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Capital is the turbo engine

The commodification and transformation of private ballet education
in China

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Abstract

This thesis opens new considerations of the nexus of dance and the economy, by advancing discussions from the *commercialization* of dance education to the *commodification* of dance education. The key question prompting this research is: ***Why and how has commodification shifted the practice of ballet teaching?*** From this foundation further questions are also discussed, such as: How do dance educators perceive the injection of venture capital in private ballet education? How do neoliberal economic strategies present concerns for dance educators? How have consumer needs shifted teaching practices? What further concerns regarding the impact of commodification of dance education emerge from dance educators?

This research critically reflects on the impact of neoliberalism on dance education, specifically focusing on the personal experiences of six dance educators and venture capitalists in Chengdu, China. These dance educators and venture capitalists describe shifts in the teaching of ballet teaching in response to concerns over business competition, market share, and customer satisfaction. These concerns have given rise to changes in how dance education addresses personal growth and aesthetic needs, have increased qualification and certification and emphasized transferable professional pathways.

This ethnographic qualitative research was gathered over a year-long period that I, the researcher, spent travelling in Chengdu, China. Through in-depth personal interviews and a broad literature review, I illuminate how a free market economy can foster feelings of alienation as well as transformation. Dance educator's experiences highlight how ballet teaching can be affected by a complex political-economic environment and reveal approaches that present commodification and cultural hegemony within pedagogic and economic practices. Through an articulation and critical analysis of the experiences and concerns of the six dance educators and venture capitalists, this research contributes to understandings of the interrelation between dance and economy in China.

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Sitting at my isolated study room in lockdown in Auckland in April, 2020, I have no idea how the ongoing global public health crisis of Covid-19 could change the world of all, the world of dance and the world of myself, in the future. The unforeseen consequences of this pandemic have tremendously influenced dance people's daily practices, social connections, financial incomes, and common understandings.

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Dance is not a dream; however, dance creates dreams.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“You are an intruder in the dance community!”

A professor said this to me five years ago, sitting in his office in a leading public dance academy in China as I explained my professional interest in private dance education. Before entering into the world of dance, nearly all of my career experience was in business and management, from strategy planning to daily operation, from controlling finance to balancing human resources. I had had very little physical dancing practice for the first thirty years of my life, but six years previously I had accidentally entered into the world of dance education, managing two organisations in New Zealand: one for-profit private ballet school and one non-profit public charitable trust.

Due to the cooperation between these two organisations and counterparts in China, this work experience enlarged dance education for me. This came through close and intensive communication with dance professionals in China, both dance educators and venture capitalists in private ballet education. Many of them shared their dilemmas and perplexity over the management and teaching practices of private ballet schools.

As a business investor and manager for sixteen years in diverse industries in multiple countries, I have drawn on my own experience in commerce to construct an insider’s study over the impact of venture capitalism in private ballet education, particularly the shift of teaching practices and management methods from commodification of dance education. This research collects and records the stories and concerns from both dance educators and venture capitalists in six leading private ballet schools in Chengdu, China. This research draws on philosophical conceptions of commodification, cultural hegemony and economic theories of neoliberalism in order to extend research participants’ perceptions and concerns on the shift of pedagogy, the impact of management practice, and the hegemonic influence of the economy.

1.1 Research question

Throughout the research process, my mind was driven by the question:

Why and how has commodification shifted the practice of ballet teaching?

This research project pays attention to dance education in private sectors to reveal experience and reflect perspectives. In order to further understand this question, I expand this primary question into three sub-questions.

- How do dance educators and venture capitalists in private ballet education in Chengdu perceive changes of teaching practice and business models?
- How does commodification shift private ballet schools/studios in regards to business competition, consumer satisfaction, and related teaching practice?
- What are the key shifts that dance educators have observed as a result of this commodification?

1.2 Contextualisation of key terms

As Martin (2012) emphasised, individuals might understand words, phrases, and ideas in different ways, so vague expressions can lead to confusion and contention. In order to enhance understandings in the following chapters, this section clarifies the meaning of some key terms by contextualisation.

Private ballet education

“Dance education incorporates learning in, through and about dance (Rowe et al., 2018).” The definition of *dance education*, and its similarities and differences with *dance training*, has been continuously discussed by dance scholars (Cohen, 2002; Dyke, 1992; Kerr-Berry, 2004; Koff, 2000; Posey, 2002; Risner, Godfrey, & Simmons, 2004; Risner, 2006, 2007, 2008 & 2010; Schwartz, 1993; Rowe, Martin, Buck, & Anttila, 2018; Stinson, 1988; Stinson,

Blumenthal-Jones & Dyke, 1990). Koff (2000) acknowledges dance education is “sequential development through the exploration of time, space, and energy in order to express oneself” (pp. 27-28), while she emphasises dance training focuses on “dictating movements and strategies for learning specific motor skills with the aim of mastery and future performance” (p. 28). This distinction between dance education and dance training is similarly described as the former aiming to build a way of attending to the world (Schwartz, 1993), and the latter to teach formal technique (Cohen, 2002). In a broader viewpoint, Dyke (1992) differentiates the goals of dance training as to produce a better dancer versus to educate dancers as citizens and members of a culture. However, professionals, e.g., teachers, choreographers, event organisers etc., in the private dance sectors argue that they deliver knowledge as well (Cohen, 2002), so they are important part of the whole of dance education (Posey, 2002).

Integrating above considerations and the nature of this research project, the expression *private ballet education* in this thesis means ballet schools, and/or studios in private sectors (Cohen, 2002; Posey, 2002) for preparing recreational and pre-professional students. The ownership is the primary criterion to distinguish private ballet schools/studios from state-owned public dance academies. Another condition is that the former are profitable commercial organisations, normally running as sole traders, partnerships, and limited companies, and the latter are non-profit educational institutes, such as national or local public dance academies and charitable or community Children and Adolescent Palaces. All research participants in this project are working in the sector of private ballet education.

Dance educators:

Dance teacher, dance educator, and dance tutor have been used interchangeably (Kerr-Berry, 2004, 2007; Posey, 2002). In this study, the term *dance educators* particularly emphasises the teachers, tutors, artistic directors, and any other teaching staff working in private ballet schools/studios. The significance of adopting the term *dance educators* is implicit in “promoting the concept that dance when taught in the private sector is an integral and

important component of the overall educational system" (Posey, 2002, p. 41). It is possible the dance educators in this research are simultaneously the owners, investors, shareholders, directors, and managers of a private ballet schools/studios, however, a significant standard is that he/she has certain practice experience in teaching dance.

Venture capitalists:

I adopt the term *venture capitalist* in this research to stand for the investors in private ballet education who have no regular and systematical training background in dance. Venture capitalists are recognised as playing the role of a catalyst in the economy (Wonglimpiyarat, 2007) and are considered as the institutional managers of innovation (Cornelius, 2005; Khanin & Mahto 2013). Although it could not be ruled out that dance educators might also be investors, and in fact there are several amongst our interviewees, I use the term venture capitalists in this thesis to represent individuals (much like myself) who had little experience of dance prior to engaging in it as a business venture.

1.3 Research aims and significance

I planned to achieve three fundamental aims in this master's thesis, which might further open the field of neoliberal capitalism and private ballet education to further scholarship.

1.3.1 Research aims

This study seeks to examine and discuss the impact of commodification on private ballet education from the experiences and perspectives of dance educators and venture capitalists.

In order to achieve this aim, it was designed to meet three goals:

- Firstly, to explore and explain dance educators' and venture capitalists' understanding of the injection of venture capital into the private ballet education in Chengdu.
- Secondly, to discuss venture capital's consequential influence resulting in

commodification of private ballet education from dance educator's and venture capitalist's perceptions.

- Thirdly, to elucidate potential influence of neoliberal capitalism that concerns dance educators.

There are two reasons to opt for China to discuss the hegemonic power of capitalism in private ballet education. The practice of neoliberal free market policy and the contrasting ideology of socialist communism form a complex scenario for the development of the economy in China, and, as an epitome of culture economy, the commodification of private ballet education raises dance educator's concerns about the shift of teaching practice and business survivability. Moreover, the power of private ballet education in China is rapidly expanding, and might have a considerable influence on the future of arts education globally, from pedagogical practices to operational philosophies.

1.3.2 Research significance

Shifts in dance education in private sectors

Dance scholars have previously noted how dance education in private sectors is a process of commercialisation in a market economy (Clark, 2004; Monts, 2015; Posey, 2002; Woerner, 2011). However, through the transformation of dance teaching from a trade of service to an exchangeable commodity, dance education in private sectors has not only been privatised and marketised, but also been financialised and capitalized: in a word, commodified. This presents a paradigm shift for dance education: from a trade to a commodity. This commodification transforms the business of dance education from simple commerce to practices of knowledge produced through the relations of power (Foucault, 2008; Peter, 2016).

This research is devoted to constructing a corner stone for future studies of dance economy and dance management. Rowe, Martin, Rowe, and Anttila (2018) emphasise that "art is not

above politics, and dance education is not above policy” (p. 93). Through exploring and promulgating the stories in Chengdu, China, this qualitative research evidences that dance is not above the economy, and dance education is not above commodification. This may pave a path for future research on private ballet education from an economic standpoint.

1.4 Overview of the thesis

For the sake of providing clarity and focus throughout the reading of this thesis, I summarise below the structure of the thesis through an overview of each chapter that will be presented.

In Chapter 2, the review of contextual and conceptual literature is presented, from historical archives, and theoretical concepts to philosophical approaches. The literature review assists identifying pertinent research related to this study while also specifying significant gaps between the existing literature and the discussion of this research. Section 2.1 presents the concept of commodification of culture and art education as the philosophical underpinnings of this research; it reviews the related literature about commodity fetishism and its application and perception in private ballet education. Section 2.2 concentrates on venture capitalism from the viewpoint of neoliberalism, which offers the theoretical foundation for this research. Section 2.3 sketches the development of private ballet education in China and extends to the debate over cultural hegemony in ballet education.

Chapter 3 presents the research methods utilised in this research. Section 3.1 explains that this project is a qualitative research with a post-positivist approach. This research draws on post-nationalist perspectives and does not attempt to reveal certain reality or truth, but intends to explore insiders' stories and concerns of engaging in private ballet schools/studios and how they perceive the influence from the injection of venture capital. It is hoped that this research could generate an articulation of the journeys and feelings of the six dance educators and venture capitalists participating in this research, providing the recognition and understandings of the development of dance education in China. Section 3.2 discussed the research methods of phenomenology. The following sections, 3.3 and 3.4, introduce the facilities and processes

of data collection and analysis in this research. Interviews, especially in-depth semi-structural interviews, is considered the primary and appropriate method of data collection for this project, in combination with the review of literature. Section 3.5 shares the position of the researcher as both insider and outsider in this research. Sections 3.6 clarifies the ethics in this research according to the regulations of the University of Auckland. Section 3.7 considers the limitations and challenges that emerged through the research process.

Chapter 4 contributes the essence of this research. Section 4.1 begins with the distinctive perception on the injection of venture capital between dance educators and venture capitalist, and discusses the philosophical distinction in commodification of ballet education. Section 4.2 explores the business competition formed by the free market within the neoliberal approach, and extends dance educator's concerns about market share and customer satisfaction. Section 4.3 elaborates on the shift of teaching practice due to meeting the consumer needs, particularly the emphasis on personal growth, qualification and certification, and pathway to a professional career. Section 4.4 presents dance educator's further concerns regarding the impact of capitalism in doubting their management competence and loss of control over dance in society.

Chapter 5 forms the conclusion of this thesis. Section 5.1 recounts the key findings and recommendations of this research project. Section 5.2 illuminates future research direction.

As a qualitative study with a social constructivist standpoint, this research does not attempt to reveal a universal reality or prove a dedicated truth. Rather, it aims to construct from the experiences and perspectives of six dance educators and venture capitalists an atmosphere of conversation about the impact of the economy on dance education. Their story and concern show an increasing entanglement between commerce and art, which opens a gate for further discussions in certain sections of the arts economy, or creative industry, or culture economy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature in relation to this research. Existing literature provides contextual and conceptual knowledge for understanding the research question in a panoramic and comprehensive way. Some pivotal concepts and theories are introduced and articulated to analyse the question: *Why and how has commodification shifted the practice of dance education?*

There are three sections in this literature review. Section 2.1 emphasises that neoliberalism values privatisation and commercialisation of everything, including cultural products and services such as dance education, leading to commodification. Section 2.2 describes dance education as a cultural service that has been commercialised, and further questions: *Can it be commodified?* Section 2.3 reviews the history and contemporary development of ballet education in China, identifying how dance education in China has expanded from the public to the private sector, and how this economic transformation is transitioning from commercialisation to commodification.

2.1 The road of neoliberalism from commercialisation to commodification

Neoliberalism is one of the pillar concepts in this research as the main question is focused on the commodification of private ballet education through the process of privatisation, marketisation, and commercialisation of ballet teaching. Neoliberalism is recognized as a dominant ideology shaping our world today (Robertson & Dale, 2009). The foundation of the principles of neoliberalisation are based on Friedman (1962) and Hayek's (1973) market-based ideas, and moved beyond a set of hegemonic discourses and practices to achieve the status of a doxa, or an accepted worldview (Bourdieu 1999). This section aims to establish the philosophic underpinnings of the whole study through reviewing and examining the following question: *How has neoliberalism impacted on society and education?*

2.1.1 Commercialisation of everything in the context of neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is associated with policies of economic liberalisation including privatisation, deregulation, financialisation and free market capitalism to increase the function of the private sector in the economy and society (Bloom, 2017; Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009; Friedman, 1968; Harvey, 2005; Hayek, 1973; Jones, Parker, & Bos, 2005; Maher & Aquanno, 2018; Palley, 2005; Springer, Kean & Julie, 2016). The origin of neoliberalism roots in a set of ideas that caught on in the 1970s to 1980s associated with the economic policies conducted by Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States (Jones, Parker, & Bos 2005; Springer, Kean & Julie, 2016). The power of the market is recognized by scholars as functional and ethical in economy, and as Jones, Parker, and Bos (2005) suggest neoliberalism “is an updated version of older ideas about ‘liberal economics’ which has long argued that markets should be free from intervention by the state. In its simplest version, it reads: market good, government bad” (p. 100).

Through the development of the ideology and practice, neoliberalism is marked as “*laissez-faire* economic liberalism” or free market capitalism (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009; Brown, 2015 & 2019; Harvey, 2005; Springer, Kean & Julie, 2016). Economists and sociologists debate over the positive and negative effects of “neoliberalization of everything” (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009; Brown, 2015, 2019; Harvey, 2005; Miatta, 2020; Palley 2005; Springer, Kean & Julie, 2016). Supporting the privatisation and marketisation, Palley (2005) emphasises the intrinsic drive of the market through the supply and demand process, and assures that “free market will not let valuable factors of production go to waste” (p. 20). However, on the other hand, neoliberalism has been criticised by scholars for an undeserved “faith” in the efficiency of markets, in the ability of markets to self-correct, and in the market’s ability to deliver economic and political freedom (Miatta, 2020). Brown (2019) further asserts the overriding objective of neoliberalism is “the economization of all features of life” (p. 13).

In recent decades, the concept of neoliberalism has “become an important area of study

across the humanities and social sciences” (Julie, 2017, p. 6). Springer, Kean & Julie, (2016), describe this phenomenon in The Handbook of Neoliberalism as follows: “Neoliberalism is a slippery concept, meaning different things to different people. Scholars have examined the relationships between neoliberalism and a vast array of conceptual categories” (p. 1). Through the extension and expansion of the meanings of neoliberalism, economists and sociologists examine and debate around the ethics of neoliberalism in society, culture and education (Bloom, 2017; Duménil & Lévy, 2004; Jones, Parker, & Bos, 2005; Levidow, 2005; Macrine, 2016; Peter, 2016; Springer, Kean & Julie, 2016). As an ideology, it denotes a conception of freedom as an overarching social value associated with reducing state functions to those of a minimal state: “Neoliberalism can be seen as an intensification of moral regulation resulting from the radical withdrawal of government and the responsibilization of individuals through economics” (Peter, 2016, p. 301)”. Bloom (2017) elaborates on the ethics of neoliberalism as follows:

Neoliberalism strategically co-opts traditional ethics to ideologically and structurally strengthen capitalism. It produces “ethical capitalist subjects” who are morally accountable for making their society, workplace and even their lives “more ethical” in the face of an immoral but seemingly permanent free market. (p. 3)

In education, neoliberalism performs as privatisation and commercialisation of education. Therefore, scholars’ critiques of the goals and outcomes through neoliberalisation of education are not always consistent (Macrine, 2016; Peter, 2016). Levidow (2005) examines the attempts to privatise education, in primary and secondary schools and higher education, and he further elaborates on the marketisation of education saying that it “aims to subordinate education to commercial values and vocational skills” (p. 156). Macrine (2016) describes that “many neoliberal ideologies, values, economic policies and practices are shaped, conveyed and adopted through networks or constellations of top-down and bottom-up hegemonic tools by way of the media, politics, education, and policy institutes, etc.” (p. 308).

2.1.2 Commodification of dance education

Are culture services a commodity?

The definition of commodity is repeatedly discussed and debated among economists and anthropologists since the eighteenth century (Appadurai, 1986 & 2005; Binet, 1887; Botton, 2004; Frow, 1997; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/1972; Lukács, 1923/1971; Marx, 1867/1977; Smith, 1776/1982; Veblen, 1899; Zipes, 2001). In a narrower sense, a commodity is an economic good or service that is full of substantial fungibility. Marx (1867/1977) acknowledges some priced goods can be treated as commodities, e.g., human labour, works of art and natural resources, even though they may not be produced specifically for the market, or be non-reproducible goods. In the contemporary context, a commodity is anything intended for exchange or any object of economic value (Appadurai, 1986 & 2005). Under such criteria, cultural products and services, including dance education, can be qualified as a commodity.

Since Marx (1876/1977) presented the concept of commodity, sociologists, economists, and anthropologists examine and expand it in cultural aspects of political economy in capitalism. Binet (1887) extends commodity fetishism to the theory of sexual fetishism, and further interprets it by labelling advertising as a type of sexually-charged economic relationship between consumers and commodities. Veblen (1899) and Botton (2004) develop the theory of social status to describe that the consumer establishes a personal identity, including social, economic, and cultural, which is defined and presented by the commodities. They further acknowledge consumers buy, own, and use certain goods and services to show correct signals of prestige in the right social class. Lukács (1923/1971) developed the theory of reification, which elaborates on psychological transformation of an abstraction into a concrete object, to emphasise the principal obstacle to class consciousness. "Just as the capitalist system continuously produces and reproduces itself economically on higher levels, the structure of reification progressively sinks more deeply, more fatefully, and more definitively into the consciousness of Man" (p. 93). The theory of reification extends the impact of commodification to conscious human activity, and emphasises that the growth of capitalism

commodified all aspects of human activity, including cultural events, into consuming goods and services in the market.

How has culture been commodified?

Within a capitalist economic system, commodification is the transformation of goods, services, ideas, nature, personal information, and people into commodities or objects of trade. Frow (1997) describes the process of commodification as having three fundamental aspects:

The commodity form does three things. First, it channels resources of capital into an area of production in order to expand it to its fullest capacity, at the same time destroying all productive activities which are not themselves commodified. Second, it transforms the purpose of production away from the particular qualities of the thing produced and towards the generation of profit; production is the indifferent medium for capital valorization. And the qualities of the thing produced are incidental to this end. Third, it transforms previously or potentially common resources (both raw materials and final products) into private resources; the allocation of these resources normally takes place according to economic criteria (ability to pay rather than moral or civic entitlement), and it may be either restrictive or expansive in its effects. (pp. 138)

Applying Frow's (1997) theory of commodification to dance education in private sectors, dance teaching has been transformed from a trade of service to a capitalised commodity. First, the injection of capital into a dance school enlarges its capacity to obtain more economic resources: bigger studios, better teachers, more publicity etc.; at the same time the quality of teaching itself is subordinated to the decoration of classrooms and the profiling of teaching staff. Second, the mission of dance education is re-directed from transmitting and expanding knowledge of dance toward gaining financial profits through business operations. Third, the value of a dance school is transformed from the education of students to the allocation of

resources: in other terms, financialisation and operational activities become more important than curriculum and pedagogy.

Through the study of cultural products and service, the idea of a culture industry is theorised systematically by the Frankfurt School. Horkheimer and Adorno (1944/1972) describe how the process of commodification pervades the human psyche. They examine and discuss how humankind's artistic, spiritual and intellectual activity has been commodified when subordinated to the "natural commercial laws" of the market. On the surface, the cultural goods and services in the market offer a developed and creative individuality, however, the inherent commodification profoundly limits and shifts the human psyche.

The culture industry, the planning is in fact imposed on the industry by the inertia of a society irrational despite all its rationalization, and this calamitous tendency, in passing through the agencies of business... For the consumer there is nothing left to classify, since the classification has already been preempted by the schematism of production. This dreamless art for the people fulfills the dreamy idealism which went too far for idealism in its critical form.

(p.98)

Horkheimer and Adorno (1944/1972) reveal that the person is a passive consumer, not the active creator, of his or her life. They further emphasize the promised life of individualistic creativity is incompatible with the collectivist, commercial norms of bourgeois culture. Zipes (2001) critiques the commodification and commercial hegemony behind the culture industry. Through the analysis of Harry Potter, he argues that products of the culture industry become "popular" because they are homogenous and obey standard conventions: "To be a phenomenon means that a person or commodity must conform to the hegemonic groups that determine what makes up a phenomenon" (p. 175).

Art and art education have been commodified

As an aspect of culture, art and art education has been commodified through the development of free market within the context of neoliberalist capitalism (Kaplan, 2008; Kasiyan, 2019; Kerrigan & Ozbilgin, 2007; Michelsen, 2014; Mikolaski, 2013; Singh, 2014). In particular in ballet, many ballet teachers acknowledge the authoritarian pedagogy of ballet teaching is immutable and frozen, and they evidence this by presenting an inherited curriculum and teacher-student relationship tracing back for hundred years (Dyer 2009; Green 1999; Lakes 2005; Ritenburg 2010; Stinson 1993). However, dance scholars argue that even though there are inherited techniques and teaching methods, ballet and ballet teaching have been frequently and geographically altered and transformed due to political, economic, and cultural events (Alterowitz, 2014; Booth, 2003; Bronner & Worthen 1999; Choi & Kim, 2015; Hagood, 2000; Kerr-Berry, 2003, 2004; Posey, 2002; Rowe, & Zeitner-Smith, 2011; Zeller, 2017).

In the last twenty years, the concept of the creative industry was utilised to discuss the relationship between art/aesthetics and capitalism (Kaplan, 2008; Kerrigan & Ozbilgin, 2007; Leonard, Barry & Geus, 2013; Michelsen, 2014; Mikolaski, 2013; Singh, 2014; Staufenberg, 2011; Stettler, 2014; Stolle & Michelett, 2013). Hawkins (2013) describes the creative economy as an economic activity that is driven by creativity. Keane (2016) refers to creative industry as the culture industry. This combination of “industry” and “creativity” traces a nostalgia from the industrial revolution and introduces a contemporary cultural phenomenon (Kasiyan, 2019). Kasiyan elaborates on the relation between humanitarian art/art education and industrialised capitalist economy:

Certainly, people can be seen as *homo economicus* and their lives will always be characterized by materialistic and economic calculations. However, people are also *homo sapiens*, creatures with common sense, who also aspire to higher order values and ideals... Art and art education is highly relevant in this context. From a critical and reflective perspective, art and art education should be positioned more as subjects rich in possibility rather than only

as objects to be exploited in the discourse of creative industry... Art is a significant domain of civilization which, together with other pillar of civilization, guarantees the existence of ideal values of humanity. (pp. 2-3)

In this context, art and its aesthetic function are subsumed under the influence of the economy, which Kaplan (2008) describes as “culture of fetishism” while Michelsen (2014) defines creative industry as “aesthetic capitalism”. Immanent pragmatism converts the presentation of arts to a process of manufacturing industrial products for consumerism and hedonism (Stettler, 2014; Stolle & Michelett, 2013). The problematic outcome of consumerism and hedonism of arts and arts education hinges on the philosophy of materialism pursuing only personal pleasure (Mikolaski, 2013; Staufenberg, 2011). Therefore, creative industry positions art as a facility, along with other cultural elements, to exploit political and economic gain (Kasiyan, 2019).

Before further discussing the commodification of private dance education in China, the next section first reviews the history of the ballet education in private sectors in the world, in particular focusing on the process of commercialisation of dance education in the United States. While the privatization of dance education in China develops later than in the West due to political reasons, commercialisation, and even commodification, of dance education in China is rapidly growing, and may even surpass the capitalization of dance in the West.

2.2 The commercialisation of dance education

Dance scholars have explored and have been concerned about the process of commercialisation of dance education in the world (Foster, 2018; Kerr-Berry, 2003; Monts, 2015; Palmer-Fornarola, 2003; Posey, 2002; Risner, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2012; Risner, Godfrey & Simmons, 2004; Woerner, 2011). This section reviews the development of commercialisation of dance education in private sectors and further questions the potential commodification of dance education.

2.2.1 Focus on dance education in private sectors

In 2003, the Journal of Dance Education created a new feature section for private dance education. It presents “integrating higher education, K-12 dance education, and private studio teaching within the scope of dance education parallels the mission of National Dance Education Organization (NDEO) and of this journal” (Kerr-Berry, 2003, p.85). The editorial of the Journal of Dance Education emphasises the significance of researching dance education in private studios as that is “where most young people receive their initial and continued dance training’ (Kerr-Berry, 2003, p.85). Since then, a good number of “cross-cultural” and “cross-national” research projects about private dance education have been published in the Journal of Dance Education and other leading dance and arts academic journals (Foster, 2018; Kerr-Berry, 2003; Palmer-Fornarola, 2003; Posey, 2002; Reinders, Fletcher & Bryden, 2015; Monts, 2015; Risner, 2006, 2007 2008 & 2012; Risner, Godfrey & Simmons, 2004; Rogoski, 2007; Scheff, 2005; Werbrouck, 2004; Woerner, 2011).

Posey (2002), the former President of the National Dance Education Organization (NDEO) of the USA, reviews the history of private dance school in the United States, and she ascribes the booming of private dance education to two major reasons: “the coming of age of the media, both movies and television … combined with the burgeoning of the middle class in America during the time of post-war prosperity which in turn lead to more free time and disposable income that aided in heightening the public demand for dance” (p. 44).

With the fast development of dance education in private sectors, dance scholars conduct researches in this field from different contexts. Palmer-Fornarola (2003) reviews and lists both pedagogical and commercial concerns in the private dance studio. Risner, Godfrey, and Simmons (2004) complete a qualitative research through in-depth interviews with dance educators in private sectors about sexuality in contemporary culture to "successfully negotiate parental expectations, economic forces, and cultural pressures encountered in private sector dance education" (p. 23). Werbrouck (2004) summarises the responsibilities to students, parents, and faculty in a private dance studio from his personal experience in middle America. Rogoski (2007) acknowledges the necessity of teacher training and introduces his empirical human resource experience in studio management practice. Woerner (2011) asks private studio owners in Detroit, New York, and Pittsburgh after the 2008 financial crisis, "what economic shift have you noticed in the arts and your area's private studios", to discuss the economic influence on private dance studios. N. Ostashewski, Reid, and M. Ostashewski, (2016) explore how electronic devices can be used in the dance classroom for efficient digital media access as well as customised instructional video productions. The application of multimedia devices in the dance studio is a technological progress, however, the commercial power of modern devices shifts and reforms dance teaching practice in a business context. Within this research on private dance education in the context of pedagogy, some dance scholars acknowledge the impact of commercialisation in dance education.

2.2.2 Privatisation of dance education

Within all possibilities, economic reason is critical to the shift in dance performance, choreography and teaching, particularly in a neoliberal free market environment (Foster, 2018; Kerr-Berry, 2003; Monts, 2015; Posey, 2002; Risner, Godfrey & Simmons, 2004; Woerner, 2011). Foster (2018) acknowledges the force of commerce in dance performance as follows: "In order to turn a profit, a dance needs to be made cheaply, transmitted to dancers efficiently, and sold as a popular item to viewers" (p. 114). And she further emphasises the

commercialisation can result in a significant shift in dance performance: “The production process must rely on standardized vocabularies of movement that embody clear criteria for virtuosity and can be marshaled to construct familiar narrative progressions that incorporate reliable techniques for constructing eye-popping spectacle” (p. 115). A similar influence exists in ballet teaching too, as it has been commercialised through the emergence and development of private ballet education in a free market environment (Clark, 2004; Monts, 2015; Posey, 2002; Woerner, 2011).

Posey (2002) acknowledges the commercialised dance education in private sectors is considerably formed and dominated by neoliberalist capitalism: severe business competition, consumer-driven marketing, and purpose-built dance curriculum and teaching practice toward satisfying consumer needs.

In the private sector, the public's perception of dance education determines what they will buy and marketing strategies are developed accordingly. This has an impact on the curricula offered at private schools of dance. In order to meet operating expenses, the private dance school must offer classes that someone will buy, and thus economic reality intrudes on dance education and influences both its artistic and educational values. (p. 43)

Through close interviews with multiple dance educators and entrepreneurs in private schools after the recession of the 2008 financial crisis, Woerner (2011) suggests practitioners “make sure you are in business to serve the community” (p. 31).

The shift of ballet teaching due to the commercialisation presents inherent cultural hegemony. Building upon the dance education in private sectors, dance competitions in the United States construct hierarchic prestige in youth dance learners (Posey, 2002). The booming dance competitions, e.g., Youth America Grand Prix, keep advertising a perceived quality of teaching on the pyramid of private dance schools. Woerner (2011) believes the higher survivability of private dance schools in recession periods is in line with their engagement in dance competitions: “private studios with at least half of their attention on competition training did not

have the same struggles as noncompetitive studios or performing arts and K-12 institutions” (p. 30). This narrative presents that dance teachers in private sectors have learned how to benefit from the commercialised dance competitions. Woerner (2011) observes: “as a group, the studio chooses which competitions to attend depending on students’ scholarships from the previous year” (p. 31).

In contrast to being competition-driven, another business ideal of commercialisation in private dance studios is to propagate curriculum and pedagogy as “creative”, “quality” and “recreational” (Clark, 2004; Monts, 2015; Posey, 2002). Monts (2015) presents her practice in designing and delivering certain counter-competition programmes: “I had to create a curriculum for the private studio that incorporated the way that parents, students, and the community want me to teach” (p. 14). Monts (2015) understands the extreme effect of the competition-led model in private dance education, and she echoes Clark’s (2004) claim that “transforming dance experience for children from exploitative to appropriate is critical” (p.20). In Monts’s business practice, she focuses on “excluding the expense and pressure of competitive dance, giving families the freedom to choose the number and genre of dance classes” (p. 12).

If the practices of competitiveness and being recreation-driven are both examples of internal commercialisation within private ballet education, then the mass-media-oriented sexexploitation constructs external cultural hegemony over young dancers (Clark, 2004; Risner, Godfrey, & Simmons, 2004). Clark (2004) acknowledges that “exploiting the human body for sexual titillation, entertainment, or marketing is referred to as sexexploitation” (p. 18). He further ascribes this trend to the effect from commercialised entertainment and mass media: “due to the hegemonic pervasiveness of “objectifying” dancers for entertainment as encouraged by the media, costume catalogs, and other sources, educators need to pause and consider their assumption and practices” (p.17).

Posey (2002) rationalises this phenomenon as dance schools reflecting public choice: “This is the image projected by the media - television, movies, print, and advertising - as it represents

dancers, the dance profession, and dance as an art form. Artistry, creativity, aesthetics, and educational values are all secondary to the primary popular image" (p. 46).

In reviewing Posey's argument and through interviewing seven practitioners in private dance sectors in the United States, Risner, Godfrey, and Simmons (2004) further explain the complexity and contradiction that dance educators experience and are concerned about:

In tandem, keeping parents satisfied in a highly competitive market frequently remains amorphous in the private sector because parents often express diverse needs, hold differing values, and make a range of assumptions about dance. ... Private sector dance schools often find themselves as mediators, negotiating contemporary culture, economic reality, and their parental constituency. Making important artistic and educational choices for their schools from this triangulation often results in complicated compromises. (p. 27)

Cost sensitivity for costumes, age appropriation of music and lyric, are all entangled with parental satisfaction and economic perspectives, which presents "a profound asymmetry between the perceived forces of commerce and the participants' ability for informed decision-making in their own schools" (Risner, Godfrey, & Simmons, 2004, p. 31). Meantime, dance scholars present their concerns over such concessions, as the private sector may sacrifice its artistic sensibility and educative mission (Clark, 2004; Posey, 2002; Risner, Godfrey, & Simmons, 2004; Risner, 2008, 2010).

Dance scholars have established an epistemology of the commercialisation of dance education in private sectors in the Western context. The development of private dance education in China presents a different story. The next section is going to review the history of private ballet education in China to further discuss the commercialisation and commodification of dance education in a free market economy.

2.3 How dance education in China has expanded from public to private

It doesn't matter whether the cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice.

- *The Theory of Cat* (Deng, 1994, p. 323)

Dance education in China has increasingly expanding from public sector to private sector delivery. The development of ballet teaching in China presents complexity within the contexts of political, economic, and cultural events (Chang & Frederiksen, 2016; Christopher, 1979; Liu, 2018; Mullis, 2017; Wang, 2018; Wilcox, 2016, 2018a; Xi, 2009; Yang, 2016). Within all factors, the process from commercialisation to commodification drives ballet teaching in China from public-dominant to private-pervasive.

As an aspect of dance education, private ballet education is one of the outcomes of the Reform and Opening policy with the implementation of Deng Xiaoping's "Cat Theory". This pragmatism theory was promoted by Deng Xiaoping, the paramount leader of the People's Republic of China from 1978 until 1992, and became the fundamental philosophy to support the economic Reform and Opening policy which shelved the dispute of whether market economy belongs to capitalism or socialism, and objectively liberated the private-owned sectors to achieve the economic boom in China since 1980s (Wright, 2010). Harvey (2007) concludes that "the outcome in China has been the construction of a particular kind of market economy that increasingly incorporates neoliberal elements interdigitated with authoritarian centralized control" (p. 120). In Chinese scholars' viewpoints, three political values compete with each other in China: Marxism, economic pragmatism, and Chinese traditional values (Yan, 2018).

2.3.1 Private ballet education in China

In China, the development of dance education is determined and affected by authoritarian power from government ideology and policy (Chang & Frederiksen, 2016; Clark, 2008; Li,

2009; Wilcox, 2018a). From the viewpoint of ownership, the development of ballet in China experiences three phases: the vast majority of private-owned companies and schools from 1900s to 1954; totally state-owned from 1954-1978; gradually shifted from public to private from 1979 onward (Chang & Frederiksen, 2016; Christopher, 1979; Li, 2009; Mullis, 2017; Xi, 2009; Xu, et al., 2016; Wang, 2008; Wilcox, 2011, 2018; Zou, 2013). Historically, although ballet and ballet teaching in China was controlled by government in an extreme socialist approach for two decades from 1954 to 1978 (Chang & Frederiksen, 2016; Christopher, 1979; Mullis, 2017), it has moved towards a market economy with a neoliberal approach through commercialisation to commodification (Chang & Frederiksen, 2016; Wilcox, 2011, 2018; Xu, et al., 2016).

As a foreign art form, ballet was introduced and developed in China at the end of the nineteenth century, and most ballet companies and schools were privately owned and operated in a few major cities, such as Shanghai, Tianjin, and Harbin, for around half a century (Christopher, 1979; Liu, 2008; Wang, 2008; Wilcox, 2011, 2018; Xi, 2009; Zou, 2008). However, with the founding of the Communist People's Republic of China in 1949, political and ideological approaches prompted the government to replace all private ballet companies and schools by state-owned institutes in the year 1954 (Li, 2009; Qi & Gao, 2014; Wang, 2017; Wilcox, 2018a; Zou, 2013). From 1954 to 1978, two public ballet schools and one state ballet company were established and progressed in China: Beijing Dance School, Shanghai Dance School, and the National Ballet of China (Chang & Frederiksen, 2016; Feng, 2002; Li, 2009; Wang, 2017; Wilcox 2018; Xu et al., 2016). These ballet companies and schools only selected talented children between age 9 and 11 to join full-time pre-professional programmes based on the Russian Vaganova method (Feng, 2002; Li, 2009). It was not allowed for these ballet companies and schools to deliver teaching to community, as private economy was banned (Harvey, 2005; Wright, 2010), so a market for private ballet education did not exist (Feng & Mao, 2010; Pang, 2018).

After the Culture Revolution, in order to implement the national economic Reform and Opening policy, the state-owned ballet companies and schools introduced and created a ballet curriculum for adolescents (Liu, 2002, 2014, 2018; Pang, 2018; Sun, 1997; Qi & Gao, 2014). Beijing Dance Academy prepared and released China's first ballet examination curriculum for private dance sectors in 1980s (Li, 2009; Liu, 2014; Sun, 1997), and set up a dedicated Department of Dance Examination to promote and organise the teaching and testing, including training registered teachers and examiners, certifying private dance schools, arranging examination and issuing certificates etc. (Liu, 2014, 2015; Pang, 2018). Dance educators recognise this is the start of privatisation and commercialisation of ballet teaching in private sectors (Liu, 2014; Lv, 2018; Pang, 2018; Sun, 1997)

Through the development for 35 years, Beijing Dance Academy has constructed hegemonic power in the market of ballet teaching in mainland China through enhancing systematisation in institutional operation, standardisation of curriculum and pedagogy and authorisation of certification and assessment (Liu, 2014; Pang, 2018; Qi & Gao, 2014). There are around ten other Chinese local ballet examination curricula in use (Pang, 2018), such as the National Ballet of China's curriculum and Zizi ballet, but in 2019 Beijing Dance Academy's curriculum occupies the majority of the market (Intelligence Research Group, 2018a, 2018b & 2019; Pang, 2018).

In the twenty first century, international ballet curricula and examinations entered into the booming market of ballet teaching in China (Pang, 2018; Royal Academy of Dance, 2019). The Royal Academy of Dance set up its China office in 2001 in Shanghai and has conducted events and activities, including course delivery, teacher's training and examination for nearly twenty years (Royal Academy of Dance, 2019). A significant milestone event in the history of the Royal Academy of Dance happened on 12 December, 2019, when the Royal Academy of Dance and Poly Group announced "the Poly-RAD School of Dance was opened at the 1862 Fashion Art Center in Shanghai". This is the Royal Academy of Dance's first overseas outlet

under its direct management in its history of 100 years (Royal Academy of Dance, 2019; Shanghai Municipal People's Government, 2019). Not only the Royal Academy of Dance, but other international ballet curricula and examinations, e.g., Commonwealth Society of Teachers of Dancing (Australia), Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (UK), have taken roots in China (Commonwealth Society of Teachers of Dancing, 2018; Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing, 2020). While international ballet curricula and examinations are expanding in China, Chinese ballet curricula and examinations are extending to other countries as well, e.g., the Beijing Dance Academy have signed overseas organisers and promoted its curriculum to the U.S., Singapore, New Zealand etc., (Ding, 2014; Liu, 2014). Localisation and internationalisation simultaneously interrelate with each other, and they co-work to the privatisation and commercialisation of ballet teaching in private sectors in China. This distinctive phenomenon presents characteristics of neoliberal business competition. The next section is going to focus on the shift from commercialisation to commodification of ballet teaching in private sectors in China.

2.3.2 The transformation of ballet teaching

The recent process of commercialisation of ballet education in China echoes the history of dance education in the U.S.(Guo, 2019; Jia & Wang, 2010; Lu & He, 2011; Posey, 2002; Zhu & Hu, 2019), the speed and scale of the marketisation of dance education in China is even more intensified due to the increasing density of mass media, e.g., internet and social media replaced movies and television, and combined with the demand of consumption upgrade in the middle class during the time of post-WTO prosperity since year 2003 (Guo, 2019; Zhang, 2017; Zhu & Hu, 2019). Although public dance education is still provided through community facilities, e.g., Children's Palaces and Adolescent Activity Centers (Li, 2015; Shi, 1993), private dance schools have pervaded the market of dance education today (Chen, 2013; Tian, 2015; Wang, 2013; Yuan, 2016). Privatisation and marketisation of dance education in China form the first stage of the development of ballet education in private sectors.

The concept of business models emerged in the 1960s and gradually attracted substantial attention from both economists and entrepreneurs, and the practice of business modelling was adopted in trading and economic behaviours long before, even since pre-classical times (Baden-Fuller and Morgan; Bock, 2012; Drucker, 1994; George and Bock, 2011; Madlin, 2012; Richardson, 2008; Teece, 2010; Velu and Jacob, 2016; Zott, 2011). During the theorising process, scholars raised inconsistent definitions and boundaries of the concept of business model in academic literature (Bock, 2012; Richardson, 2008; Teece, 2010; Zott, 2011), however, most of them consider value is closely connected with the business model concept and conclude three key components: the value proposition, the value creation and delivery, and the value capture (Richardson, 2008). The business model summarises the architecture and logic of a business (Baden-Fuller & Morgan, 2010; Velu & Jacob, 2016). The identification of the core meaning of business model helped scholars and practitioners to further define the constituent parts and build an effective model which leads to a successful enterprise (Johnson, Christensen & Kagermann, 2008; Li, 2016). In China, the concept and practice of business model innovation has drawn considerable attention from scholars as well (Diao & Bai, 2012).

In dance education in China today, the traditional business ideal and operation model is challenged by new innovations, not from pedagogy or technology, but from the injection of capital and re-defining of the value to customers (Tian, 2015). The introduction of capital into dance schools, no matter whether state-owned or privately-owned schools, has transformed the business of dance education from labour operation to capital operation. Considering the value proposition is the crux of the business model (Leavy, 2010), as a trade of service, dance education normally sells dance teacher's knowledge and time, combined with the space of studio and the necessary costumes, therefore the value provided is contained in the quality of teaching and in the dance product. However, through the capitalisation of dance schools, the value has fundamentally shifted from the quality of teaching to the profit of commerce. This process of commodification is achieved through business model innovation as "it defines a series of activities, from preparing the raw materials to satisfying the final consumer" (Li, 2011, p.2).

Like product and service, business model is conceived as easy to imitate; however, implementing a dedicated business model requires a characterised environment and support, such as external policy, culture, and social circumstance and internal asset, process, and system of a certain business (Drucker, 1994; Eurich, 2014; Teece, 2010). In China, successfully achieved business model innovation can attract business competitors in the same industry to blindly imitate rather than resist (Keane & Zhao, 2012). This homogeneous business competition under the catalyst of capital presents intensive zero-sum games between dance schools in the market.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodologies I applied to address the research question *Why and how has commodification shifted the practice of ballet teaching?* The major method adopted in this project is qualitative research, through semi-structured interviews. In order to explore the phenomenon, this research utilises phenomenology to show participants' perceptions of the effect of commodification on the private ballet education in Chengdu, China. The chapter concludes with the presentation of the data collected.

3.1 Theoretical frameworks

This section explains the necessity and feasibility of the research methods applied and contains three sub-sections. The qualitative approach defines the overall atmosphere of the methodology and its adaptability in this research. Narrative enquiry allows the research questions to be more tangible and distinct, eliciting personal representations of the development of private ballet in Chengdu. In-depth semi-structured interviews explore the individuality of the perspectives of dance educators and venture capitalists as interviewees.

The section concludes with discussing the connections among these three elements.

3.1.1 Qualitative research

Considering the aim of the research question, this study utilises qualitative research methods to examine dance educators' and venture capitalists' perceptions on the impact of neoliberalism on the private ballet education in Chengdu, China. Distinct from quantitative economic and business research, which generally engages a statistical process (Johnson & Duberley, 2000), the data collected in this project is more focused on personal cognition, viewpoints, intentions, and values, to further understand the meanings of people's behaviour and the reasons behind it (Malhotra, 2004; Schwandt, 2001). This qualitative research process is necessary for exploring reflections and concerns of dance educators and venture capitalists,

as it allows investigation of “complex phenomena that are difficult to measure quantitatively and to generate data necessary for a comprehensive understanding of a problem” (Curry et al., 2009, p. 1443). Furthermore, qualitative research provides an open environment, to inspire these research participants’ retrospection and reflection on the shift and challenges in private ballet education from a distinct perspective; allowing them to theorise on unknown and unfocussed knowledge and causality, without need to be reductive.

3.1.2 Narrative inquiry

“Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375). In the past five years, I heard many vivid stories from dancers and dance educators: some of them recalled brilliant moments of their careers, and some of them recounted painful experiences of confronting failure. I am immersed in their stories, and through them learn and understand the joys and sorrows of dance and dance education. This “study of experience understood narratively” (Lessard, Caine, & Clandinin, 2018, p.194) encourages me to apply the methodology of narrative inquiry in my study, to explore human experience and personal perception (Trahar, 2013).

In this research project, the narrative inquiry is conducted to elaborate six dance educators’ and venture capitalists’ stories in line with their practice at private dance schools in China, to reveal their perspectives and concerns about the commercialisation and commodification of dance education in China. Narratives shared in this research are collected from conversations through the interviewing process between six participants and me, by recalling their experiences in daily management and operation.

More than simply representing participants’ personal stories (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009), researchers also theorise the facilities and rationales behind those stories (Reissman, 2005). Throughout the interviewing, I focused on the participants’ perspective related to the shift of

teaching practice due to the injection of capital, business competition, and change of consumer needs. In order to consistently examine the narratives, I maintained a frequent contact with participants to confirm and refine the data collected. Meanwhile, with the progress of literature review, I conducted repeated communication with research participants to establish a constructive process of theorising knowledge and findings.

3.2 Research methods: constructivism

Within this thesis I theorise knowledge about the commodification of dance education through exploring participants' experience and perception. In such a way, the findings are constructed and developed by participants' individual cognition (Matthews, 1997; Phillips, 2000; Rasmussen, 1998), "based on constructions they have already created in the form of concepts or picture of the world they live in" (Rasmussen, 1998, p. 554).

This research holds a constructivist approach in discussing topics of dance education in China, in particular relying upon the individual's perception and concern through personal experience and interaction with others (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). Constructivism has been broadly utilised in researching educational topics (Philpott, & Batty, 2009; Shively, 2015), and also has been applied in China for discussing educational phenomena (Tan, 2017). Through repeated conversation with participants in this research, new knowledge was identified and theorised through questioning and discussing topics around business competition, market share, customer satisfaction etc. The participants' individual experience and the business environment they engaged with provides me with a theoretical framework to research how commercialisation and commodification impacts dance education in private sectors.

3.3 Data collection

Data collection and analysis are recognised as an important process in qualitative research (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2006). In this project, the primary data collection method is in-depth

semi-structured interviews. In addition, a holistic review of literature on dance education in private sectors, neoliberal free market, commercialisation and commodification, and related contextual and statistic data help provide a theoretical underpinning to this thesis.

3.3.1 Interviews

Interviewing is considered an effective and popular method in educational, social, business, and dance studies (Granot et al. 2012; Rivas & Gibson-Light, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Silverman, 2013). To support qualitative research with a social constructivist approach, interviews as conversational talk can assist the researcher and participants in deeper understanding the phenomenon and potential reasons (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Rivas & Gibson-Light, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In association with the economic characteristics of this project, I considered interviews as a feasible and tangible method to conduct the data collection process. Granot et al. (2012) emphasised the importance of the qualitative interview in business and market research:

Qualitative data are of greater value in the identification of underlying causes, as well as the understanding of the processes. In a discipline as applied as marketing, qualitative methods enable a deeper understanding of behavior, rather than a shallow representation of intentions.
(p. 547)

As the commodification of dance education in Chengdu is an ongoing event with complicated changes and updates, my interview process sought ‘insider’s’ aims to probe the reasons behind these stakeholders’ perspective. This project design therefore involved six participants in a qualitative interview. Two of them are principals in private ballet schools in Chengdu with previous dance teaching experience but who are not engaging in teaching at present; another two participants are managers in private ballet schools who shoulder both management and teaching responsibilities; and the remaining two are investors and venture capitalists in private

ballet schools without any dance or dance teaching experience. These participants possess a distinctive background of knowledge and experience, as some of them have performed dancing and dance teaching longer than business management and the others hold a sophisticated understanding in investment but without dancing experience. It was therefore critical to allow a freedom within the interview processes to accommodate these different perspectives; without presuming and presetting a standardised list of questions. Rubin & Rubin (2005) suggest that “the responsive interviewing model relies heavily on the interpretative constructionist philosophy, mixed with a bit of critical theory and then shaped by practical needs of doing interviews” (p. 30), so it is effective to continually identify and act in consonance with the requirements of the occasion during the conversation.

In general, interviewing is a broadly utilised method in social practice and research between doctors and patients, constables and victims, as well as researchers and participants etc. (Lucas, 2014). But there are fundamental distinctions in the interview due to diverse purposes and intentions; so, for the sake of collecting adequate and profound data through the interview process with multiple restraints, this project decides to adopt in-depth semi-structured interviews to better understand the phenomenon.

3.3.2 In-depth semi-structured interview

In recent studies, scholars identify plausible connotations of “in-depth” as individual perspective, relatively small group of participants, and particular idea or situation (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Lucas, 2014). In this project, the particular situation is the development of private ballet education in Chengdu; the group of interviewees is in a manageable scale of six participants; and undisturbed and non-deceived individual feelings and thoughts are crucial for the quality of the discussion and findings.

Bendelow & Williams (1995) emphasised that interviewees may hide their experiences or

thoughts from “critical audiences”, and dance scholars further explained ballet dancers’ and teachers’ concerns for the potential social and emotional cost to their career and interpersonal relationships (Martin, 2007). Sensitive to these concerns, I prepared a semi-structured interview plan to achieve “in-depth” results. This allowed for a conversation with a purpose (Burgess 2002), that acknowledges the participants’ background, their connection with the researchers, and their potential concerns. This is to avoid problematic topics which might cause the participants to develop psychological restlessness and mental resistance during the conversation. Such preparation allowed me to prepare comfortable topics, which are functional and focused on the main research question and might make the participants actively engage in the recalling of their stories and theorising the causes and reasons behind them. This series of topics created a flexibility in the semi-structured interview process (Kvale, 1983, 2006; May, 2001; Patton, 2002). As Bogdan and Biklen (1997) emphasised that the semi-structured interview provides interviewees with opportunities to communicate in their own frames, thus releasing them from the restraints of preset questions and fixed structures.

In order to collect data in a panoramic perspective, this project adopts direct face-to-face conversation. Compared to long-distance communication, a face-to-face interview provides more opportunities for researchers to observe the participants’ non-verbal expression such as body language and change of expression (Kawanura, 2011), so further extending the data analysis with a holistic comprehension (Aronson, 1992). In this research, both interviewer and interviewees hold the same cultural background and communicated in Mandarin, so face-to-face interview can potentially make the levels of dialogue more profound with a manageable interpersonal relationship. The unexpected disturbance from the environment around the interview is considered as a factor of limitation in the face-to-face interview process. To balance the interference from external factors and the relaxation for exchanging ideas, the interview was arranged to take place in a quiet cafeteria or tea house with privacy.

For the purpose of progressing the data in the analysis, the whole process of interviewing was

recorded by utilising an iPhone 7's recording function and the sound file was transcribed and saved in a MacBook Pro laptop.

3.4 Data analysis

According to the complexity of the development of private ballet education in Chengdu, thematic analysis is the adopted method to describe and discuss such particular events in a qualitative approach (Boyatzis, 1998; Roulston, 2001). Aronson (1995) argues that thematic analysis is a research tool with flexibility to support the discussion of detailed and complex data and Boyatzis (1998) further extends this explaining that this analysis method focuses on pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns according to themes within research data.

For example, in this research, three core themes associated with business model innovation are determined through the screening and pinpointing of collected data from the transcript of the interview recording: *Customer Value Proposition*, *Key Resources and Processes*, and *Profit Formula* (Johnson, Christensen & Kagermann, 2008). Key words/sentences related to these three concepts are targeted, e.g., “parents are blindly believing that NBC’s teachers can provide much better teaching quality than us” stands for the customer’s perception and assumption of value proposition. Through the screening process, irrelevant information has been eliminated and materials focused on the discussion of hidden hegemony in the business model innovation has been selected.

The detailed discussions and findings are presented in Chapter 4 of this thesis. Significant phenomena, including stories, narratives, concepts, theories and hypothesis, are compared and contrasted throughout the evaluation process.

3.5 Researcher's position

As the researcher in this project, I personally perform and shift between both insider and outsider position. Chesney (2000) argued that researcher's philosophy, beliefs, feelings, and personal experience have potential effects on the research process and outcomes in the qualitative research. Berger (2015) further discussed and illustrated that the interrelation between researchers and participants in qualitative research can impact the research process and its analytic stance. As for my instance, I have fifteen years work experience in business, from strategic planning, operation, marketing and sales, to human resources and financial management, including in three world top 500 enterprises and in regional branch Chief Executive Director roles from the Middle East to Australasia. For seven years, since 2012, I have been engaged in building and managing a private dance school in New Zealand, parallel to one year of study in the postgraduate diploma in Dance Studies at the University of Auckland. In addition, as a native Mandarin speaker, I can communicate with all participants in using the same language and sharing the same cultural characteristics. These three fields of my personal background shape me as an "insider" in this research and establishes a foundation in both dance and business contexts from ontological and epistemological aspects.

Meanwhile, the other two factors retain me as an "outsider" in this research. One obvious aspect is my dancing history: compared to dancers or dance teachers, I have no dance practicing, performing, and teaching experience. I am also living in Auckland, New Zealand, far away from the location and market of the research place in Chengdu, China. This allows me to not habitually concentrate on dancing topics ontologically, but reflect more on the influence of business on dance; and my location in Auckland helps avoid any perceived conflict of interest, in terms of competing business strategies, with my research participants in Chengdu.

Sword (1999) argues "no research is free of the biases, assumptions, and personality of the researcher and we cannot separate self from those activities in which we are intimately involved" (p. 277). It is important to mention that the researcher's position "may be fluid rather

than static" (Berger, 2015, p. 231), and it inevitably affects the emic-etic balance in the research project (Eppley, 2006). In this research, it is undeniable that my own experience, cognition, and value might be involved in the data collection and analysis processes, while I am endeavouring to share the knowledge, understanding and viewpoint with all participants based on my working in a similar environment and facing same challenges and opportunities (Couture et al., 2012). This shared mission and vision helps me to better understand the participants' thoughts, inclinations, and concerns, and further explore and theorise through generating resonance in the interviewing process.

Notably one challenge in this research is how to manage the interviewing process without misunderstanding my social relationships with these participants. I have had previous contact with some of these interviewees, and I do not know the others. For the familiar interviewees, I set up a neutral business environment for the interview, such as in a quiet meeting room to build a more official atmosphere. With the unfamiliar interviewees, I managed to complete the interviews in a more comfortable place to let interviewees feel safe and easy to open their mind and share their stories and perceptions.

Not every participant engaged in the interview successfully to provide valuable information and material due to both subjective and objective reasons. One significant cause is the sensitivity of the discussion around dedicated business model innovation. As a researcher, I have no intention to be involved in business competition with these ballet enterprises, but some of the interviewees might be concerned that the publication of my research will invite unnecessary troubles. This concern required that as a researcher I openly address the ethical issues with all of the interviewees in advance of the interview.

3.6 Ethics

This research complies with the requirement of the University of Auckland's Human

Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC). I invited the six research participants to join this study through an open email/social media call, allowing them to respond voluntarily if they felt interested to take part in this research. Before engaging in the interviews I provided all with a thorough understanding of the aims and processes of the research, and their rights to suspend the interview or withdraw at any time if they chose to. Throughout the conversations, I made an effort to maintain a comfortable atmosphere and let them freely choose to refuse to talk about certain topics. All participants received and signed an interview consent form in Mandarin and understood and accepted that the research findings supplied by them were presented in such a way that their identities would remain confidential. To achieve this, all participants' names in this research were given pseudonyms: Helen, Henry, Shirley, Yvonne, Peter, and Bella. They each received the transcript of their interview in Mandarin, which will be stored by the researcher for six years and is accessible only to the research team, to be deleted and shredded after six years.

3.7 Limitations and challenges

Effectively organising data is important to qualitative research (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). There are several foreseeable constraints in this project, and these limitations might result in adjustments for future research. The small scale of the participants in the interview process can lead to a bias or inclination in perception as every dance educator and venture capitalist holds different positions and goals. This research aims to identify the commodification of dance education within a qualitative research context, so, a quantitative statistical survey to reach more dance educators might be helpful to prove or revise the conclusion of this research in the future.

An additional consideration is the rapid change in private ballet education in Chengdu, in which all stakeholders are adjusting their behaviours according to the situation. Thus, constant observation and continuous research is necessary to advance with the times. It is hoped that the questions raised from this research will lead to further discussion and future research.

Chapter 4: Discussion

This chapter presents research participant's concerns and reflections on their business practices and rationales in the development of private ballet education in Chengdu. These perceptions come from personal experiences in a free market with neoliberal approach. The research participants include both dance educators and venture capitalists, and the data presented in this chapter is in the form of direct quotations of these interviewees. The participants shared stories and they show controversial and complex perspectives over the commodification of dance education in the private sector in China.

Section 4.1 presents the distinct perspectives on the injection of venture capital into private ballet education of dance educators and venture capitalists. Dance educators tend to think the venture capital is a challenge to the sound development of private ballet education in Chengdu. However, venture capitalists are inclined to believe it is an opportunity for the evolution of private ballet education. The distinctions between them can be epistemological as the undercurrent behind the venture capital might be the impact of neoliberalist capitalism. This more recent economic ideology has brought tensions and risks to dance educators in the private ballet education in Chengdu because it resulted in shifts in business models and teaching practices of private ballet schools/studios.

Section 4.2 focuses on the shifts attributed by venture capital. Research participants' experiences showed business competition among ballet schools become intensive due to the influence of neoliberalist free market economy. This magnified competition prompted dance educators paying further emphasis on the market share. Through introducing "service-profit chain" theory into the participant's story, the discussion forwarded to elaborate the positive association between market share and customer satisfaction.

Section 4.3 discusses the influence of commodification on ballet teaching. The discussion is broken down into three sub-questions: the trend of teaching contents from kinesthetic training to aesthetic education, the utilitarian purpose of examination and certification, and the tailor-made pre-professional programmes for career pathways. This section connects dance educator's concern on the shift of teaching practice to the theory about the interrelation between commodification and cultural arts product and service.

Section 4.4 extends the discussion to dance educator's further concerns regarding the impact on their control and authority in the society of dance. The collected data is relatively insufficient for an in-depth discussion on this question; however, I am willing to present the narratives I have in this research project. It is hoped this realistic and far-reaching question can be further researched in future projects.

4.1 How do dance educators and venture capitalists perceive capital investment in private ballet education in Chengdu?

The six participants who shared their narratives for this research are working in private ballet schools/studios in Chengdu, P.R. China. Four of them, Shirley Liu, Henry Fang, Yvonne Zhao and Helen Zhang (pseudonyms), trained in ballet and Chinese dance in mixed Western culture context with Chinese pedagogical characteristics for different lengths of time, and in different locations such as Chengdu, Chongqing, Beijing, and Shenyang. They are considered dance educators as their primary job description but not venture capitalists in this research, though they might simultaneously perform part or full responsibilities and/or roles such as investors, shareholders, directors, and managers in their dance schools/studios. Another two participants, Peter Yuan and Bella Bai (pseudonyms), trained and worked in business and management, are recognised as venture capitalists in this research, due to neither of them having come through training in dance before they entered into ballet education, nor do they have the intention to learn dance in the future.

How do these two groups of people perceive the injection of venture capital into private ballet education in Chengdu? Scholars have researched and discussed the powerful influences of personal history and social context on the propensity to enter self-employment (Katz, 1990, 1992; Kolvereid, 1996). Regardless of being defined as dance educators or venture capitalists in this research, all six participants presented perspectives and concerns in relation to their career history and specialty.

This section discusses the contrasting perspectives between dance educators and venture capitalists over the injection of venture capital in private ballet education in Chengdu. Dance educators tend to see capitalism more as a challenge while venture capitalists see capitalism more as opportunity. The distinctions between them could be philosophical and might lead to the rise of tension in private ballet education.

4.1.1 Dance educators see capitalism as a problem and challenge: Capital is always chasing profit

Henry, a pioneer dance educator in private ballet education in Chengdu, clearly expressed his perspective on the influence of capital at the beginning of our conversation: “Capital is always chasing profit”. Henry’s viewpoint comes from his own career experience. After working full-time in a professional state dance academy for twelve years, he decided to establish his own ballet school in year 2008 in Chengdu. To some extent his privately-owned ballet school imitates the business model in operation and teaching curriculum in pedagogy from the public dance academy where he worked before. Considering the institutional distinction between state-owned and privately-owned ballet schools (see Chapter 2.2.1 & 2.2.2), Henry showed his concerns about the uncertainty over the injection of venture capital into private ballet education:

I can understand the input of capital in private ballet school is a market behaviour. However,

capital's influence on ballet education is not clear yet. As a dance teacher and entrepreneur working in this industry, I see capital has been pouring into ballet schools in Chengdu recently. Many of us have a lack of experience in understanding this phenomenon.

Henry's narrative might illustrate two significant approaches. The first is Henry sees that venture capital can be legally and freely introduced into the private ballet education in Chengdu nowadays. This is in line with the scholars' research that the injection of capital is the latest ongoing development in private ballet education in China (see Chapter 2.3). Within neoliberalism, deregulating capital markets is recognised as a critical part of market-oriented policies (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009). Harvey (2005) argues that the market economy in China increasingly incorporates neoliberal elements (see Chapter 2.3). As in other industries, the free movement of capital into ballet schools/studios could result in a consequential shift in private ballet education in Chengdu.

Henry's other perspective indicates his concern about the uncertainty of this change. It seems that he does not have a clear expectation and evaluation of the development of the injection of capital. This concern could be real as it happened similarly in other industries in the process of the Reform Policies in China, and the consequence could be critical to many practitioners and entrepreneurs in their industry (see Section 2.3). While Henry's opinion shows more characteristics of being neutral, some of the other dance educators in this research present more negative attitudes towards capital in private ballet education. Shirley, former ballet teacher and now ballet school principal, gave me her understanding on the venture capital as follows:

I personally believe that whether it is self-management or capital operation, the most fundamental purpose of dance education is to foster qualified dance students. If the capital injection causes dance educators to give up the quality of teaching, then it may not be successful.

Within this narrative, Shirley shared her first perspective on the priority between teaching quality and economic benefits. Throughout the interview process, Yvonne and Helen, both of them are principals of private ballet schools in Chengdu, echoed Shirley's viewpoint that teaching quality takes precedence over economic benefits in dance education: "I trained years and years in dance schools, it makes me believe students' learning result is the First Law of a dance school". Yvonne agreed with the approach that the top priority of teaching is quality in dance education, and she ascribed this approach to her personal experience of dance learning. It seems that this is a good example that Katz (1990) and Kolvareid's (1996) argument that personal history and social context could produce powerful influence in their career, especially for someone entering self-employment.

Throughout the interviews, it appears that the priority of teaching quality is widely shared by the participants in this research, and this shared sense is affecting dance educators' ideology towards venture capital. In Shirley's recognition, the injection of venture capital is not inevitably positive and constructive. She argues the capital could raise risks in sacrificing teaching quality and lowering students' achievement. This cognition might be linked to Harvey's (2005) interpretation that the neoliberal capitalist ideal is a kind of "accumulation by dispossession", and the commodification and financialisation of certain industries might subvert the original value; here, it means putting commercial profit over educational purpose.

I was curious to listen to the venture capitalist participants in this research about their perception of the injection of capital into private ballet education. Should different knowledge and career background form a distinct understanding and perspective? And how do they consider the potential of capital in private ballet education?

4.1.2 Henry: The capital is the turbo engine of private ballet schools

In contrast to the dance educators, the participants with capital investment and management experience present distinct perspectives on the injection of capital. Peter used the metaphor “turbo engine” to show the importance of capital for future development of private ballet schools. As a professional venture capitalist with more than thirty years of investment experience, he brought capital to a ballet school in Chengdu six years ago and works as a business adviser. He explained that the input of capital into private ballet education in Chengdu is unavoidable and functional:

From the perspective of the investor, the injection of capital into private ballet education is unstoppable. In fact, capital has been introduced into private education in China for many years, such as New Orient Group’s successful IPO in Nasdaq in 2006. The route of capital in education started from learning English, to pre-school and tertiary education, and then into other academic tutoring; now it is time for arts education.

From Peter’s perspective, the present moment is ready for capital to enter private ballet education. During the conversation, I was curious about the reason why he makes this judgment. He further elaborated that it accorded with economic law: “capital follows market, when the market is large enough, capital will promptly enter the market.” This perspective is closely connected to the theory of neoliberal economics to emphasise the role of the capital in the free market economy (Springer, Kean & Julie, 2016). In the literature reviewed, it is suggested that although many scholars argue that the market economy in China is not fully aligned with a commonly accepted concept of free market economy within Western contexts, some researchers affirm that market indeed plays a critical role in the development of many industries in China (see more details in Section 2.3).

Continuing the chat over capital, Peter shared his other understanding that if capital is a

current trend in private ballet education, then what it might bring to the industry:

Venture capitalists don't provide financial funding only, but also join in a school's management and operation, as well as assisting in establishing private business's norms and models complying with the economic law and industry regulations.

Peter did not make a value judgment but discussed capital's potential function in private ballet schools. Within this narrative, Peter emphasised that capital could result in reformation of ballet schools such as drawing management facilities to assist the growth of organisation, rather than supplying financial funds only. To further explain the importance of capital's function in the business model innovation, Peter used a counter-example from the failure of shared bicycles to evidence that the inappropriate method of capital injection could be harmful:

The venture capitalists who don't participate in the management normally can't work well in many cases, such as the failure of shared bicycles in China. Tens of billions RMB poured in there, but the investors didn't intervene in the management, only dreamt that the market is huge by imagination. Dozens of venture enterprises in this industry bankrupted in only two to three years.

Through the introspection on the recent failure cases of venture capital in China, Peter used a counter-example to show the importance of appropriate application of capital in business. This is in relation to the benefits from capital injection at the stage of fast-shifting development of an industry.

The divergence between dance educators and venture capitalists captivates my interest on the following two questions: ***How do dance educators understand the nature of business? In***

contrast, how do venture capitalists understand the nature of dance education? With these questions, it is hoped to discuss the distinctions in philosophical rationales.

4.1.3 The different views and concerns of dance educators and venture capitalists can be epistemological

No snowflake in an avalanche ever feels responsible.

Lec, 1969, p.1

Henry, Shirley, Helen, and Yvonne had contrasting perspectives to Peter over the value of the capital in private ballet education. However, they acknowledged the pervasive influence of venture capital's entry into private ballet education. The question is, if profit might be the primary benefit for entrepreneurs, then why do these dance educators have a negative perspective on capital? It seems dance educators might hold deeper concerns in their consciousness and/or subconsciousness, and this new question aroused my curiosity to explore the contradicting phenomenon.

Dance educators in this research all had previous dance learning and teaching experience in public professional dance academies, and they maintain ideals on the nature of 'non-profit' in dance education. Henry repeatedly emphasised that "students are the final product of a ballet school, we have to be responsible for their achievement." And Yvonne echoed Henry's standpoint in a further explanation:

Many new-coming investors in ballet schools have no dance learning and teaching experience. From my view, dance education is different from other industries such as real-estate or IT services. If an investor has no idea about dance, the direction of the school might be deviated into a wrong way. In my opinion, ballet teaching is not only for profit.

This narrative could be comprehended in two layers. Firstly, Yvonne argued that the nature of ballet education, including private ballet education, shall be recognised as not fully ‘for -profit’. Secondly, she perceived investors do not seem to be able to distinguish the characteristics of the non-profit aspect of ballet education from other common businesses because of their inexperience and lack of a career history in dance.

The debate over ‘for-profit’ and ‘non-profit’ could be explained from a political economy standpoint. Dance educators in this research habitually maintain a socialist ideology that the intrinsic quality of education is to prepare qualified graduates in a non-profit approach, no matter what the financial cost is or what the pedagogical process could be. It might be considered that this perception is appropriate in a public dance education system, and it indeed has been adopted as the common practice in China for years (see Section 2.2). However, the concept of non-profit could collide with the purpose of for-profit in the commercial environment of private ballet education, especially if the business circumstance is free market with a neoliberal capitalist ideal. If the contradiction between socialist education ideology and neoliberalist economy ideals are the crux of the distinction between dance educators and venture capitalists, then it might be connected to a more fundamental philosophical concept of hegemony and counter-hegemony.

In dance educators’ epistemological view, teaching quality stands at the top of the hierarchy of value in ballet education. This therefore determines that dance educators maintain hegemonic power in the private ballet schools/studios. However, the injection of capital has or would shift this power to venture capitalists and professional managers, as commercial profits could be recognised as the supreme goal in the neoliberal market economy. Helen shared her personal entrepreneurial story about the transformation of her career identity and status due to the injection of capital:

When I was aware that I was not able to manage my ballet school with the joining of new investors and they were planning to invite sub-franchisees, I decided to hand-over the position of Director to professional managers. I am only responsible for supervising teaching now, but I do have arguments with management team over new programmes or human resources sometimes and again.

Helen's experience reflected the shift of hegemony caused by capital, and it is in line with Flank's (2007) explanation that "the concept 'hegemony' has the ability to reproduce unequal social relationships without resorting to physical coercion" (p. 10).

One of the most remarkable things about capitalism has been its ability to compel people, without using overt force or repression, to conform to the social roles which allow the bourgeois class to exist and prosper. If the bourgeois mode of production is a dictatorship, it certainly appears to be a benevolent one. (pp. 9-10)

In the complexity of the rivalry between hegemony and counter-hegemony, it is hard to distinguish whether teaching quality is hegemony or commercial benefit is counter-hegemony, and their positions are interchangeable. However, both dance educators and venture capitalists might perform the role of flake in the avalanche from the influence of capital.

Bella, General Manager of the Chengdu branch of a ballet education chain which is running 27 studios in seven major cities in China, shared her story in comparing mathematics tutoring school and ballet schools:

I worked five years in a mathematics tutoring chain before transferring to ballet school. In academic tutoring industries, most private schools have already been controlled by

sophisticated venture capital investors. An individual maths teacher will hardly compete with the franchise or direct-running education groups in marketing, resources, events and online services. I think the same story is happening in ballet schools now. The reason I transferred from academic tutoring to arts education is because there are more vacancies in higher management positions in private ballet schools.

I suppose Bella represents venture capitalists' benefit, though she is not the investor herself. Within this narrative, two perspectives are shared: one is that Bella argued venture capital could enter into private ballet schools the same as it did before in academic tutoring; the other standpoint is the capital would influence the hegemony of different business models. It seems that sole traders and small businesses might have less chance to survive in a capitalised market. This prediction is identical with Harvey's (2005) "accumulation by dispossession", but it is presented from venture capitalist's perspectives. It looks like they believe the commodification and financialisation of private ballet education is the necessary route to achieve commercial profit. From the perspectives of both dance educators and venture capitalists, the distinction between them might be attributed to the discourse power and ideology hegemony rather than contradiction on the injection of capital, however, as Wonglimpiyarat (2007) emphasised, venture capitalists could act as catalysts in the competition of private ballet education at the current moment.

Throughout the interview process, the research participants shared their experiences and perspectives of business competition. Some stories could be relevant to Chesbrough's (2007) discussion that the business competition among different ownerships has shifted from technology/product invention to business model innovation. Then, ***what influence have venture capital brought in private ballet education in Chengdu? And how do dance educators and venture capitalists perceive these influences on their business, on related stakeholders and on themselves?***

In the next section, I am going to discuss how does the neoliberal capitalist ideal pervade the participants' business practice. The discussion is going to be expanded through a logical order of: i) neoliberalism appears to foster extreme business competition; ii) competition prompts dance educators to focus on market share; iii) market share prompts dance educators to focus on consumer needs.

4.2 How do neoliberal economic strategies present concerns for dance educators?

Throughout the conversations with the research participants, dance educators showed significant concerns over business competition, as they see economic law could be different from, or even controversial to education principles. Yvonne described that she “suffered” to confront business competition, and she “abominated” the strategies and means used against peer competitors. Henry expressed he felt “excluded” from peers in the commercial rivalry, which is not like the “inclusive” coordination with other dance educators that he enjoyed before. Helen criticised “the competition to capture market share is bloody”, and many dance educators in private ballet school/studios are forced to be energised and eventually exhausted for securing the fast-changing market shares. Shirley emphasised that the business competition among ballet schools/studios has considerably affected the interaction with customers: “Nowadays the customer is the God. We must adjust our courses and teaching methods to satisfy their needs.”

Within the narratives I collected, a neoliberal approach might pervade and catalyse the business competition in Chengdu, and could shift and reform the hegemonic power among competitive ballet schools, as well as between dance educators and customers of students and parents.

4.2.1 Neoliberalism appears to foster extreme business competition

From the research participants’ perspectives, free market and capital, as typical characteristics of a neoliberal economy, act as key functions in the shift of private ballet education in Chengdu. Through the conversation with interviewees, the “warring state” of business competition, and the “jungle law” of the commercial environment, was presented as the shift towards business model.

Yvonne and Helen: warring states

Yvonne acknowledged that “Chengdu is in ‘warring states period’”. She presented that the business competition between ballet schools in Chengdu is becoming increasingly intensive:

Chengdu is currently the battlefield of ballet schools. The market in Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen have been basically developed. As a central city in the West region of China, ballet schools in Chengdu are entering a ‘warring states’ period. Dozens of new ballet schools open in one year while old ballet schools are busy expanding new branches as well.

Yvonne has observed the commercial environment becoming competitive in her resident city as similar scenarios of business competition happened before in other major cities in China. She emphasised that the increasing number of ballet schools is a significant phenomenon. Helen echoed Yvonne’s perception and argued “comparing to the earlier years, the market is bloody now”. According to scholars’ research, ballet education in China is experiencing a fundamental shift from previous public Children and Adolescent’s Palaces to privately-owned and operated enterprises (Li, 2015; Shi, 1993). Both Yvonne and Helen’s impressions are in line with the development of macro-economic development through China’s Reform and Open-up policy, which promoted the market allocation of resources as the primary method (Lu, 2019; Xie, 2012). Therefore, market economy is producing a marked effect in private ballet education, as it did in other creative arts industries, which are considered part of service trade in China which has been influenced by neoliberal ideal in the last twenty years (Maher & Aquanno, 2018; Stark, 2018; Yan, 2018;).

Henry and Shirley: jungle law

In another narrative, Henry further illustrated the picture of the development of private ballet education from more dimensions other than the increasing school numbers:

Chengdu is one of the top competitive markets of ballet in China. A large number of professional ballet dancers and teachers are engaged in teaching in private ballet schools at present. The competition is not only in ballet examination and competition, but also in market share, after-sales service for customers, and capital injection. In one word, the competition follows 'jungle law'.

Henry described the business competition of private ballet schools in Chengdu is following 'jungle law', which means "survival of the strongest or fittest". This describes the concept of the zero-sum game, which takes place when limited human resources and limited customers are shared among competing businesses. Henry was one of the first batch of dance educators who established a privately-owned ballet school in Chengdu in 2000. He has trained many students who have successfully enrolled into public, full-time, pre-professional programmes; in the Beijing Dance Academy, Shanghai Dance Academy, and elite overseas ballet schools. His students have won multiple prizes in high-end international ballet competitions such as YAGP in New York and AGP in Hong Kong. However, throughout the interview, he emphasised that the success or failure of a ballet school does not depend on unique standards of teaching achievement. In contrast, he insisted on the importance of "basic elements of capitalist economy and business development" (Sklair, 1994; Wright, 2019), from strategy management, demand-supply relationship, to business model innovation.

The description of 'jungle law' might reflect another concern about the social connections which become tense and exclusive among dance educators of different ballet schools. Shirley expressed her concern on this as well: "As a member of the local dancers' association, I can feel the disharmony between dance educators in the annual meeting or other association meetings. I know part of the reason is the poaching of teachers and students from others." Poaching could be recognised as a vicious measure following the rule of jungle law, and it may be evidence that the rivalry in Chengdu has become aggressive and harmful. Dance educators showed further concerns over the potential division and hostility in the dance community.

Shirley, Yvonne and Peter: dancing with wolves

Shirley reflected that ballet schools with diverse business models are competing against each other. New competitors with different backgrounds, such as state-owned ballet companies and international ballet schools, have intensified the competition to a new level:

All types of ballet schools are co-existing in Chengdu today, including sole traders, mom-and-pop shops, limited companies, arts education groups, international ballet schools, and state-owned ballet companies. I may say we are dancing with wolves.

Shirley imagined her competitors as “wolves”, which might show her concerns in facing new competitors. Yvonne faced same impact from competitors, and she agreed with Shirley’s comment that “wolves” are coming eventually: “It is no doubt that state-owned ballet companies and international ballet schools possess comparable advantages in bigger platforms, wider resources, and stronger capital.” Shirley and Yvonne’s feelings mirror the emerging diversity of business models in service trade in China (Huang, 2012). And their story reflected an epitome of the influence of the neoliberal economy.

In Peter’s view, the transformation from socialist planned economy to capitalist market economy could thoroughly change the map of an industry and involve people’s life:

Since China’s accession to the WTO in 2001, banks in China have entered into intensive competition. In Chengdu, state-owned banks, joint-stock commercial banks, and foreign banks compete. It really concerned many banking practitioners, as their career and life were changed due to the shift in the banking industry, someone met challenges and someone found opportunity. After nearly twenty years, most banks survived, but some other banks have been

moved out from Chengdu. It is market economy.

Peter reviewed the history of the banking industry in Chengdu to present the possible process of the development of private ballet education in the future. In his perspective, one implicit understanding is that the business competition is an inevitable product of the free market economy with neoliberal ideals; furthermore, the business competition could restructure the market share of competitors.

4.2.2 Competition prompts dance educators to focus on market share

Dance educators emphasised that the market share is the hinge of business competition, even is placed prior to profit gain. They perceived there are several key factors which could change the hegemony in the market share: regulatory constraints and competitors' rivalry.

Henry and Helen: regulatory constraints

Throughout the conversation with dance educators in this research, many of them mentioned the "non-governmental school license". According to the Non-state Education Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China, approved by the National People's Congress in 2018 (Ministry of Education, 2018), all private schools, including private ballet schools, are required to have this consent from the local Bureau of Education. Henry described this certification process is "a reshuffle of business" in private ballet education in Chengdu:

Since the middle of the year 2018, Chengdu local government has cleaned up dozens of private ballet schools without the school license. And it is not easy to meet the requirements for applying for this license, especially for sole traders and personal studios. There are some strict conditions, such as business premises, fire fighting system, health and safety facilities and teacher's qualification; any noncompliance of these requirements could result in failure of consent.

Henry illustrated the significant impact to the market share from the compliance of policy. And from his experience, these regulatory constraints could rebuild hegemony of certain ballet schools in the market share through the examination and approval process of school license. In ballet education, public ballet companies and public ballet academies have more political and social resources than private ballet schools (see Section 2.3). It seems that they might build their hegemony in private ballet education by extending their advantages in compliance. The difference lies in the nature of the ‘matrix’ that before the Reform policy, they were born to have the exclusive position in the planned economy due to private business not being allowed to exist; while this time they rebuild their prestige in the free market environment. So, legislation and compliance could be their hi-tech weaponry to secure their top hierarchic status in the market share.

In addition, international ballet organisations and schools brought new concerns to dance educators in Chengdu. Helen saw the entry of RAD (the Royal Academy of Dance) as a new “threat”:

RAD is a new threat to us. Its teacher’s certificate is too hard to get, we can’t train our teachers to be registered RAD teachers in a short time. We only heard of ballet schools with RAD courses in Beijing or Shanghai before. But since year 2018, more and more ballet schools have promoted RAD courses in Chengdu, and made students and parents believe it is a better syllabus than the BDA syllabus, because it is internationally recognised and widely advertised in China.

This echoes Helen’s feeling that RAD is speeding up its expansion in mainland China (see Chapter 2.2.2). A significant phenomenon which could further aggravate the shift of market share is that RAD has reached agreement with Poly Group, a giant state-owned monopoly

group, to build Poly-RAD ballet schools in dozens of Chinese major cities, and Chengdu is one of their target locations. This is the first case that RAD builds its direct-invested ballet schools outside the U.K. in its history of 100 years.

It seems that RAD may form another hegemony of regulatory constraints. Through the development of 100 years, RAD has built its institutional and commercial hegemony in private ballet education in many countries (see Chapter 2.2.3). And with the benefits from the globalisation and China's Open up policy, RAD has introduced its syllabus, examination, and events to mainland China since the beginning of the new millennium (see Chapter 2.2.3). However, RAD maintains a system that only its registered teachers have the right to receive internal information and enroll students for examination, which builds the de facto power-knowledge hegemony. As Foucault (1979) elaborated in "Discipline and Punish", "It is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge" (p. 28). With this power of knowledge, RAD could redistribute the portion of market share between ballet schools with RAD certificate and the ones without it, which is what Helen is concerned about.

Shirley and Yvonne: throwing a stone in a lake

The competitor's impact on the market share is widely discussed and analysed by international researchers (Baden-Fuller & Morgan, 2010; Johnson, 2008; Madlin, 2012; Schaltegger et al., 2012). The participants presented perspectives that competitors' rivalry could shift the market share, however, they did not reach an agreement why and how competitors could affect the hegemonic power of ballet schools in the market.

Shirley shared her concerns over the new competitors of a state-owned ballet company. NBC

Chengdu is established by a national ballet company in 2018 and has entered into private ballet education since year 2008. NBC is running nearly 20 ballet schools in Beijing, Shenzhen, and Chengdu at the end of 2019. The opening of its new branch in Chengdu is recognised an iconic impact on the development of private ballet education in the perspective of local dance educators:

The opening of the NBC Chengdu school is like throwing a stone in a lake. It is no doubt that they will affect our business, in fact, some of our students and teachers have already transferred to them. I can't stop them, because I don't have resources they have. The only thing I can do is to face it, and try my best to make ourselves stronger in the market.

From Shirley's story, customers (students) and human resources (staff teachers) are transferable with absolute freedom in Chengdu. It might be evidenced that free market could bring loss to existing players. Shirley saw the rivalry of competitors as a negative impact, while Yvonne shared a different idea when she met the same competitor:

We never dreamt of obtaining NBC's resources, on the contrary, we recognise our advantage lies in "grounding (keeping the common touch to clients)", and our grasp of the market is more accurate. For example, we have a mum who took her daughter to a trial class in NBC. The teacher there was very supercilious and aloof. When she examined this student, she ridiculed her saying, "you can't even do a battement tendu, you can't even do a good plié." At the end, this mum brought her daughter back to us again.

Yvonne acknowledged that some advantages in business competition are incomparable. But she found out that powerful competitors have their own weakness as well. The business competition is more complex than simple calculation of resources, and 'soft power', such as understanding of customer needs, may influence customer's decision as well. When I shared

this story with Peter, he understands this scenario from the point of market segmentation:

The market of ballet teaching in Chengdu is big. It is impossible for any single school to monopolise the whole cake. I see the market is a pyramid. As a big brand, NBC targets the top. However, our school can operate in a different way to take the middle and low end. Although it is impossible to divide the customer base completely, but I follow my market positioning, and NBC maintain theirs.

Within this narrative, Peter reviewed the market share from a venture capitalist's approach: he considered the market volume as first step; then extended the analysis to market segmentation; and set up his own competition strategy to maximise the market share. This process is in line with the development in the early age of capitalism. No matter whether it is the "Enclosure Movement" in England in eighteenth century, or the "Online Commerce" in recent years, they all put market share prior to the profit gain or other business goals (see Section 2.3). While Peter discussed the market share from the elements outside of ballet schools, Yvonne further emphasised the importance of factors inside the schools:

The success of a ballet school depends on many factors. Whether investors' backgrounds are a match and their values are similar. Whether the management team can coordinate with teachers' team well. Whether the communication with customers is smooth and our programmes can fit their demand. All of these matters could affect business outcome.

Yvonne connected the ballet school to the customer's need. Throughout the interview process, in order to obtain more market share, dance educators tended to prepare or redesign their teaching programmes and methods to feed customers' tastes. The next section will discuss the shift and influence of supply-demand relations, from the research participants' perspectives.

4.2.3 Market share prompts dance educators to focus on consumer needs

Market share and customer satisfaction are recognised as central constructs in marketing theory and practice (Rego, Morgan, & Fornell, 2013). Since the 1990s, researchers have constantly discussed the interrelation between market share and customer satisfaction, and they maintain tit-for-tat arguments on whether this interrelation is positive, negative, or unconnected (Anderson, Fornell, & Lehman, 1994; Fornell, 1995; Morgan, Anderson, & Mittal, 2005; Griffin & Hauser, 1993; Kamakura et al. 2002; Rego, Morgan, & Fornall, 2013). Kamakura (2002) emphasised that a “service-profit chain” could improve customer satisfaction and could result in enhancing retention of a business’s existing customers and attracting new customers. Therefore, customer satisfaction should be positively related to the business’s future market share.

Throughout the interviewing process, research participants shared an intensive sense about the focus on consumer needs, which is in line with the theory of the ‘service-profit chain’ about the positive association between customer satisfaction and market share. In order to explore the research participants’ perspectives on this question, the conversations were around two topics: *How do dance educators and venture capitalists perceive the factors that might affect consumers choosing a ballet school? And how do they consider to responding to this change?*

Shirley, Peter and Yvonne: customer is God

“In private ballet schools, the playing rule is the customer is God”. Shirley acknowledged students/parents possessing hegemonic power in the balancing between them and ballet schools. The idea of “customer is God” was respected and practiced by entrepreneurs in China since the economic reformation in the 1980s due to the market competition (Jia & Wang, 2010; Zhao et al., 2016). Shirley further described her experience which formed her idea of “customer is God”:

When I was teaching professional students in a government ballet school, I didn't care about students' feeling too much, but I paid more attention to the achievement of teaching. However, since I started my own ballet school, I have always thought from students' and their parents' position, what kind of teachers and teaching method they prefer, as their demands are diversified and changeable.

Shirley compared her experience in public and private ballet schools, and she recognised the distinction between those two careers is that the focus is transformed from teacher-led to student-led, or translated to business language, from supplier-drive to consumer-needs. Shirley's practice correlates to the theory of service-profit chain. When Heskett et al. (1994) firstly created the concept of service-profit chain in marketing theory, they aimed to "establishes relationships between profitability, customer loyalty, and employee satisfaction, loyalty, and productivity" (p. 164). Therefore, the operational investment is integrated with service operation, and is related to customer perceptions and behaviours within one framework; furthermore, this relation is considered as positively associated (Kamakura et al., 2002). 'Customer is God' could be interpreted as a practical ideal of the service-profit chain, which prompts the idea that higher customer privilege should lead to positive effects on market share. Based on empirical experience, Shirley and most research participants put customer satisfaction as the primary goal in marketing. This 'common sense' was not only shared by dance educators in this research, but was also echoed by Peter, who emphasised the importance of interpersonal communication between dance educators (the suppliers/sellers) and students/parents (the customers/buyers). Peter narrated a phenomenal story from a ballet school:

Due to some minor disputes, BEC (a pseudonym) ballet school's manager published an investigation report about one incident with a student's parent through their social media, and publicly required this student to be withdrawn from BEC. About this issue, I am not saying

customer is always right; but it is unbelievable that a ballet school manager kicks her customers out in such a way and without any reasonable cause. This incident indeed hurt BEC's reputation.

Peter used this example to challenge authoritarian management, which negatively affects customer satisfaction, emphasizing that students/parents enjoy customer's rights. When I shared this story with Yvonne, she compared this incident with her own practice:

I always place myself in the parent's position, even though I am a teacher and manager in ballet school. From my view, BEC's manager was committing a suicide to his business. I have to face complaints every day, but I never publish the dispute with parents publicly, even though some parents could share their comments through social media. My top goal is to solve the problem, I would like to contact the parents promptly and satisfy their reasonable requirement within our policy boundary.

Yvonne considered customer satisfaction as more important than the right or wrong of the incident. Heskett et al. (1994) describes one critical business law in the service-profit chain as "value drives customer satisfaction" and he further explains that "value means the results customers receive in relation to the total cost" (p.166). Heskett uses an example of CAT (catastrophe) team in an insurance company to evidence that quick and smooth handling would create value to customers and make surplus profit for an insurance company. In relation to the above incident, BEC's manager devalued his service by ignoring customer satisfaction. In contrast, Yvonne performed crisis management to maintain customer satisfaction, and in addition, she might create new value through this problem solving.

Throughout the conversation, fulfilling 'customer is God' was perceived by research participants as necessary efforts to achieve customer satisfaction. Meantime, dance educators

and venture capitalists have noticed customer psychology within the new generation of parents, which had fundamental distinction from the elder generation.

Helen and Bella: less herd mentality

Helen observed the parents in her ballet school were independent and dominant in choosing ballet schools and programmes. As a mother of a 7-year-old girl, Helen understands this phenomenon as the new generation of parents hold less herd mentality in consumer psychology:

The herd mentality of young parents is not as heavy as in the elder generation. Post-80s and post-90s parents are more rational in choosing dance schools, as they pay more attention to personalised development of children. This more mature view on education and consumption has gradually become the mainstream of society. Compared with the elder generation, they now have more information, more knowledge, and more opportunities to choose.

Bella shared a similar perception, and she attributed the distinction between new and old generations of parents to the cognition and preference whether authority-oriented or quality-oriented.

Children and Adolescent Palaces were the dominant forms of dance education for young students until 1990s. Parents at that time would like to send their children there because they were public organisations and charged favourable tuition fees. However, post-80s and post-90s parents would be more attentive to the quality of teaching, so they prefer to choose private ballet schools with better quality and bigger brands.

Hellen and Bella's experiences connect to Zhang's (2017) research on the consuming

psychology of the young generation in China. He explains that the self-centred cognitive approach promotes customers to form personalised consuming behaviour. Zhang further ascribes this shift of consuming psychology to the “One Child Policy” started in 1978, which describes that the only child has more independent personality.

Another reason perceived by participants about why young parents hold less herd mentality is contained in the improved education level of the new generation. Both Helen and Bella mentioned that young parents are knowledgeable and rational in searching and choosing ballet schools, which aligned with the research that says the rise of education level would upgrade the consuming behaviour, and in China this happened with the implementation of Nine Year Compulsory Education since the reform and opening up policy at the end of the 1970s (Lu & He, 2011).

Peter: consumption upgrade

Throughout the interview, Peter acknowledged that the shift of relationships between dance educators and customers is a kind of consumption upgrade, and that it is correlated with the economic development and the growth of residents' income:

I am very optimistic about the private arts education market in China. For example, in the 1990s, there were a large number of giant supermarkets and shopping malls emerging in China. At that time, the traditional mode of dairy shops couldn't meet people's daily needs anymore. Today, people's common understanding is that arts education is their new demand.

Zhu & Hu (2019) echoed Peter's perspective and emphasised that the upgrading in residents' income will greatly affect the consumption behaviour in the current Chinese society. Peter further elaborated on the distinguishing feature of the new trend in arts education:

The disparity of cultural and arts products and services between China and developed countries is striking. We hope the next generation has opportunity to obtain better aesthetic accomplishment in future.

Dance scholars observe and evidence the booming of the private ballet education in China during the past 20 years (Ding, 2014), and a large number of dancers, dance teachers, choreographers, musicians, investors and entrepreneurs, have engaged in ballet schools and related events (Chen, 2013; Liu, 2014). However, Peter's narrative showed a new challenge to dance educators: while dance educators recognised the importance of customer satisfaction, consumer needs might in contrast shift the purpose, content, and method of ballet teaching reversely.

Connecting to the development of the residents' consumption in Chengdu, Bella suggests another possible factor to increase the demand of dance education:

The family disposable income in Chengdu is constantly increasing, which stimulates parents' requirements for quality arts education. Now there are more and more ballet schools, and the tuition fees have been reduced. Considering the advantage of ballet as recognized internationally, more parents choose ballet for their children.

Bella's understanding is relevant to the viewpoint that the evolution of consumption behaviour is a dynamic process of interaction between consumption upgrade, changes of consumption tendency, and income growth (Zhu & Hu, 2019). And her empirical observation of the increasing number of ballet schools in the market is aligned with scholars' research on the quick development of private dance education in China (Ding, 2014).

4.3 How have consumer needs shifted teaching practices?

Dance educators presented their concerns on the shift of teaching practices, that are emerging from the requirement to satisfy consumer needs. These changes were perceived by research participants as complex and interrelated. The first phenomenon is recognised as the altering of teaching purpose towards personal growth and aesthetic education. The second change was described as the increasing utilitarian function in private ballet education, which promotes syllabus teaching and examination/certification as primary goals in ballet schools. Thirdly, some ballet tutors extend their zone from recreational classes to pre-professional classes, which was previously identified as the sphere of public ballet schools. This section thus explores the dance educator's perspectives as to how neoliberal capitalism might entangle and twist ballet teaching.

Richardson (2008) emphasises that value proposition is the first and core step of business model innovation, which correlates with the service-profit chain theory that value drives customer satisfaction. Dance educators showed a trend that multiple utilitarian purposes become 'the value' in private ballet education, first emerging from customers, and then accepted by dance educators.

4.3.1 Emphasis on personal growth and aesthetic education

This section discusses the research participants' perceptions about the ongoing shifts in the context of personal growth, which is converting the focus from kinesthetic practice to aesthetic development.

Bella and Henry: ballet is for everyone

Dance educators in this research challenged the traditional technique-oriented method of ballet teaching, and they emphasised the popularisation of ballet is based on the requirement from students and their parents. Within these voices, Bella mentioned her ideal is to make

ballet accessible for everyone:

SBN ballet school aims to build a reputation for professional ballet, and they only accept selected students. But, I know more teachers uphold the philosophy that ballet is for everyone, because most parents send their children to learn ballet not for becoming professional ballerinas, but they believe ballet cultivates children's temperament and accomplishment.

Bella's perspective is in line with research findings and government policies. Chinese dance researchers had emphasised the necessity and feasibility of implementing quality dance education in China, and they further elaborated the importance to identify and distinguish diversified pedagogy for different dance genres and teaching purposes, e.g., preventing solid physical training to young learners in primary and secondary schools as well as private dance studios (Lv, 2013 & 2018; Liu, 2008, 2014). In the year 2015, the State Council of P.R. China released Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Extensively Strengthening and Improving the Aesthetic Education in Schools. This new policy of arts education legislates that dance is a compulsory part in the national education curriculum for primary and secondary schools, and it regulates that aesthetic education shall be the goal of teaching.

Henry agreed with Bella's perspective and further recognised that the free market characteristics defined the hegemonic position between supply and demand:

Private ballet education today is a kind of universal aesthetic education because ballet schools can't select students from enrollment. For teachers and managers, the priority is to provide popular and quality ballet teaching to meet consumer needs, rather than involve difficult movements for professional development.

Lv (2018) criticises that teaching high-end technique to non-professional students in private dance schools is “pseudo-science”, and he emphasises that encouraging difficult skills in dance performance and competition has misled students/parents’ comprehension of the value of dance. Connecting dance educator’s perspective to scholar’s research, three factors formed the resulting forces to challenge and change the teaching practice of ballet: dance researcher’s critique and appeals, government policy and legislation, and the shift of consumer needs.

4.3.2 Emphasis on increasing qualification, certification, assessment, and evidence of learning progress

There are more than forty adolescent dance curricula in China, and these dance curricula are categorised by different criteria, such as national or provincial by region, or ballet, Chinese folk dance, ballroom, and Jazz by genre (Pang, 2018). Throughout the interviews, dance educators paid particular attention to ballet examination and certification. Shirley claimed that “ballet exam and certificate are the most tangible product to promote in the market”. Henry emphasised that “authorised ballet curriculum standardises ballet teaching and its certificate is a proof for school enrollment”. Two questions made me curious: ***How do exams and certificates influence ballet education? And how do dance educators respond to this shift?***

Shirley: we need paddles

Within their narratives, dance educators acknowledged that exams and certificates had formed the main structure of ballet teaching. Shirley recognised that ballet syllabus is a popular product on the market due to its characteristics:

We need paddles to drive our ballet teaching. Some key factors made the dance syllabus popular: certification by authority, unifying teaching content and method, and providing proof of

ballet learning. All of these are what parents prefer and need.

It seems that Shirley saw utilitarian functions of ballet syllabus as effective and accepted by the market of private ballet education because they satisfy consumer needs. Dance researchers noticed that ballet syllabuses had developed the popularisation of ballet education; they emphasised its function in forming the market of private ballet education in China, however, scholars reviewed and argued that this popularisation is not inevitably snug and sound (Chen, 2013; Liu, X., 2008; Liu, Y., 2008; Sun, 1997). Liu Xiuxiang (2014), Deputy Dean of School of Dance Examination of Beijing Dance Academy, presented concerns on problematic phenomena in the process of teaching BDA ballet syllabus, e.g., a fair number of unqualified teachers engaged in teaching the BDA ballet syllabus and mislead students doing wrong movement with inappropriate methods. Liu (2014) further said that marketisation and monetisation negatively affected dance educators, under the influence of venture capital, to seek instant benefits through delivering syllabus, and it is regretful that these dance educators ignored quality of teaching.

Comprehensively combining dance educator's practice and scholar's critique, on the one side of the coin, dance educators need a ready-made product for ballet teaching with endorsement from dance authorities to meet the demand of the expanding market; on the side, the supply side could not provide sufficient qualified ballet teachers. Dance scholars are concerned that the imbalance of supply and demand pushed some dance educators and venture capitalists to lower standards in pursuit of profit. *Therefore, if Shirley perceived the ballet syllabus her paddles, then, how did she define the ocean, ballet education or market? And how did she define the other side of the ocean, quality of teaching or profit on the balance sheet?*

Yvonne and Helen: pragmatism over quality

Research participants presented that a hierarchy of ballet syllabuses might exist in customers' cognition and perspective, and such knowledge hegemony could be installed through a complex process and be oscillated by political, economic and social interrelations.

Yvonne recounted her experience of re-structuring the teaching curriculum in her ballet school due to the local protectionism and its influence on customers' preferences:

We taught the NBC (National Ballet of China) ballet curriculum for years, but parents disliked it due to it not being recognised for enrollment to higher public schools. So we changed the whole curriculum and paid for the cost of re-training teachers to obtain the certificate. Now we deliver the BDA (Beijing Dance Academy) ballet curriculum because it is the only recognised curriculum for school enrollment in Chengdu.

Yvonne's story reflected that social cognition could affect a customer's purchase preference, and then lead dance educators to change teaching content to feed the customer's requirement. Such power might further complicate the supply-demand relation in private ballet education.

Research participants hold concerns on how to choose the appropriate ballet syllabus to meet students/parents' needs. This is connected to the debate between Say's Law of market and the challenge from John Maynard Keynes about whether "supply creates its own demand" (Keynes, 1936). Chinese economy researchers consistently promote the market mechanism as the solution to balance the supply and demand (Hong, 2016; Guo, 2019). However, economy researchers emphasise that market power could be used to achieve accumulation by dispossession (Havey, 2005, p. 160), or grabbing wealth by exploiting others (Stiglitz, 2019, p. 49).

Henry and Bella: RAD is English language

Dance educators in this research saw the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) as an overseas threat which was invading the market in Chengdu. Their anxiety grew with their understanding about RAD's global power and from educator's intimate knowledge and experience. Henry shared a personal story about his first impression of RAD:

If we assume ballet is language, then the BDA syllabus is Mandarin, RAD is English. One of my students emigrated to Australia; she told me her ballet teacher there couldn't decide which grade she should enroll when she presented a BDA ballet certificate, while another student was easily assigned to the right level by submitting their RAD certificate.

Henry recognised the popularity of RAD in overseas markets, while Bella presented her strategy over how to balance imported and local ballet syllabuses:

Many Chinese parents hold the psychology of worshiping foreign countries. In my school, we are delivering both BDA syllabus and RAD syllabus. Parents compare and choose the syllabus for their future needs. For example, some parents prefer RAD because its certificate is verified internationally.

Both Henry and Bella acknowledged the influence from RAD, which has not originated inside of China but comes from overseas through the process of the globalisation. This could be linked to the interaction between the market power and cultural hegemony. Nye's (1990, 2011) concept of 'soft power' suggests that cultural hegemony may strengthen the political and economic 'hard power'. Dance educators in this project realised that RAD might form soft power from its global recognition, which could be recognised as a cultural hegemony. This is in line with Stiglitz (2019), who emphasised market power can be translated into political power and lead to further societal consequence (p. 77). Furthermore, Bella presented a narrative on

how real RAD's prestige transformed into market share and commercial profit through building a dominant position in the mind of consumers.

In my school, BDA classes usually charge around 70 RMB per lesson, but RAD classes are 250 RMB per lesson, at least. Even so, a large number of parents are happy to pay for RAD classes. And a RAD registered teachers normally gets a wage of 500 RMB per hour, that is three times of BDA registered teachers.

The significant gap of the tuition fee and teacher's wage between BDA and RAD presented the influence of cultural hegemony on market power and consumer needs, and this effect had extended to pedagogical level. Both aesthetic education and syllabus teaching are relatively prepared for everyone who hopes to learn ballet, then, another trend of professionalisation is generated by consumer needs for talented students who plan to make ballet their career.

4.3.3 Emphasis on professional outcomes and pathways

Throughout the interview, the research participants shared their expectation to build a pathway for preparing pre-professional ballet students. Some dance educators had already implemented pre-professional programmes, which aim to pass examination of professional ballet academies such as the Beijing Dance Academy and Shanghai Dance School. I explored two questions : *Why did dance educators in private ballet schools want to deliver a pre-professional programme which was traditionally recognised as public professional ballet school's area and function? How could these commercialised pre-professional programmes affect teaching practice of other non-preprofessional students?*

Henry and Shirley: student is the final product

"If we see a ballet course as the manufacturing process, then, the student is the final product."

Henry acknowledged that regular ballet courses and training are not the product of ballet schools, but the students and their learning achievement are the result:

The ballet course is only the process. Eventually it is students, not the course, presenting the examination and competition, and get certificates and awards. Ballet teaching is mature and has no fundamental changes through its development. So students and their parents always evaluate the quality of a ballet school by its students but not the course, just like nobody cares about how to produce an iPhone.

Differentiating and analysing the distinction between ballet course and student achievements helps us to understand why dance educators in this research are keen to provide pre-professional programmes. Henry perceived that the pre-professional programme assisted ballet schools to establish hegemony in business competition through value proposition in the mind of consumers. Dance researchers acknowledged that variations of pre-professional programmes, such as elite troupes, private coaching, and holiday intensive training, are organised and developed in China (Lv, 2018).

In another narrative, Bella emphasised that pre-professional programmes worked as a market segmentation strategy to meet premium customer's specific requirement:

For talented students whose parents desire to support them, we can provide a tailor-made pre-professional training programme, such as small group lessons and private coaching, to prepare them achieving the entry level of professional academies. And of course, they need to invest corresponding time, cost, and commitment.

Scholars emphasised value creation and capture is the key link in the business model (see Section 2.3). Dance educators saw that pre-professional programmes created high net worth for customers and successful students increased the reputation for ballet schools. There is an idiom in Chinese: “shoot two hawks with one arrow”. Bella further explained the potential value of pre-professional programmes in business competition:

If we see that the syllabus course is the standard product whose price and quality consumers can easily compare between ballet schools, then a pre-professional programme is relatively non-standard and it is more difficult to evaluate, because some contents are customised or even personalised.

Throughout the interview process, dance educators and venture capitalists presented considerable concerns on business competition. However, they were unconsciously and consciously being affected in teaching practice by meeting consumer needs. It is regretful that such shifts and concerns are less reflected by dance researchers in China, especially considering the number of involvements of human, material, and capital resources.

The next section focuses on further concerns regarding the impact of venture capitalism which emerge from dance educators, who doubt their management competence and fear loss of control and authority in society.

4.4 What further concerns regarding the impact of venture capitalism emerged from dance educators?

Dance educators in this research acknowledged further concerns on business competition which could be related to their intrinsic drive and personal background. One concern was their diffidence in their management competence, when transforming from ballet teacher to entrepreneur, which they perceived as stepping into a new territory of knowledge and practice. Another concern was the fear of loss of control and authority over dance in society. This perception comes from the injection of venture capital which shifted the nature of ballet school from an educational institute to a profitable business.

Due to the limitation of the time frame and number of words, the narratives collected in this research may not be sufficient to support a comprehensive and in-depth discussion on these two questions. However, I have a feeling that these two questions contain realistic and far-reaching significance. It is hoped to have opportunity to extend this research to these two questions. Even so, this research has touched fundamental concerns, and I present the discussion in this thesis as a bridge for future research.

4.4.1 Dance educators doubt their management competence

Henry, Yvonne, and Shirley: we are not business guy

Dance educators showed their diffidence in management during the conversation. Henry expressed his anxiety: "I was not trained in business; this is an inherent flaw." Yvonne presented some degree of fear: "being nonprofessional in business possibly puts the ballet school in a risky and fragile position." Shirley shared her pain in learning management and business:

I have not had knowledge and experience in business before establishing my own school.

When I face difficulties like financial crisis or staff turnover, I couldn't find the right way to

manage. Once I asked my entrepreneur friends how to learn doing business. They told me it is a long journey and it is a real challenge for dancers like me. I agree with this comment today, because it is not as easy as reading some books or mimicking some scattered marketing strategies.

“Can I do business?”, “how to learn management” were repeated throughout the conversations by dance educators. Henry and Yvonne told me they enrolled in MBA and equivalent management courses, however, they were confused and argued “I don’t exactly get what I need, and I have learned too much I don’t need”.

Peter, Bella, and Yvonne: I have no dance gene

Venture capitalists and professional managers shared similar dilemmas in crossing disciplines between dance and management. They argued that there was a threshold for learning dance which might cause non-understanding and misunderstanding in ballet. When I asked Peter if he is interested in dancing, he laughed: “Dance is not for me, I have no dance gene”. Peter is in his early 60s, he is an amateur calligrapher, and exercises Tai Chi regularly, but he expressed disinterest in dancing, though he invested in a ballet school.

In contrast, Bella held a positive attitude to learning dance. Though she had no ballet learning experience before taking a manager position in a ballet school, she was willing to join in ballet classes:

I am personally interested in arts education, so I am happy to know more about ballet. Sometimes I engage in ballet class, and teachers help me exercising posture positioning and leg movement. Our school organizes training for the administration team, so they can communicate with students and their parents smoothly. However, ballet is really hard to learn.

The threshold for venture capitalists and managers to understand ballet was recognised and this concerned dance educators. Yvonne presented her “painful” story in coordinating between managers and teachers:

It is painful to make the teachers’ team and administration team work together. They are all good staff and work well in their own area. But when I ask them to co-operate in an event, they need a long time to reach agreement and sometimes they insist on different opinions from each other.

Not every dance educator persevered in management and some of them returned to focus on teaching. Throughout the conversation with dance educators, I felt the anxiety and disappointment in their feelings due to the loss of full control in their school. This negative impression could potentially lead to the loss of confidence in dance education.

4.4.2 Dance educators fear loss of control and authority over dance in society

Some dance educators shared their initial purpose to establish ballet school was primarily to complete their own education ideal, and some dance educators openly expressed income was a pivotal consideration as well. No matter whether it was an idealist or realist intention, dance educators presented concerns on loss of control and authority in their own school due to the marginalisation through development and expanding of schools. This marginalisation came from the doubt of management competence and stretched to daily and future business development. Helen was concerned that “one day, I will become a puppet principal”, while Henry emphasised the Effect of Gresham’s Law would happen in private ballet education. Dance educators perceived the ruling power would shift from dance educators to venture capitalists through the injection of capital and the commodification of ballet teaching.

Helen and Peter: take a backseat

“I am sitting in a backseat and only monitoring the growing of my school.” Helen acknowledged that she is in a semi-retirement situation. However, this is not because she felt tired but it is the irresistible trend accelerated by venture capital:

My ballet school was a one-woman studio, but it was not survivable in the market. So I decided to invite partners with good business experience to join and manage the school. They know how to attract financial investment and polish and promote ballet class in the market. Sometimes I have a sense that this is not my school, when I am watching them being busy but I have nothing to do.

“It is understandable that teachers pay attention back to teaching itself through the development of ballet school. This is quite normal in sophisticated industries.” Peter suggested that dance educators could recognise their advantage and accept the shift of authority in school. He further said “in a free market economy, capital means power”.

4.5 Summary

Within the narratives from six dance educators and venture capitalists, it is suggested that the development of ballet education in Chengdu, China has experienced two stages of transformations: the first is from public to private, the second is from commercialisation to commodification. The discussion in this chapter is based on the philosophical underpinnings of neoliberalism and cultural hegemony, in combination with economic theories of business model innovation and service-profit chain.

There are two points to be emphasized. First, this discussion does not intend to judge the “good or bad side” of the impact on dance education from neoliberalism, but aims to present

insiders', including both dance educators' and venture capitalists', perception and concern on the existing influence of commercialisation and commodification in dance education. Second, the reflection and rationale of this impact could help more dance educators and investors to further understand and discuss the dance education in private sectors from a broader lens of political, economic and cultural aspects.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

During the process of finalising this thesis, Covid-19 spreads and alarms the world with a public health crisis. The first country that suffered was the People's Republic of China. Since 23 January, 2020, all dance schools in China, whether state-owned public academies or privately-owned dance schools and studios, were shut down due to the epidemic prevention measures.

I contacted the six research participants in this project, and I heard a number of painful and desperate stories from them: hundreds of thousands of dance teachers lost their jobs and had little or even no income, studio owners mortgaged their personal apartments to pay for studio rents and staff wages, former ballerinas transferred to modelling for selling cloths online. In one word, Covid-19 changed dance people's lives. On Chinese Tik Tok and other social media, countless news about bankruptcies of dance studios are published, as Henry told me: "a historical reshuffle of private ballet schools has begun".

During the pandemic, I was locked down in my house in Auckland, New Zealand. I was experiencing the same journey as my research participants: zero turnover due to lockdown in Level 4, financial burden of rent and wages, and fear for an unknown future. In such a circumstance, I review my research and consider existing findings and future meanings for the people in the real world.

5.1 Key findings

This thesis provides a lens through which to consider how dance education in private sectors in China has transformed from commercialisation to commodification. This led to several key findings.

Neoliberalism is pervading dance education in private sectors in China; this is contrasts with perceptions that dance education is public and non-profit. The concepts of business competition, market share, consumer needs and business model innovation present the contemporary position of private dance schools in a free market economy. The acknowledgment of neoliberalism within the “socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics” paves the way for further discussion.

Within the neoliberal context, participants’ narratives show their concerns about commercialisation of dance education from public to private, comparing with their counterparts’ practices and perceptions in the U.S., they share similar dilemmas and rationales. While previous research has acknowledged business practices, they have not extended into the ontological study of micro-economic phenomena. The significant paradigm shift of epistemology in this research transforms the discussion over private dance education from commercialisation to commodification. Dance teaching is not only a trade of service, but becomes an exchangeable commodity in the market; therefore, purpose, content, and method of teaching could all potentially be twisted and shifted to satisfy economic return on investment. Further, the concept of quality, creativity, and inclusion of dance teaching could all possibly be reexamined and redefined, not by pedagogical measurement but by measurements of financial profit.

Further research might clarify whether this commodification process is one-way or reversible. However, in this research, participants’ experiences and concerns expressed that the consequences of commodification are real; and all factors in free market, including injection of capital, business competition, customer satisfaction, and business model innovation, might intensify the commodification of dance education in private sectors, then further shift the teaching practices and values of dance education.

5.2 Future research directions

From this study, areas for future research and emerging questions have been illuminated. Further projects exploring experiences of commodification and alienation dedicated in relation to dance education in private sectors in different political-economic and cultural contexts would be of benefit to stakeholders, from dance educators, venture capitalists, to students and their families. More concepts in economics and dance education, in particular financialization of dance education through venture capital, could be explored further. Management threshold and capability, specifically cash flow, leadership and risk management, could also be an area for future study to examine, especially under and after the catastrophe of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The crisis of Covid-19 triggers a chain reaction in dance education in private sectors in China. It is too early to conclude why and how so many private dance schools ran into trouble or even went bankrupt. Just as variables of cause of death in Covid-19 can be attributed to diverse factors (Al-Rousan & Al-Najjar, 2020), causes of business failure in private dance schools could relate to multiple factors. The factors that determine a dance school's economic sustainability could be a central question for future research.

Although the pandemic of Covid-19 is still in rapid development and changing at present, based on the findings of this research, some questions have emerged and are potentially worthy for further investigation. These questions include but are not limited to:

- What are major factors affecting the management and operation of dance schools in private sectors?
- Judging from difficulties derived after the Covid-19 pandemic, why and how could a private dance school survive from a crisis?
- Under the commodification of dance teaching, how might other dance educators in private sectors in other regions perceive the capitalisation and financialisation of

private dance schools?

- How could the practice of commodification in private dance education in China further influence the practice in dance education in Western countries, through the expansion of the Chinese community and its influence?

The long-term consequences of Covid-19 are obscure and unpredictable at present. However, the uncertainty of the U.S. - China relationship over the past few years (Pei & Pritzker, 2020) could deteriorate multilateral coordination and intensify contradictions between nations:

...this ongoing tension - particularly with the added pressures of the new coronavirus outbreak and an economic downturn - is likely to expose the brittleness and insecurity that lie beneath the surface of Xi's, and Beijing's, assertions of solidity and strength.

(Pei & Pritzker, 2020, p. 82).

The future research on the development of dance education in China could be under this tilting political situation, which could potentially entwine a neoliberal economy within an authoritarian policy.

The future of dance education within this rapidly changing landscape is as political and economic as it is cultural.

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