



MIXED-METHOD ANALYSIS OF PREDISPOSING FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THESIS-WRITING BURNOUT AMONGST CHINESE POSTGRADUATES

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Abstract:

This mixed-method analysis investigates thesis-writing burnout among 117 Chinese postgraduates, probing the patterns, magnitude, and influencing factors. A measurable burnout trend emerges across thesis-writing stages - Thesis-Writing Proposal (TTP), Thesis-Writing 3-Chapter (TW3C), and Thesis-Writing 5-Chapter (TW5C) - peaking ($X=4.41$) during TW3C, reflecting heightened exhaustion and cynicism. Notably, burnout varies with demographic attributes, specifically gender and marital status. Concurrently, exhaustion and cynicism levels fluctuate with thesis-writing progression, while professional efficacy gradually escalates. Participants convey a shift from profound exhaustion and cynicism in TTP and TW3C stages to resilience, manageable fatigue, and self-assuredness during TW5C. Predisposing factors encompass uncertainty, anxiety, and advisory attributes, spanning styles, diligence, and personality traits. These aspects, especially autocratic and laissez-faire approaches, exacerbate stress and impact motivation and research methods. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of academic burnout during thesis-writing among Chinese postgraduates, necessitating stage-specific interventions. Such tailored strategies facilitate burnout prevention, promote thesis completion, and yield profound implications for Chinese conventional postgraduate education. The research also establishes the vital role of advisors in modulating stress levels, underscoring the need for proactive support measures and fostering a conducive academic environment. This study augments understanding of academic burnout, offering valuable insights to counteract its detrimental effects and bolster postgraduate students' academic journey.

Keywords: academic burnout, Chinese postgraduates, mixed-methods design, thesis-writing phases

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Problem Statement

The clear disparities between postgraduate and undergraduate academic experiences universally remain apparent and have been well documented in the field of education and psychology (Kumi-Yeboah, 2020; Cai, 2018; McKeown & Anderson, 2016). Graduate students, by comparison to undergraduates, confront a more arduous journey, characterized by copious reading, relentless coursework presentations and rigorous academic writing (Wei & Miao, 2020; Kumi-Yeboah, 2020). This advanced scholarly pursuit necessitates the development of research skills and the acquisition of specialized knowledge. Consequently, these demanding endeavors engender heightened stress, anxiety, and fatigue or burnout, which inevitably influence postgraduate students' academic progress and personal growth (Beasley et al., 2023; Alexander & Tureen, 2022; Chue & Cheung, 2021). Thus, it is crucial to adopt strategies that mitigate these challenges and foster resilience in this intellectually enriching phase of academia. In other words, postgraduate students genuinely grapple with various stressors that impinge upon their academic and personal growth, which may manifest as heightened anxiety, fatigue or burnout, and other stress-related ailments. Among these factors, the incessant pressure to excel academically, coupled with the necessity to generate novel research, can be particularly taxing. Apart from the abovementioned facts, balancing rigorous coursework, intricate academic projects, and professional responsibilities, engenders an intricate web of demands that may precipitate stress-related maladies (Fuente et al., 2022; Cooksey & McDonald, 2019). The nebulous nature of academic timelines and milestones, such as comprehensive examinations and thesis completion, may exacerbate feelings of uncertainty and insecurity (Beasley et al., 2023; Cummins, 2022; Chue & Cheung, 2021). The complex interpersonal dynamics within academic cohorts and with faculty advisors can contribute to postgraduates' trepidation, as the potential for competition or conflict looms large. Hence, the multifarious factors delineated herein converge to render postgraduate studies a veritable crucible of academic and personal challenges, underscoring the need for robust support structures and coping mechanisms.

Evidently, academic burnout, predominantly emanating from the arduous thesis writing process, constitutes a paramount factor in exacerbating postgraduates' stress, anxiety and academic burnout throughout their scholarly pursuits (Cancan & Shuanglin, 2021; D'Souza, 2020; Dammeyer, 2018). This phenomenon necessitates a comprehensive and systematic exploration to identify potential mitigative measures, thus fostering a conducive learning environment for these burgeoning academics. Academic burnout, a pervasive issue impacting the mental and physical well-being of postgraduates, has been identified as a crucial factor contributing to stress and anxiety throughout the academic journey, particularly during the arduous thesis-writing process (Fesun & Kanivets, 2019; Garner, 2019; Guthrie et al., 2018; Eckleberry-Hunt et al., 2017). In both educational and psychological realms, academic burnout is characterized by a debilitating state of exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced efficacy, which inevitably hampers the holistic

development and progress of postgraduates in their academic pursuits. It is imperative to critically examine and address this phenomenon, as it profoundly affects various aspects of the students' lives. Utilizing a sophisticated and cohesive academic writing style, this study seeks to explore the complex interplay of factors leading to academic burnout and provide logical, accurate, and organizationally coherent insights for mitigating its detrimental effects on postgraduate education.

1.2. Research Question

Undoubtedly, the phenomenon of academic thesis-writing burnout has garnered considerable attention in recent years, particularly as it pertains to the postgraduate experience. This study endeavors to embark upon a mixed-method investigation, meticulously analyzing the predisposing factors contributing to such burnout amongst Chinese postgraduate students. The impetus for this research is grounded in the imperative to enhance the understanding of the multifaceted determinants that precipitate this debilitating condition, thereby facilitating targeted interventions that may mitigate its deleterious effects on the academic and psychological well-being of these scholars. In pursuit of this objective, the following research questions have been meticulously formulated:

- 1) What is the pattern and extent of academic burnout experienced by Chinese postgraduates during the thesis-writing process?
- 2) Is there a statistically discernible variation in academic thesis-writing burnout among Chinese postgraduate students when analyzed with respect to demographic characteristics such as gender, profession, marital status and employment situation?
- 3) What are the main predisposing factors associated with academic thesis-writing burnout among Chinese postgraduates?

1.3. Research Values

The mixed-method investigation of predisposing factors associated with academic thesis-writing burnout amongst Chinese postgraduates constitutes an invaluable contribution to the field of education, as it endeavors to elucidate the degree of burnout experienced by this cohort and the underlying variables that foster such detrimental outcomes. By examining the nexus between study-related variables, such as workload, supervision, and support, and the phenomenon of academic thesis-writing burnout, the research not only delineates the intricate dynamics of this relationship, but also paves the way for fostering a supportive academic environment. Furthermore, the exploration of Chinese postgraduates' experiences and perceptions of burnout accentuates the significance of addressing individual subjectivities in the pedagogical realm. Lastly, the consideration of demographic variables, including age, gender, and marital status, serves to enrich the understanding of the multifaceted nature of academic thesis-writing burnout, thereby facilitating the development of targeted interventions aimed at ameliorating its adverse effects on Chinese postgraduates' well-being and academic performance. Consequently,

this research proves to be a salient addition to the existing body of knowledge, with the potential to inform and enhance educational practices in higher education institutions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Notion of Burnout and Theoretical Framework

In recent years, scholarly attention has been devoted to the phenomenon of burnout, defined as a state of chronic physical and emotional exhaustion, often accompanied by diminished personal accomplishment, cynicism, and depersonalization (Hasanah et al., 2022; Housel, 2021; Nikpour, 2020). Drawing upon an extensive body of literature, the multifaceted phenomenon of burnout has been extensively investigated and conceptualized in various disciplines. Lavalley et al. (2021) pioneered the study of burnout by defining it as a psychological syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Subsequent research, however, has offered alternative perspectives. The study conducted by Marsh et al. (2022) expanded this understanding by delineating burnout as a work-related psychological ailment, manifesting as chronic emotional and physical exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy, whereas Koppenborg et al. (2022) suggested it results from a discrepancy between personal expectations and workplace reality. Furthermore, Demerouti et al. (2001) contributed to the discourse by positing the Job Demands-Resources model, which elucidates the intricate interplay between job demands, resources, and burnout, thereby highlighting the context-specific nature of this complex construct. Collectively, these seminal works offer an invaluable foundation for comprehending and addressing the enduring challenge of burnout in today's fast-paced and demanding work environment.

Also, in the scholarly examination of burnout, a plethora of literature has illuminated the intricate interplay between various theoretical frameworks, most notably the Demands-Control Model (DCM), the Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R), and the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) model. The DCM, expounded by Karasek (1979), postulates that burnout arises as a consequence of a high workload coupled with a dearth of control over one's job; conversely, increased autonomy serves as a mitigating factor. Subsequently, the JD-R model, proposed by Demerouti et al. (2001), extends this conceptualization by positing that a confluence of job demands and inadequate resources precipitates the manifestation of burnout. Furthermore, the ERI model, developed by Siegrist (1996), emphasizes the salience of a disproportionate ratio between efforts expended and rewards reaped, thereby contributing to the exacerbation of burnout. In synthesizing these models, the literature delineates a multifaceted landscape wherein academic burnout emerges as a byproduct of complex interactions among individual, environmental, and organizational factors.

2.2. Academic Burnout - Critical Subtype Burnout

Turning to the specific realm of academia, academic burnout has been conceptualized as a distinct subtype of burnout, characterized by the confluence of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy that emerges in response to persistent academic stressors (Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Leskinen, & Nurmi, 2009). The concept of burnout, a psychological phenomenon, was initially posited by Herbert Freudenberger in 1974, who delineated it as a failure, wearing out, or exhaustion due to unrelenting demands on an individual's energy, fortitude, or resources. Academic burnout, a term coined by Nuemann et al. (1990), is typified by a multitude of attributes, such as extreme fatigue stemming from overwhelming scholastic workload and expectations, escalating pessimism and waning interest in academic pursuits, and impaired personal growth in educational matters. Manifestations of academic burnout encompass disengagement during in-class endeavors, inattentiveness and emotional disconnection in the classroom, heightened apprehension surrounding evaluations, frequent absenteeism, diminished morale, cynicism, and a pessimistic outlook on scholastic achievement (Bikar et al., 2018; Demir et al., 2017; Salami et al., 2017). This psychological state exerts a considerable influence on students' academic performance (Sanchez & Hooper, 2022), mental well-being (Ranasinghe et al., 2017; Ahola et al., 2014), and motivation (Lee et al., 2020). Although sharing commonalities with general burnout, academic burnout uniquely encapsulates the psychological strain engendered by educational demands, such as excessive workload, insufficient support, and lackluster supervision (Gustafsson et al., 2018). Notably, the present research endeavors to investigate the prevalence and underlying factors of academic thesis-writing burnout among Chinese postgraduates, recognizing its potential ramifications on individual well-being, academic achievement, and career trajectories. By adopting a mixed-method approach, this inquiry seeks to illuminate the nuanced interrelations between demographic and study-related variables, and elucidate the subjective experiences of burnout within this specific context.

2.3. Academic Burnout in Education

In accordance with the extensive body of literature exploring the ramifications of academic burnout, it is imperative to delineate the multifarious consequences this phenomenon engenders from both pedagogical and scholastic perspectives. From the vantage point of educators, a plethora of studies have unequivocally demonstrated that burnout precipitates a marked deterioration in teaching efficacy, manifesting in diminished enthusiasm, reduced dedication to students' holistic development, and an overall decline in pedagogical innovation (Sholicha & Hasanah, 2021; Swarnalatha & Janardhanam, 2021; Tomaszek & Muchacka-Cymerman, 2020). Concomitantly, the detrimental repercussions of burnout on students' academic performance have been substantiated through numerous empirical investigations, revealing a compelling nexus between burnout and adverse educational outcomes such as reduced cognitive engagement, diminished intrinsic motivation, and compromised achievement (Wang et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2022; Yeom et al., 2020). Furthermore, the pernicious interplay between

teacher and student burnout has engendered a reciprocal, self-perpetuating cycle wherein one party's psychological distress exacerbates the others, thereby underscoring the exigency of addressing this pervasive issue in contemporary educational discourse. Undoubtedly, the burgeoning body of literature on academic burnout amongst undergraduate students studying abroad presents a multifaceted conundrum, necessitating a comprehensive exploration through the lenses of cultural, personal, societal, and academic factors. A plethora of empirical studies delineates the crucial role that cultural dimensions play in exacerbating burnout, particularly among students experiencing dissonance between their native values and the host country's educational environment (Ladum & Burkholder, 2019; Klos, 2019). Moreover, individual differences in personality traits, such as resilience, self-efficacy, and locus of control, have been posited as essential determinants of burnout susceptibility (Daghash, 2022; Katkova & Tytarenko, 2020). Simultaneously, the extant research has highlighted the indispensable influence of societal factors, including peer and familial pressure, on the onset and progression of academic burnout (Yu et al., 2016; Lai & Yeung, 2023; Li, 2020). Notwithstanding these findings, an abundance of studies has also scrutinized the academic milieu itself, emphasizing the potentially deleterious effects of excessive workload, inflexible curricula, and insufficient institutional support systems on student well-being (Aldrup et al., 2018; Fan, 2020; Williams, 2019).

2.4. Academic Burnout throughout Asian Students

In light of the extant literature, a plethora of empirical studies have delved into the realm of academic burnout among Asian students, with a particular emphasis on academic matters. Scholars have underscored the significance of various factors, such as psychological distress, maladaptive coping strategies, and unsupportive academic environments, that potentially precipitate burnout (Liu et al., 2023; Mu et al., 2020; Xu, 2017). Predominantly, researchers have sought to delineate the multifarious causes and consequences of academic burnout in relation to academic performance, psychological well-being, and sociocultural contexts. One salient finding consistently reported in the literature is the significant correlation between excessive academic demands and burnout symptoms, such as emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced personal accomplishment (Koivuneva & Ruokamo, 2022; Fan, 2020; Xu, 2017). Concurrently, the deleterious impact of maladaptive perfectionism, stemming from cultural expectations and family pressures, has been highlighted as a crucial determinant exacerbating academic burnout (Koivuneva, 2021; Asikainen et al., 2020). Furthermore, studies have underscored the pivotal role of social support networks, encompassing family, peers, and educators, in mitigating academic burnout and fostering resilience (Liu, 2023; Lai & Yeung, 2023; Li, 2020). Interestingly, recent investigations have begun to explore the efficacy of various interventions, including mindfulness-based approaches, to ameliorate burnout symptoms and bolster psychological well-being amongst Asian students (Liu, 2023; Mu et al., 2020; Li, 2020).

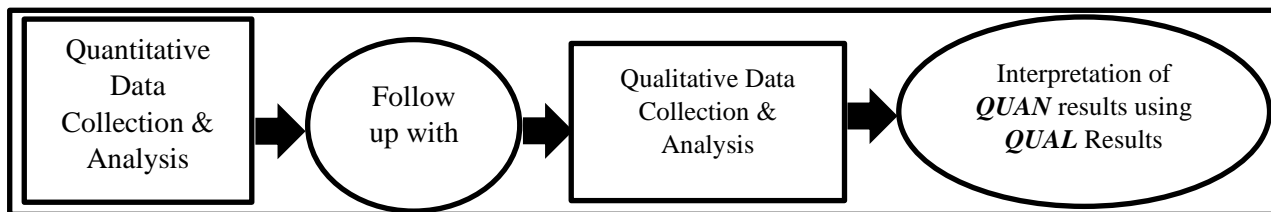
In summation, the literature substantiates the necessity of addressing academic burnout through a multifaceted lens, encompassing individual, institutional, and sociocultural dimensions, and devising efficacious interventions tailored to the unique needs of Asian students. In particular, the role of high-stakes academic environments, coupled with cultural expectations for academic excellence, and pervasive pressure to publish, has been implicated in the exacerbation of burnout (Chamandy & Gaudreau, 2022; Daumiller & Dresel, 2021). Nevertheless, a conspicuous lacuna persists with respect to the dissection of academic burnout experienced by Chinese postgraduates amidst the thesis-writing process, including Thesis-Writing Proposal (TTP), Thesis-Writing 3-Chapter (TW3C) and Thesis-Writing 5-Chapter (TW5C) phases (Worrall, 2022; Samuels, 2022; Naoum, 2019; Naoum, 2019; Paltridge & Starfield, 2019; Joyner et al., 2018; Flames et al., 2017). This notable void warrants further exploration, as the process of composing a thesis is inherently riddled with unique stressors, including but not limited to, the exigencies of originality, rigorous methodology, and stringent time constraints. Consequently, the present research endeavors to augment the existing body of knowledge by conducting a mixed-method analysis of predisposing factors associated with thesis-writing burnout among Chinese postgraduate students, thereby bridging the gap in the literature, and offering a comprehensive understanding of this multifaceted phenomenon.

3. Material and Methods

3.1. Research Design

The study “Mixed-Method Analysis of Predisposing Factors Associated with Thesis-Writing Burnout amongst Chinese Postgraduates” utilized a mixed-method sequential explanatory design (Watkins, 2022; Aultman, 2020; Mihas & Institute, 2019; Creswell & Clark, 2018; Baran, 2016) as illustrated in Figure 1 below, synthesizing the strength of both qualitative and quantitative data. Predominantly, the quantitative dimension employs the Academic Burnout Scale, offering numerical insights into the propensity for thesis-writing burnout. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews provide the qualitative perspective, offering profound elucidation of the numeric findings. Concurrently, semi-structured interviews provided rich, qualitative insights, elucidating underlying causes and personal narratives. The blend of data types - numerical and narrative - served to foster an enriched, multifaceted understanding of this phenomenon, corroborating the numerical results with anecdotal perspectives, thus bridging the chasm between quantitative rigidity and qualitative flexibility (Aultman, 2020; Baran, 2016; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2012; Tashakkori et al., 2003). The design, meticulously structured to ensure reliability, validity, and triangulation, fortifying the analysis and conclusions drawn, would afford a rigorous, comprehensive examination of the burnout phenomenon (Aultman, 2020; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2012), fostering an intricate understanding of the pivotal factors engendering burnout among Chinese postgraduate students, ensuring the results cohere with the complex reality of postgraduates’ experiences.

Figure 1: Prototype of Mixed-Method Sequential Explanatory Design



Resource: (Creswell & Clark, 2018)

3.2. Research Participants

The participants for this study encompass a diverse selection of 117 Chinese postgraduates, each characterized by an array of demographic and academic variables. When segregated by gender, males are slightly dominant with 65 participants (N=65, 55.6%) compared to females' representation of 52 participants (N=52, 44.4%). Analyzing their academic undertakings, the majority are pursuing a Master of Education Administration (N=67, 57%), with the remainder enrolled in a Master of Business Administration program (N=50, 43%). Analyzing the stage of thesis writing reveals that 43.6% were in the Thesis-Topic Proposal (TTP) phase (N=51), 32.5% were at the Thesis-Writing 3-Chapter (TW3C) phase (N=38), and the remaining 23.9% were in the Thesis-Writing 5-Chapter (TW5C) phase (N=28). Professional commitments are also accounted for, with a significant portion being on-the-job postgraduates (N=89, 76.1%) compared to regular postgraduates (N=28, 23.9%). The marital status indicates an almost equal distribution among single (25.6%), in a relationship (41.9%), and married participants (32.5%). Lastly, a considerable percentage of the participants with occupation (N=80, 68.4%), while those without comprise 31.6% (N=37) of the population. Presented herein is a consolidated Table 1, encapsulating the referenced demographic information:

Table 1: Distribution of Research Participants' Demographic Information

Variables	Frequency (N) & Percentage (%)
Gender	
Male	65 (55.6%)
Female	52 (44.4%)
Educational Profession	
Master of Education Administration (MEA)	67 (57%)
Master of Business Administration (MBA)	50 (43%)
Thesis-Writing Phrase (TWP)	
Thesis-Topic Proposal (TTP)	51 (43.6%)
Thesis-Writing 3-Chapter (TW3C)	38 (32.5%)
Thesis-Writing 5-Chapter (TW5C)	28 (23.9%)
Marital Status	
Single	30 (25.6%)
In a Relationship	49 (41.9%)
Married	38 (32.5%)
Employment Situation	
Employment	80 (68.4%)
Unemployment	37 (31.6%)

3.3. Research Instruments

The employment of systematic research instruments forms an imperative element of this investigation. For the quantitative portion, the researcher has judiciously modified the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS), a validated tool extensively utilized to measure the phenomenon of academic burnout. This tool is stratified into three distinct subscales: exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy, comprising of 5, 4, and 6 items respectively, operationalized on a five-point Likert scale. The reliability of Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS) has been consistently upheld in the present study and others. In accordance with Wijegoonewardene et al. (2019), Wickramasinghe et al. (2018) and Yavuz et al. (2014), the instrument presents robust Cronbach's Alpha coefficients across all three dimensions reached an estimable $\alpha=.867$. Notably, the pilot study, using an adapted version of MBI-SS, for the current research delivered analogous Cronbach Alpha coefficients of 0.810 (Exhaustion), $\alpha=.834$ (Cynicism) and $\alpha=.856$ (Professional Efficiency), validating MBI-SS's dependability. The reliability of the MBI-SS was summarized in Table 2 in comparison to earlier studies and the current one.

Table 2: Cronbach Alpha Coefficients of MBI-SS

Research, Authors/ Years	Subscales: Three Dimensions			
	Exhaustion	Cynicism	Professional Efficacy	α Ave.
Wijegoonewardene et al. (2019)	.874	.896	.892	.887
Wickramasinghe et al. (2018)	.837	.869	.881	.862
Yavuz et al. (2014)	.838	.844	.875	.852
α Ave.	.850	.870	.883	.867
Current adapted vsn (Pilot Test, 2023)	.810	.834	.856	.833

Hence, the utilization of the MBI-SS, in this context, ensures dependable and insightful data instrumental to a comprehensive understanding of thesis-writing burnout among Chinese postgraduates. On the other hand, the qualitative component of this mixed-methods study utilized semi-structured interviews as the primary instrument for data collection. Interviews were systematically designed around three subscales: exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy, which aimed to comprehensively elucidate predisposing factors of thesis-writing burnout amongst Chinese postgraduates. This choice of instrument ensured a structured yet flexible approach to allow participants to freely express their experiences and emotions, while maintaining alignment with the current quantitative objectives. As these subscales were derived from the burnout model, they provided a conceptually robust framework for interview questions, subsequently enhancing the content validity of the qualitative data. Interview data were meticulously analyzed to derive rich, contextual insights to illuminate and echo the quantitative findings, thereby creating a synergistic interface between the two methodologies. The application of these procedures certifies the researcher's commitment to precision, reflexivity, and interpretive rigor in this research endeavor.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The research procedure implemented in this study utilized a mixed-method methodology to systematically examine factors predisposing postgraduates to thesis-writing burnout. The participants were all postgraduates from three distinct cohorts, each enrolled in a course of English for Graduate studies. This course, primarily designed to promote English usage for academic purposes like thesis writing, English for research and academic writing, provided an apt platform for the investigation. Data collection spanned over a three-month period - September to November throughout 2022, each month representing a different group (Class A, N=36; Class B, N=47; Class C, N=42). This approach enhanced the reliability and validity of the data, allowing the researcher to draw robust conclusions from the analysis. The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS) was administered to the participants during class time, with a generous allotment of 10-15 minutes for completion. In total, 125 questionnaires were disseminated, with 117 (N=117, 93.6%) deemed viable for data analysis after dismissing 8 surveys due to ambiguity in the responses. Further, the researcher randomly selected a subset of 30 postgraduates from the initial pool for a more in-depth, qualitative exploration through semi-structured interviews. Each participant was accorded a 15-minute time slot to respond to open-ended questions. This enabled the researcher to execute a content analysis and thematic coding on the interview excerpts. For quantitative data, the analysis included descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, and Pearson's correlation. The dual-pronged approach permitted the researcher to acquire a nuanced understanding of the predisposing factors for thesis-writing burnout amongst Chinese postgraduate cohort.

4. Results

4.1. Inexhaustible Thesis-Writing Burnout Encountered by Chinese Postgraduates

To address the first research question "What is the pattern and extent of academic burnout experienced by Chinese postgraduates during the thesis-writing process," the research results uncover a noteworthy pattern and extent of academic burnout experienced by Chinese postgraduates during distinct stages of the thesis-writing process. When analyzing the data pertaining to each phase, the Thesis-Writing Proposal (TTP) phase exhibited a mean burnout rating of 4.11, derived from 51 responses ($X=4.11$, $N=51$). This degree escalated during the Thesis-Writing 3-Chapter (TW3C) phase, registering a mean of 4.41 from 38 participants ($X=4.41$, $N=38$), indicating a peak in burnout during the midway point. However, a slight dip was observed in the final Thesis-Writing 5-Chapter (TW5C) phase, with a mean of 4.02 as recorded from 28 respondents ($X=4.02$, $N=28$). Cumulatively, across all three phases, the overall burnout mean is calculated to be 4.18, based on 117 responses ($X=4.18$, $N=117$). These findings vividly highlight the pervasive phenomenon of academic burnout amongst postgraduate students, confirming its pronounced existence throughout the thesis-writing process in its entirety. The intensity of burnout, although variable across stages, consistently

maintains high levels, warranting further investigations into effective mitigation strategies. Table 3 succinctly encapsulates the synopsis of the extensive evaluation report on thesis-writing burnout among Chinese postgraduate students.

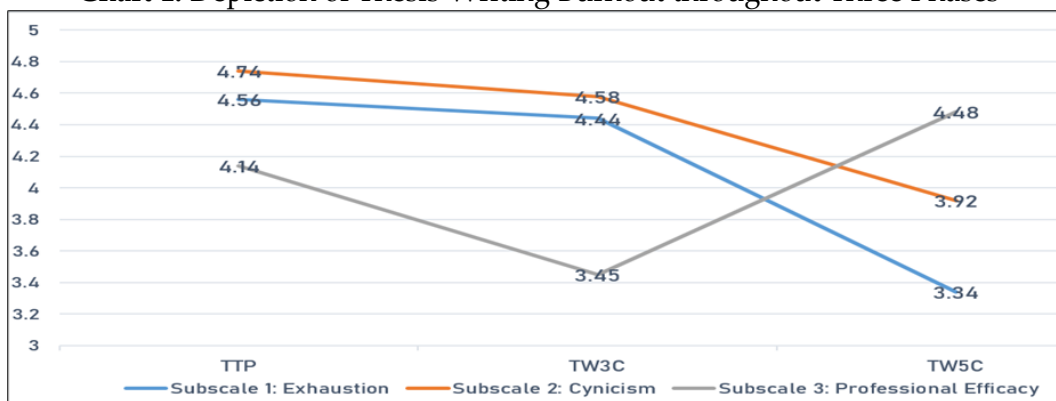
Table 3: Summary of Thesis-Writing Burnout among Chinese Postgraduates

Thesis-Writing Phase 1: Thesis-Writing Proposal (TTP)																
	Subscale 1: Exhaustion					Subscale 2: Cynicism					Subscale 3: Professional Efficacy					Ave
N	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	
Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
SD	0.71	0.87	0.73	0.85	0.69	0.92	0.78	0.88	0.76	0.84	0.91	0.74	0.73	0.87	0.79	
Mean	4.56	4.61	4.47	4.63	4.52	4.47	4.23	4.45	4.63	2.95	3.52	2.78	3.67	4.33	2.81	
Ave.	4.56					4.44					3.34					
Thesis-Writing Phase 2: Thesis-Writing 3-Chapter (TW3C)																
	Subscale 1: Exhaustion					Subscale 2: Cynicism					Subscale 3: Professional Efficacy					Ave
N	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	
Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
SD	0.87	0.82	0.93	0.78	0.75	0.85	0.74	0.63	0.93	0.89	0.71	0.95	0.80	0.94	0.83	
Mean	4.85	4.56	4.69	4.71	4.89	4.85	4.63	4.45	4.37	3.22	4.01	3.82	4.17	4.34	3.97	
Ave.	4.74					4.58					3.92					
Thesis-Writing Phase 3: Thesis-Writing 5-Chapter (TW5C)																
	Subscale 1: Exhaustion					Subscale 2: Cynicism					Subscale 3: Professional Efficacy					Ave
N	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	
Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
SD	0.57	0.79	0.81	0.66	0.92	0.68	0.77	0.62	0.89	0.63	0.54	0.67	0.85	0.74	0.90	
Mean	4.22	4.31	4.18	4.02	3.98	3.16	3.07	4.10	3.45	4.27	4.65	4.06	4.74	4.83	4.35	
Ave.	4.14					3.45					4.48					
Total Subscales Means Average (TTP + TW3C + TW5C)															4.18	

Additionally, to address the initial research query more comprehensively and offer in-depth discernment concerning the trends of thesis-writing burnout among Chinese postgraduates, the researcher conducted a comparative analysis. This analysis examined burnout levels across three distinct subscales, each corresponding to different phases of thesis writing. This approach provided a detailed panorama, thereby enabling a nuanced understanding of the burnout phenomenon within this specific academic population. The quantitative analysis reveals a discernible pattern of academic burnout among Chinese postgraduates throughout the distinct phases of the thesis-writing process. Concomitant with the progress of thesis-writing, students demonstrated an initial rise and subsequent fall in exhaustion levels. The mean scores increased from 4.56 in the Thesis-Writing Proposal (TTP) phase to a peak of 4.74 in the Thesis-Writing 3-Chapter (TW3C) phase, before subsiding to 4.14 in the Thesis-Writing 5-Chapter (TW5C) phase. Cynicism levels mirrored this trajectory, rising from 4.44 in TTP to 4.58 in TW3C, and then receding to 3.45 in TW5C. Intriguingly, professional efficacy, however, showed an incremental progression across phases. Its mean scores steadily ascended from 3.34 in TTP to 3.92 in TW3C, ultimately reaching 4.48 in TW5C. Hence, the thesis-writing process evinces a complex interplay of varying degrees of exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy.

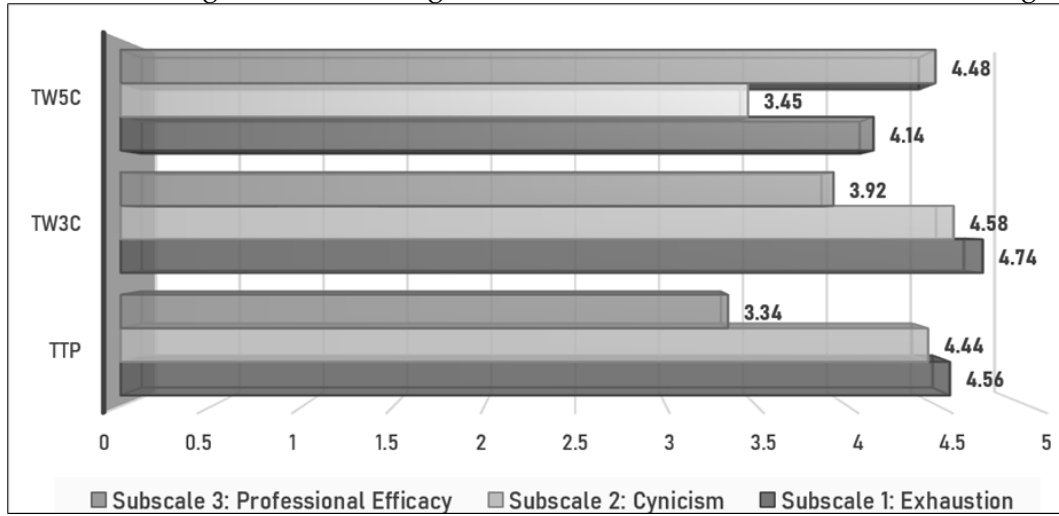
Undeniably, Chart 1 provides a comprehensive and more accurate depiction of the burnout encountered during the process of thesis writing. This depiction is methodically demarcated into three principal stages, as depicted in the charts. This stratified structure serves to highlight the progression and intensity of burnout that was typically experienced at different points throughout the thesis-writing process while as well offering a detailed visual representation, enabling an enhanced understanding of this phenomenon.

Chart 1: Depiction of Thesis-Writing Burnout throughout Three Phases



Furthermore, the evidence gathered through this research elucidates a discernible and conspicuous pattern of academic burnout experienced by Chinese postgraduates during the thesis-writing process. As indicated in Chart 2 below, in the Thesis-Writing Proposal (TTP) phase, high mean scores for Exhaustion ($X=4.56$) and Cynicism ($X=4.44$) were discerned, indicating an intense onset of burnout. This heightened level of burnout persisted into the Thesis-Writing 3-Chapter (TW3C) phase, as exhibited by exacerbated Exhaustion ($X=4.74$) and Cynicism ($X=4.58$) scores. Paradoxically, professional efficacy, denoting personal accomplishment, was low during the TTP phase ($X=3.34$), but its conspicuous elevation was discerned in the Thesis-Writing 5-Chapter (TW5C) phase ($X=4.48$). The latter suggests an unexpected resilience or capacity enhancement in the final stage, despite high burnout levels. These findings imply a complex, nuanced landscape of burnout across the thesis-writing trajectory, with severity fluctuating across different stages and varying aspects of the burnout construct, indicating the heightened exhaustion and cynicism in the early stages and a consequential, yet delayed, rise in professional efficacy towards the conclusion.

Chart 2: Breakthrough of Burnout Degree Fluctuates across Different Thesis-Writing Phases



4.2 Qualitative Evidences to Support Exhaustion Experienced at TTP & TW3C But NOT TW5C

Qualitative data collected via semi-structured interviews were segmented into three thesis-writing phases—Thesis-Topic Proposal (TTP), Thesis-Writing 3-Chapter (TW3C), and Thesis-Writing 5-Chapter (TW5C)—the data underscored exhaustive, cynical, and professional efficacy aspects. From each phase, a cohort of ten postgraduates, culminating in thirty participants, provided robust insight. The data were subjected to thematic content analysis, effectively distilling the exhaustive landscape of factors into discernible themes, thereby illuminating the pivotal predispositions associated with academic burnout.

In this qualitative exploration of burnout among Chinese postgraduate students during the thesis-writing process, intriguing insights were garnered through semi-structured interviews. The qualitative findings underscore a prominent emotional dichotomy amongst Chinese postgraduates within differing thesis-writing phases. Those in the Thesis-Writing Proposal (TTP) and Thesis-Writing 3-Chapter (TW3C) stages displayed a profound emotional exhaustion. Terms such as "emotionally tired", "low spirits", and "miserably losing hope" painted a picture of students navigating a daunting academic landscape, fraught with feelings of despair and exhaustion. Additionally, responses indicated feelings of fatigue, emotional depletion, and avoidance of thesis-related matters, juxtaposed with an overarching sense of panic, despondency, and lack of enthusiasm. Such sentiments allude to a stark emotional hardship pervading the early first-two stages of thesis-writing. Contrarily, postgraduates in the Thesis-Writing 5-Chapter (TW5C) stage painted a more resilient picture. While fatigue was still noticeable, it was considered manageable. The TW5C postgraduates expressed an adaptation to the thesis-writing demands, noting an emergent sense of interest and excitement. Writing thesis was perceived more as a routine practice rather than a daunting task, demonstrating a shift towards a more positive and resilient emotional disposition in the later thesis-writing stage. Table 4, seen below, presents selected statements from Chinese

postgraduate students throughout the interview process. These students voiced apprehensions regarding feelings of exhaustion, a form of academic burnout, experienced throughout the process of crafting their theses

Table 4: Chinese Postgraduates on Individual Thesis-Writing Exhaustion

Excerpt Samples of Chinese Postgraduates' Responses from Interview Question 1	
Interview Question 1: How do you feel about your current thesis-writing stage?	
Interviewees	Personal Statement as Well as the Excerpts of the Interview
TTP-S2	<i>"I'm mentally worn out from managing a tough school world. I feel like I'm stuck in a bad mood and always on the verge of giving up hope..."</i>
TTP-S3	<i>"You know... the current stage of writing a thesis makes me feel tired and emotionally drained. It's like I'm trying to stay afloat in a sea of hopelessness and tiredness...."</i>
TTP-S5	<i>"I...well... tend to avoid things that have to do with my thesis because I feel sad all the time. I'm very worried now instead of being excited like I used to be..."</i>
TTP-S7	<i>"I'm pretty much stuck in a bog of hopelessness. My interest in the thesis has faded, leaving me in a loop of tiredness, mental drain, and a suffocating lack of drive..."</i>
TW3C-1	<i>"Honestly... At this point in writing my thesis, I'm emotionally exhausted, stuck in a bad mood, and hopelessly losing faith in this difficult academic task...."</i>
TW3C-3	<i>"To tell you the truth, my main feelings about my thesis are hopelessness and exhaustion, like a sailor navigating a scary, stormy seascape of scholarly exploration...."</i>
TW3C-6	<i>"Seriously, I go back and forth between being tired and feeling emotionally drained, so I keep avoiding things that have to do with my thesis. This dodging is a disturbing sign of how hard this job is..."</i>
TW3C-8	<i>"Writing my thesis has left me with overwhelming feelings of fear and hopelessness, which are made worse by a noticeable lack of excitement... My academic zeal seems to have been worn down by this long process...."</i>
TW5C-1	<i>"No kidding... I've certainly felt fatigue, yet, intriguingly, it's manageable. My thesis-writing, once overwhelming, has transformed into a routine, sparking newfound interest and excitement."</i>
TW5C-2	<i>"The funning thing is... Exhaustion is evident but not debilitating in the TW5C stage. Thesis-writing has morphed from an intimidating task to an exciting daily habit; resilience seems to emerge naturally..."</i>
TW5C-5	<i>"While weary, I don't find myself crippled by fatigue. I've adapted to the demands of thesis-writing, seeing it more as an engaging routine than an arduous ordeal..."</i>
TW5C-9	<i>"Indeed, the fatigue lingers, but it's under control. Thesis-writing, initially daunting, has now become routine. My emotional resilience has flourished, inducing a sense of intrigue and enthusiasm..."</i>

4.3. Qualitative Indications of Intense Skepticism towards TTP & TW3C Over TW5C

Additionally, the qualitative research conducted on Chinese postgraduates during thesis-writing stages unveils a distinctive evolution and variance in their attitudes. The study, utilizing semi-structured interviews, identified a pervasive sense of cynicism at the Thesis-Writing Proposal (TTP) and Thesis-Writing 3-Chapter (TW3C) stages, demonstrated by waning interest, poor motivational levels, and a doubtful outlook towards their thesis's value and their capabilities. This cynicism, however, appears not to be a static state but part of a transitional process. Reversely, a significant shift in sentiments was observed as postgraduates transitioned to the Thesis-Writing 5-Chapter

(TW5C) stage. While minor doubts regarding future utility of their thesis persisted, they exuded robust confidence, positivity and resolution towards thesis completion. Also, postgraduates at the Thesis-Writing 5-Chapter (TW5C) stage exuded greater confidence. While slight doubt about the future applicability of their theses was observed, the overall demeanor remained resolute, with strong commitment to successful thesis completion, underscoring a transition from skepticism to certainty as they advanced in their thesis-writing journey. The study, thus, highlights the transitioning attitudes over various thesis-writing phases, from initial cynicism and self-doubt to subsequent confidence and determination. Such findings underscore the criticality of strategic interventions at specific stages to prevent potential burnout and support the successful completion of the thesis. The table depicted below, Table 5, provides a selection of remarks made by postgraduate students from China during the course of semi-structured interviews. These students communicated concerns related to experiencing cynicism, a form of academic burnout, throughout the intricate process of constructing their dissertations.

Table 5: Chinese Postgraduates on Cynicism toward Thesis-Writing Burnout

Excerpt Samples of Chinese Postgraduates' Responses from Interview Question 2	
Interview Question 2: How do you feel about your current thesis-writing stage in terms of motivation, interest, potential of usefulness of your thesis, skeptical attitudes toward thesis writing?	
Interviewees	Personal Statement as Well as the Excerpts of the Interview
TTP-S1	<i>"My current stage in thesis writing is marked by ebbing enthusiasm, weakened motivation, and doubts about the potential utility of my work, yielding a prevailing sense of skepticism..."</i>
TTP-S3	<i>"I find myself grappling with dwindling motivation and a growing skepticism towards the potential applicability of my thesis. My interest is not what it was at the inception..."</i>
TTP-S4	<i>"My thesis-writing, once invigorating, now feels like an arduous task. Motivation is low, cynicism pervades my outlook on the worth of my work, affecting interest levels..."</i>
TTP-S7	<i>"Well, I would say... my current stage in thesis writing is marked by ebbing enthusiasm, weakened motivation, and doubts about the potential utility of my work, yielding a prevailing sense of skepticism..."</i>
TW3C-2	<i>"Faced with the TW3C stage, my motivation wanes, and interest fades. A skeptical attitude shadows my belief in the value of my research and my capability to effectively undertake it..."</i>
TW3C-3	<i>"Simply... Amidst TW3C stage, an unsettling cloud of disillusionment looms, coupled with diminished motivation and interest, along with a growing skepticism regarding the usefulness of my thesis and my capacity to execute it..."</i>
TW3C-5	<i>"Regrettably, my enthusiasm is ebbing; the burdensome thesis-writing stage gnaws at my motivation. I harbor skepticism towards the potency of my thesis and my own proficiency..."</i>
TW3C-9	<i>"My enthusiasm and motivation, unfortunately, are fading, casting a pall of skepticism over the value and potential impact of my thesis. It's an arduous journey with daunting uncertainties..."</i>
TW5C-1	<i>"At first, I felt cynical, but when I got to the TW5C stage, I felt full of hope. There are still questions about how useful the thesis will be in the future, but I'm very determined to finish it."</i>
TW5C-2	<i>"I'm feeling inspired, but still have doubts about how useful my thesis is. However, the resolution helps me feel better about it...clearly doubts turned into confidence..."</i>
TW5C-5	<i>"I'm getting deeper into the process, even though I'm still not sure how useful my thesis is. The TW5C stage gives me more confidence and drive than any other step..."</i>
TW5C-10	<i>"I look at the TW5C stage through a realistic lens, which encourages steadfast commitment despite some skepticism. The possible use of my study still excites me, which keeps me interested and motivated."</i>

4.4. Indications of Superior Professional Efficiency in TW5C Compared to TTP and TW3C

Another in-depth qualitative analysis, drawn from semi-structured interviews, delineates a dichotomy in the perspectives of Chinese postgraduate students at various stages of thesis-writing. Those in the Thesis-Writing Proposal (TTP) and Thesis-Writing 3-Chapter (TW3C) stages express sentiments of limited confidence, effectiveness, and self-efficacy, and characterize their progress as unsatisfactory, with problem-solving viewed as formidable. Conversely, students at the Thesis-Writing 5-Chapter (TW5C) stage exhibit enhanced professional efficacy, reflected in their commitment to complete their theses, notable self-efficacy improvements, substantial progress, and active engagement in problem-solving, and overall high effectiveness in managing thesis-related tasks. Evidently, thesis-writing burnout diminishes as a progress, suggesting a resilience-building trajectory amongst these postgraduates. Table 6 contains an assortment of comments made by Chinese postgraduate students during semi-structured interviews. Throughout the complex process of writing their master's theses, these postgraduates voiced concerns about professional efficacy as a form of academic burnout.

Table 6: Chinese Postgraduates on Professional Efficacy toward Thesis-Writing Burnout

Excerpt Samples of Chinese Postgraduates' Responses from Interview Question 2	
Interview Question 3: How would you describe the current state of your thesis-writing mission in terms of effectiveness, self-efficiency, progress, problem-solving skill, etc.?	
Interviewees	Personal Statement as Well as the Excerpts of the Interview
TTP-S1	<i>"Frankly, my thesis-writing mission lacks effective organization and I'm struggling with self-confidence. My problem-solving skills seem inadequate to tackle the task at hand..."</i>
TTP-S2	<i>"The current state of my work is ineffective, with a constant sense of self-doubt and difficulties in progressing and problem-solving that make me feel overwhelmed..."</i>
TTP-S5	<i>"Given my early stage, I grapple with doubts about my efficacy and effectiveness in tackling my thesis. The progress is arduous, problem-solving overwhelming..."</i>
TTP-S7	<i>"My progress feels unsatisfactory at this nascent stage; effectiveness and self-efficacy aren't fully realized, and problem-solving remains a herculean task..."</i>
TW3C-2	<i>"I would describe my thesis-writing as unsatisfactory so far. I lack confidence in my abilities, and problem-solving has been a considerable challenge..."</i>
TW3C-3	<i>"Though I'm working diligently, the progress seems insufficient, and I find the problem-solving aspect to be daunting, which often affects my self-efficacy..."</i>
TW3C-5	<i>"As of now, my thesis-writing mission is ineffectual, grappling with self-efficiency issues and meager progress. Problem-solving appears to be a formidable hurdle..."</i>
TW3C-9	<i>"My efficiency, although marginally improved, is still deficient. The process is labored, and problem-solving challenges add to the complexity of the task..."</i>
TW5C-2	<i>"I'm experiencing a robust change in my self-efficacy, and my problem-solving skills are more pronounced. There's been significant progress in my thesis-writing mission..."</i>
TW5C-4	<i>"My thesis-writing now exhibits substantial improvement, with increased self-efficacy and notable progress. I feel more equipped to resolve problems that arise..."</i>
TW5C-7	<i>"I perceive a palpable improvement in my thesis-writing effectiveness. The progress is remarkable, and my problem-solving capacity seems to be evolving constructively..."</i>
TW5C-10	<i>"My problem-solving aptitude has significantly improved. The visible progress bolsters my self-efficacy, reflecting an overarching growth in my professional efficiency..."</i>

4.5. Significant Differences of Burnout on Gender, Thesis-Writing Phases, Marriage

The analysis of different demographic factors linked to academic burnout encountered during the thesis-composition process by Chinese postgraduates has led to some notable results. These results, derived from quantitative analysis, particularly ANOVA as indicated in Table 7, shed light on the complex mechanics of thesis-writing burnout in this group. The data suggest significant variations in burnout in relation to specific demographic aspects, such as gender differences (GD), thesis-writing phases (TWP), and marital status (MS). In terms of statistics, it was found that burnout differed considerably across these variables, with gender differences [F=1.878, p=.045], thesis-writing phases [F=2.397, p=.009], and marital status [F=2.243, p=.015] all registering below the p<.05 cut-off point. This indicates a considerable statistical influence on burnout levels within these individual demographics. Contrarily, no significant variation in burnout levels was discovered with respect to the factors of professional differences (PD) [F=1.755, p=.066] and employment status (ES) [F=1.810, p=.056], as they both surpassed the p>.05 threshold. Thus, it appears that while gender, marital status, and thesis-writing phases have a pronounced effect on academic burnout in Chinese postgraduates, professional and employment status play a lesser role. Incorporating these findings could assist in the development of more refined strategies for managing academic burnout.

Table 7: Results of ANOVA Analysis Based on Demographic Variables

Demographic Variables		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Sq.	F	Sig.	Stats Diff
Gender Differences (GD)	Between Groups	5.145	12	.429	1.878	.045	Yes
	Within Groups	23.744	105	.228			
	Total	28.889	117				
Thesis-Writing Phases (TWP)	Between Groups	16.138	12	1.345	2.397	.009	Yes
	Within Groups	58.341	105	.561			
	Total	74.479	117				
Profession Differences (PD)	Between Groups	4.822	12	.402	1.755	.066	No
	Within Groups	23.811	105	.229			
	Total	28.632	117				
Employment Situation (ES)	Between Groups	4.370	12	.364	1.810	.056	No
	Within Groups	20.929	105	.201			
	Total	25.299	117				
Marital Status (MS)	Between Groups	13.869	12	1.156	2.243	.015	Yes
	Within Groups	53.584	105	.515			
	Total	67.453	117				

Note: The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

4.6 Factors Causing Thesis-Writing Burnout: Advisee Knowledge & Advisor Leadership

In addressing the 3rd research question—delineating the salient predisposing factors associated with academic thesis-writing burnout among Chinese postgraduates—individually targeted semi-structured interviews were deployed while asking the 4th interview question "In your opinion, based on your current thesis-writing stage, what could be the most significant or predisposing factors related to your academic burnout?"

On one hand, Chinese postgraduates from three major thesis-writing phases were interrogated. Respondents from the Thesis-Writing Proposal (TTP) stage underscored uncertainty and anxiety as primary instigators, which emanated from ambiguous research goals, methodological quandaries, and trepidations regarding faculty approval. Upon progression to the Thesis-Writing 3-Chapter (TW3C) stage, burnout reportedly shifted etiological grounds, largely attributable to practical and analytical obstacles inherent to data collection, scrutiny, and preliminary interpretation. Lastly, the Thesis-Writing 5-Chapter (TW5C) stage was marked by burnout underpinned by the accumulative pressures of previous stages. The daunting culmination process—synthesizing research findings, refining arguments, revising chapters, and the looming defense—was noted as a substantial catalyst for burnout. In essence, each stage presents distinctive stressors, cumulatively contributing to a high risk of thesis-writing burnout. On the other hand, qualitative data from the semi-structured interview also suggested the predisposing burnout-caused factor connected to thesis advisor-related variables. The initial phase of thesis writing, dubbed the Thesis-Writing Proposal (TTP) stage, is marked by the selection of a research topic, the formulation of a research question, and the construction of a preliminary framework for the study. Within this early stage, the leadership style and personality traits of the thesis advisor can significantly influence the student's level of motivation, engagement, and stress. Autocratic leadership, for instance, might instill fear and apprehension, while a laissez-faire style could engender a lack of direction or support. Furthermore, an advisor's personality traits - be they impatience, indecisiveness, or unreliability - could provoke anxiety and unease, thereby increasing the potential for burnout.

Transitioning into the Thesis-Writing 3-Chapter (TW3C) stage, postgraduates delve deeper into their research, guided by their advisor's expertise. At this juncture, the advisor's diligence in working becomes paramount. A dedicated, hard-working advisor can inspire similar characteristics within their student, fostering an environment conducive to intellectual curiosity, deep thinking, and perseverance. However, if an advisor demonstrates an unhealthy level of diligence, epitomized by overworking and neglecting personal wellbeing, it may cultivate a destructive work ethic in the student, leading to a perilous pathway towards burnout. The Thesis-Writing 5-Chapter (TW5C) stage denotes the final and arguably most taxing stage of the thesis writing process, incorporating comprehensive analyses, synthesis of results, and conclusions. The cumulative effects of the advisor's leadership style, personality traits, and working habits are starkly realized here. Should these elements harmoniously facilitate the students' growth, they can successfully navigate the rigors of this stage. However, should they instead impose undue stress or unrealistic expectations; they can significantly heighten the risk of academic burnout, therefore proving to be predisposing factors. Table 8 displays a range of assessments submitted by Chinese postgraduate students during meticulously planned interviews. During the intricate process of generating their master theses, these postgraduates voiced their concerns regarding precipitating factors that resulted in a feeling of thesis-writing burnout.

**Table 8: Factors Related to Thesis-Writing Burnout
 (Advisee Knowledge vs. Advisor Leadership)**

Excerpt Samples of Chinese Postgraduates' Responses from Interview Question 4	
Interview Question 4: In your opinion, based on your current thesis-writing stage, what could be the most significant or predisposing factors related to your academic burnout?	
Interviewees	Personal Statement as Well as the Excerpts of the Interview
Advisee Knowledge	
TTP-S1	<i>"The unclear limits of my research goal often leave me feeling anxious and worried, which makes me more likely to get academic burnout..."</i>
TTP-S5	<i>"Frustrating methodological problems and the fear of faculty disapproval are two big reasons why I'm feeling burned out right now..."</i>
TTP-S8	<i>"Burnout is starting to set in because I don't know where my research is going and I'm worried about whether or not my proposal will be accepted...."</i>
TW3C-S2	<i>"As I learn more about data analysis, I get very tired of it. The biggest problems are practical problems and problems with how to interpret the data..."</i>
TW3C-S6	<i>"My burnout is due to the Herculean task of collecting and analyzing data, which was made worse by the pressure of presenting my preliminary findings..."</i>
TW3C-S9	<i>"The complicated process of analyzing data and the need to make an initial interpretation often make me tired in school..."</i>
TW5C-S1	<i>"My burnout is made worse by the stress from the previous stages and the difficult task of putting together research findings..."</i>
TW5C-S4	<i>"The culmination process, which requires me to improve my arguments and revise my chapters, is a major cause of my academic fatigue right now."</i>
TW5C-S7	<i>"Synthesizing the research, revising the written work, and getting ready for defense are three pressures that cause me to burn out in school..."</i>
Advisor Leadership	
TTP-S2	<i>"The strictness of my advisor's autocratic leadership has made me feel more stressed, which is a big reason why I'm academically burned out..."</i>
TTP-S3	<i>"My advisor's hands-off approach and inability to make decisions often leave me without direction, which makes it more likely that I'll burn out..."</i>
TTP-S6	<i>"The advisor's impatience has caused me a lot of stress, which has hurt my motivation and made me more likely to burn out..."</i>
TW3C-S1	<i>"At first, my advisor's hard work was inspiring, but over time, it made me have an unhealthy work ethic, which made my burnout symptoms worse..."</i>
TW3C-S5	<i>"At first, the advisor's dedication piqued my interest, but the lack of concern for his or her own well-being shows an unsustainable path that raises the risk of burnout."</i>
TW3C-S9	<i>"The extent of my advisor's tendency to work too much makes me subtly want to do the same, which indirectly contributes to my burnout..."</i>
TW5C-S2	<i>"My burnout has gotten a lot worse as a result of my advisor's strict leadership and the pressure of putting together comprehensive analyses..."</i>
TW5C-S3	<i>"My advisor's dominant personality traits have increased stress throughout the thesis process, leading to a worsening of burnout..."</i>
TW5C-S7	<i>"The difficult nature of the thesis-writing stage and the unreliability of my advisor have made burnout a big problem in my academic journey..."</i>
TW5C-S9	<i>"The delicate balance between working hard and overworking has been thrown off in the TW5C stage, which has made my academic burnout worse..."</i>

5. Conclusion

To summarize, this mixed-method research provides robust evidence to confirm the extensive academic burnout faced by Chinese postgraduates during the thesis-writing process. A meticulous investigation into the patterns of this phenomenon revealed a rise in exhaustion and cynicism during the initial stages, followed by a surge in professional efficacy during the concluding stages of thesis writing. The compelling analysis further suggests that burnout levels fluctuate not just across different stages of the process, but also based on demographic aspects such as gender, marital status, and thesis-writing phases (Omary, 2020; Ogunbamila & Fajemirokun, 2016). The data, however, does not offer definitive evidence of substantial variation in burnout due to professional differences and employment status. The findings of this research serve as a robust basis for future investigations aimed at further delineating the complex dynamics of academic burnout among postgraduates and developing effective strategies for its mitigation. Moreover, the present study offers valuable insights into the progression of burnout experienced by Chinese postgraduates at various stages of the thesis-writing process. The findings elucidate a clear trajectory of emotional and academic tribulations—starting with profound exhaustion and cynicism during the Thesis-Topic Proposal (TTP) and Thesis-Writing 3-Chapter (TW3C) stages, transitioning into increased resilience and professional efficacy in the Thesis-Writing 5-Chapter (TW5C) phase. Additionally, burnout causative factors identified involve stressors unique to each writing phase, encompassing uncertainties in early stages, practical challenges in mid-stage, and accumulated pressures during the final stages. Moreover, advisor-related variables such as leadership style, personality traits, and diligence were underscored as significant contributory elements. These findings provide a robust groundwork for developing effective interventions, aiming at bolstering emotional resilience and professional efficacy, while mitigating potential burnout during the thesis-writing process among Chinese postgraduates.

6. Discussion

The current study offers a comprehensive examination of thesis-writing burnout amongst Chinese postgraduates, revealing intricate patterns of burnout across different stages of the process. Additionally, a comparative analysis demonstrates a significant variation in burnout levels based on gender, marital status, and thesis-writing phases. This identification of demographic variables that contribute significantly to academic burnout presents a crucial contribution to the field. While this research illuminates the complex phenomenon of academic burnout, future investigations could further explore the delayed rise in professional efficacy noted in the concluding stages of thesis writing. This could potentially shed light on resilience strategies employed by postgraduates. Furthermore, understanding the intricate interplay between professional and employment status and burnout, despite insignificant statistical variation, may also

warrant future exploration. These prospective research avenues, inspired by the findings of the current study, could significantly advance our understanding of thesis-writing burnout, its implications, and the mechanisms that could potentially ameliorate its impacts.

A synthesis of the obtained data allows for a holistic understanding of the burnout phenomenon among Chinese postgraduates during the thesis-writing process. It is evident that burnout is not a static state but a transitional one that morphs in nature and intensity as students' progress through the thesis-writing stages (Dai, 2013; Worrall, 2022; Paltridge & Starfield, 2019; Thomas, 2017; Trumbo, 2017). Early stages appear marked by feelings of exhaustion and cynicism, which subsequently transition into resilience and heightened professional efficiency. Notably, stressors unique to each thesis-writing phase emerge as salient predisposing factors, thereby suggesting a necessity for stage-specific interventions. Importantly, the role of the thesis advisor is markedly influential in this trajectory—potentially instigating or mitigating burnout through their leadership style, personality traits, and working habits (Dinić et al., 2023; Sirowa, 2023; Hager, 2021; Kipman, 2021; Stephen, 2021; Swarnalatha & Janardhanam, 2021; Socolov, 2018). These insights invite further research into developing more nuanced, stage-specific interventions, and advisor training modules, thereby aiding in promoting resilience and reducing burnout among postgraduate students. The findings also urge for consideration of cultural dimensions, given the unique academic and societal context of Chinese postgraduates.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Dr. Li-Wei (Henry) Wei is a distinguished researcher, serving as a full-time Doctoral Pedagogue at the illustrious Chinese International College, a renowned institution within the acclaimed Dhurakij Pundit University. His broad spectrum of academic interest covers an impressive range of disciplines, inclusive of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Writing Instruction, Language Education Studies, Collocational Analysis, Research in Higher Education, Educational Psychology and to name but a few. Esteemed as an integral figure within the Thai-Chinese scholarly community at DPU Thailand, Dr. Wei has contributed to the academic world through an extensive corpus of insightful publications. Concurrently, he is engaged in an ongoing series of research projects aimed at broadening the horizons of his fields of expertise. His relentless pursuit of knowledge and dedication to his discipline aligns with his ultimate goal of achieving the respected title of professorship.

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