence, there were just 90,000 teachers working in the arena in the year 2000, teaching almost one million students in about 2,500 schools worldwide.

Our paper is focused on the aspect of teacher growth, arguably the least discussed of these three areas (schools, children, and teachers). By the end of the 2017-18 academic year, there were 492,000 teachers, of which:

‘the vast majority are qualified English-speaking teachers who have trained and gained teaching experience in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand’ (ISC Research, 12th December 2018).

In 2018 it was being expected that by 2023 the demand for teachers would hit 589,000. The ISC Research website in July 2020 was showing a figure of 566,000 educators teaching 5.98 million children in 11,627 schools. From this data, we can calculate that the market is seeing a steady annual growth of about 35,000 educators (teachers, administrators, and leaders). Many of these educators are emanating, still/always from Britain. Even as far back as 2013, the British press was reporting (Vaughan, 2013) how Britain has become the biggest single supplier of staff to the field, accounting for more than 100,000 teachers in total.

Our paper is one of the first to directly tackle the issue of the reality of motives and subsequent experience of the British staff who enter the arena of International Schooling. This

is seen as necessary, and timely. It has been said, by one researcher in the field, that: ‘we need a more complex explanation of the motivations and careers of teachers in International Schools’ (Bailey, 2015 p.6). Moreover, Bailey’s study (2015 p.9) had revealed that teachers ‘revelled in and enjoyed the uncertainty’ of working abroad and ‘they felt they had actively chosen these challenges, rather than having them imposed upon them’. This latter sentence is crucial to the narrative of how we frame the motives and experiences of these teachers, since we cannot assume that they are being forced to leave Britain, nor can we assume that they seek or obtain a better life. As Bailey notes, the field involves a high degree of uncertainty, insecurity, and precarity. To mix metaphors, are they ‘seeking out pastures that are greener’ or are they ‘escaping the fire for the frying-pan’? The reality is probably a bit of both, it may be a bit ‘greener’ but it is probably nevertheless a ‘frying-pan’.

It seems strange that this discussion needs to happen at all, since as we have already noted the growth of the field has had direct (negative, detrimental) consequences for Britain’s schooling system where a shortage of teachers has led to a discussion about a ‘brain-drain’. Yet, few attempts have been made to imagine why and where these teachers (re)emerge overseas, or what the reality of their existence is/becomes. It is as if they suddenly move overseas, and completely disappear from the radar of researchers and commentators.

Clearly, a huge research avenue has opened up here, as discussed by Bailey (2015) in the context of teaching in Malaysia; our paper aims to start filling the gaps, and we hope it might spur other scholars to get involved. In our paper we will reveal the potential base of entry for an increasing number of British teachers, using mainland China as an example, and we will subsequently begin the discussion for the need for the narrative about these teachers to be reframed based upon the reality.

In doing this, we add to the discussion recently started by Flores (2020), whose findings suggested that teachers can deal with adverse and worsening change by trying to survive and cope (which sounds negative), whilst also becoming more resilient and resisting (which sounds positive). This offers a framework for identifying that teachers leaving Britain for International Schooling overseas are not necessarily ‘fleeing’ and ‘escaping’, but are perhaps ‘surviving’ and ‘resisting’. Moreover, if they are indeed escaping it might merely be a case of from the fire, into the frying-pan. As said, we feel that the narrative needs to be re-considered to reflect the reality rather than just the imagination, and we need much more research investigation in this area. This reality is one based on performativity, which we define as ‘a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of incentive, control, attrition and change’ (Ball, 2003, p.216). International schools, although more autonomous than state schools in the UK, are similarly undergirded by regimes that reinscribe technologies of performativity. Further, these teachers leaving Britain for overseas ventures are arguably building up capitals of resilience (Poole, 2020) that will hold them in good stead in the uncertain and precarious arena of International Schooling. In this context, the shift becomes partly a positive one of agency and personal development, mixed with uncertainty and precarity.

## **The ‘brain-drain’ issue**

### **An under-reported phenomenon**

It is well-recognised that Britain has a teacher retention problem, and we can place the growth figures mentioned firmly above at the heart of this. Weale (2019a) draws attention to the survey of 8,600 teachers by the National Education Union (NEU), Britain’s largest teaching union, that says 40% of teachers will no longer be working in schools in Britain by 2024. Further,

almost one-fifth (18%) were expecting to leave teaching in Britain within two years (by 2021). The reasons were mostly linked to ‘out of control’ workloads, and ‘excessive’ accountability such as Ofsted inspections. The NEU replied that:

‘So long as the main drivers of a performance-based system are still in place, schools will continue to be in the grip of a culture of fear, over-regulation, and a lack of trust.’

One teacher in the NEU survey said that of the 30 he had graduated amongst only four are still teaching in Britain, whilst the rest are in places such as Dubai.

Further research, described in this journal (Perryman and Calvert, 2019), of 1,200 teacher education graduates of UCL Institute of Education (IOE) London, over five years, had explored what originally motivated them to teach, and the reasons why they have left or may consider leaving in the future. It was discovered it was workload, linked to notions of performativity and accountability, that was a crucial factor. Moreover, it was the *nature* of the work not the *amount* that was the main issue i.e. the teachers felt that they did not want to do the work, and it was not a question of too much work. Significantly, the survey found the vast majority of those who entered the profession viewed teaching as a long-term career, and only 7% saw teaching as a route to another career.

This seems to imply that many teachers leaving teaching in Britain intend to stay in teaching, but are prepared to work in another setting overseas i.e. they intend to stay teaching but will leave Britain to do it. As said already, the International Schooling market generally requires an extra 30,000 teachers per year, and half of that number in any given year will emanate from Britain (Marsh, 2017). This helps partly to explain why one-in-seven newly qualified teachers in Britain leave teaching after the first year (Speck, 2019). In fact, that figure is rising; it was 15.3% in 2017 and 14.9% in 2016 (Morrison, 2019). It was widely reported in

2016 that more teachers left England to teach overseas than had been trained that year, leading to warnings about a ‘teacher brain-drain’ (Richardson, 2016).

### **The emergent negative narrative**

A common narrative has emerged among reporting of the ‘brain-drain’ phenomenon. To reiterate, about 15-20,000 teachers leave Britain each year to teach overseas, a fact now being recognised by British government officials (Knight, 2016). Furthermore, it is recognised they may never return. One leading analyst was cited (Weale, 2019) as saying that:

‘And while once upon a time they might have gone abroad to work in the international sector temporarily...these days they may prefer what they find overseas and not return.’

One newspaper report (Ferguson, 2018) had called our attention to teachers ‘fleeing England’ and ‘finding refuge abroad’. An earlier article (Barker, 2016) had linked this movement to teachers in England being ‘sick of the system’ and seeking freedom from testing, inspections and bureaucracy. The notion of escaping and irresponsibly abandoning their post is a strong one. As discussed further in *The Guardian* newspaper (Weale, 2019b),

‘Those teachers...are a small subset of the thousands leaving their students in Oldham and Lewisham, Liverpool and Leicester, and heading for Switzerland, China, Canada, Dubai, Australia, Thailand, Mexico, Nepal and numerous other international education destinations.’

Connected to this, the notion that teachers are leaving due to performativity and governmentality measures is a strong recurring theme. Richardson (2016) had reported on the ‘brain drain’ being due to teachers escaping ‘punishing workloads’ and seeking instead ‘attractive pay packages’. It is said by Weale (2019) that: ‘The benefits include small classes, capacity to save, private healthcare, free flights home and no Ofsted.’ An online *BBC News*

report (6<sup>th</sup> February 2016) had interviewed some teachers and they had verified the attractions of the aforementioned benefits. Harris (2016) had implied, rather disparagingly, that teachers are fleeing overseas to ‘escape the paperwork’, although had also remarked that you cannot escape it completely.

This all seems rather harsh and speculative, since we know surprisingly little about why teachers *really* leave Britain to go overseas. Aside from the anecdotal evidence from Britain’s press, garnered often from third-parties, we actually now know a little bit more about why teachers are ‘fleeing’ Britain, but it still involves only a small, minority sub-set of schools. The Council of British International Schools (COBIS), together with ISC Research, has published two sets of annual reports on the topic. The second, published in June 2020 revealed from a survey of 1,100 schools in the so-called ‘Internationally British’ schooling sector that the main motivator for moving overseas to teach was ‘travel and cultural exploration’. Less than half of respondents cited ‘dissatisfaction with the home education system’. In other words, we cannot assume that all, even the majority, of British teachers move overseas to ‘escape Ofsted’.

Moreover, the COBIS report from 2020 covered only about 10% of the overall global market of almost 12,000 ‘International Schools’ and cannot be taken as fully representative of the entire arena. In particular, seemingly no attention has been given to the strategies employed by these teachers, and the extent to which they are purposefully resisting and opposing changes that they maybe do not agree with, or do not wish to be part of anymore. The rhetoric and imagery employed by the teachers has not been investigated, and instead commentators have drawn conclusions largely based upon anecdotal stories. It has been found in other contexts, such as resistance to educational reforms in Israel in 2007 (Berkovitch, 2011), that few studies involve analysing the strategies that teachers employ to drive their opposition.

In particular, the ‘escaping Ofsted’ issue does seem over-exaggerated. The emergent data reveals that many have only taught for a year or two in British schools, which does imply that many have not ever experienced the ‘terror of Ofsted’. It was even reported (Williams, 2010) that between 2000 and 2007 over 25,000 teachers qualified in England but never actually entered the profession there, which implies that some teachers ‘flee’ England straight after qualifying to teach.

### **The need for a reconsidering of the narrative**

In the absence of research evidence showing the exact reasons for the continuous ‘brain-drain’ and exodus of trained teachers from Britain (or other English-speaking nations) we believe there is an urgent need to re-consider the context of teaching in the arena of International Schooling. In particular, the context of entry (reason for, and the ultimate destination) requires a new imagination, and the narrative needs re-considering. As seen, at present it tends to be based largely upon anecdotal evidence and is both negative and quite condescending, implying teachers are selfishly abandoning their positions in an irresponsible manner. Moreover, the existing narrative implies they are seemingly being ‘forced’ out, unable to meet the demands and pressures of the system, even though many have barely witnessed this ‘unpleasant’ scenario. The flip-side of that discussion is the implication that they are, in turn, seeking out an easier, more ‘cushy’ life whilst avoiding the stress of inspections or examination league-tables. Further, this implies that the destination, in a school in China teaching local kids or a branch of Dulwich College teaching overseas British kids is an easier option, which seems disputable. Indeed, one recent study (Rey, Bolay, and Gez, 2020 p361) has concluded that:

‘While a key point of appeal for such teachers’ participation in the international school sector lies in the ostensible participation in the carefree, privileged environment of

lifestyle migration that would have been out of reach for them otherwise, in reality, such horizons of opulence are limited.’

We prefer to discuss the ‘exodus’ of teachers into the arena of International Schooling as a particular contemporary example of changing power relations, where educators sense they can transition abroad, and survive. This issue has yet to be fully discussed or theorised; as Ball (2016a) notes about resistance to governmentality and neoliberal policy in general, there is a need to address the ‘theoretical silence’ about entry to International Schooling.

The emerging research base points to numerous, complex issues. Savva’s (2015) study of 30 teachers revealed they had a predisposition to move overseas to teach, based upon critical incidents and travel during their younger years. This seems to imply a strategic decision, which undermines the notion that they are suddenly ‘escaping.’ Earlier studies such as Chandler (2011) had also identified a more strategic choice being made by international schooling educators. One personal strategy might involve ‘self-care’. As discussed by Ball and Olmedo (2013), resistance is normally viewed as a ‘collective exercise of public political activity’. Teachers fleeing Britain *en masse* might be seen the same way, as the terrain of ‘resistance’ not ‘weakness’. Instead of being viewed as irresponsible, and a cowardly act of deserting the sinking ship, the act might be viewed more positively as one of taking responsibility for caring for oneself, whilst at the same time, showing displeasure at the changes being enforced upon the teaching profession back in Britain. Entry into International Schooling becomes here a positive act of ‘resistance’ and ‘self-care’, rather than simply a negative one of ‘fleeing’ or ‘escaping’. Further, the term ‘escaping’ implies that the push-factors will disappear, which is wholly untrue as we will show later.

Further, the move overseas becomes one of gradual awakening, not sudden movement. As noted by Ball (2016b), the advent of performativity measures such as testing, auditing, and

targeting might lead to a ‘slow burn’, as teachers gradually confront the ‘slouching beast’ of neo-liberal reform. In this context, teachers continuously ‘fleeing’ England for entry into International Schooling might be seen as gradually taking up Ball’s (2016b) call for becoming more reflexive, and politically reawakening. This all requires further research inquiry, but it shows that an alternative, fresh narrative is possible, feasible, and desirable.

## **The emerging arena**

### **The emergence of a ‘Type C1 school’**

It is important to consider in greater detail where the teachers ‘fleeing’ and ‘escaping’ Britain each year are potentially (re)emerging. A contemporary framework is Hayden and Thompson’s (2013) typology of international schools, which encompasses two types of ‘Traditional’ schools. The prototype of the ‘Type A’ market-driven model has always been the 1924-established International School of Geneva, which helped develop the Geneva-registered International Baccalaureate in 1962. The prototype ‘Type B’ ideologically-driven model is arguably the Kurt-Hahn inspired Atlantic College in south Wales, which appeared in 1962 and also helped develop the IB. Traditionally, this area of schooling has been the preserve of the globally-mobile expatriate community; in one of the first academic discussions (Hayden and Thompson, 1995 p.389) had described the arena as ‘the education experienced by growing numbers of children of parents who are internationally mobile and who wish their children to accompany them as they travel the world.’

A third type has since appeared, in the complex and diverse form of the ‘Non-Traditional’ model, termed by Hayden and Thompson (2013) as the ‘Type C school’. This sub-arena of activity is now the most growing area, and encompasses a rich diversity of schooling experience, as described in this journal (Wright and Lee, 2014; Bunnell, Courtois, and

Donnelly, 2020). These schools are more typical of the newly-commercialized aspect of the arena i.e. they tend to be branded, and profit-driven, largely within networks of schools such as Dubai-based GEMS Education.

This three-fold typology provides the reader unfamiliar with the arena of International Schooling a good idea of its scope, heterogeneity and contradictions. However, since that framework was developed, in 2013, the growing *breadth* of activity, amidst the ‘spectrum of approach’ from the ‘ideological’ to the ‘pragmatic/market-led’ has been joined by a growing *depth* of activity. Comment about the sudden growth of the field in Sri Lanka had said that: ‘Since then, there has been a profusion of independent primary and secondary education institutions claiming to be ‘International Schools’ (Wettewa, 2016 p.67).

Further, since 2013 another explicit development has been the observation of a distinct ‘Premium’ and ‘Non-Premium’ sector of activity. The demarcation-line for this, as drawn by ISC Research, has tended to be accreditation (only 21% of all International Schools are currently accredited) and the delivery of an international curriculum such as one of the four IB programmes. In this context, we can identify the ‘Premium-sector’ as consisting of roughly only about 2,000 schools worldwide.

We can arguably safely-assume that the vast majority of the ‘Type A and B/Traditional’ schools are probably in the ‘Premium-sector’, and some of the ‘Type C/Non-Traditional’ area of activity involves the ‘Premium-sector’. This in turn opens up the possibility for identifying a clear division within the ‘Type C’ area; there are those schools that are ‘Premium-sector’ (we will term them ‘Type C1’) and those in the ‘Non-Premium sector (we will term them ‘Type C2’).

The growth of International Schooling in the Philippines offers a good example of the emerging division. ISC Research were identifying an enrollment rise of 39% between 2012

and 2017 (Gaskell, 2017), but most of the growth during that period had been in what ISC Research call the ‘Non-Premium sector’, comprising of schools who ‘offer lower enrollment fees, are not accredited, nor are they members of a reputable International School association...many of the schools rely on the ‘International’ name and the language of learning’ (Gaskell, 2017 p.6). In other words, in some areas of the world the ‘Type C2’ model is probably a prevalent one, representative of the majority of newly emerging ‘Non-Traditional’ schools.

This new typology is significant since we can now begin to imagine, with more clarity, where the teachers who ‘flee’ and ‘escape’ Britain each year might potentially end up. In the absence of data or research evidence, but knowing that most are trained and qualified, we can imagine they mainly settle within the ‘Type A’ or ‘Type B’ area of activity. This area of International Schooling is also growing, and has traditionally a very high rate of annual turnover of both teachers and school leaders. However, a sizeable grouping of teachers may settle in our newly identified ‘Type C1’ area (i.e. the Non-Traditional, Premium-sector), especially in Asia and the Middle East. It is very unlikely that many teachers ‘fleeing’ Britain will emerge in the somewhat murkier ‘Type C2’ area (i.e. the Non-Traditional, Non-Premium sector), although some might. Of course, to reiterate an important point, this discussion has involved much speculation and requires research investigation, clarification, and data evidence.

It was reported (Robertson, 2018) that the ‘Premium-sector’ overall (representing, for reclarification, our ‘Type A, B, and C1’ schools) is expecting to employ an extra 145,000 British teachers by 2028, doubling the numbers that had existed in 2014. Put another way, that body of several thousand International Schools is expecting to hire about half of all the teacher graduates from England over a ten-year period until 2028. There is evidence that the ‘Premium-sector’ in general is predominantly staffed by British teachers. ISC Research in October 2016 were reporting the number of teachers in the Middle East had grown from 75,000 in 2011 to over 112,000. Of these, 86% were Western-trained, but in some schools the proportion was

reportedly 92%, predominantly from the USA and UK. In the UAE, including Dubai, the biggest single market in 2020, almost exactly half the teachers are British-trained, reflecting the large number of National Curriculum of England (primary) schools in that region.

### **An exploration of the ‘Type C1’ terrain in China**

This section explores the different types of International School to be found in China. This context is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, the number of Type C1 schools continues to increase in China (Gaskell, 2019). In fact, China is now one of the most fertile markets for Type C schools (Bunnell, Courtois, and Donnelly, 2020). Despite this increase, this type of school, and the context of China, remain under-researched and under-theorised. Our paper addresses this gap. Secondly, given that many British teachers who are ‘fleeing’ overseas might (re-)emerge in our newly identified ‘Type C1’ area of activity (in the Non-Traditional, Premium-sector), it is worth exploring this body of schooling in more depth. One particularly fast-growing area has already been mentioned, and involves the exportation and quasi-replication of elite branded English private schools, as pioneered in Thailand by London’s Dulwich College, and Harrow School (Bunnell, Courtois, and Donnelly, 2020). This now has a strong China base.

A further sub-set of the ‘Type C1’ school has appeared in mainland China. This type of school goes by various names, such as ‘International Chinese Private Bilingual Schools’ (Gaskell, 2019), or ‘Non-Exclusive International Schools’ (Young, 2018). They have also been described (Poole, 2020) as ‘Chinese Internationalised Schools’ (CISs). The curriculum will comprise of the Chinese national curriculum, until grade 9, and international curricula, such as the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) or the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) from grade 10 to grade 12 (thus acting as a

symbol of the ‘Non-Traditional’ yet ‘Premium-sector’ model). It is reported (Gaskell, 2019) that this type of school was educating 250,000 children (mainly Chinese) across 563 schools in 2018, with Shanghai alone having almost 170. It is expected that by 2028, the arena will be educating 800,000 children. By 2023, the arena will involve 65,000 teachers, of which 37,000 are expected to be foreign-trained (Gaskell, 2019).

Faculty of CISs will be comprised of host country nationals and expatriate teachers, but with a greater degree of ‘local’ teachers than found in the ‘Traditional’ models where Anglo-Saxon ‘expat’ teachers dominate. The proportion of foreign/overseas teachers employed by CISs currently stands at about 40-45% of the overall workforce (Gaskell, 2019). Those who hold a teaching qualification and hail from Britain will most likely be offered the best salaries and packages, and often will often have a reduced teaching load. The others will often bear the brunt of the teaching load and will receive a less competitive salary. In this respect, the British-trained teachers might find that the conditions are better than for others within the same school, but it still does not fully guarantee that the ‘grass is greener’.

Based on the experiences of one of the present authors, it is possible to illustrate the differences in salary and workload between native and non-native teachers. The information was obtained through conversations with the author’s colleagues. The school did not make the pay-scale publicly available, choosing instead to negotiate salaries with the teachers on a one-to-one basis. As the majority of the expatriate teachers were male and above thirty, the examples offered here are representative of the wider staffroom. However, it has to be acknowledged that in other Type C Schools, age and gender might play a more significant role in determining salaries, particularly in schools where the teacher demographic is more diverse. Therefore, the examples offered here are illustrative in nature, designed to build our argument. Future research would need to explore the issue of salaries and the contextual factors (native-speaker/non-native speaker, age, gender, ethnicity) in greater detail.

One qualified, Anglophone expatriate teacher was on about six teaching periods a week whilst another teacher who was a non-native speaker and an unqualified teacher had to endure teaching twenty-two teaching periods a week. Another teacher, who hailed from South Africa and who was the head of PE, complained that that he was earning about ten thousand RMB a month (about one thousand British Pounds) less than his British counterpart, the head of the English department, who earned forty thousand RMB (about four thousand British pounds) a month. One of the authors was also on a reduced teaching load, teaching only twelve periods a week, whilst also receiving about thirty thousand RMB a month (about three thousand pounds a month), the same as the head of PE who had more responsibilities. Whilst the examples here are based on one teacher's experiences and therefore cannot be said to be representative of all CISs, they nevertheless indicate that ethnicity and professional qualifications determine a teacher's status within the school. Future research would need to establish whether this is the case for CISs' in general. Future research would also need to address the role of credentials in determining status. Whilst we make a distinction between native and non-native speakers, it is also the case that teachers can be differentiated according to whether or not they hold a professional teaching qualification. An interesting avenue of inquiry might involve exploring whether qualified non-native speakers are considered to have more status in Type C1 schools in China than non-qualified native speakers.

CISs are also privately run, largely profit-driven, often in partnership with Chinese businesses (representing the epitome of the 'Type C Non-Traditional' model). Although CISs must comply with the same government regulations as other local schools, such as patriotic education, it has been argued that they have more flexibility in management and administration than other public or private schools for Chinese citizens (Young, 2018).

CISs cater to a local middle-class elite, whose motivations for sending their children to an international school are based on the perception that an International Schooling educational

experience is both superior to, and more rigorous than, the kind of education typically offered in local/national schools (Hayden, 2006). As most Chinese nationals are unable to attend a ‘Traditional’ model of International School, which require the child to hold an overseas passport, CISs represent a convenient alternative pathway, which not only potentially confers social and cultural capital, but also provides (more ‘guaranteed’ or assured) access to an elite overseas university (Wright and Lee, 2014).

However, not all CISs cater to elites, and we must not assume they are first-choice options for all parents. The issue of parental choice in mainland China is far more nuanced. Young (2018) has identified another new type of ‘International School’ in mainland China, which appears to correspond to our notion of CISs, and can arguably be viewed as another ‘Type C1’ variation. These schools serve families who are well off economically but lack other markers of elite, such as high levels of education or household registration. Families at the school in Young’s (2018) study held precarious social positions in Chinese Society. For example, they were internal migrants or members of China’s new entrepreneurial class, perhaps more aligned with the so-called ‘global middle class’. Moreover, according to Young (2018) this new type of school provides a remedial rather than an elite academic environment, acting as a schooling of second-choice based upon the child being less settled (and many apparently have been ‘bullied’) in the national system.

### **The reality of performativity**

Whilst ‘Type C1’ schools have more autonomy and flexibility than other public or private schools for Chinese citizens (Young, 2018), it is possible to identify a number of regulatory technologies that impact upon teachers’ identities and well-being. Firstly, the local education bureau will inspect schools to ensure that the national curriculum is being implemented

thoroughly. Also, they will ensure that symbolic routines that reinforce the twelve core socialist values<sup>2</sup> are observed and displayed around the school, displaying the Chinese flag in every classroom, and raising the Chinese flag and singing the national anthem during weekly assemblies. National schools that offer some form of international curricula must follow these requirements in order to be granted a licence to operate. Failure to follow these requirements could result in the closure of the school.

Local teachers will also be appraised by the local education bureau, as they are classed as ‘national’ teachers due to their ethnicity and training. In contrast, expatriate teachers are not appraised externally, as they do not fall under the auspices of the local education bureau. Rather, they will be appraised internally, with the head of department observing a number of classes and students submitting teacher evaluations based on a teacher’s performance. Secondly, schools wishing to offer the IBDP will need to be authorised to become an ‘IB World School’, which involves, amongst other things, two school inspections and follow-up evaluations every five years (IB, 2020). Thus, the ‘Type C1’ school, as an ‘elite International School’ faces regulatory pressures from both internal agencies (Government/State), and external (International Baccalaureate Organisation, IBO).

Finally, and perhaps the most significant regulatory force in CISs, and one which has yet to be fully discussed, is that of the parents *and* their children. As CISs are run for-profit, the paying parents are elevated to primary stake holders. Ascertaining the fees that CISs charge is problematic, as many schools do not advertise them. However, based on one of the author’s time in the field, many schools will charge between 80,000 – 105,000 RMB a year (about 88,000 – 115,000 British Pounds); cheaper than the ‘Traditional’ schools, but considerably

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<sup>2</sup> The 12 values are the national values of "prosperity", "democracy", "civility" and "harmony"; the social values of "freedom", "equality", "justice" and the "rule of law"; and the individual values of "patriotism", "dedication", "integrity" and "friendship".

more expensive than other private schools, putting the parents in a very powerful position. This is partly true in the 'Traditional' model, but here the parents have a direct financial investment and incentive and it is unlikely their school fees are paid for by their employers as part of a business expatriate contract package.

Further, the children hold considerable power, as their teacher evaluations can influence whether a teacher's contract is renewed. Given the financial stake that parents have in the school, a son or daughter's dissatisfaction with a teacher will carry more weight, particularly in a market that is characterised by school choice, something which is typically not the case for over-seas students in relation to 'Traditional' International Schools. So, teachers entering this area of International Schooling cannot completely escape the shadows of performativity. Rather, as we argue, they will encounter regimes of performativity in a different form.

Overall, CISs reason for being is to provide local Chinese middle-class elites with a route to an overseas university, a route typically inaccessible via 'Traditional' International Schools that require the student to hold an overseas passport. Even in the case of non-elite families, as in Young's (2018) study, their motivation for enrolling their children into CISs is arguably not just remedial, but also aspirational in nature: they seek to foster elite educational trajectories through their children's education. The stated benefits of an elite International Schooling experience, such as enhanced intercultural awareness, criticality and independence would appear to be of secondary importance. CISs are not so much providing an education as a service, be it remedial, aspirational or elitist, which is driven largely by the clientele, the parents, who buy (into) International Schooling in order to cement and develop their status as part of the emergent 'global middle class', acting as a class-in-the-making. Therefore, the imperative is for teachers to ensure that students attain excellent results. Typically, this will be measured by external examination results, which are taken to be an 'objective' measurement of a teacher's ability. Although a C grade is considered to be a 'passing' grade, many, if not

all, Chinese parents expect their children to attain A grades, thereby placing a great deal of pressure on their children and teachers.

The wash-back effect of student and parental expectations has a number of consequences for the notion of teacher agency and identity in such schools. Based on one of the author's experiences teaching in CISs, the imperative to 'keep the customer satisfied' results in teachers choosing to 'play it safe' by 'teaching to the test' rather than experimenting with new teaching approaches. Out of necessity, teacher performance becomes just that, a performance. In such a context, teacher agency becomes a form of (in)discretion, a deviation from the script. One author recalls receiving a disheartening student evaluation which highlighted his use of student-centred activities, such as group work, as a weakness of his teaching. Whilst the negative evaluation made him more resilient by spurring him on to be a more 'authentic' teacher in the eyes of the student, he nevertheless felt a niggling sense of inauthenticity. This condition has been referred to as 'values schizophrenia' (Ball, 2003) where judgement and authenticity are sacrificed for impression and performance. Given that teachers in CISs are hired on short-term contracts that are contingent on a teacher's performance (usually measured by students' examination results and student evaluations), it is imperative that teachers turn in the 'right' performance. This can result in feelings of insecurity and anxiety. At the same time short-term contracts can offer teachers a way out of the high-pressure environment (Poole and Bunnell, 2020). It is easier to endure the pressure of performativity for a few years and then move to another school than remaining at the same school and existing in a kind of 'permanent agonism' (Ball and Olmedo, 2013). To return to our metaphor of fire, teachers may still be in the frying pan of performativity, but the short-term nature of their work enables them to escape and jump from pan to pan.

The example above is not designed to be a critique of such schools. Rather, we want to highlight how the imperative to achieve and quantify excellence in the form of examination

results is the reality of ‘Type C1’ schools; this after all, is what helps to make them ‘Premium-sector’. It also has to be stated that they should not be viewed as inferior International Schools. Rather, as argued elsewhere (Poole, 2020), and implied by Young (2018), CISs should be decoupled from normative constructions of the International School that are based on western-centric models that take the ‘Traditional’ model as the paradigmatic example of *the* International School. Instead, CISs should be taken on their own terms, rather like the ‘Satellite Colleges’, and understood in relation to the contexts in which they have emerged and the clientele they serve.

## **Conclusions**

Given the fact that a large body of teachers each year (in the region of 15,000) leaves Britain to teach overseas, the context with which they (re)engage teaching requires inquiry and discussion. Yet, in spite of at least two decades of continuous ‘brain-drain’, very little attention has been given to the reality of both why they leave, and what they arrive at. In particular, we identify the need for much more research inquiry into the type of international school they enter. We speculate that many might enter the growing ‘Non-Traditional’ scene and we have begun in our paper to identify the sub-arenas (the ‘Types C1 and C2’) that this might involve, and which we hope might help facilitate further and more detailed research inquiries.

Our anecdotal evidence from the emerging ‘Type C1’ setting in China begins the discussion about the extent to which the teachers ‘fleeing’ Britain might actually, in practice, be escaping the ‘terrors of performativity’ (Ball, 2003). Instead, they might be transitioning towards unwittingly encountering the very thing from which they are supposedly escaping. Of course, we still know very little about their exact expectations upon teaching in mainland China or elsewhere such as the United Arab Emirates, another major unreported growth arena. To return to our mixed metaphor introduced earlier, teachers might be leaving Britain to ‘seek out

pastures that are greener' (or, at least the British press seem to think that) but in so doing they may simply be 'escaping the fire for the frying-pan'. Performativity generally may appear less prevalent and intense in 'Type C1 schools' in China, but it nevertheless is still present in mechanisms of accountability driven largely by the profit-driven and politicised nature of such schools.

Although the 'slouching beast' (Ball, 2016b) of neoliberalism might stalk the corridors of the 'Type C1 school', we can find very little evidence to deny an assertion that teachers tend not to 'flee' or 'escape' *back* to Britain. After all, the arena is continuously growing which seems to imply a high degree of resilience, and coping. There are a number of reasons why they might choose to 'stick it out', despite the precarious and performative nature, and this points to another viable research avenue. The first might be high salaries, numerous benefits (such as pension gratuity, medical cover, and contributions to children's education), and relatively light teaching schedules. The temporal and financial benefits was neatly described by a former colleague of the second author's as 'the gravy train'.<sup>3</sup>

Another explanation might be the short-term nature of teacher contracts (typically two-years in duration). Even though this is often a contributing factor to precarity, we have found that the short-term enables (perhaps positively empowers) teachers to 'jump-ship' whenever things get too intense. Therefore, teachers from Britain may choose to change schools after their contract expires, hopping around from contract-to-contract, until they find a better fit. The picture that seems to be emerging is one of an arena of schooling where the turn-over is high (teachers frequently change schools) but attrition is low (the teachers do not seemingly exit the field, but instead transition from school-to-school). Again, this warrants further research inquiry.

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<sup>3</sup> An informal expression that the Cambridge Dictionary defines as 'a way of making money quickly, easily, and often dishonestly.'

A further explanation might involve the notions of ‘resilience’ and ‘resistance’. To reiterate, as Flores (2020) suggests, teachers can deal with adverse and worsening change by trying to survive and cope (which sounds negative), whilst also becoming more resilient and resisting (which sounds positive). In relation to our paper, resilience might be developed as a result of the short-term nature of CISs. Because mobility is high, teachers are likely to encounter many difficult (frying pan) situations. However, due to the frequency of these encounters (engendered by high mobility as a result of short-term contracts and precarity) and the fact that teachers choose to ‘stick it out’, they will also develop reserves of resilience.

The short-term nature of teaching in this diverse arena can perhaps be thought of as a kind of ‘safety-valve’ that functions as a coping strategy, allowing teachers to both escape but remain, within the advantageous arena. Over time, teachers are also likely to build up reserves of resistance. For us, resistance is an ongoing process of struggle against granted neoliberalisations that creates the possibility of thinking about education and ourselves differently (Ball & Omedo, 2013). Although oppositional, resistance is fundamentally affirmative in nature (Hviid, 2018).

Future research would need to theorise the exact relation of resistance and resilience in relation to International Schooling teachers. However, as sketched here, resilience potentially gives teachers the confidence to resist, which in turn creates more resilience; the two neatly feed into each other. Future research would also need to explore what resistance looks like in other similar International Schooling contexts (such as the overseas branches of Dulwich College), and how it relates to the development of resilience. As implied here, one dimension of resistance may be choosing to take advantage of the short-term nature of teaching contracts to move on, despite the financial incentive to stay. It could be thought of as a refusal to ‘sell out’, or a form of ‘resistance’.

‘Resilience’ has started to be seen, and we think rightly, as a key theme in examining teachers’ work and lives in recent years (Flores, 2020). It has also been identified as a necessary condition for teacher effectiveness (Day & Gu, 2007). If schools value their staff as professional educators and not simply as replaceable receptacles of knowledge, they need to be aware that resilience need not simply be a side-effect of teaching in adverse times. As Gu and Day (2007, p. 1314) argue, resilience is determined by ‘the interaction between the internal assets of the individual and the external environments in which the individual lives and grows (or does not grow)’. It is imperative, therefore, that schools recognise the complex role of resilience. On the one hand, it is born out of adversity and struggle. On the other, it has the potential for development and resistance. So far in our work, we have only identified teachers’ individual strategies for developing resilience. If schools were to nurture that resilience as well as activate it, teachers are more likely to develop from simply ‘surviving’ to ‘thriving.’ Further empirical research, such as interviews, would be valuable in applying the concepts of resistance and self-care.

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