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Oriental Mysteries, Occidental Dreams?
Perception, Experience and Cultural Reinterpretation
in Contemporary Cross-Cultural Contexts

A Comparative Analysis between China and the West

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To my parents,

Wu Yanxia and Li Guozhi

Abstract

This study is a qualitative analysis of direct cultural encounters between China and the West. It examines the subjective experiences of Chinese students in Britain and Western expatriate teachers in China from their own viewpoints – how they understood and interpreted different cultures and made sense of similarities and differences between one another, that is, how they experienced cultural translation. It employs focus group and individual interviewing methods.

This study adopts an analytical framework of a before-during-after logic to answer three questions: 1) why did participants come to the host country and what did they think of it before arrival? 2) how did they relate to the host environment and make sense of differences? and 3) how these direct cross-cultural experiences influenced them as well as the wider context of cultural relations between China and the West? It presents the historical background of cultural and educational exchange between China and the West and identifies motives of participants coming to the host country under the current context of global cultural flows. Furthermore, it highlights factors that differentiated the subjective experiences of participants, such as gender, duration of time spent in the host country, relationships with local people and the subjects of study. The effects of participants' experiences in the host country also varied according to these factors.

What underpins the relationship between China and the West in terms of cultural and educational contacts, presented by Chinese students in Britain and Western expatriate teachers in China, is fundamentally an interplay between economic and cultural factors. Differences between China and the West are as much cultural as institutional. This study provides a detailed account of such differences. It discusses what aspects of Western cultural values have a strong influence on China and which traditional Chinese values still hold their importance during direct cultural encounters with the West. It reveals the internal struggle, caused by cultural differences and institutional limitations, amongst both Chinese students in Britain and Western expatriate teachers in China, but it also highlights the ways in which some differences have been exaggerated during direct cross-cultural encounters as well as the profound social and cultural similarities shared by China and the West, which tend to be overlooked.

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Last but not least, I dedicate this PhD thesis to my loving parents: Wu Yanxia and Li Guozhi. Their endless love, care and understanding is what kept me motivated through these years.

Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature _____

Printed name _____Yue Li_____

Abbreviations

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBC	British-born Chinese
CD	Compact Disc
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
CNN	Cable News Network
DVD	Digital Video Disc
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EU	European Union
GBP	Great Britain Pound (Pound Sterling)
GP	General Practitioner
GRE	Graduate Record Examinations
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
MBA	Master of Business Administration
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSW	Post-study Work
PX	Paraxylene (p-Xylene)
SIRC	Social Issues Research Centre
RMB	Renminbi (official currency of the PRC)
TV	Television
UK	United Kingdom
UKBA	United Kingdom Border Agency
UKCOSA	United Kingdom Council for Overseas Student Affairs
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNNC	University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China
US/USA	United States/United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
VCD	Video Compact Disc
VIP	Very Important Person
XJLU	Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University

Note on Terminology

China and Chinese Cultures

The term 'China' in this study refers to the mainland of China. A country as large as China certainly presents disparities in terms of value, social norm, cultural practice and institution. General arguments about one part of China or one group of Chinese people do not necessarily reflect others. This is why the term 'Chinese cultures', in the plural sense, is introduced and used in this study. It indicates certain cultural diversities between different groups, communities and regions within the mainland. This does not, however, mean that a degree of cultural homogeneity does not exist. The data collected in the study will demonstrate in what ways and to what extent some Chinese cultural norms and practices are internally coherent (or incoherent) and consistent (or inconsistent).

The West and Western Cultures

The term 'the West' (or 'the Occident') and the meanings that are attached to it have been debated heatedly, and there are sharp controversies within academic circles as well as amongst the public over what it represents. I will provide a detailed account of the debates over it in Chapter 2.3. For analytical purposes, in the discussion of data collected from my sampled foreign expatriate teachers in China, the term 'the West' and 'Western countries' will be adopted to loosely represent the countries where these participants come from, that is, the UK, the USA, Canada and Australia. The participants, however, might have different understandings of these terms (with academia as well as amongst themselves). In writing this thesis, I will use quotation marks in participants' use of the relevant terms as well as other scholars' when I refer to existing literature. As in the case of 'Chinese cultures', cultural norms, institutions and practices in these Western countries also vary between different regions and social groups. 'Western cultures', in the plural form, is thus adopted to indicate such diversity. Nonetheless, this does not necessarily suggest that there are no shared values or homogeneity amongst these countries. The data gathered will manifest this in a detailed way.

Part I Introduction, Theories and Methods

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research Objectives

This study is a qualitative enquiry into the subjective experiences of Chinese students in Britain and Western expatriate teachers in China, and the processes by which they experience cultural translation, that is, how they understand and interpret the home and the host cultures. These processes involve the ways in which they perceive the host country before direct contact, how they relate to the local environment and make sense of similarities and differences during contact, as well as how such experiences might have transformed their knowledge and behaviour after direct encounters. It is thus a study essentially exploring cultural translation through a before-during-after framework. The 'perception, experience and cultural reinterpretation' employed in the title of this thesis intends to reflect such an analytical framework of three-dimension. 'Perception' represents, in this study, the intentions, ideas and expectations that the sampled Chinese students and Western expatriate teachers had before coming into direct contact with the host country; 'experience' looks at their direct experiences in the local context—the social interactions and feelings generated from these; 'cultural reinterpretation' refers to the outcome of these experiences, that is, their reinterpretation of their home and the host cultures and how such experiences might have changed their knowledge and behaviour.

This study thus intends to answer the following three research questions, each of which corresponds with the three dimensions elaborated above: 1) *why do Chinese students/Western expatriate teachers come to the host country and what do they think of it before arrival?* 2) *how do they relate to the host environment make sense of differences?* and 3) *how these direct cross-cultural experiences might have influenced themselves?* Furthermore, this study examines the *similarities and differences* (in terms of their intentions, direct experiences and effects of these experiences) of the two sampled groups, and explores the ways in which these experiences, at an individual level, influence and are influenced by the wider processes of cultural exchange and power relations between China and the West in the current context of globalisation.

1.2 Background

Vanessa Fong is well known for her works on China's 'One-Child' generation (Fong, 2004, Fong, 2006). In one of her studies, Fong (2006) observes that there is a wide spread desire amongst Chinese youth in urban cities to pursue higher education in the 'First World' and try to settle down there afterwards. For many of them, this has been a dream since their childhood. In a book named *Chinese Learning Journeys: Chasing the Dream* (Su, 2011), eight Chinese people depict the journeys they have taken to achieve their long-desired dream of studying and settling down in the UK. Similar stories can also be found in Qian's (2002) widely read work *Chinese Students Encounter America*. It can be understood from such works that a *dream* of directly experiencing the developed world through education and career has long been popular amongst young Chinese students, with many of them growing up with it. On the other hand, due to the seclusion policy since the Qing Dynasty and the long-implemented economic policies of self-sufficiency, China has historically been a *mysterious* place for outsiders. Isaacs's (1958) book *Scratches on Our Minds: American Images of China and India* presents a detailed account of American perceptions of China from the 18th century to the first half of the 20th century, which can be extended to the wider context of the whole 'West', but still, 'Western' ideas and interpretations of the more recent, more modernised version of China during the last few decades are much less explored. It is only in the last 30 years that China has opened up its doors to economic exchange. A series of devastating political disturbances in recent history have further contributed to outsiders' limited understanding of political issues in China. In other words, the country still remains obscure to people from the outside.

The fundamental point upon which this study is based is that there has been a continuous growth in cultural and educational contact between China and the outside world. Economic reforms in recent decades (implemented since 1978 and referred to as the 'Reform and Open-Up' policy) have opened the door for both Chinese people and foreigners to better understand each other through direct contact. There are now over a million Chinese people who have received an overseas education since 1978 (Hayhoe, 2011) and a growing

number of foreign experts working in the educational sector in China.[1] These two groups are arguably two of the largest and most important social groups in the history of educational and cultural exchange between China and the outside. With the growth of this exchange, it is interesting to see how Chinese and Western people perceive each other now, as compared to, for example, Isaacs's (1958) sample. More specifically, this study explores the processes of direct educational and cultural contact experienced by Chinese students in Britain and Western expatriate teachers in China, the ways in which their perceptions are formed and transformed under such circumstances as well as how they interpret similarities and differences coexisting between each other's country.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of four parts with fifteen chapters:

Part I is *Introduction, Theories and Methods*. This part lays out the research background as well as the theoretical and methodological framework of this study.

Chapter 2 reviews the concepts relevant to this study and provides the theoretical framework for the selection of research methods as well as the collection and analysis of data. **Section 2.2** reviews the conceptualisations of culture and its relation to society. It stresses the importance of culture to the development of a society and focuses in particular on the cultural transformation of China in recent years due to economic reform as well as its educational exchange with Western countries. **Section 2.3** is devoted to the discussion of the power relations between 'the West' and 'the Rest', and reviews the controversies that arise from it in relation to cultural identity, with particular emphasis on the cultural relations between China and 'the West'. It then explores Chinese perceptions of 'the West' and 'Western' perceptions of China. Furthermore, it provides a historical account of how China and 'the West' have constructed their own modern identities. **Section 2.4** explores

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[1] In 2012 alone, there were over half a million 'foreign experts' working in China (State's Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs, the P.R of China, 2013). It is believed that a large proportion of them are from Western countries, and working in the educational sector, with many being teachers. Chapter 4.2 and Chapter 9.2 will provide a detailed introduction of the historical background of the educational and cultural contact between China and the outside and why many have been working, studying and living in the host country.

theories of globalisation and how processes of globalisation shape cultural flows between societies. It emphasises the effects of Western media products on China.

Chapter 3 outlines the methods and samples used in this study. It begins with a review of the qualitative methodologies used in my research. **Section 3.3** is divided into two parts in which focus group and individual in-depth interviewing approaches are explained respectively. **Section 3.4** shows the selection criteria for sampling and describes the samples. It also stresses ethical issues in the processes of data collection and analysis. **Section 3.5** lists the questions set for each sample and explains why they are important in answering the research questions. **Section 3.6** discusses the ways in which data has been analysed. **Section 3.7** provides a background of the localities where the fieldwork was carried out. This is to demonstrate that the cultural backgrounds of the particular regions in China/Britain where participants were based might be different from the rest of the country, hence their perceptions and experiences are not representative of the country as a whole. **Section 3.8** reflects on my subjectivity in this study and how my identity as a Chinese PhD student studying in Britain might have affected this research.

Part II is *Western Expatriate Teachers in China*. This part analyses the data collected from Western expatriate teachers in term of their direct experiences in China.

Chapter 4 explores Western expatriate teachers' perceptions of China before arrival and how these perceptions differed from their actual encounters in the local contexts. It begins with a historical introduction of educational exchange between China and the outside, focusing particularly on the import of Western educational resources into China as an essential part of its modernisation program. **Section 4.3** shows why the Western expatriates came to China. **Section 4.4** demonstrates their prior perceptions of China and how they might differ from the perceived social reality. It first looks at what ideas they had about China before and where they obtained these ideas from. It then analyses their actual experiences by emphasising the contrast between the local reality and what they had previously expected.

Chapter 5 shows the experiences of Western expatriate teachers in relation to their particular identity as *laowai* in China.[2] **Section 5.2** demonstrates the ways in which Chinese people treated them and explains why, with an emphasis on the differences between Chinese and Western cultural perspectives. **Section 5.3** presents the effects of being a foreigner in China. It first looks at issues of discrimination and racism. Then it shows how Western expatriate teachers formed social relations with Chinese people from two perspectives: friendships and relationships (or marriage), with an emphasis on gender difference. **Section 5.4** analyses social interactions between the sampled expatriate teachers and local Chinese people. It first looks at interactions on university campuses. Then it focuses on their general social interactions with the wider society and demonstrates different types of life styles they had, which are defined by their particular ways of forming social relations in China. **Section 5.5** shows the experiences of Western expatriate teachers living together with Chinese people.

Chapter 6 presents how Western expatriate teachers experienced the Chinese educational system. **Section 6.2** explores the perceived attitudes of Chinese students towards study and how they might be different from students in Western countries. **Section 6.3** focuses on the concept of 'critical thinking' and how the sampled teachers saw this as something that Chinese students lacked. **Section 6.4** shows the social pressure that young Chinese students were under and how that might differ from the educational environment in the West.

Chapter 7 presents how Chinese social behaviour was perceived and interpreted by Western expatriate teachers and how they were influenced by it. **Section 7.2** presents the previous ideas they had about the 'inscrutable Chinese' and how these ideas fitted into their actual experiences when they directly interacted with Chinese people in China. **Section 7.3** explores the Chinese concept of *mianzi* and how it was understood by Western expatriate teachers.[3] It first looks at Chinese students' behaviour in the classroom environment and how this was related to the concept of *mianzi*. It then focuses on the different facets of *mianzi* to analyse how each was practiced in China and understood by Western teachers. **Section 7.4** emphasises the Chinese concept of *guanxi* and explores how it was understood and practiced by Western teachers.[4]

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[2] *Laowai* literally means 'old outsider' in Chinese, but its more accurate translation would be 'foreigner'.
[3] It means face.
[4] It literally means relationship, but its more accurate translation is social connection.

Chapter 8 discusses family relations in China and young women's roles in them. **Section 8.2** shows how the sampled Western expatriate teachers perceived the structures of Chinese families, and how these were seen as different from family structures in Western countries. **Section 8.3** shows the conflict in terms of attitude and value between the young urban educated Chinese students and their parents. It focuses in particular on the experiences of female Chinese students. **Section 8.4** shows the struggle of young urban educated Chinese females in terms of marriage and family obligation.

Part III is *Chinese Students in Britain*. This part is the analysis of the data that was collected from Chinese students in Britain.

Chapter 9 mainly explores the experiences of Chinese students before coming to Britain. It begins with an overview of the history of educational and cultural contact between China and the outside, especially with developed countries such as the US and Western European countries. **Section 9.3** identifies motives of the sampled Chinese students for coming to Britain and discusses these with regards to the conceptual framework elaborated in Chapters 2.2 and 2.3. **Section 9.4** then demonstrates, in detail, what ideas and expectations the participants had of Britain before arrival, how they obtained these ideas and how their experiences differed from their prior perceptions. In **Section 9.4.1**, their previous perceptions and the sources of these perceptions are identified. **Sections 9.4.2** and **9.4.3** then examine the 'culture shock' experiences that participants had when they first arrived, specifying their impressions of the 'British gentlemen' and encounters with 'troublesome' British teenagers.

Chapter 10 explores how the British educational system was perceived in comparison with the Chinese system. **Section 10.2** shows the expectations students had before arriving in Britain and how they were different from their actual experiences. **Section 10.3** focuses on the distinguishing characteristics of British education, explaining how these were seen as different from the ideas that Chinese teachers, families and the society had about education and career, and, furthermore, how such experiences might have influenced the sampled Chinese students.

Chapter 11 discusses participants' understandings of social relation, ideas of love and family as well as perceptions of Chinese women's identities in family, work and society. **Section 11.2** looks at the concept and cultural practices of *guanxi* with an emphasis on *renqing*. This is an equivalent section to Chapter 5.2 where my sample of Western

expatriate teachers talked about their understandings of these concepts and their experiences of them. Here it shows the sampled Chinese people's perceptions of *guanxi* in terms of conducting business as well as employment, and also demonstrates the ways in which differences and similarities between Chinese *guanxi* and social connections in Britain were interpreted. **Section 11.3** presents participants' responses to the discussions of relationship, marriage and women's roles in family, as well as in society. This is a section based primarily on females' comments of the differences between China and Britain in their attitudes towards, and social reality of, marriage and women's rights.

Chapter 12 shows foreign perceptions of China and how the sampled Chinese people might be discriminated against in the British local environment. **Section 12.2** presents how the foreign friends of the sampled Chinese students perceived China and the ways in which such perceptions might have been formed. **Section 12.3** explains the potential discrimination that Chinese students faced in Britain and how respondents reflected on such experiences.

Chapter 13 explores Chinese students' experiences of general social life in Britain, their understandings of British attitudes towards employment, leisure and social life, as well as encounters of cultural conflicts in the local contexts. **Section 13.2** shows how students perceived Britain as being organised through rules and regulations and the extent to which such rules were followed. **Section 13.3** explains the ways in which British democracy and individual freedom of choice was understood by the students. **Section 13.4** presents students' perceptions of the British attitudes towards employment and leisure activities, and how these were different from the general attitudes that Chinese people might have. **Section 13.5** focuses on their experiences of British social life and the cultural conflicts that students had encountered. The concept of *mianzi* is explained and discussed here with an emphasis on its importance in participants' social interactions with their foreign friends and flat mates.

Chapter 14 discusses the effects of living in Britain on Chinese students. **Section 14.2** shows the ways in which Chinese students formed social relations with fellow Chinese students, as well as with British people and international friends. **Section 14.3** explores the struggle of cultural identity amongst Chinese students in their social life as well as in the seeking of potential employment in Britain. **Section 14.4** demonstrates the outcome of their life experiences in Britain in relation to the cultural transformation of themselves at

an individual level, as well as, more importantly, the potential social change they could bring, at a societal level, to China.

Part IV is *Discussion and Conclusion*. This part is the final discussion of the data and summarises the conclusions of this study.

Chapter 15 concludes the findings of this study. Section 15.2 summarises this thesis and addresses the theoretical issues it raises in relation to Chapter 2. Section 15.3 discusses the implications and limitations this study has.

1.4 Main Contribution of the Study

This thesis adds the following original contribution to knowledge:

1. This study is an interdisciplinary research project based on theories and methods from sociology, anthropology, media studies and political science. It provides a three-dimensional analytical framework of a before-during-after logic in the study of cultural translation between China and the West through direct cultural and educational contact in the current context of globalisation.[5]

2. It offers *a comparative perspective* to explore direct cross-cultural experiences and interprets such experiences from the native's point of view from both sides. It looks at not only young Chinese students' experiences of Western countries, such as Britain, but also Western expatriate teachers' experiences in China, exploring the similarities and differences between the two groups in terms of how ideas and values move between societies. It also highlights the profound similarities existing between China and the West, as well as the striking differences within each national/cultural group.

3. At an individual level, it identifies Chinese students' and Western expatriate

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[5] 'The West' here is used in the sense that is defined in Chapter 2.3, which includes the UK, the USA, Australia and Canada.

teachers' motives for coming to the host country, their experiences with the host cultures, as well as the effects of such experiences in terms of the transformation in knowledge and behaviour. It then, at a societal level, relates these findings to the wider context of globalisation and power relations between China and the West.

4. It provides a detailed description and interpretation of the ideas, values and practices involved in participants' experiences, how different cultural elements were interpreted and, furthermore, how these were related to their original cultural frameworks.

5. It identifies factors that caused differences in perception, understanding and experience amongst Chinese students in Britain, as well as amongst Western expatriate teachers in China. These factors can be applied to further research, such as in quantitative questionnaires as variables and in qualitative methods as the stratifying criteria.

6. It finds that social connections with the local environment, to a great extent, affected participants' experiences in the host country. In both the case of Western expatriate teachers and of Chinese students, there was a considerable amount of participants who had few local friends, rarely participated in the local social activities and who found little sense of belonging in the host country. This study thus calls for institutional establishments in university settings to help newly arrived students/teachers better adjust to the local environment. It also draws attention to the similarities between China and the West that transcend conventional boundaries as well as to the reflection and reevaluation of one's own cultures triggered by direct cross-cultural encounters with others.

Chapter 2 Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the concepts relevant to this study and develops the theoretical framework for the selection of research methods as well as for the collection and analysis of data. **Section 2.2** reviews the conceptualisations of culture and its relation to society. It stresses the importance of culture to the development of a society and focuses in particular on the cultural transformation of China in recent years due to economic reform as well as its educational exchange with Western countries. **Section 2.3** is devoted to the discussion of the power relations between 'the West' and 'the Rest', and reviews the controversies that arise from it in relation to cultural identity, with particular emphasis on the cultural relations between China and 'the West'. It then explores Chinese perceptions of 'the West' and 'Western' perceptions of China. Furthermore, it provides a historical account of how China and 'the West' have constructed their own modern identities. **Section 2.4** explores theories of globalisation and how processes of globalisation shape cultural flows between societies. It stresses the effects of Western media products on China.

2.2 Culture and Society

> *Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. This is so partly because of its intricate historical development, in several European languages, but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought.*
>
> *(Williams, 1983, p. 87)*

Culture is now indeed being applied in different ways throughout different disciplines. One common understanding of 'culture' is that it refers to a whole way of life of a people: anthropologists and some prominent sociologists such as Raymond Williams (1958) are all in agreement with this strand. Etymologically, the term 'culture' means 'tending' or

'cultivation', and it has now gone through a variety of reinterpretations into the recent well-accepted application of 'practices that produce meanings', or of 'signifying practices' (see, for example, Williams, 1983, Bocock, 1992, Barnard and Spencer, 1996, Bauman, 1999). For anthropologists, culture is the fundamental concept which lies at the core of the discipline; it means everything of a society. Geertz defines culture as a 'semiotic' concept:

> *Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.*
>
> *(Geertz, 1973, p. 5)*

Hannerz (1992), also from an anthropological perspective, breaks 'culture' down into three aspects: 1) ideas and modes of thoughts, 2) forms of externalisations, the different ways in which meaning is made public, and 3) social distribution--the way in which 1) and 2) are being distributed. For some sociologists, culture refers to the sphere of meaning, which unifies the sphere of production (economics) and the sphere of social relations (politics) of a society (O'Sullivan *et al*, 1994). It is seen as one of the parallel and interrelated elements, amongst which are economy and politics, that defines a society.

The concept of 'society' is thus important to the conceptualisation of 'culture' in sociology. Williams (1983, p. 291) observes that 'society' has two main senses: 'as our most general term for the body of institutions and relationships within which a relatively large group of people live; and as our most abstract term for the condition in which such institutions and relationships are formed'. When defining the subject of Sociology, Max Weber is most concerned with social action and the interpretive understanding of it:

> *We shall speak of "action" insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behaviour—be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. Action is "social" insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course.*
>
> *(Weber, 1968, p. 4)*

Action is social and can only be interpreted relationally within the same network of institutions, relationships and meanings. Taking on Weber's (1968) thesis, Frisby and Sayer (1986, p. 75) argue that 'society itself is accordingly apprehended as the network of shared understandings, the cognitive and communicative community which makes the actions of individuals—a prayer, a promise, a vote—meaningful to themselves and others'.

This study takes the concept of society, in relation to the analysis of 'culture', as ***the shared body of institutions and relationships within which actions of individuals make sense to themselves and to others***. Hall, Neitz and Battani (2003), from a sociological perspective, propose a three-dimension framework to define the culture of a society as encompassing: 1) ideas, knowledge and recipes for doing things, 2) humanly fabricated tools, and 3) the products of social action that may be drawn upon in the further conduct of social life.

These conceptualisations seem, however, to have covered too much to be applied as a workable definition. As Raymond Williams (1958, p. 297) reflects, 'culture' will not hold significance unless it is returned to immediate experiences. O'Sullivan *et al* (1994) assert that 'culture' can only be defined upon its particular *discursive context* in which it is being analysed:

> *The term culture is multi-discursive; it can be mobilized in a number of different discourses. This means you cannot import a fixed definition into any and every context and expect it to make sense. What you have to do is identify the discursive context itself. It may be the discourse of nationalism, fashion, anthropology, literary criticism, viti-culture, Marxism, feminism, cultural studies, or even common sense. In each case, culture's meaning will be determined relationally, or negatively, by its differentiation from others in that discourse, and not positively, by reference to any intrinsic or self-evident properties that are eternally fixed as being quintessentially cultural. Further, the concept of culture cannot be 'verified' by referring its meaning to phenomena or actions or objects out there beyond discourse. What the term refers to (its referent as opposed to its signified) is determined by the term itself in its discursive context, and not the other way around.*
>
> *(O'Sullivan et al, 1994, p. 68-69)*

The discursive context of this study is that it examines the cultural perceptions of Chinese students in Britain and Western expatriate teachers in China, the experiences at an individual level of one encountering the other, as well as the impacts of such cross-cultural experiences. It examines participants' knowledge and understanding of the ways of life of the host, as well as of the home, countries, of people's symbolic practices, therefore, of 'cultures'. Geertz's (1973) classic interpretive theory of 'thick description' has now established a practical position for cultural analysts to observe and interpret the meaning of social interactions rather than to explore the law of human behaviours as if cultural

analysis were an experimental science. [6] This study is thus a subjective reflection, a description of participants' interpretations of their own experiences, as well as an interpretation and analysis of such description itself. It is not intended to explore the symbolic practices *per se* from a behavioural perspective, but to narrate participants' perceptions and experiences of different ways of life, as well as the effects of such experiences from their own subjective perspectives. The term 'culture' adopted in this study is thus prone to its subjective dimension: as an analytical term, it refers to ***ideas, perceptions, values, attitudes, beliefs and underlying assumptions prevailing amongst people in a society or a social group***. This study is thus an exploration of cultures, of how elements of cultures move between societies, and of the ways in which the culture of a particular social group may change upon direct experience with a foreign society.

Why is culture and its transformation so important? Inglehart (1990) argues that a reciprocal relation exists between cultural changes and changes in social, political and economic environments. He explains that changes in socioeconomic, political and technological situations will inevitably lead to changes in the culture of the society, which will further affect the extent to which the former circumstances transform. Huntington (2000, p. xiii) compares the economic developments of South Korea and Ghana over three decades and observes that culture serves as an important factor in differentiating the economic achievements between the two countries. Although these arguments manifest in themselves a tendency towards cultural reductionism, it is clear that culture has a key role in societal development. Such development may, however, occur in a multidirectional fashion, depending on the specific historical contexts. For instance, on the one hand, the Cultural Revolution has been the most violent and darkest history of contemporary China and dragged the trajectory of Chinese development backward drastically; on the other, the 'Reform and Open-Up' policy, especially the subsequent introduction of market economy, albeit with socialist modifications, marked the beginning of China's modernisation process and its economic development.

This leads to the question that what type of culture (as previously defined for this study) appeals to the positive progress of a society? Inglehart (2000) identifies two sets of dimensions in terms of the worldviews that differentiate rich societies from low-income

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[6] 'Thick description', as Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 7) theorises, is the object of ethnography: a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of which behaviours, whose meanings are public, such as twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies, rehearsals of parodies, are produced, perceived, and interpreted and without which they would not in fact exist.

societies based on his previous research (Inglehart, 1997): 1) traditional vs. secular-rational authority, and 2) survival vs. self-expression. He explains that 1) 'societies at the traditional pole emphasise religion, absolute standards, and traditional family values; favour large families; reject divorce; and take a pro-life stance on abortion, euthanasia, and suicide. They emphasise social conformity rather than individualistic achievement, favour consensus rather than open political conflict, support deference to authority, and have high levels of national pride and a nationalistic outlook. Societies with secular-rational values have the opposite preferences on all these societies' (Inglehart, 2000, p. 83); and 2) 'societies that emphasise survival values show relatively low levels of subjective well-being, report relatively poor health, are low on interpersonal trust, are relatively intolerant toward outgroups, are low on support for gender equality, emphasise materialist values, have relatively high levels of faith in science and technology, are relatively low on environmental activism, and are relatively favourable to authoritarian government. Societies that emphasise self-expression values tend to have the opposite preferences on all these topics' (Inglehart, 2000, p. 84).

Inglehart (2000) subsequently analyses 65 societies based on the World Values Survey between 1995 and 1998 and draws a global cultural map upon the two sets of dimensions elaborated above. As is shown in Figure 2-1, China is towards the 'secular-rational authority' on the first dimension and 'survival' on the second dimension. Whereas English-speaking countries such as the USA and Britain are in the middle towards the 'traditional' on the first dimension and 'self-expression' on the second dimension; Protestant European countries are relatively extreme in their inclination towards 'secular-rational authority' and 'self-expression' on the two dimensions respectively. Inglehart (2000, p. 95) thus observes that 1) economic development seems to have a powerful impact on the cultural values of a society and tends to move societies in a common direction of secular-rational authority and self-expression (see Figure 2-2); and 2) societies that emphasise secular-rational authority and self-expression are much more likely to have stable democracies (see Figure 2-3). His argument is, however, a macro assumption that is largely based on general value surveys in a particular historical context (in the late 20th century), which does not necessarily imply the rather specific aspects of the culture or the trend of cultural change (for example, there is not necessarily a positive relationship between economic growth and democracy, or the establishment of democratic government will certainly lead to the increase in economy), but it nonetheless suggests a strong link between cultural values and socioeconomic progress of many societies.
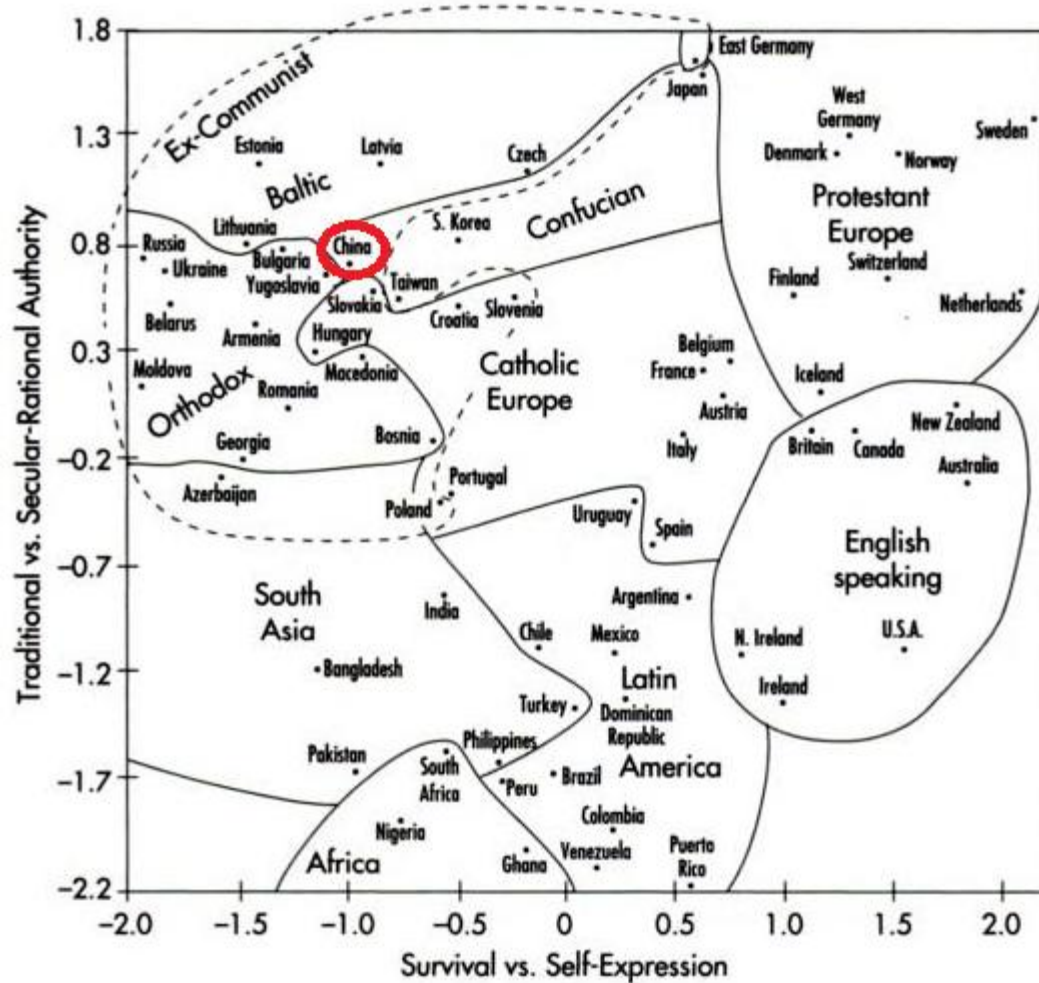
Figure 2- 1 Locations of Sixty-Five Societies on Two Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Variation[7]

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[7] The scales on each axis indicate the country's factor scores on the give dimension. The data for the following fifty societies are from the 1995-1998 World Values Survey: U.S, Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Turkey, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Great Britain, East Germany, West Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Spain, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Slovenia, Croatia, Yugoslavia, Macedonia, Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, Venezuela; data for Canada, France, Italy, Portugal, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Northern Ireland, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania are from the 1990 World Value Survey; the positions of Colombia and Pakistan are estimated from incomplete data (Inglehart, 2000, p. 85).
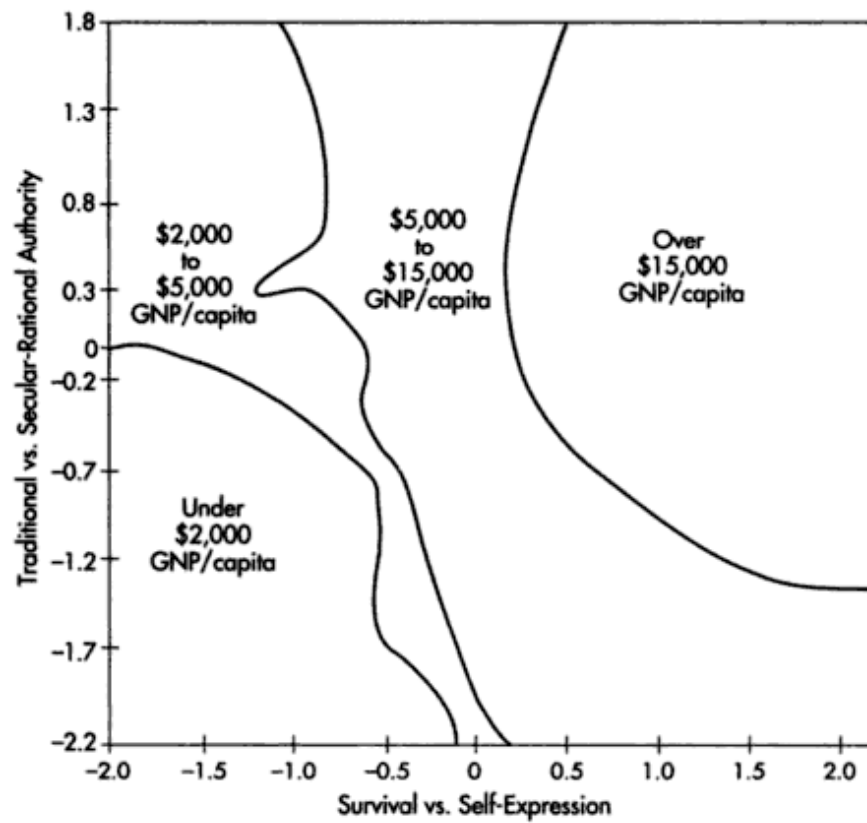
Figure 2- 2 Economic Levels of Sixty-Five Societies

Superimposed on Two Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Variation[8]

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[8] All but one of the sixty-five societies shown in Figure 2.1 fit into the economic zones indicated here: only the Dominican Republic is mislocated. Economic levels are based on the World Bank's purchasing power parity estimates as of 1995 (Inglehart, 2000, p. 89).
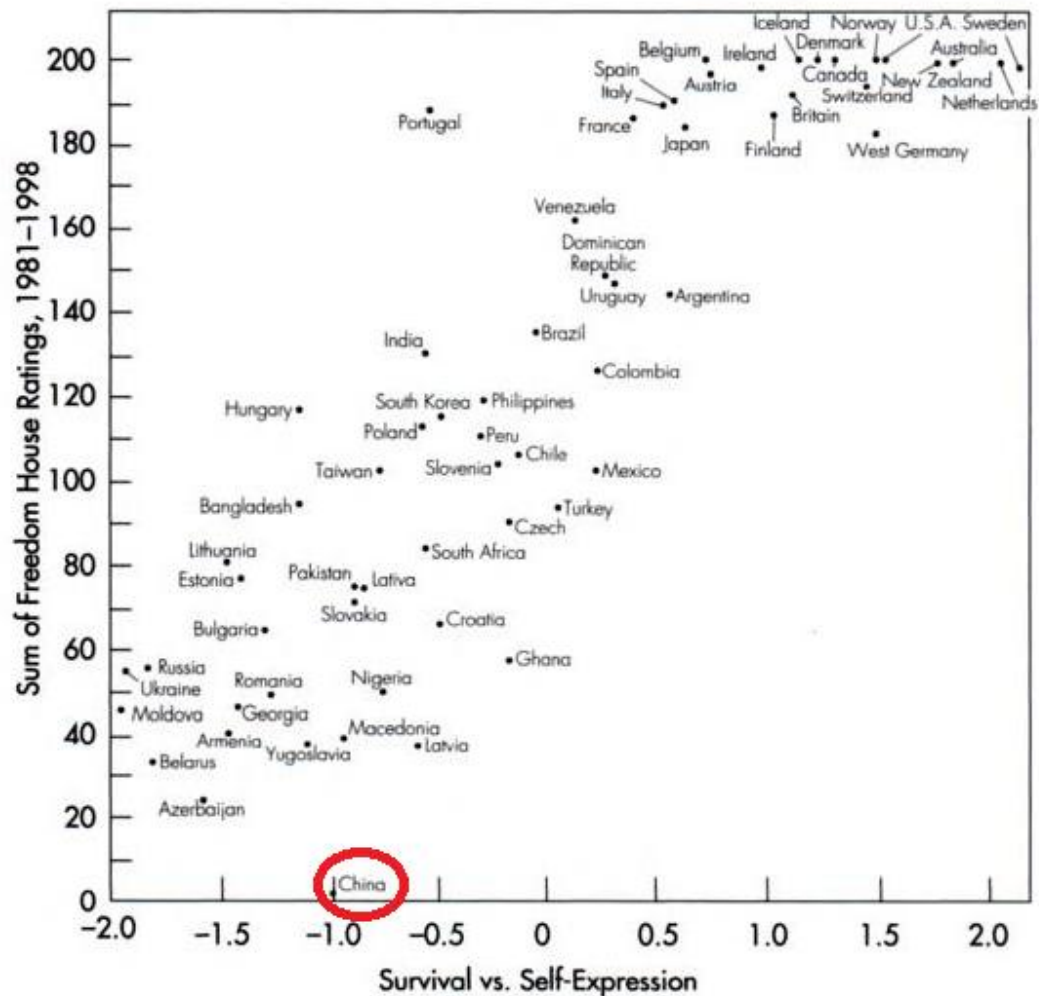
Figure 2- 3 Self Expression Values and Democratic Institutions[9]

In the case of China, there has been a cultural process underpinning its post-1978 development (after the implementation of the 'Reform and Opening-Up' policy), a trend where China has a growing involvement in the global market. China has been learning from the successful experiences of modernisation from developed countries and applying them to its own domestic contexts.[10] This has been undertaken through various programs of cooperation and exchange, one of which is the endless efforts of the government to encourage young people to study abroad and work for the country's modernisation upon

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[9] The vertical axis is the sum of the Freedom House ratings for civil liberties and political rights from 1981 through 1998. Since these ratings give high scores for low levels of democracy, polarity is reversed by subtracting these sums from 236 (China, which had the maximum score of 235, has a score of 1 after this transformation). The horizontal axis reflects each country's mean factor score on the survival/self-expression dimension: it taps levels of postmaterialist values, trust, tolerance, political activism, and subjective well-being among each public. r=.88 N=63 p=.0000; source: Freedom House surveys reported in successive editions of *Freedom in the World*; survey data from the 1990 and 1995 World Value Surveys (Inglehart, 2000, p. 93).

[10] This will be introduced in Chapter 4.2.

completion of their degrees.[11] Li (2006) observes that a number of Chinese individuals who have returned from foreign studies have now taken important political positions in China, and served as carriers of 'Western values':

> *For instance, the Western college model, the diversity of course offerings, the pragmatism in the sense of social usefulness, and the spirit of academic freedom in seeking truth have all had their impact on the Chinese students. They normally want government to tolerate criticism, boost the private sector, and encourage the rule of law. Some of them strongly feel that a democratic China is absolutely necessary for its modernization.*
>
> *(Li, 2006, p. 15)*

Huang (2002) also argues that the progress of modern China's social transformation has been closely related to overseas returned students and foreign education. In Britain alone, there were over 120,000 Chinese students in higher education in 2011.[12] Philo (2010) has studied Chinese students in Britain and argues that some of their ideas and values have been dramatically transformed by their stay in Britain. For example, they show higher inclination towards democratic institutions and social equality for women. It is clear in these studies that ideas and values from Western countries, such as Britain, leave an imprint on the young generation of Chinese people who have received Western education, as well as on contemporary China as a whole. Using this logic, it can also be argued that direct exposure to China should also have an impact on the foreign population who have had equivalent experiences. It is thus important for this study to explore, from a reciprocal perspective, the direct processes through which elements of cultures exchange between China and the West, carried out by Chinese students in the West and Western expatriate teachers in China, and how these might influence individuals as well as the wider societies.

2.3 The West and the Rest – the Power Relations

The term 'the West' has been both extensively and intensively used in media productions, public discussion as well as academic works. Within academic circles, there have been heated debates over the meanings of the term and the power relations which underpin it.

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[11] I will discuss this in detail in Chapter 9.2.

[12] Cai Hong, Secretary of the Education Section, Embassy of the PRC in the UK, provided and verified this data in 2011.

In 1996, Samuel Huntington published his books *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* based on his previous article *The Clash of Civilizations?* (Huntington, 1993). In his book, Huntington (1996) elaborates upon his previous arguments and defines a unique 'Western civilisation'. In his definition, 'the West' includes Europe, North America, as well as other European settlers such as Australia and New Zealand, although the term itself originally referred to 'the western parts of Eurasia' (Huntington, 1996, p. 47). Huntington (1996, p. 43) applies the term 'civilisation' instead of 'culture' in his thesis to represent the 'highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity'. He then distinguishes six or 'possibly' seven civilisations coexisting in the contemporary world: *Sinic*, *Japanese*, *Hindu*, *Islamic*, *Orthodox*, *Western* and possibly an *African* civilisation. Sinic civilisation, he argues, is not only confined to China, but also extends to encompass 'the common culture of China and the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and elsewhere outside of China as well as the related cultures of Vietnam and Korea' (Huntington, 1996, p. 45). In terms of the 'Western civilisation', which is his primary concern of the book, Huntington (1996, p. 69-72) offers a comprehensive analysis and asserts that it presents eight distinguishing characteristics: *the classical legacy*, *Catholicism and Protestantism*, *European languages*, *separation of spiritual and temporal authority*, *rule of law*, *social pluralism*, *representative bodies* and *individualism*. He goes on to explain that there is no clear distinction between different civilisations and the eight key elements of Western civilisation are not exhaustive in that some of the characteristics have also been shared by other civilisations throughout history. However, he asserts, the combination of them is what gives 'the West' its distinctive quality (Huntington, 1996, p. 72).

Huntington does not explore the distinctive natures of the other civilisations. Instead, he argues that the dominant conflict amongst intercivilisational relations is between 'the West and the rest' as they are more 'conflict-prone':

> *At the macro level, the dominant division is between Muslim and Asian societies on the one hand, and the West on the other. The dangerous clashes of the future are likely to arise from the interaction of Western arrogance, Islamic intolerance, and Sinic assertiveness.*
>
> *(Huntington, 1996, p. 183)*

Huntington thus, on most occasions, packs the other civilisations into a single cultural entity, which he termed as 'non-Western societies', to explore the shifting relationships

between 'Western societies' and 'non-Western societies'. It is clear from his thesis that 'the West' is leading the progress of modernisation in terms of economy, science and technology, and its leadership has a significant influence over the rest of the world. The 'non-Western societies', on the other hand, implement different methodologies to respond to such impact. China is categorised as a country of 'reformism', in terms of its cultural relations with 'the West', which is to 'combine modernisation with the preservation of the central values, practices and institutions of the society's indigenous culture' (Huntington, 1996, p. 74). Zweig, Chen and Rosen (2004) have analysed the potential upward mobility of overseas returned scholars to China, and argue that they have brought back skills and technologies that are in short supply in China. This provides them with greater opportunity to achieve higher social and economic status. Their argument indicates that there has been a strong motive amongst overseas educated Chinese students to gain knowledge and skills from the outside, mostly 'the West', and that there is an attempt to apply them to Chinese domestic contexts in order to help the country achieve modernisation. However, the potential cultural change occurred to these overseas Chinese people is contested. Rosenthal and Feldman (1992, p. 214) observe that there exists an erosion of ethnic identity over time between different generations of overseas Chinese people in terms of behaviour and knowledge, but not for the 'evaluative and importance components'. This suggests that some key cultural elements and fundamental presumptions are more resistant to change due to their rootedness. These studies thus support Huntington's (1996, p. 74) categorisation of China as a 'reformism' country: China has been absorbing the well-exercised experiences of 'Western' countries in terms of modernisation, without yet fundamentally reorganising its cultural framework according to these countries during the process. Huntington (1996, p. 75) describes this trend as 'modernisation without substantial Westernisation'.

As 'non-Western' countries become more modernised, Huntington argues, the indigenous cultures from 'the Rest' reassert themselves, and the balance of intercivilisational power shifts with 'non-Western societies' more committed to their identities and less dedicated to adopting foreign cultures. In this respect, China is categorised by Huntington (1996, p. 184) as the 'challenger civilisation': it gains an increasingly important status in the global arena (while the influence of 'Western civilisation' declines) while at the same time reaffirming its cultural and political practices, some of which have been historically in sharp conflict with 'the West'. He also asserts that China belongs to a civilisation which embodies glorious cultural traditions that 'are very different and in their eyes infinitely superior to

those of the West' (Huntington, 1996, p. 185). Indeed, China has raised its international position by its economic achievements after the economic reform, but in terms of cultural transformation, as I have mentioned in Chapter 2.2, there has been a long-established project of young Chinese students studying in developed countries and bringing back new ideas and values with them. It has already been suggested that these overseas-educated Chinese people serve as the carrier of 'Western values' in a gradual way. Therefore, during this process of cultural exchange, whether the cultural practices of Chinese people have indeed been reaffirmed, as Huntington suggests, or challenged by 'Western' influence, and whether Chinese people, especially the current generation of young students, view their cultural traditions as indeed 'infinitely superior' to that of 'the West', needs to be further explored. Such assertions, like Huntington's, need to be based on the more solid empirical evidence rather than on an observation which is seemingly confined within the perspective of international political relations. This study intends to make such empirical contribution.

Huntington's work outlines a cultural mapping of the world and especially sheds some light on the shifting cultural orders between China and the 'Western civilisation'. Nonetheless his framework requires more detailed analysis at an individual level in terms of how people actually view this cultural relationship, as this study aims to, rather than a general speculation. More importantly, although he acknowledges the cultural diversity within the 'Western civilisation' itself, his method of grouping all the other 'civilisations' still tends to neglect such significant diversity. Norris and Inglehart's (2009, p. 285) work based on the World Value Survey strongly argues that 'important cultural differences exist between Protestant and Catholic Europe, and between Western and orthodox Europe, as well as between Europe and the United States'. To offer a more detailed account, they go on to elaborate that 'America is far more religious and nationalistic than most post-industrial societies, and Sweden remains the most liberal in terms of sexual morality and the most politically engaged' (Norris and Inglehart, 2009, p. 286). In his book, *A New Politics of Identity*, Bhikhu Parekh (2008) also attacks Huntington's (1996) arguments and proposes different layers of identity in the current world that is seen as multicultural. He argues that culture is not an isolated existence, and it has been interrelated with other social contexts such as economy and politics. He thus criticises Huntington's thesis as cultural reductionism in that culture has been defined as the sole factor of difference.

Parekh takes a micro perspective and argues that human identities vary, sometimes

extremely, between different groups within the same 'civilisation' that Huntington theorises. 'The West' as a civilisation is itself not coherent. Parekh argues that if religion, as Huntington suggests, is the core of a civilisation, then 'Western societies' have been historically too diffuse to be collapsed into one single civilisation. He disagrees with Huntington's way of grouping people by their 'cultures', and observes that there is a wider identity beyond civilisational boundaries that all human beings share, which he theorises as the 'human identity' (Parekh, 2008, p. 26). He, therefore, argues that it is fundamentally problematic to distinguish a unique 'Western civilisation' without realising that there is diversity within one civilisation as well as major similarities between civilisations, which is shared as 'human identity'. He also criticises Huntington's framework as being fundamentally cultural romanticism which ignores the historically profound influence that different cultures of the world have on the formation and development of 'the West'.

Indeed, any 'civilisation' or 'culture' has been a product of diverse impacts. For example, quite often the nation-state is adopted as the framework to measure the boundaries of cultures. Yet, historically, the nation-state has also been a major agent for selectively importing and incorporating ideas and practices from other societies and thus for cultural diversity and hybridisation (Robertson, 1995). Therefore, a 'civilisation' may well include different and sometimes contrasting currents of thoughts:

> *Western civilisation then does not have a singular identity. It is made up of different and conflicting strands of thought, and includes robust rationalism and a deep – and at times naïve – religiosity, acute sensitivity to human limitations and a Messianic belief in the possibility of creating a heaven on earth, moral universalism as well as relativism, egalitarian and hierarchical impulses, and authoritarian as well as liberal tendencies.*
>
> *(Parekh, 2008, p. 160-161)*

Parekh (2008, p. 163) describes Huntington's thesis as essentially being civilisational narcissistic: it ignores the negative side of 'Western' history and never asks whether it might benefit culturally from the rest of the world. In relation to China, there have been a number of studies concerning overseas Chinese people and how the cultures of 'the West' have transformed Chinese societies, both domestically and overseas (see for example Watson, 1977, Ting-Toomey, 1981, Rosenthal and Feldman, 1992, Huang, 2002, Fong, 2006, Cohen, 2008, Philo, 2010). Little has been done, however, on how 'the West' understands China and is influenced by it under the current context of globalisation.

Edward Said's celebrated book *Orientalism* (1978), amongst other anthropological works, has fundamentally challenged the idea of 'the West' which underpins such discussions in terms of global cultural relations:

> *[...] the French and the British [...] have had a long tradition of what I shall be calling Orientalism, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in Western European experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilisations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilisation and culture.*
>
> *(Said 1978, p. 1-2)*

Said's thesis also suggests that instead of being a distinct 'culture', 'the West' has historically been incorporating cultural elements from 'the Orient' through colonial relations. He argues that Orientalism is a discourse which has been produced and articulated by Western Europe through colonisation as well as the promotion of 'capitalist world-system' (Wallerstein, 1984) in an attempt to gain control of 'the Orient' to fulfil its political, military, ideological and economic agenda. As a result of this, Said notes, the subject of 'the Orient' could never be free and unbiased, and that it is always involved in the struggles of power and interests. Hall (1992, p. 276) also asserts that 'our ideas of 'East' and 'West' have never been free of myth and fantasy, and even to this day they are not primarily ideas about place and geography'.

This idea of 'the West' and the power relations attached to it in comparison to 'Oriental' countries such as China might be partly the reason for what Fong (2006) describes as the glamorous image of the 'First World' and the shared desire of entering it amongst young students in urban China. In her works, the 'First World' does not refer to any geographic region but rather represent 'an imagined global community of affluent, powerful, and prestigious people' (Fong, 2006, p. 151). She adopts 'Western' to represent the UK, the USA, Ireland and Australia, where her participants had studied with an attempt to achieve elite status. These countries are all part of the 'First World', which the students highly desired. Fong (2006, p. 171) observes that all the Chinese students she knew 'hoped to attain some aspect of the Western citizenship by studying abroad'. In my own study, '***the West' or 'Western societies/countries'*** are intended to loosely represent the countries

where the sampled expatriate teachers come from, that is, ***the UK, the USA, Australia* and *Canada***. This is not due to geographical factors, nor does it mean that the cultures are essentially the same amongst all these countries. Rather, this reflects only the shared language (which is arguably an essential part of culture) and similar cultural backgrounds that are commonly described as Western. 'The West'/'Western' is thus adopted only as an *analytical term* for the purpose of addressing discussions. The participants might, however, have different understandings of the term and adopt it for different meanings. Nonetheless, cultural identity is only positional and contextual (Hall, 1996). It is during social interactions with others that one's identity is defined. This study thus, in part, intends to explore the ways in which participants understood Western cultural identities in comparison to Chinese cultural identities to reflect the power relations between China and the West.

We have now established that young generation of urban Chinese, mostly singletons, tend to view 'the West' as a dream place and many are eager for 'Western' education and cultural values. On the opposite side of the discussion, there has seemingly been much less studies concerning the 'Western' perceptions of 'the East', or more specifically, of China. Harold R. Isaacs's (1958) work, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Views of China and India*, is one of the few exceptions. It is an empirical enquiry, based on interviews, into American people's perceptions of the 'Far Eastern' Asia, and offers a stunningly detailed account of how Americans viewed Chinese from the 18th century to the first half of the 20th century. He argues that there have been two sets of contrasting images of China coexisting amongst Americans along the country's history of association with China. The first is the powerful image of 'China's ancient greatness, civilisation, art, hoary wisdom', with which comes 'a heavy cluster of admirable qualities widely attributed to the Chinese as people: high intelligence, persistent industry, filial piety, peaceableness, stoicism' (Isaacs, 1958, p. 63). The second set of images has come from the non-Chinese ancestors, Genghiz Khan and his Mongol hordes, which has also been strongly associated with Chinese people: 'cruelty, barbarism, inhumanity; a faceless, impenetrable, overwhelming mass, irresistible if once loosed (Isaacs, 1958, p. 63). This second set of images has been further legitimised, in the minds of many Americans, by 'the killers of girl infants, the binders of women's feet, the torturers of a thousand cuts, the headsmen, the Boxer rebellion and the Yellow Peril, the nerveless indifference to pain, death, or to human disaster, the whole set of lurid, strange, and fearful images clustered around the notion of the awakening giant and brought vividly to life again by Mao Tse-tung's "human sea" seen flooding down across the Yalu,

massed barbarians now armed not with broadswords but with artillery, tanks, and jet planes' (Isaacs, 1958, p. 63-64).

These two sets of images, as Isaacs suggests, come hand in hand through time and history, never solely appear in one strand without mingling with some elements from the other. He further elaborates on these jostling pairs of contrasting images of Chinese people that his interviewees revealed:

> *The Chinese are seen as a superior people and an inferior people; devilishly exasperating heathens and wonderfully attractive humanists; wise sages and sadistic executioners; thrifty and honourable men and sly and devious villains; comic opera soldiers and dangerous fighters. These and many other pairs occur and recur, with stresses and sources varying widely in time and place. As many of our interviews have shown, they are often jumbled all together, with particular facets coming more clearly into view when struck by the moving lights of changing circumstances.*
>
> *(Isaacs, 1958, p. 70-71)*

Isaacs then summarises crudely, as he puts it, the general changing pattern of American perceptions of China from the 18th century to the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, with each period coinciding with a particular historical background of political relations and warfare: 1. the age of respect (the 18th century); 2. the age of contempt (1840-1905); 3. the age of benevolence (1905-1937); 4. the age of admiration (1937-1944); 5. the age of disenchantment (1944-1949); 6. the age of hostility (1949 onward) (Isaacs, 1958, p. 71). He suggests that although his interviewees, and many other Americans, still hold great admiration towards Chinese people, many have already started to view China as a potentially hostile counterpart, dangerous for America's future development as a country in the world. This trend, as Isaacs reveals, is becoming dominant in the minds of current generations of Americans.

Isaacs's research had been conducted under a particular historic period: the Cold War. Now more than fifty years have passed since then, and China has transformed dramatically, through other major warfare (such as the Korean War and the Vietnam War), domestic disturbances (with the Tiananmen Square incident being the most widely acknowledged one in the West) and most importantly, the economic and political reforms, which is the beginning of what has now been widely circulated as the 'China miracle' in terms of economic development. Leonard (2008) views China's rise as a defining event of our history, whose after-effect could echo down generations to come:

> *Like the rise and fall of Rome, the Ottoman Empire, the British Raj or the Soviet Union, it is the stuff from which grand narratives are wrought. For the first time since the end of the Cold War, a non-Western power is in the global premier league: China has joined the United States and Europe as a shaper of world order.*
>
> *(Leonard, 2008, p. 5-6)*

Theses like Leonard's and Huntington's (1996) all have a strong suggestion that the West has now well recognised the rising power of China and its potential impact to the West. Amongst such discussions in the West, one could not help but notice their heavy, and sometimes almost exclusive, emphasis on the economic and political aspects of China. Moreover, there has been an underlying worry, or even fear, indicated in these discussions that China is seemingly going to take over the world with its economic patterns and political ideologies. The accuracy of such predictions is, of course, under contest, but the Western perceptions of China have now been focused primarily on the rising economic and political power is much less doubted. Then how Western people perceive China now, as, for example, compared to Isaacs' sample as well as to Western economists and political analysts, is an important question at present. What is more important is the ways in which Western people will reflect on these perceptions as well as on the cultural similarities and differences between them and China after they have come to live in China.

The discussions in this section on mutual perceptions between China and the West have raised important intellectual questions about the nature of being Chinese/Western and the formation of their modern cultural identities—how they construct their own identities in the modern age. Chinese civilisation dates as far back as 1500 B.C. and perhaps to a thousand years earlier; while 'Western' civilisation emerged from A.D. 700 or 800 (Huntington, 1996, p. 45-46). They both have profound cultures and histories that, in the eyes of themselves, are proudly unique to others. Traditionally, Chinese people have always seen themselves at the center of the human race. This anthropocentric view has been based on a deep-rooted sense of belonging to a unified civilisation that boasts several thousands years of uninterrupted history (Wu, 1991). This sentiment is still widely found amongst Chinese people to date, even those who have moved to the periphery of Chinese territory or overseas permanently. Wu (1991) identifies two sentiments shared by all who see themselves as Chinese: on the one hand, they identify themselves as being *zhongguoren*, literally 'Chinese person', which carries the connotation of modern patriotism or nationalism, they feel a deep connectedness with the fate of China as a nation, and they see themselves as the bearers of a cultural heritage handed down from their

ancestors, essentially separating them from non-Chinese; on the other hand, Chinese people see themselves as members of *zhonghua minzu*, a close but inadequate translation to English would be 'the Chinese race' or 'the Chinese people'.

Since ancient times, Chinese people have viewed themselves as being at the centre of the human race, surrounded by culturally inferior barbarians at the peripheries (Wu, 1991, p. 160-161). This particular sentiment had been cumulated internally by a series of historic conquests and the unification of different peoples throughout Chinese ancient and modern history. While the idea of 'the West' was emerging during the Enlightenment in Europe in the 18th century, Chinese people were going through its last feudal and one of its longest dynasties—the Qing Dynasty (from the 17th century to the early 20th century). During this period, China remained quite isolated, kept minimal contact with the rest of the world, and still had a sense of superiority over other peoples. The sentiment of being part of *zhonghua minzu* had also been reinforced by Western invasions during the second half of the 19th century, when Chinese people realised, painfully, that their narrow-minded sense of cultural superiority blinded them from acknowledging the advancement of the foreign world, particularly the West, in terms of technology and military power. Nonetheless, the concept of *zhonghua minzu* (rather than the sentiment of it) is rather modern and only emerged at the turn of the 20th century alongside these Western invasions. It was initially disseminated in nationalistic writings as a warning, to Chinese people, of the danger of annihilation under Western invasion (Wu, 1991). The nationalistic sentiment of being Chinese has been gradually weakened by a sentiment of modernisation during the second half of the 20th century: in order to revitalise the country out of warfare and political disturbances as well as to maintain the dignity of its profound and superior cultural heritage, China had to learn the successful experiences of modernisation from the West. Thus Chinese cultural identities have, since then, been constructed through the processes of modernisation and learning from the West. It has to be noted that, since Han people now occupy most of China's population and territory (and have historically had great conquests in and around the country), especially political and economic centres, the Chinese identity is greatly linked to that of the Han people. The demographic feature of the locations of the fieldwork and the sample of this study both reflect this.

On the other side of the discussion, as mentioned above, the cultural identity of 'the West' first became prominent during the Enlightenment in Europe in the 18th century, though it had been a gradual process which could date back to as early as the Portuguese

explorations of the African coast and Columbus's voyages to the New World during the 15th century. Hall (1992) asserts that in was from the 18th century that the Europeans began their full-scale exploitation on the lands they had previously 'discovered' and imprint their cultures and customs onto these new worlds. It is in these and subsequent historical processes of exploration and colonisation that 'the West' cumulatively finds its distinctiveness in comparison with 'other' cultures, peoples and civilisations they have 'discovered':

> *[...] in the Age of Exploration and Conquest, Europe began to define itself in relation to a new idea – the existence of many new 'worlds', profoundly different from itself. The two processes – growing internal cohesion and the conflicts and contrasts with external worlds – reinforced each other, helping to forge that new sense of identity that we call 'the West'.*
>
> *(Hall, 1992, p. 289)*

'The West' gradually, through ways of interpreting, representing and restructuring 'the Others', finds itself as being a uniquely triumphant civilisation. This process in return strengthens the cultural identity and superiority of 'the West' as it accumulates a perception of the 'Others' as being 'primitive', 'barbaric' and 'uncivilised' (Hall, 1992, p. 278). In other words, 'the West' is constructed by itself in setting its identity against the 'Others'. Hall goes on to elaborate that this unique identity has been constructed, in particular, through deliberately using stereotypes in representing itself in relation to the others. By 'western', he observes, it means the type of society that is 'developed, industrialised, urbanised, capitalist, secular and modern' (Hall, 1992, p. 277). The 'Others' simply reflect the opposite. The cultural identity of 'the West' is thus a historical, instead of a geographical, construct.

It can be seen that the Chinese/Western identities have not been constructed on their own, but rather through interacting with others. More importantly, the development of their cultural identities has historically been related to each other. Hall's (1992) thesis essentially suggests that what defines one's identity is the way in which one is differentiated from others. In other words, differences are the source of identities. By this point, there is little doubt that China and the West have been different from each other. We need to understand, however, in what ways exactly they have found each other different. I have addressed that the ways in which their modern identities have been historically related to their military and political relations. Another source of their identity formation and transformation has been the long-established educational and cultural contacts. This

study intends to explore differences between China and the West in terms of knowledge, value and behavioural pattern through individuals who live in the counterpart society. In other words, how they view themselves in relation to the other, how they view and construct their own and the other's cultural identities upon direct experience of the counterpart society is a key question in this study. Furthermore, we need to be reminded, as Parekh, and even Huntington himself, suggests, that there are cultural characteristics beyond national or 'civilisational' boundaries, that there are similarities shared by all peoples and cultures instead of being exclusive to one. Differences between China and the West are undoubtedly profound, but similarities need not to be ignored, either. In the process of understanding differences, it is also important to reflect simultaneously on similarities that transcend cultures, which, in many studies exploring cultural translation and cross-cultural relations, are lack of proper attention.

2.4 Globalisation and Cultural Flows

The concept of globalisation refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole (Robertson, 1992). Giddens (1990, p. 64) defines it as 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa'. These conceptualisations suggest that there is now a growing awareness of, and interconnectedness between, one another. Appadurai (1996, p. 53) observes that the process of cultural globalisation presents us with 'a rich, every-changing store of possible lives' due to the development of mass media. For instance, there is an increasing contact between societies through the 'indirect travel' experiences of watching TV (Curran, 2002, p. 172). Yet the process of globalisation is not only unifying, as it may literally indicate, but also multi-directional. Various theorists have suggested that the new cultural elements that are brought into societies by globalisation will most likely become indigenised in one way or another. The most notable theory which examines this is Robertson's (1995) conceptualisation of '*glocalisation*'. He argues that 'globalisation—in the broadest sense, the compression of the world—has involved and increasingly involves the creation and the incorporation of locality, processes which themselves largely shape, in turn, the compression of the world as a whole' (Robertson, 1995, p. 40). There are,

however, other responses to the process of cultural globalisation. Since cultural identities are often defined by difference and opposition (Burke, 2009, Hall, 1992), globalisation is also often the reason for the revival of local cultural identities (Giddens, 2002) and the erosion of nationalism (Curran, 2002).

Although there have been various reactions at the local level towards this 'global' process, it is still widely believed that globalisation is a process of unequal nature. For many people outside of America and Western Europe, this so-called globalisation is seemingly just another way of describing Westernisation, or indeed Americanisation, since America is now the sole superpower exercising the domination of global economy, culture and military force (Giddens, 2002). Norris and Inglehart (2009) observe that the United States has been leading the competition in terms of market share of cultural exports across the globe, followed by Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Canada. Nonetheless, the psychology of how foreign cultural imports may change the domestic cultural diversity of a nation is complicated. In this respect, Norris and Inglehart (2009, p. 31) propose the 'Firewall Model' framework of cosmopolitan communications, in which there are four variables that define the impact of foreign cultural imports: 1) media freedom (internal barriers to information); 2) social learning (processes for acquiring values and attitudes); 3) trade integration (external barriers to integration in cultural markets); and 4) access (lack of resources to access mass communication).

China is one of the countries that have little press freedom. Major global social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter as well as the largest and most popular video sharing site, Youtube, are all banned within the mainland, domestic television programmes are strictly dictated and the government exercises rigorous censorship on the internet.[13] All of these factors have resulted in the absence of information outside of the government's ideological framework. In addition, because the impact of cultural globalisation partly depends on social learning and the accessibility of mass communication (Norris and Inglehart, 2009), a large proportion of rural and suburban China and uneducated urban population are hardly involved in the processes of globalisation.

It is interesting, however, to see that despite the heavily monitored media outlets, many Chinese people have still found a way to access foreign cultures. In his book *America*

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[13] Norris and Inglehart (2009, p. 144) observe that media freedom in China is one of the lowest in the world (N=159).

through the Eyes of China and India, Sherman (2010) offers a vivid portrayal of the ways in which Chinese people encounter American cultures through watching TV series, yet with unconventional approaches. He depicts his experiences on how he manages to, just like many Chinese people around him, get access to American television programmes via dubbed VCD/DVDs and how some Chinese people would interpret American cultures by what they have seen from such media products. He describes walking down the streets of the city centre, and being approached by Chinese people promoting bootlegged CDs/DVDs, amongst which almost all the popular American television dramas of the last several years such as *Friends*, *Lost*, *24*, *Prison Break* and *Gossip Girl* can be found (Sherman, 2010, p. 71). In addition, he mentions that there are a number of Chinese websites that subtitle or dub up-to-date American (or more infrequently British) movies, TV series, and reality shows into Mandarin. It can be seen from his experiences that this has become an increasingly interesting cultural phenomenon and one of the routine sources for a large number of Chinese people to relate to foreign cultures.

It has to be noted, however, that the population of Chinese people with this degree of access is limited by such factors as residency location, educational background and gender. Damm (2007, p. 282) observes that there are some shared characteristics amongst Chinese internet users: male (60%), young (80% are under 35-year-old) and highly educated (more than 75% have a senior high school degree or higher qualification), and this particular social group is seen as belonging to the new urban middle class and being beneficiaries of the economic and, to some extent, political reforms of the later 1990s towards the 21st century. Norris and Inglehart (2009, p. 234) also observe that the impact of cultural globalisation through mass communications is uneven in that only the heaviest users of the mass media are generally more liberal towards cosmopolitan values. It is nonetheless revealed from works like Sherman's, that media has a predominant role in forming Chinese people's perception of foreign societies. However, such perceptions might have been distorted due to different cultural perspectives and potential cultural resistance rooted in local traditions and social networks (Curran, 2002). As Sherman (2010, p. 78) observes, when watching the popular situational comedy *Friends*, American people would encounter a vision of themselves as socially dislocated and dysfunctional but, on the other side, the same stories would have a far more positive reading from a Chinese perspective. For instance, in terms of the living arrangements in *Friends*, the group of friends is either in *Monica*'s apartment, which is inherited from her grandmother in order to maintain rent control, or in a coffee shop where various people have worked in at different times, and

which is countlessly rearranged with the result of being almost like a common space for the group of friends. Sherman explains that these living arrangements fosters an impression to the audience that these are shared spaces for everyone of the group, which is much likely interpreted differently by the Chinese viewers because of different cultural perspectives:

> *From our perspective, these are just people trying to get by economically and doing what is necessary to live in a major city in the United States. From a Chinese perspective, however, with the cultural emphasis on harmony and the political emphasis on Communism, this begins to look a whole lot like socialism. While each may have their own jobs, they tend to work for the social good, live in shared space, and help to support each other both emotionally and economically. So, again, what to us may appear to be people struggling financially and having to be creative in order to live the American dream may have a far more positive reading from a Chinese perspective.*
>
> *(Sherman, 2010, p. 78)*

His interpretation of the Chinese perspective seems to be rather subjective and based largely on the 'Western' stereotypical image that Chinese people tend to always conform to the group and place the collective good ahead of individual achievement. Nonetheless, his account accurately indicates that the images from media sources cannot be directly transferred into individual perceptions, especially when these individuals are from a foreign country with an arguably quite different cultural perspective. As discussed above, Appadurai's (1996) theory suggests that mass media in the process of cultural globalisation presents a large repertoire of possible lives. This is indeed the case, but the ways in which these images of different lives are seen and interpreted in different countries by people with different cultural backgrounds are most likely different, hence particularly important. Moreover, such ideas which are obtained from media sources might change upon direct experiences of the actual foreign country, which previously has only been seen on television or via the internet. Discussions of globalisation and cultural flows mostly rest upon the fundamental standpoint of cultural diversity. This may drive the entire attention away from similarities in cultural traits and characteristics that are shared amongst peoples beyond borders and conventional boundaries, as I have addressed above through Parekh's (2008) and Huntington's (1993, 1996) theories. Thus what these traits and characteristics are, and more importantly, in what ways they are shared and have remained between China and the West during direct cultural encounters in the globalisation processes are also highly relevant to this study.

2.5 Summary

This chapter lays out the theoretical foundation for the data analysis in Parts II and III. It first defines 'culture' from a purely subjective perspective based on the discursive context of this study. It then reviews the controversial discussions on the concept of 'the West' and the cultural relations between 'the West' and China. It points out that there is a lack of literature on how the cultures of China have influenced 'Western' countries, while 'the West' has long been a dream place for many young Chinese students. This study adopts 'the West' to loosely represent the countries where the sampled expatriate teachers come from because of the similarities of their cultural backgrounds. Lastly, it reviews the concept of globalisation by explaining its effects such as '*glocalisation*'. It then emphasises the effects of mass media on people's perceptions by referring to the influence of Western media products on Chinese society. It finally points out the importance of exploring such effects in this study.

Chapter 3 Methods and Sample

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methods and samples used in this study. It begins with a review of the qualitative methodologies used in my research. **Section 3.3** is divided into two parts in which focus group and individual in-depth interviewing approaches are explained respectively. **Section 3.4** shows the selection criteria for sampling and describes the samples. It also stresses ethical issues in the processes of data collection and analysis. **Section 3.5** lists the questions set for each sample and explains why they are important in answering the research questions. **Section 3.6** discusses the ways in which data has been analysed. **Section 3.7** provides a background of the localities where the fieldwork was carried out. This is to demonstrate that the cultural backgrounds of the particular regions in China/Britain where participants were based might be different from the rest of the country, and hence why the perceptions and experiences of my informants are not representative of their country as a whole. **Section 3.8** reflects on my subjectivity in this study and how my identity as a Chinese PhD student studying in Britain might have affected this research.

3.2 Qualitative Methodologies

As stated, this study attempts to capture cross-cultural experiences of individuals living in a foreign country, how they make sense of differences, and furthermore explore the ways in which they form new cultural identities in such contexts. This study thus focuses essentially on the life experiences of my participants and how meanings are formed. Therefore, qualitative methodologies were employed to collect and analyse data. The motives for selecting such methods is reflected in Patton's observation of the uniqueness of qualitative methodologies in social sciences:

> *[Qualitative research] is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is*

an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting-what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting-and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting… The analysis strives for depth of understanding.

(Patton, 1985, p. 1)

This study itself arises essentially from the unique social setting of a foreign country. What does it mean for a Chinese student to live in Britain and for a Western teacher to live in China? What are their lives like in the host country? What distinguishing experiences might they have and what are the meanings of these? These are the essential questions that this thesis tries to explore. In addition, this research wants to understand these from the participants' points of view. Qualitative methodology is thus of particular significance here as it is fundamentally 'an approach to the study of the social world which seeks to describe and analyse the culture and behaviour of humans and their groups from the point of view of those being studied' (Bryman, 1988, p. 46).

3.3 Focus Group and Individual In-depth Interviewing

3.3.1 Focus Group

Morgan (1996) asserts that focus groups are a research approach that collects data through group interaction on a specified topic determined by the researcher(s). Given the interactive nature of this method, one of the strengths is thus its capacity for interactive discussion in that a wider range of relevant issues can be generated from what the research pre-set. These issues might be the sub questions of what the interviewer already asks, but may also be something that the interviewer has not considered relevant, but which is important for the participants and the social group they belong to, and hence significant to the research itself. It also provides a ground for alternative and additional ideas to surface from each other's answers, which might not be revealed in individual interviewing. As Macnaghten and Myers (2004, p. 65) observe, compared to other qualitative methods, focus groups work better for exploratory purposes when researchers are not yet sure

exactly what is relevant. In this respect, Bryman's account outlines the advantages of focus groups:

> *In a normal individual interview the interviewee is often asked about his or her reasons for holding a particular view, but the focus group approach offers the opportunity of allowing people to probe each other's reason's for holding a certain view. This can be more interesting than the sometimes predictable question-followed-by-answer approach of normal interviews. For one thing, an individual may answer in a certain way during a focus group, but, as her or she listens to others' answers, he or she may want to qualify or modify a view; or alternatively may want to voice agreement to something that he or she probably would not have thought of without the opportunity of hearing the views of others.*
>
> *(Bryman, 2008:475)*

Such interactions between individuals in the focus groups allow the researcher to identify variables in respect to the factors that differentiate perceptions, experiences and interpretations of certain cultural phenomenon between participants with different backgrounds.

3.3.2 Semi-Structured In-depth Interviewing

Morgan (1996) shows that most sociological studies employing focus groups also combine them with additional methods, with individual in-depth interviews and surveys being the most frequent. He further observes that the pairings of focus groups and individual interviews are more straightforward given their shared qualitative nature, and this combination often points to the greater breadth and depth in the understanding of the specific research questions (Morgan, 1996, p. 134).

Semi-structured interviews are conducted by one interviewer with an interviewee using a list of questions or fairly specific topics that are to be explored, which is often identified as an interview guide. The interviewer is required to adjust the questions according to specific responses, from the interviewee, in terms of the use of words, the sequence of the listed questions, as well as the breadth and depth of any specific information (Patton, 1987, p. 111). Interviewees are given an extent of leeway in terms of their answers. Nonetheless, all the questions will be asked consistently throughout all the interviews, and with a similar wording (Bryman, 2008, p. 438).

Based on the complementary nature of focus group and individual interviewing methods, each participant in this study was invited to take part in a focus group and then a subsequent follow-up individual interview. Most participants chose to take part in only one of them.[14] Focus groups were used first to generate a wide range of relevant issues for subsequent individual interviews to specify. Follow-up individual interviews were conducted to address issues raised in previous focus groups/interviews with relevant participants.

3.4 Sampling

3.4.1 The Selection Criteria

The qualitative nature of this research reflects that it aims at an in-depth analysis of the actual experiences of different social groups rather than to make generalised statements about various populations. Purposive sampling, as opposed to probability sampling, was adopted to recruit participants for this study. The goal of purposive sampling is to recruit participants in a strategic way so that those sampled are highly relevant to the research questions that are being proposed (Bryman, 2008, p. 415). The power of this sampling method lies in its ability to select 'information-rich cases' for the analysis to be in-depth; such cases are those of central significance to the research objectives (Patton, 1987, p. 52). The key to the purposive sampling in this study is the variations of participants in terms of some presumed key characteristics that might differentiate the outcome. Firstly, *gender* was considered as an important factor: females were expected to be more involved in discussions such as different ideas of beauty and feminism while males were more likely to talk about sports such as football (as Britain is quite famous for it). Secondly, the *time duration spent living in the host country* was considered as significant for both Western expatriate teachers in China and Chinese students in Britain in respect to the understandings of the host country and cultural differences. The longer one lived in the host country, the more likely he or she was assumed to have gained deeper understandings

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[14] Section 3.3.2 will describe the nature of the samples, how each sample was recruited and what method(s) was used accordingly.

of it. Thus the *time duration spent in the host country* was considered as a variable in recruiting participants. The third factor that was put into consideration was the *subject/area of study* in the sample of Chinese students in Britain. The assumption was that students from the subjects of social and political sciences had different perspectives in understanding issues related to culture and social relations, which are all relevant to their subjects, from students in areas of arts, business, science and engineering. Correspondingly, *subject/area of study* was one of the criteria according to which the sample of Chinese students was stratified.

3.4.2 The Nature of the Sample

The final sample involves 100 participants in total, including: 1) 45 Chinese students and 6 Chinese language teachers in Britain; 2) 37 Western expatriate teachers in China; 3) 6 Chinese university students in China who had never been to Britain (or any other country); 4) 3 English language teachers in Britain and 3 British students who had never been to China. Sample (1) and (2) were the intended focus of this study, while sample (3) and (4) were recruited as a control group for comparative purpose to better understand the actual effects of direct cross-cultural encounters as opposed to cultural knowledge which was based upon other sources.

Sample One -- Chinese Students and Teachers in Britain

All the student participants in this sample were interviewed in focus groups. Most of them were seen regularly afterwards on and off campuses. Subsequently seven were interviewed individually through either face-to-face or telephone conversations. In addition, for the diversity, width and richness of the sample, five Chinese language teachers in British secondary schools participated in a focus group together, another one was interviewed individually. All the individual interviews and focus groups were conducted face-to-face in Glasgow with the exception of two follow-up telephone interviews. In those cases, the interviewees had gone back to China. All participants in the focus groups preferred to be in a group only with familiar faces. Thus snowball sampling was adopted. Each group was organised by one person through his or her personal connections as well as knowledge of shared experiences between one another, such as classmates, flatmates or previous friendships already established back in China. This provided the trust between themselves needed for the discussion of personal experiences, but, on the other hand, it was likely to lead to low diversity in terms of the background of potential participants. Attention was thus paid to selecting focus group organisers according to the factors identified in 3.3.1 (i.e. the friend circles of a student who had been in Britain for over three years and for a undergraduate degree were most likely different from those of a student who had come to take a one-year postgraduate course). Each initial focus group lasted between 1.5–2 hours. The detailed nature of this sample is listed in the following tables:

Group	Name	Micro-Social Context		Gender	Institution	Area of Study	Time Duration	Factors emerging from the group	
								foreign flatmate	other
A Organiser: Li Zhao	He Tian	classmates who shared lectures	College friends back in China	M	University of Glasgow	Business-related courses	over 1.5 yrs	No (all Chinese)	studied in England for 1 yr
	Liu Ran			M					
	Li Zhao			M					
	Pan Hang			M					
	Qu Jia		friends who hung out frequently	F			8 months		
	Qiu Yanyan			F					
	Zhao Wei			F					

Table 3- 1 Focus Group A of Chinese students in Britain

Group	Name	Micro-Social Context		Gender	Institution	Area of Study	Time Duration	Factors emerging from the group	
								foreign flatmate	other
B Organiser: Ma Na	Ma Na	classmates who shared lectures and were in the same undergraduate program		F	University of Glasgow	Sociology	over 4 yrs	lodged in a local family for 1 yr	Sociological perspectives; undergraduate courses allowed more interaction with local students and communities
	Jia Qing		friends who hung out together	F			nearly 4 yrs	Yes	
	Meng Ling			F			3 yrs	N/A	

Table 3- 2 Focus Group B of Chinese students in Britain

Group	Name	Micro-Social Context		Gender	Institution	Area of Study	Time Duration	Factors emerging from the group	
								foreign flatmate	other
C Organiser: Ma Na (from Group B)	Yu Ting	classmates who shared lectures; friends who hung out frequently (also with the recruiter)	flatmates together with the Recruiter	F	University of Glasgow	Business-related courses	nearly 1 yr	lodged in a local family for a 1 yr in Australia	did her undergraduate in Australia
	Li Yingying			F				No (all Chinese)	did pre-sessional English course
	Ye Yuan		from the same hometown with the Recruiter and Li Ying	F				No (all Chinese)	did pre-sessional English course

Table 3- 3 Focus Group C of Chinese students in Britain

Group	Name	Micro-Social Context		Gender	Institution	Area of Study	Time Duration	Factors emerging from the group	
								foreign flatmate	other
D Organiser: Ma Na (from Group B)	Ye Tingting	friends	couple	F	Glasgow School of Art	Art Design	nearly 3 yrs	N/A	
	Luo Hao			M	Glasgow Caledonia University	Business-related course	8 yrs	No	migrated to Britain with his family when 16
	Wang Yi		flatmate with Luo	M		Politics		No	

Table 3- 4 Focus Group D of Chinese students in Britain

Group	Name	Micro-Social Context		Gender	Institution	Area of Study	Time Duration	Factors emerging from the group	
								foreign flatmate	other
E Organiser: Gu Chao	Gu Chao	friends	classmates who went to pre-master's program together	F	University of Glasgow	Art and Media	nearly 2 yrs	No (all Chinese)	French boyfriend
	Bian Yu			F		Computing Science	nearly 2 yrs	Yes	
	Liang Juan			F		Law	3 yrs	had lodged in a local family for 8 months	had lived in London for nearly 1 yr
	Bo Yiwen			M		Law	nearly 1 yr	No (all Chinese)	
	Gu Yue			M		Bio and Environmental Science	nearly 2 yrs	N/A	
	Li Wei			M		MBA	nearly 1 yr	Yes	

Table 3- 5 Focus Group E of Chinese students in Britain

Group	Name	Micro-Social Context		Gender	Institution	Area of Study	Time Duration	Factors emerging from the group	
								foreign flatmate	other
F Organiser: Wen Jun	Gao Yao	classmates who shared lectures	met with Jun before arrival in Britain	F	University of Glasgow	Business-related courses	nearly 1 yr	No	
	Wen Jun		college friends back in China	F					
	Ji Ying			F					
	Gu Ning			F			nearly 4 yrs		studied in London for 3 yrs before

Table 3- 6 Focus Group F of Chinese students in Britain

Group	Name	Micro-Social Context		Gender	Institution	Area of Study	Time Duration	Factors emerging from the group	
								foreign flatmate	other
G Organiser: Wan Lei	Li Jie	classmates who shared lectures	classmates who did pre-sessional English course together	F	University of Glasgow	Business-related courses	nearly 1 yr	N/A	
	Wan Lei			F				No	did pre-sessional English course
	Cao Yiwei			M				N/A	
	Li Yinan			M				N/A	
	Zhao Lei		couple	M				No	
	Huang Jun			F				No	

Table 3- 7 Focus Group G of Chinese students in Britain

Group	Name	Micro-Social Context	Gender	Institution	Area of Study	Time Duration	Factors emerging from the group	
							foreign flatmate	other
H Organiser: Wu Shan	Wu Shan	classmates who shared lectures	F	University of Glasgow	Business-related courses	nearly 1 yr	N/A	
	Wang Shang		F					
	Fang Wen		F					
	Yao Zheng		F					
	Wang Nan		M					
	Cheng Fan		F					

Table 3- 8 Focus Group H of Chinese students in Britain

Group	Name	Micro-Social Context	Gender	Institution	Area of Study	Time Duration	Factors emerging from the group	
							foreign flatmate	other
I Organiser: Han Zheng	Han Zheng	classmates who shared lectures and who all went to the same tutorial sessions together; became close friends who hung out on regular basis	M	University of Glasgow	Business-related courses	nearly 1 yr	No	did pre-sessional English course
	Wu Zheng		M					
	Xue Yi		M					
	Huang Lei		M					
	Han Tian		F					
	Yin Ran		F					went to Portugal for 1 yr of exchange program
	Xue Ting		F					

Table 3- 9 Focus Group I of Chinese students in Britain

Group	Name	Micro-Social Context	Gender	Area of Teaching	Time Duration	Factors emerging from the group	
						foreign flatmate	other
J Organiser: Liu Hong (program supervisor of the participants)	Cheng Yan	colleagues under the same exchange program; were colleagues and friends back in China from the same school	F	Chinese language and culture teachers	nearly 1 yr	No	
	Liu Yang		F				
	Hong Qian		F				
	Liang Zhen		M				
	Xu Cheng		M				
individual interview	Wei Fang		F	Chinese language and culture teacher	nearly 1 yr	No	

Table 3- 10 Sample of Chinese teachers in Britain

Sample Two -- Western Expatriate Teachers in China

All participants in this sample were interviewed individually as this was their preference. They were recruited through the British Council office in Shanghai as well as their host universities' websites where their contact information was listed. Thirty-six of them were interviewed in China while they were working as teachers (academic as well as English language). These interviews were carried out in Nanjing, Suzhou (Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University, XJLU) and Ningbo (University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China, UNNC).[15] Only one British respondent was interviewed via telephone back in Britain. In this case, he had been an expatriate teacher in UNNC and Shanghai but gone back to Britain. Five were interviewed for a second time either face-to-face or via telephone for follow-up questions. I kept in touch with interviewees in Nanjing via emails and some were seen for a few times after the interviews. I also kept in touch with one female respondent in Suzhou via emails and telephones. Each original individual interview lasted approximately one hour. The detail description of this sample is listed below in Table 3-11:

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[15] A brief introduction of the research localities will be provided in Section 3.3.3.

	Variables prior to the interviews					Factors emerging from the interviews		
Name	Sex	Nationality	Time Duration	Locality of Residence and Teaching	Chinese Partner	Previous Cultural Experiences	Other	Follow-up Interview
Poppy	F	British	8 yrs	Suzhou	Yes (boyfriend for 7 yrs)		spoke Mandarin fluently	Yes (telephone); kept in touch via email
Nick	M	British	2 yrs	Suzhou	No	10 yrs in Indonesia (teaching English)		
Lucy	F	American	3 yrs	Suzhou	No	3 yrs in Taiwan	Husband came with her	
Gary	M	Canadian	7 yrs	Suzhou	Yes (Chinese Wife)			
Andrew	M	British	10 yrs	Suzhou	Yes (Chinese Wife)			
Sam	M	British	4 yrs	Suzhou	N/A	has been living outside of Britain since 11	Previously in Beijing for 2 yrs 8 years ago; an artist	

Katherine	F	American	7 yrs	Suzhou	Yes (boyfriend for 1 yr)			Yes (telephone)
Matthew	M	American	6 yrs	Suzhou	N/A	2 yrs in Japan		
Judy	F	Australian	14 yrs (on and off)	Suzhou	N/A	had lived in a quite poor area of China before		
Grace	F	Polish /British	10 yrs	Suzhou	N/A		related to personal experience of Communist country (Poland)	
Jake	M	British	8 yrs	Suzhou	Yes (Chinese Wife)			
Anthony	M	British	1 yr	Suzhou	N/A	Singapore and Malaysia for extended period of time (teaching English)		
James	M	British	3 yrs	Suzhou	Yes (Chinese Wife)			

Steven	M	British	8 months	Suzhou	N/A			
Thomas	M	Australian	2 yrs	Suzhou	N/A			
Ian	M	British	10 yrs	Suzhou	Yes (Chinese Wife and a son)	had lived in Northern part of China for 2 yrs	spoke Mandarin fluently; son went to schools in China	Yes (telephone)
Louis	M	British	10 yrs (on and off)	Ningbo	Yes (Chinese Wife)	Most of previous working life in Japan; been to other Asian Countries frequently	had been doing cross-cultural training and related academic work	
Adam	M	British	6 yrs	Ningbo	Yes (Chinese Wife)	First lived in Northern part of China	spoke Mandarin fluently	
Carine	F	Mauritian/ British	5 yrs	Ningbo	No		Black/Racism	
John	M	American	2 yrs	Ningbo	N/A	had a Chinese girlfriend in college		

Madelyn	F	Spanish/ British	3.5 yrs	Ningbo	N/A	lodging in a Chinese family in Beijing for 4 months		
Nathan	M	British	6 yrs	Ningbo	Yes (Chinese girlfriend→ wife)[16]			Yes (telephone)
Peter	M	Australian		Ningbo	Yes (Chinese Wife)	had lived in South America for 1.5 yrs		
Josh	M	British	3 yrs	Ningbo	N/A	was teaching English in Middle East (Kuwait) before coming to China and had also done so in Slovakia before		
Alex	M	Canadian	3 yrs	Ningbo	No	had been English teachers in Korea and Taiwan before		
Jocelyn	F	Australian	14 yrs	Ningbo	No			

[16] She was his girlfriend at the time of the first interview. By the time the second interview was conducted via telephone, they got married and just had a baby.

Hannah	F	British	1 yr	Ningbo	N/A	had worked in Japan	single mum with a son who went to schools in China	
Sarah	F	American	13 yrs	Ningbo	N/A	8 yrs in Northern China before this job	daughter went to schools in China	
Aaron	M	American	5 yrs	Nanjing	N/A	had taught in high schools in poorer area		met on campus and chatted
Justin	M	British	7 yrs	Nanjing	Yes (Chinese girlfriend)	shared flat with Chinese students in Britain	Dad was from Hong Kong; spoke Cantonese and Mandarin	met on campus for a few times; kept in touch via email
Mike	M	American	4 yrs	Nanjing	Yes (Chinese girlfriend)			
Phillips	M	American	2 yrs	Nanjing	No	had been in Netherland and Japan for extended stay	Ann's husband, interviewed together	Yes (face-to-face; met on campus and chatted

Anne	F	American	2 yrs	Nanjing	No	had been in Netherland and Japan for extended stay	Norm's wife, interviewed together	met on campus and chatted; kept in touch via email
Jonathan	M	American	6 yrs	Nanjing	No		Sunny's husband, interviewed together, kids went to schools in China	met on campus for a few times
Susan	F	American	6 yrs	Nanjing	No		John's wife, interviewed together, kids went to schools in China	
Chase	M	American	8 yrs	Nanjing	No	had lived in Northern China, was being trained as an English teacher with Chinese language course	Lauren's husband, interviewed together, kids went to schools in China	met on campus for a few times

| Laura | F | American | 8 yrs | Nanjing | No | had lived in Northern China, was being trained as an English teacher with Chinese language course | Chad's wife, interviewed together, kids went to schools in China | |

Table 3- 11 Sample of Western Expatriate Teachers in China

Sample Three -- Domestic Chinese Students

Six domestic university students in China were recruited as a control group for comparative purpose. It was assumed that, without direct exposure to Britain, they would have different perceptions of it from Chinese students who had lived there. This focus group was conducted in Nanjing. All the participants were females because this group was recruited via a class monitor who was a female, and she reached out first to her female classmates who lived in the same dormitory building (the males' and females' dormitory buildings were separated in this university, as well as most other Chinese universities). The nature of this sample is listed below in Table 3-12:

	Name	Micro-social context	Gender	Institution	Area of Study
Group H Recruiter: Fang Zheng	Fang Zhen	classmates who studied in the same School, who went to lectures of some courses together, who lived in the same dormitory building	F	Nanjing University of Science and Technology	Social Sciences
	Liu Xintian		F		
	Song Weijun		F		
	Liu Yun		F		
	Huang Rong		F		
	Li Xueting		F		

Table 3- 12 Sample of Chinese Students in China

Sample Four -- Domestic British Teachers and Students

Three British university students and three English language teachers in Glasgow were recruited as another control group in comparison with Western expatriate teachers in China. The three students were in a focus group together while the three teachers were interviewed individually. All three students had not been to China while one teacher had but only briefly as a bypassing tourist. The detailed nature of the sample is described below in Table 3-13:

	Name	Micro-social context	Gender	Area of Study	Factors emerging from the interviews	
Group I: Recruiter: Anna	Anna	friends who spent time with each other regularly	F	Social science		
	Amy		F	Social science	sister had been to Beijing	
	Tim		M	Art and Music	played music with Chinese friends	
Individual interview	Ryan		M	N/A	had travelled to Hong Kong yet only briefly as a tourist	had been teaching many Chinese students
Individual interview	Sophie		F	N/A		
Individual interview	Ruth		F	N/A		

Table 3- 13 Sample of British Students and Teachers in Britain

3.4.3 Ethical Issues

I went through official procedures set out by the University of Glasgow to obtain ethical approval before carrying out the fieldwork. I explained, in my application, the objectives of this research, my targeted sample pool and planned sample recruitment procedures. I also included my interview guides and indicated issues of sensitivity, anonymity and confidentiality. These were addressed and explained to potential participants during recruitment and repeated to the final participants before the actual focus groups/interviews started in the form of oral statement and signed consent form (see Appendices). Information revealed in the focus groups/interviews remains confidential and pseudonyms are adopted in the writing of the thesis. All the interviews and focus groups have been tape-recorded with the consent of the participants. Transcripts were provided for participants if requested. All focus groups and individual interviews were conducted in the native language of the participants, and all the Chinese transcripts are translated into English when quoted. Copies of data collected in each focus group/interview have been kept in password protected computers and in locked cabinets that only I have access to. These have not been revealed until the submission of this thesis.

3.5 Interview and Focus Group Schedules

Based on the research questions proposed in Chapter 1.2, a general focus group/interview schedule was designed for the focus groups to allow open-ended discussion and to raise issues that participants considered important from their own perspectives. The sub-questions identified in these focus groups could furthermore serve as the interview schedule for individual interviews where more specific questions were needed for the breadth of the research. Each focus group in *Sample One* was conducted according to the schedule shown below:[17]

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[17] Schedules for Samples Two, Three and Four were similar, with adjustments of the names of the countries and with omission of some questions. This will be explained later in this section.

1) When and why did you come to Britain/here?

This was to identify the time duration participants had spent in Britain as well as their motives for coming abroad. As outlined in 3.3.1, the time duration spent in the host country was considered as a variable that was relevant to participants' experiences as well as their understandings of the host country. Furthermore, in order to understand cross-cultural experiences, the intentions behind the decisions of going to a particular country were seen as important factors that would influence the actual experiences. Thus question 1 laid out the background information from which further questions about direct cultural encounters could be asked. Participants were also free to talk about any specific reasons they might have had for coming to the particular city or the university they were studying in, compared to other possible destinations.

2) What ideas did you have about Britain and where did you get them? What did you expect? What has been different in reality?

This is to understand participants' previous ideas about the host country as well as how it might differ from the perceived social reality after arrival. This question provided a comparable position for later exploration of their ideas, which were based on actual direct experiences, in order to understand the ways in which previous ideas might have changed. The sources of the prior ideas identified by this question lead to discussions with regard to the role of the media and other sources in the formation of people's perceptions of a foreign country, and how this might affect expectations and the actual direct experiences. In analysing the data collected in this respect, concepts and theoretical strands discussed in Chapter 2.3 will be referred to.

3) Was there anything you found difficult to accept or understand when you first arrived? Or is it still hard for you now? How do you handle it?

This question served primarily as a trigger to retrieve memory from the beginning of the participants' experiences. It was expected that coming to a new country would cause issues especially in the introductory phase. According to Oberg's (1960) popular 'culture shock' theory, this initial phase is described as a 'honeymoon' where everything is new and exciting for people who have just arrived in the host country. It was assumed in my study that these 'new' experiences would be of particular significance in participants' cross-

cultural experiences. By thinking of these 'new' elements of the host environment, differences between the home and host country were revealed, stimulating the general discussion about cultural differences, which will be explored further in question 4.

4) What do you think is different from your home country?

This general question aimed to stimulate free-flow discussion on the topic of cultural differences. It was also a follow-up discussion of question 3 where initial issues had already been identified which might need further exploration. With this question, the participants were expected to have a relatively high level of control over the issues they were interested in and the interviewer's role was primarily to record topics that were brought up and considered important by the participants. Further in-depth sub-questions with regard to these specific topics were asked in the same focus group, as well as in others, and in individual interviews for deeper understanding.

5) Which elements of the Britain do you identify with and which do you not? Why?
6) Has living in Britain changed your attitudes or behaviour? If so, how exactly?

Question 5 focused on cultural differences yet it was intended specifically to understand how differences were interpreted and how new sets of cultural identifications were formed. According to Fong's (2004, 2006) previously discussed works, there was a shared desire amongst young Chinese students to go to the 'First World' to study. It was thus assumed that there would be elements of the new environment that the participants identified with and wanted to learn to incorporate into their original cultural framework. Correspondingly, some aspects of the host society might not be accepted. Question 6 aimed to understand the actual changes that occurred to the participants in terms of values and behaviour, and how these were related to both the host and the home countries. The ways in which elements of cultures moved between societies were revealed through the discussion of these two questions, and the outcome of participants' direct cross-cultural experiences was discussed in relation to the theoretical framework proposed in Chapter 2 (especially 2.2 and 2.3).

Participants in *Sample Two* were asked according to the same schedule as well with 'Britain' and 'British' being replaced by 'China' and 'Chinese' respectively. Participants in *Sample Three* were asked Question 2, 4, and 5, with question 2 only being focused on the ideas they had about Britain and the sources of these ideas. Participants in *Sample Four*

were interviewed with the same questions as *Sample Three* with 'Britain' and 'British' being replaced by 'China' and 'Chinese' respectively.

3.6 Data Analysis

As stated in Chapter 3.4.3, all the interviews and focus groups in this study have been tape recorded. Initially, I transcribed them all into documents word for word for subsequent analysis. As my sample consists of two distinguishable national/cultural groups, I divided my data into two major parts. This is demonstrated by the division of Part II and Part III in this dissertation: Part II discusses the data collected from the Western expatriate teachers and Part III analyses the data gathered from the Chinese students and teachers.

In each group, I first coded the data into three major categories according to the three-dimensional analytical framework explained in Chapter 1.1: 1) comments from the participants involving their ideas, perceptions and expectations of the host country prior to their arrival were coded into the 'perception' category which examines their experiences with the host country before arrival (these mainly came from participants' answers to questions 1 and 2 demonstrated above in Chapter 3.5); 2) comments on their social interactions in, and general or particular feelings of, the host country caused by direct encounters were coded into the 'experience' category which examines their experiences during direct contact (these primarily came from participants' answers to questions 3 and 4 outlined in Chapter 3.5); and 3) comments indicating the ways in which their previous ideas, knowledge and behaviour had changed due to such direct experiences were coded into the 'cultural reinterpretation' category which examines their experiences after direct contact (these mostly came from participants' answers to questions 5 and 6 stated in Chapter 3.5).

Furthermore, as explained above in Chapter 3.5, the focus group and interview schedules designed and used in this study did not presume any specific theme of interest, but rather meant for participants to identify and develop their own categories of topic that were important to their experiences. Thus, data analysis was further carried out according to the specific themes that the participants raised and considered significant. Comments from

later focus groups and interviews which embodied an identical or similar theme were put into the same thematic category that had been developed from the previous focus groups and interviews. Individual comments under the same theme were further analysed together to develop patterns that explain the collective experiences of the participants as a social group. The titles of the chapters in Part II and Part III demonstrate the themes identified in this study. Themes that raised significant interest amongst both Chinese and Western participants have been analysed separately in Part II and Part III with reference to each other.

Under each theme, there are factors that differentiate the experiences of the participants. Some of these factors, such as time duration spent in the host country, the subjects of study and relationships with local people, were presumed as the selection criteria explained in Chapter 3.4.1. Other factors were developed during the course of data analysis, such as previous cross-cultural experiences in another country, attending English language courses prior to their academic programs, as well as sharing flat or apartment with local people or with classmates and friends from foreign countries. I have analysed the data according to these variables to develop different patterns under the same theme. Participants' comments are interpreted with reference to the concepts and theories discussed in Chapter 2 as well as to other existing evidence which reflect the concepts and patterns emerging from these comments.

3.7 The Locations of the Fieldwork and How They Mattered to the Data

As stated above, the interviews of Western expatriate teachers (*Sample Two*) were conducted in Nanjing, Suzhou and Ningbo. As demonstrated in Figure 3-1, these cities are all located around the Yangtze River Delta, which is arguably one of the richest and most cosmopolitan areas of China.[18] Nanjing is the capital city of Jiangsu Province and also the

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[18] In Figure 3-1, A represents Nanjing, B represents Suzhou, C represents Ningbo, and D represents Shanghai. The annual GDP of Jiangsu Province (where Nanjing and Suzhou is located) is 4911.027 billion RMB in 2011 (Jiangsu Statistic Bureau, 2011); the equivalent figure of Zhejiang Province is 3200.01 billion RMB (Zhejiang Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Whereas in some inner regions, the figures are much lower in comparison. For instance, the GDP of Hunan Province in 2011 is only a little over 1/3 of that of Jiangsu

cultural and political centre of the province. It is famous for its historical significance to China as the capital of the six dynasties. It is also a landmark city for the Yangtze River Delta area due to its importance in culture, history, politics and economy. Suzhou has historically been a popular destination for tourists due to its attractive natural scenery. It is also becoming the economic, commercial and international trade centre of Jiangsu Province because of its high capability in industrialisation. Ningbo, the second largest city in Zhejiang Province, is famous for private business ownerships and is also an economically advanced city, with a GDP figure of more than that of the whole Gansu Province in inner China in 2012.[19]

Participants in Suzhou were teachers at the Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University (XJLU) and those in Ningbo were working at the University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China (UNNC). Both are Sino-British university setups where the majority of academic and English language teachers are from Western countries, primarily Britain, and the administration staff are mostly Chinese. The teaching programs are delivered in an identical way as their mother universities back in Britain while the administration procedures are conducted by Chinese staff.[20] Both campuses are located in the suburban areas of each city, and are highly self-contained environments which are relatively isolated from the urban centres. Chapter 5.3 and Chapter 6 will illustrate how understandings formed primarily through contacts on university campuses (where most teachers were native English speakers, the rest of the working staff understood English quite well and the students had already achieved certain levels of English language abilities) might differ from those established elsewhere. On the other hand, participants in Nanjing were based at university campuses that were part of the urban area and quite close to the urban centre. These campuses were not as self-contained as XJLU and UNNC, and were in fact interactive with and integrated into the surrounding local communities. On these campuses, native English speakers were an extreme minority as most of the population, both teachers and students, were Chinese. Nonetheless, it is important to note that all the participants in *Sample Two* had travelled across China and had different experiences in different regions. The later chapters will explain in detail the ways in which experiences in different regions of China differentiated perceptions.

Province (Statistical Information of Hunan, 2011); and in provinces such as Gansu, the figure is even drastically lower, with its GDP only being equivalent of ¼ of that of Hunan (Gansu Statistical Information Network, 2011).

[19] Zhejiang Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 2012 and Gansu Statistical Information Network, 2012.

[20] It was noted by participants that the administrations procedures were also identical to those implemented in their mother universities in the UK, but they were carried out in adjusted ways by the Chinese staff.

Figure 3- 1 Political Map of China[21]

In the case of Chinese students and teachers in Britain (*Sample One*), the participants were all based in Glasgow, which is the commercial centre and largest city of Scotland.[22] The experiences of participants based in large cities like this might be different from those formed through studying in small university towns. Furthermore, the political and cultural histories between England and Scotland may highlight the differences in comparison to the ones experienced by students in England. Nonetheless, as listed in Tables 3-1, 3-5, and 3-6, four participants had lived in England for an extended period of time before relocating to Glasgow, and all participants had travelled across Britain, and many to other European countries and regions. Unless the comments were made specifically on Scotland or Glasgow, it is assumed in this study that the 'Britain' referred to by the participants in *Sample One* was an indication of a generalised comment towards to the country as a whole, that is, they did not differentiate between 'Scotland' and 'Britain'. As mentioned in the beginning, in *Note on Terminology*, Chinese students in this study also constantly used 'the West', 'Western countries', or even 'foreign countries' and 'foreigners', to generalise the

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[21] Retrieved from: http://www.ezilon.com/maps/asia/china-maps.html on 20/04/2013.

[22] Glasgow is shown as A in Figure 3-2.

society they referred to (where they lived in) and the people they had interacted with.

Figure 3- 2 Political Map of the UK[23]

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[23] Retrieved from: http://www.ezilon.com/maps/europe/united-kingdom-maps.html on 20/04/2013.

3.8 The Role of the Researcher in the Research

The key to the qualitative methods adopted here in the exploration of cross-cultural perceptions and experiences is to establish close contact, build up trust and create a relaxed environment for free discussion. This is because such experiences can sometimes be sensitive and negative. For instance, Philo (2010, p. 94) mentions that some Chinese students in his sample were quite worried about expressing negative thoughts about China. Gu and Maley's (2008) and Gu's (2009) studies on Chinese students in UK higher education reveals the frustrations that they have experienced with their experiences and personal lives. Additionally, topics such as sex, relationships and marriages, or general cultural assumptions about issues of privacy, are in themselves rather sensitive, especially since sharp differences in the attitudes towards these topics are presumed in a cross-cultural study like this. It was thus expected that these issues would only be revealed when a certain level of trust was built between the interviewer and the interviewee.

My identity as a Chinese PhD student studying in Britain gave me an access to Chinese students in Britain via our shared experiences as well as two important identities of mine besides the national identity. Firstly, each focus group was organised through a friend that I had previously made through such experiences as playing football together, sharing a flat, being in the same lecture, socialising at gatherings of Chinese students or simply meeting randomly on the street and becoming friends. I was thus introduced to the participants as primarily a *friend/classmate* of the organisers. Secondly, as will be revealed in Chapter 6 and Chapter 10.2, Chinese students tend to respect seniors and authority figures in the sense of knowledge learning. Being a PhD student and also a more senior student (as I was older than most of the Chinese students in my sample), I was seen as a '*xue zhang*' (a senior fellow student) and also a 'doctor'. I was introduced quite often with these titles to potential participants by the organisers and constantly called so by the actual participants. I was thus given the respect and authority of having more knowledge in general. Being a friend and a '*xue zhang* of doctor/PhD' thus allowed trust to be established. Meanwhile, the latter identity kept a certain distance of respect, in that, while the atmosphere was friendly and relaxed, they did treat the interviews more seriously than simply as a casual chat between friends. One issue that came up during the fieldwork was that, as an academic researcher who had also been going through the researched experiences, I was

quite often asked to comment on and judge their opinions and experiences.[24] Thus during these conversations, I paid attention to avoid such involvement which might bias their answers. Personal comments and experiences were nonetheless shared after each focus group if asked.

As for the Western expatriate teachers in China, contacts were initially set up through the British Council office in Shanghai, who was in charge of the IETLS examiners (who were mostly from Britain) in the Yangtze River Delta area. The recruitment email was circulated by an officer in that office and reached to the Language Centre in XJTLU and the Centre for English Language Education in the UNNC.[25] Further direct contact was made based on contact information listed on the two universities' websites. Thus the contacts established in the beginning were formal and official. I introduced myself as a PhD student of Sociology in Britain and explained my purpose of the fieldwork. Many of these teachers, as they revealed later on in the beginning of the meetings, were quite busy with their multiple jobs. Nonetheless, because I was introduced in the first place by the official organisation that had a supervisory role over many participants, I was seen as a trustworthy person for them to talk to. In addition, I share the experiences that are quite similar to their own: I am a Chinese person who has been living in a Western country while they are from Western countries who have been living in China. This gave them a very positive idea that I was able to relate to their life and understand their experiences, especially their frustrations, better in comparison to the majority of Chinese people they had talked to who had not been to their home country (or any other foreign country), who were thus seen as not being able to relate to these teachers' experiences. One female participant talked about her struggles with her Chinese boyfriend, because she thought that I could understand her standpoint, which her boyfriend (who had never been to a foreign country, let alone her home country) could not.[26] Furthermore, my relatively proficient English, which was positively commented upon by almost all participants in my sample, gave them the impression that I was able to understand their cultural backgrounds since I had learned their language well, and that they would not feel frustrated to explain certain traits of their

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[24] This was primarily so with the Chinese students as our experiences were relatively identical and as we were in the same age range, less so with the Western expatriate teachers. But it was nonetheless significant in both groups.

[25] It turned out that many of the teachers had been IELTS examiners around the area besides their daily jobs as English and academic teachers in these two universities.

[26] The stories she told were very personal and private, which could only be shared with someone who was deeply trusted. The detail description and analysis of this case will be referred to in Chapter 5.2.2

original cultures, as they would to other Chinese people.[27] This allowed them to be more open and straightforward in their answers and thus released the constraints on the topics they would want to talk about.

3.9 Summary

Based on the theoretical framework proposed in Chapter 2, this chapter explains why qualitative methodologies were chosen and how focus groups and individual in-depth interviews were conducted in the fieldwork. A total number of 100 participants were involved in this study. The fieldwork started in March 2011 in Glasgow in Britain. Fifty-one Chinese participants (45 students and 6 Chinese teachers) in Glasgow were interviewed in ten focus groups and one individual interview. Later, thirty-six Western expatriate teachers were interviewed individually in Nanjing, Suzhou and Ningbo in China, and one back in Britain. These focus groups and individual interviews were all conducted with an interview guide that consisted of a list of open-ended questions that were primarily focused on the three-dimensional research questions proposed in Chapter 1. Participants were selected according to such variables as *time duration spent living in the host country* and *subject/area of study*. Additional factors that differentiate the outcome were identified in the fieldwork and listed in Tables 3-1 to 3-13. The locations of the fieldwork were also introduced and explained in relation to their potential influence on the data collected. Furthermore, my subjectivity as a Chinese PhD student in Britain was identified as an element that might have affected the outcome. In this respect, it was demonstrated that how I was seen by the participants and how my identities played an important factor in the sampling as well as in the actual fieldwork. Attention to how these identities might influence the data was addressed throughout these processes.

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[27] I was often asked by the end of the interview that where and how I learnt my English. Many would compare my English with their Chinese students and judged that I was much better.

Part II Western Expatriate Teachers in China

Chapter 4 Intention, Prior Perception and Perception Gap

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores Western expatriate teachers' perceptions of China before arrival and how these perceptions differed from their actual encounters in the local contexts. It begins with a historical introduction of the educational exchange between China and the outside, focusing particularly on the import of Western educational resources into China as an essential part of its modernisation program. **Section 4.3** shows why the Western expatriates came to China. **Section 4.4** demonstrates their prior perceptions of China and how they might differ from the perceived social reality. It first looks at what ideas they had about China before and where they obtained these ideas from. It then analyses their actual experiences by emphasising the contrast between the local reality and what they had previously expected.

4.2 Historical Background

It is necessary to refer to the 'Economic Reform' when it comes to the processes of contemporary China's massive economic development and social transformation. Before the reform, China had been in a relatively closed state with very few economic relations with the outside. Marked by the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1978, China launched a full-scope project of exchange with the outside world, promoting a fundamental reform to its economic and social structures (referred to as the 'Reform and Open-Up' Policy), and thereafter has entered into a brand new phase of modernisation.

There have been two interrelated processes emerging during China's modernisation: the import of Western-style education and the development of English language teaching and learning. Both of these have resulted in an ever-growing demand for 'foreign experts' in

the education sector.[28] Western education, since the late 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, has become significant to China, as Deng Xiaoping was convinced that the advanced science and technology enjoyed by Western countries held the key to China's modernisation and that China would need to access scientific and technological advancements worldwide to develop the knowledge base needed for national revitalisation (People's Education Press, 1986). The 'need to access', thus, marked the beginning of a process known as 'learning from the West' and raised the importance of Western education. As mentioned in Chapter 2.3, there have been a number of studies focusing on young Chinese people pursuing education in developed countries. Such studies are mostly based in the territories of Western countries. Yet to China, 'Western education' does not only refer to educational institutions based in those countries, but it also means incorporating Western educational elements into Chinese local contexts-a Western-style education. Historically there have been Western educational establishments set up on Chinese soil, focusing primarily on such areas as natural sciences and related technology (Hayhoe, 1986). A large number of Western educational experts and resources have thus been in demand in the domestic environment as these establishments all require such intellectuals to carry out the educational programs.

The other key trend that has been brought into the spotlight by the modernisation process is the importance of English as a means for Chinese people to communicate with the outside world. Crystal (1997, p. 1) asserts that 'English is the global language'. In many ways, the success of an international relationship depends heavily on the ability to accurately communicate with each other and exchange information. In order to fully incorporate the successful modernisation experiences of Western countries, the Chinese government started implementing a variety of policies to promote English language education, which had thus become an integral part of the modernisation drive (Hu, 2005). The motivation to promote English language education, however, does not only come from external pressures (the necessity to be able to understand and learn from the outside), but also from internal desire. As Pan and Block (2011, p. 400) argue, English is regarded by Chinese learners as 'having an instrumental value, a linguistic capital that could be beneficial to employment and career development of individuals'. Today, China still boasts the largest English learning population in the world (Pan and Block, 2011), with a figure of between 200 and 350 million, a number that may well exceed the total number of English speakers in the

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[28] Chinese government defines foreign intellectuals as 'foreign experts'. Source: State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs, the P. R of China.

USA (Gu, 2010). However, the current exam-oriented English teaching strategies seem unsatisfactory for most Chinese learners (Pan and Block, 2011), and new sets of methods such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which go beyond the traditional approach of teacher-centred, book-centred, grammar translation with a heavy emphasis on rote memory (Anderson, 1993), have been advocated. Nonetheless, the lack of qualified English teachers has been the most significant constraint to the application of such alternative methods (Yu, 2001), and has thus led to a huge demand of native English speakers who are qualified for teaching English in China.

4.3 Western Expatriate Teachers—Why Do They Come to China?

4.3.1 Financial Motives

As stated above, this lack of qualified English language teachers is potentially transforming the global allocation of labour in terms of English language teaching. China's massive economic development and social transformation has now generated numerous opportunities for career development as well as alternative ways of social life for foreigners. Nineteen out of the thirty-seven respondents specifically referred to China's current development or the particular job offer as their primary initiative to come. Most of them considered the offer financially better than their previous ones or good enough for them to move away. One British teacher, whose family was from a working class background, noted that the 'economic incentive' was one of the major reasons he chose to come to teach English in China.[29] Another teacher, who had retired in her home country, commented with some laughter that 'it's hard not to accept it' because of the financial attraction.[30] With the rise of China in the global market and the general decline of Western economies, flow of the financial capital into China is shifting the global market of employment. This is believed to be an important trigger for Western expatriate teachers to come to China. What has to be noted is that, in China, these Western expatriates often were treated financially and socially better than most of their Chinese colleagues, and as the

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[29] Nathan, October 2011.
[30] Grace, October 2011.

above respondent noted, if this was not the case, many of them would not have come to China. I will discuss these issues in Chapter 5.2.1.

Nonetheless, four respondents did comment in particular that they had turned down a much better offer or stepped down from a major permanent job to take the offer from China, as one female teacher from Australia noted:

> *Back then I left a very good job—in Australia's No. 1 university—to come to China to earn 50 Australian Dollars a month. That's what I did in 1997, at Hunan Agricultural University.*
>
> *(Judy, October 2011)*

Another teacher commented that she gave up a permanent academic post in Britain to come to China.[31] What underpins such choices was often to do with their personal beliefs and interests in China. One female teacher noted that there was little understanding between Western countries and China and that she wanted to come to China to be 'a world citizen' to bridge the gap in between.[32]

4.3.2 Cultural Motives

Cultural adventure and curiosity is another factor that emerged in the interviews. Historically China has been a very attractive place for European adventurers. Classic books such as *The Travels of Marco Polo* were widely read during the 13th and 14th century. In such works, China is referred to as the 'Far East'; this geographical distance, combined with government's policies of seclusion has added to a perception in Western countries that China is a mysterious place, especially since previous narratives such as Marco Polo's have generated wide controversies over the accuracy of these accounts. This partly contributes to curiosity and motivation for cultural adventures dispatched from 'the West' to 'the East'. Half of the respondents quoted cultural curiosity and adventure as their initial motive. One respondent commented that she had been interested in Chinese culture since she was a kid, especially martial arts because she grew up watching TV shows of Jackie Chan and movies of Bruce Lee and other Chinese Kong Fu stars.[33] While her interest was very strong, the country was so little known and so far away that she wanted to come and

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[31] Carine, October 2011.
[32] Sarah, October 2011.
[33] Madelyn, October 2011. Kong Fu is Chinese martial arts.

see for herself. Another teacher noted that he wanted an alternative way of life adventurous enough for him to move away from his original life circle in Europe:

> *I just wanted to go somewhere crazy. One day I looked into one of the newspapers, and it had a job advertisement in China. I looked into the map and it was up north in between Russia, Mongolia and Korea, and I thought it's kind of the crazy place I want (chuckle).*
>
> *(Andrew, October 2011)*

This comment is a clear indicator of the motive of cultural adventure.

4.3.3 Personal Contacts

There are additional factors besides the two discussed above. Some respondents had personal contacts who recommended that they work in China, such as friends who were living in China at the time or who had worked in China and come back. One British participant noted that his brother and father were already living in China at that time and it had made it easier for him to decide to join them. [34] Among such contacts, it is worth noting that eight male teachers had already been married to Chinese people, and their wives and the contact with the Chinese families served as a significant personal factor when they came to make the decision. [35]

In terms of the cultural motive, it is interesting to explore the ideas that participants had before they came to China. What did they think of China before they came? Where exactly did the cultural curiosity and fascination come from? I will now move to analyse the perceptions before and after their direct experiences with the local Chinese society.

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[34] Ian, October 2011.
[35] Whether one participant was married to a Chinese person is shown in Table 3-11 in Chapter 3.3.2.

4.4 Previous Perceptions and the Perception Gap

4.4.1 What Did They Think of China?

4.4.1.1 Images from the Media

For most respondents, media accounts were the biggest source of their previous perceptions of China. Over three quarters of the sample referred to it. News reports and movies accounted for the majority of what were cited. Nearly one third of the sample quoted *Kong Fu* movies of Bruce Lee or Jackie Chan as they were quite popular in their home countries. One teacher even commented, with some laughter, that 'when I was a kid, we thought all Chinese people studied Kong Fu'.[36] Nevertheless, movies are an art form which does not necessarily offer an accurate account of a particular country. One respondent related this issue to some Chinese people's perceptions of the US:

> *It's just like in China where they think they go to the United States, everybody is going to wave a gun around, right? You know, lots of Chinese they can only go by movies they watch.*
>
> *(Lucy, October 2011)*

This participant's reflection on Chinese people's perception of the US was not necessarily accurate, but media accounts are nonetheless a natural source for the knowledge of foreign cultures when there are little direct sources of information. Since press freedom is very limited in China and the Chinese government exercises one of the most rigid censorship regimes in the world,[37] the sources for Chinese people to access foreign information can be limited to music, TV programs and movies. Sherman's (2010) narratives of his own personal experiences also indicates that American TV series and movies are a popular source for Chinese people to learn about the country, yet the ideas obtained from these sources can be quite different from what American people might have. What's more, these ideas can be quite far away from the everyday social experiences of the foreign society,

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[36] John, October 2011.
[37] Norris and Inglehart's (2009, p. 144) research reveals that in 2005, the level of press freedom in China was one the lowest in the world, only higher than countries such as Cuba, Libya and Iran.

and often dramatic. One female teacher described her interesting learning experience of the Chinese language from movies and music:

> *I thought I spoke some Chinese but it was only because I was watching a lot of Chinese movies. So I knew things like 'Kill him for me!' (chuckle), you know. And I had been listening to the songs, so I knew how to say 'I love you'. So I was able to say either 'I'm going to kill you' or 'I love you' (chuckle). That's all I could say, you know (chuckle). And it wasn't very useful.*
>
> *(Madelyn, October 2011)*

With regards to news reports, quite often, the respondents consciously generated critical reflections on such sources themselves, as one participant commented, 'I distrust the media implicitly because the media is partly selling something'. Here participants were referring to media in general, but more likely media from their home countries. A third of the respondents noted that 'fear' and 'threat' had been the prevailing feelings generated from Western media discourse on issues related to China. One teacher[38] commented that 'no matter what China does, there is an underlying fear that it's going to take over things, and it's going to attack and it's going to be militaristic.' Another couple witnessed the 60th Anniversary of the PRC in China and the husband commented on the militaristic image that the American news reports delivered:

> *Recently we had this 60th anniversary (of People's Republic of China) in China. Many Americans reacted to the fact that there was so much military equipment on display. They were saying 'they are becoming a big military country' and they were feeling very threatened by that. And the news media in America played that up because it was big news. So everybody has a totally incorrect picture of what China is doing and nobody really knows.*
>
> *(Phillips, Mar. 2011)*

Another teacher from Australia commented that because of China's recent economic achievement and military power, news reports from Australian media outlets often saw China as a big threat:

> *I saw a ridiculous report in Australia recently about China obtaining an aircraft carrier. The US, I think it might have been even Hilary Clinton, wants an explanation why China wants to have one of these. And I thought to myself this is so ridiculous. Why do they see China as a threat? The US must have hundreds of them, and yet they are worried about China having ONE (chuckle). I just think this is the perception that China is becoming powerful and somehow dangerous. I think the perception is dangerous.*

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[38] Sarah, October 2011.

(Peter, October 2011)

It has to be noted here, however, that what participants received as the primary representations of China from these media sources does not necessarily reflect the whole reality of the media accounts in Western countries, and the effects of them on audience perceptions should be contested. For such effects can only be studied in relation to the real intentions of particular media outlets (Williams, 1990), and the audience's perceptions most likely change upon direct exposure to the social context of it (Philo, 1990). Nonetheless, it can be seen from these comments that media accounts are indeed an important source of information about China for people in the West, and the perceptions formed through them are inclined to be concerned with political regimes, human rights issues and economic developments. One respondent[39] described the news reports she had read, and commented that there were often two things about China in the media: the first was that 'it is not democratic' and the second was 'its rapid economic growth'. Over half of the participants in my sample revealed similar thoughts as well. The fact that more than half of the respondents had come to China because of the economic developments just manifests that Chinese economic developments were highly likely to be well acknowledged in Western countries.

Some of the teachers' parents showed more negative feelings towards China because of its communist political system and human rights issues. One British female respondent[40] reported that when she told her father she was going to China, her father said it was very dangerous and even threatened that he would hide her passport. Three of the respondents were originally from a former communist country or the family was of a communist background in recent generations ago;[41] their parents would make judgments about contemporary China using their previous knowledge and actual experiences of living a communist country. One respondent commented on how her grandmother reacted to her decision of going to live in China:

> *When I got my position, I told my grandmother. We are of Hungarian background, which is also used to be communist country. I remember my grandmother saying to me 'we've fought so hard to leave communism, I can't*

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[39] Hannah, October 2011.
[40] Poppy, October 2011.
[41] In the interviews, I did not ask specifically about this, but three respondents mentioned it when the issue of communist society was discussed. It is possible that there were other participants in my sample whose family had previous background of living in communist countries that I am not aware of.

believe two generations later, you are going back to communism'. From her perspective, it was just bizarre, you know. I have friends now who still can't understand why I've kept coming back, you know, the communist, the party, and human rights, and we can go on and on.

(Judy, October 2011)

For her grandmother who was originally from a communist country and was now living in a democratic country, the fundamental difference underlying the two types of government, that is the political regimes and the social orders derived from them, was the primary reason they left a communist state. It was thus not a surprising reaction to question their relatives' decision of coming to China and to be suspicious, confusing and even worried. It was reported that the particular disturbing political events in the history of communist China made a significant prior impression. For example, one male respondent from Britain[42] noted that his family had quite negative feelings towards China because the only things they knew about China were political disturbances such as the Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen Square; from their perspective, it was hard to understand why someone would go to a communist country which, in their own views, had less freedom and human rights. These three particular participants, after coming to China, were able to relate their experiences of China directly to their previous experiences in communist societies and showed more understanding towards the current transformation in China. One of these teachers was originally from Poland and she reflected on previous social transformations of Poland in the 1980s:

I had an idea in 2001 that it would be very much like Poland pre-1980s—when we had changed the government, things happened in Poland as well. People were kind of dependent on the state rather than their initiative. So I was not at all surprised although some people from Britain couldn't understand certain things.

(Grace, October 2011)

China's being 'communist' and the 'human rights' issues were two interrelated topics that were commonly reflected in my sample, and according to the respondents' answers, it was obvious that such issues had been well acknowledged amongst people back in their home countries. One teacher from Britain commented on how he became aware of these matters and the ways in which he understood them from BBC reports:

They (BBC and other left-leaning liberal media outlets) are quite skeptical of China's authorities, of the Chinese governmental control over its people, and

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[42] Nick, October 2011.

particularly issues such as censorship and lack of freedom of speech. So I was aware there would be a difference in political consciousness and the sense of the function that individual plays in society. So I was aware that there would be different perceptions of what you can and cannot do; what you can and cannot see; what you can and cannot read and so on. I was aware there would be some limitations in freedom. That was kind of my BBC-filtered image of China.

(Nathan, October 2011)

His comments reveal that he was already aware of the political control over some public spheres in China, such as limited access to information and less freedom of public expression on certain topics. The issue of censorship was frequently mentioned in the interviews, with one teacher[43] commenting that a lot of her colleagues decided not to come to China because of the censorship. In this study, I also include six British nationals (teachers and students in universities) who had not been to China as a control group for the purpose of comparison. The three students from this group commented on the human rights issues, and all noted specifically the news stories of the Chinese famous artist (also a vocal public critic) Ai Weiwei[44] who was under house arrest, because they were widely circulated in British news reports at the time of the interview.[45] Generally, it was reported that a lot of the information about China in the media had revolved around such issues. Another teacher also commented on what he considered as biased information on American news reports:

Since living in China, I find very strongly whenever I go back to the West, particularly America but Britain too, there is a very strong biased opinion against China. The information is biased, and there is a lot of anti-Chinese propaganda. The things they tell you and the news are just not true and wrong. And the suspicion of China, almost fear I would say in America—they are very afraid of China; they think they are going to try to take over the world, and its military power, you know, that kind of thing. And they don't have an idea about what modern China is like. I didn't. So I didn't have much source of information.

(Madelyn, October 2011)

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[43] Nick, October 2011.

[44] Ai Weiwei is a successful Chinese artist based in Beijing. He has an international reputation and helped create the Olympic 'Bird's Nest' stadium for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games. He has been using his fame and position to criticize the Chinese government about human rights issues. Ai Weiwei is an avid user of social networking sites such as Twitter, which makes his voice more widely heard.

[45] This particular focus group interview was conducted on April 23th, 2011. Ai Weiwei was detained at Beijing Airport on April 3rd and had been under house arrest since then (China's foreign ministry claimed that he was under the investigation of suspected tax evasion) until he was released on bail on June 22nd 2011. The BBC reported the series of stories of Ai's detention from April 3rd to 8th everyday (and also followed the investigation through during May and June until he was released on Jun 22nd). Source: *BBC, 03/04/2011, BBC, 04/04/2011, BBC, 05/04/2011, BBC, 07/04/2011, BBC, 07/04/2011, BBC, 08/04/2011, BBC 16/05/2011, BBC 26/06/2011.*

Her comment, similar to some previous comments, certainly sheds some light on the current situation of how media in Western countries presents China, yet the ways in which the general public have received such messages are not necessarily indicated by these comments. The relationship between media accounts and audience reception is complex, and the latter cannot be well understood simply through the contents of the former as mass communication is a circulation of processes in which production, content and audience reception are mutually dependent upon each other (Philo, 2007). Ang (1991, p. 2) asserts that the institutions that are directly responsible for producing and transmitting television programming rely on the actual existence of the audience in very material terms. Media accounts are, therefore, very likely formed upon institutional interests as well as their anticipated reactions of potential audiences with whom they have certain economic relationships. This indicates that it is indeed possible that Western media accounts focus on political and human rights aspects of China and try to manipulate public perceptions as commented, but these do not necessarily represent how the audience understands the media and reacts to it. Nonetheless, it was noted that their previous actual experience of Western media had resulted in a rather limited and imbalanced understanding of China. One teacher from Britain narrated his only prior experience with China and noted with some laughter that 'funny thing is that the only thing I knew about China was the Tiananmen Square':

> *I was working in a hotel in my early twenties in London. I used to go for my lunch and they had a TV there. For a week, we had to watch Tiananmen Square. It was on TV for 10 days or two weeks even. I remember following it, and when the tanks went in and shots fired, because we didn't expect it. We expected it would like what happened to Russia, I suppose. So funny enough, that was the only real connection I had with China—it was watching Tiananmen on TV.*
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> *(Andrew, October 2011)*

4.4.1.2 Information Derived from Personal Contacts

Personal contact, on the other hand, was referred to in my sample as another important source of information. One male respondent commented on how he saw personal contact with people who had been to China as a reliable source:

> *Westerners who had worked in China and had come back from China, I did listen to their stories very carefully because the experiences I'm going to have*

*are not going to be media experiences; they are going to be experiences of a
person being displaced in a foreign culture.*

(Anthony, October 2011)

One of the British students in my sample,[46] who had not been to China, noted that her
sister had been to Beijing and told her what it was like. One third of the sample had
personal interactions with Chinese people back in their home countries, which provided
them with ideas of how real Chinese people lived and socialised. Two teachers mentioned
particularly that they had taught Chinese students English back home,[47] and two male
respondents once had Chinese girlfriends and met with their families,[48] which gave them a
fairly good idea of how Chinese people thought and interacted, especially in a family
environment.

The perceptions that were based on personal contacts were mostly positive. One teacher[49]
had worked in a company with people from China, and he got the idea that Chinese people
were smart and extremely hard working. Another respondent[50] noted that his best friend
back in Canada was a Chinese person; they went to kindergarten together and spent most
of their childhood together, and he even worked at the friend's parents' restaurant. Thus he
always felt very comfortable with China and Chinese people. Another female teacher
described similar experiences with diaspora Chinese people in her home country:

*When I went to secondary school, I spent about 6 important years (11-18) with
a group of Chinese girls. I spent a lot of time with them; I learnt a bit of
Chinese with them and also about Chinese cooking. And I learnt a lot about
Chinese culture from them. I just became very interested in Chinese culture.*

(Carine, October 2011)

For some Western expatriate teachers, their families' contacts with Chinese people also
served as a good indicator. One respondent's[51] father was a professor of medicine in
Britain and had a lot of Chinese students. Another teacher's family once hosted a Chinese
academic, which, combined with his knowledge of Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong,
provided him an idea that Chinese people were very hard working:

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[46] Amy, Mar. 2011.
[47] John, October 2011 and Adam, October 2011.
[48] Thomas, October 2011 and John, October 2011.
[49] Gary, October 2011.
[50] Alex, October 2011.
[51] Hannah, October 2011.

> *I remember my family back in the UK always have positive views about China and Chinese, not only because the people from Hong Kong traditionally in the UK are always being hardworking and successful—they have a reputation. My mother hosted a Chinese academic; this was when China was still a very much closed country before the country opened up. She hosted a Chinese academic from one of the universities in Beijing. It was for two years and we got along very well.*
>
> *(JS, October 2011)*

As a result of the massive migration movements of Chinese people to the outside world, Chinatowns and Chinese restaurants were referred to in my sample as additional common places for experiencing Chinese cultures. Almost two thirds of the sample mentioned this in the interviews. In Britain, for example, Chau and Yu (2001)'s study suggests that the consumption of Chinese food has been the main channel for other people in Britain to have contact with Chinese people. One respondent in my study[52] noted that she grew up in Chinatown and could use chopsticks when she was only 6 years old. However, to most respondents, such experience was rather limited. One teacher[53] commented on Chinese restaurant: 'You don't really know those people. It is just an experience.' She further commented that the same Chinese people working in the catering service were not often seen socialising with the rest of the society, and they somehow disappeared into their own isolated community after work. In Britain, as Chau and Yu (2001, p. 116) argue, 'the interaction between many Chinese and the members of mainstream society is essentially limited to a commodity relationship regulated by the private market', particularly by the catering service. They observe that, from the British perspective, the trade with a Chinese restaurant is based predominantly on cultural differences, namely, how distant the experience is from the routine meal British people would have. In addition, the fact that a large proportion of Chinese migrants are based in catering service market attracts more attention to them as a commodity rather than citizens (Chau and Yu, 2001, p. 119). This sheds some light on the reason why some participants frequented Chinese restaurants back home but still had the idea that the Chinese people working there were very much unknown, mysterious and often not active in socialising with the rest of the population outside of work.

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[52] Judy, October 2011.
[53] Hannah, October 2011.

4.4.2 What Has Been Different from Their Previous Ideas?

Nonetheless, the experiences and knowledge that the Western expatriate teachers had before they came were generally limited to a rather confined perspective. There were gaps between their previous ideas and the social context they had encountered.

4.4.2.1 The Actual Living Conditions of Local Chinese People

The most prominent gap was in the perceptions of the general living conditions of people in the mainland China. Almost half of the respondents expected a far less 'modernised' China. By the term 'modern' or 'modernised', participants here were referring to urban construction, commercial development and the general living condition of people, which contrasted to what they previously expected to be–a predominantly rural China. The general picture of China was, as an American teacher[54] depicted, that everybody ate rice all the time, rode bicycles and there were lots of fields, farmers, workers and countryside. One respondent[55] reported that she thought China would be 'the contrast to modernity', with lots of traditional buildings. Another teacher[56] noted that he had an expectation of far less cities and skyscrapers, and was surprised to see the massive urban developments. One teacher described how shocking it was for him to see the development in China and how modern it was when he arrived:

> *We had impressions that Chinese would live in—some of them still do—old, classical architecture homes. You can see them sometimes here, but we had no idea that China was going to be like it is now, you know, with high-rises everywhere. That was probably the eye-opening experience when I went to Beijing for the first time, the number of massive buildings, huge huge buildings. From television, I thought everyone would be riding bicycles, but now everybody just drives cars or the electrical bicycles.*
>
> *(John, October 2011)*

As was shown previously, Western expatriate teachers were aware of the massive economic developments occurring in China, and for most it was the primary motive of coming to China. However, a picture of far less 'modern' and far more rural China still

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[54] Katherine, October 2011.
[55] Hannah, October 2011.
[56] Jake, October 2011.

remained in the back of their minds. As one respondent[57] who came in 2004 noted, he knew China was developing economically really fast, but because it was such a big country with such a huge population, he was expecting a lot more poverty than he actually saw. It was a surprise for him to see so much modern construction and so much wealth on display. Those who came to China very recently also made similar comments. Therefore, such perception gap was consistent against the time variable. What should be emphasised here is the particular locality where the participants were based, which is believed to be a significant variable in my study. As I have previously discussed in Chapter 3.5, the three cities where I conducted my fieldwork are all located within the Yangtze River Delta area, which is arguably one of the wealthiest part of China; even within this area itself, there are differences between urban cities and rural villages. Thus the experiences of respondents in relative wealthier urban cities in China cannot be applied to other parts such as inner/western cities or even the rural outskirts of the cities where this research was based. Nonetheless what can still be seen from such comments is that despite the fact that China's economic growth has been represented through media to the outside and acknowledged by people in Western countries, there was still a relatively large gap between what the Western expatriate teachers expected and what they had actually experienced in the local context in terms of the urban development and general living environment in China.

4.4.2.2 Social Behaviour—the 'Inscrutable Chinese'

The perception gaps were not only in terms of environmental conditions, but also, more significantly, in ways of thinking and the social behaviour of Chinese people. The stereotype of China and Chinese people was 'inscrutable'. This particular term was quoted specifically by six respondents, yet the experiences of cultural shock generated by encounters related to it have been frequently mentioned by almost all Western expatriate teachers. I will discuss this in Chapter 7.

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[57] Peter, October 2011.

4.5 Summary

The major initiatives for Western expatriate teachers to come to China were economic and cultural. As I mentioned, China has been eager to attract Western educational resources to establish its own Western-style education at a local level as well as to enhance the general quality of English teaching. With its fast-growing economy, the country has now been able to provide sufficient funds and a well-suited environment for these teachers. The potential decline of Western economies after the financial crisis may have further prompted such movement of global employment in education from these Western countries to China. On the other hand, historically China has been seen as a place of mystery and adventure, and it was only in the late 1970s when China fully opened up its doors of exchange. Though information had been flowing in and out of China, there was still a strong sense of cultural curiosity and fascination amongst the Western expatriate teachers, and most likely other people in the West, towards China.

In terms of their previous perceptions of China, news reports and movies, as media products, were the sources that were most referred to. The information received from such sources, however, was often limited in that it was most likely to focus on political issues, with the most notable being the Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen Square incident, as well as economic development. On the other hand, the real life experiences learnt from people who had gone through similar processes were seen as better reference. These personal contacts were the second most cited source and often considered as a more reliable one compared to media outlets. Chinatowns and Chinese restaurants in Western countries were quite popular and indeed provided a basic idea of how real Chinese people lived and socialised, but they were commonly seen as a cultural experience or even a commodity (Chau and Yu, 2001) rather than to lead to any deeper understanding of Chinese people as a social group in the mainstream of the society.

There were thus perception gaps between these limited previous perceptions and their direct experiences of China. The most notable one was the contrast between what the participants expected as a very rural China and the massive urban construction and the 'modernised' living environment. This is, however, only a reflection of the particular localities where the sample was based. Nonetheless, such urban development of these

metropolitan urban areas were nonetheless out of their previous knowledge, which was based primarily on movies and news reports. There were certainly other aspects of China that were contrasting to their prior perceptions, such as the ways in which Chinese people behaved in public as well as in a private context. This will be discussed in particular in Chapter 7 with the emphasis on the Chinese concept of 'face'.

Chapter 5 Foreign Identities, Discrimination and Racism

5.1 Introduction

This chapter shows the experiences of Western expatriate teachers in relation to their particular identity as *laowai* in China.[58] **Section 5.2** demonstrates the ways in which Chinese people treated them and explains why they were treated in such ways, with an emphasis on the differences between cultural perspectives. **Section 5.3** presents the effects of being a foreigner in China. It first looks at issues of discrimination and racism. Then it shows how Western expatriate teachers formed social relations with Chinese people from two perspectives: friendships and relationships (or marriage), with an emphasis on gender difference. **Section 5.4** analyses the social interactions between the sampled expatriate teachers and local Chinese people. It first looks at the interactions on university campuses. Then it focuses on their general social interactions with the wider society and demonstrates their different types of life styles which are defined by their particular ways of forming social relations in China. **Section 5.5** shows the experiences of Western expatriate teachers living together with Chinese people.

5.2 Being a '*Laowai*' in China

The discussion related to the perception gap has revealed that China still remains relatively unknown to the outside, and of the little that is known, most has come from media sources. On the other hand, correspondingly, Chinese people who have not travelled to the outside most likely have limited understanding of it as well. There is still a strong curiosity towards foreign people.

The circumstances might vary, however, between regions. In relatively wealthier regions such as the Yangtze River Delta, there is more exposure for Chinese people to foreigners

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[58] *Laowai* literally means 'old outsider' in Chinese, but its more accurate translation is 'foreigner'.

and foreign products than in some inner/western cities and rural areas. Arguably, China has witnessed a growth in the foreign population and foreign goods in recent years. This was agreed by Western expatriate teachers who had been in China for more than 5 years. The growing exposure for Chinese people to Western countries had made it easier for new-coming Western expatriates because the food and products that they were used to at home can now be more easily accessed. However, for participants who first came more than 5 years ago, their initial experiences were quite overwhelming. At that time, the foreign population was quite small. One British teacher[59] came to Ningbo 11 years ago, and as he could recall, there were only 50 foreign people in the whole city at that time.

5.2.1 How Do Chinese People React to Them?

The most common reactions they received from Chinese people had been being starred at, pointed at and shouted at with the word '*laowai*'. The word literally means 'old outsider' but the more accurate social translation is 'foreigner'. One teacher[60] noted that 'literally, people stop their tracks and look at you walk by, as if you were a foreign ghost'. Another[61] described a situation where everyone (Chinese people around him) was pointing at him and saying '*laowai*, *laowai*'. It was also reported that they had also constantly been in the situation where local people would take pictures of them. From their perspectives, this might have been the result of the lack of exposure for Chinese people to the outside. People were really interested in foreigners because they were 'quite a novelty in China', as one respondent noted:

> *They want to know us. They want to talk to us. Whereas if you are an immigrant or a foreigner in the UK or Australia, there are so many foreigners, people are not necessarily interested.*
>
> *(Peter, October 2011)*

Even for those who came only in the last one or two years, there were still similar experiences for them. It was noted that many of their students (who were in the first year of university) had not talked to a foreigner before or seen a black person. This indicates that even people in higher education were still likely to have not had much experience with the foreign population.

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[59] Alex, October 2011.
[60] John, October 2011.
[61] Alex, October 2011.

These encounters had been more striking in cases where the expatriates came with their young children. An American teacher[62] came with her five-year-old daughter 12 years ago to the city of Dalian in the northeastern part of China. She narrated that when she and her daughter were walking along the street, the entire traffic stopped and everybody was sticking their heads out from cars and buses to watch her 'blonde hair, blue eyes' daughter and shouting '*wai guo ren*' (foreign man) or '*wai guo hai er*' (foreign kid) at her, because all those people had most likely not seen a foreign child before. She continued to comment and explained that it was a totally different way of expressing curiosity and love in China:

> *It was curious. They had not seen a foreign child, they called her 'yang wa wa' (foreign doll) because she just looked like a doll to them. They would touch her and she would be frightened. So it was very difficult to live in that situation because they were trying to express their love and appreciation and she was terrified. In China children are more obedient; in America children are individuals, so people ask permission to children to do things like touching them.*
>
> *(Sarah, October 2011)*

Her comment indicates that the ways in which Chinese people showed concern and interest would sometimes be considered as impolite or even intimidating from an American perspective. It can be seen that, in the US children are more likely to be treated as individuals with more respect rather than as appendants to the parents, which is more often the case in China. This same respondent described another story that seemed to be frightening from her perspective:

> *I remember once we were buying an ice-cream cone, and I was paying for the ice-cream cone and all of a sudden I turned around and my daughter's disappeared, and I hear her scream! Some man had picked her up and carried her off across the street to show his mother what a foreign child looks like. She had nightmares for weeks afterwards about being stolen. But again he was not being unkind.*
>
> *(Sarah, October 2011)*

This of course had been an extreme case, but it nonetheless demonstrates a certain level of the degree to which some Chinese people were not used to interacting with foreigners. It also manifests the different ways of expressing love and interest: for Chinese people, it is more likely that they show their love and interest by being directly curious, whereas the same social behaviour can be interpreted as being rude, impolite or intimidating in some

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[62] Sarah, October 2011.

Western countries. Another female teacher from Britain also commented on this issue yet tried to look for an explanation from a Chinese point of view:

> *I have a son, who is blonde. There is that. Everywhere I go, he gets these photos taken; he is looked at; people ask if they can see him. People are very nice, and they are never rude. Some foreigners don't like it at all. But I don't mind. I let him have his photo taken. It's OK. But part of me thinks it's very naïve. If I see a Chinese kid in England, I don't take a photo. In an international world, racial difference and ethnic difference should not be that interesting. If you are truly international, then seeing a kid shouldn't be a big deal.*
>
> *(Hannah, October 2011)*

What has to be noted again is that the respondents in my sample were all based on university campuses, which is a relatively enclosed self-contained environment. The students and colleagues are generally more open-minded than the general public outside of the 'university campus bubble', as was referred to by some teachers. The campus environment had thus made it easier for Western expatriate teachers to deal with. In addition, as mentioned, there is a growing appearance of foreigners in the metropolitan cities where my fieldwork was based. Nonetheless, for the general public and most other parts of China, it is likely that there still exists a lack of understanding of the foreign world.

5.2.2 Why Do Chinese People React in Such Ways?

To analyse the factors that might have formed their prominent identity as being *laowai* in China, I will now look at some salient features in the different cultural backgrounds.

5.2.2.1 Multiculturalism in Western Countries vs. Ethnic Uniformity in China

The Western expatriates in my sample all come from countries that are arguably multicultural (the UK, the US, Australia, Canada, Spain and Poland), whereas the Han People accounts for the majority of the Chinese population. As commented, their home countries had been so multicultural and ethnically diverse that they were shocked to see the uniform ethnicity in most Chinese cities they had visited. Even though there is an

increasing number of foreign people coming and staying in China, the huge population density and the population ratio of Chinese people against foreigners still makes it impossible for foreign faces to be a normal appearance for local Chinese people.

5.2.2.2 Different Geographical Mobility

The lack of exposure to and understanding of different cultures might not have simply resulted from ethnic uniformity, but also because Chinese people are not likely to have travelled extensively within their own country, let alone to a foreign one. It was commented that a large proportion of the Chinese people they had encountered had not been to a foreign country before, whereas in their home countries travelling was more common and population mobility seemed much higher. Thus it was frustrating for them to connect with Chinese people because of the lack of shared experiences. One respondent compared his personal experiences with his observations of Chinese people in terms of geographical mobility:

> *What's normal in my life is I travel a lot. For most people in China, that's just not so. People here are restricted geographically to a much greater degree than they are in Europe. My wife is Chinese. OK, we travel. But most of her family is from Fujian Province, and they don't move far from their home. They are very fixed in one location, whereas I've lived in 5 or 6 places for extended periods of time. They think that's just crazy. My wife has an auntie, who lives about 80 kilometers from Fuzhou. I was teaching in Fuzhou for a while; we went out to see her. She told me 'I've been to Fuzhou! And I've been there twice! But it's very very far away, and I don't want to go again. The travelling made me very very sick'. You know, it's 80 kilometers away, and here is a lady who is 50 years old, in her whole life, she's travelled 80 kilometers twice!*
>
> *(Jake, October 2011)*

As noted, this respondent had been living in different foreign countries, each for an extensive period of time, as an expatriate. It was further indicated (although some indirectly) that over half of the Western expatriates in my sample had lived and worked in other foreign countries such as in the Middle East for extended periods as well. This study thus believes that extensive travelling and staying overseas was a common behaviour specifically shared amongst these Western expatriates. Therefore, the above-mentioned particular comment certainly reflects different geographical mobility between Chinese people and people from Western countries, but it does not necessarily indicate the whole of

China or the West.[63]

The geographical mobility of Chinese people has historically been restricted by the government policy of *hukou* (household registration), which still holds its power in population mobility and the distribution of labour in China to date. Introduced in 1950s, the *hukou* system of population registration essentially confines Chinese people to the land of birth and fundamentally divides them, from the very beginning of their lives, into the dichotomy of rural and urban citizenships. The *hukou* registration system was not only the defining factor for establishing identity, citizenship and official status but it was also the essential element for every aspect of life, without which individuals were not eligible for food, clothing or housing, nor could they be employed, obtain education or even establish marriage (Cheng and Selden, 1994, p. 644). Even though the *hukou* system has been relaxed to a much greater extent since the 1980s, allowing people to work and live in a different place than the cities where their *hukou* are registered, there are still social welfare schemes that these people are not eligible for in places other than their *hukou* registered places (Shen and Huang, 2003), constraining the geographical mobility of the population as a whole. Certainly people can re-register their *hukou* to a different city, but it usually has very strict regulations and procedures, especially for metropolitan cities where opportunities for careers are more attractive than other cities. It is thus often quite difficult to apply for re-registration for many people who do not have the financial and social resources needed.

Thus the social and institutional backgrounds of Chinese people are likely to lead to differences in ideas and behaviour in terms of travelling and experiencing different places and cultures. These contrasted to the experiences of Western expatriates who were much more likely to have travelled extensively to connect with many Chinese people. Yet more importantly, because Chinese people in general did not have much experience with foreign cultures, the Western expatriates' cultural identity as a foreigner exceeded their other identities and became the most significant one for them in China.

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[63] In Chapter 13.4, I will discuss Chinese students' perceived attitudes of British people in terms of tourism. It is believed that such attitudes most likely vary between different social and family backgrounds.

5.3 The Effects of the Foreign Identity in China

5.3.1 Positive Discrimination and Racism

Most local Chinese people have quite different experiences with foreign cultures compared to the Western expatriates in my sample. Being a *laowai* in China does not only mean that one is visibly different, it also has certain social and cultural meanings. I will now look at the ways in which Western expatriate teachers interpret their cultural identities and relate them to their personal and professional lives.

As I have mentioned in Chapter 4.2, China has been eager to attract educational resources from Western societies to set up its own Western-style education. However it seems that qualified teachers are still in short supply. One British teacher who had been in China for more than 10 years recalled that China was almost desperate for foreigners to teach English at that time he first arrived:

> *The amount of time I would walk down the streets in Dandong (Northeastern China) and be offered a job was crazy. On the Internet, everywhere was 'Job in China'.*
>
> <div align="right">(Ian, 2011)</div>

He admitted that now since there was an increasing trend of Western expatriates coming to China and the employers' standard of qualification had gone up significantly, it was still not difficult for them to find a good job as an English teacher. As mentioned in Chapter 4.3, the economic factor had been the primary motive for over half of the Western expatriates to work in China. This was also reflected by the ways in which they had been financially treated in the universities. As agreed by all the respondents, Western expatriate teachers as a group were treated financially differently from their Chinese colleagues. One respondent from Australia commented on the different financial treatments between Western expatriate teachers and Chinese administrators in her university:

> *The rules for the foreign teachers are very different to the rules for the Chinese teachers. The Chinese people that are employed here get a much rougher deal than the Westerners that are employed here. For example, in the first-year offers, every administration staff in that offer has a master's degree, but they*

get paid a lot lot less than the (foreign) teachers, and not all the (foreign) teachers have master's degrees. The reason we are paid more is our foreign faces. The more foreign faces, the more students you will get and the more money the university will make.

(Jocelyn, 2011)

Such comments were quite common in my sample, yet it has to be noted that the comparison were made specifically between Western expatriates who were all in academic departments and their Chinese colleagues who were mostly in the administration departments. There were indeed a few Chinese professors also in academic departments who were receiving equivalent contracts in terms of salary and welfare with all the Western teachers. During the fieldwork, I also came across a Taiwanese and a Singaporean (who was Chinese in terms of ethnicity) teacher[64] who were working in the academic departments with the same financial package as the Western expatriate teachers. However, the fact that Western expatriate teachers had occupied most of the academic positions in these institutions nonetheless suggests that the funding of the universities were intended more to Western teachers than to the Chinese ones. Given the comments that it was not uncommon for Chinese administration staff to have higher degrees than most Western expatriate teachers, a direct correlation between Western expatriate teachers' foreign identity and better financial status was indicated.

In a broader sense, these teachers were socially different from their Chinese counterparts. As discussed previously, the identity as a *laowai* was beyond any other identity they held such as gender or profession. One female teacher[65] commented that 'there is no sexuality at all. I am a foreigner before I am a woman.' She continued to explain that if she went to apply for a job, the Chinese employers would not compare her with a male or a female but rather with a Chinese person. In social contexts, she had been invited to some very high-level banquets just because she was a foreigner. In this respect, she commented that 'I am invited to this thing not because I am me, not because I am very professional, but just because I am a white face'. A Canadian teacher commented on the attitudes of the local people and the government towards them when he and his wife[66] first came to Ningbo in 2000:

The attitude at that time that I took was that I was like a rock star. In a way that is true because we used to be on television fairly frequently; we would be

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[64] They are not included in my sample and data.
[65] Sarah, October 2011.
[66] She was Canadian as well.

invited to events with the Mayor. When they have the Ningbo fashion shows and things like that, we were VIPs. They would buy us traditional Chinese suits and they would dress us up in these traditional clothes, and we would go to these things or they would invite us to ceremonies, about once a month when we were here. It was very cool. Everyone in town kind of knew us, because we were out all the time and we weren't shy about it.

(Alex, October 2011)

The background for this to occur was that the Ningbo government was trying to internationalised the city and promote their metropolitan image; and this respondent and his wife had been the very first group of foreigners coming to the city. It can be seen that the primary factor underpinning their social interactions with local Chinese people was their unique identity as foreigners. This particular identity resulted in them directly being linked to a better socio-cultural condition. Another respondent from Britain described her experiences in the local hospital when she had a tumour:

When I walked in the Chinese hospital, there is a massive queue and everybody is waiting. But because I'm a laowai, they move me to the front. And I get first treatment. I think that's only because I am white. Because there are old people waiting, and the doctor immediately sees me first, in a public hospital.

(Hannah, October 2011)

As discussed above, their unique identity sometimes also led to a certain degree of curiosity that from their original cultural perspective can be interpreted as being impolite or rude, such as being starred at, pointed at or having their photo taken without prior consent. Nonetheless, in general, their identity as foreigners had very positive social and cultural meanings. This is referred to in this study as 'positive discrimination'. The concept of 'positive discrimination' normally refers to 'policies and practices which favour groups (mainly ethnic groups and women) who have historically experienced disadvantages (usually in fields of employment and education)' (Scott and Marshall, 2009, p. 581). Here it simply refers to the ideas and practices that favour particular social groups.

All the comments that reveal positive discrimination were from white expatriates. One black respondent and half a dozen white female respondents noted that racism towards black people very much existed in China. This suggests that it is very likely that only white expatriates in China are in preferential position socially and culturally. Black expatriates, on the other hand, are likely to constantly cope with racism. One black female teacher from Britain commented that 'I have never experienced racism before until I came to China':

Sometimes somebody would just see me and then they would just go. I think it's just maybe they haven't seen many black people, and they would just physically go. I've been to a massage bar before, and I went with a Chinese friend. There were two ladies who were going to give us massage, and one of the ladies saw me and immediately went away. So I just kind of knew. So that's really difficult to take. And it's pretty obvious, you don't need language to understand.

(Carine, 2011)

This respondent's fiancé was a white person from Ireland, so she was also able to reflect on the different ways in which Chinese people treated him. She commented that in China 'there is an association between whiteness and superiority and financial power, and the blackness with the Third World in general'. Another white respondent also revealed the link between whiteness and financial power through his narrative:

I was going to the bamboo forest in Chongqing, the bus driver started arguing with my friends about the hotel. All I heard was 'wai guo ren' (foreigner), and something like 'he shouldn't go there'. And I thought she was being racist. Then my friend informed me that that woman told her that the hotel was only a three-star, and foreigners should have at least four-star. It was like reverse racism, I guess. It was very strange, she was being racist in a way that I couldn't accept such low quality. Or we expect better.

(Matthew, October 2011)

He further commented that it might have to do with that Chinese people thinking that white people were financially better off in general. As mentioned above, such comments did not only come from the black expatriate teacher herself, but also from white expatriates as well. One female teacher[67] mentioned that there was a lot of racism but because she was white, she could get off easily; yet for her black friends and colleagues, it had been quite difficult to cope with. My interviews thus suggest that in socio-cultural contexts, white and black expatriates are very likely to have quite contrasting experiences. One white teacher from Australia mentioned that there was even institutional discrimination from higher educational institution towards black expatriates as well:

I once worked in Guangzhou for an Australian university. They were told by the principal of the whole complex that they were not to employ people with black faces.

(Jocelyn, 2011)

Previous studies also suggest that racism is a significant issue in contemporary China. Sautman (1994) provides an account of the serious clashes between Chinese students and

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[67] Madelyn, October 2011.

African students on university campuses in China during the 1980s and 1990s. He notes that what triggered these conflicts was not xenophobia but racism in that Chinese students viewed African students as dark and backward peasants (Sautman, 1994, p. 435). Dik ötter (1992) also argues that blackness has always historically been a symbolic expression for slavery in China. Certainly racial prejudice against black people may well exist in various other countries as well, some with greater extent, yet as Dik ötter (1992, p. 195) observes, the discourse of racism in China has never been as overtly expressed, discussed and contested as in some Western countries, suggesting a high potential of its pervasiveness and tenacity in contemporary China. Sautman (1994, p. 435) also argues in his work that negative stereotypes of black people in China might have come from overseas Chinese students who convey negative impressions of black people to relatives and friends back home, and foreign films shown in China have a general effect to reinforce negative stereotypes amongst Chinese domestic students as well.

In my own interviews of Chinese students in Britain, participants in Focus Group I talked specifically about their opinions in terms of personal and social relationships with different ethnic groups, which in some respects indeed reflect Sautman's thesis. For female students in this group, they made clear that they were not to date black males. One female student[68] commented that she was scared of black people and often would feel intimidated when approached by black males, especially when she was alone; yet she would less likely feel that way when white males was around. Two other female students[69] noted that their perception was that black people were more likely to be less educated, and they had personal contacts with such people that justified this perception. Furthermore, one of them[70] noted that she had read some academic and news reports which suggested that the rate of crimes committed by black people were higher. She further commented that her parents' generation had deeper negative stereotypes about black people. This was resonated by all the other respondents in this same group. She narrated that one of her female friends was in a relationship with a black man, and the family became so angry when they found out. It was not made clear what exactly the family thought of black people, but the comments indicated a strong stereotype of black people being backwards and dirty, and dating a black person would be a humiliation to the family. In addition, she and her peer group friends, mostly females, would also be suspicious about and against

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[68] Han Tian, Focus Group I, February 2012.
[69] Xue Ting and Yin Ran, Focus Group I, February 2012.
[70] Yin Ran, Focus Group I, February 2012.

such relationships. It is interesting that amongst all the Chinese students, there was a strong indication that any facial color other than yellow (i.e. Chinese people and alike) or white would be defined as 'black', such as Indian, South American and Caribbean, not to mention African. Nonetheless the Chinese students who revealed negative feelings towards black people also noted that they had personal contacts with black people who were quite nice and friendly.

The promotion of whiteness through media representations in China might be an additional factor to have cultivated positive discrimination against white Western expatriates and potentially reinforce racial prejudice over black people. A white British female teacher[71] noted that there were a lot of white images in advertisements and the media, and such images had often been associated with beauty and success, such as fashion and business advertisements. The black British female teacher mentioned above, on the other hand, narrated her experiences of shopping for facial moisturiser:

> *I went to all the shops and all of them had whitening agents in them, and I couldn't find one normal facial moisturiser. A lot of the sales agents said to me 'this is good for you because it has whitening agent', because it will make your face whiter. I couldn't find a facial moisturiser that had no bleach in it. There is a deep association between fairness and beauty, because I assume the Chinese will have incredible discrimination against one another. I had a student, who is from a different part of China, and she is a bit darker than my other students—she was not an ethnic minority, she was Han—you can see the discrimination within themselves.*
>
> *(Carine, 2011)*

In this case, the sales agents were likely to perceive the facial look of whiteness as the common standard of beauty, which to the respondent was an indication of racial prejudice against people with other facial color such as black. The pervasiveness of whitening facial moisturizers in Chinese advertisements also implied that such prejudice were likely to exist widely in China. It was further indicated that facial colors were potentially correlated with social and cultural statuses. This was also confirmed by my sample of Chinese students in Britain. It was commented that the correlation between facial color and socio-economic statuses was due to the current international economic order and 'cultural invasion'. As the population of the most powerful economies today is predominantly white, and products from these countries are increasingly pervasive in China, this might have gradually defined and transformed public perceptions and customs.

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[71] Hannah, October 2011.

5.3.2 Forming Social Relations with Chinese People

In this section, I will look at two types of social relations: friendship and romantic relationship/marriage.

It was revealed in the interviews that it had been quite hard for Western expatriates to form friendships, especially deeply attached ones, with Chinese people. Such experiences were reported to often have caused psychological unease. One teacher noted that 'foreigners in China often feel extremely lonely' and he went on to comment on the ways in which he felt he was isolated by Chinese people:

> *In China, there is a sense that 'OK. They are foreigners, so they are going to do it differently'. There is almost a sense of being slightly afraid. You get this feeling that some Chinese people don't want to have too much interaction with you because they are afraid of causing embarrassment. So they leave you alone.*
> *(Anthony, October 2011)*

There were other sources that revealed the similar sentiment, especially from Chinese people of older generations for whom talking to foreigners used to be scary and seen almost as a taboo.[72] A female teacher commented that China was a quite closed country and it had been hard for Western expatriates to form friendships:

> *In terms of average people, it's just hard to make friends partly because of the language difference but partly because it's quite a closed society in some ways, especially emotionally. Europeans and American talk a lot about how they feel psychologically, emotional problems and issues quite freely. That's not common for Chinese people to talk about. So that's a big cultural difference when you are making a friendship.*
> *(Nathan, October 2011)*

His comment was indeed the case, yet there might be other factors. For instance, Norris and Inglehart (2009, p. 188) observe that as a most parochial nation, China is one of the least trusting societies towards outsiders. Certainly, as the authors themselves mention, the level of trust varies according to age, education and income, but the low level of trust in

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[72] This was revealed from one of a series of documentaries called 'EU China Love links' sponsored and presented by the European Union Delegation in China. It is a series of short documentary films about real-life European-Chinese couples. This particular one mentioned here was an English girl dating a Chinese guy. She asked about his boyfriend's parents' opinions about him dating a foreign girl. The mother-in-law said 'many Chinese still will have some thought about it [being in a relationship with a foreigner]' because 'before it was very very scary, you couldn't speak freely to a foreigner'. This documentary has been displayed on the film director's personal website: www.jasonleewong.com/clients/eu/love/#page.

general might nonetheless prevent foreigners such as the Western expatriate teachers from establishing close social relations with local Chinese people.

Furthermore, there were factors that influenced and differentiated the level of social integration of Western expatriate teachers into China. One of them was personal relationships with Chinese partners. For people who were married to a Chinese person or in long-term relationships with Chinese partners, it was reported that they were more likely to have relatively wider and deeper connections with Chinese people through their partners and the extended families.

It is interesting that amongst the Western teachers in my sample, it had been much more common for male expatriates to have relationships with Chinese females than vice versa.[73] One male respondent commented from his personal observation in the university environment on this trend:

> *It's very pleasant and full of opportunities for young males (from foreign countries). But I think it can be quite a hostile place for European females— they feel more isolated. They have more trouble forming social relationships. If you look at this university, for example, I can bet you there are over 100 foreign people working here, I can bet you all of the guys have local girlfriends, but the women don't have local boyfriends…. Many many of my colleagues have married into Chinese families. Usually, if they have stayed here beyond five years, they get married into a Chinese family. But the reverse… it doesn't happen for European women.*
>
> *(Jake, October 2011)*

In the interviews, I did not ask specifically about my respondents' relationships or marriage status. However, what was indicated (explicitly and implicitly) reflected the comment above. Of the 26 males in my sample, four were already married to women from their home countries before they came to China. At least 10 out of the remaining 21 male respondents had been married or in long-term relationships with Chinese females at the time of the interview.[74] For the rest of the male sample, there was a strong indication, both from themselves and their colleagues, that almost all of them had been in a relationship with a Chinese female before or currently dating one. In addition, the perception that

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[73] As will be mentioned, personal relationships were not a specific topic that I intended to explore. So was the sexual orientation of my interviewees. All male respondents were most likely heterosexual; given that female respondents were less actively involved in the discussion of personal relationships, it was less clear in this respect, but it was nonetheless indicated that they were most likely heterosexual as well.

[74] This was confirmed in the interviews by them mentioning a current Chinese girlfriend or wife. A few had been married to Chinese before they came.

foreign males were able to quite easily form relationships with Chinese females can also be widely found amongst Chinese people. There have been various online contents that provide evidence of this trend and explain from Chinese females' perspectives the reason why they made such a choice.[75] The Chinese students in my sample also mentioned that it was much more common for them to see a Chinese girl with a foreign boyfriend than vice versa.

On the other hand, only 2 out of the 11 females in my sample reported that they had been in relationships with Chinese males, and there was an indication that it was much less common for Western female expatriates to form relationships with Chinese males. A study on international marriages of Chinese people for the past two decades also reveals a low percentage of male participation, with only 10% of the total number being men (Liu and Liu, 2004), suggesting that it is significantly less likely for Chinese men to marry foreign women than vice versa. Fong's (2006) also observes that almost all the Chinese participants in her study who dated or married Western citizens were females. This might be partly due to that both Western and Chinese ideologies see it as more acceptable for low-status women to date or marry high-status men than vice-versa (Fong 2006, p. 166), and as discussed in this chapter, Western expatriates in China were often both socially and financially as in a higher status (than many Chinese people), hence it is understandable for Chinese females to date such Western males that they see as high-up while it is less socially acceptable for Chinese males to date females that have higher social and financial status. One female teacher from Britain commented on some elements that she considered as barriers for her to establish close personal relationships with Chinese people (both males and females):

> *People are often scared of approaching me. I think especially as a Western*
> *woman, and I'm a tall Western woman, I'm also not married, so I'm not much*

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[75] The website Foreign Teachers Guide to Living and Working in China (2011) conducted a survey of 144 Chinese females and concluded that foreign men provided a very attractive alternative to those Chinese women who felt they were not competitive for the most desirable and sought for Chinese men. It showed that this group of Chinese women primarily included: women who were considered relatively unattractive or just mediocre in appearance by Chinese standards; women over the age of 30 and those who were no longer virgins, irrespective of marital status; women who were divorced especially, but not only, if they had a child; women from poor families, especially those whose parents were farmers and transient workers and were not born in the first-tier cities. Given the potential population of these 4 types in China, especially the last one since the majority of China was still agricultural which was arguably relatively poor, the number of women who fit into these categories was considerably high. As the article argued, consequently, it was not unusual to see Western men coupled with girls 25 to 35 years their junior, irrespective of their overall appearance, weight, height, intelligence, personality, level of education, financial assets, work history or any other attribute that would be a determining factor in mate selection in the West.

in the stereotype of typical submissive female. Sometimes people are a bit nervous of me.

(Hannah, October 2011)

From the perspective of Chinese males, there might be indeed a sense that Western females tend to be less submissive, more independent and likely in a stronger position in relationships compared to Chinese women. This might have come from the images in movies and media accounts of the feminism movements in Western countries. In my interviews of Chinese students in Britain, whenever the topic was brought up, almost all male students noted (often with some laughter) that they did not have the confidence to date foreign females because they were highly suspicious about whether they could satisfy them and make them happy, both psychologically and sexually. These comments indicated that their perceived idea of the sexual behaviour of foreign women came largely from certain foreign movies, where the concepts of female sexual liberation were openly displayed. This projected an idea to them, both male and female Chinese students, that foreign women were much more eager to have a sex life, craved stronger and more sexually enthusiastic men with whom to form relationships, and were more likely to be involved in causal sexual behaviour. One British female teacher[76] in my sample reported that she had encountered twice a situation where a Chinese man who she was meeting for the first time displayed explicitly and overtly his sexual desire to her; she also narrated that in the university canteen, Chinese students had come up to her and asked directly that whether Western women would sleep with anyone they met. Both encounters conveyed to her quite strongly that there was a widely shared perception that Western women tended to be extremely open about their relationships and sexual behaviour. Yet she herself had only had relationships with two males (one was British and the other was Chinese) in her entire life.[77] It was additionally reported by my sample that the perceived differences in the concepts and understandings of romance might be another barrier for them to pursue a foreign girl. One male student noted that he was quite unconfident that the behaviour he perceived to have the potential to move a Chinese girl would not be able to touch a British girl in the same way.

In terms of male expatriates' relationships with Chinese females, some attributed the reason to physical attractiveness of Chinese females; some provided explanations from the perspective of personality and cultural traditions of Chinese women:

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[76] Poppy, October 2011.
[77] She was in her 30s.

> *There is not much highs and lows with a Chinese woman; whereas in the West that's quite common. I have a lot of friends who are married to Chinese girls, and they seem to be quite happily married, which you don't see that quite often in the West. I think it's much more committed. When you are married to a Chinese girl, that's it, you are together for life; whereas I think in the West, say if you are with an English girl, you will never have that total commitment. I think here you think about things from a much more practical perspective. In England, it's like you fall in love and then you think about practical stuff. Whereas in China, from my personal experience, when we were together, we knew right from the beginning, if we were boyfriend and girlfriend, then we were going to get married.*
>
> *(Andrew, October 2011)*

Indeed, the divorce rate is relatively low in China, with only 10% to 15% of the total population (Dong, Wang and Ollendick, 2002, Zhang, 2008). There is, however, growing evidence that suggests that it has become more acceptable and has increased in recent years. A recent news article reported that the divorce rate had been increasing for the past 7 years in China, with the majority coming from relatively young adults between the age of 22 and 35 (Li, X. Ifeng, 02/06/2011). The trend has in part come from a shift in the attitudes of Chinese younger generation, which is one of the consequences of the increase in the economic power women are now able to achieve with their increasing involvement in the labour market as well as a growing exposure to foreign cultures. *Higgins et al* (2002) observe that most Chinese students (N=505, Age=17-24, Mean=21.7) do not think of divorce as a shameful and embarrassing thing. Therefore, what some Western expatriate teachers considered as an advantage of being married to Chinese partners also face potential challenges.

Nonetheless, being married to a Chinese person was helpful for Western expatriate teachers to better adapt to the local life in China. One male respondent commented on the role of Chinese partners as translators and cultural intermediates:

> *So there is this welcoming aspect that if you are a foreign male, you will be able to form social relations, and they will help you become acclimatized; they will help you ease the way into the local culture. Because you will have an instant interpreter or someone will help you everywhere you go. But if you are female, the same thing won't happen; you might have a few boyfriends, but you will still feel quite isolated here.*
>
> *(Jake, October 2011)*

In general, Western male expatriates were more likely to form social relations with Chinese women, especially through relationship and marriage with Chinese females. It

opened up a way into Chinese society through the family connections with Chinese people. In Chapter 8, I will discuss Western expatriate teachers' understanding of the family relations and structures in China, from which it can be seen that respondents who had been married into a Chinese family were able to provide more insights and deeper understandings of China.

5.4 Life Styles and Social Interactions in the Local Context

5.4.1 Social Interactions within the University Settings

One of the most important factors that had shaped Western expatriate teachers' life styles in China was the localities of their social interactions. Most of the respondents in my sample had been living on or around university campuses. This was partly because the universities offered the option of arranging nearby apartments for newly arrived expatriate teachers, and partly because of their tight work schedules that required close residencies. It was reported that most teachers had to teach 12 to 16 hours a week and basically spend the rest of the time preparing for those lectures. Living on or around the campus was considered highly convenient for their work. Their daily interactions, therefore, had mostly been with colleagues and students within this educational environment. It was further noted that the university campus was an enclosed self-contained and self-sufficient environment that provided everything from food to leisure facilities, which made them less likely to interact with people from the outside. The professional locality of university campuses and the immediate vicinities had thus become the major base for their social interactions.

It is believed here that a linguistic factor is underpinning the formation of their social interactions in China. The majority of the population on university campuses is able to at least understand English, and very likely to communicate in English. This suggests that there is a certain level of comfort in social and professional interactions on university campuses; while on the outside, the situation can be quite difficult as the general level of English language abilities of the people is generally much lower. One British teacher

commented on how difficult it was outside of the university:

> *(Before I came) I got the impression from friends that in China nobody spoke English, which is probably true once you are out of this little educational environment, or if they are not university students. So outside of this area, you cannot speak English. The other thing is nothing is written in English, as a matter of fact.*
>
> *(Nick, October 2011)*

However, it was considered rewarding on the other hand to live in the local Chinese communities away from campuses with social interactions being predominantly with local Chinese people who understood little English. One teacher had lived in Harbin (northeast part of China closed to Russia) when he first arrived in China, he described the experiences he had in an environment where little English was spoken:

> *Where I was first based (Harbin), literally just outside the door, there were lots of different little markets selling things, lots of tiny little restaurants. You know, you go in and you HAVE to speak Chinese. They didn't speak any English; they spoke some Russian. You know, it was good just speaking to people, making friends, and also bargaining… going out and buying your vegetables and food, unsuccessfully sometimes. But it's good. It's part of the culture, isn't it?*
>
> *(Adam, October 2011)*

He continued to comment that the current environment of a self-contained, self-sufficient campus had made it much easier to live in but lost the essence of experiencing a different country. It was indicated that his identity as *laowai* was not as prominent on campus as outside of the campus; on his university campus, people were quite familiar and used to interacting with foreign people. They were thus not necessarily a population that would stand out; whereas when he was based in Harbin, because he was living off campus and there were much fewer foreigners in general, the local people would be curious to them and actually take the time to talk to them, most often very patiently, because foreigners were quite a distinct social group there. These previous experiences had given him a rather deeper insight into the local cultures. This suggests that the locality of social life potentially had a significant impact on cross-cultural experiences.

5.4.2 Three Example Categories of Expatriates' Life Style

There were nonetheless other factors that differentiated the experiences of participants.

There were three different types of expatriate life styles revealed in my sample. It has to be noted that this categorisation did not only come from Western expatriate teachers when talking about themselves, but also from comments based on respondents' observations of other expatriates' social lives. There were, however, no clear boundaries between each group; characteristics that were displayed by one group were not necessarily exclusive but rather likely to be shared amongst other groups. This is best seen as three interconnected categories along a spectrum rather than three distinct types. What defines these groups was their particularistic social relation with Chinese people and the ways in which they actively formed their cultural identities in China in general.

5.4.2.1 Outsider

Type I is what I term as the Outsider. On this side of the spectrum, Western expatriates often did not have much interest in learning the Chinese language. In terms of cultural experiences, they tended to look at Chinese cultures from a tourist's perspective. Most of such Western expatriates would ask their Chinese friends or colleagues to write down certain notes in Chinese exhaustively for practical purposes. For example, they would ask their Chinese friends to write the names or specific addresses of their destinations so that they were able to show them directly to the taxi drivers without the need to communicate; in restaurants or supermarkets, they would have different notes written down in Chinese of the names of specific food they would want to order, or they would go particularly to restaurants with menus presented with pictures of the actual dishes so that all they had to do was to point their fingers. In one word, the *Outsider* had minimal encounters with Chinese people; they had little initiative to learn the Chinese language, or to communicate with the majority of the population who did not quite understand English, or try to better understand China. One teacher commented on how he considered such Western expatriates in China:

> *Their social life generally revolves around going to restaurants and bars, which cater for the expatriate population, and you tend to call them smokers and drinkers, because their life revolves around restaurants and bars.*
> *(James, October 2011)*

These expatriates often lived in the 'foreigner bubble' where all their social activities were based on shared native language and cultural background. They had spent the least effort to

try to adapt to the local environment; their social interactions were most likely confined within their original cultural groups, and their contact with Chinese people had been the most limited. This thus indicates that they separated themselves and were separated from the Chinese society. Such expatriates often tended to blame the host country for the difficulties they encountered. A British teacher narrated the extreme case he had met:

> *Every year from here, two or three people leave because they just can't live in China. They blame China for it of course. But it's about how much they are willing to give to China. They were quite happy being the foreigner; they didn't want to join in. It's quite sad though.*
>
> *(Ian, October 2011)*

5.4.2.2 Chinese-Westerner

On the opposite side of the spectrum is what I term as the Chinese—Westerner. This was the smallest group amongst all. Such Western expatriates had often been in China for a relatively long time (at least 5 five years, some for over 10 years), and had extensive knowledge of the country. To most Chinese people, they were barely foreign and almost Chinese. The most important feature of them was that they were all in long-term relationships with Chinese partners, whether married or not. The relationships were a major factor that had kept them in China. These particular respondents noted that as an intermediary, their partners were of significant help for them to better understand local rituals, customs and social institutions as well as to establish close contacts with a large number of Chinese people. It has to be noted nonetheless that not all Western expatriates who had long-term Chinese partners were in this category.

Another significant feature was that most of them barely spoke English outside of work; they were able to function quite well as a Chinese person. One teacher narrated a lively story of his own experience in the local grocery market where he fluently spoke Chinese with a Chinese seller:

> *Yesterday was hilarious. I was doing a little bike riding to get some stuff at the market, I stopped to talk to this woman and she wasn't really looking up. She was talking to me and then she looked up and was really shocked. She said 'You are not Chinese!' I said 'No, I'm not'. She said 'Oh, I heard a bit of accent but you are just speaking so fluently'.*

(Alex, October 2011)

The *Chinese-Westerner* had been the most willing to learn Chinese language and customs, and more importantly they had the initiative to put it into practice and made efforts to adapt to the local Chinese contexts. Certainly they kept frequent contact with people who shared their cultural background, but they had spent much more time with their Chinese partner, friends and family. For this group of Western expatriate teachers, the identity of '*laowai*' was the least prominent. One British teacher narrated his long-term experiences with the local football team and described the ways in which his identity shifted through this period:

> *When I first came, I played in a football team where everyone was Chinese. It was good for my Chinese because I learnt all the football phrases in Chinese. Three years later, we had a party and there were some new players coming in. They asked 'who's the one over there?' And I was introduced as the goalkeeper rather than 'Oh, this is Ian, the foreigner'. You know, I was one of the team! It was a great moment for me! I was like 'wow! I'm not the foreigner any more. I'm the goalkeeper'.*
>
> *(Ian, October 2011)*

As discussed previously, the identity as *Laowai* was the most prominent one for them, this narrative reveals that after a long period of interactions with the local environment of China, it was quite possible for the Western expatriates to establish close contact with local Chinese people, and more importantly for their identity as '*laowai*' to take less prominence while their socio-cultural identity as an equal individual in China to become more significant. This was much more likely to occur within this group.

5.4.2.3 Adapter

The Outsider and Chinese-Westerner reflect the extreme ends of the spectrum; anyone who fell in between is what I term as the Adapter, and it was the largest group amongst the three. Such Western expatriates presented certain characteristics from both *Outsider* and *Chinese-Westerner*. They certainly had interests in the host cultures and were willing to learn the language, understanding rituals and customs, and were keen to extend their Chinese social circles. However, the process of learning and adapting had been slow. They were nonetheless able to manage their life in China quite easily on their own, but lacked

the initiative and commitment to further adapt to the local cultural environment.

5.5 Living with Chinese People

As respondents who were married to Chinese wives noted, the closer they got into a Chinese family, the more rules applied to them, and the deeper they could understand the meanings of certain rituals and customs and relate to it. This however also meant that more cultural conflicts were visible. A British male teacher made comments on the conflicting ideas he and his Chinese mother in-law had about bearing and giving birth to children. It was reported that traditional Chinese values expected a certain type of behaviour from women who had just given birth to children, which, to the respondent, were quite bizarre and difficult to understand:

> *My wife's parents were with us for three months. It was OK at the beginning, but then my wife had a son here, that's where it became difficult. Because suddenly they expected my wife to stay in the bedroom for a month; she could only eat certain food. It just got crazy. It had something with the Chinese traditions; she shouldn't wash, and she shouldn't change her clothes.*
>
> *(Andrew, October 2011)*

Traditional Chinese Medicine defines a specific pattern of cultural practices for women in their postnatal period. Such rituals are defined under the cultural framework of '*zuo yuezi*', which literally means 'sitting in for the first month', and can be loosely translated as 'confinement in childbirth'. Due to the physical and spiritual exhaustion caused by the childbirth, Chinese women are traditionally expected to stay at home and rest for at least a month to readjust their bodies and spirit. This set of rituals involves a particular diet and modified postpartum behaviour. Cheung (1997, p. 55) argues that *zuo yuezi* is an integrated set of practices for postnatal Chinese women, which is not only important for their physical recovery but also of great significance to the psychological well-being for many Chinese women. These practices and their importance do not appear to have been recognised by midwives in the UK. As narrated above, the wife's family expected her to apply certain rituals in terms of food and clothes, which the respondent found difficult to understand. He further reported that there were serious conflicting ideas about who should take care of the baby and how to raise him. These similar experiences were shared by two other British

male respondents who were married to Chinese women with children in China.[78] The three respondents all mentioned that their in-laws were trying to impose their traditional ideas and control the ways in which their grandchildren were being cared for and raised. From these participants' perspectives, their children were their own responsibilities and the parents should not interfere. It has to be noted that it was not clear whether these conflicts occurred only between the Western male expatriates with their in-laws or between them and their Chinese wives or between the couple together with their parents/in-laws. There is some evidence suggesting that more educated Chinese women are less likely to follow the cultural practices of *zuo yuezi* (Matthey, Panasetis and Barnett, 2002). In my own interviews, all of the Chinese wives of the three respondents mentioned above were of higher education background. Also the fact that they were married with Western expatriate suggests that they most likely had similar ideas of starting a family, and they might be more willing to raise their children under the ideas of their husbands instead of their parents.

5.6 Summary

Overall it can be seen that the identity of *Laowai* had no doubt been the most prominent identity for Western expatriate teachers in China. The social reactions of Chinese people towards them were primarily based on it. This identity was so overwhelming that it exceeded any other identity they might also hold such as teacher, or even their gender identity as a female or a male. It often generated curiosity amongst Chinese people, and the ways in which they showed their curiosity can sometimes be interpreted as intimidating or even rude, even though the Western expatriate teachers in my sample understood that this was not intended. Ethnic uniformity and the relatively low geographical mobility of the Chinese people were two significant factors that attributed to the particular social reactions of Chinese people towards the foreign population.

The foreign identity of the Western expatriate teachers was often related to certain financial and socio-cultural statuses that were different from that of most of their Chinese colleagues. From the financial perspective, all Western expatriate teachers in my sample

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[78] Ian, October 2011 and Hannah, October 2011.

had been in preferential position compared to most of their Chinese colleagues. The social and cultural statuses they obtained, however, varied upon racial differences, with white expatriates receiving positive discrimination and black people having to cope with racism. In terms of forming social relations with Chinese people, this study finds that Western expatriate teachers who had been in stable long-term relationships with or married to local Chinese people had a much better potential for forming extensive social connections with Chinese people, because their partners served as an immediate translator not only for them to understand the Chinese language but also, more importantly, for them to make sense of the rituals and customs. There was however a gender factor influencing the formation of relationships with Chinese people. My study finds that male expatriates were much more likely to have been in relationships with Chinese females than for female expatriates to be with Chinese males. From Chinese male students in Britain, it was revealed that there was shared lack of confidence to date Western females due to perceived sexual and cultural factors. The liberating sexual images from movies and related art forms formed the perception amongst these Chinese students that Western females most likely desired strong and sexually enthusiastic males, which were not the conventional image of Chinese males.

The localities where the social interactions of the Western expatriate teachers were based were also a significant influencing factor. This study finds that the majority of their social interactions were based primarily on university campuses, which were self-contained environments. Their interactions were thus limited to the contacts with Chinese staff and students who most likely had learnt English well enough to be able to communicate with them. On the other hand, for Western expatriates who had lived outside of such environment where the majority of their interactions were with Chinese people who barely understood or spoke English, the experiences can be quite different yet more rewarding. This is because they were allowed for a different perspective to look at the China, a perspective that was seen as allowing for a more realistic aspect of the culture.

In addition, there were three example categories of life styles of the Western expatriate teachers that were identified in this study, with the *Adapter* potentially being the largest and *Chinese—Westerner* being the smallest group. The factors that were shaping such life styles had also been various, including the time duration of stay in China, the initiative to learn the language and adapt, relationships established with Chinese friends and partners as well as the contexts of cross-cultural encounters. Closer contact with Chinese people established through relationship/marriage or shared living experiences had significant

potentials to provide alternative perspectives for Western expatriate teachers that often resulted in broader knowledge and deeper understanding of the structures and cultural practices of Chinese families.

Chapter 6 Educational Systems and Young Students in China

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents how Western expatriate teachers experienced the Chinese educational system. **Section 6.2** explores the perceived attitudes of Chinese students towards study and how they might be different from students in Western countries. **Section 6.3** focuses on the concept of 'critical thinking' and how the sampled teachers saw this as something that Chinese students lacked. **Section 6.4** shows the social pressure that young Chinese students were under and how that might differ from the educational environment in the West.

6.2 Students' Attitudes towards Study

Western teachers widely made positive comments on Chinese students, particularly on their attitude towards study. They agreed that most students were quite focused on their study and worked very hard. It was further commented, by teachers who had previous teaching experiences back in their home countries, that the behaviour of Chinese students in class was generally better and more motivated because of the respect they paid to teachers and parents. One British respondent, who had taught in Britain for 18 years, noted that his perceived behaviour of British young people in class was much worse. There is previous evidence which in part supports this view. Bradshaw and Tipping's (2010) report shows that 31% pupils in England feels noise and disorder in most or all classes. Other evidence suggests that although the overall classroom environment is pleasant enough for pupils to focus on study, for the majority, there is evident disruption in the classroom on their learning (Department for Education, 2012), and teachers lose a significant amount of lesson time in resolving disruptions and administrative issues (OECD, 2010). In my own interviews, almost all the teachers indicated a very decent level of class order with hardly

any disruption in the Chinese classes they had taught. It has to be noted nonetheless that the bulk of such evidence in regard to British schools came from studies of students in or even before secondary schools, and there was a tendency in my interviews that the sample of Chinese students that most Western expatriate teachers made comparisons upon were university students who were naturally much more mature than pupils from lower level schools. However with the 'One-Child' policy creating a 'spoiled generation' (Fong, 2004), there is a growing tendency of disciplinary issues amongst these young Chinese students.

6.3 Critical Thinking

Issues regarding critical thinking, however, were most heatedly discussed in my sample. Turner (2006) argues that in international educational context, Chinese students compete well with their Anglo-European counterparts, but are stereotyped as having a lack of 'critical' capability. In my own interviews, almost all the Western expatriate teachers made comments about how the Chinese education system had not been able to cultivate an atmosphere where students were encouraged to think independently, critically and creatively. This was a general agreement, though it was indicated that there were differences between students from different regions.

The discussion of critical thinking that most Western expatriate teachers focused on had been related to students' attitudes towards existing ideas as well as towards their parents' wills upon them. The respondents in my sample were all teaching in universities, but some of them had been involved in lower level educational programs, such as in secondary schools or even elementary schools in China. Most of the teachers observed that the students in their classes rarely had strong opinions and their views were quite narrow and fixed. Some teachers attributed this phenomenon to the ways in which Chinese high schools and lower level institutions educated students:

> *My impression of high school is that you are given one line and you accept that*
> *line and they all believe it.*
> *(Hannah, October 2011)*

This was also reflected in another respondent's narrative where he depicted the 'model

class' he once watched on Chinese television. The local government was trying to demonstrate to the public what a good high school class should be. In this class, as the respondent described, there was one teacher walking around the classroom talking, and the whole class of approximately 60 students were listening very carefully and taking notes without making a sound. Every now and then, the teacher would ask a question and one student would stand up and give the expected correct answer; otherwise, the students would just remain completely silent—there was no communication between the teacher and the students or between students themselves. This scenario was seen as very different from the methods the Western expatriate teachers adopted. As one respondent commented, the ways in which they would teach were quite communicative, but the students were not used to such methods and would therefore often perform in a rather passive and irresponsive way in their classes. This was likely the result of the education schema derived from Chinese traditional philosophy. Chinese education is known for its tradition of teacher-centred, book-centred, grammar translation methods with a heavy emphasis on rote memory (Anderson, 1993), and there are currently constraining factors in adopting alternative pedagogies such as communicative language teaching (CLT) in China (Yu, 2001).[79] Confucius philosophy of education, with contemporary interpretation, emphasises the role of teachers as moral cultivators and moral models as well as the role of books, all of which deserve high respect without questioning (Hui, 2005). This was widely resonated in my sample, with such comment that the general cultural belief in Chinese educational context was that teachers would always be right and the students should trust the teachers with the knowledge they had to offer.

It is, however, also possible that the blunt change of educational contexts (from a Chinese high school to a British style university) has left a huge yet unclearly defined gap between what the students anticipate and what is expected from them by the teachers in terms of learning approaches such as critical thinking. As Turner (2006, p. 9) observe, Chinese students in the UK are aware that their educational experiences would be different from what they had in China and are ready to adapt to the new settings but quickly discover after arrival that the basic expectations lecturers have of them are rather implicit. All of these

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[79] The communicative approach is characterised by the following: 1) concentration on use and appropriateness rather than simply on language form; 2) a tendency to favour fluency-focused rather than simply accurately-focused activities; 3) communicative tasks are achieved through the language rather than simply exercises on the language; 4) an emphasis is placed on student initiative and interaction, rather than simply on teacher-centred direction; 5) there will be a sensitivity to learners' differences rather than a 'lockstep' approach; 6) there is an awareness of variations in language use rather than simply attention to the language (Maley, 1984, cited in Anderson, 1993).

factors above explain, in part, for the issues that the Western expatriate teachers faced while teaching in cross-cultural context in China.[80]

The ways in which Chinese students were taught within its domestic education system were further reflected in what Western expatriate teachers termed as an excessive memorisation and exam-oriented method of study. As one commented with a comparison to what he perceived as the Western education system:

> *The way that the students are taught through Chinese schools tends to leave them to simply want to memorise and regurgitate. So the way you pass the tests here is very exam-driven. So what's the answer? If you ask this question, I need to know the answer so that I can give it back to you on the test. That's profoundly different in some ways than the Western system (problem-based learning).*
>
> *(Alex, October 2011)*

Another teacher also reflected on the issue of rote learning and the lack of critical thinking and creativity away from the given fixed paradigms; he did so more from his perspective as an IELTS examiner in Shanghai:

> *When I give an essay title to a class for 20 students, I will almost get the exact same idea from all of them. There are very very few different ideas. I do IELTS examining as well. When we do IELTS exams we often get students from international schools from Shanghai and things like that; the moment they start talking, you can tell the difference. If you get a student from a Chinese high school, they are going to say 'every coin has two sides' blah blah blah... you know. It's very very limited.*
>
> *(Andrew, October 2011)*

Rote learning was considered to have accounted for a significant part of Chinese education, especially before college and university: on the one hand, the students had been prescribed to simply memorise by the system and lacked the initiative and willingness to challenge existing ideas.

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[80] It was also indicated that the concept of *mianzi* (face) also played a role in determining students' behaviour in classroom environments. I will discuss this in detail in Chapter 7.3.

6.4 Social Pressure in Education for Young Chinese Students

It was reported that there was a tendency amongst Chinese students to pay less attention to knowledge itself and more to how they could use it to pass certain exams and apply the qualifications to achieving certain practical purposes. Over half of the sample commented that Chinese students tended to be more goal-driven and focused on their career development right from the start of university.

This mentality amongst Chinese students mirrors the prevailing social pressure in contemporary China, especially for young people who are the first generation after the state's 'One-Child' policy. Fong (2004, p. 179) argues that the 'One-Child' policy mandated by the Chinese government has resulted in 'unrealistic expectations for the children's success', and the only child has become the only hope for the family to enter the first world. These unrealistic expectations have often led to unprecedented pressures on the younger generation of Chinese people. In my interviews, almost all the teachers had noted that Chinese students were under serious pressures with their study. One respondent[81] commented that 'the pressure on young children and teenagers in China is enormous'. This was not only reflected by students' serious attitudes towards study in class environment, as reported by most teachers, but also mirrored in their spare time activities, as observed by some respondents. One teacher from Britain commented with some laughter on her students' social life on weekends:

> *There is a lot of seriousness about life. You know, people feel guilty if they do nothing on a Sunday—it's fine (chuckle)! You know, life, you should have fun just for the sake of having fun sometimes. It's OK.*
> *(Hannah, October 2011)*

Similar comments were also found in other interviews, which indicate that the attitudes towards study had a significant potential affecting young people's social and leisure life. As in this British teacher's comment:

> *One of the questions I gave to my students yesterday was something interesting you did recently, one girl talked about preparing for the IELTS exam! Something interesting she did recently was study!*

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[81] Madelyn, October 2011.

Such social pressures for young people to study and become successful were not only found in higher education but also in lower level educational institutions. As one respondent commented, the pressures that used to be upon high school and university students had been transferred further down to much younger pupils. In this respect, those Western expatriates whose children were receiving education in the Chinese system and those who had taught in lower level schools were able to offer more insights. One female teacher with a six-year-old son commented on the attitudes of the fellow Chinese parents towards children's education:

> *When I go to parents' evening, I hear the Chinese parents always want more homework (chuckle). I'm like 'let them be children!', 'He's six!'. He comes home from school and if he has one hour or one hour and a half homework, that's a lot for a child, I think. I think you should just play football.*
> *(Hannah, October 2011)*

Furthermore, it was widely reported that Chinese students often take extra classes outside of the compulsory curricula, even children in kindergartens. One British respondent whose child is half-British half-Chinese commented that the pressure that used to only start from secondary and high schools had been transferred further down:

> *The other children in my son's class are already doing art class, math class. They are only four! The pressure that used to be in high school and middle school is being pushed further down. I take my children down to the play area. In the summer, there used to be lots of children running down there. Now nobody is there. All the children go home or go to other schools for extra classes.*
> *(Ian, October 2011)*

It can be seen from these comments that the Chinese students are under unprecedented pressure to study well and become successful. This is partly because the introduction and development of the free market economy generates serious competition in education and employment, and partly because the ''One-Child'' policy creates a generation with tremendous amounts of expectation from families and the society as a whole. As Fong (2004, p. 108) argues, the pressure comes from the heavy desire to achieve the 'First World' status; yet the opportunities to obtain such status are far outnumbered by those aspire to obtain it. The social pressure on young people in China to succeed in education has become much more severe. What is interesting in my findings is that this pressure,

which Fong notes in her sample of teenager students in urban China, is likely being passed further down to younger Chinese children in urban elementary schools and even kindergartens. This pressure was becoming an issue for Western expatriate teachers with children in China to overcome, and as they noted, it might eventually force them to leave for alternative educational options. This concern was voiced by the same British male teacher. He was concerned that as the pressure on students in general increased, his son might be not be able to take it:

> *The thing that pushes me out of China is children's education, because it really pressures them from very young age. The other day, a boy got on the bus, he turned around and his bag hit my knee. It felt like somebody hit me with bricks! I could only just pick it up. This boy is just about ten, and he's got 20 or 30 books in his bag. It didn't even look like he was struggling! I was just thinking 'No no no, I wouldn't want my son doing that'.*
>
> *(Ian, October 2011)*

This is, however, not to suggest that children in Britain have little pressure in terms of education, although the British teachers with children in China tended to indicate so. A UNICEF survey demonstrates that overall child well being in the UK ranks at the bottom of a total sample of 21 economically advanced nations, with the USA just being above (UNICEF, 2007). In the dimension of 'educational well-being', the report shows that the UK only ranks 17th, and it is also the last on the list in the dimension of 'subjective well-being' (UNICEF, 2007, p. 2), suggesting that children in the UK feel the unhappiest amongst children in these rich countries. Subsequent news stories based on this survey reported that two thirds (64%) of British parents were concerned that there were too much testing in schools and that the mental health issues of children due to pressure at schools were in dramatic increase.[82] Certainly, this pressure at schools raised by the parents may not only come from study (i.e. peer problems such as bullying), but the report nonetheless suggests that there is a significant amount of pressure in education for British children as well.

Nonetheless, it can be seen from my interviews that there was a strong tendency to push young people in China to become successful. In a broader perspective, this push and the goal-driven mentality coincide with the current process of China's fast modernisation and economic development, which is to prioritise success and profit over quality. Comments

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[82] Etchingham, J. *Telegraph, 02 January 2011*, Henley, J. *The Guardian, 27 June 2012*.

were widely made amongst my sample on the scandal over the San Lu Milk[83] and it was related to the current push in China for fast economic growth that was aimed primarily at financial profit without proper care to the process. Half a dozen teachers related these issues to the common behaviour of students' taking shortcuts in study and even cheating in exams, and noted that many of their Chinese students only cared about the marks and the practical advances they would achieve with that marks (i.e. in terms of applying for better Masters or PhD programs or for better jobs) but did not pay much attention to the improvement of knowledge, abilities and skills *per se*. These comments indeed reflect part of the social atmosphere in China as the expansion of enrollment in Chinese higher education has led to 'degree inflation' (Fong, 2006) and subsequently an increasing rate of graduate unemployment (Wu, 2005, Bai, 2006). With high financial investment in higher education combined with a fiercely competed job-hunting market, it is thus understandable for some Chinese students to prioritise their practical goals.

On the other hand, the same can also be argued to have been occurring in Britain. With the expansion of higher education, the number of aggregate students has doubled in the last 20 years (Greenaway and Haynes, 2003). Thus now nearly one in two British young people are receiving higher education, therefore the inflation in degrees is also accelerating, and full employment in regular, relatively permanent jobs are giving way to more insecure and risky working lives (MacDonald, 1998). Practical values towards education, therefore, are also very likely to exist in Britain, especially after the financial reforms in Higher Education (Dearden *et al*, 2008).[84] In the wider context of society, the free market in Britain and Europe as a whole also faces practices of fraud in economic activities during the pursuit of higher profit. For instance, there has been a major scandal lately sweeping Europe where horsemeat was being declared as beef, smuggled across borders and then into processed food in order to decrease cost and increase profit.[85] It is obviously an irresponsible act directly towards gaining maximum profit, as is San Lu in the milk scandal, although the degree to which it hurt the public life has been much less severe than the

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[83] San Lu milk scandal was a severe food safety incident that broke the news in Sep. 2008 (*CNN, 12/09/2008*, *CNN, 13/09/2008*). By the time of December the same year, nearly 300,000 infants had been made ill and at least six died from kidney stones and other kidney damage. Sixty people were arrested, and major executives received serious legal punishments (*CNN, 31/12/2008*, Vause, J. *CNN, 23/01/2009*.

[84] While Greenaway and Haynes (2003, p. 153) make a rather general argument that public funding in UK Higher Education (HE) has been significantly decreased and public funding per person has been halved (with the increase in the aggregate student number), Dearden *et al* (2008, p. 100) observe that the poorest students gain the most from HE financial reforms and students from relatively well-off backgrounds face higher net costs of Higher Education.

[85] The time line of the horsemeat scandal: Lawrence, F. *The Guardian, 10/05/2013*.

Chinese case.

The key issue in China now is the rapid growth of the free market economy and the massive development of new institutional structures which generate extraordinary increases in material goods. Meanwhile, on the other hand, it also creates opportunities for alternative approaches to be adopted by individuals to achieve success. For instance, the 'institutional holes' existing in the labour market during the current transitional period of China allows individuals and organisations to utilise social connections (*guanxi*) to gain person advantages of job opportunities, which would have otherwise been allocated through formal institutions (Bian, 2002).[86] With such fundamental structural change and unprecedented economic growth, especially when famine, wars and various devastating political turbulence such as the Cultural Revolution were only a generation ago, there is a high incentive to prioritise financial security and stability through practical means such as educational degrees that are considered to be directly linked to high economic and social statues.

This focus on career developments and financial gain through education, in a narrow sense, was often reflected, by the sampled Western teachers, on the courses that the students had chosen to study. In the universities where my interviewees were based, it was reported that practical courses in the Business School were the most popular,[87] followed by studies related to engineering. These courses were largely considered as the ones that would often be linked with financially decent jobs and thus high economic status in China. It was noted, however, that for a significant proportion of the students, it was their families' will rather than their personal interests to pursue such courses. As was frequently brought up by the Western expatriate teachers, quite a number of their students had been studying courses that they in fact had little interest in. It was revealed that most of these students just studied what their parents put them into, because, 'mum's brother thinks it's a really good idea or dad's got a friend whose brother's cousin did it somewhere else and thought it would be really good for them', as one respondent[88] noted. Another teacher from Britain made comparison with his perceived circumstances in Britain in this respect:

> *We often ask our students 'why did you choose your major?' And the answer*
> *comes out as 'my father chose it for me'; 'my mother decided I would be a*

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[86] This will be discussed in Chapter 7.4 and Chapter 11.2 in detail.
[87] Both in the XJTLU and the UNNC, business school is the largest school.
[88] Jocelyn, October 2011.

business woman because she is a business woman'. There is that respect for the elders. But if my father decided I was going to study something else, I'd say no. There is that kind of respect of what people tell me to do. Yesterday there was one student, and I said 'why did you decide to study accounting?', she said 'oh, my father chose it for me'. 'What will you do at the end of your course?' 'I want to be a nurse.' (chuckle) I was like... 'Hang on a second! Do you really think it through?' They just believe that 'my father is going to do the best for me'. They quite believe in the family doing the right thing, the elder people knowing better; whereas in the UK, we wouldn't have that. We believe that I know what's best for me. I might listen to what my father says and say no.

(Ian, October 2011)

As discussed above, Chinese students' lack of initiative to think critically for themselves have in part come from the Confucius tradition of respecting teachers and other authority figures such as parents and the elderly. Nevertheless, there might be an underpinning economic and structural factor here. International educational programs and institutions in China (such as XJTLU and UNNC in my sample) are arguably much more expensive, with much less funding sources, than domestic ones. The majority of these students have no other opportunities of financial supplements (such as student loans) except from their families. The families therefore hold a prominent and powerful position in the decision-making process. In comparison, there is evidence suggesting that British children have been encouraged and supported to believe they have the abilities to pursue any course and career of interest (Hall and Langton, 2006). This idea was also widely revealed amongst my sample,[89] and is believed to be largely the case.

6.5 Summary

Being university teachers allowed the Western expatriates in my sample to closely observe the Chinese educational system and young students. This study finds that almost all the teachers in my sample considered Chinese students as highly motivated and goal-driven. The behaviour of Chinese students displayed in classroom was reported as very good, and widely believed to be better than students in equivalent stages back in their home countries. However, the lack of critical thinking which was considered as widely existing amongst young Chinese students was a major issue they had encountered in their professional work.

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[89] This was agreed by Chinese students in Britain in my sample. This will also be discussed in Chapter 10.3.

It is believed that the traditional Confucius ideas of education and the current practices of examination-oriented evaluation approaches were the factors attributing to this issue.

All teachers reported that Chinese students were under severe pressure in terms of education and subsequent employment. Education was thus seen primarily as an investment by young Chinese students and their parents for practical purposes such as future employment. This is because the free market economy generates high competition in the labour market, and also because the 'One-Child' policy has created a generation with high expectations but with fewer opportunities given the expansion in higher education in China in recent years. The sampled Western teachers, however, tended to overlook that similar issues exist in Western societies such as Britain as well, since, for example, the British higher education has also been undertaking expansion that potentially causes degree inflation and difficulties in maintaining stable decent jobs. Nonetheless the practical purpose of educational choices and the goal-driven mentality of young Chinese students found in my interviews reflect the current economic development of social movement of China, which tends to prioritise fast economic progress over the quality of the projects *per se*. Business courses were reported to be the most popular since they were linked more directly with decent financial achievement. It was also revealed that quite often it was students' parents who made the choice for their children. This is partly because of the traditional Chinese ideas of respecting the elderly in the family, and partly because most of the students that my sampled Western teachers had taught were financially supported by their families, which gave them power in deciding their children's educational choices.

This study also finds that the high expectations and pressure found amongst urban middle/high school students in Fong's (2004) is now being passed further down to younger students even in kindergartens. In this respect, this study reveals that teachers with children who were receiving education in China had more insight into the social environment for children's education. The perceived high social pressure for children's education was considered by these teachers as very unhealthy for their children's growth in China, and may finally force them to move back to their home countries where education was seen as much healthier for young students' personal development. Again, the educational pressure in Western countries like Britain has also been high, but tends to be overlooked by the sampled Western teachers.

Chapter 7 Chinese Social Behaviour and the Concept of *Guanxi*

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents how Chinese social behaviour was perceived and interpreted by Western expatriate teachers and how they were influenced by it. **Section 7.2** presents the previous ideas they had about the 'inscrutable Chinese' and how these ideas fitted into their actual experiences when they directly interacted with Chinese people in China. **Section 7.3** explores the Chinese concept of *mianzi* and how it was understood by Western expatriate teachers. [90] It first looks at Chinese students' behaviour in the classroom environment and how this was related to the concept of *mianzi*. It then focuses on the different facets of *mianzi* to analyse how each was practiced in China and understood by Western teachers. **Section 7.4** emphasises the Chinese concept of *guanxi* and explores how it was understood and practiced by Western teachers. [91]

7.2 The 'Inscrutable Chinese'

It was revealed from the interviews that one stereotype about China was that it was 'inscrutable'. This particular term had been mentioned specifically by half a dozen respondents, yet the experiences of cultural shock generated by encounters related to it were frequently mentioned by almost all the respondents. One gap in perception was the ways in which some Chinese people publicly displayed their emotions. A British respondent[92] noted that people back home talked about the 'inscrutable Chinese' quite often, but in reality 'the ordinary Chinese people are anything but'. He commented that Chinese people were quite direct in certain ways and showed their feelings quite explicitly

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[90] *Mianzi* is Chinese, and it means face.
[91] *Guanxi* means social connections.
[92] Nick, October 2011.

in public. Another British teacher shared the same opinion:

> *You see more people arguing and shouting on the streets than you would see in England, unless you'd drink at 12 at night (chuckle).*
>
> *(Andrew, October 2011)*

Another respondent described his experiences of traveling on trains in China and commented that the ways in which Chinese people sometimes behaved in the public were the results of being less considerate for the public:

> *If you get on a train, you'll find people who are travelling together are extremely noisy. Or somebody will be on a mobile phone, and they will be almost yelling at the top of their voice. To my mind, there is no consideration of public space, and of other people in the public space.*
>
> *(Anthony, October 2011)*

This is true to some extent, but it was most likely dependent on a variety of factors such as education. Another British teacher tried to understand why Chinese people were sometimes loud and noisy in public places, and commented that it was not that Chinese people were being rude, but there were just so many other sources of noise for people to compete with. He narrated one of his interesting experiences on a busy street where he literally could not hear the person next to him:

> *I was in Hefei two or three weeks ago, we were walking down the road, there was McDonald's blurring out there their ads; there was this noodle shop playing out some Islamic music; the bikes were beeping and shouting and they went along the road; and then there were some stores set up along the side of the road—they were playing music. And literally, you couldn't hear the person standing next to you.*
>
> *(Ian, October 2011)*

What is interesting is that most respondents who commented on Chinese people's public behaviour also noted that there was, on the other hand, a sharp contrast in their social behaviour in other contexts. One teacher noted that in the office setting his Chinese colleagues fitted more into the stereotype of the 'inscrutable Chinese':

> *We have a lot of meetings but the Chinese staff never say anything in the meetings—never ever; whereas Westerners will shout out loud arguing. You know, it's much more normal to argue at a meeting, even with your boss. Often half way through the meeting, the English people turn around to the Chinese and say 'what do you think'. They'll answer but it'll be very diplomatic. They'll*

never commit strong opinion. For us, it's normal to disagree. And you can disagree with your boss. I think Chinese don't disagree with the boss, and they don't even disagree with the colleagues.

(Andrew, October 2011)

One female respondent[93] observed that in a group environment (referring to staff meetings) the Chinese colleagues would often look for collective consensus and try not to harm any relationship with one another. Opinions thus would more likely be subtle and indirect in order for them to keep some harmony. Furthermore, it was reported that Chinese social behaviour in a rather personal setting had sometimes been quite direct, instead of being inscrutable. This was quite often related to the issues of privacy. It was noted that the different understandings of the concepts and practices of respecting personal privacy were a significant issue for Western expatriate teachers to cope with. This was mostly reported by female participants. One female teacher from the US commented that some Chinese people would be 'exceedingly direct' in what she referred to as 'personal questions':

In the English world, if I want to know something about someone personally, I have to wait for that person to open the door. So I would never ask you 'Are you married?' I would wait for you to say something about your wife and I would say 'Oh, you are married?' You know, when you open the door by mentioning your wife, I can ask about your marriage, because you've given me permission. Chinese people do not wait for a door. They just say 'Are you married?' 'How many children do you have?' 'What is your salary?' (chuckle). Everything is very straight.

(Sarah, October 2011)

She further commented that the ideas and understandings of being courteous, concerned and caring about other people were quite different. To her knowledge, people from Western countries tended to show courteousness by not asking such questions, whereas Chinese people would often express their concerns by asking these questions quite directly. Since she understood that Chinese people were not intentionally being impolite or offensive, she had found out a way to cope with it:

I've learnt to deal with it, in a way that satisfies me and satisfies them. Usually what I do is answer the question without answering the question. They'll say something like 'How much money do you make?' which to me in my culture is a very offensive question. But I realise they are not being offensive, they are just being interested and curious. So then I'd say something like 'not as much as I would like, and you?' (chuckle). So I've not got upset or rejected that person, but I have not really answered the question in a mandatory term

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[93] Sarah, October 2011.

because I find that uncomfortable. I do it that way and Chinese people are sensitive and most people would accept that as an answer and realise that I am not going to answer that question. And then we just laugh and the person would say 'me neither'(chuckle). I have escaped that situation without hurting anybody's feelings.

(Sarah, October 2011)

For these respondents from Western societies, maintaining personal space and privacy was seen as the most basic and fundamental idea of their cultures. It was further commented that because of this particular difference, the longer they lived in China, the less they would like to extend their stay. One female respondent from Britain had been living in China for 8 years and was also in a long-term relationship with a Chinese boyfriend. She was one of the most culturally integrated expatriate and would most likely to settle permanently in China. She commented that even though she had been in China for a long time, accepted and incorporated many ideas and practices from the host culture, there were still some facets that seemed to be pushing her to the margin of the society, with the issue of privacy being the most notable. She narrated that she once got quite offended by her colleague's inquiry into her personal financial status in a public place, and it was made worse when this colleague judged her relationship with her Chinese boyfriend:

This is something I really couldn't tolerate. A member of the HR department here, she once was speaking to me about my salary. This was outside of the university in the playground where there were other people listening. And she was not very tactful, and she was talking about… I bought a property, an apartment here at the community, and she said to me 'how big is your apartment, the one that you bought?' I said '96 square meters'. She said to me '96 square meter??? Why didn't you buy the bigger one? Why didn't you buy the 140??'. And I said because I don't have enough money. It's very difficult to pay the down payment. And then she said to me 'you have a good salary. I know how much you earn. You don't have enough money on your salary?' The thing is she thought I was rich just because I was a foreigner. She doesn't know how much money I have to send home to my parents, she doesn't know how much student loan I have. And then she said 'but you have boyfriend, he can give you money'. And I felt really bad about that because she didn't know our personal situation. This is in front of everybody. She is not supposed to tell anybody this. She is supposed to… because of her position in HR, you'd expect it to be confidential. It's very… I've never forgotten this (chuckle).

(Poppy, October 2011)

This particular narrative was a detailed reflection of the conflicting ideas that this, amongst many other, respondents had with Chinese colleagues in terms of personal space, privacy and acceptable social behaviour. This was widely reported to have occurred in other situations with other Chinese people. It can be seen from the comments that the respondent

was seriously offended by her Chinese colleague's inquiry into her personal life, especially in such aspects as financial situations and relationships. From her perspective, such behaviour in the public would be interpreted as discourteous and offensive; even in a more private context, as the previous narrative suggested, inquiry into one's personal life without an indication of consent was considered impolite as well.

7.3 Chinese People Love *Mianzi*

7.3.1 Why Are They Being Silent in Class?

Mianzi means 'face' in a literal translation to English, yet the meaning of this term, in some respects, is quite different from that in the English language context. Most of the social behaviour of Chinese people that was interpreted by Western expatriates as 'inscrutable' is most likely to do with the fundamental Chinese concepts of *mianzi* and the practices of maintaining *mianzi*. One aspect of it was reflected in the behaviour of Chinese students in the classroom environments. Almost all the respondents noted that Chinese students tended to be quiet and some even passive in the class environment. One commented that often when they (the teachers, despite of nationality) asked a question, nobody in the classroom seemed to be willing to share the answers:

> *In classes, it's much more difficult to get interactions because no one seems to want to put their hand up. So if you actually select someone and say what can you tell me about this, they know what they are talking about, they know it all, but they wouldn't put their hands up and answer the question if I ask the entire class.*
>
> *(Steven, October 2011)*

It was revealed that this had been a common issue for nearly all Western teachers, especially newly started ones in China. One British respondent[94] related to the issues of noisiness discussed above and commented with some laughter that 'on the other hand, when you walk into a Chinese classroom sometimes, it's one of the quietest places I've

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[94] Anthony, October 2011.

ever been'. Another teacher[95] noted that he often saw the correct answers written down on students' notes but they rarely would interact with the teacher. He continued to comment that as a teacher the most natural reaction to it was 'Why aren't you answering my questions?' However he described that he had realised that it was 'their culture', and he had to explain to the students first that in this British-style university, they had a totally different way of teaching and learning, a much more communicative and responsive approach. Another teacher[96] from Australia commented that she had worked in Australian schools as a teacher before, and there were so many people from different regions around the world that she had to quieten people down because everybody was trying to share their thoughts. As was commented, the Chinese notion of *mianzi* was a decisive factor for students' unresponsive behaviour in classes:

> *It's not that they are shy. Traditionally they don't like to lose face. The teachers probably instill in them that if you don't know the right answer, you shouldn't be offering it, and you really shouldn't be showing off what you know. So when you combine all these things… They don't want to make fool of themselves in the class, because they are worried that it's not right; they are worried it would be a show-off; or if they aren't quite right, we'll laugh at them.*
>
> *(Grace, October 2011)*

Confucius ideology emphasises social harmony which requires the control of feelings and humble behaviour by individuals within the group (Faure and Fang, 2008). In terms of students' behaviour in class, sharing thoughts and answers could thus be interpreted as showing off knowledge, which would potentially hurt the harmony of the group. Faure and Fang (2008, p. 198) also observe that, for Chinese people, not showing ignorance seems more important than telling the truth. Western teachers in my sample were not quite as worried about making mistakes and losing face in the attempt to explore the answers of the questions. To them, making mistakes did not necessarily lead to losing face, and there was much less such direct cultural assumption; whereas the link between making mistakes and losing face was considered quite strong in Chinese cultural framework.

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[95] Ian, October 2011.
[96] Judy, October 2011.

7.3.2 Losing (*diu*) *Mianzi*, Saving (*liu*) *Mianzi* and Giving (*gei*) *Mianzi*

It was widely noted that when the teachers made mistakes in the class, their students would not mention it or say anything publicly because they were worried it would make the teachers lose face. What was important in relation to *mianzi* was not only losing face and saving face, but also 'giving face'. By 'giving face', it means someone is showing respect for the other person's feelings. It has to be noted here that in certain social contexts, it is culturally expected from the counterpart to gain such respect from the potential givers as well. Ho's classic conceptualisation of 'face' shed some light in this dimension:

> *Face is the respectability and/or deference which a person can claim for himself from others, by virtue of the relative position he occupies in his social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in that position as well as acceptably in his general conduct; the face extended to a person by others is a function of the degree of congruence between judgments of his total condition in life, including his actions as well as those of people closely associated with him, and the social expectations that others have placed upon him.*
>
> *(Ho, 1976, p. 883)*

His thesis suggests that face is not a fixed concept but rather relies significantly on the position one is placed in a specific network. To maintain, gain or, as noted in my sample, give face, certain behaviour is thus expected according to one's particular social relations with the other within that circle. One British male respondent in my sample was married to a Chinese woman. Certain cultural expectations in term of 'giving face' were placed onto him because of his role as part of a Chinese family. He narrated his experiences with his wife's Chinese family in the Chinese New Year:

> *If I go back to Dalian,[97] which these days I try not to do to be honest at Chinese New Year's time, because I find it very stressful. It's tiring for an average Westerner in a cross-cultural margin with Chinese to cope with that family pressure. I know from my Chinese friends and colleagues that you are also saying that 'Oh God! Chinese New Year is also hard work for Chinese!' All family gatherings are hard work because you've got to go; you've got to give face, you know, this kind of pressure. My Chinese friends and colleagues say that 'I can't get out of that. I've got to go. At least you are a foreigner, you can make an excuse and get out of it'.*
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> *(Louis, October 2011)*

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[97] His wife is Chinese, and her family is from Dalian, which is in the northeastern part of China.

What he meant in the comment about 'giving face' was that in the family structure, one was expected to behave in a culturally scripted way according to his or her position inside the family. For him as the husband of a Chinese woman, paying visits and showing respects to the in-laws was a cultural expectation generally placed on all sons-in-law in China. On the other hand, mother/father-in-laws were in the position to expect such respect. He further commented that the idea of 'giving face' was quite demanding in China and it often posed as a burden to personal as well as professional relationships. As previously discussed, when a foreigner is married into a Chinese family, more cultural expectations are to be exerted on him/her (in comparison to those who were not married with a Chinese person). As a foreigner, excuses could be made to avoid certain cultural practices of 'face-giving', however, in other respects they have to behave according to the cultural framework of *mianzi*. For example, another British male respondent whose girlfriend was Chinese noted that when he first visited his girlfriend's parents, she made clear that there were certain rules he had to follow, such as addressing her father as 'father' instead of 'mister', which was seen as a way of maintaining the *mianzi* of the father and showing respect to him.

7.4 Social Relations in China and the Concept of *Guanxi*

7.4.1 The Concept of *Guanxi*

Guanxi is a Chinese term that literally means 'relationship' in English. In Chinese social and cultural context, however, the more appropriate translation is 'connections', which people use to gain advantage. It is acknowledged that China has been undertaking massive transformation where old social orders are collapsing and new ones are yet to be built. Guthrie (2002, p. 37) argues that *guanxi* is important 'in weak institutional environments, where the formal rules of economic interaction are vague or non-existent, where economic and social structures are built on particularistic relationships'. Once a *guanxi* is established, one can assume that based on mutual benefits, the counterpart will offer certain favours with the expectation that the debts incurred will be paid back by returning the favours (*renqing*) (Yang, 1994). The practices of *guanxi* thus rest upon strategic attempts to

generate and manipulate *renqing* (Kipnis, 2002). Sometimes such *renqing* can go beyond existing institutions to have resulted in the abuse of power and law, corruption and social injustice, which dominates most of the discussion of *guanxi* (Gold, Guthrie and Wank, 2002).

G*uanxi* in academic discussions has both positive and negative implications. For critics, *guanxi* sometimes involves bribery and leads to corruption; for others, it merely represents one's social capital and involves returning favours or exchanging gifts which exist in all societies. Despite the different connotations that are attached to this term, the organisation of *guanxi* in China has been quite different from the forms of social connections in Western societies.

7.4.2 *Guanxi* in Business

Although *guanxi* extends to all walks of life in China, quite often it is seen specifically as a systematic approach of conducting business (Luo, 1997, Lovett, Simmons and Kali, 1999), as it first drew the attention from 'Western' countries in the business sector (Fan, 2002). After the introduction of market economy, gifts exchange and bribes, as two key components of *guanxi*, have become central factors in the development of capitalist relations of production in China (Smart, 1993). In my own interviews, nearly a third of the teachers had been involved in business positions and observed the practices of *guanxi* from the perspective of conducting business operations. They noted that Chinese people tended to only establish business relationships with people they knew. Participants thus commented that in order to successfully conduct a business deal, people would normally make friends with potential partners as the very first and necessary step. This quite often meant that one party would treat banquets to the other and talk about businesses over tables. An Australian teacher commented on her own experiences of being in charge of a department and conducting projects with Chinese businessmen, where the practices of *guanxi* were confusing for her:

> *In a business context, from a Western perspective, especially from an Australian perspective, the first thing for us is we sit at a table, ok, what do you bring to the table, what do I bring to the table, what can we agree or disagree, negotiate or compromise, sign the paper, thank you very much and see you later. That's how we do business. Maybe we'll go for a drink later; whereas here, you don't know. Are they going to agree or disagree? We don't know. We*

just keep drinking and drinking. It's very interesting. From a management perspective, it took quite a while to get used to. You can't push, because if you do, it might not result in a good way. You just let the diners and meetings happen, and then there will be results.

(Judy, October 2011)

The gift giving aspect of *guanxi* practices sometimes seems to have caused ambiguity and misinterpretation. One British teacher[98] noted that in the business context there was generally less gift giving in Britain because it might be misconstrued as bribery. What has to be noted here is that China is becoming increasingly incorporated into the global market. The increasing amount and extent of international cooperation will most likely lead to the development of formal structural institutions, challenging the persistence of *guanxi* practices and weakening its importance in some domains, as some existing literature have also suggested (Guthrie, 2002, Hanser, 2002).[99]

7.4.3 Manipulation of *Renqing*

Another aspect of *guanxi* is returning *renqing* (favour). It has similar connotations as reciprocal giving, where a person has to return *renqing* to the person who has offered help before. One teacher narrated his experience during a dinner to which he was treated, and the people who treated him bluntly asked him to teach their children English in order to return this favour of dinner:

I remember one of the teachers in the university asked me if I wanted to go for lunch. I said to my wife (she is Chinese) 'do you want to go for lunch with these people'. She said 'no, no, no, I don't want to go for lunch with them', and she dismissed me. I didn't understand. I was like 'why? why not?', you know. So I went for dinner with this woman and her husband and another couple. Half way through the dinner, they brought up their children and said 'will you teach our children English'. I was like 'how can you say no'. That wouldn't happen in the West; you wouldn't have that. So things like that—you were persuaded to do things that you didn't want to do, which is a different culture, like the guanxi thing, where I do you a favour so you have to do me a favour. We don't have that in the West so much. I came home and told my wife 'do you know that they brought their children up half way through the meal and ask me to teach their kid?!' She said 'yeah, I knew it would happen'. And I'm like 'why didn't you tell me?!' (chuckle)

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[98] Adam, October 2011.
[99] Yang's (2002) historical approach to the study of *guanxi* suggests that the cultures of *guanxi* are in continuous transformation to adapt to new social institutions and structures in China; *guanxi* practices may indeed decline in some areas but find new ones in which to grow and flourish.

In this case, the parents felt they could ask a favour from the respondent by giving a favour of treating him dinner first. This put personal pressure onto the respondent and made it difficult for him to refuse (in comparison to how he might have responded if he had been asked under a formal context without any personal favour involved). Another male teacher, who had been living in China for more than 7 years, commented that he knew well the cultural meanings of personal favours and how to utilise them, though he did not like to use them:

> *In China, I've got the feelings that often people will offer to do something for you but want something in return. So I know how to play that game as well. But I don't really like playing it so much. If I think someone is trying to take advantage of me, then I would call and ask them to do me a favour or do something for me. So for example, if I help out a student who is not mine; they are quite forward and saying 'Can we meet again? Can you mark some of my work?' I said 'Well, what's in it for me?', 'OK. Fine. But you have to mark my Chinese work.' (Chuckle). You know, if they are too pushy and trying to take too much advantage, I need to count on that. I don't want to, don't really like that.*
>
> *(Adam, October 2011)*

It can be seen that such practices of *guanxi* involve primarily the manipulation of *renqing* to achieve personal purposes or advantage. These rely on the resources that one has to offer to exchange.

7.4.4 *Guanxi* vs. the Social Connections in Western Countries

It was thus commented that the most important element of *guanxi* was one's personal connections, that is, the people one knew and were able to offer help to under certain circumstances. It was widely seen that deeply connected *guanxi* was often established through classmates and friends in universities and colleges. One teacher[100] commented from this perspective that the students he came to know would often have a group of friends from the university and last for their entire lives, to whom they would reach out to for help later on in their lives, whether for personal situations, career paths or business setups. Another respondent had similar understandings:

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[100] John, October 2011.

> *I just heard yesterday from someone that a lot of the 'guanxi' is linked to your university class—people who are in your class at the university tend to be lifelong friends, people that you'd contact when you need help.*
>
> *(Peter, October 2011)*

This is understandable as university life is the first adulthood experience away from the environment determined by the parents for many students and directly precedes entrance into the job market and careers for which social contacts are quite important in any country (Mayer and Puller, 2007).

Almost all respondents nonetheless mentioned that *guanxi* or similar forms of social relations were not unique to China and Chinese people, and certainly not always negative. One respondent from Australia[101] commented that finding a job in Australia was also dependent on the connections people had. He noted that most of the jobs he had got were because he knew the right people at the right time and he was recommended to the positions before anybody else was. Montgomery's (1991) reviews the studies on the importance of social connections in labour market in various countries and notes that approximately 50% of all workers employed at that time found their jobs through friends and relatives. Bayer, Ross and Topa (2004) observe that individuals residing in the same block in Boston, US are significantly more likely to work together, suggesting a strong neighborhood referral effect, which illustrate the important role of social connections in the job market. Existing literature as such points to a trend that social connections are used in many countries to achieve personal advantages, especially in terms of employment. One teacher[102] from Britain commented that the Chinese system of *guanxi* was simply similar to the 'old boy network' or the 'old school tie' in Britain. It refers to an exclusive group or class whose membership is governed by personal connections (Taylor, 2000), which can be seen as similar to the university networks of Chinese students mentioned above. In my own interview here, the same respondent[103] commented that 'there is a Western perception that *guanxi* sometimes can be corruption, which is not necessarily true'. Certainly, *guanxi* is used in different ways and to different degrees from the social connections in the West in terms of employment,[104] and some elements of *guanxi* could be interpreted as foul play or even corruption from a Western perspective. One respondent narrated his experience of

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[101] Peter, October 2011.
[102] RB, October 2011.
[103] Peter, October 2011.
[104] See, for example, Yang's (2002) anthropological analysis of how *guanxi* was used in obtaining employment, job transfers and promotions during the period of state job allocation system.

renewing his visa in China through certain *guanxi* and indicated that it was done in a preferential way and certain regulations might have just been circumvented:

> *I had to get my visa renewed and somebody at the university might know somebody in the government, and they can quickly talk to that person and let that person make sure everything goes smoothly.*
>
> *(Peter, October 2011)*

Nonetheless, some elements of *guanxi* were also shared amongst other cultures such as in Britain but indeed it might have been more organised and widely practiced in China.

7.5 Summary

This study finds that even though only half a dozen participants referred specifically to the 'inscrutable Chinese' as a major image they had about Chinese people, there was a strong indication that almost all of them had such ideas before and almost all had encountered culture shock which was generated by experiences related to them. In public places, such as on public transportation and on the streets, Chinese people were seen as very loud and sometimes rude in manners; while in more private social settings, such as meetings, there was a tendency amongst their Chinese colleagues to keep quiet and not to express their opinions and feelings. This is also the case for their Chinese students in class as there was a lack of initiative amongst the students to be actively engaged in interacting with the teachers.

In this respect, this study finds that the Chinese concept of *mianzi* was at the center of the perceived passive behaviour of the students in class. Answering the teacher's question, when nobody else did, could be considered as showing off. While if the answer is incorrect, it may be seen as losing *mianzi*. As maintaining *mianzi* is essential to the Chinese people, most students were thus less likely to interact with the teachers than Western students. There are three aspects of *mianzi* that were revealed in participants' comments: losing *mianzi*, keeping *mianzi* and giving *mianzi*. This study argues that while losing face and keeping face is an important part of every culture, giving face was considered as an essential element of Chinese cultural framework in particular. This was revealed by

participants who were in China for a relatively long time and who were married to a Chinese person. This aspect of *mianzi* often involves the person who is lower in the social hierarchy showing respect to the person who is higher up in the structure. This was commented on more by the participants who were married into a Chinese family because the closer a Western teacher established relationships with a Chinese family, the more ritual and customs were to be applied on him/her.

The Chinese concept of *guanxi* was also at the core of the sampled Western expatriates' social interactions in China. For participants who had been involved in management positions in China, the importance of *guanxi* was seen as essential in terms of business operations. For the practices of *guanxi* in general, participants who had been in China for relatively long period of time (usually more than 5 years) were more likely to understand the complex nature of it and even manipulate it through receiving and returning *renqing*. In addition, although *guanxi* was seen as a particularly significant element of China, it was noted by almost all participants that similar forms of social connections also existed in their home countries. British respondents made particular reference to the 'old boy network' in Britain as an example. Nonetheless, the perceived centrality of *guanxi* and the ways in which *guanxi* is practiced by Chinese people are unique and quite different from what exists in Western societies. Such practices and understandings of them are believed to be an essential part of Western expatriate teachers' social life in China: how well they could utilise them might well indicate how well they could integrate into the Chinese society.

Chapter 8 Chinese Families and Women's Social Conditions

8.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses family relations in China and young women's roles in them. **Section 8.2** shows how the sampled Western expatriate teachers perceived the structures of Chinese families, and how these were seen as different from family structures in Western countries. **Section 8.3** shows the conflict in terms of attitude and values between the young urban educated Chinese students and their parents. It focuses in particular on the experiences of female Chinese students. **Section 8.4** shows the struggle of young urban educated Chinese females in terms of marriage and family obligation.

8.2 Family Structures in China

Family relations in China were widely reported in a positive way by my sample, with more than two thirds of the respondents appreciating the strong bonds that Chinese families seemed to have. From their perspectives, Chinese people were quite supportive of each other in the family: parents cared about the children to a great extent and they were quite likely to take good care of their elderly parents.

In general, the structures of Chinese families were reported to be quite different from those in Western societies. One American teacher[105] had a Chinese girlfriend when he was in the States and met her family. He commented that the Chinese family had entirely different dynamic, with all the parents, grandparents and siblings living together. This is certainly true for some Chinese families, both living abroad and in China. As Tsui (1989) observes, even though the nuclear family has always been the most prevailing family structure in

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[105] John, October 2011.

China, the common existence of stem family is also persistent, even in a slight increase, and a rapid decrease of this structure is not likely to occur in the near future in China. It is common for older-generation overseas Chinese people to live in a stem family structure, especially since they are quite likely to not have enough money to obtain multiple properties in a developed country such as the US. In the Chinese domestic context, it is also widely argued that coresidence between generations still remains at a high level (Bian, Logan and Bian, 1998, Logan and Bian, 1999, Logan and Bian, 2003, Zhang, 2004). An American respondent, who had been living in China for 10 years commented on the different structures and intergenerational relations that she had observed of Chinese families:

> *In China, the children are being taken care of by the grandparents. The parents work and support the elderly and the children, and the elderly support and take care of the young ones (children), and support the parents at work by doing all the cooking and shopping and many other things. It's a very integrated system of care for one and another. It works quite well as long as everybody is doing their parts. But our system doesn't.*
> *(Sarah, October 2011)*

Her comments indicate a stronger tie and higher possibility of coresidence between generations within Chinese families. Indeed, traditional Confucian cultural scripts promote an ideal living arrangement of large and extended families (Tu, Liang and Li, 1989). The high level of intergenerational coresidence is thus likely to be understood particularly as the cultural practices of tradition. Yet the persistence of large family structures in China, such as stem families, is not solely due to cultural tradition, as most participants in the interviews implicitly indicated, but also because of social and economic factors (Tsui, 1989, Logan, Bian and Bian, 1998). The decisions to coreside are often strategic rather than based solely on a fixed cultural framework (Logan and Bian, 1999). As the mothers of young children increasingly participate in the labour force during industrialisation, which has been occurring in China at the moment, more adult children rely on services from elderly parents for housework and childcare and make monetary transfers to the parents in exchange (Morgan and Hirosima, 1983). The aging population, combined with the underdeveloped social welfare system in China, furthermore, urges traditional family support, such as coresidence, for the elderly (Zhang, 2004).

In comparison, most of the respondents in my sample commented that the family structures of their original countries had been disintegrating. Certainly this was the case to some

extent. For example, as Jenkins, Pereira and Evans (2008) report, British families are increasingly transforming into a mix of non-traditional structures such as stepfamilies, cohabiting parents, single parents, couples living apart together and civil partnerships due to a variety of factors including a more relaxed societal attitudes towards sex, marriage and divorce; societal aging, an increase in the employment of women as well as changes in legislation for divorce and civil partnerships. The SIRC[106] report (2008, p. 12) also reveals that, in the UK, the number of all marriages and first marriages are decreasing while the number of remarriages and divorces are gradually growing over the past three decades, and the overall ratio of divorce reached 55% in 2006, which is significantly higher than that in China, even though the Chinese divorce rate has also been increasing in recent years. It is also argued elsewhere that stepfamilies are the fastest growing family formation in the UK.[107] These all suggest a trend of restructuring within family units in the UK from traditional towards non-traditional types.

This, however, does not necessarily mean that family ties in Western countries, such as the UK, are much looser or even broken, as over two thirds of the respondents suggested. There has been evidence indicating that stem and extended families are not uncommon in Western countries and that the role of extended family members such as grandparents is also crucial to children's growth. In the case of the UK, for example, grandparents are growingly important in supporting family life and caring for children, with every 1 in 3 grandparents now in Britain having a dependent child living with them and half of the grandparents having a living parent of their own (Grandparents Plus, 2009). Since the number of broken families and that of women returning to work have both been increasing, it is often grandparents or other extended family members who step in to fill up the gap of childcare. To the wider context of all families in the UK, it is also argued in the same report that 40% of the parents are much likely to turn to grandparents to seek for help with childcare (Grandparents Plus, 2009, p. 6). News reports also shed some light on the return of extended family structure in the UK:[108] it was recently reported that the country had seen an increase in multi-generational households, which was primarily driven by economic factors including the squeeze on incomes and jobs, the cost of housing and the pressure of both childcare and eldercare. To some extent, the necessity of large family structures and the role of grandparents in the UK are much similar to that of the Chinese

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[106] The Social Issues Research Centre in Oxford, UK.
[107] A report from Grandparents Plus published in March 2009.
[108] Bingham, J. *Telegraph, 22/08/2012*.

families.

In discussing the different cultural values of family and intergenerational relations, it was widely reported in my sample that it was culturally much more expected for Chinese people to take care of their retired-age parents financially as well as socially by living close or even together with them; whereas the cultural atmosphere was judged as quite different in Western societies. One British female respondent commented that 'I live in China and my parents in the UK—it's not a big deal. I love them, but I don't feel I have to be in the same city as they are'. Comparison was further made on the different attitudes towards family support for the elderly in the US and the wider context of Western societies:

> In Chinese society, it's very much expected that you will take care of your parents when they are elderly. And if you send them to a retirement home, it's quite bad; whereas in the US, some elderly actually choose to do that because they don't want to be a burden or a string on their children. It's not because their children don't care for them. In Chinese society there is such a strong obligation you have to your family. So you give money to support your family and you move back to your hometown, not because you want to, but because you have to be there for your parents. In the West, we don't have that strong obligation to your family, because we are so independent of each other. We wouldn't think about worrying about certain things about parents.
>
> *(Katherine, October 2011)*

This perception was prevalent amongst the interviewees. The literature also supports this view in respect to the strong bond between Chinese children and parents. Bian, Logan and Bian (1998, p. 122) conducted a survey in two major Chinese cities and concludes that noncoresident adult children live close to parents, maintain high levels of face-to-face contact with them and provide help on a regular basis to them. The comments in my study indicate strongly that money transfer from adult children to elderly parents commonly existed in China. In this respect, however, evidence suggests that this is only true to a certain extent and the situations have been complex. For example, Logan and Bian (2003, p. 92) find, in their study of nine major Chinese cities in 1987, that 42% of the parents neither give nor receive money from their nonresident adult children; yet over one third receive financial compensation from their adult children while do not provide any to them, which is still a considerable proportion. Furthermore, the ways in which intergenerational financial transfers and social support for the elderly occur are also depended on a variety of additional variables such as the number of children (Zimmer and Kwong, 2003), gender and marital status (Bian, Logan and Bian, 1998, Logan and Bian, 2003, Zhang, 2004),

elderly parents' needs and urban/rural regional divide (Lee and Xiao, 1998), class statuses of both the adult children and their elderly parents (Zhang, 2004) as well as children's educational backgrounds (Zhan, 2004). In particular, participants commented on the geographical proximity that many Chinese families seemed to have shared. One respondent from Britain described the geographical scatteredness of his family members:

> *I said to my students where did your family come from. They all say 'we've got a hometown'. I say in my family, we hold English, Australian, Chinese, Dutch and French passports, and we live on every continent in the world except for Antarctica. So when they say 'where is your hometown', I say 'it depends on which part of the family you are talking about'. We get together every few years. Last time we got together was in Australia, but there is no way normally we would be in the same place at the same time. Even I have a brother and a sister, we are never in the same country; we live in three different countries.*
> *(Jake, October 2011)*

What has to be stressed here is that this was likely a unique characteristic that only prevailed in this particular socio-cultural group of expatriate teachers and might not be more widely extended to other individuals or groups from the West. As was frequently mentioned, many of the respondents in my sample had previously lived and worked in other foreign countries for extensive periods of time. The particular expatriate life style was, therefore, much likely to have become a normality to themselves as well as to their families.

In terms of the current transformation of China, on the other hand, there is growing evidence to suggest that traditional ideas and values are shifting and reshaping rapidly upon the growing contact with foreign cultures as well as the increasing accessibility of high quality higher education. For example, young Chinese people are increasingly focusing on individual happiness and growing a stronger sense of personal independence (Yu, 1997). This suggests that the younger generation of Chinese people is more likely to prioritise personal development over family obligation. In the same study, where Bian, Logan and Bian (1998) observe that most noncoresident children live in proximity to their parents, they also find out that higher-educated children are more likely to move further away from parents than were lower-educated ones. Zhan (2004) also observes that, born under the state's 'One-Child' policy, young Chinese adults' higher educational levels are negatively related to their commitment to parental care when they foresee conflicts between their job and family care. In my own interviews, it was noted that a growing number of their students were reluctant to return home for significant Chinese traditions

and festivals, and it was further mentioned that some young newly-employed Chinese people (who were used to be the respondents' students) would rather choose to work overtime during these national holidays than pay a visit back home for family reunions. Certainly the latter might be extreme cases, but it is clear from existing studies and my own interviews as well that there has been a shift in the ideas and values away from the traditional ones amongst younger and better-educated Chinese people, especially the 'One-Child' generation, in terms of one's identities in family and society. I will now move on to discuss this shift and the potential conflicts caused in between generations.

8.3 Clashes between Generations

While economic reform with the introduction of market economy significantly increases the financial capabilities of average Chinese people, the 'One-Child' policy, implemented around the same time, drastically decreases fertility and thus the number of children per household. These two factors combined, with the additional factor of the educational expansion since the late 1990s (Bai, 2006), allow a much greater opportunity for younger generation Chinese people to receive higher education. This, however, lead to a potential clash of ideas and values between young Chinese students and their parents', for whom higher education was much less widely accessible. An American male respondent had a female Chinese friend, who had received a prestigious education and was judged to be very intelligent. He commented on how this Chinese person had serious conflicts over her attitudes towards traditions and religious beliefs with her mother:

> *My friend's father just passed away. She's brilliant; absolutely brilliant. She's top at her class in Nanjing University[109] in Law. But her mother doesn't have higher education. She's from Nantong,[110] and she lives in a part that's more like a village. At her father's funeral, she (the daughter) went through all these traditional Buddhist stuff. She didn't understand why; she tried to get an explanation. And all they answered was 'tradition'. Don't question it, just do it. For her, she has an exquisite mind and an independent personality. So it's very hard for her to just accept only because 'it's what we do'. She couldn't handle it, and it almost drove her crazy.*
>
> *(Matthew, October 2011)*

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[109] Nanjing University is arguably a top 10 university in China, and many see it as being in the top 5.
[110] Nantong is a third-tier city near Nanjing.

In my interviews, such conflicts in values and attitudes between the college-student generation and their parents' were frequently reported. Existing studies are also able to lend some support in this respect. Egri and Ralston (2004) observe that value orientations have changed through three generations of Chinese people. In the process of industrialisation and modernisation after the Open-Up policy, college-educated Chinese youth are under the strong influences of Western cultures and the Chinese traditional morality is seen to be collapsing at the current age (Wang, 2006). Philo's (2010) analysis of Chinese students in Britain also reveals a cultural clash between young Chinese people and their parents. Nevertheless, it was revealed in my sample that there were still young educated people who shared deep traditional beliefs with older generation and were seen as being caught up in between old values and new ones. One female respondent commented on how she thought all traditional cultural practices were gone but did observe them in a young educated Chinese woman:

> *One of my Chinese friends' mother died recently. I never suspected it, because she's educated and intelligent. But suddenly she told me that she couldn't visit me because when someone dies in the family, you are not supposed to visit because you'd bring bad luck. She started to bring all these strange beliefs that I thought were nonexistent in China. But she was telling me how she has to celebrate her mother's death by various dates. So you do this six weeks after and six months later something else. All of these, which I think are OK, but some of them are excessive. The beliefs are all somewhere subconscious in China. When her mother was ill, she was treated in modern hospital but also traditional Chinese hospital. That kind of double lives as if there is one part, which is deeply traditional, and the other part which is modern. And they haven't yet merged completely.*
>
> *(Grace, October 2011)*

This narrative demonstrates the confusion that the Western expatriate teachers had towards the perceived paradoxical values and beliefs in contemporary China. There is a part of Chinese values that have been shifting away from the traditional ones, yet still some parts of its cultural framework remain deeply rooted in tradition and even superstitions. As Faure and Fang (2008) argue, the single most important cultural characteristic of China is its ability to manage paradoxes, even during the current time of fundamental transition. They observe that modern beliefs and adaptation of science come paradoxically hand in hand with traditional and new religious beliefs which provide some answers to the spiritual needs left unattended in China (Faure and Fang, 2008, p. 205). This seems to have explained, in part, the struggles of many of such young educated Chinese females.

8.4 Social Conditions for Young Women in China

It was widely reported in my sample that young unmarried Chinese women were under significant pressures in terms of education, employment and marriage, with marriage being the most prominent one. Traditional Chinese cultural framework values women as wives and mothers. Pressure comes not only from the identities of women as mother and housewife, but also, more importantly, on the specific age to achieve such identities. Nearly two thirds of the respondents noted that when an unmarried young Chinese woman reached a particular age, there would be tremendous pressure to push her into marriage. It was widely reported in the interviews that the age of 25 or so seemed to be a threshold for Chinese women in terms of marriage. One British female teacher commented on her experiences with her Chinese female PhD students:

> *I still find it very difficult to understand, to see my students who are doing PhD here to get married by the age of 26 and bear a child at the age of 28. It's not very good for them; they have to get married… one of my students said she had to get married before she did a PhD because she would never find a husband afterwards. It's interesting to see how much traditional values still hold on China.*
>
> *(Carine, October 2011)*

Similar comments can also be found in other works. For example, in Philo's (2010, p. 106) work, it was also mentioned that marriage at the age of 25 was seen by the public as routine for Chinese women. Chinese current social attitudes have particular negative views on single women beyond a specific age and tend to label them as 'leftover women' (*sheng nu*). This particular terminology recently hit British major media outlets and has provoked heated debates amongst the public.[111] Previous stories on this subject can also be found in other major global news networks such as the New York Times.[112] These reports have been triggered by the Chinese government allowing the official feminist All-China Women's Federation to use the term 'leftover women' to articulate the growing number of urban, educated, professional and single females aged between 27-30 who have 'failed' to find a husband. Furthermore, the State's laws of marriage seem to have also supported such social attitudes. One British respondent in my study was married to a Chinese woman,

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[111] BBC, Guardian and The Daily Mail almost simultaneously reported this current cultural phenomenon in early 2013. Source: Magistad, M. K. *BBC, 21/02/2013*, *The Guardian, 24/02/2013*, Simpson, p. *Daily Mail, 21/02/2013*.

[112] Fincher, L. H. *New York Times, 11/10/2012*.

and they got married when the wife was 25 and had a baby when she was 27. He mentioned that she was able to have extended maternal leave because she was 'late marriage, late birth' as defined by the law:

> *She was only 27 and it was considered late by the Chinese law! In Britain, that's early!*
>
> (Ian, October 2011)

These examples, however, do not suggest that the social pressure for young Chinese women to get married is solely the consequence of state's propaganda, media discourse and official legislation, but rather a manifestation of how overwhelming the cultural atmosphere has been in China. Historically arranged marriages had been widely practiced in China but encountered a sharp decline when the idea of freedom of love and marriage was introduced and promoted by the state after it opened its door of exchange with the outside, particularly with Western societies. Xu and Whyte (1990) observe that although the parents' role in children's marriages has decreased drastically while young people are in growing dominance in spouse selection, there are still signs of a 'dating culture' emerging in recent years. In Shanghai, for example, there has been a growing popularity from media and the public on the 'matchmaking corner' (literally *xiang qin jiao* in Chinese) located in the People's Park (see pictures below), which is at the very center of the city. In this increasingly famous corner, personal information about marriage seekers are put up along the sides of the corridor as advertisements. The information normally includes sex, age, physical description (height etc.), educational background, income, household registration and property status[113] (if any, whether it is registered at one's own name) as well as the requirements for the potential partners, which would often include equivalent information. It is believed that these have mostly been carried out by the parents without the actual seekers themselves being present and a large proportion of the seekers are in their late 20s to 30s, with women accounting for nearly two thirds.[114] Figures 8-1, 8-2, 8-3 and 8-4 below will demonstrate the environment of this matchmaking corner.

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[113] Household registration still matters very much for Shanghai local women, so does the property owning status of the potential partner. Many people residing in Shanghai have not yet had their household registered locally, many are renting without owning any property, many own properties but these have been registered under other family members' names, most commonly the parents' as they have likely funded the purchase.

[114] A lecturer, Sun Peidong, in the Department of Sociology from East China Normal University (in Shanghai) published her research finding about this matchmaking corner as a news article on a local newspaper in 2012. She observes that over 60% of the marriage seekers are women and half of them are aged between 26-30. Source: Sun, p. *Dongfang Daily 31/10/2012.*

Figure 8- 1 'Matchmaking Corner' in People's Park, Shanghai[115]

Figure 8- 2 'Matchmaking Corner' in People's Park, Shanghai

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[115] Figures 8-1 – 8-4 were taken by Huang Junchun in Shanghai. He gives me full authorisation to use these images in this thesis.

Figure 8- 3 'Matchmaking Corner' in People's Park, Shanghai

Figure 8- 4 'Matchmaking Corner' in People's Park, Shanghai

It is, however, not clear whether it is the parents who prompt their children to participate in matchmaking and blind dates or if it is the children who initially ask for their parents' help to do so. In my own interviews, it was widely noted that such pressure had primarily come from family members, particularly, but not exclusively, the mothers. One female

respondent commented that some Chinese parents would press their daughters into marriage by continuingly arranging blind dates without their consent; and some had eventually, yet unwillingly, given in:

> *So they keep throwing these young men at the girls. I have two friends here who recently got married because they just give in to the pressure. The first two guys their parents introduced to them, they didn't like them, but by the time it got to the third or fourth, they gave in to the pressure. The thing is they were going to keep doing this until they get married. Because they don't want to hurt the parents; they don't want to let the parents down.*
>
> *(Madelyn, October 2011)*

She went on to describe how some Chinese mothers would put emotional pressure on the children:

> *You know, 'Oh, I'm not going to have any grandchildren; I'll die before I have grandchildren', this kind of stuff. 'I want to see you settled; I care about you'.*
>
> *(Madelyn, October 2011)*

On the other hand, there was little evidence to suggest a similar degree of social pressure towards young single Chinese men or unmarried young women in Western countries. This same respondent was originally from Spain but had spent most of her adult life in Britain. She referred to the parental attitudes in Spain towards marriage:

> *In Spain, parents will say to unmarried girls 'Oh, when are you going to get married and settle down' and everything, but people don't assume that as a pressure, they just… they don't see it as a reason to go and get married. I have some unmarried friends in Spain who are getting in their 30s. They say that their mothers always ask… but if they have any pressure, it's from themselves. It's because I really would quite like to get married, but I just never met the right person. But I don't think there is any parental pressure.*
>
> *(Madelyn, October 2011)*

Another British male respondent[116] noted that his brother had been living with a partner for over ten years without any pressure to get married from both families. This was further confirmed by my interviewees of Chinese students in Britain: although half a dozen girls noted that there was no such pressure in their families, almost all female students agreed that it was largely true for many Chinese girls but the same was much less likely to occur in Western countries, such as Britain. Cross-cultural statistics on marriage ages also lend

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[116] Ian, October 2011.

some support to this difference. The UN World Marriage Data (2012) demonstrates that up until 2010, only 21.6% Chinese women aged 25-29 were single, while the figure of the UK and the USA were 71.9% and 46.3% in 2009 respectively.[117] Between the age of 30 to 34, there was still a significant proportion (47.8%) of British women who were single (meanwhile the divorce rate was quite low) while the figure in China dropped drastically down to only 5.4%. This suggests that the majority of Chinese women get married in their 20s with a large proportion between 25-29 years of age (though the source also suggests the average age of women's first marriage is in gradual increase over the past three decades in China). In addition, the age of 25-29 is also most likely to correspond to the very first few years right after university for the majority of the current generation of Chinese youth to start their first jobs. This means that a large proportion of marriages have occurred during this specific period. One British teacher, in this respect, commented on the fixed cultural scripts that many young educated Chinese people were still adhering to in terms of education, employment and marriage, especially women:

> *Here (in China), you get out of university, the first thing people are saying is once you've got a job, you're getting married, having a baby and buying a house. You know, those three things. It must be a little bit of suffocating for people. Because you've had ten years of education up to high school where your teachers tell you to do everything—you must do this, you must do this; then to get to university where it's the same. And at some point between university and your first job, you have to meet someone who you want to spend the rest of your life with. You know in high schools you are not allowed to have boyfriends or girlfriends. Then suddenly, in a five-year period after high school, you are meant to meet the person you want to marry, buy a house and have a child. How? If I was forced to do that, I would've married to the wrong one. I would've just married to someone I met at the university, and it would've been a failure.*
>
> *(Ian, October 2011)*

In comparison, one female respondent commented on why in Britain and other Western societies there was less proportion of people in the same age range who had been married:

> *...because people are aware that so many people now are getting divorced, people realise that marriage is not going to be for life anyway. So lots of people are rethinking it. The situation in Britain is that there are now a lot more people living along in Britain than live in a family unit, because divorces are so common, people don't get married—they sometimes live together and things like this. So the situation in Britain is that I don't think there is any*

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[117] As some respondents who had lived in Japan commented that the social pressure on women's marriage was considered much more overwhelming, it is quite interesting to see that the figure of Japan was in fact 60.3%, which is quite higher than that of the US and only slightly lower than the UK.

pressure at all on women getting married. There is the pressure of finding the Mr. Right or love of life, because the whole romantic thing is about finding this wonderful person.

(Madelyn, October 2011)

As mentioned above, the average age of first marriage in China has also been increasing, along with the divorce rate, for the past three decades. With women growingly participating in the labour force and becoming financially more secure and independent, the situation in China is nonetheless very likely to transform as well.

8.5 Summary

The Chinese family relations were widely praised by almost all participants for the strong bonds between generations, which was seen to have been reflected in intergenerational care and coresidence. In comparison, over two thirds of my sample judged that family structures in Western societies had been degenerating to a certain extent. This is certainly true, but my study finds that these participants tended to overlook the growing importance, in Western societies such as Britain, of extended families, intergenerational coresidence and grandparents' role in children's care due to socioeconomic factors such as the increasing number of women returning to work after giving birth as well as the increase in living cost. In this respect, participants in my sample tended to relate the practices of intergenerational coresidence in China primarily to the cultural tradition of extended family. This might again overlook the fact that similar socioeconomic factors mentioned above exist in Western societies are now increasingly influencing the structures of Chinese families as well. This study also finds that although the majority of participants indicated that Chinese adult children tended to live in close proximity to their retired parents, which is supported by existing literatures, there has also been a growing tendency amongst the current generation of young urban educated Chinese students to prioritise their personal development over the obligation of family care.

In terms of cultural conflicts between the current generation of young urban educated Chinese students and their parents, this study finds that on the one hand, there has been a tendency amongst these young Chinese people to break away from traditional values held

by their parents, while on the other hand, traditional rituals and beliefs still have significance despite the impact of higher education expansion and encounters with Western cultures. The clash of values between parents and children along with the contradictory attitudes amongst young Chinese students towards traditional superstitions and modern science are a manifestation of the paradoxes of contemporary China in its pursuit of modernisation.

Almost all participants reported that young unmarried Chinese women were under sever social pressure to achieve the identity of wife and mother, while there was seemingly much less pressure in this respect in the West. There was a perceived tendency amongst the sampled Western teachers to judge these identities as the main criteria in China that defined Chinese women's values. This study argues that this social atmosphere is not only a consequence of the persistent traditional Chinese attitudes towards women in terms of marriage and motherhood, but also the result of the current government's propaganda as well as the official legislation of marriage. Thus, arranged married, as a historically common practice in Chinese society, is still persistent yet in an adjusted manner. In this respect, this study also provides a detailed analysis of the currently heated cultural phenomenon of 'matchmaking corner' to articulate it. In addition, women's identities and their role in family and society will also be discussed in Chapter 11.3 from Chinese students' perspective.

Part III Chinese Students in Britain

Chapter 9 Intention, Previous Expectation and the Perception Gap

9.1 Introduction

This chapter mainly explores the experiences of Chinese students before coming to Britain. It begins with an overview of the history of educational and cultural contact between China and the outside, especially with developed countries such as the US and Western European countries. **Section 9.3** identifies motives of the sampled Chinese students for coming to Britain and discusses these with regards to the conceptual framework elaborated in Chapters 2.2 and 2.3. **Section 9.4** then demonstrates, in detail, what ideas and expectations the participants had of Britain before arrival, how they obtained these ideas and how their experiences differed from their prior perceptions. In **Section 9.4.1**, their previous perceptions and the sources of these perceptions are identified. **Sections 9.4.2** and **9.4.3** examine the 'culture shock' experiences that participants had when they first arrived, specifying their impressions of the 'British gentlemen' and encounters with 'troublesome' British teenagers.

9.2 Chinese Students Overseas – Historical Background

There has been a long history between China and Western countries in terms of educational contacts. It was in 1847 that the first Chinese overseas student Rong Hong went to study at Yale University (Yao, 2004), and in 1872 the Qing Court first dispatched a group of thirty teenage students to America based on the agreement of both governments (Qian, 2002). The majority of overseas Chinese students, before the late 1970s, had been organised and sent overseas only by the government due to various reasons such as warfare, change of government and the consequences of international political relations and domestic disturbances (Yao, 2004).

When Deng Xiaoping initiated the 'Reform and Open-Up' Policy of China in 1978, educational exchanges between China and the developed world subsequently entered into a boom phase prompted by a variety of state policies. The Chinese government promulgated a series of polices encouraging young Chinese people to study abroad and contribute to the country's modernisation with their foreign education. Firstly the government reduced the limitations on self-funded students going abroad in the mid 1980s, and then in 1993 a confirmed official policy was released where the government 'supports students to study abroad, encourages them to come back, and guarantees their freedom of coming back and leaving' (Yao, 2004, p. 7). Meanwhile, the 'One-Child' policy was also introduced in 1978. The Chinese government was aiming at cultivating a generation with sufficient resources so that they could help their country, and thus themselves, to become modernised and developed. The children of the 'One-Child' policy were, therefore, born to become part of the country's modernisation drive, with high expectations and ambitions to achieve elite status (Fong, 2004).

At the initial stage of the economic reform and the 'One-Child' policy, between 1978 and 1987, eighty percent of overseas Chinese students had still been sponsored by the government or other organisations because most families at that time simply could not afford it, and of the students who were not government-supported, most of the funding came from foreign universities and institutions instead of their families (Yao, 2004). The circumstances started to change drastically in 1990s as the Chinese economy entered a boom period and an increased number of families had the financial power to send their children abroad. At a peak year, 2002, nighty-four percent of overseas Chinese students were self-funded (Yao, 2004), and the total number of overseas Chinese students from 1978 to 2009 reached to 1.62 million (Hayhoe, 2011). The surge in studying abroad has since been spreading so pervasively that in some Chinese cities it has become the norm for middle class families. As Vanessa Fong observes in her celebrated anthropological work on the Chinese 'One-Child' generation:

> *Almost all of the young people I met in the PRC told me at some point or other that they wanted to work and study in the First World Society.*
> *(Fong, 2006, p. 154)*

It can be seen from Fong's thesis that the 'One-Child' generation was born with the dream of entering the developed world and achieving elite status via education and career development. In a book called *Chinese Learning Journeys* (Su, 2011), eight Chinese

writers also depict their journeys of how they have managed to achieve their long-desired dream of studying and settling down in the UK. Even with the attempt to pursue a career back in China, foreign education is quite often seen as more prestigious than Chinese institutions. Many of the returned overseas Chinese students are working in international firms and joint ventures that offer better pay than Chinese companies, and many of them have currently occupied important positions in the Chinese government and have been incorporating the 'Western values' they have obtained from overseas (Li, 2006).

In the UK alone, there are now 120, 000 Chinese students currently in pursuit of higher education.[118] One of the reasons that countries like the UK are a most popular choice is that most Chinese students have learnt no other second language than English. As I have mentioned in Chapter 4.1, as part of the modernisation drive, English language education has been incorporated as part of the compulsory curriculum into Chinese educational system. All Chinese students are required to learn a second language since middle school. Now that the competition for higher education and elite status has become fiercer, a growing number of primary schools have included second language education as a compulsory part already. Many families start to put their children into English learning since even younger; even families who do not have enough budgets try to provide decent English education with what they have. The majority of Chinese students from primary school all the way to university study English as their second language as it is the most versatile and useful second language. For them, wanting to study in a native English speaking country such as Britain is reasonable as they do not need to learn another language. Furthermore, having invested as much in English as in Chinese, math and physics, it is only natural for Chinese students to want to directly experience the societies where English is the native language.

9.3 Why Do They Come to Britain?

Three significant factors are identified in this study as the motives for Chinese students to come to Britain.

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[118] Source: Ms. Cai Hong, Sectary of the Education Section in Embassy of P.R.C in the UK.

9.3.1 Prestige of a British Degree in a Short Period of Time

For almost all the student participants, the perceived prestigious international degrees and the potential social statuses attached to them were a most significant factor underpinning their decisions to study abroad. All my respondents believed that higher education degrees offered by British universities were quite prestigious and better than average Chinese domestic institutions in terms of experiences, knowledge and the cultural values that can be obtained. These were considered as quite helpful for their future employment and goals of achieving elite status. This factor was specifically important for those who were undertaking a master's degree in my sample. Of the 45 students, 40 of them were undertaking master's programs and five were in undergraduate programs. For almost all of the students who were in pursue of master's degrees, *the short duration of only 12 months* was a most important attraction and decisive factor for them to come to Britain.[119] The usual duration of completing a master's program in a North American university is 24 months, and for a Chinese university, it is usually between 24 to 36 months. It is significantly shorter than in British universities, which were believed to enjoy equal prestige as universities in North America and some other Western countries in terms of educational quality. In addition, the application requirements of British universities were considered easier by the participants since they did not have to take tests such as the GRE as they would have to if they were to apply for an American university. These tests were seen as much more complex, difficult and preparing for them would take much more time and efforts than for the British universities.[120]

Of these participants, three quarters saw higher education in Britain as an investment which would in return offer them higher potential in finding a better job back in China, and many indeed came with the specific purpose of obtaining the degree and going back to China for better employment right after. This was because the domestic job market did not seem to have much to offer to those with an average bachelor's degree. One female student indicated that the undergraduate degree she had obtained back in China could not help her find a decent job yet an overseas degree might make a difference:

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[119] There are indeed master's programs that lasted longer than 12 months, but all the participants who were master's students were doing a 12-months program, and it was agreed that almost all of their friends were studying for the same period of time.
[120] GRE (Graduate Record Examination) is the standardized admission examination for most universities in the US. Meanwhile, there is no such test for British universities. This was thus considered by the Chinese students as a big advantage for choosing to come to Britain over the US.

I was totally in a state of running away from the social reality. I came out because I didn't want to work right away. I found out that when I graduated in 2008, a lot of the fellow students went abroad because the state's economy wasn't very good and it was quit difficult to find a good job. If you were working in a small city, you would only earn one or two thousand yuan (100 or 200 pounds) a month, and two or three thousand (200 or 300 pounds) if you were in a big city. I thought I would rather not work at all.

(Liang Juan, Focus Group D, April 2011)

This was largely the case for the students in the one-year master's courses. As discussed in Chapter 6.4, this is partly due to the expansion of Chinese higher education in recent decades causing more fierce competition in the domestic job market, but it is also because the willingness of family members to concentrate all their financial resources to raise the standards of their only child's education to the 'First World' has resulted in a rapid increase in the economic standard of a respectable job (Fong, 2004). In addition, there has been an increasing emphasis on 'a good income' as the primary criterion for selecting a job (Bai, 1998).

For students who failed the *gaokao* (National Higher Education Entrance Examination) and ended up in a third-tier or even lower level university in China, obtaining a master's degree in a British university was considered as having the potential to significantly change their life paths, making them qualified for a much better range of jobs, compared to the circumstances they would face if they only had their first degree from a lower-tier Chinese university. One participant,[121] who was doing her undergraduate program, noted that she decided to come to Britain for undergraduate study right after she found out her unsatisfactory *gaokao* results, and she did not bother to spend four years wasting her life in a low-tier university in China, from which she would not have benefited much in the future.

As jobs in international firms and joint ventures were seen as quite decent in China in terms of financial compensation, some participants noted that having the educational background in a developed country would give them an advantage in pursuing such jobs, and living in an English speaking country could also help improve their English abilities[122] as well as their knowledge of foreign cultures, which would certainly make them more qualified for such positions.

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[121] Jia Qing, Focus Group B, April 2011.
[122] As mentioned in Chapter 4.2, English is seen by Chinese learners as having instrumental values.

9.3.2 Fascination of Western Cultures Combined with the Perceived Life Style of Independency

Cultural motives, which had been most frequently discussed in my sample, were another factor that was significant. One participant commented that 'I think everyone studying abroad has the reason of experiencing the culture'. This comment indeed reflects the reality as almost all participants mentioned their strong interest in foreign cultures, which is considered in my study an important factor in their decision to go abroad. However, this motive was largely an attachment to the first motive that was revealed above. Few participants indicated that Britain was of particular interest to them; nearly all participants saw the country as an equal option in terms of cultural experiences amongst all the developed countries where English was a native language. It is thus believed that the 'foreign' referred to by the participants here was most likely an indication of such countries. There was a strong indication that even though they were quite interested in the Britain *per se*, they came to it primarily because of the prestigious degrees to be gained in a relatively short period of time. Otherwise, they could have chosen other options such as the US, Canada or Australia. This is not however to suggest that British cultures were not fascinating to them, but rather to indicate that it was part of a more significant factor that was discussed in 9.3.1. Nonetheless three students did particularly mention the Premier League and commented that it was a dream for them to watch one of the highest level and most exciting football matches live in a stadium in England. One female student[123] even commented that most of her previous knowledge about Britain and British cultures had come from her vivid memories of the football teams' names and the related information (historical, geographical and cultural) about the cities that hosted those teams. She further noted some classic British movies such as *Love Actually* that gave her a very positive impression of Britain and thus made her want to see the country for herself. Nonetheless, this motive was most likely extendable to other popular countries for overseas education. Indeed, almost all the students mentioned that they wanted to see the foreign world in general and broaden their minds by coming out to experience the ways in which other peoples lived. One female student described her fascination with the foreign world:

> *I just wanted to experience the life of abroad and the cultures. I've always loved to live in a completely English speaking country and just talk to people. It's not saying that everything foreign is good and everything Chinese is bad.*

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[123] Jia Qing, Focus Group B, April 2011.

Not at all. I just naturally quite like the free and independent life style of foreign countries.

(Huang Jun, Focus Group G, May 2011)

Over one third of the students noted specifically that the experiences of living in a completely different country were quite attractive to them and they were looking forward to an exciting and challenging life overseas. To their knowledge, the impact of such cultural experiences would be quite profound and lasting to one's personal development not only in terms of potential career paths, but also, more significantly, in terms of one's knowledge, values and worldview that would fundamentally better them. For participants who had been so used to their families being around, studying abroad and living on their own (not necessarily financially though) was seen as a way of growing independence and self-care abilities. For instance, one female student noted that she had been living with her family for almost all her life before she came to Britain, even after she entered university where she was supposed to live on campus:

I had been living in my home city Dalian for my entire life, Even for my undergraduate study, I did it at the closest university near my home. So I knew little about being on my own or taking care of myself. I even lived at home during my undergraduate because I couldn't live on campus in the dormitory. I moved back home after my first year of university. So I didn't know how to live on my own and I couldn't handle it.

(Gu Ning, Focus Group F, April 2011)

However, less than a third of the sampled Chinese students had already been accustomed to living in different cities away from home so that choosing to live abroad was simply a continuity of their previous life style of experiencing different cultures. Only this time the cultural differences were expected to be much more profound. For example, one student[124] commented that her hometown, her undergraduate university and the company she worked for afterwards were three different cities because she had always wanted to travel to different places, live with different life styles, meet with different people and experience alternative ways of thinking and social life. Going abroad was an easy decision for her. Another student shared similar experiences and related her choice of coming to Britain to her previous experiences of relocation:

In China, I think between the southern and northern part, there are quite a lot of differences in customs and cultures. People think and deal with things in

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[124] Cheng Fan, Focus Group H, May 2011.

very distinguishing ways. I spent 20 years living in the north, so I wanted to go down to south to do university. After studying in the south, I thought I had spent so many years in China, so I wanted to go abroad to open my mind and improve my knowledge and experiences. I just wanted to appreciate different cultures and ways of thinking.

(Fang Wen, Focus Group H, May 2011)

From such comments, it was clear that diverse cultural experiences in a foreign country had been quite an important motivational factor for Chinese students to come to Britain.

9.3.3 Peer Pressure

Nearly half of the student participants noted that seeing fellow students going abroad and enjoying their lives or hearing such stories of parents' friends' children who were in the same age circle prompted their decisions. However, the extent to which peer group pressure worked was dependent on different educational backgrounds as well as regions. One student[125] who was attending private schools all the way from primary school up to high school commented that the large proportion of her fellow classmates and life-long friends had successively gone abroad for higher education. It was thus made easy for her to make this same choice. Another student[126] from an inner province in China, on the other hand, noted that there was little information available for her to refer to when she considered applying for an undergraduate program in a foreign country because few people knew anything about it and even fewer had been abroad. Peer pressure also worked in a rather contrasting fashion. As one student mentioned, when she was doing an internship after graduation, all her fellow colleagues who were about her age were eagerly anticipating marriage and having children, which made her realise that it was not the way she wanted her life to be. She wanted to experience the ways people lived in other parts of the world before settling down, rather than simply conform to the traditional Chinese values in terms of women's roles in family and society.[127]

9.3.4 Tourism

Certainly there were other factors that constituted motives for studying in Britain. Nearly

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[125] Qu Jia, Focus Group A, March 2011.
[126] Ma Na, Focus Group B, April 2011.
[127] This is discussed previously in Chapter 8.

one third of the students noted that tourism was important as Britain had quite a few internationally famous cities and scenic spots. What is more important was that Britain is located in Western Europe where there are a number of other famous tourism countries nearby. It was considered as an advantage over other destination such as North America and Australia.

For Chinese teachers in my sample, on the other hand, the work assignment was the primary reason for them to come. However it was nonetheless noted that the experience of British cultures and tourism was also highly anticipated, even though they would not have thought about this if they had not been given the opportunity to come and teach in Britain.

I will now move on to examine what ideas the participants had about Britain and British cultures before they came and how these ideas fit into the local cultural reality.

9.4 Previous Ideas, Expectations and the Perception Gap

This section explores the ideas and expectations Chinese students had about Britain and its higher education system, and how these were reflected in the actual experiences. Perception gaps will be discussed subsequently.

9.4.1 Sources of Previous Perceptions

9.4.1.1 Movies, Classic Literature and Other Media Sources such as News Reports

> *In China, there are much more information about American culture, quite less about British culture though.*
> *(Zhao Lei, Focus Group G, May 2011)*

This comment from one student participant was widely shared amongst my sample, with

particular reference to the overwhelming import of American cultural products into China. This is certainly the case for many, as the USA is leading the cultural export industry in the world (Norris and Inglehart, 2009), and American movies and TV programs are now being widely viewed in China, especially via the Internet (Sherman, 2010). Nonetheless, over two thirds of my sample referred to British media sources such as news reports and British movies as their sources of previous perceptions about the country. One student noted that in terms of British cultural icons, she knew about William Wallace through the classic film *Braveheart*, and hence about the relations between Scotland and England within the UK. Furthermore, she quoted a line that had won universal praise from her 'all time favourite' movie *Love Actually* word for word, from which she obtained some basic ideas about British cultures:

> *We may be a small country, but we are a great one too, a country of Shakespeare, Churchill, The Beatles, Sean Connery, Harry Potter, Beckham's right foot…*
>
> *(Jia Qing, Focus Group B, April 2011)*

A third of the sample also quoted classic British literatures such as Shakespeare as their source as they were well read in China.

9.4.1.2 Agencies for Overseas Education

Another important source of reference was the agencies for overseas study. Over three quarters of the students mentioned that they went through such agencies to apply for the programs in Britain, and inevitably as part of the services received, they had come to understand quite a lot about the cities where their potential host universities were located and some basic information such as weather, accommodation, transportation, local customs and festivals. One student noted that she particularly chose Scotland because the agency promoted that there would be less Chinese students studying here and it would provide a better opportunity for her to interact with local people and improve her English language skills and cross-cultural social abilities.[128]

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[128] However the actual experience contrasted to this impression and there were quite a lot of Chinese students studying business-related courses in Scotland. This will be mentioned in Chapter 14.1.

9.4.1.3 Social Networks

Equally significant to their previous knowledge about Britain was the friend networks and other types of social connections some Chinese students had as their sources of information. Some students reported that the narratives of friends who had studied in Britain were quite useful for them to know the educational system, the local environment as well as British society as a whole. Such communications were divided into two types, first was the face-to-face oral conversations with those who had come back to China before the participants came to Britain; second was communication with those who were still in Britain based primarily on online conversations. For some other students, their families' connections also served as a source. One participant[129] mentioned that when he thought about studying abroad, her mother's friend, whose child was studying in Britain, offered useful advice to help him make the decision. This was reflected as a popular source nowadays in China. Some indicated that this was becoming a fashionable topic of conversation amongst students' parents.

9.4.2 Prior Expectations vs. Direct Experiences: First Impressions and the 'British Gentlemen'

For nearly half of the students, the first significant perception gap they experienced was that British cities were not as 'modern' as they expected them to be. One student[130] noted that her previous impressions were that Britain was a developed country and 'developed' should equal skyscrapers everywhere; but when she got out the airport, it surprised her that the airport was quite small and the city was very old and to some extent underdeveloped. Philo's (2010) study reveals that such experiences of urban construction were dependent on the particular places where his respondents went. In my own sample, experiences also varied between different cities and areas of Britain. Nonetheless respondents who had traveled around Britain[131] noted that the general urban construction of British cities was not as modernised as they had expected, and certainly was not as new as in some major

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[129] Liu Ran, Focus Group A, March 2011.
[130] Zhao Lei, Focus Group G, May 2011.
[131] As discussed in Chapter 9.3, tourism was one important motivation of coming to Britain. Although I did not ask specifically whether they had travelled to other parts of Britain or Europe, there was a strong indication that traveling to famous scenery spots at least across the UK was a must-do for Chinese students and almost all of my participants had done so, to various degrees though.

Chinese cities. This is because it was only in recent years that China started its industrialisation and urbanisation (especially since the Cultural Revolution prior to the economic reform had ravaged many previous constructions), hence the urban construction is supposed to be relatively new. Meanwhile as Britain has always been labeled as an 'industrialised' 'modern' 'developed' country in the media, and China is still a 'developing' one, it is thus understandable for Chinese students to expect Britain to be more 'modern' and 'developed' in its appearance. Another student described the same perception gap while commented on why Britain had kept some 'old constructions':

> *I thought as a developed country, the cities of Britain would be very modernised. I was expecting everything to be brand new and dynamic. But actually, except for London, other surrounding areas haven't gone through wars, so the cities and the streets are kept well and old. Basically they haven't been refurbished much. So what you see here are old things, or you can call them cultural antecedents. But compared to the modernised cities in China, there is a gap. You see the tubes, very very old, like way back to the old days of the English mine workers. It doesn't at all reflect a powerful nation's image. But when you look at the tubes back in China, they are all super brand new.*
> *(Liu Ran, Focus Group A, March 2011)*

This particular respondent is from Shenzhen, which is a major metropolitan city in China. The other participants in this same focus group commented that it was a good thing to maintain the traces of old cultural symbols rather than to constantly refurnish and even rebuild cities like China was doing. One student noted that in her home city,[132] the roads kept being refurbished once in a month, which was seen as redundant and probably cost a lot of taxpayers' money. These comments, to a certain extent, reflect the current urbanisation trend in China. China now has been experiencing significant changes in urban landscapes and the internal structure of cities. As He and Wu (2007, p. 206) observe, urban redevelopment is now in 'mushrooming large-scale'. It is pointed out that driven by profit seeking and the political need to beautify urban appearance, the local government, despite the real needs of low-income residents, legitimises the demolition of old urban neighborhoods and the construction of new high-value-added properties (He and Wu, 2007, p. 206). These prevalent property-led redevelopment projects have now caused and intensified the conflicts between urban neighborhoods and developers (He and Wu, 2005, p. 19). In the same focus group discussion, it was agreed that many of these urban redevelopment projects were excessive and had caused problems such as wasting resources

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[132] Qu Jia, Focus Group A, March 2011. She is from Tianjin, which is one of the four municipality cities in China.

and pollution, leading to the potential deterioration of living environment and political conflicts between residents and the local authorities.

The most significant positive impression about Britain was how nice and courteous the people were. Most respondents noted that British people had been generally quite gentle, just as what they expected 'British gentlemen' to be like. It was frequently mentioned that people said 'thank you' all the time even though they had done nothing to be thanked for, and 'sorry' when they had not done anything wrong. One common example that the respondents liked to elaborate on in terms of the British courtesy was how British people liked to hold the doors for other people to come through, and it was not only males for females, but the other way around as well. One female student described how people would do so and how this had influenced her behaviour:

> *The difference I feel the most is that people open the door for you. When a foreigner walk into a door ahead of me, and I am far far away behind that person, but he or she will hold the door and wait for me to come through anyway. I now always look back when I enter a door. This is a good thing.*
> *(Qu Jia, Focus Group A, March 2011)*

This comment on one hand reflects the British courtesy, yet on the hand indicates that this particular respondent and likely other Chinese people were less likely to act in this way. It was further reported that people would also verbally express their kindness and appreciation with expressions such as 'thank you' 'no worries' and 'cheers', which, on the one hand, made it nice and warm, but on the other was sometimes seen as too much courtesy to afford. One male student commented with some laughter on how such courtesy had been overwhelming for him:

> *I am now quite afraid if someone is behind me when I walk into the library. It's too much. I don't mean that holding the door is too much, but the person has to thank you, and you have to thank back, and we end up thanking each other for a long time. It's not that I'm tired of saying all that stuff. It's just the courtesy is way too much for me to afford.*
> *(He Tian, Focus Group A, March 2011)*

Some participants had gone back to China after staying in Britain for while, and because they had been so used to the British way of being kind and polite, they experienced reverse culture shock when they returned to China. One participant had moved to Britain with his parents when he was in high school. He described the reverse culture shock he encountered

when he first went back to China after a long stay in Britain:

> *I was quite young (back then), and it gave me a pretty bad impression. I was walking out of the airport, and there were two big fireproof doors. When I was walking out, I pushed it open, and there were people behind me, right? If I let go, it would rebound and hit them. According to the British propriety, you hold it and let people behind you through or wait for a following person to take it from you. And it goes on like that. So I was carrying a large suitcase, and I was holding the door, people walking past me just gave me this bizarre look, and then left. The next one was the same look, and then left. I was just standing there like a complete idiot and carrying this huge suitcase in my other hand. And I thought to myself 'what the heck is going on here'! Because in China, we don't have such consciousness to think for other people and hold the door for them. They just push the door open and leave, leaving me stupidly standing there by myself.*
>
> *(Luo Hao, Focus Group D, April 2011)*

This narrative manifests how this Chinese student had been accustomed to the British way of courtesy and how it had led to reverse culture shock. This comment was met with resonance when it was referred to in other focus groups, with almost all respondents who had gone back to China after staying in Britain reporting similar experiences. When Chinese students discussed the reason why Chinese people would be less like to display the courtesy that British people showed, participants in three focus groups frequently commented that there was a decline of social integrity in China.[133] It was pointed out in these groups that Chinese people would sometimes be extra cautious dealing with strangers, especially with those who had exhibited extra kindness; whereas in Britain people were generally seen as quite nice to other people, even if they were strangers. Another student formed critical comments on China in comparison:

> *In China, the trust between strangers has gone to the point of extreme weakness. You wouldn't dare to spend a night at other people's place. You wouldn't dare to eat food that other people offer you. People wouldn't offer you something without a price as well. The social integrity mechanism that used to exist in China has collapsed, but the new one has yet to be built up.*
>
> *(Li Wei, Focus Group E, April 2011)*

His comment is from a critical point of view and seems only to reflect extreme cases. Yet in the same focus group, another male student did narrate such a case with his mother. He

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[133] Focus Group A, D and E.

noted that he loved traveling and once wanted to register on the website of Couchsurfing[134] so that he could sleep at somebody else's place for free, which would save a lot of money for accommodation. When he told his mother this idea, she angrily replied 'No! They'll sell you! To those sweatshops!'. It indicated that his mother did not believe that people would offer their kindness and help for free; if they did, it would have been a fraudulent conduct. This however can be understood rather as an idea that more likely prevailed only within the mother's generation, since they are the generation that was involved in the Cultural Revolution, when the Red Guards spied on people and reported any/every 'suspicious' behaviour to the officials. This has left a major psychological effect on the minds of the whole generation, most likely leading to the issues regarding trust and social integrity that are discussed here.[135]

Furthermore, the kindness of British people and the social integrity of Britain were also reflected on how much British people loved to talk to strangers, especially in public places. For some students, it was quite weird to see two strangers just start talking all of a sudden about their personal lives in public places. One female student described how shocking yet interesting for her to see complete strangers chatting with each other about their daily experiences and family matters on a train:

> *I feel like the local people really LOVE chatting. I remember when I first came here, one time I was on a train, there were two people chatting delightfully along the way. Then suddenly one got off the train. You know, they didn't know each other at all! But they chatted all kinds of personal stuff, family things, you know. I remember sitting there, I could hear one guy saying he was once working in some place, and then changed his job to another place; he also talked about his family, you know, all kinds of personal stuff. Yet they were complete strangers. In the end, they didn't even exchange contact information. They weren't going to talk to each other ever again. It's just super bizarre!*
> *(Qu Jia, Focus Group A, March 2011)*

Other students in the same focus group reflected on her comments and noted that it seemed that Chinese people would not talk to strangers as much as British people would do, especially with topics regarding personal matters, simply because people would much less likely trust them with their personal details, worrying that the strangers might take advantage of such information and use them in dangerous ways. Norris and Inglehart

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[134] Couchsurfing is an international social networking website offering free hospitality exchange for its members across the globe. Any registered member can offer to host other registered members to stay at his or her places on the tour for free. In exchange, he or she can also stay at other members' places when travelling.
[135] Philo's (2010) study also reveals this.

(2009, p. 186) also reveal that China is the country with one of the lowest level of trust towards outsiders.

Furthermore, it was reported that not only were Chinese people more likely to distrust strangers that they talked to, but they would also be extra cautious when dealing with people who appeared to be in disadvantaged situations. It was noted that there had been incidents occurring in China where old ladies had fallen down on the streets but were not offered help her because people were afraid and suspected that the lady would frame them for the 'tumble' and blackmail them. Such comments were largely based on recent incidents of lawsuits in China in regard to similar suspicious blackmails, with the most famously circulated one known as 'The Case of Peng Yu'.[136] These cases were widely referred to in my sample as their source of the idea that social integrity in China had been in decline. It was further reported that in some of these cases no witness would come forward to testify for the 'good people' in these scenarios. Certainly these were extreme cases and it was hard to tell which party in these cases was telling the truth, but participants had nonetheless developed an idea that social integrity and ethics had been degenerating in China. In comparison, a female student narrated that some old British ladies she had come across exhibited, to her knowledge, extremely high level of trust towards strangers like her:

> *Once I was waiting for the lights to cross the road. An old lady came out of nowhere and just held me arm-in-arm before I even realised it. Then she asked if I could take her across the road. I said 'yes'. She held me before she even asked. How could I say no? (chuckle) Then she just started talking about how slippery it was the last time she crossed a road and how she fell over and went to the hospital. During that short time of crossing a road, she managed to tell me all those things, and I couldn't get a word in (chuckle).*
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> *(Qu Jia, Focus Group A, March 2011)*

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[136] Peng Yu is a Chinese male from Nanjing. It was claimed that in November 2006, he got off a bus and helped up an old lady who fell off on the street—she was trying to catch up the bus behind his. He then took her to the hospital with another guy who was around. The lady was diagnosed to have broken her shinbone. She subsequently claimed that it was Peng Yu who ran her down when he got off the bus, and requested financial compensation from Peng for her medical care. Peng rejected. The old lady and her family took Peng to court. The first instance judgment was announced in September 2007 that Peng was guilty of charge and to pay the amount of 45,000 RMB (roughly 4,500 GBP) for compensation. He felt injustice, and subsequently reached out to the press for help. It instantly became a heatedly debated national story. Peng appealed subsequently. During the second (final) trial, it reached to a reconciliation that Peng was to pay 10,000 RMB. During the years of trails, the story has been constantly broadcasted nationwide by nearly all the major news outlets. It also becomes an iconic incident in relation to morality, conscience, social justice and legal system construction. Source: Wang, Y. *Ifeng, 28/09/2011*.

The News agency 'China News' revealed an online poll in that 62.54% of the voters would 'never' help a tripped old lady because they might get in trouble, and 33. 45% voted that they would 'rationally judge' the circumstance before they decided whether to offer help. Source: Yao, p. (ed.) *China News, 26/02/2013*.

She narrated that she had once seen an old lady asking another person to tie her shoe because she could not bend over to do it herself. She commented that it seemed to be such a normal thing to do in Britain, but in China people simply would not even think about that because it would be suspected as a fraud in that the old lady would claim that the person who had helped her was in fact trying to assault her. Such cases were chosen particularly for the discussion and did not necessarily reflect the whole of the two countries. In the following section, I will discuss how the manners of some British teenagers were seen as a major problem by Chinese students and their reflections on the perceived behavioural 'change' from 'troublesome teenagers' to nice 'British gentlemen'.

9.4.3 Encounters with British Teenagers

Although British people in general were seen as very gentle and nice to others, it was largely reflected in my sample that there was a significant gap between mature adults and teenagers in terms of manner and social behaviour. Over four-fifths of the student participants noted that they had quite negative experiences with British teenagers, who were described as very troublesome. These negative encounters were considered as a most prominent issue for them to cope with in their social life in Britain. In addition, all the Chinese teachers in my sample also agreed that British secondary school students were less disciplined and more likely to display behavioural problems in class compared to Chinese students in the same age range. For the Chinese student participants, it was common for them to experience intimidation by verbal harassment or even physical confrontations from British teenagers. One student[137] even commented with a warning tone in the focus group that 'stay away from those teenagers'. Another female student depicted how she thought the British legal system seemed to be protecting delinquent minors and how she would avoid contact with them:

> *I think the most dangerous people here are the teenagers. It seems that any bad records would be deleted after they reached 18, so they are quite unbridled. So I just think they are very dangerous. If I see a guy who's in his twenties, I won't worry a thing, even if he appears super tough. But if I see some little kids, I run away. It's just those primary school kids, I stay far away from them the second I see them. If you give them a little bit more eye contact, they might come over and mess with you. So kids are quite frightening here.*
>
> *(Qu Jia, Focus Group A, March 2011)*

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[137] Yu Ting, Focus Group C, April 2011.

Comments as such clearly indicate a level of fear, most likely due to unpleasant encounters, amongst Chinese students when they came into contact with British teenagers. All the participants in these three focus groups[138] made further comparison between British and Chinese teenagers: Chinese teenagers were judged as generally quite pure and unsophisticated. It was noted that they would normally not offend other people who had nothing to do with them, but some British teenagers would. This might be true, however with the 'spoiled' one- child generation (Fong, 2004), it is also more likely to see the Chinese singletons of more recent decades (who had access to an ever increasing range of material goods) exhibit behavioural problems.

Nonetheless, a UK government report suggests that teenager crimes have indeed been a serious issue for the country to tackle. Cooper and Roe (2012) estimate that young people aged 10-17 in England and Wales represented a disproportionate amount (23%) of police recorded crime in 2009/10, as they only accounted for 10% of the total population. Hough and Roberts (2004) observe that most of the British public consider youth today as less respectful than previous generations, however they also show concerns that many people over-estimate the circumstances of youth crime.

It is clear that there was a sharp contrast in Chinese students' perceptions of the public behaviour between some British teenagers, who were seen as quite provocative, and the more mature adults, who were seen as very gentlemen. This contrast was particularly raised in Focus Group A, where a female student expressed her deep confusion that the troublesome teenagers all seemed to suddenly change into the decent 'British gentlemen' after they became adults. Her particular confusion was reiterated by all the other students in this group. Notably such confusion was mostly concerned with students who had lived in Britain for relatively short period of time (usually less than a year). It is believed in this study that the social behaviour of such troublesome British teenagers is linked with their socioeconomic backgrounds. It was noted in particular by a few other students that the troublesome social behaviour of some British teenagers was most likely to do with social stratification and their particular class backgrounds. One student attributed this issue to the financial statuses of the families and the kind of education they could provide for their children, and furthermore related it to her previous ideas of British attitudes towards education:

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[138] Focus Group A, C, D.

I think it's got a lot to do with class. It's really different between the kinds of education they could receive. I used to believe that Chinese children were really bitter [under a lot of pressure] whereas British kids were quite lucky because their pressure wasn't that heavy. But I realised it's not true when I came here. If the family's got some money, they definitely want their kids to be better educated. I used to lodge in a local family. They would send their kids to learn piano and stuff like that, and the schedules for weekends would also be filled with extracurricular courses. It's not that they just let their kids be, like we expected British parents to back in China. So I think it's just class. If you don't have money, you just let them be; but if you do, especially those strict families, you absolutely send your kids to be better educated.

(Yu Ting, Focus Group C, April 2011)

In this case, the participant had done her undergraduate degree in Australia and had lived there for 4 years before she came to Britain. It was also revealed later that she had lodged with an Australian local family and had established close contact with them when she was there. These factors are believed to have contributed to her specific perspective of social stratification in looking at the issue of British teenagers. Another female student also commented from a similar standpoint. In this case, she was doing her undergraduate degree in sociology for almost four years in Britain and had formed close friendships, through her relative, with local people who were middle-upper class lawyers. Her *sociological background*, relatively *longer duration of time spent in Britain* and *close contacts with local British* gave her an impression that the class backgrounds indeed made a significant difference in terms of social behaviour. She commented that the longer she was living in Britain, the more conspicuous the social stratification of the society appeared to her, and this had been different from her expectations prior to her arrival in Britain:

My auntie's husband is local, and his friends are all lawyers. It's quite obvious. The minute he starts talking, you'll know which social class he's from--the words he uses and the tones, etc. The first year I was here, I didn't notice this. Not until the second and third year did I start to realise the class differences here are so clearly visible! I once watched a documentary about social mobility in Britain. It featured the kids from working class families. It seemed that they might never be coming out that community. They asked them what they wanted to be in the future, a lawyer or something. The kids all said they'd never thought about it. They just might not be able to get out of that circle. Jobs like dentist and lawyer are pretty much occupied by people from middle and upper class elites because, you know, they started attending private schools since they were little and have been edified in that environment. The kind of education they receive is completely different from public schools. So the differences are quite obvious. It's quite stunning.

(Ma Na, Focus Group B, April 2011)

Two other students in this same focus group shared similar ideas. They were also

undergraduate students in sociology and had been in Britain for over three years. The reasons underpinning the confusion that many other Chinese students in my sample had might be due to the short duration of their stay in Britain combined with the particular contexts of their study. For these participants who were doing 12-month postgraduate courses, as discussed in Section 9.2, the primary intention of their stay in Britain was rather specific: to obtain the degrees in a rather tight schedule. It was thus more likely for their social activities to mingle with their academic life, which was based on university campuses and their immediate vicinities. Hence, the majority of their contacts with British adults were with British university students who were receiving higher education. These British people were most likely to display decent manners as a result of their educational and family background.

On the other hand, the troublesome teenagers that my participants mentioned were most likely those who were not receiving good-quality education, and who were often on the streets and living in relatively poor neighborhoods. For Chinese students who were self-funded and who had to pay tuition fees as international students (which was normally twice or three times the amount of local and EU students), these economical communities were also very likely to be their choice of residence since they were less expensive. The short duration of time spent in Britain also limited the access that these Chinese students had to the bulk of the society that was outside of universities—residence context. In addition, as will be discussed in Chapter 14.1, the majority of these Chinese students primarily socialised with fellow Chinese students. This furthermore reduced their contact with British people, which might have given them different perspectives in understanding the 'different' behaviour between British teenagers and adults. Thus the relatively short duration of time combined with their primary focus on academic achievements were fostering an imbalanced perspective in this regard. On the other hand, participants who were doing undergraduate programs, had a much longer time of stay in Britain which allowed them to experience Britain in a different way, because the ratio of local British students was arguably much higher, the duration of time stay in Britain was much longer and the academic degrees were not an immediate task at hands (compared to a master's degree of 12 months). They were thus much more likely to attend extra social activities and to socialise with British people. Additionally, the sociological background of the students was also an important factor attributing to their perspectives as the issues regarding social stratification and class conscious were certainly at the core of the subject.

9.5 Summary

Knowledge and values are significant in determining power relations. In my study, there was an overwhelming desire amongst the students to learn the knowledge from British education as well as the educational and social values from Britain. The driving force behind Chinese students coming to Britain for higher education is fundamentally an interplay between economic and cultural motives. This study identifies four significant factors in Chinese students' decision to come to Britain. For almost all of them, the most prominent motive was the prestigious degrees of higher education conferred by British universities, which were believed to have better quality in education *per se* as well as greater potential for their future career development as compared to Chinese universities. For students who were undertaking one-year master's programs in particular, the short duration of time was the most significant attraction in comparison to other popular destination for overseas education such as North America and Australia. This gives British universities a significant advantage in terms of attracting Chinese students who aim to undertake postgraduate study overseas. The second factor was the strong interest in foreign cultures. Almost all of the students indicated such an interest, however, only a few mentioned specifically the cultural aspects of Britain which were of particular attraction to them. It is thus believed that such strong interest was intended towards developed countries in general instead of towards Britain in particular, and an interest in British cultures was part of the more important motive that was identified as the first factor. Peer group pressure was also important as one third of the students mentioned the influence of their fellow students who had gone overseas. This factor is believed to be growingly important as the number of overseas Chinese students is increasing. Furthermore, as Britain is located in Western Europe, where many internationally famous tourism countries are located, tourism is identified as the fourth important factor. This is a factor that was specifically related to Britain. Lastly, for the Chinese teachers in my sample, the motive was rather simple and direct. Their job assignment was almost the only factor, even though interest in British cultures was also mentioned and there was an indication that many had wanted to travel to Europe.

This study finds three major sources when it comes to the perceptions of Britain before arrival. Over two thirds of the sample referred to news reports, motives, classic literatures

and other media products as the sources of their previous ideas about Britain. Agencies for overseas education were also an important place for receiving information about the host country. This was quoted by three quarters of the students. In addition, social networks such as fellow students, peer friends and family connections were another significant source.

The expectation of Britain as a very developed country in terms of urban construction was met with disappointment as many post-industrial cities were not as new as some major Chinese cities that were undergoing industrialisation and urbanisation. The experiences with 'British gentlemen' were largely what they expected, but such experiences were more likely with mature British adults than with teenagers. This was one of the most positive experiences the sampled Chinese students and teachers had had. The social integrity of Britain was believed to be higher than that of contemporary China where people were seen as displaying a higher level of distrust towards strangers, especially in recent years due to a series of suspicious public incidents as mentioned.

In contrast, British teenagers were considered potentially dangerous and had become an important issue for the Chinese sample (both student and teachers) to cope with in their social life. Nonetheless, it seemed that most one-year postgraduate students were misled by the provocative behaviour of some British teenagers who were most likely from low social class backgrounds and judged the entire social group based on that. This was because of the short duration of time spent in Britain as well as their primarily university-residence life circle. Students who had been in Britain for much longer time and were undergraduate in the subject of sociology, on the other hand, had more rounded perspectives looking at such issues. In addition, participants' personal relationships with British people allowed them to understand the structure of British society more deeply. The troublesome behaviour of some British teenagers had largely to do with their particular socioeconomic backgrounds.

Chapter 10 Educational Systems between China and Britain

10.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how the British educational system was perceived in comparison with the Chinese system. **Section 10.2** shows the expectations students had before arriving in Britain and how they were different from their actual experiences. **Section 10.3** focuses on the distinguishing characteristics of British education, explaining how these were seen as different from the ideas that Chinese teachers, families and the society had about education and career, and, furthermore, how such experiences might have influenced the sampled Chinese students.

10.2 Perceptions before and after Coming to Britain

This study expected that the British educational system would be highly praised since the students came for its internationally established reputation of prestigious quality. The data collected in this respect indeed reflects this. The British educational system was commonly praised for its general quality with an emphasis on creativity.[139] There were, however, certain elements of the British system that did not match students' expectations. Over one third of the respondents commented particularly that they expected British classes to be much smaller, there would be frequent interactions between teachers and students or between students themselves, and that the relationships between teachers and students would be closer. Yet it turned out that most classes were similar in form to those in Chinese universities, where there was a lecturer leading the class with little interactions between him/her and the students. Feelings of disappointment were thus expressed, with

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[139] This will be discussed later in this section.

one[140] commenting that 'it's surprising that it's not even as good as in China'. This was largely the case amongst students who were doing one-year postgraduate degrees in business-related courses, and less so amongst students who were in other postgraduate courses and undergraduate programs. This is because business-related courses in their universities, and likely other British universities in general, admitted a large number of international, especially Chinese, students to the one-year postgraduate degrees, while the number was reported as much smaller in other courses. Undergraduate Chinese students also frequently had lectures that were in large rooms full of students without much interaction, there was however no disappointment in this sense since they, unless students who had graduated with a undergraduate degree, had no prior experiences with higher education, hence no reference or comparison could be made in this sense. Also, by the time of the focus group, they had already been studying in Britain for three years or so, they were therefore most likely used to the academic environment and teaching methods.

The experiences of the British universities were different if participants took pre-master training course such as English language courses. One female student narrated how her experience in pre-sessional English language courses was drastically different to that in the master's program:

> *I came here earlier to do 10-weeks language course. That course was kind of what I had expected. Every class had about 11 students, and the tutor would talk to you regularly. There were a lot of foreign classmates. I felt that kind of fulfilled my previous expectations. When the formal master's courses began, the schedule was a lot less tight, and there were too many people in the same class. We didn't know the teachers and the teachers didn't know us either. What's more, I was surrounded by Chinese students and this was completely out of my expectation.*
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> *(Fang Wen, Focus Group H, May 2011)*

For the master's programs in particular, most students were anticipating that the knowledge they were to learn would be quite advanced and much more profound than what they had previously learnt in their undergraduate programs. However over a dozen participants in my sample judged that the lectures in their courses turned out to be quite unsophisticated, with one respondent[141] commenting: 'it's quite general and basic, almost the same as what I was taught in undergraduate, they just fill me in with the knowledge

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[140] Liu Ran, Focus Group A, March 2011.
[141] Fang Wen, Focus Group H, May 2011.

that I almost forgot'. Another student[142] noted that 'I barely find any advancement of British education over the Chinese system'. These comments were subjective judgments that did not necessarily reflect the true quality of the education system as a whole, yet they indeed indicated a high level of previous expectation and subsequent disappointment. As for the evaluation process, over one third of the postgraduate students commented that it was quite similar with Chinese methods in that students also had to remember and recite certain concepts and equations, which were what eventually got them through the exams. Such comments often suggested that these Chinese students were expecting that there were no standardised answer in exams in British universities and that diversified opinions or what was called 'critical thinking' would be encouraged. Yet the forms of assessment were seen as essentially the same as in the Chinese universities. It has to be noted here again that these comments were often generated from postgraduate taught master's students in business-related courses, and whether these could be applied to students in other course was, however, in conclusive. In addition, the disappointment of the students on these courses might be deepened by the overwhelming presence of fellow Chinese students, since they were expecting a much more international academic environment.

10.3 Distinguishing Characteristics of British Education

For most of the participants, however, British education was still highly praised for its capacity to foster independent thinking, encouragement for expressing different ideas, critical thinking and creativity, despite the gap between their previous expectations and the reality. As Hui (2005, p. 25-26) observes, in China, teachers are conceptualised as moral models, authoritative in class and all interactions should be initiated by them. Traditional concepts in the Chinese educational system have thus been focused on the dominant role of teachers and the submissive role of students in the classroom. In the British educational context, on the other hand, it was noted that teachers were more like facilitators who on the one hand disseminated knowledge while on the other fostered a communicative atmosphere to stimulate discussions and the flow of ideas.[143]

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[142] Pan Hang, Focus Group A, March .2011.

[143] This was also reflected in the interviews of the Western expatriate teachers in my sample.

The perceived differences between the two educational systems were often revealed in the polarised behavioural patterns of students from the two different cultural backgrounds. One student[144] commented that in terms of intelligence, Chinese students would be no worse than British students yet the confidence to speak in class was much weaker on the Chinese side. It was further agreed by all the other respondents in this focus group that quite often if there were students asking questions to the teacher in class, they would likely not have been Chinese students. This idea was shared amongst nearly all the students despite the different course environments they were in. They went on to comment that Chinese students were often very quiet in class and quite unwilling to express their ideas even when they were not able to understand the teachers or if they had different opinions. This was also consistent with my findings in Chapter 6 where identical ideas were widely expressed by the Western expatriate teachers. In this respect, the traditional philosophy of Chinese education was seen to constrain people from expressing diverse opinions and thinking critically. One female student[145] commented that Chinese education was more likely imposing standardized answers to every question as if each had only one perfectly correct answer and every student should recite and repeat it in the exams. Hui (2005, p. 27) argues that the Chinese education schema has fostered the deep belief in teachers and the materials they have taught, which is prevalently reflected by students' good memorisation of them. Whereas in Britain, this same participant commented that people were most likely encouraged to express different ideas and to speak freely in class right from the very beginning of their education. It was judged that students from such cultural backgrounds had been much more positive and interactive than Chinese students in the same class environment.

For nearly two thirds of the students, the insufficiency of their English language abilities combined with their relatively reserved personal characteristics were the additional factors that lead to their lack of confidence and willingness to express thoughts in class and other public contexts. One participant described how she felt when she wanted to speak up in class or talk to native English speaking students:

> *We feel pretty embarrassed to speak out. It has to do with personality. We are not so fluent in English, so we don't have the confidence to talk to local students anyway. When we do talk to them, we are immediately in a weak position in terms of the tone of speech [because of the language abilities]. So*

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[144] Qu Jia, Focus Group A, March 2011.
[145] Qu Jia, Focus Group A, March 2011.

even if we wanted to argue with them, we wouldn't have won. When we do assignments, in a group, if there is a local student, we just shut up and let him or her be the group leader. We just let that person distribute work and tell us what to do. When we have a discussion together, there will often be embarrassing blanks in the conversation because our English is not good enough and we don't want to be embarrassing ourselves in front of native English speakers. I think whether you are willing to speak out relies on your personality.

(Yu Ting, Focus Group C, April 2011)

Personality was indeed a significant factor that differentiated participants' behaviour. One female[146] noted that she quite often expressed her opinions in a group environment in spite of the fact that she judged her English abilities as not very good. In this case, she was an outgoing person and was not shy about talking to strangers or making mistakes in answering questions in class; but she was certainly one of the few Chinese participants who had this type of personality in terms of social behaviour. Another student[147] noted that when she had a problem or something she did not understand from the class, she would not get up the nerve to talk to the lecturer; instead, she would ask her fellow students, because she was not very confident talking to the lecturers. The latter example was most likely the common behaviour for most Chinese students in my sample.

Another key issue participants frequently reported was that the British socio-cultural context for education was seen as much freer with little to no constraints on the subjects that students would like to study, and more importantly, teachers, parents and the society as a whole would often encourage them to pursue their dreams. This was of course their subjective judgment, yet such comments were based mostly, not exclusively, upon students' personal interactions with their supervisors of dissertation or research projects, which is considered in this study as a significant indicator. In terms of the university context, it was widely noted that teachers commented on their works generally in a very positive and encouraging way, and they would much less likely give students fixed paradigms, let alone standardized answers. Rather, they would offer various opinions, options and possibilities for students to consider, but in the end it was always up to the students who made the choice. One male student who was doing a research program in biological and environmental science depicted how the freer educational environment had grown confidence in him:

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[146] Gu Chao, Focus Group D, April 2011.
[147] Li Yingying, Focus Group C, April 2011.

When I was having trouble choosing my research topic or other problems during my research process, my supervisor never told me 'you should do this and that'. When I went to him, he just gave me some suggestions. I've now been doing my research for 4 or 5 months, there was once a serious mistake that I made to my research design, my supervisor and another senior fellow student were trying to help me in a very encouraging way. They just said 'generally, your design is great, but there might be this small leak you want to fix'. I think in that way it has helped me to gradually be more confident. I feel like I made the right decision coming here so that I have the freedom to do what I like.

(Gu Yue, Focus Group E, April 2011)

Most Chinese students in my sample agreed that the encouraging approaches in teaching and supervising were quite positive and helped them build confidence. On the other hand, it was reported that there was a tendency amongst Chinese parents and teachers to criticize students' achievements as an approach to stimulate better work. One female student[148] commented that her biggest reward from studying in Britain was that she had become much more confident. She pointed out that in China there were more fixed cultural ideas of what was success, such as being good at certain subjects and pursuing certain career paths, which made it quite difficult for her to have the freedom to do what she truly loved. Since living in Britain, she felt the atmosphere was much freer and healthier for expressing different ideas and pursuing different life paths. Another female student[149] commented that in her family, her father was always pessimistic about her and did not seem to believe she could make any significant achievements. Since absorbing the ideas of education from Britain, she noted that she would educate her children in a much more encouraging way, just as she perceived British parents did.

Similar to what was previously discovered amongst the Western expatriate teachers, the sampled Chinese students also revealed that their families played an important role in selecting their courses of study. For over one third of them, it was not theirs but their parents' choice of subjects. It can be seen from the interviews that the collectivist cultural idea of conforming to the societal rules, prioritizing family interests over personal ones and going with the mainstream still existed amongst the students' generation. As one female student depicted, she had always wanted to study graphic design but was strongly opposed by her family and ended up studying business in university:

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[148] Bian Yu, Focus Group E, April 2011.
[149] Wen Jun, Focus Group F, April 2011.

When I was in high school, I really wanted to study graphic design for university, because I had been learning drawing since I was very little, things like sketch art. So I had always loved things related to design. But when I was choosing the major for my university study, my mum set up a family convention for not allowing me to study design. I was very depressed, and ended up studying business because my mum's job is business related. So be it.

(Jin Ying, Focus Group F, April 2011)

The idea of her parents was that courses in humanity and arts had no guaranteed potential to achieve financial stability, whereas business majors were more easily linked with economic achievements and higher status that would lead to more affluent life styles in China. Now the same correlation between certain courses and their financial potential can also be said to be true in some Western countries such as the UK. Nonetheless, for the Chinese students' parents' generation, who have gone through wars, famine and severe political incidents such as the Cultural Revolution, to achieve financial security is understandably a top priority. In this case quoted above, her mother considered it easier for her daughter to follow her successful footsteps. From this female student's perspective, on the other hand, she was dreaming of pursuing a career and life path in art and design yet struggling at the same time because she did not want to disappoint her parents and be considered as selfish. Nonetheless there is a financial factor underpinning such struggle: all of the Chinese students in my sample were fully self-funded and hence financially supported by their families. The parents thus had the decisive power in the children's choices of course. In Britain, there are indeed many students who are also financially supported by their parents, yet as was pointed out, there was seemingly less pressure from the parents on their children with regards to selecting courses, and quite often students were pursuing careers different from what their parents had been doing or wanted them to do. One respondent commented on her friend's family situation where none of the siblings were following their parents' footsteps of becoming doctors:

I have a British friend whose parents are both GPs.[150] They have four children, one studies politics, one in language, one in literature and one is in music. None of them studies medical major even though both parents are doctors! Their parents just encourage them to do whatever they love. They are not like Chinese parents at all. If my parents studied medicine, I would have majored at least in relevant areas. You know, family business… Like my mum, she studied accounting so she made me study it. I'm studying accounting not because I love it, but because my parents set it up for me.

(Gu Ning, Focus Group F, April 2011)

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[150] General Practitioners of medicine, it refers to professional family doctors in the UK.

Similar comments were also found amongst Western expatriate teachers when they commented on how some of their students chose their courses of study. Here this female participant went on to comment that the whole Chinese educational context tended to oppress children's individual thoughts and interests, and people had to study what other people studied, with much less opportunity to follow their own dreams. This is likely partly to do with the *gaokao* system, which the majority of Chinese students would have to go through to attend universities. The evaluation mechanism is strictly confined to certain subjects, mainly including Chinese, Math, Foreign Language (mostly English), Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Politic, History and Geography. Students who are in specialised subjects such as arts and sports also have to pass certain examinations in some of the above-mentioned courses, which are often no use to their future specialised trainings, so as to attend college or university in their areas of specialty. Thus the whole educational environment has made it quite difficult for students who have special talents to receive higher education in a prestigious institution. One male student[151] noted that when he was in elementary school and middle school, he had met a lot of fellow students who were generally not that good with their study but very talented in a particular subject; yet such talent was easily strangled by the educational system. He mentioned that a friend was quite talented with drawing but was forced to study math by his father and ended up in an engineering science major. His comments also indicated the family and the educational system did not provide an encouraging environment for individuals to develop their personal interests and promote talents that were different from traditional career paths.

Having absorbed some basic ideas of British education, one third of the students indicated that they would try to educate their children with a freer approach in that they would stimulate their interests and encourage them to study what they truly liked. For some of them, it was further noted that they would send their children overseas to escape them from the fiercely competitive domestic educational environment. In this respect, one of the students commented on how overwhelming her high school life was and how she was suddenly lost when she entered university:

> *Chinese education is oppressing individuals' thoughts and creativity. Everything is standardized, and the competition, the pressure is unhealthy for children's growth. When I was in high school, we studied from Monday to Saturday, plus extra remediation classes on Sundays. Even in summer and winter school breaks, we would go to extra curriculum courses. Every day was*

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[151] Liu Ran, Focus Group A, March 2011.

packed by parents' or school's arrangements. Then all of a sudden, I was in university. I had a lot more free time yet I suddenly didn't know what to do. It made me very unhappy with my university life…… in China, study is the only thing that you should do. The only thing that matters is what your test marks are, they don't care about what you like to do in the future. So I'll send my children overseas to be educated. I will go back to China, but my brother is in Canada and I'll encourage him to stay there, and then I'll be able to send my children over there to him.

(Gu Ning, Focus Group F, April 2011)

Her comments indicate that she saw the British education system as a much less pressured environment for children's education. This is certainly true in some respects, yet as I have previously discussed in Chapter 6, British students are also under serious pressure in term of education, particularly in the current economic climate. This is easily overlooked by the Chinese students in my sample as they were all in the university settings and most had relatively limited access to the vast majority of other British schools and the lives of British students outside of campuses.

10.4 Summary

In terms of the quality of their education in Britain, a third of the sample judged that it had not met with their high expectation. Small classes and frequent interactions between the teachers and the students were highly anticipated yet most often the lectures were large and there was little communication between the students and the teacher. These comments were mainly from one-year postgraduate students in business-related courses. It is believed that the overwhelming presence of Chinese students in such courses might be a factor emphasising such negative feelings.

Nonetheless, overall the educational system of Britain as a whole was largely seen as very positive and more prestigious than the Chinese system, especially in terms of the capacity to foster independent thinking and creativity. This was further confirmed by the Chinese teachers who were teaching in British secondary schools. Having previously been educated in a rather oppressive context, Chinese students in my sample shared the desire for a much freer, more innovative and stimulating learning and living environment in Britain. Most of them reported they had grown confidence upon living and studying Britain in terms of

publicly expressing their minds and speaking English.

However, this study finds that the extent to which this confidence had grown in the classroom environment varied between different courses. For those who were studying courses that had large presence of Chinese students, primarily business related, it was revealed that the change had been relatively limited due to the comfort they could easily achieve in working with fellow Chinese students in group projects and speaking Chinese whenever they wanted; academic problems were much easier for them to solve because of this demographic factor. For students in programs that were predominantly occupied by non-Chinese speakers, the change in confidence had been more evident; it was reported that these students felt more rewarding about their academic life in Britain.

Chapter 11 Social Relations, Family Life and Women's Identities

11.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses participants' understandings of social relation, ideas of love and family as well as perceptions of Chinese women's identities in family, work and society. **Section 11.2** looks at the concept and cultural practices of *guanxi* with an emphasis on *renqing*. This is an equivalent section to Chapter 5.2 where my sample of Western expatriate teachers talked about their understandings of these concepts and their experiences of them. Here it shows the sampled Chinese people's perceptions of *guanxi* in terms of conducting business as well as employment, and also demonstrates the ways in which differences and similarities between Chinese *guanxi* and social connections in Britain were interpreted. **Section 11.3** presents participants' responses to the discussions of relationship, marriage and women's roles in family, as well as in society. This is a section based primarily on females' comments of the differences between China and Britain in their attitudes towards, and social reality of, marriage and women's rights.

11.2 Social Relations in China—*Guanxi* and *Renqing*

11.2.1 An Understanding of *Guanxi*

I have previously discussed the concept of *guanxi* in Chapter 5.2. Here this term and the social and cultural meanings attached to it are also discussed. It is acknowledged that the practices of social networking, extending personal connections and the gift exchanging economy exist in all societies, yet the sampled Chinese students saw it as a fundamental element of contemporary Chinese society. *Guanxi* was considered as a must-have element in almost all walks of social life. It was noted that even when it came to medical treatment,

one would have to press his or her *guanxi* for better-qualified doctors to achieve more satisfactory treatment. The particular examples given in my focus groups in this respect demonstrate that prestigious doctors were not easily available for normal patients, thus to register with these particular doctors one had to have *guanxi* with them or with people who were close to them. In addition, it was indicated that the practice of '*hongbao*' (red packet) commonly existed in medical practices in China, especially in those practices that involved surgeries, where the patient's family packed a red envelop with cash and offered it to the surgeons and sometimes supporting nurses.[152] It has to be noted that some Chinese people do this simply because traditional Chinese culture views it as good luck for the surgery *per se*; while a large proportion of such practices nowadays are seen as briberies, without which some doctors would not take the cases or fully commit to the practice. Yang's (1994) anthropological analysis also reveals that in China both general and particularistic medical care sometimes require certain layers of *guanxi* to get hold of the right doctors. As she observes: 'doctors are important people with whom to cultivate *guanxi* because, in addition to providing access to hospital beds, *guanxi* with a doctor can sometimes make the difference between whether he or she seriously listens to a patient and gives a good diagnosis during a visit or only half-heartedly deals with the patient in a pro forma way' (Yang, 1994, p. 95). Nonetheless such practices of '*hongbao*' are likely to vary between regions and rest upon local cultural traditions and particularistic rituals.

It was agreed amongst the sampled Chinese students and teachers that *guanxi* in Chinese socio-cultural contexts tended to be related to negative practices such as corruption and bribery. Nonetheless, most of the time, *guanxi* simply means someone is taking advantage of their connections to gain what should otherwise have been equally contested by all participants, especially in terms of employment. It was noted that if several candidates were competing for one position, normally the job would be offered to the one who had *guanxi* with the person in charge. One male student[153] commented that it was quite natural and understandable to give that position to a relative instead of someone unknown without considering the factor of professional skills. He further noted that such behaviour of favouring someone who had *guanxi* was not only confined within kinship relationships but also applied to people who had offered help before and now were expecting the return of

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[152] Red Packet means literally 'red envelop' (*hongbao*). In traditional Chinese culture, it refer to red envelops with an amount of cash in them that people give to others on traditional Chinese festivals, weddings or funerals as good wishes. The amount of cash inside varies between regions and depends on specific occasions, how close the personal relations are, local rituals as well as the regional economic levels. In medical practices, it can mean for good luck or bribery, depending on the specific circumstances.

[153] He Tian, Focus Group A, March 2011.

the favours (*renqing*). The same can also be said to be true in Britain, but the extent to which *renqing* can be extended and recurred is different. The same respondent commented that in Britain profession was more likely separated from personal favours, and people generally would not jeopardise regulations or their own credibility for their personal relationships; on the other hand, it was much more likely to be the case in China. This is partly because of the deeply-rooted cultural practices of *guanxi* and *renqing*, and partly because of lack of regulations regarding formal procedures and the potential abuse of power.

11.2.2 *Guanx*i in Doing Business in China

The male respondents in Focus Group A referred to *guanxi* networks as social circles, and commented that they were extremely important for conducting businesses in China. As was mentioned in Chapter 7.3, the core value of *guanxi* in conducting businesses in China has been well acknowledged in various academic works. Xin and Pearce (1996) argue that for private companies, the organisation and maintenance of *guanxi* is much more significant for their success than for state-owned firms or companies of collective ownership.

It is seen in my study that the practices of *guanxi* with respect to business cooperation were almost exclusively discussed by the male Chinese students in my sample. Although it was seen as much more prevalent in certain provinces, it was nonetheless indicated by almost all other participants that *guanxi* was a significant factor for doing business in their own home cities as well and most likely for the wider context of Chinese society as a whole. Another male respondent[154] thus judged: 'it is quite tiring to do business in China because you have not only to complete your own work well but also to take care of all layers of *guanxi*.' Yang's work sheds some light on the business practices in rural China and suggests that a very significant element involved in setting up, maintaining and developing rural enterprises is 'the delicate yet difficult task of developing good *guanxi* with various offices and personages of local government' (Yang, 1994, p. 77). Her detailed account also indicates that extending proper *guanxi* is at the center of business practices and involves structural as well as systematic practices that have to be thoroughly organised.

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[154] He Tian, Focus Group A, March 2011.

11.2.3 *Guanxi* in the Eyes of Foreigners and in Western Countries

It is interesting that a male student noted from his personal experiences that the practices related to Chinese *guanxi* had come to the awareness of foreign people. One male student depicted an interesting experience with a foreign friend, who was trying to practice *guanxi* by offering cigarettes:

> *We went out to eat once with a foreign friend. He was pretty knowledgeable about Chinese culture and all that. So he displayed his pack of cigarettes on the table, but he wasn't going to smoke them. He just left it on the table and then looked at us [hoped we would take some]. He knew it was some kind of Chinese culture but he didn't annotate it well enough for us to know what he was trying to do. So we weren't sure what he was doing, and it would have felt awkward if we did smoke his cigarettes. This just means that Chinese cultures, including guanxi, have become a [well acknowledged] phenomenon, and foreign people start to know about these.*
>
> *(Liu Ran, Focus Group A, March 2011)*

His comment indicates that the complex nature of *guanxi* makes it difficult for people from other cultural backgrounds to fully understand and apply. In a Chinese socio-cultural context, *guanxi* quite often involves cultivating and maintaining personal connections over banquets and other types of social gathering. For smokers, it is assumed that offering cigarettes to people you want to establish *guanxi* with is a necessary basic step. Even if a *guanxi* is not intended, it is still assumed cultural behaviour to do so simply to show politeness and closeness. Close friends might leave their cigarettes out on the table for each other to share, and they would pick up each other's cigarettes at will. In this particular case, this respondent's foreign friend was trying to show his kindness and close personal relations in a Chinese way by displaying the cigarettes on the table and assuming his Chinese friends would appreciate it and pick them up. However, he did not make it clear enough for his Chinese friends to understand and the Chinese people involved in this case were not expecting him to suddenly adopt Chinese cultural practices. It should be noted that in this case it is not clear how close his foreign friend was with this participant and other Chinese people in that context. If they were not close, the alternative explanation might be that the foreign friend misunderstood the extent to which he was assumed to do that or miscalculated the level of friendship between him and his Chinese friends because such practices are most likely reserved for close personal relationships.

Indeed, *guanxi* is particular to the Chinese cultural framework. However, it was pointed

out that some aspects of *guanxi*, although organised and practiced in different formats, also existed in British and most likely other foreign societies as well. One female student in my sample was in Australia for four years for her undergraduate degree and she narrated how she had expected there would be no such thing as *guanxi* in Australia but ended up experiencing it herself. In this case she used 'going through the back door' (*zou houmen*) as an alternative expression for *guanxi*:

> *I felt that foreigners wouldn't go through the back door, and only Chinese people would do that. But actually foreign people do as well, and they also pay a lot of attention to it. When I was in Australia, my friend was lodging in a local family for three years. She got along with the host family very very well. The family was living in a villa right along the seaside with a magnificent view. So they were middle-upper class people, and they hosted international students purely for the cultural experiences [not for money at all]. So they got along very well and she never moved to another place. She told me that the father of the family was saying to her 'if you want to stay and work here, I will help you find one', and 'what kind of job do you want, I can find some connections for you'.*
>
> *(Yu Ting, Focus Group C, April 2011)*

Here 'going through the back door' in Chinese language refers to the negative connotations of *guanxi* rather than the more neutral indication of social connections. Yang observes that the distinction between '*la guanxi*' (pull social connections) and '*zou houmen*' (going through the back door) is that '*zou houmen*' is less a descriptive term focusing on the actual process of utilising social relations than a classificatory label for a set of practices that are either semi-legal or irregular or exclusivistic or particularistic ways of getting something, by using channels not open to everyone, but only to a few who have the right *guanxi* (Yang, 1994, p. 65). Here this female student's comments do not necessarily suggest that the Australian father would have been involved in such exclusivistic practices or adopted methods that may challenge the marginality of the law. Yet her following narrative of another experience leaned more towards the Chinese cultural practice of '*zou houmen*'. In this case, she had another friend whose stepfather was local from Australia. Her friend was trying to apply for a job in a bank, the father thus got in contact with the interviewer from the bank and asked for some of the test questions in the actual tests of the application, which the interviewer should not have given away. He also asked the interviewer to talk to his stepdaughter in order for them to know each other beforehand. The indication of the narrative was that this meeting was for both parties to establish personal contact in order for the stepdaughter to receive some personal favours during the application. All of these practices were seen as a violation of fairness and thus *zou houmen*.

In the end, the girl got the job. This participant commented that *guanxi* that were based on irregular approaches indeed existed in Western countries such as Australia:

> *They [Australians] have also got to have certain identities or backgrounds; they've also got to have guanxi so that they could get into certain companies. It's not that it's completely relied on their own talents and abilities—it's a big part, but they've got to have guanxi as well… it's just not that obvious as in China.*
>
> *(Yu Ting, Focus Group C, April 2011)*

Another male student[155] also commented on what he perceived as *guanxi* existing in Britain. In this case, his friend went to the visa center with his lawyer for a visa application. The lawyer led the way, and when he entered the center, everybody there knew him and was very respectful to him. He commented that the lawyer was already known and had probably established personal connections with people in the visa center and might have already taken care of the *guanxi* network there, so he could go through certain procedures more easily. In the end, the application did go extremely well and was much smoother than for other people. For this participant, this was an indication of the existence of *guanxi* in Britain as well. However, as most respondents noted, *guanxi* was a particularly prominent element and defining factor of Chinese society, whereas it was not as organised or had as much instrumental and institutional values in other societies. This same participant commented that *guanxi* was the backbone element in China for people to move up in the social hierarchies. It was seen as much more important in China and some other Asian countries than in Britain and other Western countries.

11.2.4 The Importance of *Guanxi* in Employment

As a cultural element, *guanxi* compensates for a lack of legal regulations or proper social institutions (Bian, 1994, Bian, 2002). As a prevailing phenomenon, however, it reflects the fundamental structural issues of Chinese society. In terms of job seeking, which was a primary issue revealed by my sample on the topic of *guanxi*, the market economy has been introduced in China for two decades, yet corresponding mechanisms are in slow growth for satisfying the needs of job hunters for prospective positions after the bluntly withdrawn statue job allocation programs (Bian, 2002). This 'institutional hole', as Bian (2002) puts it, allows *guanxi* to grow, and those who have high level of *guanxi* are more active in the

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[155] Liu Ran, Focus Group A, March 2011.

emergent labour market nowadays.

Here it has to be addressed that the importance and changing nature of *guanxi* in existing literatures is still under contest. While Bian (2002) argues that practices of *guanxi* are persistent in occupational processes in China's emergent labour market, Guthrie (2002) suggests that the importance of *guanxi* is in decline and contingent on the structural positions of individuals in the social hierarchy. Hanser's (2002, p. 160) interviews of young Chinese people also indicates that there is a significant reliance on formal methods of job searching and a measured degree of skepticism about the effectiveness and at times the appropriateness of the use of *guanxi*.[156] My own study here does not make particular suggestions on the current trend of the application of *guanxi* in China, but rather only to indicate that Chinese students I have interviewed believed that *guanxi* was pervasively applied in the social life and labour market in China, and that irregular practices of using social connections (similar to Chinese *zou houmen*) existed in Western countries, such as Britain and Australia, as well, although they were not believed to have the same level of instrumental values as in China. In addition, the extent to which *guanxi* is practiced and how it is practiced vary between different regions in China.

In addition, *guanxi* was also seen as linked to the 'beauty economy', particularly by female respondents, in the context of employment. It was noted that when it came to the female beauty economy, *guanxi* often meant sexual attractions that could be taken advantage of by female to achieve certain social and financial statues. Sometimes it could also lead to inappropriate sexual relations between female employees and their employers or supervisors. One female student[157] mentioned that in China bosses would approach young beautiful female employees for sex in trade for a promotion in the department or the company, or females would initiate such *guanxi* as well. Another[158] noted that 'if a girl is a little prettier or taller, or sings or dances well, she would be asked to accompany the bosses at banquets and drink with them'. From her narratives, there was an indication that female's beauty was a resource that they could take advantage of to establish close contact or personal connections with supervisors or employers in order to achieve promotion or general better development in their careers. Liu (2007)'s work on factory workers in China

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[156] Hanser (2002) also argues that Guthrie's argument and his are not inherently contradictory with Bian's (2002) findings. Bian (2002) suggests that *guanxi* is a particular product of the 'institutional holes' and exists to compensate the lack of formal institutions in matching job seekers with prospect employers. Hanser's (2002) argument leans towards the holes in guanxi networks *per se*.

[157] Ma Na, Focus Group B, April 2011.

[158] Qu Jia, Focus Group A, March 2011.

reveals that the ways in which for women promotion is linked with trading sexual favours. Also, both Liu's (2007) and Yang's (1994) works describe the gender inequalities of women in work units in that they have to give up more of themselves than men do. In my own study here, it was pointed out that, for some girls, they were passively involved in such close *guanxi* (not necessarily sexually though) just for the survival of their careers. For others on the other hand, it was seen as the resource that they were able to manipulate to gain certain advantages.

Notably, although *guanxi* can often be related to corruption, bribery or simply social injustice, half a dozen students mentioned that when living abroad and coping with difficulties that could otherwise been easily fixed by *guanxi* back in China, they realised that certain networks of *guanxi* were necessary for emergencies and even desperate situations; whereas in Britain, for them to have little personal connections of any kind with local people, it was harder to deal with. This might be one of the factors which explain why many of the participants did not feel the sense of belonging and tend to only socialise with fellow Chinese students, which is discussed in Chapter 14.1 and 14.2.

It is clear from my focus groups that *guanxi* was seen as an essential element and defining factor of contemporary China. Social connections that individuals could obtain for the use of personal advantages do exist in other countries such as Britain, though they were seen as fundamentally different from Chinese *guanxi* and certainly not above laws and other formal social institutions. Living and studying in Britain has indeed offered alternative perspectives for Chinese students to understand the concepts of law, institutions and social relationships, yet the unsound social institutions and lack of supervisory mechanism for power and authority in China still breeds the existence of *guanxi*. There was thus a struggle amongst the students in my sample. For some, it was easy to identify with the much better established laws and social institutions in Britain that could better prevent corruption. For others, this was not simply a matter of choosing between the Chinese *guanxi* and the formal institutions well established and practiced in Britain, but rather which could be utilised to help with their personal achievements. One male student made the following comments when asked how he identified the differences between China and Britain in terms of *guanxi*, law and social institutions:

> *Speaking of cultural differences and which side [Britain or China] we identify with [in terms of different guanxi types], it is actually a matter of on which side*

you have the advantage. People say they are objecting injustice [caused by guanxi], that's because they couldn't gain any advantage out of it; they don't have the advantaged status, so they are against it. In China, people complain about the unfairness of public servant selection regimes; they complain about corruption and all that. That's because they couldn't gain any advantage. If they could, they wouldn't complain at all.

(He Tian, Focus Group A, March 2011)

For Chinese students living in Britain, the lower presence of *guanxi* structures in Britain on the one hand mirrored the social justice and equality that they previously anticipated of foreign cultural experiences, but on the other posed as a barrier for their further career opportunities in Britain (Philo, 2010) and might prompt them to go back to China.[159]

11.3 Love, Family Life and Women's Identities

The structure of relationships was an issue that had been well discussed amongst my sample. One male student narrated an interesting encounter he had with an old British lady, who had the idea that Chinese women were forced to be submissive in the relationships:

I went to the rail station to take a train back to England with a friend. There was an old lady who was chatting to us. After a few words, all of a sudden, she started to curse, saying that 'Chinese men are stupid', 'You're making women to make meals for you constantly, and you're making them to do this and that. You are disrespecting women!' From her perspective, Chinese women do everything for the men.

(He Tian, Focus Group A, March 2011)

There have indeed been studies suggesting that, views about 'male superiority' are persistent in relationships (Higgins and Sun, 2007), and Chinese females are 'passive, reluctant, responsive and dependent on the male partner' (Evans, 1997, p. 191-192). However, the female students in my sample had different opinions. One female respondent commented on how she liked to be independent and just as equal in a relationship by reflecting on some Chinese males' 'traditional' ideas that she disagreed:

I want to be with a guy who lets me be in charge. I don't want someone who tells me what to do every day. Otherwise, why would I receive so much

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[159] Their cultural identities in Britain will be further discussed in Chapter 14.

education? But some guys' ideas have still not been turned around. They think because their family is very wealthy so they should dominate women. I can work myself, and I'm capable of feeding myself and taking care of myself. We can share housework. I'm no worse than you.

(Ye Yuan, Focus Group C, April 2011)

Most of my female sample noted that they would not want to become a housewife and serve the traditional role of the submissive wife who did not have a career and stayed at home, did all the housework, took care of the husband at home and raised the children. It was pointed out that such 'traditional' ideas still widely existed amongst young Chinese males nowadays and probably in the society as a whole as well. This trend is also reflected in previous works. Chia *et al* (1986) find, in their study of the attitudes towards gender roles in marriage, that female Chinese students hold a more equalitarian view than Chinese male students; while they also reveal that Chinese students as a whole display a more male-dominant view toward marriage roles. This suggests that there is a strong tendency amongst their male participants to anticipate a strongly male-dominant marriage relationship, with which the Chinese females are likely to disagree. As higher education is increasing in popularity in China, there is an increased likelihood that females who have received higher education will question the traditional role of them in marriage. For young Chinese students who are receiving higher education in a Western country, such as Britain, the impact of education itself combined with the lived experience of British/Western cultures, which are arguably more cosmopolitan in the values of sexuality,[160] will prompt such changes.

There was a tendency, revealed from these comments, that respondents, especially females, viewed being a housewife as potentially an inferior and undesirable option nowadays. However, the female students also expressed a variety of perspectives. One commented that to be a traditional housewife was individuals' personal choice that also deserved equal respect:

You have to look at it from various angles. In fact, I think those who say being housewives is disrespecting women's rights are yet truly disrespecting women's rights. They view being housewives as an inferior and very low choice. I just like to be a housewife, it's what maximises my values, it's the most joy, why not do it? And you have to force me to work and have career? I just don't fancy it! Isn't this a form of feminism?

(Qu Jia, Focus Group A, March 2011)

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[160] See, for example, Norris and Inglehart (2009).

Although this respondent used first person to comment in this case, she was not referring to herself but rather simply trying to put herself in the shoes of the women who desired to be a more 'traditional' role in marriage. Nonetheless, it was reported that the general social pressure on women was enormous in China in that their identities as wives and mothers were highly expected at a certain age. This further confirms the perceptions that Western expatriate teachers in my sample had of the social pressure that many Chinese women were under.[161] In my sample of Chinese students here, such pressure also manifested itself in the job seeking market for women. One female respondent judged that Chinese companies would rather employ males than young unmarried females because the cultural assumption was that these females would get married very soon, have children right after it, and be on leave for a certain period, which would jeopardise the productivity of the company.[162] Women were thus seen as being under severe pressure finding jobs and even more so maintaining them while they started families and had children. The different situation in China is that labour laws are not as well practiced and labour unions are not competent to protect women from being unfairly treated in the labour market.

To some extent, the worries that prospective employers might have are not necessarily unreasonable. Two thirds of the female students in my sample reported for themselves that they were under direct/potential pressure of getting married before a certain age,[163] and the rest of the sample simply agreed that it was just the case for many of their peer friends. One female student commented on how her mother would be worried about her marriage but not worried about her brother because of the gender difference:

> *I'm about to be 26, 27, so my mum is very worried. Not 'worried', I should say.*
> *It's just she wants me to have a stable relationship and get married and settle*

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[161] See Chapter 8.

[162] In my sample of Western expatriate teachers in China, one British male teacher (Ian, October 2011) noted that there was indeed a case like this that happened to a Chinese female friend of his. In that case, she was a newly graduate from university who just got married. The employer only gave her the job in the first place on the agreed basis that she was not to have children (thus maternal leave) during her two-year contract. But she did anyway and the employer fired her because of that and she ended up taking him to court. The interesting part was even though she admitted that they had a deal prior to signing the contract, she claimed that 'of course I was going to have children' as if the employer should have known that the 'deal' did not, and should not, mean anything when it came to giving birth at her age. This respondent did not specify on the official final result of this dispute, but this story manifested the conflict between this young Chinese lady who adhered to the tight schedule of university—job—marriage—motherhood and the employer who was quite worried and almost nervous about such life course schedule of young Chinese females. Certainly, this was likely an extreme case, yet it still indicated a certain level of reality and why female students in my sample would be worried.

[163] For some it was 'potential' because they mentioned that their parents did not push them at the time but there was a strong indication that they would as soon as they reached the certain age. For others, they were already being prompted by their parents.

down before 30. I mean, normal people would think like that, even people from
here [Britain]. So… But guys are different. My mum won't be worried if my
little brother is still not married when he turns 30. So it doesn't matter that
much for guys. My mum will give him more time.

(Gu Ning, Focus Group F, April 2011)

The pressure does not only come from factors such as family and culturally scripted values, but also from females themselves. Gender roles of women to become caregivers as wives and mothers are still deeply rooted for some girls that such identities are the only factors that define their happiness. For others, physiological factors are considered significant as the best childbearing age for women was seen as before 30. In comparison with the circumstances in Britain, it was judged that it did not seem as culturally scripted for British women to get married and have children as was for Chinese women. However, it was commented that certain pressure for marriage in terms of age also existed in Britain, although whether it came from internal desire or external pressure was not specified. One female student commented on what she perceived as the British attitudes toward marriage and family life:

Of course they are also urged to get married when they turn 30. It's just not as
serious as in China though. And… about getting married or not… they like to
live together, and divorce… Probably because they started their sex life at
quite young ages, much younger than Chinese people, so the restraints on
marriage are not as heavy as in China.

(Gu Ning, Focus Group F, April 2011)

As I previously mentioned, dominant discourse on sexuality in China regulates women's sexual behaviour and defines marriage as the only site for sexual relations (Evans, 1997). Drawing from the above comment, there is an alternative explanation for Chinese women's desire to rush into marriage in their early ages. For women's sexual desires have been oppressed and 'dependent on the male partners for awakening' (Evans, 1997, p. 191-192). For them to emancipate their bodies and release their sexual desires, marriage is, under dominant state discourse on women's sexuality, the only legitimate ground for sex life.

Such differences in the attitudes and social reality of marriage in Britain had an impact on my participants' values and were potentially changing their behaviour. One female respondent narrated how her attitudes about marriage had changed upon living in Britain and commented on the differences in terms of the structure of marriage and relationships:

For foreign people, what's it about late marriage? It's about both parties have independent economic foundations, they are both independent, otherwise, if the woman is dependent on the man, domestic violence would happen. A very important notion from here is the female has to have economic power so that she would not be abused by the male, that she would not be on the disadvantaged side. This is what my landlord told me. But if the female wants to achieve certain economic independence, it's not going to happen right after university graduation. It's too soon to happen. So naturally they get married late. Then I realise, this is great. Men can have careers, why can't women? When we have our careers and do what we should do, we can find someone better.

(Gu Chao, Focus Group E, April 2011)

While Chia *et al* (1986)'s study suggests that female Chinese students hold more equalitarian views toward marriage, this comment further confirms the potential shift in such a direction amongst the current generation of young Chinese students. Nonetheless, attitudes towards marriage and sex are likely to vary between regions, ethnic groups as well as individual families in China. One female student noted that her parents were not worried about her finding a boyfriend while some parents of her fellow students were desperate for their children to settle down when they were only in the second or third year through university.

For the male students, on the other hand, they tended to pay more attention to their personal and career developments rather than to marriage and family life at this stage of life. Male respondents in Focus Group A noted that they were planning to travel more and focus on their careers for a few more years after graduation before considering marriage or settling down, and there was a clear attitude amongst female students in the same focus group that this was much more socially acceptable for males than for females.

It has to be noted again that one of the primary intentions for the sampled Chinese students to come to Britain was their interest in foreign/British cultures. This suggests that this particular group of female students might already have been more accepting towards values from Western societies than the average of their peer group. It can be seen from these females' comments that a critical attitude against traditional Chinese values of gender rights and family structures was deepening (since the change has already occurred, which has been revealed by previous studies) amongst young female Chinese students in Britain in that independent roles and equal responsibilities in relationship, marriage and family life were commonly, and more strongly, anticipated.

11.4 Summary

As an equivalent chapter to Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, this chapter interprets the cultural practices of *guanxi*, relationships and family life as well as women's social identities from the perspective of Chinese students in Britain. Similar to the understanding that the Western expatriate teachers had, *guanxi* was widely seen by the sampled Chinese group as a fundamental part and defining factor of social interactions in China. While male students tended to discuss the importance of *guanxi* in business practices, female students concentrated more on the topic of the beauty economy where the sexual element of *guanxi* was a potential influencing factor in their employment. In the discussion of business operations, it was believed that the cultivation of *guanxi* was an essential part to its success. In terms of females' employment, it was suggested that promotion was potentially linked with sexual favours and such favours could be initiated and manipulated by females to achieve career goals. In terms of job hunting in general, although the existing literature is inconclusive on the current moving trend of the importance of *guanxi* in job market, it was believed in my sample that it was still a key element in finding jobs in China nowadays. Nonetheless, *guanxi* was not seen as being particular to the Chinese cultural framework, but rather a practice that existed (in different formats) in Western countries such as Britain and Australia as well. More interestingly, it seems that the concept and practices of *guanxi* have extended to the outside world as well and people from foreign countries, as they have started to recognise the importance of it in socialising with Chinese people.

When it comes to relationships, marriage and women's roles in them, almost all female participants in my sample reported that they would not want to become a submissive housewife, as traditional Chinese culture might promote, but rather a more equal partner. There was a tendency amongst them to see the submissive housewife as inferior, which was seen by others as a discrimination in itself that did not respect one's free choice of becoming a housewife. Nonetheless, this study believes that such more equal ideas (compared to the traditional ones) of women's role in marriage is partly due to the particular family and educational background of the sampled Chinese students. The fact that they were all receiving higher education in a Western country means that: 1) they might already be much more accepting of Western values (or at least potentially anticipating them), and more open towards cosmopolitan values in sex, relationship and

marriage; 2) they are most likely from families with good financial background as they were all financially supported by their families, which means the parents most likely had successful careers, social status and were able to provide good-quality family education.

The social attitudes towards women in terms of marriage and motherhood were also widely considered as a significant pressure in China. This resonates with the findings in Chapter 8. Two thirds of the female students reported that they were under pressure to get married and become a mother even when they were only in their early 20s. Such pressure does not only come from their families and the society, but also from themselves as traditional ideas in such respect still have an impact on their perceptions of happiness. This contributes to an internal struggle amongst the students between their individual values (which were obtained through years of good-quality education), the societal cultural scripts and the Western influence. It is, nonetheless, believed that directly exposed to the cultural elements of Britain in terms of the attitudes towards sex, relationships and marriage has an impact on their perceptions and has potentially prompted a shift in their ideas towards a more cosmopolitan attitude.

Chapter 12 Foreign Perceptions of China and Potential Discrimination

12.1 Introduction

This chapter shows foreign perceptions of China and how the sampled Chinese people might be discriminated against in the British local environment. **Section 12.2** presents how the foreign friends of the sampled Chinese students perceived China and the ways in which such perceptions might have been formed. **Section 12.3** explains the potential discrimination that Chinese students faced in Britain and how respondents reflected on such experiences.

12.2 Foreign Perceptions of China

Based primarily in the context of university campuses, Chinese students in my sample were easily able to have encounters with local students as well as international students. It was widely pointed out that perceptions of China from the outside were rather limited and, to a certain extent imbalanced. One male student mentioned that what represented the image of China was quite often *Kong Fu* and related movie stars such as Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan, and it was judged that not many people from the outside world really knew anything about ordinary people's life in China. For example, a common confusion between China and Japan was reported in my sample. One male student noted that foreigners would ask him about 'Chinese Ninja', which apparently was the result of misplacing the Ninja as a character in Chinese culture instead of Japanese. Almost identical ideas were reflected in Chapter 4.3.1 amongst the Western expatriate teachers.

Nonetheless, the most prevailing perceptions of China from the outside that were noted were in relation to the poor living conditions of Chinese people, the totalitarian authority of the Communist Party reflected in various political disturbances throughout the

contemporary history of China, as well as the lack of individual freedom such as freedom of speech, assembly and protest marches. All of these were noted to have been gained primarily through the media. One male student who listened to the BBC daily commented that 'if you want to know something negative about China, just listen to the BBC'. He went on to comment that negative information about China was much more abundant in Britain than in China. This is likely the case as China is the country with one of the lowest levels of press freedom in the world (Norris and Inglehart, 2009) and Britain is arguably high on the list. Thus negative information about China tends to be filtered by the Chinese government's control over the media while British media would not edit out such issues. It should be noted that, before this particular focus group, the famous Chinese artist and vocal critic Ai Weiwei was placed under house arrest by the Chinese authority. The BBC reported this story for days,[164] while Ai's name was filtered by Chinese government in China. His comments, however, did not necessarily imply that British media stories were intentionally against China, but were rather to suggest that the bulk of information about other aspects of China was missing in major British media outlets and was overshadowed by the predominance of political and human rights reports, leading to the limited understanding some British people might have of Chinese people and the country. This same respondent also narrated how his foreign flat mate had known about the disturbing political history of contemporary China but had no awareness of the current social transformation and how wealthy the country had become:

> *When I talked to my flat mate, I've found out that he knows about those negative things [about China] inside and out. The Cultural Revolution, the Tiananmen Square, he knows everything about them. But when I mentioned the Reform and Opening-up policy and such, he doesn't know a thing! He just thinks that China might be very much lagged behind, to the extent that… he once asked me 'are you [Chinese people] having enough food to eat?' I said to him 'why would we be here [Britain] if we were not having enough food? Do you have any idea how much money it costs every year for us to study abroad?' He said 'then are you just a very small minority of very wealthy people who can afford it?' I said 'every year, hundreds of thousands Chinese students go and study abroad'. His perspective is that China is a country that needs to be saved by others, and it's a very backward and closed country. This is just their general idea.*
>
> *(Li Wei, Focus Group E, April 2011)*

Another female respondent commented on her similar experiences with two classmates. In this case, she showed them pictures of Chinese metropolitan cities such as Beijing,

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[164] Full details of the BBC stories were mentioned in Chapter 4.4.

Shanghai and Hong Kong, and these pictures shocked her classmates because they never expected any Chinese region would be so modern built. Certainly such mega cities could not represent the bulk of the country, which is not as new and cosmopolitan, and there are regions in China that have arguably lagged far behind and were far less wealthy than Beijing and Shanghai, yet her comments still indicated that the image that parts of China had already become as metropolitan as London in terms of urban development was nonexistent in her foreign classmates' previous knowledge. Other elements, such as the ways in which Chinese people in Britain participate in the local economy primarily through the catering industry (Chau and Yu, 2001), also partly contribute to a lack of understanding, amongst people from Western countries such as Britain, of Chinese people. Parker (1994) suggests that in Britain there are racialised stereotypical representations about Chinese youth formed through encounters with young Chinese people working at restaurant counters. This particular cultural identity (of Chinese youth in Britain) has fostered a sense that they are exclusively being confined within take-away employment, which often excludes them from interethnic peer groups.

Issues of different understandings of religious beliefs were also addressed by some of the respondents. One male student narrated his conversations with his foreign friends about the religious beliefs in China:

> *They think there's no religion in China. I was saying to them that the biggest religion in China is Buddhism. We also have Islam and other religions. They just said there was no religion in China. I told them I kind of believed in Buddhism. They couldn't understand. I have a best friend here from Romania. Right before he went back, he kept saying to me 'you are a nice guy, but I suggest you should have a religious belief'. He also gave me a Bible as a gift. He just thinks that China has no religions. I can't figure out why. Maybe it's to do with our government's propaganda. But as far as I know, China does have religions. It's not like what they say that we don't have beliefs.*
> *(Li Wei, Focus Group E, April 2011)*

Indeed, China has gone through periods when religions were heavily repressed, especially during Mao's era and the Cultural Revolution, and even though the state's policy on religious beliefs has become more tolerant and liberated, religious practices are still regulated by the socialist regime and the discourse of religious control remains strong (Potter, 2003). Nonetheless, the above comments suggest that the existence of various religions in China is still less known to the outside, yet the bulk of the information on them is most likely related to the government's suppression of religious beliefs and related

issues of human rights. However, unlike the strong dislike of the troublesome behaviour of some British teenagers, which was often interpreted as racial discrimination, Chinese students did not consciously link the negative perceptions their friends/classmates had of China to discrimination or racism. This might be because the sampled Chinese students had already judged that these ideas were the result of news reports, movies and other media sources, and their friends were simply stating what they had learnt from them. In addition, as nearly a dozen other participants noted, their local friends in Britain had shown significant interest in Chinese cultures. One male student[165] noted that his local friends and colleagues were simply curious about China. In this case, he was the only Chinese student in the entire labouratory and his colleagues were all very interested in him and China. Another female respondent[166] mentioned one of her British friends who had been to China and spoke quite good Chinese. She noted that having actually lived in China gave him a more realistic perspective on China rather than only observing China through media from afar or even forming perceptions solely based on hearsay. The kindness and curiosity that these British colleagues and friends showed was likely another reason why discrimination or racism was not mentioned in such discussions.

12.3 Dealing with Potential Discrimination and Racism

Nonetheless, potential discrimination was indeed a significant issue revealed in my sample. It was widely noted that potential discrimination towards Chinese people existed in Britain, though it was reported to have been quite often disguised by polite manners. For half of the respondents who reported this issue, there were no overt confrontations that appeared in their narratives. Indeed, some of the participants in my interviews simply talked subjective feelings with no particular references. For Chinese students who were undertaking undergraduate programs, and those who had had deep personal connections with local people, they tended to have better knowledge of Britain because of their more extensive social interactions with the local environment and the fact that they had spent a longer duration of time in the country. One female undergraduate student noted that she was not treated equally in the classroom environment. In this case, her tutor went around the

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[165] Gu Yue, Focus Group E, April 2011.
[166] Bian Yu, Focus Group E, April 2011.

classroom to discuss questions with every student but intentionally skipped her and went straight to the next student. This happened in the tutorial session where nearly 20 students were present. She commented that 'it was quite obvious and there were many other students from various countries'. Another undergraduate student narrated her experience with a British student who made racist remarks toward her in the classroom during the discussion of global warming:

> *There was this one time I remember clearly. We were discussing environmental issues. I would be constantly inattentive because they were talking about British public policies that I couldn't understand much. So I would sometimes be inattentive and distracted for the whole lecture. All of a sudden I heard one guy saying 'the environment would be better if Chinese people were all dead'. Before, I wasn't paying attention, and then all of a sudden I was shocked, because he knew I was Chinese. Then I started to star at him but I didn't say anything. I was actually wanting to say that 'we do have a lot of people, we do waste a lot of resources, but we wouldn't keep the heaters on in June! And we actually have to pay for the water, so we don't use it endlessly!'[167] But all the other students were British, I didn't know how to say it back. And it would have been awkward too. Then the guy probably realised it, and said sorry immediately and 'I didn't know what to do to deal with it [environmental problems]'. This has happened for a couple of times.*
>
> *(Meng Ling, Focus Group B, April 2011)*

She further commented that a lack of English language skills was sometimes an element that could generate possible prejudice and discrimination. She went on to describe how she had trouble communicating with a native English speaker who had a Scottish accent, which she was not used to:

> *Native English speakers won't forgive you for your bad English just because you are a non-native speaker. You should have been good with English, even though you are a foreigner. This is cultural difference. Because in China, if there is a foreign person in a class, everybody will takes care of him. People will assume he's not good at Chinese, so we'll help him, talk slowly. It'll be very obvious. Here, for example, when doing group works, sometimes I'll be like 'Excuse me [for not understanding your accent], could you say that again' or 'could you speak a bit more slowly'. The person will just say it again using the same speed. I'm like 'God! Can't you just slow down?!' I don't know whether it's that they don't realise it at all or what. But for Chinese people, if foreigners couldn't understand us because of our dialects or accents, we would definitely slow it down or express it in an alternative way. This is cultural difference.*
>
> *(Meng Ling, Focus Group B, April 2011)*

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[167] In Scotland, in student accommodations or if you are a student in rented accommodation, the use of water is unlimited and free of charge.

Modood *et al* (1997, p. 351) also argue that both white and ethnic minorities in Britain believe that there is an increasing scale of racial prejudice and discrimination. In this respect, another male[168] student commented that Chinese people would be curious about foreigners coming to China in a kind way. Even though the fact that Chinese people would call foreigners '*laowai*' might be intimidating for them, it was generally not meant to be discriminative, and preferential treatment would actually be given to those *laowai*. Drawing from my respondents' experiences and comments on potential discrimination, my own study suggests that potential discrimination might be becoming an important issue in the academic life of the students who were undertaking undergraduate courses. The reason why other students did not encounter such incidents might be because students who were doing postgraduate degrees in business related courses were in an environment that was predominantly international, and particularly Chinese. For those who were in courses such as biology and computing science, where Chinese students were in the minority, the duration of the course was only one year, which was not long enough for them to realise such subtle issues as racism. On the other hand, students who were undertaking undergraduate courses, regardless of the areas of study, had interacted predominantly with British students for a relatively long period of time. Racial discrimination was more likely to be realised in such cases. It has to be noted that, no specific narratives about discrimination were directly revealed in terms of their general everyday life or social life, although it was still widely pointed out that it did exist yet in a subtle manner that could not be accurately articulated.

What is important here is that public behaviour of potential discrimination and racism is most likely influenced by factors such as socioeconomic backgrounds as well as social stratification. As I have previously discussed, British teenagers from working class backgrounds are more likely to exhibit discriminative behaviour than those from middle and upper class families. It was noted in my sample that middle or upper class professionals such as lawyers and bankers might have different understandings of Chinese people than British people from a lower class background. These comments were primarily from students who were undertaking the undergraduate course in sociology and also from students who had close friendships with local British families. One female student of sociology[169] described that for upper class British people, the discrimination most likely existed towards Chinese refugees rather than Chinese students or legal immigrants. She

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[168] Liu Ran, Focus Group A, March 2011.
[169] Ma Na, Focus Group B, April 2011.

commented that even she herself was sometimes annoyed by the 'uncivilised' behaviour of some Chinese refugees, especially children, in public places, and it was quite understandable for her to see that some British people showed disrespect towards this particular Chinese group. Another female student had established a close friendship with a local British woman who was a successful lawyer in Britain. She narrated how this lawyer thought about Chinese refugees without grouping them with all other Chinese people:

> *She's very uncomfortable with these Chinese [refugees] who are dependent on the welfare scheme [tax payers' money], because she makes a lot of money so she has to pay a lot of tax. She's a lawyer, she has very very high income, she has her own law firm. She thinks it's just too unfair. She thinks that she works so hard, pays so much for tax but it's only to provide for these refugees. So she hates these people. Super hate. But she's able to differentiate those people with us students. So she is very nice to us and invited us over to dinner at her place.*
> *(Li Yingying, Focus Group C, April 2011)*

Similar comments were revealed by other students as well, and these indicate that the UK government's policies of immigration have a certain level of impact on the perceptions of British people towards refugees from other countries such as China. It was further noted in relevant discussions that some British people were not able to differentiate between refugee, migrants and students and would group all Chinese people together and judge them as if they were all the same. Nonetheless, some Chinese students' inappropriate public and private behaviour had indeed misrepresented the image of the entire group and generated negative comments even from Chinese students themselves. One key element that was commonly reported was how inconsiderate some Chinese students are of others in public places, such as not taking care of their own waste and making too much noise.

12.4 Summary

This study finds that the understanding of China by people from other countries is quite limited, and of the little that is known, the information has been most often related to the living conditions of the poor Chinese people, and the Communist nature of the ruling party, which is seen as promoting a totalitarian government and a lack of human rights. Such issues are indeed part of what China is like today, but what this study reveals is that the bulk of China is nonetheless unknown and misunderstood by people outside of China. The

news reports and art forms of the media such as movies, which quite often concentrate on these aspects of China, are part of the formation of such perceptions. Furthermore, these imbalanced perceptions are, in part, a result of the ways in which Chinese migrants, a large proportion of whom are working in the catering service, participate in British economy. As will be shown in Chapter 14.1, Chinese students were almost exclusively socialising with fellow Chinese people, which also potentially contributed to the lack of understanding of China and Chinese people.

In terms of discrimination and racism, although almost all participants reported that racial discrimination against them existed in Britain, for most it was rather a subjective feeling that could not be articulated in words. Nonetheless, students who were undertaking undergraduate courses and those who had close contacts with local British people were able to demonstrate the detailed ways in which they encountered racism. It is believed that the particular academic and social environment for these students is a significant factor. For undergraduate students, where their fellow classmates were predominantly British local students, subtle issues such as racism were much more likely to be revealed in contrast to the environment of postgraduate lectures of business-related majors which were predominantly Chinese and other international students. Students who had close friendships with local British people were much more likely to discuss such sensitive issues as racial discrimination. More importantly, these students were able to consider the factor of social stratification and its influence on the perceptions of international immigrants and potential racism. Potential discrimination and racism is believed to be a highly class-dependent phenomenon in Britain. An example of this is the provocative behaviour of British teenagers.

Chapter 13 Social Life, British Attitudes and Cross-Cultural Conflicts

13.1 Introduction

This chapter explores Chinese students' experiences of general social life in Britain, their understandings of British attitudes towards employment, leisure and social life, as well as encounters of cultural conflicts in the local contexts. **Section 13.2** shows how students perceived Britain as being organised through rules and regulations and the extent to which such rules were followed. **Section 13.3** explains the ways in which British democracy and individual freedom of choice was understood by the students. **Section 13.4** presents students' perceptions of the British attitudes towards employment and leisure activities, and how these were different from the general attitudes that Chinese people might have. **Section 13.5** focuses on their experiences of British social life and the cultural conflicts that students had encountered. The concept of *mianzi* is explained and discussed here with an emphasis on its importance in participants' social interactions with their foreign friends and flat mates.

13.2 Law and Social Institutions in Britain

British society was seen as extremely well organised in that law and social regulations were reasonably set out and strictly practiced by the public. This was primarily reflected by how well British people were seen to have respected and followed the rules. One facet that had been commented on most often in my sample was how much British people loved to queue. One female student[170] even noted with some laughter: 'everywhere you go, you see people queuing up for something'. After living in Britain for a while, almost all the student participants mentioned that they had now been so used to respecting and following social

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[170] Qu Jia, Focus Group A, March 2011.

rules such as queuing, when they went back to China, the reverse cultural shock was quite negative and thus difficult to re-adapt to. It was noted that Chinese people back in China tended to jump the queues, with one participant[171] even commenting: 'there is often no queue at all'. This student narrated that when she was queuing at the telephone service center (when she traveled back to China during her stay in Britain), she intentionally kept a certain distance behind the person who was at the counter so that it left enough space of privacy; yet the person behind her just jumped in front of her as if she was silly to leave that open space without moving forward. Another student [172] described similar circumstances where there was no queue at all, and every time she moved up to the counter, she would be crowded out by others. One respondent further commented on this issue based on her understandings of the differences in the two different educational environments:

> *In Chinese elementary and middle schools, few teachers ever taught you about manners. Most would just say 'as long as your marks are good, you are fine'. The elementary school I went to was a private school, so it was an exception. But when I entered middle school, it felt totally different. At elementary school, my teachers taught boys to be gentlemen; they taught them when to let girls go first and queue for lunch. The teachers would focus on these things. But my middle school was very different. My first semester in middle school, I wouldn't eat at the canteen for once; I wasn't comfortable with it, because if I was queuing, I would always be the last, and there would have been nothing left when it was my turn. As soon as the class was dismissed, everybody just rushed out to the canteen for lunch. When we finished doing exercises between classes and went back to the classroom, girls always let the boys rush in first. I just couldn't understand. They didn't have the manners. Yes, they were very good with their study, and every one had a very high IQ. But they just didn't seem to know certain manners.*
>
> *(Qu Jia, Focus Group A, March 2011)*

Her comments suggest that the educational environment serves as a potential variable in terms of individuals' public behaviour. Those who have attended private schools or schools with excellent overall quality are less likely to behave in the ways described above. In comparison, all participants noted that in Britain manners and social rules were extremely important. One student even commented with some laughter that the extent to which British people stuck to rules and regulations had gone to the point of almost madness:

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[171] Meng Ling, Focus Group B, April 2011.
[172] Gu Ning, Focus Group F, April 2011.

Everything has to be done according to a certain procedure; you have to make an appointment first, and then you go and you have to queue and wait for your turn.

(Ye Yuan, Focus Group C, April 2011)

For many Chinese students, however, this was sometimes considered as demonstrations of low efficiency and less flexibility. One student noted that the time schedule was strictly applied in Britain, especially with formal appointments, with no exception for even a slight adjustment within reasonable scope:

I went to the police station to register, but I forgot to bring my photo. I said to the officer that I would go back and bring it back because I would have come back in time for the scheduled meeting. But he said 'No. You have missed the scheduled meeting because you didn't bring your photo'. Even if they had no other appointment after mine, they just wouldn't get me registered.

(Li Jie, Focus Group G, May 2011)

Another female student[173] narrated her experiences in the similar environment of the police station. In her case, she arrived 10 minutes earlier than expected and was given a waiting number to wait for her turn. Then nobody called for her, until 5 minutes after the time of the scheduled appointment, an officer came out and asked why she did not arrive on time. She explained she had arrived earlier already but nobody called for her. The officer kept saying it had already passed their working time and kept telling her with a warning tone that she should not be late next time, even for a minute. This student noted: 'he insisted that it was me being late, and they wouldn't register for me even though there was nobody else after me; they just wouldn't be willing to do it for me; from their viewpoint, it was me violating their regulations, and their regulations were very important that I could not adjust but have to obey'. Another female expressed how she was confused by the inflexible administration procedures in the university context:

I went to the secretary to collect my letter. She said earlier that the letter would arrive at her but after so many days it still hadn't. So I went to her at about 10 am that morning, she said 'It's not here yet. You have to wait a little bit longer'. Then at about 11, she emailed me to pick up the letter. When I got to her, she said 'Actually it was already here this morning, but I had to email you first before you could come and pick it up'... I just couldn't understand it! What is going on in these people's minds! (chuckle)

(Qu Jia, Focus Group A, March 2011)

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[173] Wan Lei, Focus Group G, May 2011.

Such comments were also revealed in other social contexts such as dealing with customer service in tourism spots. This same female participant described that she and her friends were travelling to York (in England, Britain) and had already bought all-inclusive tickets for all scenic spots. But the all-inclusive ticket had only two options: child and adult, no student tickets, so they bought adult ones. When they got to a scenic spot, it was not included in the ticket but a student discount was offered. So they thought they just purchased student tickets since they were students and had their student ID cards with them to prove it. However, the conductor insisted that they were not eligible for student tickets because she saw their adult all-inclusive tickets (which meant they were adults). This participant commented that 'she insisted we could only buy adult tickets even though we showed her our student cards'. From this student's perspective, it was a very reasonable request from the customers, and she was not lying about her identity or cheating in any way, yet the conductor was still unwilling to be reasonably flexible about the ticket policy. It was noted that policies and social orders as such were aspects of the Britain that students found quite hard to adapt to.

Britain was seen as being organised by entirely different systems with China. Even though the 'inflexibility' in social life caused by strictly regulated institutions is likely to cause practical conflicts for students to cope with, the ways in which Chinese institutions work have higher potential for corruption because rules are not strictly applied to everyone and people would press their *guanxi* and would more likely operate under the table. On the other hand, law and regulations are generally strictly followed in Britain, which leaves much less room for error and misconduct. One male participant commented on his experiences with a landlord, from which he found out how much the law was respected and equally applied in Britain:

> *We were moving out of that flat, but the landlord would only refund ¼ of the deposit. We thought it was unreasonable, because he had to have probable cause for the cost. He said the cost was to clean and paint the flat, but he didn't do it because he couldn't provide the receipts. So we went for a lawyer for help, and the lawyer said if he couldn't finish the cleaning and painting before the next tenant moved in, we didn't have to cover for that cost. Then our lawyer sent out the request by both email and by post, and the landlord's lawyer replied immediately agreeing to refund half of the deposit. Our lawyer said no because he still didn't have any probable cause for that, so we couldn't accept that. Eventually the landlord provided the receipt only for the cleaning and refund the rest of our deposit.*
>
> *(Li Yinan, Focus Group G, May 2011)*

He commented that if this happened in China, the best and quickest solution would have been to find some *guanxi*, someone who was high up in the social hierarchy and had certain power, and it would go away easily. However, if the tenants, or in this case him and his flat mates, were from disadvantaged group in China who did not have such *guanxi*, they would have to go through the legal process anyway but it would take a long time and might not work, especially if the landlord had his own powerful *guanxi*. Similar narratives can also be found in Philo' work (2010, p. 102-103). It was thus widely noted that Britain might be less efficient in some aspects, but in terms of legal disputes, it was quite fair and efficient to resolve problems.

13.3 Democracy and Individuality in Britain

Issues of democracy, equality and individual freedom of choice were also frequently discussed as these were all seen as advantages that Britain had over China and were highly desirable for the Chinese students. One male student compared the public construction of infrastructure in China and Britain to elaborate his observation of the democratic nature of British government:

> *Take refurbishing a road or building up a construction for public use for example. In China, it can be done just by some government leader's approval, but it could be a jerrybuilt project or end up totally wasted, which is unnecessary; whereas in Britain, it has to be demonstrated to the public, illustrated, discussed and then approved by the public, and it takes years to do these. Once it's done, it lasts for decades or even hundreds of years, which is good.*
>
> *(Zhao Lei, Focus Group G, May 2011)*

This is nonetheless not to suggest that there is no corruption in Britain or that every public construction in China might be corruption-related.[174] Rather, it is to indicate that Chinese society is organised in a fundamentally different way from British society as the latter is democratic in that the government generally operates on the wills of the people, thus higher level of equality and social justice are achieved. In addition, it was also revealed that political issues were quite sensitive in China and people would not normally talk about

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[174] For example, the case of horsemeat scandal has already been discussed in Chapter 6 in regard to potential corruption and cheating acts in Britain and Europe as a whole.

it in public. When it came to discussions of different political systems between China and Britain, one male student[175] even asked 'this conversation wouldn't be revealed to the Communist Party, right?' Certainly part of his tone was exaggerating and joking, but it indicated that publicly discussing political issues in China was still in some sense seen as a taboo and would lead to dangers or troubles from the authorities. This was also reflected by another female[176] student's narrative in that her mother once warned her not to share negative feelings of the Communist Party with other people in case she might get in trouble. In contrast, she noted that it was much more liberating in Britain where it was completely fine to make negative comments on the government and the authority figures. She narrated how she understood British democracy from watching British television shows:

> *I love watching BBC iPlayer. You know, there are some comedian shows on BBC iPlayer, stand-up comedies. They are just making fun, like Chinese crosstalk comedians,[177] but they are individual shows. You listen to them, they can make fun of the Queen, and... there were some scandals lately about Prince Andrew, right? So they would make fun of him. In China, who dare to make fun of the princelings?[178]*
>
> *(Gu Ning, Focus Group F, April 2011)*

Another significant issue that had been widely discussed was the freedom in Britain to participate in protest marches and the actual effects that publicly expressing opinions could make on the policy-making process. During the time of my fieldwork, the British government implemented a series of fiscal cuts on higher education, students and faculty members thus went out on the streets to march in protest of the cuts. A female student observed several related events happening in her university and commented in the focus group that 'students protested and expressed their wills, and it has actually worked'.[179] She pointed out that it would not have worked in China, based on her knowledge of the

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[175] Cao Yiwei, Focus Group G, May 2011.

[176] Gu Ning, Focus Group F, April 2011.

[177] Literally '*xiang sheng*' in Chinese. It is a traditional Chinese comic performance. It often features two actors, with one playing the leading comedian and the other playing the supporting comedian. The performance is often in the form of funny dialogues. In much less cases, *xiang sheng* can be performed in the form of solo monologue or multi-actor talk show. The form of solo monologue can be roughly seen as the equivalence of stand-up comedic show in Britain, but revolves generally around grass roots' everyday life rather than political issues.

[178] Princelings are the offspring of the ruling class members. The term has an indication of the feudalism monarchy in Chinese language. In contemporary China, it often refers to the offspring of the highest leaders in the Communist Party. They were born with privilege from their parents and are able to circumvent certain social orders and rules that the majority of the population could not. To the general public, they are protected by the unshakable powers their parents hold and certain laws are not to be applied on them.

[179] It was reported that the university had decided to cut several lectureships but the protest marches and a series of related events finally pressed them to withdraw the decision.

Tiananmen Square incident and her father's actual experiences of it:

> *There used to be protest marches and protests, but they were suppressed by the government, like in 1989.*[180] *I heard it from my dad, he was in university at that time and went to participate in a protest in Shanghai,*[181] *but he was dragged back by his classmates (chuckle). You know, the government was sending out the police…*
>
> <div align="right">(Jiongjie, Focus Group H, May 2011)</div>

Her stories are certainly based on true events, and the Tiananmen Square is indeed an iconic political disturbance that may well demonstrate the totalitarian nature of the Communist Party. However, the emphasis on this particular case overlooks the general picture of an increasing scale of public protest marches that did not necessarily result in blood and have had actual influence on the policy-making process in China. For instance, from 2006, a series of chemical plant projects in China have been under the media spotlight, starting with the case in Xiamen (Southeast of China along Taiwan Strait) where massive public protests forced the government to relocate a chemical plant producing paraxylene (PX)[182]. It is thus known as the 'PX Incident'. PX projects subsequently appeared in Dalian, Ningbo and Kunming, yet large-scale protests were initiated by the public and made a decisive impact on their execution: the local government in Dalian and Ningbo had all decided to relocate the project or put it on hold,[183] and a recent news article regarding the most recent incident in Kunming reported that the local authority had announced that they would call off the PX project if most of the public said no to it.[184] These public protests regarding political decision-making in recent years well manifest that there has been a growing awareness amongst the public in China to voice their own rights and more importantly amongst the policy makers that the legitimacy of their authority would be jeopardised if they did not operate according to the will of the people.

Nonetheless, in China the public power on the policy making as well as on the supervision of the government's operation of these policies is considerably lower than that in Britain.

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[180] Here she was specifically referring to the Tiananmen Square political incident in June 1989.

[181] Tiananmen Square incident happened in Beijing, but there were protest marches of university students across China. In this case, the respondent's father was studying at Shanghai and went to join the protests, and there was also heavy police presence at the protest marches in Shanghai.

[182] This chemical is considered particularly carcinogenic and according to the Chinese official regulations, plants producing such chemicals have to be located at least 10km away from the residential areas. However, in this case, the plant was planned to be located 7km from Xiamen. Source: Global Nonviolent Database, 2007.

[183] Source: Bristow, M. *BBC, 2/01/2008*, *BBC, 14/08/2011*, *BBC, 29/10/2012*, *BBC, 16/05/2013*.

[184] Source: *China Daily, 10/05/2013*.

This lack of restriction on government operations and the high degree of control and restriction over people's freedom of speech might be part of the factor that has led to the loss of highly educated and skilled people to democratic countries. There have been various studies discussing this trend of migration as 'brain drain', and Chinese government's response to it as 'reverse brain drain' (see for example Kao and Lee, 1973, Broaded, 1993, Zweig, 1997, Zweig, Chen and Rosen, 2004, Saxenian, 2005, Zweig, 2006). One female respondent's comments regarding why she had left China for Britain in some respect manifested the 'brain drain':

> *Under the cultural background of Western countries, individual rights are of supremacy. Every person is an individual with dignity, and each individual's life has its own meanings. But I don't think the same exists in China. In China, you've got to have guanxi, you've got to have money and you've got to have political power. Life is so tiring; people don't have the rights they deserve. In other countries,[185] people all protect and maintain the dignity of their own countries. Sure they are criticizing their governments all the time, but their governments are nice to them, and in the end people protect the dignity of their nations unconditionally. But in China, there aren't many people like that. People are trying to get out of the country all the time. A large proportion of the population is very unsatisfied with their own country.*
> (Huang Jun, Focus Group G, May 2011)

British democracy and ideas of individual freedom and equality were also reflected widely through respondents' perceptions of people's everyday life. A common example that student participants, especially females, mentioned was the ways in which people dressed. One female student[186] commented that in China if a person dressed in a way that was slightly abnormal, people would stare at or point fingers at that person behind their back and even make judgmental comments; whereas in Britain, it was seen that generally people wore whatever they liked and other people would not judge them based on their outfits. It was also pointed out that dressing styles in Britain were much less confined by social statuses or identities. One female student narrated her encounters with custom service staff in the airport when she first arrived in Britain:

> *When I arrived here [at the airport], the young lady at custom service had purple hair, and she was wearing super bright-colored lipsticks and was chewing gum. And she was a custom service officer!*
> (Qu Jia, Focus Group A, March 2011)

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[185] Here she was most likely referring to democratic countries in particular.
[186] Li Yingying, Focus Group C, April 2011.

There is an indication in such comments that, in China, certain styles of dress are more likely to be related to certain socio-cultural backgrounds, while in Britain the atmosphere is more tolerant for pursuing different individual styles of dressing. Certainly there is certain code of dressing that also has to be followed in Britain, for example, people would also have to wear suit and ties in rather formal contexts. In this case, it was rather the expectation gap in that particular context that surprised this participant because in a formal setting such as the custom office it was anticipated that the staff would be very serious in attitudes as well as in their appearance. Thus it was this particular gap that led to this experience of culture shock. Whether this could be extended to the differences in the dressing styles in general could not be directly indicated. Nonetheless this female student did note that when she was in middle school, Chinese parents would not allow their children to spend much time on dressing, and they would keep instilling the idea that study was the only thing that mattered.

As commented by the female students in Focus Group A and B, the general cultural presumption in China was that before university, dressing up and putting on makeup were bad habits and would take up time that could have otherwise been spent on studying. Girls would be considered flighty if they wore makeup to school. Well-behaved and motivated students often followed teachers' and parents' guidance and concentrated on nothing but study. Thus most often, middle school and high school students with high marks were normally those who did not pay much attention on their appearance, and those who did were more likely to be the ones with worse school behaviour. Fong gave a detailed account of this atmosphere in China:

> *Schools tried to deprive students of everything that might distract them from their studies. From primary school through high school, students had to wear school uniforms, which usually consisted of durable, comfortable unisex sweat suits. Girls were required to either wear short hair or keep long hair tied back, and boys were not allowed to let their hair grow even a little longer than the standard male haircut. Jewelry, makeup, and dyed hair were prohibited for both genders.*
>
> *(Fong, 2004: 121)*

Of course, what is required by official script can be quite different from what is done in reality, but these nonetheless set up an official criterion to define 'good student', and those who do not follow these rules tend to be the ones with worse school marks. On the other hand, as these female students commented, in Britain it was much less likely that they

could estimate whether a person was a good student by the way he or she dressed or did makeup. This was because the British attitudes in such respect were much more liberal and people cared about their appearances as self pleasure and also as a courtesy to others. They were thus encouraged to do so and develop their own style from very early ages. One female student[187] noted with some laughter that even girls in British primary schools could do makeup better than she did now because she never learnt to do makeup until she came to Britain.[188] Another female student narrated her interesting reverse cultural shock with her mother and her Chinese friends in terms of the different ideas on dressing when she went back to China during school break:

> *I quite like the fact that in Britain you can wear whatever you like, but you can't do that in China. When I got back home in summer, my mum nagged about me wearing t-shirts and shorts all the time instead of dresses. She dragged me to buy dresses the first week I got home. She said 'how could you wear this to dinner? You don't even have high heels, and you are wearing plimsolls!'. I said to her 'I came back from Britain, nobody cares what you wear over there' (chuckle). She would worry that I didn't look as dignified as other girls of my peer. Also, when I had reunions with my old classmates, I was always wearing jean shorts and t-shirts, and the t-shirt would be sportswear, very casual type. So I was also wearing these plus flip flops to meet with all kinds old classmates. And they would be wearing all kinds of dresses, earrings and high heels, you know, very pretty. And then they would ask me 'Did you really come back from Britain? Do British people really dress like you?' I was like 'Oh, I'm sorry British people, I've misrepresented you' (chuckle). But it's because people don't care about what you wear in Britain. In China, if there was a hole on silk stockings, girls wouldn't wear them outdoor. But here, who cares? It's very liberating; nobody cares. You can wear a flower on your head; you can even wear a cake on your head if you like and nobody would care at all.*

> *(Meng Ling, Focus Group B, April 2011)*

13.4 Social Attitudes towards Employment and Leisure

Social attitudes towards life, employment and leisure were seen as quite a significant difference between Chinese and British people.

The level of social pressure on working, education and financial wellbeing was reported to

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[187] Qu Jia, Focus Group A, March 2011.
[188] It was further confirmed that this was the case amongst almost all the female students in my sample.

be much higher in China, which might be a factor that contributes to differences in the social attitudes towards life styles and leisure activities. According the newspaper *China Daily* (2012), in China, employees were working 8.66 hours a day on average (China Daily, 28/04/2012),[189] surpassing the legal regulation of 8 hours per day as the maximum.[190] In China, overtime payments often account for a regular and substantial proportion of salary packages and are relied on to achieve a good standard of living (Lee, MsCann and Messenger, 2007, p. 121).

Chinese students in my sample noted that, in China, there was a drastic shift in attitudes towards employment and leisure after the official age of retirement. One female[191] commented that in China when people reached the retirement age of 60, there was an overwhelming assumption that they should just stay in their communities and maybe take care of their children, whereas in the UK, the attitude might be much less scripted. The difference lie in part in the employment/retirement policy: the UK government has phased out the former retirement age (of 65), and most businesses do not set out a compulsory retirement age for their employers. People can thus continue working for as long as they like (or have to), and the law protects them from being discriminated against.[192] As the economy of the UK is in decline, there are likely more people who would continue to work to make ends meet despite their age, and the official policy itself supports this. This indicates that people in the UK have a bigger potential to financially support themselves when they are elderly. In China, the working options after retirement are generally limited due to law and regulations,[193] thus people have to rely simply on the state's unsound welfare system and their children to support them after retirement. Therefore, the different policies with regards to employment and retirement are considered as a significant factor contributing to the perceived different social attitudes discussed here. In addition, traditional Chinese values see children who do not take up the responsibility to support their elder parents as unfilial. Thus comes the additional family factor of some children preventing parents who have already reached retirement ages from continuing their

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[189] The original study was conducted by Beijing University and a top human resource company 'zhaopin.com' in 2012 in 15 cities across the country from southeastern coastal line to inner and western cities in China.

[190] China's Law of Labour formulates that work time should not exceed 8 hours a day and 44 hours a week. If overtime is necessary, it must have been agreed by the trade union and on a volunteer basis and should not exceed 3 hours a day and 36 hours a month. The overtime payments should be at least over 150% of the original wage rate (Source: The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China).

[191] Gu Ning, Focus Group F, April 2011.

[192] Source: www.gov.uk/retirement-age.

[193] Fong (2004, p. 129) also observe that opportunities for older people in China to earn incomes after retirement are scarce.

career.[194]

13.5 Experiences of Social Life and Cross-Cultural Conflicts

13.5.1 Socialising in Britain

For Chinese students living in Britain, there was a general difference in terms of attitudes towards social life. One male respondent[195] mentioned that 'people from here most definitely stop working and go out to have some fun at weekends', Another male student[196] noted that, in comparison, quite a large proportion of his acquaintances worked overtime or just stayed at home for most weekends. A female student narrated her interactions with local students on the subject of social life at weekends:

> *People from here care about social [life] very much. They must go out at weekends, it doesn't matter what to do. Every time we have class together, they would ask us what we did for the last weekend and what we plan to do for the coming weekend. If we said we didn't do anything or we just stayed at home, they would be a little surprised and find it unbelievable—'how could you not do anything?', 'how could you just stay at home or in the library?' It's a very big difference.*
>
> *(Zhao Wei, Focus Group A, March 2011)*

For most Chinese students, the most prominent British social culture was the culture of pub and club. Yet for over two thirds of my sample, it was difficult to integrate into. One female student described how her interest in the British social cultures had degenerated over time:

> *I went to pubs quite often when I first came here, because of the feeling of freshness. Then I started to find little interest in it. You see, they are drinking at the bars every day. Who could be able to take that? (chuckle) I mean, they start drinking at the bars as early as from afternoon (upon till night), everyday. And they just feel high about it.*

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[194] It should be noted that, as discussed in Chapter 8.2, some young Chinese people are increasingly prioritising their individual development over their family obligations, but traditional ideas and values in terms of family obligations still hold its significance amongst this group.

[195] Wang Yi, Focus Group D, April 2011.

[196] He Tian, Focus Group A, March 2011.

(Qu Jia, Focus Group A, March 2011)

Another male student noted that he was expecting to experience British cultures through talking to the local people, and since bars were quite popular places to meet with them, he started to frequent bars. He narrated how he had found out the gap between his expectations and experiences:

> *Because I wanted to interact with local people much, I went to bars very often. Then I found out that the interactions with local people are basically confined with eating together and going to the bars. When chatting with local students, there is a very slight chance we could hit it off. They would tell jokes, but because of the language barrier and cultural difference, even if you could totally understand why they laughed, you wouldn't think it was anything funny. There are no shared laughing points. There really aren't. When you couldn't find the laughing point, the communications are basically ineffective. They are laughing out loud about something while you think it's just a bad joke.*
> *(Li Wei, Focus Group E, April 2011)*

Over one third of the students reported similar experiences with local students in that even though they understood the joke perfectly, they found it rather lame to laugh about from their perspective. Similar evidence has also been presented in other studies. In Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's (2006, p. 43) research on Chinese students' psychological and sociocultural adjustments in a British university, 46.4% of respondents rated 'understanding jokes and humor in English' as of 'great difficulty' in Britain, ranking top of the list.

13.5.2 Cultural Conflicts and the Concept of *Mianzi*

Conflicts over privacy and the different understandings of 'face' (*mianzi*) were another prominent issue for Chinese students to cope with when living in Britain. Two respondents mentioned about their experiences of conflict in the shared flats with British and other foreign students over the issue of how one should respect others' private space. This was resonated by most other students who had lived in university accommodations with non-Chinese flat mates. One female respondent noted how it was difficult for her to share the flat with a British-born Chinese person who had different understandings of privacy with her:

> *One of my flat mates is from Hong Kong, but he moved to Britain when he was*

five. So he's basically a British person, almost a BBC (British Born Chinese). We think quite differently. He demands his privacy; he demands his private space. But he doesn't care about other people's private spaces. For example, he would play music very loud in his room, very very very loud. And he would say it's his own private space. He wouldn't care about your feelings.
(Bian Yu, Focus Group E, April 2011)

Another male student[197] had similar encounters with his flat mate who would play guitar in his own room which obviously affected other people's privacy in that shared flat. This flat mate would defend himself by claiming that it was his right to do so in his own private room. This male respondent noted that he had communicated with this flat mate, but after a few times it still remained the same. He commented that as he cared about '*mianzi*', both his and his flat mate's, he would feel embarrassed if he continued to argue with him again on the same subject, even though he was not the person who acted inappropriately. Such cases were rather individual cases that cannot be extended to the majority of the country or considered as a 'cultural difference', but they were nonetheless significant here, as many had reported similar issues, in forming relevant students' perceptions of the British society and their understandings of cultural differences.

The Chinese concept of *mianzi* is quite significant here. It literally means 'face' in English. Even though people from different cultural backgrounds all care about face and are not keen to losing face, it is particularly an important concept that predominates Chinese cultural framework and social behaviour. As Faure and Fang (2008, p. 198) observes, it is derived from the Confucius fundamental moral notion of shame: 'face' is the key to the cultures of Chinese society in that 'social harmony is achieved through controlling feelings, appearing humble, avoiding conflict and even hiding competition'. Uncontrolled expression of emotion poses as a threat to group harmony, and individuals who do not follow such code of conduct are considered as shameless and seen as losing face. The cases where respondents were afraid of directly expressing their strong opinions towards other people's inappropriate behaviour in a group context manifest that they were trying to maintain the harmonious relationships by oppressing their own negative feelings, which, if they were to be displayed, would compromise the relationship. The same female respondent[198] quoted above commented that she was annoyed by her flat mate playing guitar in the flat, but she felt it would make him lose face if she tried to confront him. On the other hand, she also commented on how she thought she was losing face when this

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[197] Li Wei, Focus Group E, April 2011.
[198] Bian Yu, Focus Group E, April 2011.

same flat mate complained directly to the landlord about her and other flat mates messing the kitchen:

> *If he has different opinions against you, he wouldn't talk to you directly… he would go to your direct supervisors. For example, I was living in this flat, so my direct supervisor was my landlord. So he just complained to the landlord directly, saying 'oh, the kitchen, the living environment now is getting horrible'. I felt it was really unnecessary. So I talked to him, and I said 'you can talk to us directly, no need to tell other people'. He couldn't understand it. He thinks that if he talked directly to us, it would hurt the relationship between me and him, and it would hurt me. He says if he talked directly to the landlord, he was just telling the issue to the landlord and letting the landlord then talk to us, it wouldn't have anything to do with him or his relationship with me. So all in all, he was only considering his own side of the issue… Sometimes he would say 'if I play out music loud or do something else that bothers you, just tell me'. But as a Chinese person, who would go complain about such things? We care about other people's faces, we don't complain because we're afraid it'll hurt people. So we just bear with it.*
>
> *(Bian Yu, Focus Group E, April 2011)*

It can be seen in these comments that *mianzi* involves a complex framework of meanings and symbolic practices. One the one hand, this particular respondent did not complain directly about her flat mate's issue of playing music out loud because she was afraid it would make him lose face; meanwhile, on the other hand, she was quite unsatisfied about her flat mate not complaining to her directly and going over her to complain to the landlord behind her back. While in the first scenario she was afraid that direct complaints would make other people lose face, in the second case she was angry that she was also made faceless by indirect complains behind her back. Both sets of symbolic practices of complaining and its meanings fit into the cultural framework of *mianzi* even though it appears to be contradictory. Again, the case *per se* was an individual matter rather than a case to be related to 'cultural difference', though this female participant might have felt that way.

This study finds that the ideas of privacy and caring about other people's feelings in the public sphere might vary between different countries, yet the emphasis on *mianzi* by Chinese students in social life is nonetheless much higher and more demanding than by non-Chinese. The differences might have been derived from the high population density and the different social environments that Chinese generally grow up in. Due to the huge population density, Chinese people grow up constantly interacting in group contexts, where to maintain group harmony people have to constantly learn to notice others' feelings

and if necessary sacrifice their own good for the benefits of the group. By not directly expressing negative feelings towards others, especially non-Chinese people, Chinese students in Britain were trying to keep their own, as well as others', faces and thereafter maintain the group harmony. However, after living in Britain, many Chinese students had learnt to respect different ways of expressing thoughts and adopted other methods to deal with cultural conflicts. One female student commented on how she found out the 'complain system' in Britain was useful and how that other people cared less about face made things easier:

> *There is a very good system [in Britain] that we don't learn—it's to complain. You have to learn to protect your rights. We feel pissed off—that's because we don't know about protecting our rights. If somebody else offends you, why don't you go complain directly? I think they [foreigners] are good about this, and they don't care much about mianzi. Of course, if we were involved in the situation, we would have also thought 'why are you so insensitive' and stuff. But from their perspective, if you are offended and it is hurting the public life, you should say it. That is something we should learn.*
>
> *(Gu Chao, Focus Group E, April 2011)*

All the other respondents in this same focus group also noted that they had become more open and direct in terms of their social behaviour and learnt to think from the counterparts' perspectives when they encountered conflicting ideas and behaviour. One male student[199] noted that indeed privacy was very much respected in Britain, yet it was respected in a reciprocal way in that other people respected Chinese students' privacy to a great extent as well.

13.6 Summary

Britain was highly praised for how well social institutions and rules were set out and followed. Almost all the sampled Chinese students and teachers referred to the ways in which queuing were practiced in Britain to elaborate this. These symbolic practices were highly desired for the Chinese students and they had well adapted to it so that reverse cultural shock occurred when they travelled back to China where queuing was generally not as well practiced. It was further reported by all participants that in general the rules and

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[199] Li Wei, Focus Group E, April 2011.

formal procedures were strictly followed in Britain. This on the one hand reflects the healthy social system in Britain yet on the other hand was considered to have resulted in inflexibility and low efficiency in some aspects of their academic as well as social life. In terms of legal code, all students saw that the law was highly respected in Britain to a very high degree and that social justice was widely achieved without the necessity of using *guanxi* which could potentially involve illegal practices, which might well be the case in China.

British democracy was also highly praised for its nature in that the government should operate according to the will of the people. Because a series of protests had been occurring during the time of the interviews, some students witnessed the actual impact of these protest marches and protests on the decision-making process and referred to the historical incidents occurred in China where some major public protests resulted in the government repression which caused massive injuries and deaths of the protestors. However, this comparison is made rather from a limited perspective as it concentrates on the iconic Tiananmen Square incident, overlooking many of the marches and protests that have occurred peacefully and have actually changed the policy-making process of Chinese government. The success of these public protests is also iconic, in the exactly opposite sense, of the growing awareness of political democracy in China amongst the public as well as in the government itself. Furthermore, students, females in particular, referred to the liberated ways in which people dressed in Britain to elaborate the freedom of individuality they perceived in Britain, which they also highly desired.

In terms of general social life in Britain, the cultural attitudes of Britain towards life, leisure and social activities were seen as quite different. The influencing factors from which such differences rested upon can be varied, such as different laws and regulations on employment and retirement and the social welfare system. Deep-rooted cultural traditions such as the demanding concept of *mianzi* in Chinese society are also quite different from what exists in Britain, and they pose potential barriers for Chinese students to establish cross-cultural communications in the local contexts. However, living in Britain has generated amongst Chinese students a higher sense of tolerance, respect and understanding towards cultural diversity. These furthermore provide a larger repertory of knowledge and ideas for understanding the self in relation to others, and forming alternative sets of social value, behaviour and identity.

Chapter 14 Cultural Identities and the Effects of Overseas Life

14.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the effects of living in Britain on Chinese students. **Section 14.2** shows the ways in which Chinese students formed social relations with fellow Chinese students, as well as with British people and international friends. **Section 14.3** explores the struggle of cultural identity amongst Chinese students in their social life as well as in the seeking of potential employment in Britain. **Section 14.4** demonstrates the outcome of their life experiences in Britain in relation to the cultural transformation of themselves at an individual level, as well as, more importantly, the potential social change they could bring, at a societal level, to China.

14.2 Forming Social Relations in Britain

The two most prominent yet intertwined expectations revealed by the Chinese student participants in my sample were to significantly improve English language competency as well as to fit into the local socio-cultural circle. On the one hand, they expected that living in a fully English speaking country where everything was conducted in English would, in a short period, enhance their spoken English competency and allow them to ease their way into the local cultural context as well as help them form large international friend networks. On the other, they were expecting to make a lot of foreign friends through their courses and the communities they lived in, and hence to improve their spoken English via such networks and social life. One female student commented that she was expecting to fit right into the social circle of local people and improve her spoken English significantly in a very short period of time, but it turned out that her only foreign friends were her flat mates and a few fellow classmates from her course lectures. Other than that, she felt quite as an outside to local social life. This issue is significant here because such narratives were widely

revealed in my sample. In 2004, an UKCOSA (2004, p. 67) survey reveals that only 15% of Chinese students in the UK reported that they had UK friends. It also stated that it is a major concern that as one of the largest national groups on UK campuses, Chinese students mainly socialise with fellow national or other international students on campus (UKCOSA, 2004, p. 67). My own study in this respect finds that for almost all my interviewees, the strongest social network they had is fellow Chinese students and friends, and there is no indication that many had formed extensive friendships with other international students or local people from Britain.

14.2.1 The Sheer Number of Chinese Students

The sheer number of Chinese students in British universities is one primary factor that influenced the sampled Chinese students' social interactions. One described how overwhelming the environment was:

> *Everyone around me is Chinese. The students in the lectures are all Chinese. In tutorials and group discussions, everybody is Chinese. I live with other Chinese people.*
>
> *(Li Yingying, Focus Group C, April 2011)*

Another student[200] commented that her social circle had got significantly smaller after she came to Britain, and the majority of it had been fellow Chinese students who shared lectures as well as flat mates who had also always been Chinese. What is significant here is that such students were primarily one-year postgraduate students in business-related courses. The variety of academic environments where Chinese students are based has a significant impact on their cross-cultural experiences and local networks. Half a dozen participants mentioned that, prior to the master's programs, they had attended pre-master English language courses, where they had much more opportunity to practice their English and socialise with none-Chinese students. One female student who was undertaking a one-year postgraduate study in the business school noted that the types of her social interactions changed drastically after she finished the English language course and entered into her master's program:

> *I came earlier for the language course. At that time, I was the only Chinese person in the class, the rest were all Arabic. We had to speak English in class.*

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[200] Yu Ting, Focus Group C, April 2011.

I easily got up the nerve to speak it. I dealt with everything on my own. I didn't care whether I spoke it right or wrong, I just spoke it! But after I finished that course, I spoke quite less.

(Li Yingying, Focus Group C, April 2011)

She continued to comment that after starting her master's program, there were just too many Chinese classmates and she could easily make so many Chinese friends. Nonetheless the cross-cultural contexts in pre-master institutions often resulted in a lack of contact with British people since such courses were mostly exclusively projected towards international students rather than local students. Philo's (2010) study on Chinese students in Britain also reveals similar stories. In his interviews, one participant described being in a large lecture room full of Chinese students as 'like being back in China', another student reported that his English had got worse due to a lack of practice because he was surrounded mostly by fellow Chinese students (Philo, 2010, p. 95).

My own study nonetheless reveals that the situations for Chinese students' intercultural experiences also vary significantly between different courses after pre-mater training, whether in undergraduate or graduate schools. For students who were in master courses other than business-related programs or in undergraduate programs, the situation can be quite different. One student who was pursuing a master degree in biological and environmental science spoke about his experiences and how it had exceeded his previous expectations in terms of international friend networks:

When I first came to Britain, I found out that there were too many Chinese students and I thought I would not even have any good environment to practice my English. But when I started my master's program, it surpassed my expectation. I was the only Chinese student in the entire department of total 25 students. I talked to a lot of foreigners, and I regularly socialised with 10 of them. We would have some drinks together or chat in the labouratory.

(Gu Yue, Focus Group E, April 2011)

Similar experiences were also revealed from another student who was in the department of computing science:

My environment is different from others'. I'm surrounded by foreign people. No Chinese. I'm the only one, in the whole department of over 100 students. So it took me a month to adapt to it when I first started, because when there was no other Chinese people, you'd feel lonely; you had to go everywhere by yourself. And at the beginning, my English wasn't as OK as it is now. There were some problems communicating with other people.

(Bian Yu, Focus Group E, April 2011)

Nonetheless, the vast presence of Chinese students in British universities makes it quite easy for them to just socialise with co-nationals on and outside of campuses, despite the contacts they may establish in the academic environment.

14.2.2 Differences in Cultural Values

Furthermore, there is a cultural factor which is beyond simple ethnic demography which also significantly influences the formation of Chinese students' social interactions in Britain. Most participants commented that the cultural gap was so wide that it had been quite difficult for them to fit in. Over half of the students mentioned that they felt quite hard to integrate into the local cultures such as the pub/club culture and football culture of British people. In addition, as I have previously discussed, the difficulties were also shared amongst Chinese respondents in understanding British people's senses of humor. Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006, p. 50) also suggests that a clash of values and lack of common experiences are the reasons that contribute to Chinese students' low level of social interactions with British people. In my own research, one female student commented that social connections with Chinese students were necessary in a foreign context because there were cultural aspects that she could not completely adapt to, no matter how extensively she had interacted with British and other foreign people:

> *There was a lot of information [prior to my arrival in Britain] saying that 'you shouldn't hang out with Chinese people all the time', 'you should practice your English', 'you should get to know their ways of life', and 'if you still live the same way as you did in China, there is no meaning of going abroad'. But when I came here, I found it wasn't like they said. I mean, if you don't socialise with Chinese people, it's not a good idea either. For example, if you are in trouble, you will need Chinese friends to help you out. Or if you are not used to the food, you still need Chinese food. At least for me after two years in here, I haven't got used to it or fit in. I mean, when I first got here, since day one, I lived in student accommodation, surrounded by foreigners. Then I moved out to rent an apartment, still with foreign people. Then I lodged for 8 months, in a local [British] family. But I still feel like I haven't fit in.*
>
> *(Liang Juan, Focus Group E, April 2011)*

Her comments do not indicate that she was now intentionally socialising with fellow Chinese people in an exclusive manner, but rather that extensive Chinese networks were a necessity for her to live in Britain. As another female student noted, 'there are just so many

Chinese students that I don't even feel like I'm missing home in the slightest'. These comments indicate that the network of co-national students served as important emotional support and functional connections that could be used to help with everyday life as well as socio-cultural adjustment. This is also reflected in a previous study (Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006).

14.2.3 The Superficialness of the Social Relations in Britain

An additional factor that contributed to the sampled Chinese students' lack of social interactions with British and other foreign people was that the cross-cultural relationships which can be formed were seen as quite superficial and not very deeply emotionally attached. One female student[201] who had been undertaking her undergraduate program with primarily British students for more than 3 years noted that her and her classmates would not share intimate topics or even talk about gossip, and her interactions with them had mostly been greetings. Certainly there might be a factor of particular individual personality in her case, but as was indicated, it is nonetheless quite possible that this was a shared struggle for most other undergraduate students. The warm greetings from fellow British students were often seen as more of a gesture and politeness rather than an indication of true closeness and friendship. Over one third of the participants judged that British people were being nice to them in public spheres but rather would think differently about them in private. The point is that friendships formed with none-Chinese people were seen as less personally and emotionally attached. However, it was reported that friendships that can be established between Chinese students in Britain themselves were quite often seen as less deeply attached compared to those previously established in China. One female student[202] noted that 'friendships [with Chinese people in Britain] formed here are not true friendships, we might not contact each other anymore when we go back home'. This might be due to the short duration of time shared in Britain and the lack of shared previous experiences as a more solid foundation of relationships. This is not to suggest that no close contact can be built between Chinese students who are only to live in Britain for one year, but rather to reveal the barriers that exist within their own national group in terms of forming social relations as well. Nonetheless, establishing deep personal contacts with British or other foreign people were seen as generally much more difficult than forming

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[201] Jia Qing, Focus Group B, April 2011.
[202] Ye Yuan, Focus Group C, April 2011.

relationships with Chinese people in Britain. UKCOSA's (2004, p. 67) survey report also states that 'international students were much more closely integrated with co-nationals and other international students', yet my own study does not separate British nationals as an exclusive group apart from the whole group of international social circle, but it indicates similar trends that Chinese students in my sample tended to establish close personal connections within their own national group.

14.2.4 Confidence and Initiative in Forming Cross-cultural Friendships

The lack of confidence in English language competency serves as another factor that fostered the lack of social interactions between Chinese students and foreign people. One female student described how some of her foreign friends thought of the ways in which they were excluded from Chinese students' social circles yet this is how she and her fellow Chinese students perceived this:

> *I remember there was this classmate, I can't remember where he was from, but I remember him saying to me: 'why do you Chinese students always ignore us?' His meaning was that from their perspective as foreigners, they saw we were hanging out together all the time and thought we didn't like to talk to them at all. I have another foreign classmate, who often said to me 'why do I always see you Chinese students hang out together but won't talk to us'. Then I told him 'It's not like that. Deep down we want to interact with you, but we've been deeply rooted in this [Chinese] group, if we are to meet new [foreign] friends, first there is the language barrier, and second, we don't resonate on many things indeed'.*
>
> *(Wu Shan, Focus Group H, May 2011)*

She further noted that in terms of the language barrier, she and her Chinese friends generally lacked the confidence to get up the nerve to initiate contacts; in terms of common interests and values, quite often she could not relate to her foreign classmates' life experiences. However, her comments suggest that the lack of social interactions between Chinese students and British as well as other international students might have also resulted from the ways in which Chinese students were perceived from the outside of their group and how these perceptions were contrasted with what Chinese students actually anticipated. On the one hand, the sampled Chinese students had found it much easier to socialise with Chinese nationals; on the other hand, their largely exclusive social circles

was projecting to others an image of self-isolation and reluctance for external social networks, which was obviously contrasting to Chinese students' previous intentions as they had all eagerly expected to extend international and local networks in Britain as well as improve English language competency.

14.3 Cultural Identities — the Struggle

I have now discussed the conflicts that the sampled Chinese students encountered and the difficulties they faced in terms of interacting with local British and other foreign people, both in academic environment as well as in daily contexts. It can be seen that Chinese students faced such a dilemma: on the one hand, they anticipated that they would be able to expand their international social networks and improve their English language competency (both as personal development and as sociocultural capital that can be utilised for their future career development); on the other hand, the gaps in cultural values and social behaviour between them and the local British people were largely prominent for close relationships. The lack of confidence in their English language abilities was an additional factor which caused this dilemma to arise. Their social behaviour was thus likely to switch between different groups in which they interacted. One male student commented on how his behaviour had changed and how he was able to adjust it according to different contexts:

> *Sometimes we are assimilated. It's not that we have been completed assimilated, it's just to say we are in the middle point between China and the West. If we hang out with Chinese friends, we behave in the Chinese way; if we hang out with local people, we behave in the local way. It's just we say different things to different people. If you couldn't find this middle point, you are stuck in between, you'll end up feeling weird on either side. So it's just do different things with different people.*
>
> *(Luo Hao, Focus Group D, April 2011)*

There were several other sets of comments revealing similar ideas. As Hall (1996: 2) asserts, identification is 'a process of articulation', and the concept of identity is 'not an essentialist, but a strategic and positional one'. His identity theory suggests that cultural identities are contextual rather than fixed, and subject to the changing environment with which people interact. The identities of Chinese students were thus constantly constructed through social interactions with different social groups as well as through intersecting

ideas and values which emerge from these interactions. It resulted in the shifting nature of their cultural identities in Britain in that they adopted different strategies (ideas, values and behaviour) with different groups based on different social and cultural contexts.

As I have previously discussed, the sampled Chinese participants' ideas and values had drastically changed upon living in Britain in some respects, but there was a strong indication, nonetheless, that they did not feel the sense of belonging in Britain, even though many of them had learnt to adopt the ideas and social behaviour from Britain in order to better fit into the local environment. In some cases, Chinese students deeply identified with some of the values and social institutions of Britain yet they still did not identify themselves as belonging to the country. One female student described how she had found British politics more interesting and how she identified with the democratic nature of British society:

> *I don't care about Chinese politics. I only care about David Cameron. I only care about Nick Clegg. So… I didn't care about politics before at all, let alone Chinese politics. But British politics is very interesting. And British news is very interesting too. So I love watching British news instead of Chinese news. Their [British] websites are very interesting, don't you think? I don't know about Feng Jie,[203] but I know about Katy Moss, Jordan, and that girl who recently got divorced with Peter Andre… Yeah, I care a lot about British celerity gossips, I don't care much about Chinese ones… because here is more democratic, don't you think? Protest marches are everywhere.*
> *(Gu Ning, Focus Group F, April 2011)*

In this case, this particular female respondent had been in Britain for more than three years and lived in London for 2 years before moving to Glasgow. Her comments suggest that she had gradually become more incorporated into the public life of Britain than the rest of her group. In this same focus group interview that no one else knew anything about the British celebrities that she had mentioned. She still however felt that she did not belong to Britain even though she highly identified with the democratic nature of Britain and was much more integrated into it than most of her Chinese friends in Britain. Although feelings of social belonging are relatively subjective, it is significant that almost all the Chinese participants reported that there was a lack of sense of belonging amongst them in Britain. The most widely revealed comment was 'it's very hard to fit in'. One important factor that led to this was the short duration of time they were able to spend in Britain. Over four fifth

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[203] A Chinese female celerity who has got extremely famous overnight on the internet recent years and somehow become an iconic image in the whole society.

of the students in my sample were in Britain for one-year masters programs (although a few came several weeks earlier for the pre-master language courses and fewer for other preparation programs that lasted between 6 to 12 months), and all the Chinese teachers' job posts in Britain were also only for one year or less. These students noted that Chinese undergraduate students who spent four years—much longer than most Chinese students in Britain do—might have a better opportunity to adapt to the local environment, and more importantly, become more competitive in the job-hunting market in Britain after graduation. A longer duration of time spent in Britain generally allowed for more interactions with the local environment to develop along with a better understanding of the country (as already discussed) and better abilities in English. As was commented, it was particularly difficult for Chinese students who only obtained taught masters degrees in British universities to find work and settle down in Britain. Even respondents who were undertaking four-year undergraduate programs did not anticipate higher possibilities in this respect, as they saw Britain as a quite class-conscious country in that it was quite difficult for ethnic minorities to achieve high social status and become equally respected.

14.3.1 The Policies of Immigration in Relation to Employment in the UK

The immigration policy of the UK government did not provide a favourable ground for migration and potential international employees,[204] fostering an unwelcoming atmosphere towards Chinese students who anticipated working in the UK after graduation. This further prompted their sense of exclusion and led to a lack of a sense of belonging. Previously, the UK government allowed international (non-EU) students who had studied in the UK to stay under PSW (Post-study Work visa) for two years to look for jobs without needing to have a sponsor (UKBA, 2012). It was an important opportunity for local career development of newly graduated international students in the UK, which had been a major attraction for them to choose Britain as their educational destination in the first place. As reported in my study, over half of the students were aware of this particular policy. For them it was one of the major factors for them to have chosen to come to Britain. It was

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[204] According to UKBA (UK Border Agency) (2013), for the year from 6 April 2013 to 5 April 2014, only a maximum of 20,700 skilled workers can come to the UK under General Skilled Workers Visa to do jobs with an annual salary below £152,100. Newly graduated Chinese students from UK universities primarily fit into this category, and given the total number is very limited, it is difficult for them to compete in the job-hunting market of potential international employees.

commented that in China, many agencies that facilitated overseas education highlighted this particular policy to promote applications for UK universities, and many of their friends had come to Britain specifically based on that. The point is that the PSW used to be a very important policy for Britain to attract top students from China. Unfortunately, the policy has been ceased since April 6th, 2012 (UKBA, 2012). Thus it is becoming much harder for Chinese students to stay in the UK after graduation relying on the much more competitive application for the General Skilled Workers Visa. In this respect, some respondents commented that they felt they had been excluded from the country, even though they were paying high amounts of money for their education and living in the UK.[205] One female student[206] commented that she used to consider migration to Britain, but now she felt that even if she became a British citizen, she would still be seen as a 'second-class citizen'.

It should be noted, nonetheless, that English language competency is certainly a key barrier for Chinese students to compete with British people and other fluent English speakers in the job market. As reported, most Chinese students in my sample were not confident with their English language abilities and considered it as a prominent barrier for them to integrate into Britain as well as to pursue a career in Britain. Certainly feelings of social rejection are rather subjective and are easily triggered when faced with the pressure of graduation and employment, but the migration policy was nonetheless a significant factor attributing to the formation of such feelings amongst the sampled Chinese students given its great importance in making their decisions of coming to Britain.

14.3.2 The Gap in Cultural Values

Cultural differences are another significant factor that led to Chinese students' lack of sense of belonging. One male student in this respect commented on how he saw Britain as a destination for short stay and tourism instead of as a place to settle down:

> *Here is good for tourism, but to settle down, I think as a traditional Chinese person, I don't like it here. The cultural difference between the East and the West is quite big, after all only a small number of Chinese want to settle down here. Chinese people see it [Britain] as a tourism place, a place to relax and*

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[205] For students who pursued a master's degree in a business-related course in the University of Glasgow, for example, they reported that they would spend approximately 30, 000 pounds (half for tuition fee and half for living expenses) a year.

[206] Yu Ting, Focus Group C, April 2011.

rest along your life journey—it's OK. But to settle down, I don't think it'll work for me. For some people, they like the Western life style, there's nothing wrong with that. I just lean towards the ways of life in China.

(Liu Ran, Focus Group A, March 2011)

Fong (2006) conducted a series of participant observations on Chinese students who had left China to study in 'the West', and she concludes that only a small minority could secure white-collar work and those who had stayed were culturally adrift. This indicates that a dilemma exists in Chinese students' career developments in developed countries at the expenses of psychological unease in terms of cultural identity. My own study suggests that on the one hand, white-collar jobs were difficult for Chinese students in my sample to attain in Britain, because of the language barrier, lack of cultural knowledge and the unfavourable migration policies; on the other hand, having directly experienced Britain, many found the cultural gaps between China and Britain largely overwhelming for long-term personal development. There was a level of fear that the longer they stayed in Britain, the further away they would drift from their Chinese identity, and the more likely they would feel less attached with either Britain or China. One female student[207] noted that because of the fundamental differences, she would have to eventually go back to China even if she could work temporarily in the UK after graduation, and because of that she might as well go back right after graduation to better re-adapt to the Chinese environment, otherwise she would likely find herself caught in between adapting half way into the British system and half way out of the Chinese system. Fong's (2006, p. 171) study also reveals that Chinese students want to return to China for a variety of reasons such as life styles, better career opportunities, higher purchasing power and a desire to be close to friends and family, especially parents. In my own interviews, there was a strong indication among female participants that one of the primary factors that might prompt their return was to be close to friends and parents. What was more significant was their desire to start their own family as soon as possible.[208]

14.3.3 Social Network of *Guanxi*

The decision to return to China also partly rests upon the Chinese social network of guanxi

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[207] Gao Yao, Focus Group F, April 2011.
[208] I have previously discussed young female Chinese students' worries about marriage before a certain ages in both Chapter 8 and Chapter 11.

that the students could not attain in Britain. One female student[209] commented that it was extremely difficult for them to find jobs in Britain without proper connections, which most Chinese students in my sample were lacking as well. She continued to comment that for those who intend to set up their own businesses (in Britain), guanxi was even more necessary.[210] Bian (1994) argues that in urban China, *guanxi* has been a significant element influencing job allocations and mobility. It is used to 'collect internally circulated information on jobs, to obtain influence from powerful cadres to initiate an assignment or grant a labour quota, to press favourable decisions from leaders of hiring organisations for jobs, to locate a work unit to which one wanted to be transferred, and to influence the current employer to allow one to leave the work unit or job' (Bian, 1994, p. 999). Many of the sampled students, as I discussed in Chapter 9.3, chose to study abroad primarily for the overseas degrees and the sociocultural capital attached to it, which they were hoping to utilise to obtain job positions with high social and financial statuses as the ultimate goal of their investment in overseas education. This means the success of job hunting was especially important to them. Thus the network of *guanxi* might be particularly significant for their career developments. What's more, long-term overseas life could weaken their previous *guanxi* networks in China and potentially compromise their future social mobility in China (Fong, 2006, Li, 2006).[211] Therefore, the factor of *guanxi* network could be vital to their decision of returning to China for career development. Philo (2010)'s study also suggests the same trend.

14.4 Effects of Overseas Experience and Potential Impact on the Social Transformation of China

Li (2006, p. 27) observes that returned overseas Chinese students have occupied some of

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[209] Ye Yuan, Focus Group C, April 2011.

[210] I have discussed this already in Chapter 11.2 and also previously in Chapter 7.4. Yang (1994, p. 77) observes that to set up businesses in rural China involves 'delicate yet difficult task of developing good *guanxi*. Her comments do not necessarily mean that *guanxi* is also a must-have element for setting up private businesses in the UK. Rather, they suggest that it would have been easier for business startups in China due to the much higher availability of *guanxi* and more importantly its potential capacity for achieving business success in China.

[211] This had been less of a concern for Chinese language teachers in my sample because they are under the cultural and educational exchange programs sponsored by Chinese government and bond to returning to China upon completing the short-term agreement/contract.

the important political positions in the government and serve as the carriers of 'Western values', yet only in a more indirect and gradual way. I have now discussed in detail the ways in which ideas and behaviour have changed upon living in Britain. Thus, to what extent would they take these changes back to China and how they might influence the country is very important here. There were both positive and negative perspectives revealed in my sample. For the negative perspectives, one participant pointed out that individual power was so insignificant that little transformation could be prompted in the wider context of the entire country:

> *I have to say we are individuals. We can't influence the entire society. You have to go with the mainstream (sui bo zhu liu). When you go back, you will have to push in front the queues. So there is nothing you want to change or you don't want to change. You will have to go with the mainstream. My idea is simply that you have to go with it. I can't take the good things from here back to China because I would suffer from it; I would feel against the grain (ge ge bu ru). And others would look at you differently. My relatives would say 'you've been abroad for a couple of years, so what? That makes you better than others?' 'Would you have got along like this?' and 'would any company have hired you like this?' So you have to change back when you return.*
> *(Gu Ning, Focus Group F, April 2011)*

Another female student [212] commented that individual force was quite limited yet fundamental transformation would have to be prompted from the very basic element for a country's development, that is, education. However, she noted from her brother's experiences that it would take a very long time because the current social pressure that Chinese children and students are under is massive. Young people were only valued for achieving good marks and getting into good schools rather than on personal interests and individuality. It would take significant amount of time and efforts for them to switch to a more liberal social atmosphere for education and for general development of the country. Another female student gave an example of her relative who had studied in Britain and taken some promising ideas back to China with an attempt to make a big difference but ended up having to adapt to the social reality in China:

> *I have an auntie, who came to Britain to study many years ago. Her family's background was very elegant. But when she went back, she somehow gave in to it. Her English was perfect. But she was doing work on public transportation, so she had to deal with average construction workers, and she sometimes had to verbally quarrel with them. It's just that I couldn't understand a person who received foreign education would do that. And she would quite often curse in*

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[212] Jin Ying, Focus Group F, April 2011.

those arguments as well. I'm like, why would she be like that? She received higher education [from Britain], and when she went back… she became assimilated. It's just 'the fittest survives'. [213] *In different environments, you have to follow different rules, in order to survive. But she is very critical. She would say how democratic Britain is… how Chinese guanxi is [bad], how Chinese politics are dark. She would be very critical, but there's nothing she could do about it, and she had to adapt to it… After all she wants to keep the idea of democracy, she wants to keep the critical spirit. But she can't make any big change, and she's struggling. I think it's because China is going through a transitional period.*

(Wen Jun, Focus Group F, April 2011)

On the other hand, positive perspectives focused more on the changes on the individual and family levels, and it was believed that such changes at micro levels would gradually grow and transform into stronger forces and eventually prompt the transformation at the macro level of the entire country:

For ourselves, for the families we have and our own lives, it will definitely have some [positive] impact. But the impact depends, because after all we have only been able to stay here for one year, it's not the same as 10 or 20 years. Maybe when we go back, after 3 or 5 years, the impact will surface, or maybe it won't be that obvious. It's complicated. It depends.

(Gao Yao, Focus Group F, April 2011)

Both perspectives of looking at cultural change suggest that living in Britain has indeed had an impact at the individual level in terms of knowledge and behaviour, even though it was doubtful to what extent such impact at the individual level would be transferred to the wider context of China as a whole. More importantly, the comments indicate that there are structural restraints beyond cultural values *per se* to these potential transformations. Faure and Fang (2008, p. 205) argues that life in contemporary China has undergone significant cultural change under the influence of modernity and foreign cultures, yet such change is not simply occurring through replacing old system of values by a complete new system, but rather a coexistence of 'paradoxical propensities'. Take the application of *guanxi* vs. professionalism for example. Faure and Fang (2008, p. 197-198) observe that with the open market economy and increasing international cooperation, there has been a growing importance in fair and open competition and professionalism, nonetheless the network of *guanxi* is still a basic tool for many people in business and social life in contemporary China. As I have discussed in Chapter 11.2, the potential change of the cultural practices of

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[213] Literally '*shi zhe sheng cun*', the Chinese translation of the evolution theory first proposed by Charles Darwin and coined by Herbert Spencer. This particular theory is widely acknowledged in China.

guanxi networks, especially on its potential relations with corruptions and bribery, is restrained by the social reality of how *guanxi* is exercised and important advantages can be achieved through it. It still holds importance in the structures of contemporary China. Institutional holes (Bian, 2002) allow the practice of *guanxi* to flourish. Yet Bian (2002, p. 134) also argues in this same study that 'the persistence practices of *guanxi* rules in China's emergent labour market may serve as a transitional mechanism to lead to a set of more market-driven arrangements in regulating labour markets in the cities'. The massive changes and the potential transformation in contemporary China is due not only to the inflows of foreign cultures but also, more importantly, to its combination with internal desire for well-organised institutional establishments and structures to match up with the unprecedented expansion of market economy and its incorporation into the globalisation force. Nonetheless, the potential changes to China brought by foreign education and cross-cultural communications via overseas Chinese students were still seen as promising though in the long-term. One student made the following comments as her prospects to the future development of China:

> *I think China is getting more and more open, we are accepting more and more Western thoughts. And more and more people are coming out to study abroad and accepting things from the outside. Things will be taken back. It's a gradual process. Maybe eastern China is more developed, more young people from there have been abroad, they might have higher quality and wider views. So they might disseminate those ideas. What I'm trying to say is more and more people will disseminate [Western ideas]. Don't you think? Now in China, the discussion of homosexuality is becoming more open. It's only in some inner cities that people are not accepting things like that because they are very traditional. And they haven't been to those big cities, such as Hong Kong and Shanghai. There, people are exposed to a wider range of things, more communication between Chinese culture and Western culture, more blending of the cultures. So there people might disseminate more of such ideas. Plus, more and more of us [overseas Chinese students] are going back. I feel like I will definitely tell my old classmates, my future colleagues about my experiences here. I will tell them not to oppress kids' interests. I've already been telling my mum to tell my cousins how to educate children [in a more Western way]…*
>
> *(Wen Jun, Focus Group F, April 2011)*

Her comments were indeed based on true social reality and also indicated a very strong commitment to promoting the ideas and values she had learnt from direct experiences and adopting them in her future personal development as well as in the development of China as a whole.

14.5 Summary

Most students in my sample came to Britain with a desire to significantly improve their English language competency as well as to form extensive friendships with foreign people. However, the majority of the sampled Chinese students had primarily socialised with fellow Chinese students. Three factors are identified in this study in relation to this particular formation of their social relations in Britain. First is the sheer number of Chinese students in Britain, especially in the classes of business-related courses. Nonetheless, even for other students whose fellow classmates were predominantly non-Chinese, this massive presence of Chinese students on and off university campuses made it quite easy and comfortable to just socialise within the national group. Second is the difference in cultural values. It was noted that even though one had been interacting extensively with local British people, it was still difficult to feel the sense of 'fitting into the culture' because of this fundamental cultural gap in between. Third is the perceived superficialness of the personal connections that can be formed with non-Chinese friends. Last is the lack of confidence in their English language abilities as well as the lack of initiative in building up relations.

In terms of their cultural identities in Britain, this study finds that the nature of their values and behaviour was shifting, depending on the actual social context of the particular interactions. There was nonetheless a lack of a sense of belonging, especially in relation to potential employment in Britain after graduation, even though many ideas, values and social behaviour from Britain were highly desired and well practiced by them. Three factors are identified in this study. First is the unfavourable immigration policy that the UK government implements. Such policies gave the Chinese student an idea that they were not particularly welcomed to work in Britain. Second is again the cultural gap between the two societies. Third is the *guanxi* that was considered important for Chinese people in employment but was particularly lacking for the Chinese students in Britain.

In terms of the actual effects of their life in Britain, it is significant that the ideas and values in a variety of respects (as discussed in previous chapters) have changed upon direct experiences in Britain at an individual level. There was, however, different opinions on whether such change at the individual level could be extended to the wider context of China as a whole: some believed that individual power was insignificant to make an

impact on the potential transformation of the country as a whole, while others believed that changes at an individual level would gradually accumulate to changes at a societal level and eventually transform China fundamentally. Nonetheless, the desire for some of the cultural values in Britain was widely shared amongst the Chinese students in my sample. Existing literature has already suggested the trend of change amongst young Chinese students towards a set of more cosmopolitan values and attitudes in marriage, education and personal development (see for example, Yu, 1997, Bian, Logan and Bian, 1998, Zhan, 2004, Egri and Ralston, 2004). It is acknowledged that a massive social transformation has been undertaken in China. The influencing factors underpinning such a transformation vary, yet the massive educational movement of the young generation of Chinese students to developed countries such as Britain and the incorporation of foreign cultures, as discussed in this thesis, are arguably two most important ones. These are the ones this study believes will further prompt such transformation.

Part IV Discussion and Conclusions

Chapter 15 Discussion and Conclusions

15.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the findings of this study. Section 15.2 summarises this thesis and addresses the theoretical issues it raises in relation to Chapter 2. Section 15.3 discusses the implications and limitations this study has.

15.2 Discussion and Conclusions

Overseas Chinese students and Western expatriate teachers have arguably been two of the largest social groups in the processes of direct cultural and educational contacts between China and the West. This study examines their subjective experiences, at an individual level, to explore the ways in which they perceive themselves in relation to the other, how they make sense of similarities and differences as well as the ways in which such experiences have influenced them. It also, at a societal level, relates their experiences to the wider context of globalisation to reveal the ways in which changing global cultural and economic relations have contributed to their intentions, experiences and outcome of such cultural and educational experiences.

There are as profound similarities as there are differences between Chinese and Western cultures, and there are as sharp contrasts within one itself as there are between each other. In cross-cultural movements, differences between one another tend to be assumed to be more prominent while little attention is paid to similarities. This often leads to the exaggeration of differences as well as the overlooking of similarities, not only between China and the West, but also, to the much wider context, between any two supposedly 'different' cultural groups. It also results in the overlooking of differences within one's own national/cultural group. The cultures of the West are not coherent in many ways. The majority of Western expatriate teachers in my sample were from Britain, but other teachers

frequently mentioned the differences between themselves and the British teachers, yet many Chinese students, both of the students of these teachers and those in my sample, would treat 'the West' as if it had a single consistent and coherent cultural framework amongst all 'its' countries. Certainly, differences between China and the West are profound, as this study has revealed and elaborated, such as notions of privacy, ways of showing courtesy, attitudes to personal choices in education, dating and marriage as well as structures of law and institution. However, similarities are striking as well. The struggle for employment caused by the expansion of higher education, the use of social connections in employment and in social life in general, as well as intergenerational coresidence and roles of grandparents in extended families (seen in both China and the West when women return to work after giving birth) all have strong similarities between China and Britain. They indeed exist in different forms and to different degrees, but they are much less overwhelming than expected by my participants.

This, however, does not simply suggest that such differences in terms of forms and degrees should be ignored. Furthermore, factors that cause such differences are as much cultural as institutional (as opposed to being only cultural, as was indicated by most participants). For instance, social connections are utilised in both China and Britain, yet in different ways, to achieve advantages in employment, but they are not simply the result of different cultural assumptions that attribute different levels of power to such connections. The sources of these differences are rather a combination of both cultural and institutional factors. In Britain, social connections tend to rely on the 'old boy network' (Taylor, 2000) which is primarily based upon an exclusive social network formed through college and university;[214] while in China, it is mostly referred to as *guanxi*, which also partly rests upon similar networks from college and university, but is essentially concerned with the masterdom of *renqing* (favour) and gifting.[215] As I have discussed in Chapter 2, Inglehart's (2000) survival vs. self-expression dimension suggests that Chinese people tend to display low level of interpersonal trust and tolerance to members of outgroups. This cultural propensity has contributed to a strong reliance of Chinese people on connections from social networks whose members are those they deeply trust. Moreover, such social networks can be established, organised, maintained and extended by the exchange, and sometimes manipulation, of personal favours, which are often measured by gifting. This means that people from outgroups can be well accepted through exchanging favours and

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[214] This has been discussed in Chapter 7.4.4.
[215] This has been explained in Chapter 7.4.3.

gifts with members from ingroups.

While on the other hand, the core of the 'Western civilisation', as Huntington (1996) observes, embody the rule of law, and as I have discussed in Chapter 2.3, the modern cultural identities of 'the West' have been constructed through exploration, colonisation, and the subsequent treaties and exchanges, whose success has been heavily dependent on rules and agreements. The instrumentality of personal favour and gifting is, therefore, significantly limited in Western cultures. *Guanxi*, often in the form of gift exchange and personal favour, is particularly flourishing in China not only because of the Chinese cultural assumptions towards social relationships, which are based upon man instead of law and institution (as is the case of the UK), but also because of the institutional barriers caused by the unsound legal system and lack of formal institutions, as well as by the expansion of higher education and the drastic transition in employment and social structures in recent decades.[216] Granted that the UK government has also been undertaking similar projects to enlarge the scale of higher education, and the number of qualified graduates have been rising correspondingly. The importance of social connections in employment and in social life in general has thus undoubtedly been reinforced in Britain as well. However, it is the combination of Chinese cultural heritage and the particular transitional period in Chinese modernisation progress that enable *guanxi* and gift exchange to be particularly foregrounded in China (instead of in Britain or the West at large). Now, it is not difficult to see that similarities and differences exist in subtle and complex manners between China and the West. It is not a simple matter of drawing clear boundaries between similarities and differences, but rather an articulated interpretation and discussion of the detailed ways in which these similarities and differences have coexisted that this study has explored and emphasised.

The impact of direct cross-cultural experiences is profound. It challenges one's existing cultural framework by the direct experiences of alternative lives of others that are now lived by one self. Nonetheless, the effects of such experiences can only be studied with respect to the real intention of going to the host country. The driving forces of Chinese students coming to Britain, and Western expatriate teachers to China, are fundamentally concerned with the interplay between economic and cultural factors. What underpins this direct educational contact is the transformation of global economy and cultural relations.

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[216] Bian (2002) refers to them as 'institutional holes'.

As the Chinese government is eager to promote Western-style education in order to achieve modernisation (modelled on Western countries), the investment of China into recruiting educational resources from the West is potentially shifting the global employment market in education, providing alternative career choices for native English speakers from the West to teach in China. This is further hastened by the general decline of Western economies in recent years (partly due to the financial crisis in 2008). In terms of cultural relations, China is raising its profile with its fast economic development (which is widely circulated in the media), as well as by its massive patterns of migration (part of which is overseas Chinese students) to the West. The interest in understanding China and Chinese cultures has thus increased amongst a much larger population in the West. Chinese students in Britain, on the other hand, were driven by the perceived socio-economic status that could potentially be achieved back in China by utilising their degrees and experiences in Britain (as the majority of the sample had gone back to China after the completion of their degrees). This is partly due to that continuous expansion of higher education in China has resulted in 'degree inflation' and more prestigious educational degrees conferred by British universities could offer better potential for employment. It is also, more significantly, because such experiences are not only in terms of educational training but also in terms of the ideas and values they have been exposed to, which have had a tremendous impact on their knowledge and behaviour.

The intentions of both groups coming to the host country thus reflect the underlying processes of transfer between economic capital and cultural capital. As Bourdieu's (2002) classic analysis of *capital* suggests, the three fundamental forms of capital—economic, cultural and social—are convertible to each other under particular circumstances:

> *[…] capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations ("connections"), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility.*
>
> *(Bourdieu, in Biggart ed. 2002, p. 281)*

The middle class families emerging in China now, who most likely only have one child (as a result of the 'One-Child' policy), have the financial power to provide Western/Western-style education, which is typically much more expensive than Chinese domestic education,

for their 'singletons' (Fong, 2004). Born before the 'Reform and Open-Up' policy and raised through the years of wars, famine and political disturbances, the parents of these singletons did not have the luxury of good-quality education and mostly had to strive to achieve decent and stable living conditions. Education is thus seen as a priority for their children to avoid the harsh life which they had gone through. These parents are, therefore, more than willing to invest in their children's education, and hence to transfer their financial capital into their children's cultural capital through prestigious higher education, such as the one provided by Britain. In return, such cultural capital obtained through educational and social experiences in Britain, in the form of knowledge and value, has the potential to be transferred into economic capital in the form of decent employment status for these Chinese students. Knowledge from British universities (and Western education in general), English language competency as well as Western attitudes towards legal institutions, feminism and democracy, amongst others, are the cultural capital currently needed in Chinese education, and are desired by young Chinese students. This is convertible to economic capital in the sense that Western expatriate teachers can utilise these in China to obtain financial compensation and Western educational institutions are able to use it to attract Chinese students whose parents' investment compensates a significant amount of their educational fund.

The intentions of direct cross-cultural experiences are, nonetheless, by no means consistent amongst all the participants. For Chinese students who aimed primarily at the degrees and for Western expatriate teachers who was mainly driven by financial motives, the understandings of the host country were considerably limited when compared to those whose intentions were based more upon cultural experiences. Furthermore, just as the impact of global media is filtered by different layers of 'firewalls' (Norris and Inglehart, 2009, p. 31),[217] the effects of direct cross-cultural experiences for both sampled groups were also dependent on a variety of factors, besides intentions, including time duration spent in the host country, relationships (such as dating/marriage and close personal connections with local people), subject of study/educational background and gender (i.e. female Chinese students were more likely to adopt Western feminist values than male students, and male participants in general were more likely to discuss the practices of *guanxi* and other forms of social networking).

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[217] This was discussed in Chapter 2.4.

To some extent, Huntington's (1996, p. 74) categorisation of China as a 'reformism civilisation'[218] in relation to the West is indeed reflected in this study: some key values and cultural practices of China are still profound during its process of learning from the modernisation experiences of the West, such as the practices of *guanxi* and the emphasis of *mianzi* in social life. However, his thesis fails to address the diversity of Chinese cultures, and more importantly, the significant impact that direct cultural encounters with the West have on Chinese students (both domestic and overseas) and the social change they are bringing to China. Huntington (1996, p. 184) also defines China as a 'challenger civilisation' in relation to 'the West' and argues that China sees its cultural traditions as 'infinitely superior' to those of 'the West'. This argument nonetheless lacks empirical evidence, and my own study suggests that, in many ways, Western cultures were praised and desired amongst Chinese students in Britain and most likely attracted a large proportion of domestic young Chinese students as well (revealed from Western expatriate teachers).

There is also empirical evidence that suggests a contrasting cultural relationship between China and some Western countries (as opposed to Huntington's argument): Wang (2006, p. 236) observes that there was a shared sense of 'national nihilism' amongst Chinese students in the USA, in that, the USA, and most likely the West in general, was seen as more advanced and better than China in all respects. This, however, is not the case in my study, at least in relation to Britain, as there was a growing awareness, amongst the sampled Chinese students, of the downside of Britain as well as of differences between social classes in Britain. For example, the provocative behaviour of some British teenagers was a shared and unexpected problem for many Chinese students in Britain, but this was most likely dependent on the class backgrounds of these teenagers. Some students increasingly realised that there was a significant gap between rich and poor in Britain, between people with higher education from middle/upper class families and people with little to no education from working class families. The former reflected the rich, developed and powerful Britain many Chinese students had expected, but the latter, combined with the decline of some post-industrial British cities as well as the growing restriction on immigration policies, revealed the downside of Britain and excluded Chinese students from further integrating into it.

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[218] Huntington argues that, in relation to the 'Western civilisation', China belongs to a civilisation which is 'reformism': it learns the experiences of 'the West' in terms of modernisation yet without fundamentally reorganising its cultural framework according to 'the West' (see Chapter 2.3).

The cultural relations between China and the West are thus very complex. Western cultural values in terms of what Inglehart (2000, p. 84) terms as the 'self-expression' dimension[219] generally have a strong power of influence over the equivalent values of China during direct cross-cultural encounters. The values from the West of interpersonal trust, tolerance toward outgroups, gender equality and democracy were highly desired by many Chinese students,[220] and for Western expatriate teachers, these also seemed to be part of the core cultural framework with which they deeply identified. On the 'traditional vs. secular-rational' dimension of Inglehart's thesis, China is already leaning towards a general cultural framework that pays less attention to traditional family values and large families, is more tolerant of sexual issues and divorce, and focuses more on individual achievement. Chinese students in my sample did reflect similar attitudes, but Inglehart's thesis is nonetheless problematic because it only indicates an overall trend of these values without yet specifying any variables that may differentiate value orientations between different groups amongst the whole population. This trend is much more likely to be seen amongst the younger generation of Chinese students (than amongst their parents' generation) who have much better opportunities for higher education, particularly overseas Chinese students who have been exposed to a much wider set of values. The cultural clashes between the current generation of Chinese students (who are mostly the single child of the family) and their parents are still profound in some fundamental aspects, such as in obligations towards family and marriage, as revealed by this study. This causes not only a struggle between generations but also a struggle within the students themselves: many Chinese students in my sample were attracted to the ideas of respecting and encouraging individual choices and success, as well as (females in particular) of equal rights in dating, marriage and family life. However, traditional values in these respects still held importance in the form of family pressure and social atmosphere.

Identity is constantly defined through social interactions and is also based upon context of particularity (Hall, 1996). During direct experiences in a cross-cultural context, individuals are exposed to a much wider and profoundly different variety of ideas, values and behaviour, and this challenges one's original cultural presumptions to a greater extent and results in identity struggle. The gap between cultures for both Chinese students and Western expatriate teachers was overwhelming in that there was a significant lack of a sense of belonging, even for the most socially integrated participants. More importantly,

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[219] This is explained in Chapter 2.2.
[220] This set of values is also part of the 'self-expression' dimension that Inglehart (2000, p. 84) refers to.

the processes of adapting to the host environment gradually eroded some participants' original cultural identities. This dilemma of identity shift caught participants in between cultures. Both Chinese students and Western expatriate teachers constantly reported that they could no longer relate to their friends back home but could not fully adapt to the local life either. In the sense of Anderson's (1993) classic concept of 'imagined communities', national identity in itself is a collective construct within its own borders. Thus direct cultural encounters across national borders with a profoundly different set of cultural assumptions could only further blur the images of their homelands (their 'imagined communities'), hence their original cultural identities. Institutional barriers, such as the striction over immigration policies faced by Chinese students in Britain, further prompted the struggle, as this projected to them an idea that they were excluded from the country even after they had invested a significant amount of money in their education and living in Britain.

We often assume that living in another country is to experience it and learn new cultures from it. It is. However, what is equally important, yet much less acknowledged, is the fact that it is also to reflect on one's own society and cultures, which are familiar yet tend to be overlooked under such circumstances of cross-cultural encounters where differences are much easier to be exposed. Direct experiences of cultural translation are not only for us to explore new knowledge, but also to rethink and reevaluate ourselves in relation to others. Cross-cultural experiences through education, like the ones discussed in this study, is an important way to have such experiences and enhance one's knowledge of both self and others. It is also an important element in the social transformation of China as well as in the developing cultural relations between China and the West in the current context of globalisation. Theses like Huntington's (1993, 1996) have indeed provoked a huge debate worldwide on cultural identities and differences, and revealed some of the fundamental conflicts between societies and cultures, but we also need to be reminded that there are still profound aspects of human life, and of social and economic development, that transcend national borders and conventional boundaries, that are much more widely shared than may be initially apparent.

15.3 Implications and Limitations

At the theoretical level, this study has established that immersion in the cultures of others has profound influence on one's knowledge and behaviour. While this study focuses primarily on one's experiences in the host country, it does not shed much light on one's subjective experiences when one has moved back home. Such experiences are nevertheless significant as they measure the extent to which their previous experiences in the host country may extend to their life back in their home country. To learn such experiences is to understand the ways in which participants of direct cross-cultural experiences readapt to their home environment, to what extent they have carried 'new' ideas and behavioural patterns back and how these might influence their social relationships back home and, to the wider context, the future transformation of their home country.

This study also draws attention to one's perception and evaluation of his home country and cultures. As discussed above at the end of Chapter 15.2, living in a foreign country is not only to learn and experience new cultures, it also has great potential for one to reconsider and reevaluate his home society and cultural framework which used to be taken for granted. This study rests its standpoint on one's experience and interpretation of others; although it addresses the issue of how China and the West have viewed themselves and constructed their own cultural identities, this has never been the primary concern of this study. While the direct experiences of cultural translation discussed in this study provoke abundant reflections on Chinese perceptions of the West and vice versa, it lacks proper attention to Chinese and Western perceptions of themselves. Such self-observation is by no means less significant as the formation of cultural identity is interactive and two-way. Cultural translation cannot be fully effective unless one understands himself before he goes about interpreting the other. This study thus calls for further exploration from future research to focus on the ways in which Chinese and Western people, and to the much wider context of all peoples, understand and construct their own cultural identities, especially in the processes of direct cross-cultural encounters where more attentions tend to be given to the interpretations of others.

At the practical level, an important problem revealed in this study is that there was a

considerably low sense of belonging amongst both sampled groups, and the majority of my sample was primarily interacting within their own national/cultural groups, even though they all shared the same desire to better understand the host country through extensive local friendships. For Chinese students who went through English language courses, the experiences of learning as well as social interactions with other international students were largely positive. This study thus proposes that universities which host international students (and people who have similar experiences) should provide institutions, facilities and general services for them to better adapt to the local environment, not only in terms of academic learning, but also with regards to social life. For Western expatriates in particular, a basic level Chinese language course is required. Unlike Chinese students in Britain who all had a level of English competency (proven by the official standardised IELTS test required for admission) that were sufficient enough for them to deal with daily matters, the majority of the Western expatriates in my sample (and most likely others) knew little to none Chinese before they came to China, and this was widely reported as a highly negative factor for their social interactions outside of university campuses where a large proportion of the Chinese population understood little to none English.

Last but not least, this study does not aim to generalise its findings to a certain population, but rather to provide a detailed account of what the sampled groups went though living in the particular host country. This might provide reference for future Chinese students who might study overseas, particularly in Britain, and Western expatriates who may consider coming to China. The sample for this study is also relatively limited and imbalanced due to their different backgrounds: the Chinese students were in the process of studying and were largely supported financially by their families, while the Western expatriate teachers were in the process of teaching and their life in China was employment-based and self-sufficient. The intentions of the two groups, from the very beginning, already presume an imbalanced power relation between learning (Western cultures from the West) and teaching (Western cultures to Chinese). It is rather the actual processes of them living in the host country and the processes by which their ideas and values flow between societies that this study intends to explore in detail.

Appendix 1 -- Information and Consent Form for Western Participants

Hi! I am LI Yue (Daniel), a first-year doctoral student of Sociology at the University of Glasgow. My PhD project concerns how living and studying/working in another country might transform one's original perceptions and cultural identities, and how these perceptions and identities differ from those of whom that have not been to the same foreign country. In this study, you will be asked a few questions about your knowledge about China and Chinese cultures, and I am particularly interested in your perceptions of the differences between Britain and China in terms of cultural values and ways of life.

This research involves participants only above 18 and is completely voluntary. Your personal information will be used only by the researcher and will not be released to any third party at any time under any circumstance before submitting the final dissertation or publishing the work. A recorder will be employed for the purpose of transcription and reference in the dissertation. Transcript will be presented to you, if required, and verified before the stage of data analysis and writing up.

If you have any concern regarding your role and rights as a participant in this research, or you would like to obtain a copy of your transcript or offer opinion, or any further information, or mention any other question in any regard, please feel free to contact me via y.li.2@research.gla.ac.uk / 07403342599. I would be happy to answer any question you might have. You may also wish to direct your concerns to my supervisor Professor Greg Philo via: Greg.Philo@glasgow.ac.uk , if you wish.

Signature: _____   **Date**:_____

Appendix 2 -- Information and Consent Form for Chinese Participants

Hi! I am LI Yue (李悦), a first-year doctoral student of Sociology at the University of Glasgow. My PhD project concerns how living and studying/working in another country might transform one＇s original perceptions and cultural identities. In this study, you will be asked a few questions about your knowledge and experiences of the UK. I am particularly interested in your understandings of the differences between China and Britain in terms of cultural values and ways of life.

This research involves participants only above 18 and is completely voluntary. Your personal information will be used only by the researcher and will not be released to any third party at any time under any circumstance before submitting the final dissertation or publishing the work. A recorder will be employed for the purpose of transcription and reference in the dissertation. Transcript will be presented to you, if required, and verified before the stage of data analysis and writing up.

If you have any concern regarding your role and rights as a participant in this research, or you would like to obtain a copy of your transcript or offer opinion, or any further information, or mention any other question in any regard, please feel free to contact me via y.li.2@research.gla.ac.uk / 07403342599. I would be happy to answer any question you might have. You may also wish to direct your concerns to my supervisor Professor Greg Philo via: Greg.Philo@glasgow.ac.uk , if you wish.

Signature: _____   **Date**: _____

Glossary

diu mianzi	lose face
gaokao	National Higher Education Entrance Examination
ge ge bu ru	against the grain
gei mianzi	give face
guanxi	social connection
hukou	household registration
hongbao	red packet
laowai	foreigner
liu mianzi	save face
mianzi	face
renqing	favour
sheng nu	'leftover woman'
shi zhe sheng cun	the fittest survives
sui bo zhu liu	go along with the mainstream
xiang qin jiao	matchmaking corner
wai guo ren	foreign person
wai guo hai er	foreign kid
xiang sheng	crosstalk
xue zhang	senior fellow student
yang wa wa	foreign doll
zhongguoren	Chinese person
zhonghua minzu	the Chinese race/people
zou houmen	going through the back door
zuo yuezi	confinement in childbirth

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