A 'Mirror-image' Investigation: Foreign Language Learners' Acculturation Experiences in Chinese and British Study Abroad Programmes

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Abstract

This study is within the context of internationalisation in worldwide higher education institutions (HEIs), focusing on Study Abroad Programmes (SAPs) for foreign language learners. A one-term or one-year abroad programme is now embedded in Foreign Studies degree programmes in many HEIs all over the world, either as an optional (e.g. in China) or compulsory component (i.e. in the UK). Nevertheless, there are limited comprehensive insights into these non-degree-oriented foreign language sojourners' study abroad experiences in the countries of their target languages and cultures within the specific context of short-term SAPs. In particular, comparisons of SAP student sojourners' acculturation experiences in the largest origin nation and host destination, China and the UK, remain under-studied, possibly because non-degree-oriented short-term study abroad experiences are perceived to be less formal and important than degree-oriented long-term sojourns. This has led to an inadequate understanding of the overall experiences as well as the distinct challenges that this specific cohort may face as they endeavour to learn both the language and the culture of the host environment in a relatively short period.

This study aims to respond to this gap under the guidance of an overarching question: "What are the distinct features that characterise acculturation experiences in the context of Chinese and British foreign language learners where culture and language learning take place simultaneously?" Three specific research questions were formulated for the present study: 1) How do Chinese foreign language learners experience acculturation in the UK through Study Abroad Programmes? How does it compare with British foreign language learners' experiences of acculturation in China? 2) What factors facilitate Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences? What factors serve as barriers? and 3) What are the first-hand lessons (benefits and challenges) when foreign language learners are exposed to the target language and culture? In seeking to address these questions, this study provides a meaningful 'mirror-image' investigation to explore and compare the acculturation experiences of two cohorts: a) 15 English language learners in China who took one-year SAPs to the UK, and b) 18 British learners in Chinese Studies who went to China on one-year SAPs. This study adopted purely qualitative approach where creative research techniques (i.e. vignettes and metaphors) were also employed to encourage the participants' in-depth reflections and introspection of their experiences, with a view to facilitating and complementing the semi-structured interview method that was primarily used for collecting

data. Thematic analysis was utilised as a deductive data analysis approach with the assistance of the NVivo qualitative software.

Drawing upon Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development and the subsequent extended Academic Acculturation Model offered by Elliot et al. as a guiding theoretical framework, this study investigates not only the processes entailed in both groups' acculturation experiences in SAPs, but also the key influential factors, both personal and environmental. This study proposes a further extension and conceptualisation of Bronfenbrenner's theory, which has been termed the 'Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation' as a contribution to knowledge. In this proposed model, a fresh and more nuanced insight is offered to unpack the intricacies in foreign language learners' short-term SAP sojourns. In the Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation among SAP learners, three important components of their experiences of acculturation are identified: a) the 'in-between direct producer' (i.e. the person), b) the 'bi-contextualising' environment (i.e. the home and host environments), and c) the 'liquid' process of interactions between the individual sojourner and the environments he/she interacts with.

The findings from the shared experiences of the two cohorts of short-term SAP students offer 'mirror-image' insights as well as a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the (explicit, implicit and potential) bioecological-related factors that impact on these foreign language learners' overall acculturation experiences (both academic and non-academic). On a pragmatic level, it is expected that this model will have practical utility not only for foreign language learners but also for other similar groups of international students, helping them better prepare and personalise their own acculturation experiences during their sojourns. A deeper and comparative understanding of the two groups of SAP learners can assist HEIs in offering richer practical intercultural support before, during and after students' educational experiences abroad, and in improving intercultural pedagogy in future education, e.g. through foreign language education and SAP design. This 'mirror-image' investigation also offers beneficial information (e.g. facilitators, barriers, benefits and challenges) for both Chinese and British student sojourners and HEIs, enabling comparative insights on the experiences of their peers and partner HEIs (or other HEIs conducting similar programmes).

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Author’s declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that 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.

Printed Name: Rui He

Signature:

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Rationale

1.1.1 Higher education internationalisation and study abroad in China and the UK

With the steady acceleration of higher education (HE) internationalisation, cooperation and exchanges among worldwide higher education institutions (HEIs) have been booming. HE internationalisation can be defined as the ongoing "process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education" (Knight, 2009, p.6). Specific strategies include incorporating intercultural elements in curriculum design or pedagogy; recruiting international students or staff members on campus or sending home students or staff members abroad for studying, training or working; initiating or participating in joint academic events or research programmes with other institutions, etc. Arguably, the primary focus of the HE internationalisation agenda is to build and strengthen the cultural, linguistic, social and economic connections between HEIs across borders to enhance international and academic collaborations and mutual understanding (Kreber, 2009). It also aims to make both individuals (i.e. students or staff members) and institutions more competitive in both the domestic and international arenas (Chan & Dimmock, 2008). For example, students might be expected to acquire better knowledge and skills to strengthen their employability in not only their home countries but also worldwide markets. Competitive HEIs are likely to be able to generate more and better international resources (e.g. students, academic staff, funding, equipment, etc.) to deliver and support greater teaching and research work, and provide a greater variety of learning and development opportunities, at home or abroad, for students and staff members.

Students play a dominant part in the HE internationalisation agenda (Liu, 2014) with various forms of education abroad experiences such as study abroad. As one of the most prevalent forms, study abroad could be broadly understood as an approach to HE internationalisation that allows students to semi-permanently leave home and pursue education related activities in another country or region (Holdsworth, 2009). Generally, there are two types of study abroad: degree-oriented or non-degree-oriented. The former refers to students studying abroad with the purpose of pursing an academic degree (e.g. a Master's degree) at host HEIs. This type of study abroad usually involves spending a number of years overseas, such as one/two-year Master's programmes or three/four-year PhD programmes. Students who

engage in non-degree-oriented study abroad are interested in expanding their education experience without the aim of pursuing an academic degree at their host HEIs (Forum on Education Abroad, 2011). Non-degree-oriented study abroad experiences can take the form of various Study Abroad Programmes (SAPs), some of which are offered by student sojourners' home HEIs while others are run by third-party education institutions (e.g. the British Council). This study focuses on non-degree-oriented study abroad experiences in SAPs. SAPs are usually less than eight weeks, one academic term or one academic year, and are considered 'short-term' programmes. There might be different understandings of 'short-term' programmes from one country to another, but within the context of the present study (i.e. Chinese and British HEIs), SAPs are generally 'short-term' when compared with most degree-oriented programmes in both China and the UK (e.g. three/four-year undergraduate or PhD degree programmes). Notably, although some one-year SAPs equal the length of a British Master's degree programme, this is not the case with many other countries' Master's programmes, such as those in China, which are two/three years in general. Also, underlining the 'short-term' feature of SAPs in the present study intends to highlight the distinctiveness of this particular cohort (i.e. SAP student sojourners) and their roles and experiences (for more explanation, see Section 2.2.2, Chapter Two).

According to the British Council (2013), 3.85 million HE students are expected to be studying abroad by 2024, representing an increase of 0.81 million from 2011. China and India are forecast to remain the largest origin nations, while the US, the UK and Australia are expected to maintain their roles as the largest host destinations.

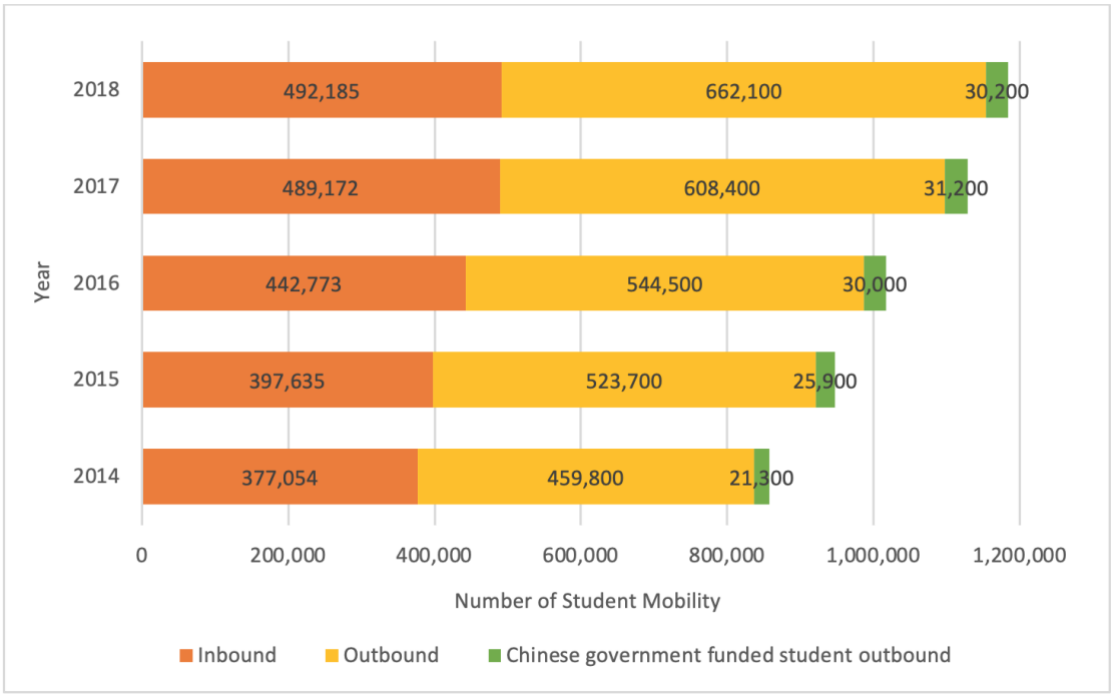

Figure 1-1 Statistics on student mobility 2014-2018 in China (Source: Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2015a; b; 2016; 2017a; b; 2018; 2019a; b)

Taking China, the top 'buying' country (Universities UK, 2017) (i.e. origin nation), as an example, the number of outbound students in 2018 was nearly one and half times as many as in 2014, with an immense increase of 202,300 Chinese students studying abroad in just over four years (see Figure 1-1). Historically, the period between 1949-1976 in China's international education was called "the relatively closed internationalisation period" (Gao, 2016, p.64), because of the limited opportunities to communicate and cooperate with Western countries (or developed countries in general). Although China is now recognised as the leading 'buying' country, it actually started receiving international students during this relatively closed period, receiving its first foreign students (five Romanians) in 1950 (Fu, 2015). Nowadays, attracting more international students and creating world-class universities domestically are becoming important parts of China's HE internationalisation agenda. As Ma and Zhao (2018) argue, China's main value and purpose in recruiting more international students are somewhat different from those of many other developed countries, such as the UK. The focus in China is on "making good impressions to the world" and "promoting mutual understanding" as well as "making Chinese HEIs more globally competitive" (ibid, p.3) rather than merely capitalising on the trend of HE internationalisation to make profits (Ma & Zhao, 2018). As Figure 1-1 shows, the number of inbound students has also increased rapidly; there were 492,185 foreign students from more than 200 countries and regions outside the People's Republic of China came to study in China in 2018, representing a growth rate of over 30% since 2014. According to the statistics, nearly half of inbound students in 2018 (47.56%) being in various non-degree-oriented SAPs (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019b). The majority of these inbound students (59.95%) were from other Asian countries, while 14.96% came from European countries and 7.26% from America (ibid). It is arguable that with the dramatic development of its economy and its massive efforts to attract foreign students, this top 'buying' country is also becoming more active in the 'selling' group.

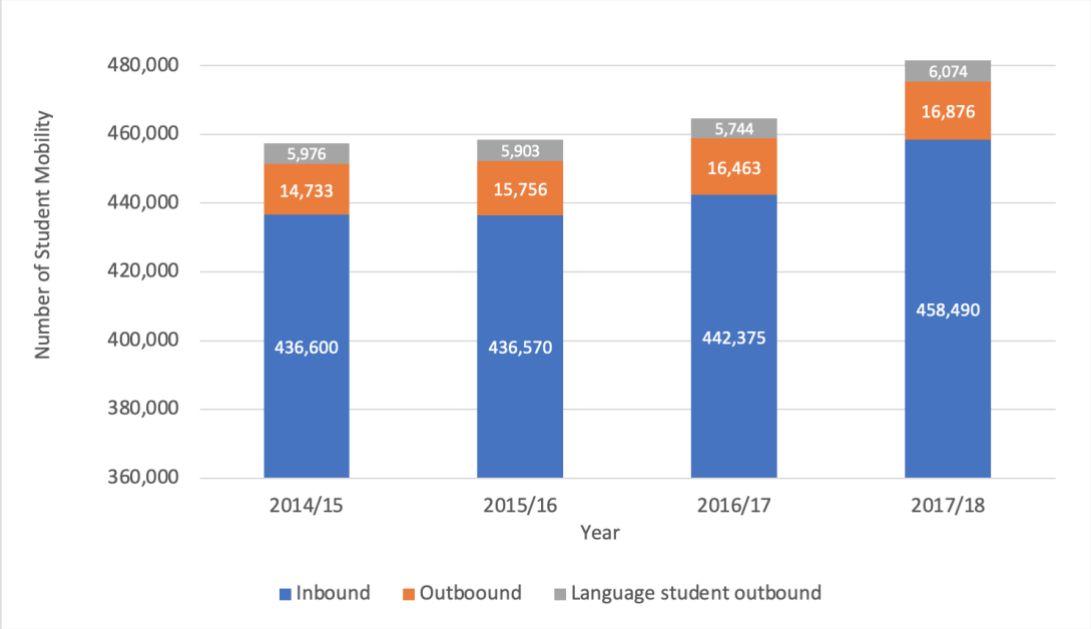

Figure 1-2 Statistics on student mobility 2014-2018 in the UK (Source: ERASMUS+, 2019; HESA, 2019)

As one of the traditional 'selling' countries (Jibeen & Khan, 2015) in HE internationalisation, the UK, as of 2018, has been the second most popular choice of student mobility destinations over the past two decades (only behind the US). Its outstanding academic reputation, "colonial legacies, the historical profile of its institutions", and the opportunity to receive education in a "global language" (Ploner, 2017, p.425) continue to attract students from around the world. As Figure 1-2 shows, over 430,000 students studying in the UK each year are from outside the UK, and the number of inbound students is increasing each year. Taking the academic year 2017/18 as an example, according to Universities UK (2019), 14.4% of undergraduates and 35.8% of postgraduates in the UK were international students, with China being the leading origin nation. As the University of Oxford (2015) reports, "almost one in six international students [in the UK] is Chinese" (p.5).

Despite the UK being regarded as an inactive 'buying' member of the worldwide HE internationalisation group due to its low outbound student rates, it is in fact providing an increasing number of outbound students (see Figure 1-2). The British government has been making efforts to increase the opportunities for their home students to study abroad by participating in various student mobility schemes such as the famous ERASMUS and ERASMUS+ programmes within the European Union (EU). The ERASMUS programme (which stands for European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) was established in 1987 with the aim of providing education exchange opportunities for European students to live and study outside their home countries as part of their degree (European Commission, 2013). In 2014, ERASMUS+ (or ERASMUS Plus) was

launched to further support overseas education, training, youth and sport opportunities (European Commission, 2014). As BBC News reports, 53% of UK university students currently take these programmes to study abroad (BBC News Reality Check team, 2020), and the host destinations are primarily within Europe. However, with the ongoing process of Brexit (the withdrawal of the UK from the EU), the future of European education exchange and cooperation have become unclear. The current 2014-2020 EU programmes, which include Erasmus+, may continue (European Commission, 2020), but there is also a possibility that the UK will depart from these Europe-focused programmes since they might not meet the needs of global education for most UK students (Briefings For Britain, 2020; Corbett & Gordon, 2020). Therefore, it might be speculated that there is a possibility that the UK will enhance its education connections, exchanges and cooperation with non-EU countries, such as China, in its future HE internationalisation agenda.

1.1.2 Chinese and British Study Abroad Programmes and foreign language learners

As Figure 1-2 shows, over one third of the small number of UK outbound students are language students. Some of them might be non-language degree students who are seeking opportunities to study a foreign language in a foreign country, but many of them are language degree students (i.e. undergraduates) for whom it is mandatory to take a Year Abroad (YA) programme (i.e. a one-year SAP) in a country where their target language is spoken natively. The YA programme is a "peculiarly British phenomenon" (Alred & Byram, 2002, p.339) in UK modern language education. This one-year SAP has been offered to the UK's undergraduate Modern Language students for over three decades as a formally embedded part of their degree structure. Other higher education systems, such as China's, recommend or provide opportunities for their foreign language students to study abroad, but only in the UK are undergraduates studying foreign languages mandatorily required "to spend one year, a quarter of the course of study, in one or more foreign countries where the language(s) they are studying are spoken natively" (ibid) (e.g. students in Chinese Studies go to China for a year). Although the number of students in YA programmes is much smaller than the inbound mobility group in the UK, the one-year experience in the country of target language and culture is expected to be particularly meaningful for foreign languages learners. As the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) (2012) claims, the YA programme is the most valuable part of Modern Languages degree programmes since the most important part of learning a foreign language is to spend time in a country that can provide the learner with both linguistic and cultural immersion.

Unlike in the UK, going abroad is not a formally integrated part of undergraduate degree programmes for students of foreign languages in China. Thus, it is somewhat difficult to estimate the number of the outbound students of foreign languages who come from China (which is a target group in this study), and it also increases the difficulty of recruiting participants from this group, as will be discussed in the Methodology chapter (Chapter Four, section 4.6.1). However, the Chinese government has also been making efforts to provide more opportunities for Chinese students to gain international skills, views and abilities (Mankowska, 2018) through studying abroad, and it is with these goals that the China Scholarship Council (CSC) was founded in 1996. CSC is a non-profit institution affiliated with the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China; it can be regarded as another milestone in China's internationalisation of higher education with the governmental and institutionalised management of government-funded study abroad opportunities (Feng & Chen, 2011) (see Figure 1-1). Most non-degree outbound undergraduates in China who take the various opportunities provided by CSC or home HEIs with CSC supported university partnerships are in long-term SAPs (i.e. one academic term or one academic year).

Thus, in this study, *foreign language learners* will refer specifically to undergraduates who engage in language and culture learning as part of their formal degree programmes at their home HEIs: for example, Chinese undergraduates in English Studies at Chinese HEIs or British undergraduates in Chinese Studies at British HEIs. Also, the term *'SAP'* will be used in the present study to describe programmes provided by home HEIs or third-party education institutions that allow undergraduate students to physically move to a foreign country to study and live in there for a planned duration (e.g. one year). Students in this kind of SAP do not aim at pursuing a full academic degree or a joint degree at their host HEIs.

Students in non-degree-oriented SAPs who are studying and living abroad as part of their degree education are likely to have different study abroad experiences than degree-oriented students in terms of the time, money or effort required while they are at the overseas HEIs. This might be one of the reasons that more attention has been paid to degree students than students in SAPs (another reason is likely to be that the number of SAP students is much smaller than the number of degree students, as is illustrated in Figures 1-1 and 1-2). For example, I conducted a search of the huge multidatabase EBSCOhost and found that when comparing the number of publications, students in SAPs are more "transparent" (Dervin, 2007, p.118) than other cohorts (e.g. degree-oriented students), with less information or

news being available on them, especially (Chinese/British) foreign language learners in (Chinese/British) SAPs (see Table 1-1).

Keywords searched	Number of publications found	Publication period
'international students'	65,794	1900-2020
'international students' + 'undergraduate'	4,674	1900-2021
'international students' + 'master'	1,786	1957-2020
'international students' + 'PhD/doctorate/doctoral'	2,198	1934-2020
'international student' + 'China/Chinese'	6,680	1909-2021
'international student' + 'UK/United Kingdom'	9,181	1914-2021
'study abroad programme'	4,152	1956-2021
'Erasmus programme'	1,221	1981-2020
'year abroad programme'	199	1962-2021
'study abroad programme' + "foreign language'	444	1963-2020
'study abroad programme' + "foreign language learner'	8	2006-2019
'study abroad programme' + 'China/Chinese'	290	1975-2020
'study abroad programme' + 'UK/United Kingdom'	228	1965-2020

Table 1-1 Publication search on EBSCOhost (retrieve date: 8 October 2020)

Study abroad experiences through SAPs are expected to be life-altering, meaning they are likely to provide significant, reliable, effective and fruitful paths for student sojourners to learn, develop and grow in the process of their degree education, especially for foreign language learners (Jackson & Oguro, 2018; The Quality Assurance Agency, 2015; University Council of Modern Languages, 2012). Target language proficiency, intercultural/global competencies, open-mindedness and personal growth are the expected 'products' (i.e. benefits) of learning by experiencing real-life contexts through SAPs (ibid). Sojourning in the country of their target language and culture might, arguably, make students'

study abroad experiences particularly meaningful. Compared with sojourners in other disciplines, foreign language learners are more likely to regard this experience as an authentic way of learning their degree subjects, so they might play a relatively more active role in their sojourns and be keener and more proactive when it comes to learning, exploring and interacting in the host country. It can be regarded as an important practice of experiential learning in their undergraduate education, especially when the cultural differences (e.g. language, academic culture, etc.) between their home country and the country of their target language and culture are large (as they are between China and the UK) (Hofstede et al., 2010; Li, 2005). Additionally, one-year SAPs are likely to be the longest in terms of duration, constituting one quarter of an undergraduate education programme. This might make the sojourns more formal and meaningful than shorter-term SAPs (e.g. two-week summer school courses or one-term SAPs) and require more time and effort to learn and adjust during the sojourns.

In order to bolster their internationalisation processes, worldwide HEIs have been signing an increasing number of partnership agreements with foreign HEIs to promote international exchanges and participation rates in SAPs (Jackson & Oguro, 2018). Nevertheless, the quality of each partnership is crucial to the success of student sojourners' study abroad experiences and HE internationalisation. Important factors involved in teaching and learning, as well as other support services or SAP arrangements (e.g. accommodation, opportunities to interact with local students) are expected to have important impacts on student sojourners' actual experiences of interaction, learning and development. However, many HEIs see quantity as being much more important than quality because they believe that the more partners they have, the better their international reputation will be (Knight, 2015). This is a misconception of HE internationalisation which is, predictably, likely to result in "McDonaldisation" (Altbach, 2004, p.6), with low-quality programme design, curriculum and services for international students or partner institutions. Hence, a 'mirror-image' comparison between countries involved in partnerships can be crucial for facilitating the success of carrying out various SAPs and HE internationalisation. It also leads to better mutual relationships, collaboration, benefits, requirements and impacts from these partnerships. Especially when the exchanges take place between countries with large cultural differences (e.g. China and the UK), the sojourns are likely to be more challenging and more support might be needed by student sojourners.

Acculturation is another key term and concept in this study. More detailed definition is provided in Section 2.2.1 (Chapter Two – Literature Review), but it is briefly defined here

as referring, in the context of the present study, to individual foreign language learner sojourners' processes of interaction, learning and development in a new cultural environment (i.e. the country of their target language and culture). These processes require the student sojourners to "learn, unlearn or re-learn" (Elliot et al., 2016b, p.1183) different ways of thinking, knowledge, skills, behaviours and development in order to better adjust and build their lives and daily routines in the new environment during the sojourn. Although a one-year SAP is a short period in a student sojourner's life, it is still likely to become an important year which is expected to impact upon the sojourner in different ways (Antonakopoulou, 2013). Many student sojourners face profound challenges such as adjustment difficulties and social-cultural and academic marginalisation (Antonakopoulou, 2013; Knight, 2015). Arguably, the less attention foreign language sojourners in SAPs receive, the less support they might have, and the more challenging their sojourns are likely to be. The existing body of research on SAPs or foreign language learners in SAPs has paid much attention to fragmented influential factors (e.g. motivations for participating in SAPs, choices of duration), benefits (e.g. linguistic proficiency, intercultural competence), or challenges (e.g. culture shock) (e.g. Byram & Feng, 2006; Badwan, 2017; Dwyer, 2004; Goldoni, 2015; Kehl & Morris, 2008; Medina-López-Portillo, 2004; Petzoid & Peter, 2015). However, it is arguable that a comprehensive investigation of the 'process' of interactions between the individual sojourners and the environment in which they sojourn (i.e. how they interact with each other and what the key factors involved are) is pivotal. It could help understand the foreign language learner's study abroad experience in SAPs in both depth and breadth.

This study is grounded in the 'process-person-context-time' concept of the Bioecological Theory of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) as well as an extension of Bronfenbrenner's theory: the Academic Acculturation Model (Elliot et al., 2006a). It aims to investigate how Chinese and British foreign language learners sojourn and acculturate in the UK and China respectively. Specifically, it focuses on these two cohorts' comprehensive acculturation experiences in the countries of their target language and culture in order to compare this 'mirror image'.

In terms of the researcher's personal background, this study was initially inspired by my personal experience as an English language undergraduate who took several short SAPs in different destinations such as the UK and the US. Unfortunately, I was not offered longer-term SAPs during my undergraduate studies. When I, as a Chinese international student, came to the UK for my postgraduate degree, I realised that the acculturation experiences of

a one-year programme would be very different from that of a programme of shorter duration (e.g. a four-week summer school). Also, as a foreign language undergraduate, although the SAPs I participated in were short-term, I was very proactive in learning the language and culture of host countries, communicating and interacting with local people, and exploring local areas. I pursued my postgraduate degree in Education out of personal interest in the subject, but I was still very keen to learn more about the language and culture of my host country, the UK. I also remained interested and curious about what the acculturation experience of an English learner in a one-year SAP would be like. By chance, I learned from a British friend who had completed his one-year SAP in Spain that a one-year SAP is compulsory for undergraduates studying Modern Languages in British universities, and I found out that Chinese Studies was also included. This aroused my great interest in exploring and comparing the one-year acculturation experiences of Chinese English undergraduates and British Chinese undergraduates in the UK and China respectively. My personal experience as an English language undergraduate who participated in short-term SAPs has been helpful to my exploration and understanding of this study topic.

1.2 Research Aims and Questions

The present study aims to bolster the extant research on study abroad sojourners by exploring in depth and breadth the acculturation experiences of two cohorts of foreign language learners in two different yet related contexts:

a) Chinese English Studies undergraduates who come to the UK through the SAPs for one academic year;
b) British Chinese Studies undergraduate students who go to China via the SAPs for the same academic year.

Based on the discussion above, this study attempts to explore an overarching question: "What are the distinct features that characterise acculturation experiences in the context of Chinese and British foreign language learners where language and culture learning take place simultaneously during short-term sojourns?" Three research questions have been formulated for the present study:

1. How do Chinese foreign language learners experience acculturation in the UK through Study Abroad Programmes? How does it compare with British foreign language learners' experiences of acculturation in China?

2. What factors facilitate Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences? What factors serve as barriers?
3. What are the first-hand lessons (benefits and challenges) when foreign language learners are exposed to the target language and culture?

1.3 Methodology

In order to address the above research questions, a qualitative phenomenological study is conducted to explore both Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences in their respective SAPs. Semi-structured individual interviews are utilised along with metaphors and vignettes for collecting data, and thematic analysis is employed for the data analysis. In total, 33 interviewees participated in this study, of whom fifteen are Chinese English Studies undergraduates who took one-year SAPs in the UK, and eighteen are British Chinese Studies undergraduates who went to China via SAPs for one academic year. The fieldwork was undertaken in two countries and eleven cities (seven in the UK; four in China). The methodology is presented and discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

1.4 Significance of the Study

It is the combination and comparison of the acculturation experiences of Chinese and British foreign language learners in one-year SAPs that can allow this study to provide important fresh insights. As discussed above (see Section 1.1.2), little is known about the in-depth acculturation experiences of Chinese English undergraduates' one-year sojourns in the UK, or of British Chinese Studies undergraduates' experiences in China through one-year SAPs. This study fills this gap by combining these key elements: 1) contextualising foreign language learners (i.e. Chinese English undergraduates and British undergraduates studying Chinese) in one-year SAPs; 2) providing a comparative 'mirror image' between two countries with large cultural differences; and 3) exploring and examining specific layers of the environments of both the home and host countries, identifying key personal influential factors, and investigating the process of the students' acculturation experiences during their one-year sojourn.

At the same time, the application of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 2005) ("Bioecological Theory" for short) along with the extended Academic Acculturation Model offered by Elliot et al. (e.g. Elliot et al., 2016a) to

the particular participants and contexts in this study also leads to an important contribution from a theoretical perspective. The majority of studies that apply bioecological theory primarily focus on the long-term development or life courses of young children or adolescents within a monocultural context (e.g. Beck-Cross & Cooper, 2015), or young immigrants (e.g. Baldwin-White et al., 2017). A few studies have paid attention to intercultural academic contexts such as international degree students' acculturation or transition experiences (e.g. Elliot et al., 2016a; b; c; Taylor & Ali, 2017). Although Elliot et al.'s work takes Bronfenbrenner's theory a pivotal step forward by bringing the development into an intercultural higher education context, it focuses on international degree-oriented students (i.e. PhD students) who sojourn in the host country for long periods of time (i.e. more than three or four years) and have a relatively stable sojourn status (meaning they are likely to stay and work in the host country after graduation). While the findings in the present study make an important contribution to the understanding of Chinese and British foreign language learners' comprehensive acculturation experiences through SAPs, it takes all the individual sojourner, his/her home and host countries (i.e. original and new environment) into consideration. New insights are drawn from the in-depth investigation of SAP sojourners' experiences, with each layer suggested by bioecological theory, and more specific personal contributions (i.e. personal influential factors) from these adult learners (i.e. undergraduates) who arguably play more active roles in their own sojourns and development. Drawing upon these different aspects together can lead to a greater understanding of how personal and environmental (both original and new) factors interact to affect Chinese and British foreign language sojourners' acculturation and development during their sojourns. Thus, this study endeavours to extend further an existing theoretical model in order to better understand SAP foreign language students' experiences, ultimately resulting in a proposed Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation. This further extended model could bring together important but somehow fragmented factors/elements to create a "fuller picture" (Alred & Byram, 2006, p.211) and a deeper understanding of Chinese and British foreign language learners' experiences in SAPs.

The fresh insights provided by this study can be of use in offering practical intercultural support before, during and after students' (especially foreign language learners) educational experiences abroad. They could also facilitate sojourners to take more control of their challenging and daunting sojourns in a foreign country and improve general intercultural pedagogy in future language education and SAP designs. Additionally, the intercultural and comparative perspectives in this study are crucial in pointing out beneficial information (e.g. facilitators and hindrances) for both Chinese and British universities, enabling them to learn

from their partner universities (or other universities conducting similar SAPs), as well as for Chinese and British foreign language learners to learn from their peers.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

The remainder of this thesis is composed of the following six chapters.

Chapter Two discusses the literature within the research context of this study, focusing on Study Abroad Programmes (SAPs) and acculturation. It sets out to review the studies specifically on influential factors, benefits and challenges related to SAPs and acculturation. This is followed with a more specific discussion of foreign language learners in SAPs. The chapter concludes by identifying the notable gap in this research field and presenting the research questions of this study.

Chapter Three discusses the theoretical framework for this study. It discusses potential theoretical approaches to understanding acculturation, explaining why certain potential theories have been rejected for this study. It then justifies the adopted theoretical framework, discusses its strengths and weaknesses, and how its application in this study facilitates the data analysis and the discussion of the research findings.

Chapter Four presents the research methodology in detail. It sets out to discuss my philosophical worldview, then explains the appropriateness of the adopted research approach and instruments for the present study. It also introduces the sampling criteria and research participants. Then, step-by-step procedures of participant recruitment, pilot study, data collection and data analysis, as well as a discussion of this study's validity, reliability and trustworthiness, and ethical considerations are also presented in this chapter.

Chapters Five and Six present the findings. Chapter Five focuses on the environmental factors that influence Chinese and British foreign language sojourners' acculturation experiences in SAPs. It sets out the demographics and the general backgrounds of the interviewees in this study, then presents an analysis of the metaphors collected from each interview. It also presents findings on the intertwined influential factors and first-hand lessons focusing on sojourners' original and new environment. Next, Chapter Six turns to the salient findings in relation to personal factors and unique cases, exploring the personal

contributions Chinese and British foreign language learners might make to their own acculturation and development processes in SAPs.

Finally, Chapter Seven discusses the key findings of the present study in relation to the extant literature. It highlights the theoretical contribution of this study by proposing a Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation. It also identifies the limitations and strengths of this study, as well as detailing the implications and recommendations for further areas of research, practice and policy. It then concludes with a personal reflection and some final thoughts on the present study and my research journey.

Chapter Two: Research Context: Study Abroad Programmes, Acculturation and Foreign Language Learners

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research context of this study. It starts by reviewing the literature on SAPs and acculturation (for both language and non-language sojourners) in Section 2.2, discussing the key influential factors, benefits and challenges involved in SAPs and acculturation. This is followed by Section 2.3, which focuses more specifically on foreign language learners in SAPs. Finally, Section 2.4 demonstrates the purpose of this literature review, which is to identify the notable gaps in this research field and to derive the research questions for this study.

2.2 Study Abroad Programmes and Acculturation

2.2.1 Definition of Acculturation

While the acquisition process of one's first culture is regarded as *enculturation*, *acculturation* can be defined as the learning and adjusting process in a "second or additional culture" (He, 2002, p.323). Individuals add or mix the second/additional culture to/with their first culture (Forum on Education Abroad, 2011) when "different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact" (Redfield et al., 1936, p.149). Acculturation studies primarily focus on individuals who permanently or temporarily move to a different place from the one where they have undergone their enculturation processes (e.g. immigrants, refugees, sojourners). As Elliot et al. (2016b) explain, through enculturation, individuals acquire the common ideas and practices (e.g. language, common values, behaviours, etc.) of their first (home or original) culture from birth. When they are exposed to a different culture, there is high likelihood that they will need to "learn, unlearn or re-learn" (p.1183) ideas and practices to support their learning and adjusting process, enabling them to "survive and flourish" (ibid) in their new context.

Scholars argue that acculturation can be unidimensional or bidimensional (Berry, 1997; Fu, 2015; Nguyen & von Eye, 2002; Gordon, 1964; Lee et al., 2003) according to the changes

to sojourners' cultural identities (i.e. to which cultural or ethnic group/society they belong). Unidimensional acculturation refers to a continuum which assumes that individuals who move from their original cultural identity (i.e. being part of original or home cultural society) to the new host cultural identity (i.e. becoming part of host cultural society) lose their original sociocultural aspects, eventually accepting and assimilating all the aspects of the new culture (Gordon, 1964; Lee et al., 2003). However, this assertion ignores the possibility of mutual exclusion between both one's original and new cultural identities (Nguyen & von Eye, 2002), as well as some individuals' potential will to retain their original cultural identity. For example, when a sojourner moves to a new country for a few years but plans to return to his/her home country and family, he/she might not 'lose' or abandon all his/her original cultural identity to fully accept or assimilate in the new culture. On the other hand, the bidimensional acculturation model (Berry, 1997) provides a more flexible alternative and takes pluralism into consideration. It asserts that an individual's original cultural identity and his/her new society cultural identity are independent to each other and that acculturation can be accomplished at different levels according to the interaction between one's original and new cultural identities. Individuals, then, make decisions regarding 1) whether or not they will keep their original cultural identities and 2) whether they tend to maintain and strengthen their relationships with their host society (for further discussion of Berry's model, see Chapter Three, Section 3.2). Bidimensional acculturation acknowledges the various possible interactions between individuals' original and new cultures, particularly for those whose stays in the new culture are short in duration (e.g. student sojourners). Thus, studies examining student sojourners are more likely to adopt the 'independent' idea from the bidimensional model and examine different possibilities and levels of student sojourners' acculturation in the light of the various contexts and influential factors involved (e.g. Bastien et al., 2018; Chao & Yen, 2018; Dervin, 2007; Elliot et al., 2016a; Lee et al., 2003; Searle & Ward, 1990; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015; Ugwu & Adamuti-Trache, 2017).

Searle and Ward (1990) suggest that there is a lack of academic consensus around the use of terms for describing sojourners' experiences. The most frequently used terms in the field include acculturation, adaptation and adjustment (Fu, 2015). Arguably, when dealing with intercultural settings, the terms acculturation, intercultural adaptation and intercultural adjustment can be used interchangeably. Generally speaking, adaptation and adjustment might have a broader meaning than only referring to a process that occurs between two cultures. For instance, one can make a small adjustment to his/her diet, or an organism can adapt to better suit an environment (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013). However, with the lexical root 'cultur(e)' explicitly and specifically indicating the potential dynamic interaction

process between an individual student sojourner and his/her home and host cultures (i.e. environments), the term 'acculturation' has become widely preferred in the current field (Fu, 2015) and is used in this study.

2.2.2 Influential factors, benefits and challenges related to Study Abroad Programmes and acculturation

As was discussed in Introduction Chapter, SAPs provide non-degree-oriented opportunities for student sojourners to have transformative and life-changing experiences as part of their degree education at home HEIs. Since students do not pursue a formal degree at host HEIs, SAPs are likely to provide them with different educational settings than degree-oriented student sojourners (e.g. the formality of their curriculum, structure of education programmes, expectations from both themselves and home/host HEIs, etc.). However, they might still encounter various challenges or benefits during their cognitive, psychological and behavioural changes and adjustments when their deeply embedded original cultural ideas, practices, and identity collide with the new culture (Antonakopoulou, 2013; Elliot et al., 2016a; b). Their long taken-for-granted cultural norms (e.g. ideas, practices, identity, etc.) might be questioned or challenged by the new and different cultural norms in the host country, and this challenge is likely to come with important opportunities for sojourners to reflect on their home culture and learn the new culture (Elliot et al., 2016c). By participating fully in real-life situations in their target language and culture through SAPs, foreign language learners in particular are offered important opportunities to "intentionally" (Mezirow, 1990, p.1) and "critically" (ibid, p.2) examine, reflect and "mak[e] a new or revised interpretation of the meaning" (ibid, p.1) of the language and culture they are learning.

Also, as discussed previously in Chapter One, given the 'non-degree-oriented' and relatively 'short-term' characteristic of SAPs, it is arguable that these SAP student sojourners have somewhat distinct roles and experiences. As Murphy-Lejeune (2002) suggests in her ethnographic study of a group of European students in the ERASMUS Programme, this group of student sojourners is different from other groups (e.g. immigrants, degree students). Their shorter length of stay allows them to have a relatively looser relationship with the new society's cultural identity and environment, and their temporary in-between position (i.e. between home and host culture) and experiences might make the challenges they confront more superficial and less profound (ibid). For example, if the student sojourners in SAPs have designated and separate classes from local students, they might have fewer

opportunities to interact with local students, meaning they will encounter fewer challenges but also gain fewer learning opportunities from those meaningful interactions. Dervin (2007) echoes this by referring to student sojourners in SAPs as "liquid strangers" (p.119), who have a temporary presence for a certain period of time and usually have a scheduled plan to return to their home countries. These 'liquid strangers' are more likely to experience 'bidimensional' acculturation than 'unidimensional' acculturation during their sojourns. Also, as Chao and Yen (2018) argue, these 'liquid strangers' might not "actively respond or adapt" (p.76) to the cultural conflict and changes since they only plan to stay for a short period and therefore do not 'have to' accept new norms and new cultural identities. Hence, the services, learning environment, etc. provided in different SAPs are arguably important factors affecting student sojourners' education abroad experiences, and, as claimed by Kehl and Morris (2008), they affect student outcomes.

Therefore, programme factors such as class arrangement, etc. can arguably be considered important and influential in student sojourners' acculturation experiences in SAPs. Additionally, given that acculturation can, arguably, be briefly understood as the interactions between the individual sojourner and the new cultural environment in which he/she sojourns, 'person' and 'environment' can arguably be identified as two other outstanding categories involved in acculturation process. Hence, the following discussion will be categorised into *programme*, *personal* and *environmental* aspects to examine the influential factors, benefits and challenges student sojourners are likely to encounter during their acculturation experiences in the setting of SAPs.

2.2.2.1 Programme factors

Enrolment

When either sending students abroad or hosting students on campus, one important programme factor in SAPs is enrolment, which primarily indicates the administration or orientation negotiation between home and host HEIs. Specifically, it is about from whom sojourners receive student services such as course delivery, accommodation, registration, etc. during their sojourns. Norris and Dwyer (2005) identify three major types of enrolment: island, hybrid and direct enrolment/full immersion.

a) Island – the home university is in full charge of all instruction. This type of SAP replicates a familiar "bubble" (ibid, p.121), with familiar faculty members and

instructions provided, so student sojourners experience a familiar 'learning environment' but in a new place (e.g. a different country or region).

b) Hybrid – as its name suggests, this type of SAP provides a mixed administration and orientation that combines elements of both the home and host HEIs. Students in hybrid programmes often receive support and services from their home university while also taking courses and doing coursework provided by the host university. This type of SAP encourages sojourners to take some steps out of their 'comfort zone' and try some unfamiliar courses or tasks while still being assisted with familiar services and support.

c) Direct enrolment/full immersion – requires student sojourners to throw themselves fully into the new environment with full matriculation. All courses, activities, services and support are provided by the host university, and there is minimal orientation from the home university.

In terms of acculturation, students in 'island' enrolment are likely to be at an 'easy level', facing relatively fewer challenges since they have a familiar learning environment with staff members and instructions they are used to. This type of SAP might relieve sojourners' anxiety and uncertainty about sojourning in unfamiliar environment, but arguably, it also reduces their opportunities to experience and learn new things with new people. Students in 'hybrid' enrolment might be at a 'moderate level'; they receive familiar support to assure them while they challenge themselves with an unfamiliar environment to a certain extent, thus gaining important learning opportunities. Finally, the 'direct enrolment/full immersion' SAP could be regarded as the 'hard level' since it throws students into the deep end with minimal familiar support. Students in this type of SAP might experience more challenges and difficulties with stronger psychological stress (e.g. isolation, homesickness), but arguably, they could also encounter "serendipity and amusement" (Elliot et al., 2016a, p.2215) from new learning opportunities.

However, although 'island' enrolment is likely to make the sojourn easier in terms of acculturation, it might be less attractive to students who are motivated and expecting to experience a different education system and a new learning, social and natural environment. Arguably, SAPs that present more opportunities to learn and interact with the new environment provide more meaningful study abroad experiences for sojourners. This idea is supported by the results of a large-scale study conducted by IES (Institute for the International Education of Students), which drew on data from 17,000 US students who took part in SAPs between 1950 to 1999 with a longitudinal retrospective 50-year survey (Dwyer,

2004; Norris & Dwyer, 2005). The results indicate that both 'hybrid' and 'direct enrolment' programmes are more popular among student sojourners than 'island' programmes because they provide more opportunities to interact with the host environment. However, there are also some different influences between these two types of enrolment since they might provide different settings for students. As Norris and Dwyer (2005) claim, student sojourners in 'direct enrolment' tend to be more interested in studying abroad longer, for a full year or more, while 'hybrid' programmes attract students who are interested in programmes lasting one term or less. Additionally, student sojourners in direct enrolment programmes have a much higher percentage (97%) of living with host-country nationals, while hybrid programmes show a balance between living with co-national US students and living with host-country nationals. Moreover, because they have longer stay in the host country, student sojourners in direct enrolment programmes are likely to develop stronger and longer-lasting ties with the local people in the host country due to their deeper and longer immersion in the host environment. Also, student sojourners in hybrid enrolment are likely to have more opportunities at internships, which can have a strong influence on their career choices (Norris & Dwyer, 2005).

Academic credit transfer

Another key factor in SAPs is the acknowledgement and transfer of academic credits (Gao & Jin, 2015). Since student sojourners in SAPs have to return to complete their home university degrees, it is important to them that their academic credits can be recognised and transferred back to their home HEIs. Otherwise, they may have to take an extension for their degree studies to earn enough academic credits required for successful graduation by their home HEIs. Huang et al.'s (2018) study on Chinese medical students on short-term SAPs found that the credits transfer between host and home universities is highly valued by student sojourners. If the academic credits earned at host HEIs can be transferred back to home HEIs, it increases students' motivation to participate and relieves their worries about the extension of study. With this concern in mind, student sojourners might be more likely to choose courses and activities at home HEIs for which the credits can be transferred rather than those that interest them but do not offer transferrable credits.

Classes and accommodation arrangements

Given the changes of education system and campus environment that present challenges to student sojourners, their classes and accommodation arrangements are crucial. For example,

when a British student, who is used to critical thinking, reading lists, classroom debates and professors who are friendly and equal to their students, enters an environment that values hierarchy and rote learning (e.g. China), he/she can easily find him/herself negatively judging his/her experience abroad. He/she may view the students in the host university as "passive" and the professors as "distant" (Engle, 2013, p.116), and vice versa for a Chinese student. To address and curtail these potential challenges, some HEIs design their SAPs around a "student comfort model" (ibid, p.112). This model may adapt the host learning instruction and environment more to a home-university style or group international students together in order to help ease the challenges and raise students' satisfaction levels with the SAPs. However, as Engle (2013) warns, heavy concern with student satisfaction may result in less effective learning outcomes. For example, the results of a 2000 survey covering 120 U.S. universities demonstrate that only 40% of students have had their gains in language proficiency assessed, and less than 10% of the content of the assessments is related to career-related outcomes. Additionally, as Goldoni (2015) and Dervin (2007) argue, placing students sojourners in the same classes or providing a similar situation to what they would encounter at their home university can be a barrier rather than a facilitator of student sojourners' experiences. Arguably, the more restricted their contact with local students is, the less interaction and fewer learning opportunities sojourners have. Conversely, those who share classes with local students might inherently experience the pressure and challenges that comes from interacting with local students, but they are also likely to gain more from learning and adapting to the host university style and environment (Hendrickson, 2018).

Living environment (i.e. accommodation) also plays a key role in student sojourners' experiences abroad. According to Rhodes et al.'s (2014) categorisation, students in SAPs have either individual or shared accommodation. Individual accommodation can be a single room in the host university's student hall, student residences or apartments, while the shared choices involve a shared room with other students in the host university's student hall, student residences, shared apartments or a homestay with a local family. The most common accommodation for SAP sojourners might be student halls. Scholars suggest that living in student halls facilitates opportunities for student sojourners to contact, interact with, learn and use the host language and culture, as they are often mixed with local students or other international students (Ife, 2000; Savicki, 2010). However, as Dervin (2009) argues, many student sojourners, especially European students, are more likely to have a specially designated residential area on most host university campuses rather than being fully integrated with the local students. Accommodation is an important environment in which student sojourners spend a good

deal of time. Arguably, if they are separated from local students, they not only miss important opportunities to have out-of-class interactions with the host language and culture, but might also be discouraged from actively engaging with the host environment since some of them may regard this arrangement as "a sign of segregation" (Dervin, 2007, p.118).

Duration

Duration, or length of stay, in SAPs has been indicated in many studies to be one of the major influential programme variables in sojourns due to its direct influence on the amount of time spent in contact with the new society environment (Bastien et al., 2018; Berry, 1997; Du, 2013; Dwyer, 2004; Leong & Ward, 2000; Medina-López-Portillo, 2004; Vande Berg, 2009). The longer student sojourners spend abroad, the more contact with the host language and culture they are able to have. Dwyer (2004) concludes from data collected by IES that "more is better" (p.162). Students in full-year SAPs are likely to be more confident in their language skills, have increased interest in their academic major and the idea of attending further education, maintain lifelong relationships with people in the host country, and have their worldview altered, since all these gains require time to develop (Dwyer, 2004). Also, student sojourners in a long-term SAP are likely to be allocated more time to adjust to their new environment, and greater opportunities to immerse themselves in the host country, or even to take specialised courses which are unavailable at their home universities (Hamad & Lee, 2013). Other benefits of studying abroad such as language proficiency, intercultural sensitivity, etc. are also claimed to have a significant correlation with the time sojourners spend in host countries (Bastien et al., 2018; Medina-López-Portillo, 2004).

Nevertheless, although some scholars suggest that 'more is better' idea for SAP duration, it does not indicate that only full-year programmes are beneficial. Studies suggest that the socio-cultural adaptation is most difficult during the earliest stage, then it plateaus after four or six months, with the key intercultural gains likely to take place during the thirteenth to eighteenth weeks (Leong & Ward, 2000; Savicki et al., 2008; Vande Berg, 2009). Du (2013) conducted a study surveying 28 American students and one New Zealander who participated in a Chinese language SAP in eastern China for one semester, and found that their language proficiency showed greatest improvement in the first month when they arrived in China, which supports the value of shorter length SAPs. Sojourners might encounter the greatest challenges (i.e. culture shock) in the first month after arriving, and these difficulties create demanding needs and opportunities for them to use the host language to communicate with

local people, resulting in their language improvement (Du, 2013). This finding may not indicate that sojourners gain no language improvement during the rest of their stay, but, arguably, it might imply the possibility that when sojourners get more used to their host environment or are not compelled to frequently communicate with local people, their language development may slow. As some studies suggest, longer duration has no necessary correlation with language development or sojourners' willingness to communicate, interact or adjust to their new environment (Hamad & Lee, 2013; Rees & Klapper, 2007). Additionally, the findings of Yu's (2010) study on foreign students in Chinese programmes in China indicate that there is a negative link between SAP duration and academic adaptation because sojourners tend to communicate or interact less with the host environment. They might, as was discussed above, be more settled and used to the host environment, have less mandatory interaction with it, or become demotivated or discouraged by personal or other potential reasons (e.g. laziness, discrimination, etc.) from having more interactions.

In this case, it is arguable that there is no fixed attached outcome related to shorter or longer durations of SAPs, and it is hard and unreasonable to judge which is better. The quality of interactions that sojourners have with the host environment are arguably more crucial in their acculturation and development. However, as Leong and Ward (2000) suggest, longer SAPs provide more time and opportunities to deal with the acculturation demands associated with the new environment. That is to say, even when the sojourner passively interacts with the host environment, the longer he/she stays, the more contact, either consciously or subconsciously, he/she is likely to have.

Pre-departure readiness

Recent research suggests that a successful SAP involves more than simply sending student sojourners to a reputable host university; more pre-departure support is required. "[C]areful preparation and orientation" (Carlson et al., 1990, p.121) regarding strategic information and skills can help lessen the shock student sojourners experience when they encounter challenges such as different lifestyle, teaching or learning approaches, etc. and help ensure that these factors will not "impede" (ibid) their learning in the host environment. Helpful pre-departure support might enable sojourners to make the most of their experiences abroad and gain their desired study abroad outcomes (e.g. linguistic proficiency) (Hoff & Paige, 2008). Bacon (2002) argues the importance of pre-departure preparation based on her case study of a British student in Mexico because "mere competence in an area such as being fluent in a language is not sufficient to guarantee success" (p. 645) in one's sojourn and

acculturation experiences. Arguably, more support such as better orientation and more practical information (e.g. how to open a bank account, supportive contact for emergencies, etc.) can arguably help increase student sojourners' pre-departure readiness and help them better enjoy their experiences abroad.

Pre-departure preparation can cover different aspects. Holmes et al. (2015) found in their study of 20 ERASMUS students that concerns regarding linguistic proficiency and how to successfully adapt to the new academic environment were repeatedly raised by their participants. The negotiation between student sojourners' own identities and the others' (i.e. the new society's identity) also increases the requirement for preparation around interculturality (Holmes et al., 2015). Expectations should also be discussed with sojourners prior to their experiences abroad. Student sojourners are likely to construct an "imagined self" (Penman & Ratz, 2015, p.51) for their study abroad period. They might imagine themselves gaining dramatic linguistic proficiency and academic development, or a large number of strong intercultural friendship ties, for example. However, it is arguable that a lack of information on the new environment may cause false expectations and generate anxiety or dampen the sojourner's feeling of elation when they are actually in the new environment because of the mismatch between their expectations and reality (Penman & Ratz, 2015). The larger gap between their expectations and their real-life experiences is, the more disappointed or demotivated they might become.

Thus, gathering and exploring sufficient sources and information on the host environment is crucial and beneficial for student sojourners. However, the accuracy of their information sources is vital in allowing sojourners to generate reasonable expectations for their experiences abroad; finding unreliable information can increase false expectations, leading to anxiety and disappointment. Additionally, scholars argue that although there are various pre-departure orientations and models, limited research has examined the selection and combination of both practical and pragmatic preparation (e.g. assembling documents for visa application, opening bank account in the new country, etc.) and intercultural training (e.g. intercultural understanding and interaction between the home and host environment, or self and others, etc.); more research on this theme is required (Morgan, 2012; Penman & Ratz, 2015).

2.2.2.2 Personal factors

Language

Language plays a distinct role in student sojourners' acculturation experiences as it is both the 'target' for learning and interactions during sojourns, and also the 'product' based on which an element of the success of an SAP is measured. It is also an important 'tool' or "mediator" (Cherednichenko, 2009, p.29) through which sojourners could achieve learning or even assimilate new norms in the new environment. Although many students, parents and HEIs expect and believe that language proficiency is one of the major gains of participating in an SAP, studies indicate that language difficulty is still a primary source of both academic and sociocultural stress that sojourners might encounter during their education abroad experiences (Bastien et al., 2018; Beaven & Spencer-Oatey, 2016; Church, 1982; Conner & Roberts, 2015; Savicki et al., 2013). In their study, Beaven and Spencer-Oatey (2016) claim that the language barrier causes the "inability to 'be herself'" (p.358) for a particular participant who felt unnatural when expressing herself in a foreign language. Academically, language difficulty is also likely to cause stress and anxiety in understanding teachers and peer students, who may not always understand student sojourners' language difficulties or may be intolerant of them intervening in discussions (Beaven & Spencer-Oatey, 2016; Savicki et al., 2013). This situation can arguably make student sojourners an even more silent image (i.e. those who do not talk much) to local teachers and students because they might be afraid of making mistakes or being laughed at. In addition, the difficulties associated specifically with academic language are likely to raise the barrier for student sojourners as they try to take notes or complete coursework (e.g. assignments, presentations, etc.) (Gebhard, 2012; Savicki et al., 2013). On the other hand, language difficulty also poses challenges to student sojourners' social interactions with local people, and scholars also claim that there is a correlation between language proficiency and social support. For instance, the better linguistic proficiency sojourners acquire, the greater social support they are likely to receive, and vice versa. (Bastien et al., 2018; Church, 1982; Conner & Roberts, 2015). This is because language proficiency is likely to have a reciprocal relationship with social interaction and support; i.e. better language proficiency increases student sojourners' confidence and willingness to communicate in the local community, and it promotes greater participation (Church, 1982). In turn, greater engagement in the local community is likely to help improve student sojourners' language proficiency when providing social support to them, both practically and emotionally.

Intercultural competence

Intercultural competence, or intercultural proficiency, is another key element identified by scholars exploring intervention (e.g. teaching and learning in pre-departure preparation, during sojourn instructions, etc.) and assessment. Although there is no consensus on its definition (Deardorff, 2006), it broadly refers to the cognitive, psychological and behavioural skills that "enable people to work well with, respond effectively to, and be supportive of people in cross-cultural settings" (American Academy of Family Physicians, 2008; cited in Clarke III et al., 2009, p.174). It is regarded as an important influential factor as well as an expected benefit of SAPs. Primarily, it comprises four major elements: a) global mindedness, b) intercultural communication, c) openness to diversity, and d) intercultural sensitivity for students in various disciplines and SAPs.

First, global mindedness is defined as "a worldview in which one sees oneself as connected to the world community and feels a sense of responsibility to its members" (Hett, 1993, p.89; cited in Clarke III et al., 2009). In other words, it refers to how student sojourners value and view cultural differences from a global perspective rather than only from the perspective of their home or host culture. Sojourners with global mindedness, as Douglas and Jones-Rikkers (2001) claim, are likely to recognise, appreciate and value the differences between their own culture and others. Since global mindedness can facilitate sojourners to critically view, analyse and compare cultural differences and learn from each other, it might also reduce their prejudices toward certain cultures or cultural norms. It might then lead to more effective interactions when they sojourn to a new environment. For example, if a sojourner is global-minded, he/she might be able to identify both the strengths and drawbacks of his/her own and host culture, and this reflection could arguably facilitate his/her willingness to learn from others to arrive at a better way. Thus, global mindedness is likely to be a crucial facilitator of sojourners' acculturation but, notably, also an important benefit. Studies indicate that SAPs serve as a positive and effective mechanism for developing student sojourners' global mindedness; they are likely to be more global minded than those who only study in their home country, as they gain awareness of both cultural and global perspectives, and ultimately become more tolerant (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Douglas & Jones-Rikkers, 2001; Kehl & Morris, 2008; Smith & Yang, 2017). Arguably, the first-hand contact with a different culture that SAPs provide can facilitate meaningful learning and development opportunities.

Secondly, according to Clarke III et al., (2009), in order to effectively communicate in an intercultural environment, it is crucial for student sojourners to possess certain knowledge and understandings of the differences in communication between cultures and the ability to

deal with and apply these differences in interactions successfully. While these knowledge, understandings, skills and abilities could be the 'tools' for sojourners to build connections and interactions with people in the host environment, they might also be the 'outcomes' of the interactions during sojourns. As Williams's (2005) study supports, after participating in SAPs, student sojourners are likely to have better intercultural communication skills than their peers who study at home HEIs. However, her study also indicates that the exposure to the new environment is not the only factor in intercultural communication development; the exposure to different cultures is also influential, even if students do not sojourn to the new environment. Through exposure to a different culture through intercultural relationships (e.g. making friends with people from a different culture), cultural courses or activities, etc., students' intercultural communication skills are also found to be proportionally influenced (ibid). Given this, it is arguable that both student sojourners and their home and host HEIs should pay more attention to the actual interaction and engagement student sojourners have in the new environment, since the physical exposure of being abroad per se does not guarantee their intercultural communication development (ibid).

Openness to diversity can be understood as the "ability to embrace people from every economic status, ethnicity, creed, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, gender, age, disability, or social background" (Clarke III et al., 2009, p.175). Sojourning experience has been identified as an important predictor of the development of one's openness to diversity; some studies indicate that student sojourners in SAPs become more tolerant, more respectful and accepting of different cultural symbol and traditions, and more willing to embrace the differences in the host environment (Clarke III et al., 2009; Conner & Roberts, 2015). In turn, it can arguably be expected that students who are more open to the cultural differences are likely to have better interactions with the local people and culture, since they are more tolerant of and interested in cultural differences and are willing to try different and new things.

The last element of intercultural competence that has attracted interest during the past three decades of scholarship on the SAP context is intercultural sensitivity (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Black & Duhon, 2006; Gaia, 2015). Intercultural sensitivity is defined as "the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences" (Hammer et al., 2003, p.422) so that sojourners can respond to and embrace cultural differences. This characteristic might enable them to live and work more effectively in a different cultural environment (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992). Likewise, student sojourners in SAPs are believed to gain better intercultural sensitivity skills (e.g. intercultural awareness and understanding), as well as

self-confidence (Black & Duhon, 2006; Williams, 2005). Also, these intercultural sensitivity skills are likely to facilitate student sojourners' understandings of and adjustment to different cultures (Bennett, 2004). Additionally, with their immersion in and exposure to cultural differences in daily practice, students in SAPs are reported to have developed much better sensitivity to cultural differences than those who have not studied abroad (Anderson & Lawton, 2011; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Clarke III et al., 2009; Jackson, 2011). Moreover, the correlation between duration of SAP and development of intercultural sensitivity has also been investigated by many scholars. Both short-term (Anderson et al., 2006; Gaia, 2015) and long-term SAPs have been found to be positively correlated with the development of student sojourners' intercultural sensitivity. However, some scholars argue that longer-term SAPs are likely to have a better influence on the development of intercultural sensitivity (Dwyer, 2004; Kehl & Morris, 2008; Medina-López-Portillo, 2004).

However, Dervin and Härkönen (2018) warn that it might be somewhat "naïve" (p.55) to regard intercultural learning as inherently embedded in study abroad experiences. Arguably, sojourners' actual efforts in active interactions and engagement in new environment are more crucial to the development of their intercultural competence. For example, as was mentioned previously, if a sojourner shares classes and accommodation only with his/her co-nationals and other international students, limiting opportunities to interact with local students, and he/she does not proactively seek learning and interaction opportunities, he/she might gain less in terms of intercultural competence development. As Vande Berg et al. (2009) support, mere physical immersion in the new environment is not sufficient for student sojourners to develop their intercultural competence; more intervention strategies, cultural mentoring and instructions are arguably pivotal to their intercultural learning and acculturation experiences. Thus, further investigation of the role of sojourners' actual interactions and engagement in their intercultural competence development is needed.

Affect

Affect refers to "various forms of emotion, feelings, and moods" which "[focus] on the emotional aspects of the human experience" (Savicki, 2013, p.131). Acculturation stress (i.e. negative affect stimulated during acculturation) is a key affective problem in students' sojourns (Berry, 2005, Savicki, 2013) since they encounter various changes and differences in an unfamiliar environment. Acculturative stresses such as alienation, anxiety, homesickness, or stronger psychological distresses such as hostility and depression are also claimed to be embedded in student sojourners' acculturation experiences (Savicki, 2013).

Although SAPs hold a relatively shorter duration than degree programmes or other circumstances (e.g. immigration), Elliot et al. (2016a) claim that life in host country includes both amusement and challenges. Since student sojourners have less time to develop strong social support in the host society due to their transient presence, this influential acculturative stress might arguably have a crucial impact on student sojourners' daily lives as well as their academic performance. For example, acculturative stress has been found to be negative correlated with the affective adjustment; in other words, the more acculturative stress student sojourners experience, the worse affective/emotional adjustment they are likely to have (Bastien et al., 2018). Acculturative stress can arguably come from both student sojourners themselves and during the interaction with the new environment. Similar to the aforementioned 'imagined self', Chen et al. (2018) claim that student sojourners often hold high expectations of a successful acculturation experiences, and this might be converted into stress, anxiety or even depression if it is not achieved. For instance, sojourners might expect to achieve great linguistic development and become able to speak the host language as fluently as native people. When they realise this expectation is too high, stresses like anxiety and loss of confidence might arise, demotivating them from having further communications and interactions with local people and using the target language. On the other hand, studies indicate that adapting to and interacting with a new culture and environment also bring stress to student sojourners (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). The absence of familiar people, surroundings, norms and behaviours can negatively affect student sojourners' physical, behavioural and psychological wellbeing, which leads to various levels of homesickness and adjustment difficulties (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Additionally, Hetz et al. (2015) add that the fear of being away from home and missing out on what is happening with family and friends at home can also aggravate sojourners' affective problems and adjustment difficulties.

However, although learning new skills, thoughts and behaviours in new environment requires the suppression of some habitual, conceptual and cultural elements associated with home, this learning process might also help improve student sojourners' interaction ability and ease their acculturative stress (Savicki, 2013). Arguably, through the process of becoming familiar with the new environment, sojourners are likely to be provided with an importantly supportive pathway to learn and practice their linguistic and cultural knowledge and skills. Then, they may also gain positive affects like confidence from linguistic, academic, social or cultural improvement or achievement in the acculturation process.

Motivations and expectations

Motivations and expectations have been identified as influential factors for participation in SAPs and interactions when sojourning in a new environment. Motivation means the "desire or willingness to do something" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013, p.367), while expectation refers to "a belief that someone will or should achieve something" (ibid, p.198). Motivations and expectations can be regarded as the "input" (Cai et al., 2015, p.52) which drive student sojourners to take initiative in their decision to participate and in their acculturation experiences. Foreign language development has been identified as the first and most influential personal motive for and expectation in taking SAPs (Allen, 2010; Coleman, 1998). For foreign students (e.g. Americans, Europeans, Japanese) who decide to study abroad in China in particular, one of their primary purposes is to learn and improve their Chinese language skills (Dixon, 2013; Yu, 2010). However, it has also been suggested that the lack of confidence in the host language can also hinder student sojourners from participating in SAPs or actively interacting with local people while sojourning (Amani & Kim, 2017; Beerkens et al., 2016). For example, sojourners might find it difficult to follow the conversation or understand certain expressions/explanations, or they may be afraid of making mistakes and being laughed at. These problems are likely to raise a psychological barrier which demotivate them from interacting with local people.

Studies also indicate that intercultural, professional and personal development are key motivations and expectations in SAPs (Allen & Herron, 2003; Bandyopadhyay & Bandyopadhyay, 2015; Dwyer, 2004; Thirolf, 2014). For example, cultural immersion opportunities (e.g. eating local food, interacting and making friends with local people, gaining more local knowledge) in SAPs are appealing for students (Allen & Herron, 2003; Bandyopadhyay & Bandyopadhyay, 2015). However, Amani and Kim (2017) point out that the fear of discrimination in the host society is likely to demotivate students from participating in SAPs since it might trigger anxiety about their security while abroad. Also, Beerkens et al. (2016) found in their study that students in shorter-term SAPs are likely to be less driven by the host universities' reputation or immediate career effect, given the short duration of their stay. However, opportunities to experience something potentially relevant to their future career choices or plans are argued to be important considerations in sojourners' motivations for and expectations of SAP participation (Dwyer, 2004; Thirolf, 2014). Additionally, personal growth acts as both an expectation and a key outcome from participating in SAPs; skills such as leadership, problem-solving, coping with unfamiliarity, as well as traits like responsibility and maturity have been identified by scholars (Bandyopadhyay & Bandyopadhyay, 2015; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Lindsey, 2005).

Since one crucial challenge in sojourning abroad in SAPs might be sojourners having to live in an unfamiliar environment without family and friends accompanying them, they might be compelled to take more responsibility for themselves. Despite the new friends they might make, their personal abilities and skills such as independence, problem-solving skills, etc. are likely to be developed during the process of sojourning in new environment. Moreover, other influential personal factors regarding students' motivations and expectations have also been indicated by scholars, such as previous travel or sojourn experience, anxiety about travel and leaving home, or simply for the sake of taking a holiday-style break that will hopefully have other benefits (Anderson & Lawton, 2015; Bandyopadhyay & Bandyopadhyay, 2015; Cai et al., 2015; Lewin, 2009; Stroud, 2010). Some students may even view SAPs as a chance to escape from setbacks in their current life (Cai et al., 2015).

Influences from others such as family, friends and institutions are also likely to be important in sojourners' motivations for and expectations of SAP participation. Suggestions and support from family and friends are regarded as important social factors (Amani & Kim, 2017; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Word-of-mouth referral from friends and family acts positively in SAP promotion, as student sojourners with family and friends who have travelled or studied abroad or even lived in host destinations are likely to be encouraged to participate in SAPs (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Family support in relation to finance is also influential in students' decision-making (Amani & Kim, 2017) since sojourners need money to travel to and stay in the host countries/regions. Additionally, studying abroad through SAPs means HEIs play an important role in students' decision-making. Key institutional factors have been identified as faculty encouragement, concerns related to credit transfer and delayed graduation, or complicated application processes (Amani & Kim, 2017; Bandyopadhyay & Bandyopadhyay, 2015; Beerkens et al., 2016). As discussed in programme factors, SAPs are opportunities to study abroad as part of students' degree programmes at their home HEIs, so whether this experience will impact their formal degree education is important for sojourners' motivations for SAP participation. Also, participating in SAPs might involve many steps, such as SAP applications, visa applications, etc., which are all trivial, complex and time-consuming. Then, as was mentioned above, financial support is important in sojourners' motivations. Financial cost has been highlighted as a motivation to participate in SAPs and is a major reason for the higher participation rates in shorter-term SAPs (Bandyopadhyay & Bandyopadhyay, 2015), which are likely to cost less than longer-term SAPs.

Motivations and expectations are likely to not only influence students' SAP participation but also their actual acculturation experiences in the host environment. As Dervin (2009) claims, student sojourners in SAPs might be under great pressure from themselves, their families, friends or home universities to integrate with local people and gain greatly improved skills and intercultural relationships. With such pressure and expectations, they are more likely to deliberately avoid contact with their co-nationals in the host country and try to meet local people to practise the host language. Also, they may feel ashamed if they do not achieve their expectations, e.g. making many local friends. Notably, Engle and Engle (2003) warn that some HEIs evaluate SAPs merely based on the number of participants rather than the quality of the programmes or the actual gains student sojourners get from their education abroad experiences. Seemingly, there is still a need to better understand the gap between student sojourners' expectations and their actual experiences, which might provide useful guidance and information on SAP design and support.

2.2.2.3 Environmental factors

Culture shock and cultural distance

The acculturation experience in a new society environment is likely to be accompanied by culture shock. 'Culture shock' was first proposed by Oberg (1960) as "the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (p.142), and it might last from days or weeks to months or even throughout one's whole sojourn depending on individual circumstances. 'Culture shock' might be seen in one of two ways: either as person-dependant – being felt by the person – or environment-dependant – being triggered by the change of crucial environmental factors (i.e. 'familiar signs and symbols'). Based upon Oberg's definition, it is arguable that changes in one's environment (e.g. how to greet people, important dates as holidays, daily meals, etc.) are more likely to be the prerequisites for the occurrence of 'culture shock' which is felt by the sojourner. Hofstede et al. (2010) echo the importance of these signs and symbols from the environment with their definition of culture as a "mental programme" (p.5), which refers to all the norms in daily life that sojourners are accustomed to. When they acculturate in a new environment, sojourners are compelled to learn a new 'mental programme' in order to survive, and the differences and conflicts between these two 'mental programmes' are likely to bring about culture shock. Thus, when student sojourners travel to a new environment in which their familiar signs and symbols have been replaced by new and unfamiliar ones, as Oberg (1960) claims, they are "like a fish out of water" (p.142). They might often feel shocked, frustrated and anxious due

to the discomfort caused by the differences between his/her home culture and the new culture. Consequently, student sojourners may become reluctant or even reject interactions with the new environment. One's recognition of his/her home culture, or "regression" Oberg (1960, p.142) calls it, might be increased, which may make student sojourners forget the difficulties and problems they have at home and only remember the good points. Some sojourners might even wish for a trip back home (Oberg, 1960) to escape from the new environment. A number of studies support the idea that student sojourners are found to experience trouble, difficulties, discomfort, anxiety, confusion, disorientation and feelings of "strangeness" (Gill, 2007, p.171) when adjusting to the new environment because of culture shock (Church, 1982; Gill. 2007; Goldoni, 2015; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Pyvis & Chapman, 2005; Zhou et al., 2008). Consequently, they might tend to insulate themselves in a comfortable and protective environment (e.g. their co-national groups) (Goldoni, 2015).

Nevertheless, culture shock may not be completely negative in student sojourners' acculturation experiences. For example, in Conner and Roberts's (2015) study, some of their participants anticipated and were excited about the differences between their home and host cultures before their sojourns. The study's findings indicate that culture shock can be a positive pathway leading to cultural learning, which "took place throughout the study abroad programme and helped participants gain a better understanding of the culture" as well as improving "their personal confidence" (ibid, p.165). Culture shock does not only make student sojourners confront the different culture in the new environment, but arguably provides an opportunity for them to reflect on their own culture, which they may have taken for granted as "just the way things are" (Montuori & Fahim, 2004, p.245; Elliot et al., 2016c).

On the other hand, scholars argue that the degree of culture shock and the sociocultural adjustment in student sojourners' acculturation experiences are often greatly influenced by the cultural distance between their home and host cultures (Belford, 2017; Fritz et al., 2008; Li & Gasser, 2005; Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). According to Babiker et al. (1980), cultural distance refers to "the distance between the two cultures and the consequent degree of alienation and estrangement" (p.109), which can be found in many aspects in daily life, such as natural environment, language, clothing, food, etc. Belford (2017) argues that even some similar elements can be interpreted differently and have different given meanings in the host culture, in which case student sojourners have to "disapprove, accept or change their beliefs" (p.506); that is an example of the 'learning, relearning, and unlearning' process involved in acculturation (Elliot et al., 2016b). This process might make the acculturation even more difficult and aggravate student sojourners'

feelings of alienness. Arguably, the larger the distance is between the two cultures, the more difficult student sojourners' acculturation is likely to be, as with the cultural distance between Asian and Western countries. For example, Li and Gasser (2005) found that Asian students studying in the U.S. have more difficulties adjusting to the new culture than European students because of the larger distance between Asian cultures and American culture. A similar gap can be assumed to exist between Chinese and British cultures, which can be understood as a typical Asian culture and a Western culture respectively. Although fewer studies have been conducted on British student sojourners' acculturation experiences in China, a number of studies have been undertaken on Chinese international students' experiences in the UK (e.g. postgraduates), which support the immense culture shock and large cultural distance Chinese international students encounter in the UK (Bordovskaia et al., 2018; Gao, 2011; Gu, 2009; Gu & Maley, 2008; Gu et al., 2010; McMahon, 2011; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006).

When student sojourners (either Chinese or British) travel to the host country through SAPs, the primary interactions they might have are within academic and social environments (i.e. host universities and societies). Their relationships and interactions with teachers as well as with local people are expected to be crucial to their acculturation experiences. Thus, two major indicators of culture shock and cultural distance are the 'power distance' and 'individualism vs. collectivism' (Hofstede et al., 2010), which will be discussed in the following subsections. Notably, the cultural dimensions developed by Hofstede are disputed. Scholars criticise Hofstede's work, pointing out that it was conducted within business context, focusing on one company in particular, and arguing that it tends to simply regard culture as equalling each entire nation as the best unit for investigation, ignoring ethnic, regional, or individual differences, etc. (e.g. Dasli & Díaz, 2017; Dervin, 2017; Jones, 2007; McSweeney, 2002; Nasif et al., 1991; Søndergaard, 1994). Nonetheless, his work can still offer valuable insights on the dynamics of different cultures (Jones, 2007), which might arguably facilitate understandings in the academic context as well (Elliot & Kobayashi, 2018).

Power distance

According to Hofstede et al. (2010), power distance can be defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (p.61). Institutions are understood as the "basic elements of society" (ibid) (e.g. school, community) while organisations refer to people's

affiliations. In a large-power-distance situation (as in China), the education system is usually teacher-centred, meaning students must treat their teachers with respect and can only speak up in class with permission, while in a small-power-distance situation (as in the UK), the education process is more student-centred, and the relationship between students and teachers is more equal (Hofstede et al., 2010, p.72). Kinginger (2013) and Goldoni (2015) both echo that student sojourners' identities (e.g. nationality, race) and behaviours can highly influence their acculturation experiences, especially their learning experiences and outcomes. This is because ideas and behaviours from their home cultural identities are likely to be "deeply embedded" (Elliot et al., 2016b, p.1183) and provide invisible 'instructions' for their learning and interactions, even in a new physical and cultural environment. Li's (2005) study on cultural beliefs and learning orientations for Chinese and Western students provides further explanations. In her study, Chinese students are more "virtue oriented" (p.191). This indicates the emphases on morality and social contributions in Chinese culture, and virtues such as perseverance, diligence. Chinese students with this cultural belief and learning orientation often respect holders of knowledge and authorities (i.e. teachers), accept and follow rote learning and are more willing to endure hardship in learning. On the other hand, in the "mind oriented" (ibid) Western model, understanding of the world and ultimate achievement of personal goals are more important. Challenging and questioning knowledge and authorities are often encouraged because communication, mutual understanding and interactions are crucial to Western cultural beliefs around learning. Western students with this orientation might pay more attention to their personal curiosity, insight and creativity.

These different learning norms can arguably help understand why student sojourners often struggle when adjusting in a new HEI, especially when there is a large power distance between the student sojourner's home and host cultures. For instance, a Chinese student who has been taught to respect professors and follow the teacher's instructions and is used to getting answers from the teacher may have difficulty adjusting when he/she is encouraged to think critically and argue with professors. However, because British student sojourners' experiences in Asian countries are underexplored in the literature, their situation is not fully understood. Nonetheless, I hypothesise that there are likely to be similarities but also differences between Chinese and British student sojourners' experiences, as will be discussed when the findings are presented in Chapters Five and Six.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

Individualism and collectivism have long been regarded as another key difference between Eastern (e.g. Chinese) and Western (e.g. British) cultures. Hofstede et al. (2010) define individualism as a worldview in which "the interest of the individual prevails over the interests of the group" and the collectivism as being where "the interest of the group prevails over the interest of the individual" (pp.90-91). Collectivists (e.g. Chinese people) are more likely to learn to think about "we" as a group instead of "I" as an individual, the importance of harmony, and they may feel anxious speaking up in an unfamiliar group; on the other hand, individualists (e.g. British people) are more likely to care more about "I" and the importance of open discussion if different opinions come up (Hofstede et al., 2010). In addition, Li (2005) argues that the purposes of education in individualist and collectivist societies are perceived differently, and in both cases, the values are deeply rooted in people's ways of thinking and behaving. Following a collectivist (i.e. 'virtue') orientation, Chinese education values the mastery of learning materials and social contributions, while the individualist (i.e. 'mind') orientated system (e.g. British education) pays more attention to personal aspects (ibid). For example, Chinese students might be taught to consider the future contribution to society they could make in their education, whilst British students might be encouraged to think more about their personal interests and goals. Consequently, students from collectivist cultures often find it difficult to adjust from a structured teacher-centred learning environment with regular checks on their progress and mental health, to a looser-structured and student-centred one with less assistance from teachers unless asked by students (Sato & Hodge, 2015; Turner, 2006).

This is not to suggest that all Chinese students would give up their personal interests and goals for the sake of 'social contributions' or that British students care nothing about society. As was mentioned above, reducing individuals to national characteristics has been criticised. Arguably, culture is more likely to have a 'liquid' than a 'solid' nature, which means it changes with society, crossing time, generations, and also distance through population mobility between countries within the globalised and internationalised context. The traditional understanding of individualism and collectivism is likely to be challenged. For example, Shi's (2006) study supports my idea, demonstrating that through the Chinese young generation's (i.e. middle-school students) attitudes and views toward English language and culture learning, personal interests such as self-improvement seem to be their dominant learning purposes. Seemingly, with the burgeoning economic and cultural development in modern China, the traditional Confucian collectivist learning culture is likely to evolve with some potential modern individualistic features (ibid). Additionally, individual

differences are arguably important when discussing cultural differences, since even two students from the same family may have different ways of thinking and behaving. However, the discussion of collectivism and individualism primarily attempts to intimate the difficulties sojourners might encounter when traveling to another environment with a different culture.

Intragroup and intergroup social contact and social support

Social contact and support have been widely studied and regarded as essential environmental factors influencing student sojourners' psychological, sociocultural and academic adjustment in their acculturation experiences in the host countries (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Bastien et al., 2018; Church, 1982; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Sojourning in a foreign country, with the absence of one's familiar environment, family and friends, is likely to make student sojourners feel lonely, homesick and isolated (Arthur, 2017). At the same time, language difficulties or cultural distance, as well as daily practical challenges (e.g. opening a bank account, etc.) and academic adjustment (e.g. different teaching and learning styles) can bring about stressful situations for student sojourners. They might often find themselves as "others" (Arthur, 2017, p.891), especially when they first arrive in the host country (Arthur, 2017; Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Salin, 2018). Hence, scholars suggest that the availability of social contact and support are crucial in student sojourners' acculturation experiences as they can make positive contributions (e.g. connectedness, closeness, help and companionship) when student sojourners are facing and coping with challenges and acculturative stress in an unfamiliar environment (Haslam et al., 2005; Lee & Robbins, 1995; Ng et al., 2018; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). With this in mind, Bochner et al. (1977) develop a functional model for understanding the friendship formation of student sojourners with three categories of friendships (or social contact and support): co-national orientation, host national orientation and other national orientation.

First, co-national orientation (or intragroup friendship) refers to contact between people from the same country or ethnic background, and it functions to affirm and maintain student sojourners' home culture identity (Berry, 1997; Bochner et al., 1977; Ng et al., 2018). While sojourning abroad, students often seek membership in and support from groups of their co-national peers (Bodycott, 2015), which can provide both cultural and emotional support (Maundeni, 2001). Particularly, student sojourners are more likely to feel comfortable when they are with those who share similar ethnic and cultural

backgrounds with them (Miyafusa & Godwyll, 2009). However, scholars also warn that intragroup friendship is likely to become a barrier and make its group members less willing to interact with the local environment (e.g. making friends with local students, adjusting to the local culture) (Church, 1982; Ward & Searle, 1991).

As has been discussed, host national orientation (i.e. making friends with local people) is one of the major motivations and expectations of many student sojourners who take part in SAPs. Studies indicate that the more intergroup contact (i.e. interaction with cross cultural and national groups) sojourners have with local students, the less lonely and homesick – and the more satisfied – they may become (Church, 1982; Hendrickson et al., 2011). Consequently, this makes it easier to adjust to the new environment with fewer difficulties and more gains in linguistic proficiency and academic development (Bochner et al., 1977; Dewey et al., 2013; Fraser, 2002; Ward & Kennedy, 1993), as well as emotional support (Li & Gasser, 2005). Additionally, Goldoni (2015) and Fraser (2002) claim that finding local boyfriends/girlfriends or forming strong friendships with local people and taking part in communities (e.g. basketball teams) can facilitate student sojourners to build wider intergroup contact, resulting in more social support in return. Also, although contact with intergroup people may push student sojourners out of their intragroup comfort zone, as Conner and Roberts (2015) argue, it is also a good way to make them adjust to the new environment quickly and gain more social support. However, Byram and Feng (2006) also argue that access to and contact with local students are, in fact, not easy and student sojourners often find themselves isolated. As has been mentioned, sojourners might be arranged in designated classes and accommodation where their interactions with local students are limited. This, arguably, might require sojourners to be more initiative and proactive in looking for interaction opportunities.

The last category of orientation is other national orientation, which is another type of intergroup friendship. It refers to the contact and friendship between student sojourners and people from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds which are neither similar to the student sojourners' nor to the host culture's. This kind of intergroup friendship is often built upon the empathy between both student sojourners and their other national friends, both of whom are strangers in an unfamiliar country; their similar experiences or feelings in the host country are likely to bring them together. For example, some student sojourners may feel self-conscious or even embarrassed by their accent in the native environment and communicating with other nationals who may face the same situation

can help alleviate their negative feelings (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Seemingly, the social support, either from co-national, host-national or other international groups, suggests that there are various opportunities to interact with people in new environment. Arguably, the more open and proactive sojourners are, the more interaction opportunities they might have, and the more social support they are likely to receive for their acculturation.

Host society attitudes

Host receptivity is an important environmental factor which is defined as "the natives' openness towards newcomers and the willingness to accommodate newcomers with opportunities to participate in local social communication processes" (Kim, 2001, p.148). From the student sojourners' perspective, it can refer to the accessibility of the natives in the local community or host society; the lower the host receptivity is, the more constraints student sojourners may experience (Kim, 2001). Arguably, if the host society has a relatively negative attitude towards student sojourners, as Ward and Kennedy (1993) warn, their acculturation experiences can result in negative ones as well. Beaven and Spencer-Oatey (2016) explain that because local students already have their own connections with their families, friends and other groups, it becomes less necessary for them to actively interact with student sojourners, who are only staying temporarily and often have problems with linguistic communication. Also, student sojourners may be viewed as strangers (or others) in social interactions and academic achievement, so they are more likely to experience isolation or discrimination in academic or social interactions, which may result in more acculturation stress (Arthur, 2017; Marginson, 2012; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007).

In addition, host conformity pressure, which means the "conscious or unconscious pressure" (Kim, 2001, p.152) on sojourners to change or adjust their original cultural norms to the host culture's, has been identified as another challenge student sojourners are likely to encounter during their acculturation experiences. Host conformity pressure may come from, for example, local dialect (which is different from what the foreign language student sojourners have learnt in the classroom), cultural thoughts, behaviours. However, the interactions between student sojourners and their host society and the influence of their host society's attitudes on their acculturation experiences have received limited academic attention.

Use of technology and social media

Six decades ago, Oberg (1960) examined the negative influences on student sojourners' psychological and emotional wellbeing resulting from the loss of familiar symbols and signs. However, the development of technology and social media in the modern world is likely to change this situation. As Montgomery (2010) argues, within the modern world and with technological communication, geographical distance is not an insurmountable barrier; the use of internet, email and mobile phones have become important means to communicate with both home and host people during student sojourners' education abroad experiences. Similarly, Costello (2015) states that "wherever these students travel, their technologies follow" (p.51). For example, the use of technology and social media (e.g. Facebook, WeChat) might enhance the interactions with both student sojourners' family and friends at home, as well as with local friends. Then, connections with family and friends at home can serve as an emotional support for student sojourners, easing their fear and anxiety about missing out on their home society, while the interactions with local people online help student sojourners improve their foreign language proficiency (Back, 2013; Hetz et al., 2015). Hetz et al. (2015) suggest that even before meeting in person, social media can serve as a useful tool for student sojourners to build social contact with each other, sharing information related to their forthcoming sojourns (e.g. module selection).

However, although these social media assist in providing sojourners emotional comfort and alleviating their acculturative stress (e.g. loneliness), scholars also warn of the potential negative influences of the use of technology and social media. Student sojourners who rely heavily on online contact with family and friends at home may become more reluctant to learn about the host culture and passive in interactions with local people, resulting in negative influences on student sojourners' psychological wellbeing, academic performance and cultural immersion (Goldoni, 2015; Huesca, 2013; Li et al., 2013; Li et al., 2019). According to Goertler (2015), communication with family and friends at home or only consuming entertainment in one's mother tongue can become a potential threat to student sojourners' new language learning, especially for those who study foreign languages. Also, by watching or listening to Western television programmes or other entertainment forms, although sojourners (i.e. Chinese students) generate information about the host culture and environment, some informed or even stereotypical views about Western life and people might be formed (Li, 2009). These views might facilitate student sojourners' acculturation experiences with intercultural knowledge about the host environment, but arguably, it can also cause culture shock when student sojourners find that what they encounter in real life in the host environment is different from what they have learnt through media.

2.3 Foreign Language Learners in Study Abroad Programmes

Studying abroad in the country of the target language and culture is expected to be a particularly meaningful experience for foreign language learners, as a "short cut to linguistic fluency and cross-cultural understanding" (Wilkinson, 1998, p.23). Apart from the programme, personal and environmental factors discussed above for student sojourners from multiple disciplines, studies on foreign language learners in SAPs particularly focus on three main aspects: linguistic development, intercultural communicative competence and identity (Alred & Byram, 2002; 2006; Byram, 1997; Badwan, 2017; Dewey et al., 2013; Du, 2015; Ife, 2000; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2011; 2013; Vande Berg, 2009). The following subsections will present each of these three aspects, after which Section 2.4 will identify the gaps left by the previous research.

2.3.1 Linguistic development

Linguistic development has long been identified and investigated as one of the major outcomes for foreign language learners in SAPs. Specific gains have been found in areas such as oral fluency, listening, writing, vocabulary, grammar, confidence and willingness to communicate, as well as overall proficiency in both formal and informal use (Cai et al, 2013; Cubillos et al., 2008; Dewey et al., 2012; Ife, 2000; Jackson 2008; Martinsen et al., 2010; O'Brien et al., 2007; Rees & Klapper, 2007; Trenchs-Pareera, 2009; Yu, 2010; Vande Berg, 2009). However, studies comparing linguistic development achieved in study abroad contexts and learning at home contexts provide contradictory findings. Freed et al. (2004, cited in Yang, 2016) suggest that in terms of linguistic fluency, foreign language learners who learn at home by attending intensive language courses can outpace those who study abroad. On the other hand, Goldoni (2015) and Yang (2016) contend that the study abroad context provides foreign language learners more beneficial opportunities at linguistic development, arguing that they outperform their peers who learn at home. Notably, although foreign language student sojourners have been learning the target language and culture, they still report their serious linguistic challenges encountered while abroad (e.g. fully expressing themselves), especially the first time they sojourn abroad (Conroy & Taggart, 2016; Trenchs-Parera, 2009). Scholars suggest that foreign language student sojourners still feel linguistic insecurity which may result in language anxiety towards interactions while abroad (Allen & Herron, 2003; Trenchs-Parera, 2009). However, according to Allen and Herron (2003), after spending time in the target language and culture, student sojourners are likely

to become more confident and have decreased language anxiety, which is presented as an affective outcome of participating in SAPs.

Apart from the primary focus on the outcomes of language learning in study abroad contexts, more attention has also been paid to the actual process of language learning (i.e. language use) in foreign language student sojourners' education abroad experiences in the past two decades (Badwan, 2017; Byram & Feng, 2006; Dewaele, 2013; Ife, 2000; Vande Berg, 2009; Vande Berg et al., 2009; Wilkinson, 1998). Two aspects have been particularly focused on: 1) opportunities for language use, and 2) the (mis)match between what foreign language sojourners have learnt at home universities and what they encounter and use in real situations in the host countries.

Firstly, even though foreign language student sojourners in SAPs are physically immersed in the target language and culture, studies indicate that they often use the target language in their daily social interactions less than they anticipated (Ife, 2000; Vande Berg, 2009; Vande Berg et al., 2009; Wilkinson, 1998). In her study of 135 British students of Modern Foreign Languages in Residence Abroad Programmes (within European countries), Ife (2000), who contents that language learning mainly "take[s] place in naturalistic conditions" (p.30) rather than language classrooms, argues that these student sojourners lack awareness of how to exploit opportunities to use their target languages and how to get input and interactions in daily life. She also contends that language development can be largely influenced by the opportunities to use the target languages these foreign language student sojourners have, and also mainly determined by their proactive efforts in seeking and capitalising on these opportunities (Ife, 2000). Vande Berg et al. (2009) echo these findings in their large-scale study comparing 1,159 U.S. students in 61 SAPs and a control group of 138 students at home universities.

However, studies strongly suggest that physical immersion in the target language and culture does not guarantee that foreign language learners learn better, but that conscious and deliberate efforts to discover opportunities and try to interact in the new environment are required (Alred & Byram, 2002; Kinginger, 2011; Meier & Daniels, 2013; Vande Berge et al., 2009). As Byram and Feng (2006) point out, access to local people is not always as easy as expected, and student sojourners often find themselves isolated; some of them might be in separate classes and accommodation, meaning they do not meet as many local students as they expect (Dervin, 2007). These studies arguably support the importance of proactively seeking opportunities to engage in social interactions, as well as taking advantage of the

services and support offered by host HEIs. Scholars suggest that if SAPs provide opportunities or requirements for foreign language student sojourners to use the target language with local people, they are more likely to benefit from the interactions and gain language development (Beaven et al., 2017; Cadd, 2012). Moreover, personalities (individual differences) have also been identified as playing an important role in seeking opportunities for language use, although studies have arrived at contradictory findings. Dewaele (2013) claims that extroverted personalities are more open to and active in seeking interaction opportunities, as they might be more talkative, giving them an advantage in language use and development over those who are more introverted. However, Ehrman (2008) argues that introverted personalities can achieve better linguistic development because they are more "logical and precise thinkers who are able to exercise judgement" (p.70). Arguably, this discrepancy is related to different ways of foreign language input; specifically, extroverted people are likely to gain more from social interactions with local people, while introverted people, although they may have fewer social interactions, are likely to improve their language proficiency through careful thinking and judgement during their limited interactions. Arguably, the study abroad context allows foreign language student sojourners to personalise their own pathways of language learning and use during their immersion in and interaction with the local environment, which is likely to be beneficial to their acculturation experiences.

On the other hand, although it remains under-studied, a few scholars have started comparing what foreign language student sojourners have learnt at home universities, and what they actually use and encounter in real life situations while sojourning abroad. Badwan (2017) argues that the idea of 'standard language' (standard English in her study) is "dangerous" (p.196) because it might mislead foreign language learners to expect that what they have learnt in classes will fully support their language use and interactions in host countries. She also describes language learning through textbooks and tests as being likely to provide "a bubble of a shiny, desired, and homogenous imagined community" (p.198) where language learners may imagine their fluent and successful interactions with native people based on what they have learnt in classrooms. If these foreign language student sojourners find the real-life situations in the host countries to be fundamentally different, acculturative and linguistic stress can arguably overwhelm them easily. For example, Chinese English learners may have been learning to speak and listen to standard British English (some of them may even put a lot of effort into learning Received Pronunciation), so when they come to Scotland and find that the local accent seems to be from a completely different planet, their confidence in their language proficiency is likely to get a hard hit. As Badwan (2017) argues, student

sojourners who travel across time as well as space are likely to become more vulnerable when shifting between what they have learnt in their home classrooms and the actual language use in the host environment. Thus, it is important to pay more attention to the gap between classroom language learning and actual language use in order to better support foreign language student sojourners' study abroad experiences.

2.3.2 Intercultural communicative competence

Byram (1997) defines intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as "the ability to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language" (p.71). It somewhat overlaps with the intercultural communication element of intercultural competence discussed above, but ICC has emerged as a crucial aspect in its own right for understanding and developing abilities and skills that support effective communication and interactions in intercultural contexts, which focuses more on language learning and use (López-Rocha & Vailes 2017). In Byram's (1997) view, successful language learning is not merely about one's ability to apply correct linguistic grammar, but also to use it socially in appropriate ways (i.e. to communicate); similarly, successful communication is not solely about the exchange of information, but also using the language to build and maintain relationships, mediate effective interactions between different cultures and develop communicative skills. In this sense, he suggests four key components of ICC: a) knowledge; b) attitudes; c) skills of interpretation, discovery and interaction; and d) critical cultural awareness (ibid).

Knowledge of student sojourners' own cultures, the host culture and how each culture is seen by people is one of the preconditions and key factors contributing to student sojourners' intercultural communication and adjustment while abroad, as well as their personal development (Alred & Byram, 2002; 2006). This can be general knowledge about cultural differences or specific, practical information related to students' own sojourns. For example, Palmer (2013) found that the more knowledge about spoken colloquial Arabic the student sojourners learn in the pre-departure training programme, the better they are likely to acculturate. Additionally, student sojourners in SAPs are found to become more knowledgeable about the target language and culture (e.g. greetings, behaviours, etc.) by participating in the culture itself (Almarza et al., 2015; Elola & Oskoz, 2008). The attitude of "relativising self and valuing other" (Byram, 1997, p.34) is the other key precondition for foreign language student sojourners. As was mentioned in the subsection on intercultural competence, student sojourners who are

open and sensitive to diverse cultures are likely to experience better exploration, appreciation and tolerance of cultural differences. Such an attitude is also found to have a positive correlation with foreign language use in social communication and interactions (Dewaele, 2013; Jackson, 2011); the more open and sensitive to cultural differences sojourners are, the more proactive and active they will be in attempting to communicate and interact, meaning they will gain more opportunities to learn and use the target language. Additionally, the 'transformative' study abroad experience might cause changes in foreign language sojourners' attitudes. As Elola and Oskoz (2008) claim, foreign language sojourners are likely to change their views toward themselves, their own culture or the target language and culture more easily, as well as developing deeper and clearer views on certain aspects of the target culture due to the changes. Arguably, the cultural differences associated with sojourning in the target language and culture present not only challenges, but also important opportunities to compare and learn the target language and culture in an authentic way (i.e. real-life context). With the sojourners developing progressively deeper and more realistic understandings of the target language and culture, as well as gaining first-hand experiences of cultural differences, these changes in attitudes might take place.

Thirdly, the skills of interpretation, discovery and interaction are necessary when acquiring linguistic and cultural knowledge through social interactions. The skill of interpretation refers to "the ability to interpret a document from one country for someone form another or identify relationships between documents from different countries" (Byram, 1997, p.37). It focuses on the linguistic expressions of student sojourners' "self" and the "other" they encounter in the new environment. The skill of discovery is "to recognise significant phenomena in a foreign environment and to elicit their meanings and connotations" (ibid, p.38), while the skill of interaction is to manage the constraints of time, different understandings, attitudes or other cultural differences during communication and interactions (ibid). In a comparison of study abroad students and at home students, students in SAPs are found to be able to better deal with misunderstandings when discovering new information (Elola & Oskoz, 2008), although the initial development of these skills is a key challenge that student sojourners need to overcome during their sojourn. For example, Almarza et al. (2015) examine two groups of students (British Spanish learners going to Spain and Spanish English learners coming to the UK) and report the sojourners' difficulties in identifying and dealing with cultural misunderstandings and even conflicts. Finally, critical cultural awareness is the "ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and

products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (Byram, 1997, p.63). Arguably, it can be understood as being somewhat similar to the concept of global mindedness in intercultural competence, but without an emphasis on global perspectives. Still, it argues for the importance of critically reflecting and comparing each culture sojourners encounter, viewing cultural differences in a more comprehensive way rather than being constrained by stereotypes. Elola and Oskoz (2008) state that critical cultural awareness does not ask student sojourners to change their values and behaviours completely, but to look back at their own culture when evaluating another one, which allows them to see familiar cultural norms with new eyes during their sojourns (Almarza et al., 2015). For instance, when a British learner of Chinese in China who possesses critical cultural awareness encounters large differences in learning (e.g. critical thinking and rote learning), he/she might reflect on both ways of learning rather than feeling uncomfortable and rejecting the new way of learning. In that way, he/she could identify both the advantages and disadvantages in not only the Chinese way but also in British way of learning, or even find similarities between the two different ways (e.g. the effort required).

With the competences discussed above, foreign language student sojourners are able to become "intercultural speakers" (Byram, 1997, p.38), who can understand and be aware of cultural differences critically and interact and communicate with people from other cultures effectively (Alred & Byram, 2002; Byram, 1997). By being 'intercultural speakers', they might be more capable to build relationships with and create or generate effective learning and interactions among not only the host-nationals but also people with other different cultural backgrounds. This competence in intercultural communication and interactions could support their professional and personal development during their sojourns. However, arguably, although Byram's theory focuses on ICC's contribution and application to foreign language teaching, it is also meaningful to foreign language student sojourners and HEIs in SAPs. The provided insights and guidance can arguably help sojourners be more prepared with certain knowledge and skills to better communicate with local people during their sojourns, as well as assist HEIs to develop better services and support for their student sojourners in SAPs.

2.3.3 Identity

In recent years, research on foreign language student sojourners has expanded from language learning to psychological aspects (i.e. identity) (e.g. Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2013). Identity can be defined as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2000, p.5). Within the education context, Gao (2011) contends that "learning is a process of becoming, or avoiding becoming a certain person" (p.288). Arguably, foreign language student sojourners' 'learning' and 'becoming' process might involve more intricacies and conflict, since this process contains two different languages and cultures (i.e. the home and target languages and cultures). For example, foreign language sojourners might have already shaped a conception of 'who they are' based on their home language and culture before learning the target language and culture. With their interest and increasing knowledge and skills in the target language and culture, they might undergo a "negotiation of differences" (Block, 2007, p.864) between their home and target languages and cultures. When they sojourn in the real context of the target language and culture, the negotiation (i.e. the process of discovering and understanding the differences between "the self and the other" (Goldoni, 2015, p.7) becomes more dominant. Since both the culture shock and the sojourners' strengthened understanding of the target language and culture might require them to undergo a necessary 'negotiation' of their identities, they might either develop a stronger 'home self' or become more of 'the host other'. These negotiations might further influence their thoughts, behaviours and attitudes when learning and interacting (i.e. foreign language exposure and use) in their new environment (Baker-Smemoe et al., 2014). Because their understandings of 'self and others' might affect how much effort they are willing to invest in, for example, opportunity seeking, active learning, interaction, acquisition of new symbols and other resources for thinking, communications and behaviours in new environment, which may impact their language use and proficiency development (Gallucci, 2014; Norton, 2000). For example, if a British learner of Chinese who holds a strong 'British' identity sojourns in China, despite being interested in the Chinese language and culture, he/she might feel reluctant to live according to the idea of 'when in [China], do as the [Chinese] do', meaning he/she may be less proactive in learning and interacting.

It is notable that the process of negotiation and reconstruction of identity can involve discomfort, ambivalence or anxiety. As Block (2007) claims, in student sojourners' familiar home environments, daily signs, symbols and their identities have been long taken for granted, so when they are exposed to an unfamiliar environment, those taken-for-granted worldviews can be challenged or even collapsed. For example, when a Chinese student who

is used to rote learning comes to the UK and is required to be critical in thinking and writing, he/she might get confused or even lost regarding how to think and write. However, it is arguable that the reconstruction of one's identity often follows the negotiation process, functioning as a facilitator for that person to better learn and adjust in the new environment, as well being as an outcome from their acculturation experiences. As Kinginger (2013) claims, this process is also beneficial in generating insights and capabilities such as intercultural awareness, multilingualism, empathy, etc. Additionally, Benson et al. (2013) argue that the negotiation and reconstruction of identity are often connected with student sojourners' expectations of their sojourn, or simply who the student sojourners would like to become in the new environment. Arguably, the more open to cultural differences sojourners are, the more information and the deeper understanding of both cultures they might generate to support the negotiation and reconstruction of their identities, and the less acculturative stress (e.g. confusion, anxiety) they may have.

Studies on this topic also support the significance of the negotiation of identity during foreign language student sojourners' acculturation experiences. In their comparison of British students in France and French students in England through YA Programmes, Alred and Byram (2006) claim that student sojourners' self-understanding and how they relate to and view their own selves, otherness, home and host environment are strongly affected. This leads to personal development (e.g. maturity) and noticeable changes in self-perception. Also, Gao (2011) suggests that Chinese English learners in the UK tend to have their Chinese national identities strengthened, and often display and affirm their Chinese national membership while abroad, which is likely to result in increased patriotism. For example, they might become more aware of their Chinese identities and feel they are representative of the Chinese people and culture, and thus pay more attention to their daily behaviours during sojourns. Likewise, in Du's (2015) study of 29 American undergraduates learning Mandarin Chinese in China in a one-term SAP, the findings indicate that the participants' identities as Americans were strengthened while abroad; consequently, they might better appreciate what they have at home, but also become homesick. The American students also report that their appearance makes their identity apparent; even though they wear similar clothes to Chinese people or speak quite fluent Chinese, they still hold the "foreigner identity" in China due to their physical appearance (Du, 2015, p.250).

Moreover, food as a crucial element in sojourners' daily lives has also been identified by a few studies as an important parameter in the process of negotiating identity (Ciliotta-Rubery, 2016; Conroy, 2016; O'Sullivan & Amirabdollahian, 2016; Taylor & Ali, 2017). Conroy

(2016) contends that food is not merely a trivial matter, but that the adjustment in dietary habits and dissatisfaction with the local food can arguably have negative influences on student sojourners' interaction and engagement in the new environment, as well as their language learning. Thus, it is not surprising that student sojourners tend to enjoy eating familiar food with their co-nationals, not only for fulfilling their taste, but also affirming their identities through their home countries' food (O'Sullivan & Amirabdollahian, 2016; Taylor & Ali, 2017). On the other hand, trying local food or adjusting to local dietary habits is regarded as a way of gaining a deeper understanding of the new environment and better acculturating; student sojourners may take this as an opportunity to engage with the local people and culture, and they may come to understand themselves and other people better through trying new food or learning new cooking skills (Ciliotta-Rubery, 2016; O'Sullivan & Amirabdollahian, 2016).

2.4 Gaps in the Literature and Resulting Research Questions

Based on the literature reviewed, a number of intertwined factors can be seen to play pivotal roles in (foreign language) student sojourners' acculturation experiences in SAPs. Over the past three decades, much research in this field has focused on examining the "product" (Wang, 2010, p.50) (i.e. benefits) of SAPs (e.g. linguistic development, intercultural competence, etc.), specific influential factors, or challenges related to different aspects (e.g. affect, social support, duration). (e.g. Allen & Herron, 2003; Byram, 1997; Cai et al., 2015; Dwyer, 2004; Goldoni, 2015; Kehl & Morris, 2008; O'Sullivan & Amirabdollahian, 2016). These examined factors help unpack the complexity and intricacies in (foreign language) student sojourners' study abroad experiences in SAPs, but they are somewhat fragmented. Some scholars argue for the significance of exploring the "process" (Wang, 2010, p.50) of sojourns and acculturation in SAPs (e.g. Alred & Byram, 2002; 2006; Beaven & Spencer-Oatey, 2016; Dervin, 2007; Dervin & Dirba, 2008; Doyle, 2009; Dewey et al., 2012; Meier & Daniels, 2013), particularly the process of how these fragmented or other potentially unknown factors interplay with each other and influence (foreign language) student sojourners' comprehensive experiences in SAPs. The exploration of dynamic interactions and relationships between these or other potentially influential but unknown factors might provide a "fuller picture" (Alred & Byram, 2006, p.211) of (foreign language) student sojourners' experiences abroad.

Various aspects, levels and contexts of the 'fuller picture' arguably need further research to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of sojourners' acculturation processes, for foreign language learners in particular. As has been mentioned, they might be motivated to more actively engage in learning and interactions in the host country because of their strong interest and formal experience (i.e. degree education) in language and culture learning, but they are also likely to be less motivated due to their 'liquid' role in SAPs (i.e. they only stay in host country for a certain, usually short, period). This potential discrepancy, as well as the gap between the language and culture they have learnt at home HEIs and the actual use in host countries, still needs further investigation and discussion, especially in countries with large cultural differences (e.g. China, the UK). Previous studies on language learners' 'fuller pictures' have mostly explored movement within Europe or from the UK to another English-speaking country (e.g. the US) (Alred & Byram, 2002; 2006; Ife, 2000; Mitchell, 2015; Rees & Klapper, 2007). However, with the rapid development of HE internationalisation, an increasing number of Asian HEIs (e.g. Chinese HEIs) are now part of various SAPs and partnerships. However, to date, international student sojourners' (e.g. British foreign language learners) experiences in the Chinese context remain under-studied (Cai et al., 2013; Yu, 2010). Additionally, although a number of studies have explored Chinese students' experiences in the UK, much less is known about Chinese foreign language learners' comprehensive acculturation experiences through SAPs in the UK.

As Gadamer (1966, p.12; cited in Zhang, 1992) reminds us, "it is the task of philosophy to discover what is common even in what is different" (p.xiv). I believe this is also the task for researchers in this current field. It is worthy of attention to investigate British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences in China as well as the comparison between their and their Chinese peers' (i.e. Chinese foreign language learners) experiences in the UK in order to offer a 'mirror image' of this phenomenon. Comparing these two cohorts and exploring the similarities and differences in programme, personal and environmental factors they might have or encounter in Chinese and British SAPs can assist us to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of these complex, challenging but also fascinating sojourns. Also, based on the findings of this study, more appropriate intercultural support and pedagogy could be provided by Chinese and British HEIs. For example, if there are differences in these two cohorts' class and accommodation arrangements that could potentially lead to their different acculturation experiences, then Chinese and British HEIs could learn from each other and make adjustments to their SAP arrangements accordingly.

Taken together, in order to comprehensively understand the distinct features that characterise acculturation experiences in the context of Chinese and British foreign language learners where culture and language learning take place simultaneously, three research questions have been formulated for this study:

1. How do Chinese foreign language learners experience acculturation in the UK through Study Abroad Programmes? How does it compare with British foreign language learners' experiences of acculturation in China?
2. What factors facilitate Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences? What factors serve as barriers?
3. What are the first-hand lessons (benefits and challenges) when foreign language learners are exposed to the target language and culture?

2.5 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has reviewed and discussed the context of SAPs and acculturation, as well as the important factors, benefits and challenges student sojourners (especially foreign language learners) in SAPs are likely to encounter while sojourning in a new environment. In order to address the above research questions and understand the 'fuller picture' (i.e. process) of Chinese and British foreign language sojourners' acculturation experiences in SAPs, the next chapter will discuss the theoretical framework, which will facilitate the data analysis and overall discussion of this study's findings.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

Given the review of the relevant literature and the resulting research questions that were presented in Chapter Two, this chapter discusses the study's theoretical framework. An appropriate theoretical framework for this study is one that helps picture the influential factors, benefits and challenges in foreign language SAP sojourners' acculturation experiences from the programme, personal and environmental perspectives in order to comprehensively understand their acculturation experiences. Section 3.2 will provide a discussion of potential theoretical approaches to understanding acculturation, explaining why certain potential theories have been rejected for this study. Next, Sections 3.3 and 3.4 justify the adopted theoretical framework: Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development and the extended Academic Acculturation Model by Elliot et al. Finally, Section 3.5 discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the adopted theoretical framework and how its application in this study facilitates the data analysis and the discussion of the research findings.

3.2 Theoretical Approaches to Understanding Acculturation

It is not by chance that acculturation has gained great attention in the field of cross-cultural psychology. As was discussed in the literature review, a variety of influential factors, challenges and benefits are involved when an individual sojourner experiences acculturation in a second/additional culture. Early theoretical approaches on acculturation were more "clinical oriented" (Ward et al., 2001, p.36), assuming that the acculturation process associated with cross-cultural contact is stressful and noxious, which led to researchers primarily focusing on sojourners' (usually long-term sojourners, such as immigrants) psychological wellbeing (i.e. the affective aspect) (ibid). From this perspective, sojourners were likely to be found to passively suffer various life changes triggered by culture shock, and research that took this approach focused primarily on stress coping strategies (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Zhou et al., 2008). Subsequently, a different view emerged that focused more on the potential skill deficit in the acculturation process; it regarded 'culture shock' as bringing not only acculturation stress, but also crucial opportunities to learn the new culture (Argyle, 1969). This approach focused more on the behavioural aspect, such as interventions in preparation and skills training, as it considered the active approaches and actions

sojourners could take to equip themselves with the necessary host culture-specific skills (e.g. knowledge about the host culture), which could facilitate their engagement in the host society (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Ward & Kennedy, 1994).

With the increasing variety of long-term and short-term sojourns, especially the rapidly growing number of student sojourners brought by the HE internationalisation boom, a different view of acculturation emerged from the cognitive perspective. This view highlighted the dynamic negotiation of the relations between home and host cultures that are embedded in the acculturation process (i.e. social identification) (Deaux, 1993; Zhou et al., 2008). As discussed in the previous chapter (Section 2.2.1), acculturation could be unidimensional or bidimensional (e.g. Fu, 2015). Milton Bennett's (1986; 2004) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) and John Berry's (1992; 1997; 2005) Model of Acculturation Strategies are two classic examples of these two types of acculturation. In DMIS, Bennett suggests "a continuum of stages of personal growth" in terms of how individuals develop sensitivity to and "construe[d] cultural difference" (1986, p.179) between their home and host cultures. He identifies a linear, unidimensional sequence of the development of intercultural sensitivity, from more ethnocentric orientations to more ethnorelative ones (Bennett, 2004). In terms of ethnocentric orientations, sojourners are more likely to avoid cultural difference, and depending on the different degrees of avoidance, they might deny the existence of cultural difference (*denial*), defend against it (*defence*), or minimise its importance (*minimisation*) (ibid). Later on, with the development of intercultural sensitivity, sojourners might become more active in "seeking cultural difference" (ibid, p.63). There are also three stages in this status: *acceptance* (i.e. accepting the importance of cultural difference), *adaptation* (i.e. trying to adapt to the host cultural identity), and finally, *integration* (i.e. becoming more multicultural rather than relating to any specific culture) (Bennett, 2004). Conversely, Berry's model is more bidimensional and categorical, suggesting four acculturation strategies (*integration, assimilation, separation* and *marginalisation*) to cope with cultural and psychological change, and "conflict, negotiation and mediation" (Berry, 2005, p.698) between two or more different cultures (e.g. home and host cultures). Berry (1997) suggests that the main conflict and negotiation occur in relation to two issues: 1) whether or not the individual tends to maintain his/her own (i.e. home) identity and characteristics; and 2) whether the individual would prefer to maintain or strengthen his/her relationships with the host society. In his model, *integration* occurs when the individual wants to keep his/her original cultural identity while also joining the new society. *Assimilation* takes place when the individual gives up his/her original cultural identity and wishes to move into the host society's cultural identity, adopting its

characteristics. *Separation* occurs when the individual wishes to maintain his/her original and traditional lifestyle and cultural identity and avoid interactions with the host society. When the individual finds him/herself becoming unattached to both the original and new society identities, he/she is likely to be struck with strong alien feelings toward both cultures, known as *marginalisation*.

For this study's investigation of the acculturation process, these two models seemed to be somewhat appropriate since DMIS provides a scientific sequence of the acculturation process, although focusing on intercultural sensitivity, while Berry's model offers more flexible and bidimensional options on the negotiation outcomes between home and host cultures. However, for Chinese and British foreign language sojourners in SAPs, there are notable limitations to these two models that prevent them from sufficiently addressing my research aims and questions. First, given the predetermined and finite duration of their SAPs, it is arguably dubious that student sojourners have sufficient time to develop their intercultural sensitivity fully following the six stages suggested in DMIS or "actively respond[ing] or adapt[ing]" (Chao & Yen, 2018, p.76) to cultural conflict and change (e.g. assimilation in Berry's model). Also, given their interest and foundation in the host culture, some of these foreign language sojourners might not start at the first stage (denial); some of them might even experience a reverse development of intercultural sensitivity (e.g. from integration to denial) due to unpleasant interactions or overwhelming culture shock. In this sense, some of the stages in DMIS and the categories in Berry's model might occur simultaneously or alternatively for each sojourner. Additionally, these two models seem to be somewhat limited to sojourners' home and host cultures rather than offering a more comprehensive picture of the environment they might interact with (e.g. people with other multicultural backgrounds such as other international students who also play an important role during these student sojourners' sojourns).

As discussed in the literature review, the acculturation process involves various influential factors, benefits and challenges from the *programme, personal* and *environmental* aspects. Arguably, the *programme* factors are likely to provide the general settings for sojourners' study abroad experiences in terms of duration, accommodation, etc. Hence, *programme* factors could arguably be understood as part of the *environmental* factors. Over the past two decades, theoretical approaches to understanding acculturation have tended to scaffold the investigation in a more comprehensive and dynamic way to cover relevant factors/aspects more fully. For example, the classic ABC Model of Acculturation proposed by Ward et al. (2001) draws these three key "individual level variable[s]" (p.43) – affective, behavioural

and cognitive – together, offering a comprehensive insight into the acculturation process. They argue that acculturation is a "dynamic process" rather than a "static condition", as sojourners are required to deal effectively with "a broad spectrum of demanding situations" (ibid). Thus, their ABC Model proposes an active, longitudinal process of how individual sojourners experience the cross-cultural transition with stress and a lack of skills, then learn to cope with the stress and acquire host culture-specific skills to finally achieve both psychological and sociocultural adaptation outcomes (Ward et al., 2001; Zhou et al., 2008). Additionally, it also considers the characteristics of both the individual sojourner (i.e. person) and the situation (i.e. environment) that are involved in acculturation process, rather than only the personal aspects. Kim (2001) echoes this with her Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-cultural Adaptation, with which she addresses a dynamic and cyclic 'Stress-Adaptation-Growth' process. The "concurrence of acculturation" (i.e. the push of, or desire to adapt to, the host culture) and "deculturation" (i.e. the pull of, or desire to retain, the home culture) generate stress, conflict and "internal transformation" (p.54) in individual sojourners. Sojourners are thus likely to be propelled to respond to "the state of misfit" between their embedded home cultural habits and the demands of the host culture. This adaptation process gradually increases sojourners' "overall fitness" (p.56) to the new cultural environment and leads to "a subtle growth" (ibid). Kim also attempts to link a variety of affective, behavioural and cognitive dimensions and factors together into an integrative, interactive structural model, focusing on the potential functions behind different adaptation levels and rates different sojourners have (i.e. why some sojourners have smoother adaptation processes than others). Various crucial factors such as personal predisposition (e.g. preparedness for change), environment (e.g. host receptivity), intercultural transformation (e.g. psychological health), etc. are covered to picture "mutual" and "reciprocal functional relationships" between the person and the contextual environment where a system and its parts are situated (2001, p.86). Also, inspired by Kim, Gill (2007) proposes a tentative transformative framework based on her work on Chinese international student sojourners' adjustment in the UK, focusing on the dynamic and cyclic intercultural learning process. Her framework follows the 'Stress-Adaptation-Growth' pattern, suggesting a three-fold process during the transition: 1) a stressful and anxious start triggered by the 'strangeness', 2) adaptation for 'fitting into' the host cultural society, and 3) changes in perceptions about 'self' and 'other' and the achievement of individual development (ibid). As she argues, through reflecting and making sense of experiences in the host culture, sojourners gain meaningful "personal growth and transformation" (p.178) from their experiential learning opportunities.

These theories/models seemingly provide meaningful insights for exploring the comprehensive, dynamic and interactive acculturation process, involving both personal and environmental factors. However, disadvantages in these theories/models are also identifiable. For instance, these theories/models tend to become increasingly complex and challenging for empirical research. Also, being comprehensive might come at the cost of offering a clearer and more systematic structure in each component, which makes the application of the component/framework in research difficult (e.g. Kim's Integrative Theory). Some of them seem to be predominantly quantitative and objectivistic (e.g. Ward et al.'s ABC Model), which means they cannot sufficiently support my investigation of the 'qualitative richness' of Chinese and British foreign language learners' overall acculturation experiences. Additionally, although the environmental factors are touched upon in these approaches, arguably, they still lack a more concrete structure behind the chaotic and complex environment for further and deeper investigation.

Moreover, for the target participants in this study – foreign language learners in SAPs – in particular, their intercultural (communicative) competence had been given predominant attention in the field of intercultural communication. Classic models include Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC; see Section 2.3.2 for a detailed discussion) and Deardorff's (2006) models of Intercultural Competence (for a discussion on intercultural competence, see Section 2.2.2.2). Similar to Byram's ICC, Deardorff's two models (Pyramid Model and Process Model of Intercultural Competence) suggest specific pivotal components for the development of intercultural competence (e.g. attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, and skills) and their hierarchy and interaction process to achieve both desired internal and external outcomes. Namely, the individual sojourner develops higher levels of intercultural competence (e.g. becoming more empathetic and ethnorelative) and can communicate and behave more effectively and appropriately in an intercultural context (ibid). However, although these two models are specifically relevant to foreign language learners and the interactions between the individual and the intercultural context might be inherently embedded, arguably, they are primarily competence-focused and still lack a concrete structure from the environmental aspect. Thus, these models were also considered unsuitable for this investigation on acculturation.

Arguably, building upon the predominant acculturation theories/models discussed above, a more comprehensive, concrete, nuanced and pragmatic structure is needed that draws together both the individual student sojourner and the environment/culture (in both home and host countries) and supports the investigation of the dynamic process of students'

acculturation. Specifically, this study requires a theoretical framework which can facilitate the investigation of both personal and environmental factors (the chaotic and intricate environment in particular) and their dynamic interactions in a both holistic and detailed structure, and offer concrete, nuanced and fresh insight. Two other theories/models I considered as potentially appropriate to help understand the dynamic interactions between the individual and the environment are Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development and Elliot et al.'s Academic Acculturation Model. I have ultimately adopted them as the theoretical framework for this study with the aim of offering fresh insights and a fuller but also more concrete picture from a developmental perspective of student sojourners' acculturation process. Discussions of my considerations of these theories/models are presented in the following sections.

3.3 Bioecological Theory of Human Development

The Bioecological Theory of Human Development ("Bioecological Theory" for short) was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner. Of the many psychological theories focused on understanding a child's development, this theory specifically and comprehensively focuses on the dynamic person-context relational process and the impact of time (i.e. temporal changes), which actually encompasses the whole person's lifespan. Namely, this refers to the reciprocal influences from both the developing individual and the people or institutions in his/her contextual ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 2001; 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Evans; 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Bronfenbrenner defines the ecology as:

> the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life span, between a growing human organism and the changing immediate environments in which it lives, as this process is affected by relations obtaining within and between these immediate settings, as well as the larger social contexts, both formal and informal, in which the settings are embedded. (1977, p. 514)

In Bronfenbrenner's earlier work in 1970s, it was called the Ecological Theory of Human Development ("Ecological Theory" for short). It described the developmental environment as a multi-layered nested system and focused more attention on the unidirectional influence of the environment (i.e. context and time) on individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, by the end of 1980s, Bronfenbrenner criticised the incompleteness of his own work. He recognised that all involved levels of organisation in a developing individual's life are the

interlinked and integrated constitutions and contributions to his/her development, and so are the individual's characteristics (i.e. biological, psychological and behavioural structure and function) (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; 2005). Thus, with the proposition that the characteristics of the developing individual function in the development both as "an indirect producer" and "a product of development" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p.xix), the theory evolved into Bioecological Theory (see Figure 3-1). The "bio" highlights the contribution of another important component: the characteristics of the person. This study adopts the revised version – Bioecological Theory – to investigate Chinese and British foreign language sojourners' acculturation experiences in SAPs.

Although the major focus in Bronfenbrenner's work is on children, this concept has also been applied to other groups such as adolescents, youths, parents, schoolteachers, immigrants and adult learners in HE contexts (e.g. Beck-Cross & Cooper, 2015; Baldwin-White et al., 2017; Elliot et al., 2016a; Gonzalez & Barnett, 2014; Lin & Bates, 2010; Leong & Tang, 2016; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Xu et al., 2020). In particular, Taylor and Ali's (2017) work is one of the very few studies that apply Bronfenbrenner's theory to examine international undergraduates' development during sojourns; specifically, they investigate five international degree-oriented undergraduates' (Year Three) sociocultural adjustment in the UK. Their findings evidentially support the applicability of Bronfenbrenner's theory in this particular context and cohort, and they demonstrate the influences of proximal and distal environments in host country (e.g. social relationships, differences in education) on international undergraduates during their sociocultural and learning adjustment in the UK. However, they only focus on the ecological system (i.e. environment) and adopt the earlier version – Ecological Theory – rather than the revised version which includes and emphasises the characteristics of the person and the mutual, progressive interactions between person and environment. The previous empirical work that has applied Bronfenbrenner's theory is significant because it implies that his theory supports the understanding of comprehensive human development, from cradle to grave. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that it could support further investigation of adult learners (i.e. undergraduates) within the context of one-year sojourns in Chinese and British SAPs.

Bioecological Theory is built upon a Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model, which comprises four interrelated components: a) the *process*, or *proximal process*, b) the *person*, c) the *context,* and d) *time.* These four key elements suggest an important integrated and

multidimensional developmental framework for adequately understanding human development. Each of them is discussed in the following subsections.

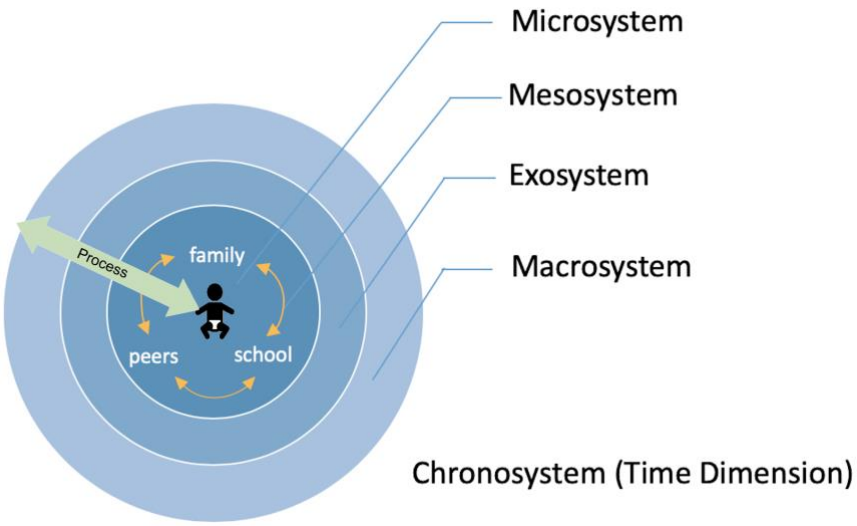

Figure 3-1 Adopted from Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; 2001; 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)

Process

The *process*, or *proximal process*, is at the centre of Bioecological Theory. It is the driving force of "complex reciprocal interaction" between the individual and "persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment" (e.g. parents, school) on a "regular basis over extended periods of time", through which the individual develops progressively (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 2005, p.178; Bronfenbrenner, 2001; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Specifically, it is the primary, dynamic interactions and relations between the individual and the environment he/she is in which operate regularly over time to produce development. For example, when a student goes to a new school, having classes five days a week for four years, the regular and long-term interactions between the student and the school (and people or objects such as courses in the school) are likely to formulate a significant process in his/her development. Additionally, the power of the process is not fixed but varies substantially based on the individual's characteristics, the environmental contexts and the time periods involved in the individual person's development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). However, arguably, it is this variety in process that influences each individual person's development and results in the uniqueness of individuals. Also, although Bronfenbrenner emphasises the *proximal process*, which refers to the immediate and closest environmental elements, he also recognises the importance of the

more remote environment such as parents' networks or national policy. A more detailed discussion on immediate and remote environments will be presented below in the sections on *Context* and *Time*.

Person

The *person* in the PPCT model refers to the developing individual and his/her characteristics. The person is a distinctive entity which "must engage in an activity" in order for "development to occur" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p.798). Three types of characteristics of a person are distinguished: a) force, b) resources, and c) demand characteristics (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). They are suggested to be the most significant personal influential factors – 'indirect producers' – that affect the "direction and power of proximal processes" (p.795) and shape the individual's development. Each will be outlined below.

a) Force characteristics are the individual's "active behavioural dispositions" (p.810) that impact the proximal processes in terms of either sustaining, hindering or even preventing the occurrence of proximal processes. For example, if the individual has "generative dispositions" (ibid) such as curiosity, responsiveness to other people, etc. that make him/her actively react to or participate in interactions, the proximal processes are more likely to be sustained or activated. Conversely, if the person holds "disruptive dispositions" that lead to negative reactions to interactions (e.g. impulsiveness), then his/her developmental processes might be interrupted or even stopped.
b) Resource characteristics are the "biopsychological liabilities and assets" (p.812) the individual possesses that promote or limit his/her capacity to react or engage in the developmental proximal process. These include, for example, the person's ability, experiences, physical or mental handicaps, access to good food, education, having caring parents, etc.
c) Demand characteristics are the stimulus to either "invite or discourage" (ibid) reactions from another person that would foster or hinder the individual's proximal process of development. Examples could be age, gender, skin colour, physical appearance, etc. These demand characteristics might influence the expectation on the individual from another person and, thus, further impact the reaction from the other person.

These three types of characteristics are understood to be "developmental outcomes" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p.798), that is, the development of the quality of personal characteristics is determined by the dynamic interactions in proximal processes. Therefore, the person's characteristics are also regarded as the "product[s] of development" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p.xix).

Context

Context is the main part of the holistic environment which contains the multi-layered nested system that forms the ecological settings for human development (the other part is *Time*, which will be discussed in next subsection). As Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) claim, the environment is one of the major elements that stimulates "chaotic systems" and "a general lack of routinisation and structure in daily life" (p.121). In order to scrutinise the developmental context, Bronfenbrenner (1994) divides the context into four bi-directional subsystems, from proximal to distal – Micro-, Meso-, Exo-, and Macrosystem – each of which will be explored in the following sub-subsections.

Microsystem

Microsystem is the proximal layer in the context at which direct and regular interactions with the individual's immediate surroundings initially occur. It refers to the interactions that happen "in a given face-to-face setting" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p.39) with key and immediate surroundings such as the person's parents/family, peers and schools/institutions. Since Bronfenbrenner's work focuses on children, I take a child's development as examples to explain this and the following subsystems. After birth, the child's closest interaction with the world is with his/her parents/family, and this interaction lasts for years on daily basis. He/she may also play regularly with peers/friends (e.g. kids in the playground). Then the child goes to schools/institutions (e.g. nursery, kindergarten) and starts having regular interactions with the schools/institutions, meeting teachers and more peers and having regular interactions with them as well. These key elements form the immediate and closest environment for the child and influence and interact with him/her over time (e.g. years) on a regular basis (e.g. daily, weekly). As was mentioned above, the interactions in the proximal process (i.e. in microsystem) are reciprocal; the individual's characteristics are influenced by this subsystem, and also contribute, either fostering or hindering, to the interactions in the microsystem.

Mesosystem

The *mesosystem* consists of interactions or relationships among two or more of the key components in the microsystem, such as the family-school relationship, parent-peer interactions, etc. The power of these interactions and relationships is expected to have an important influence on the individual's development. For example, the quality of family-school interactions or relationships could influence the actual joint engagement the child receives from both parents and the school (e.g. time, attention, resources). The better the quality of interactions and relationships in the mesosystem is, the greater joint support the child may have, and the more he/she may develop or achieve (e.g. higher scores on exams). The mesosystem is "a system of microsystems" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p.40) in which the key microsystem elements collaborate with each other to impact, either positively or negatively, upon the individual's development. Although the mesosystem is in a remoter position than the microsystem and might have less direct interactions and immediate impact, it is still a significant layer of the context.

Exosystem

The *exosystem* is a further layer where interactions take place among two or more settings from both the immediate and external surroundings, or the individual is not contained in at least one of these settings. Bronfenbrenner (2005) argues that relationships or interactions, although indirectly impacting the proximal process in the microsystem, are still crucial to the individual's development. The exosystem could include the individual's family social network, parents' workplaces or networks, local community, etc. For instance, if one of the parents loses his/her job, the family will have a reduced income. As a result, the financial investment in the child's development (e.g. tuition fees to go to a high-quality but expensive school or training centre) might also be reduced, or in worse situations, the family and its child may face problems with daily subsistence (e.g. food). Thus, although the parents' workplace does not directly impact the individual, he/she is still influenced by these remoter and wider interactions.

Macrosystem

The *macrosystem* is the furthest level in context; it serves as "the overarching pattern of micro-, meso, and exosystems characteristic" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p.40) within a certain culture or subculture. It influences the nature of each subsystem and guides the underpinning

ideas and practices for people who live in the context (e.g. belief system, lifestyle, language, national policy, etc.). For example, as was discussed in Chapter Two, Chinese learners might have been taught to respect and be obedient to teachers and the value of perseverance since they were young, while British learners might have received an education with more emphasis on personal interest and goals. The macrosystem is likely to provide the individual guidance regarding 'what things should be like' (i.e. norms), then the individual learns and practices these norms in daily life during his/her development, and these norms become a "deeply embedded" (Elliot et al., 2016b, p.1183) part of the individual.

These interlinked subsystems constitute the developmental context and influence the individual through processes, either proximal, remoter or distal, individually or simultaneously, and are also influenced by the developing individual. Additionally, the interactions among these subsystems are also reciprocal. Taking the current pandemic as an example, when the interactions among people at the family (microsystem) or local community (exosystem) levels cannot support the effectiveness of the new health policy, another new policy might replace it.

Time

Time is the third dimension in this theory, with the emphasis on the changes that occur over the course of the person's life; Bronfenbrenner terms this the *chronosystem*. Changes over time are in not only the individual's characteristics (e.g. becoming more independent) but also the context he/she lives in (e.g. a sudden worldwide pandemic). More specifically, time in the chronosystem contains various types: 1) microtime, which is the continuity or discontinuity within the microsystem (e.g. family structure); 2) mesotime, which includes broader intervals (i.e. days, months) such as moving to a temporary place of residence for two months; and 3) macrotime, which refers to the changes or events in larger society, within or across cities, countries or even generations (e.g. national socioeconomic status).

The "dynamic, interactive relationships" among these four interlinked components shape the "directions and power" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p.795) of the individual's development. Bioecological Theory unpacks the complexity and intricacies in human development by dissecting the comprehensive development into significant fragments and piecing them back together as a meaningful structure. More of its strength and weakness will discussed in Section 3.5, but one key weakness of Bioecological Theory in intercultural context is highlighted here. As has been mentioned, the acculturation process involves the

conflict and change between the sojourner's home and host culture. Although Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory is helpful for the exploration of the complexity of human development within the environment the individual is in, important elements – the change of environment and negotiation between one's home and host culture – are not covered. When a student sojourner physically moves to the new environment, he/she needs to negotiate between his/her home and host culture to support his/her "learn[ing], unlearn[ing], or re-learn[ing]" (Elliot et al., 2016b, p.1183) processes in acculturation. To place due emphasis on this aspect of the phenomenon being examined in this study, the Academic Acculturation Model offered by Elliot et al. (2016a; b; c) might provide an essential and complementary tool to cope with the intercultural intricacies in student sojourners' development. It is an extension of Bronfenbrenner's theory, and will be outlined in the following section.

3.4 Academic Acculturation Model

The Academic Acculturation Model (Elliot et al., 2016a; b; c) is an extension of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory that places the emphasis on the environmental aspect (i.e. ecological system). The data upon which the model is based came out of an investigation of international PhD students' acculturation experiences in the UK, adjusting and adapting Bronfenbrenner's theory to the specific context of intercultural experiences in HEIs. Elliot et al. (2016a; b; c) suggest two co-existing ecological systems in the sojourns (the original ecological system – one's home country environment, and the new ecological system – one's host country environment) and identify the implicit but powerful interactions between them (see Figure 3-2).

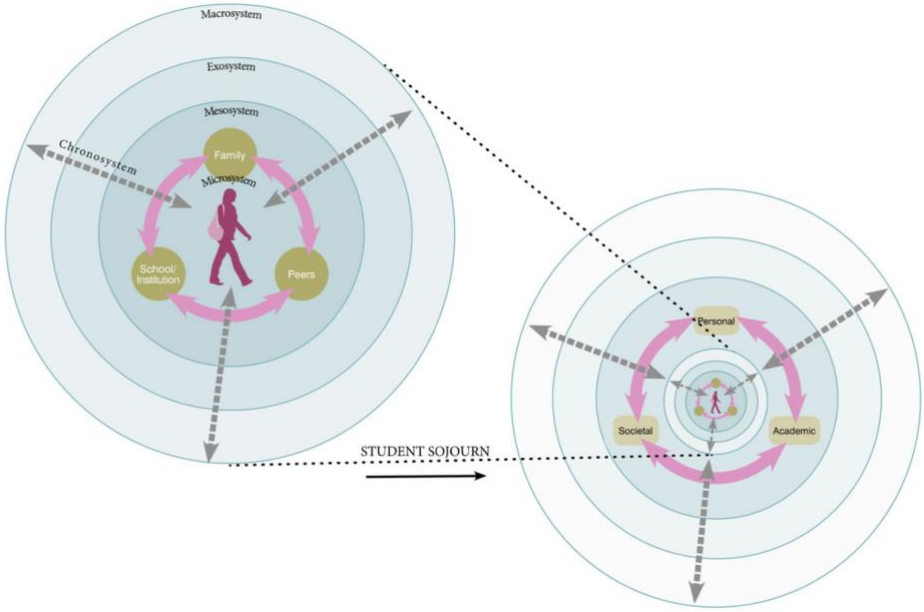

Figure 3-2 Academic acculturation model by Elliot et al. (2016a; b; c)

Before the student sojourners move to the new environment, they have close and continuous interactions with their home environment over a number of years. These interactions form their original ecological system with all the subsystems involved (i.e. micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), thus creating the "accepted norm" (Elliot et al., 2016b, p.1183) that is deeply rooted in sojourners. The 'accepted norm' could include previous contacted and conceived ideas, behaviours, language, lifestyle, etc. that are developed from their original ecological systems. However, when sojourners physically move to a new environment, the physical change of environment is likely to "disrupt" (Elliot et al., 2016a, p.2214) their familiar developmental ecological system (i.e. their original ecological system) at all levels, since these original layers do not physically accompany them to the new environment. However, Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that the change and development in the person's characteristics is "neither ephemeral nor situation-bound", which means a potential reorganisation of one's developmental systems might occur with "some continuity over both time and space" (p.28). Sojourning and acculturating in a new environment could be arguably regarded as a personal "ecological experiment" (p.36) by sojourners, who have to investigate new resources and surroundings, accommodate and control them, and finally build "another ecological system" (Elliot et al., 2016a, p.2214) to support their development during the duration of their sojourns.

The transition from one's original ecological system to the new ecological system is challenging since it interferes with sojourners' "principal sources of support" (ibid) (e.g.

family in the original microsystem, family-peers relationship in the original mesosystem, etc.). For example, when a sojourner becomes ill and needs care, his/her parents or friends are literally in another country and cannot come to look after him/her immediately. Also, when sojourners physically move to a new environment, their 'accepted norm' might, consciously or subconsciously, travel with them and is likely to be challenged by the new norm in the new macrosystem. The most obvious example is the different language that sojourners now need to use to express themselves on a daily basis. Regardless of how good their linguistic proficiency is, it might still present them with challenges. Challenges from the 'absent' micro- and/or mesosystem and the 'discrepant' original and new macrosystems are likely to arouse sojourners' acculturative stress such as loneliness, isolation, alienation, confusion, etc. (Elliot et al., 2016a; b). Consequently, some sojourners might long to stick to their original ecological systems such as by staying with co-national people or those who speak the same language or talking about or even 'creating' things they are familiar with (e.g. food and customs from their home country). However, as Elliot et al., (2016a) argue, the challenges posed during sojourns bring not only stress and difficulties but also more opportunities to learn a new culture and build a new ecological system. They suggest that some sojourners might accept and engage more in the new ecological systems or contain both ecological systems during their sojourns (Elliot et al., 2016a).

However, the transition also provides a significant "decontextualising tool" (ibid, p.2215). The invisible interactions, either negotiations or conflicts, between sojourners' original and new ecological systems seem to bring three types of "serendipity and amusement" (ibid). First, by being developed in the original ecological system for years and now moving to and building a new ecological system for their own development, sojourners gain first-hand contact and experience in both ecological systems. Second, tensions and discrepancies between the two ecological systems "compel" but also potentially facilitate sojourners' "introspection" (Elliot et al., 2016b, p.1183) of the long taken-for-granted original norm. Lastly, this "constant reflection" could help sojourners develop new opportunities to "learn, unlearn or re-learn" (ibid) a new norm and new developmental processes, new proximal process in particular, to support their "learning, growth, and development" (Elliot et al., 2016c, p.738) in the new environment. As they argue, "effective management and re-negotiation of old and new ecological systems" (Elliot et al., 2016a, p.2215) – that is, critical reflection and analysis of the original and new environment and their roles as either tools or barriers for learning and development – are crucial in the transition and acculturation process. Sojourners are encouraged to leave their 'comfort zone' and become more open to the new environment, proactively build new social relations and explore new learning and interaction

opportunities (Elliot et al., 2016a; b) since the continuing close connections with the original system are likely to become "a hindrance" for their development (Elliot et al., 2016a, p.2215). For example, if the sojourner spends most of the sojourn with co-nationals and refuses interactions with people from other cultural backgrounds, he/she might miss essential opportunities to learn and interact with the new culture and environment. On the other hand, those who more proactively communicate and interact with local people, participating in local activities, are likely to have more opportunities to learn and to more effectively build their new ecological system. Given that this model is extended from Bronfenbrenner's theory, its strengths, weaknesses and application in this study will be discussed together with those of Bioecological Theory as an overall theoretical framework in next section.

3.5 Using this Theoretical Framework to Understand Foreign Language Learners' Acculturation Experiences in Chinese and British SAPs

Bioecological Theory and the Academic Acculturation Model provide a significant framework for investigating student sojourners' acculturation experiences. They scrutinise the "frenetic activity, lack of structure, [and] unpredictability" (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p.121) in student sojourners' development during sojourns by providing a detailed structure to understand each key component involved in this study (individual sojourners, home and host environments and interaction processes). As has been mentioned above, they dissect the intricacies in development into significant fragmented pieces (two co-existing ecological systems, each layer involved, developing person, and developmental process), then shape them into a meaningful theoretical lens which can be used to support my data analysis and the discussion of the findings. The important concept of interactions between key components can also scaffold my comprehensive understanding of how the involved influential factors, benefits and challenges associated with personal and environmental (including programme) aspects interplay with each other, and also their impact on sojourners' acculturation and development. Arguably, with a detailed structure of how sojourners interact in new environments, individual student sojourners could customise unique pathways for their own development according to their own needs, and HEIs could provide more appropriate and effective support for their students accordingly. Also, although neither of these two theories/models have been applied in intercultural short-term sojourns, Elliot et al. (2016a) claim that their model can be helpful for the investigation of all student sojourners since they all encounter necessary transitions at all different levels of their ecological systems. Thus, this framework can serve as an appropriate tool in this study.

However, there are also notable weaknesses in this framework. First, according to EBSCOhost, applying this theoretical framework to investigate how foreign language learners experience acculturation in Chinese and British SAPs is a new attempt in this field. As was discussed in Chapter Two, foreign language sojourners in SAPs are likely to hold a distinct role as they might be both motivated (as language learners) and less motivated (as short-term sojourners) to actively interact and engage in new environment. Hence, the applicability of both theories/models will require further empirical evidence to support. Also, because their sojourns are finite, I hypothesise that foreign language sojourners in SAPs may have continuing contact and interactions with their original environment since they will return to their home HEIs to complete their degree programmes. In this particular case, what kind of negotiation or interactions between person, home and host environment they might have remain unclear. Also, since there is a deficiency in the exploration of both the original and new ecological systems, a potential question could be whether the new ecological system holds the same structure (i.e. subsystems and key elements) as the original one. Taking the key elements in the original microsystem in particular, as the significant driving force in the proximal process, what would their replacements be in the new microsystem? Additionally, there seems to be a discrepancy between these two theories/models in relation to the developing person. Bronfenbrenner (2005) claims the person's characteristics are the 'indirect producer' that foster or hinder interactions in developmental processes, while Elliot et al. (2016b) highlight that "proactivity is crucial" (p.1193) in effectively reflecting and managing between two ecological systems and exploring new learning and development opportunities, which somewhat suggests the 'initiative' and the 'direct' role sojourners may hold. However, although Elliot et al. (2016a) mention personal aspects (e.g. personal values, dispositions, early life experiences, etc.) as playing an important part in sojourners' acculturation processes, there is no specific component that is suggested to facilitate the investigation of personal contributors in their own development (Xu et al., 2020). On the other hand, although Bronfenbrenner provides three types of person characteristics, the 'indirect producer' concept has been criticised by scholars who claim that an individual's ability to proactively influence their own development has been underrated (e.g. Christensen, 2016; Paquette & Ryan, 2001). As Paquette and Ryan (2001) argue, it seems to indicate the child will not be able to explore or interact effectively with the environment he/she is in once the connections in the immediate environment (i.e. microsystem) are broken down. Initiative and powerful personal abilities such as self-discipline (i.e. the ability to self-direct) are also likely to be critically active and direct contributors to an individual's development. For adult sojourners in my study in particular, their personal factors during sojourns could be

hypothesised as having more initiative and being more direct contributors since they are biologically maturer than children. Also, the demand characteristics (e.g. age, gender, physical appearance) are not the main foci of this study. Hence, specific personal factors/contributors in these adult sojourners' development also need further investigation. Moreover, while the specific emphasis on the sojourn per se represents a significant change in chronosystem, the Academic Acculturation Model does not further investigate how the chronosystem would influence sojourners' development during short sojourn periods (compared with a child's development over the course of his/her life). Finally, given the complexity of interactions within each bioecological system (including the person) and between the two ecological systems, how can the deeper understanding of the interactions be put into practice for student sojourners to make the most out of their temporary sojourn, and for HEIs to provide effective support? Nonetheless, these remaining questions can arguably be regarded as significant points that are worth further investigation and development, as this study attempts, rather than weaknesses.

As Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) suggest, devising new hypotheses and research designs which could produce more "differentiated, precise, replicable research findings" (p.795) for understanding the continuity or change in development are crucial. Thus, this study attempts to apply these two theories/models to explore Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences in their respective SAPs. The key concepts from both theories/models will be adopted to construct a comprehensive structure to broadly and inclusively explore the factors and interactions impacting on human development, both within a context and the transition between contexts. Although as Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (2005) claim, it may not be possible to explicitly discuss all factors or offer all answers relating to human development, this theoretical framework still highlights the important interactions between the individual and the environments he/she is and was in. Although Elliot et al. (2016a) use 'ecological system' to emphasise the environmental aspect, my focus in this study is on both the personal and environmental aspects and the interactions among them. Therefore, I will adopt the term 'bioecological system' in my study. As is shown in Figure 3-3, the structure contains both the original and new bioecological systems, as well as the developing person. All five subsystems (micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystem) are outlined in each bioecological system. For the proximal processes (the original and new microsystems), given the HE context in this study, the key elements in the original microsystem, in parallel to Bronfenbrenner's original conceptualisation, are family, peers and institutions (i.e. their home HEIs). These three key elements are the most direct, immediate and regular sources of interactions (see Section 3.3), while their replacements

remain unclear and will be investigated in this study. Also, the three types of person characteristics in Bioecological Theory are not adopted given the discussion above. This structure will be used for data analysis and discussion of findings in this study.

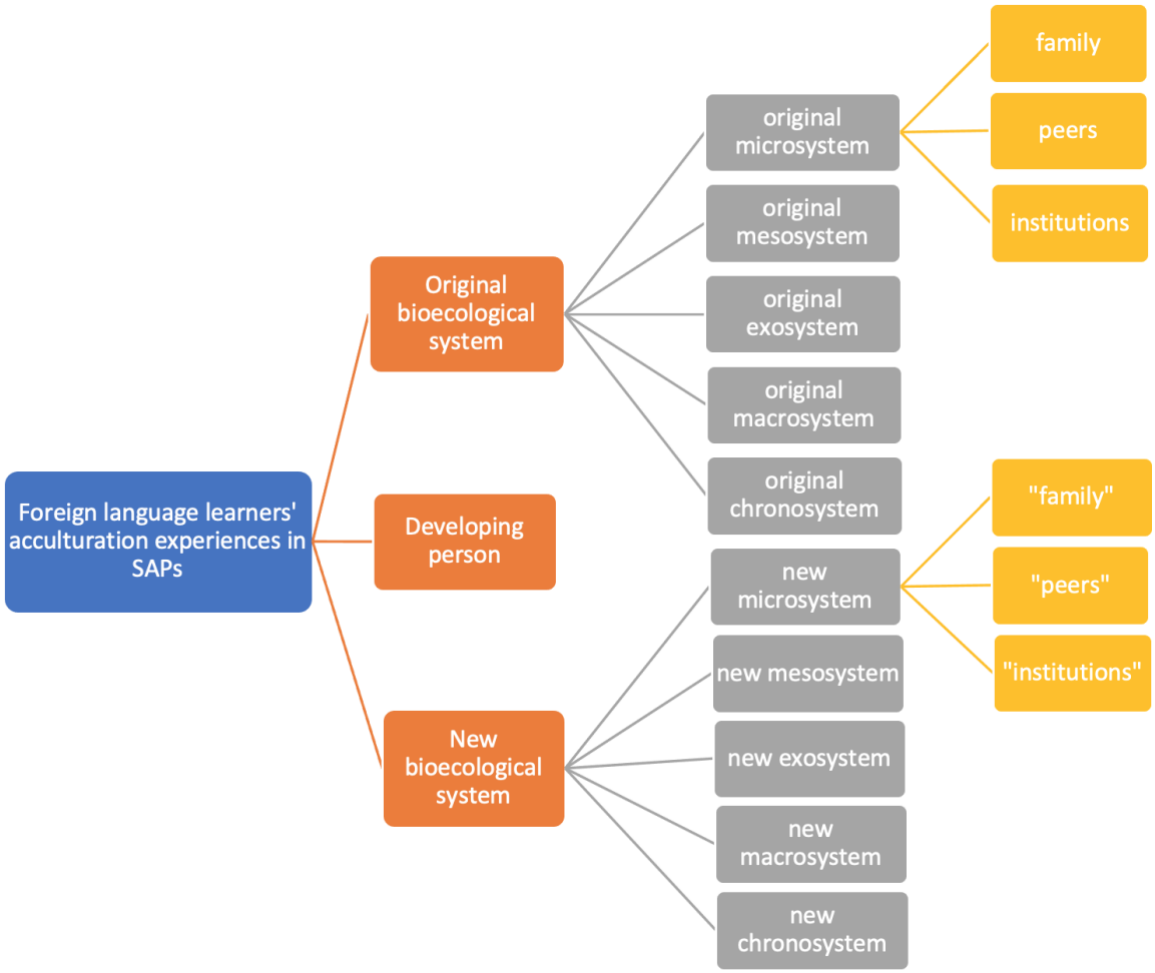

Figure 3-3 Structure adopted from the theoretical framework

3.6 Summary of the Chapter

Drawing upon the theoretical framework discussed in this chapter, three key components have been identified: a) the developing sojourners; b) their original and new bioecological systems; and c) the invisible process of interactions among the person and the environments. In order to comprehensively investigate these components in Chinese and British foreign language student sojourners' lived experiences in SAPs, this study adopts a qualitative phenomenological approach, utilising semi-structured individual interviews with the use of metaphors and vignettes. The methodological considerations for this study will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Having reviewed the relevant literature for this study and discussed the theoretical framework in Chapters Two and Three, I have identified the following research questions:

1. How do Chinese foreign language learners experience acculturation in the UK through Study Abroad Programmes? How does it compare with British foreign language learners' experiences of acculturation in China?
2. What factors facilitate Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences? What factors serve as barriers?
3. What are the first-hand lessons (benefits and challenges) when foreign language learners are exposed to the target language and culture?

In this chapter, I will set out the considerations that brought me to decide upon my research methodology. This is a qualitative phenomenological study using semi-structured interviews together with metaphor and vignettes. My philosophical worldview (my constructivist ontological position and interpretivist epistemological position) will be explained in Section 4.2, the research approach in Section 4.3, and research instruments adopted for this study in Section 4.4. Next, Section 4.5 will introduce the sampling criteria and research participants. Section 4.6 details the step-by-step procedures of participant recruitment, the pilot study, data collection and data analysis, as well as providing a discussion of this study's validity, reliability and trustworthiness. Finally, ethical considerations will be discussed in Section 4.7.

4.2 Philosophical Worldview

Instead of the term *research paradigm* used by other scholars (Crotty, 1998; Mertens, 2010), I adopt the term "philosophical worldview", taking inspiration from Creswell and Creswell (2018, p.5) and Guba and Lincoln (2004), who define the term as "a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study" (p.5), or in other words, the beliefs that guide the researcher's actions (Guba, 1990). I choose the term "worldview" because I think it helps uncover the underpinning ideas of a researcher's philosophical positions in a more holistic way than 'research paradigm'. It is

about how the researcher views the reality of the world (i.e. ontological position) and knows the reality of the world (i.e. epistemological position).

In terms of how I, as the researcher, view reality, I take a constructivist ontological position in this study. Constructivism asserts that meanings are produced by the interactions between subjects and the world rather than being discovered (Gray, 2018), and that different individuals construct their own meanings in different ways (Cohen et al., 2007). On the other hand, objectivism implies that social reality has an objective nature, that reality is "given out there" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.7) and is independent and external to individuals and their knowledge and perceptions, and also beyond their reach or influence (Bryman, 2008). In this study, I view the meaning and knowledge of acculturation experiences in SAPs as being more likely to be constructed and produced by participants (i.e. Chinese and British foreign language sojourners) based on their lived experiences. They created meaning based on their own views and feelings through interacting with the environment where they sojourn. These meanings were dependent to and constructed by them, rather than existing objectively.

In order to know the reality constructed by these individual sojourners, I take an interpretivist epistemological position rather than a positivist one. In the worldview of positivists, facts are value-free and might be available to be measured directly with senses (i.e. facts can be seen, touched, etc.), tests and assessments that lead to explanations and generalisations based on scientific laws (Bryman, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 2004; Gray, 2018). The positivist position can often be found in quantitative approaches and methods (e.g. experiments, questionnaires, etc.) (Guba & Lincoln, 2004). However, given "the immense complexity of human nature and the elusive and intangible quality of social phenomena" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.11) and human behaviour, interpretivism might better serve the in-depth exploration purposes of this study. Interpretivism, which has the lexical root 'interpret', looks for "culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p.67). This requires the researcher to gain access to an individual's social world and grasp the meanings of the constructed reality through interpreting the individual's social actions based on their own views. In this research, I attempt to explore and explain the 'reality' through collecting in-depth information on individuals' lived experiences from their own perspectives, and interpreting the meanings constructed by different individuals in order to grasp the essence or key factors of their social actions and interactions in their acculturation experiences. Then, through understanding and interpreting the lived experiences, I, as the researcher, can come to know the meaning and acquire deeper knowledge of what acculturation entails.

A researcher's philosophical worldview can provide directions for the procedures he/she will use to approach the topics or assumptions under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers with my particular philosophical worldview (i.e. constructivist ontological and interpretivist epistemological positions) are likely to focus more on unique, individual and qualitative aspects in the social world (Bryman, 2008). Therefore, this study adopts a qualitative phenomenological approach with semi-structured interviews in order to address the research questions, as will be discussed in Sections 4.3 and 4.4.

4.3 Research Approach

4.3.1 Qualitative approach

With the philosophical worldview discussed above, I hold the aim of exploring Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences in depth, so a qualitative research approach was adopted in this study. As defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2018), qualitative research situates the researcher in the world, transforming the world and making it visible through a set of interpretive, verbal or material practices, allowing the researcher to "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 10).

The quantitative approach, which is applied chiefly by researchers with a positivist philosophical worldview, is advantageous for testing hypotheses with precise measurements and large data sets (Silverman, 2011) (e.g. studies of the effectiveness of a new vaccine). However, it has little or no contact with individuals' lived experiences, perspectives or opinions, or the contextual setting of everyday life; rather, it pursues statistical correlations based on measurable phenomena (Bryman, 2008; Gray, 2018). In this study, the qualitative approach is more appropriate as it allows me to explore a subject or a phenomenon in depth in a way that would be difficult if I were to rely on numerical data and statistical analysis. Although variables such as language proficiency or achievement can be tested and measured quantitatively, this study's focus on the process of individual lived experiences of acculturation led me to adopt the qualitative approach. The "naturally occurring data" (Silverman, 2011, p.17) (i.e. the phenomena in the natural contexts of both China and the UK and the constructed meanings of these foreign language learners' lived experiences and personal views) provided me with an information-rich database. It also facilitated my

interpretation of the meanings that these individual foreign language sojourners constructed from their lived experiences of acculturation in SAPs. Although the qualitative approach has been criticised for involving smaller sample sizes than quantitative studies and, consequently, offering limited generalisability (Bryman, 2008), this study focuses more on the in-depth and meaningful exploration of sojourners' lived experiences than large populations and generalisability. Thus, the qualitative approach is best suited to this research focus.

On the whole, this study adopts a qualitative approach to explore patterns or shared meanings of acculturation with respect to 'what' the Chinese and British foreign language learners experienced during their respective participation in SAPs in the UK and China and 'how' they experienced it (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Taken together, a phenomenological study fits with the research design for this study. The rationale behind the choice will be discussed in the next section.

4.3.2 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of "gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (van Manen, 1997, p. 9). It asserts that participants' experiences in the social world are related to their consciousness of reality (i.e. the participants construct their social reality), and any attempt to explore and understand it needs to be grounded in their experiences (Bryman, 2008; Gray, 2018; van Manen, 1997). The use of a phenomenological study fits in with my constructivist ontological and interpretivist epistemological positions. Another main reason for choosing a phenomenological study was based on its feature of searching for "the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" and "what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.75). This allows me to explore how Chinese and British cohorts experience acculturation in the UK and China respectively, as well as the similarities or differences and contrasts in their acculturation experiences as a whole group since all of them experienced this phenomenon of acculturation in SAPs.

However, philosophical arguments have led to two types of phenomenological study being established: *transcendental phenomenology* (or descriptive phenomenology) and *hermeneutic phenomenology* (or interpretive phenomenology) (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1997). Transcendental phenomenology focuses more on the description of the phenomenon under investigation. It argues that researchers need to set aside their preconceptions or judgements about the phenomenon and make sure everything

is “pure” and “perceived freshly, as if for the first time” (Moustakas, 1994, p.34). However, Moustakas (1994) himself admits that such purity is difficult to achieve. Hermeneutic phenomenology asserts that a phenomenological study is not merely a description, but that interpretation is always involved (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 1997). The word *hermeneutic* is applied because researchers are interpreting the “texts” or “some symbolic form” (van Manen, 1997, p.25) of the phenomenon when they try to understand the meaning of a lived experience. As van Manen (1997) claims, a good phenomenological study “is validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience” (p.27). Researchers’ preconceptions or judgements are revised through the investigation process and finally achieve the essence of the phenomenon, rather than being set aside. My study is a hermeneutic one. Based on my constructivist ontological position, the meanings of this phenomenon were constructed by participants, and although their expressions were descriptive, they were interpreted by the participants through their own oral texts. Also, as an international student for years and an English learner during my undergraduate degree myself, I can hardly set this personal experience and my preconceptions aside because they could help me better understand my participants’ lived experiences. However, it is important for me to be cautious about my own position in this study, considering how I might attach my own understandings and experiences. This issue will be touched upon later in this chapter, together with the data collection procedures. Additionally, as I analysed the collected data deductively based on my theoretical framework (see Section 4.6.3.3), the pre-determined structures and themes guided my interpretation of the data, allowing me to focus on specific aspects, which meant my understandings of those aspects were honed until I grasped the essence of the phenomenon from my participants’ perspectives. Therefore, employing hermeneutic phenomenology is appropriate for this study.

Also, as Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest, a typical data collection procedure in a phenomenological study is to interview people “who have experienced the phenomenon” (p.77). Thus, semi-structured interviews were utilised as research instruments in this study.

4.4 Semi-structured Interviews as Research Instruments

As has been mentioned above, this study utilised semi-structured interviews as research instruments to investigate Chinese and British foreign language learners’ acculturation experiences in SAPs. An interview is defined as a verbal exchange and interaction with the aim of unfolding and gaining a meaning or an understanding of the interviewee’s experiences in their lived world (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Gray, 2018). In an interview,

interviewees can discuss their own interpretations and views of their lived experiences and social world by answering interview questions, and interviewers can gain rich and in-depth information through asking questions or using "probes" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.191) (i.e. follow-up questions) to clarify or explore deeper meanings and explanations. The interview is well recognised as a useful research instrument for achieving the interchange of knowledge (Bryman, 2008; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Cohen et al., 2007; Gray, 2018). Alternatively, a focus group also involves the interchange of knowledge, with the difference that participants discuss certain issues and express their views as "members of a group" (Bryman, 2008, p.473) to provide the researcher with various views rather than one individual's personal view, feeling or experience in depth. In this study, although the participants are regarded as comprising two 'groups' (i.e. Chinese and British groups), individual interviews allowed me to better investigate what happened in different individuals' acculturation experiences in the target language and culture context, how it happened, and what and how he/she viewed or felt it in depth.

Commonly, three types of interviews have been used in formal data collection: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. This study adopted semi-structured interviews. Structured interviews work with a specific prepared or standardised set of questions in a certain and specific interview schedule, while questions in unstructured interviews are not specifically prepared (Berger, 2000; Gray, 2018). However, semi-structured interviews are somewhat like a combination of those two extremes. Semi-structured interviews work with a list of questions but they are not standardised, and the flow in the interchange of knowledge in semi-structured interviews can be interviewer-led, interviewee-led or both in turn. In addition, they allow the order of questions to be adjusted according to the direction of the flow in interviews, or for probes to be used to deeply explore the interviewees' views and opinions, get more information, clarify ideas or generate examples (Gray, 2008). In this study, semi-structured interviews allowed me to investigate Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences with a set of questions that directed the interviews, but also offered me the freedom to adjust the order of the questions and to allow the interviewees to talk about what they thought was important. In addition, semi-structured interviews provided flexibility for me to ask follow-up questions when there were issues explained unclearly or when new issues arose. In this study, the interview themes were generated by reviewing previous studies and by following the focus determined by the research questions (see Appendix 1, interview questions see Appendix 2).

Additionally, metaphors (Section 4.4.1) and vignettes (Section 4.4.2) are two creative techniques used in qualitative research methods to help explore and elicit meanings from subjective individuals. They were also utilised alongside the semi-structured interviews in this study.

4.4.1 Metaphors

According to Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013, p.354), *metaphor* refers to "a word or phrase used to represent or stand for something else". The use of metaphors in qualitative research is a unique and creative way to explore phenomena. It is regarded as a major literary device that compares two things by highlighting their similarities in order to provide a familiar image or concept to facilitate clarification and understanding (Bonner & Greenwood, 2005; Carpenter, 2008; Miles et al., 2014). Bazeley and Kemp (2012, p.58) explain how metaphors can be creatively utilised to support integration, particularly in research methods. Examples include the following strategies:

Complementary strategies:

- Combining for completion
- Combining for enhancement
- Combining to detail a more significant whole

Generative strategies:

- Iterative exchange for initiation and development
- Transformation for initiation through exploration

It has been proposed that metaphors can be used in data analysis to condense data or to identify patterns in a new light, as in Bazeley and Kemp's (2012) strategy categories. Likewise, it can also be utilised in data collection. It is a useful way to help subjects make sense of their lived experiences with richness and complexity in a concise but also information-rich way (Miles et al., 2014), which is how it is used in this study. The use of metaphor in data collection in this study is in line with one of Bazeley and Kemp's (2012, p. 58) complementary strategies: combining to detail a more significant whole. This strategy can be pictured with the metaphors "triangulation and archipelago", which indicate how "elements can complement each other and interact to reveal an end point" (Bazeley & Kemp,

2012, pp. 60-61). The end point cannot be found in any single element or a simple combination of elements, but rather in the combined whole.

In this study, I asked the interviewees a question: "With respect to your experience, using a word or a phrase, can you think of a metaphor which describes your year abroad experience? Please discuss your overall impression." The use of metaphor allowed interviewees to construct their own overall views, rather than an episode of their experiences, to encapsulate their information-rich and complex lived experience in a word or a phrase. It also provided a holistic picture of their experiences and helped me get at the essence of their acculturation experiences through their own meaning construction. Additionally, it guided them in the interviews more specifically according to their different experiences by shifting question orders or asking follow-up questions with a more specific focus, which came from the metaphors they had created. For example, one interviewee described her overall impression of year abroad experience as "a rollercoaster". This provided a clear and holistic picture of the ups and downs she experienced in her year abroad in the host country. This prompted me to change the question order to first explore her ups and downs in depth, since her metaphor implied that there would be both positive and negative cases during her experience which had made strong impressions and influenced her experience. Changing the question order and following up on the information from the metaphor helped me better understand her experience from her point of view, and also helped me ensure that the most remarkable elements of her experience were covered in the interview, which also ensured the quality of interview data (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The analysis of metaphors as data will be presented in the Findings (A) chapter (Chapter Five).

4.4.2 Vignettes

Vignettes are defined as short stories or scenarios about hypothetical individuals in specified situations to which participants are encouraged to respond with comments or discussion of their ideas, attitudes, beliefs or personal experiences in relation to the vignettes presented (Finch, 1987; Hazel, 1995; Hughes, 1998). In qualitative research, the use of vignettes "enables participants to define the situation in their own terms" (Barter & Renold, 1999, p.1). However, Bryman (2008) cautions that the scenarios need to be believable, and credible situations must be constructed with efforts to arouse responses such as empathy, sympathy, disagreement. to elicit participants' genuine responses to these hypothetical scenarios. Hence, in this study, I developed four short situational vignettes with realistic scenarios involving hypothetical people. These four vignettes were developed based on my

observations of other international students and foreign language learners, my own experiences as an international student who also studied English Studies for her undergraduate degree, the focus of my research and previous studies in the field. They helped me explore how the interviewees judged, commented on or reacted to certain situations related to the research questions in this study.

Although the use of vignettes has been criticised as a less effective tool for collecting data than observation, Wilson and While (1998) argue that due to the nature of vignettes as "simulations of reality" (p.83), they enable participants to comment more freely and openly on similar situations or experiences from a hypothetical perspective rather than placing themselves as the story's protagonists. It could help minimise the potential bias that observation may have, since participants may alter their normal behaviours during interviews or observation when they know they are the research subjects (ibid). Also, one or two questions were asked following each vignette to help elicit participants' views and experiences, such as "What do you think of Andy's experience?" and "Do you have any suggestions for him?" (more in Appendix 2).

On the other hand, Finch (1987) cautions that it is different to ask what the hypothetical person, as a third party, should do and what the subject thinks he or she should do, warning that there might be contradictions since the hypothetical person and his/her story seem less threatening to participants. This circumstance did arise in my data collection process, but I took this contradiction as a useful probe to dig deeply why it happened. For example, when I ask a participant, "Do you have any suggestions for Andy" (in Vignette 1), she gave several suggestions. I followed up with the question, "Were they part of your experiences?", and her response showed that she had actually acted in a manner that contradicted her hypothetical advice to Andy when she encountered a similar situation in real life. I then encouraged her to talk more about what caused this contradiction to explore her acculturation experiences with more in-depth information. Findings from the use of vignettes will be discussed together with the other findings in Chapters Five and Six.

The following are the four vignettes I created and utilised for the British cohort in this study. The Chinese version was translated from the following English version by myself (both versions of the complete set of vignettes with follow-up questions are in Appendix 2).

Vignette 1

Andy, a year abroad British student, confides to his friend. He says, "The classes, campus life, academic activities, as well as living styles and the whole environment are just so different! It's not what I thought it would be at all. I felt quite disappointed. I felt discouraged from making Chinese friends and communicating with local Chinese. I just want to stay with my British friends and go back home as soon as possible."

This vignette assisted in addressing the first research questions about how the Chinese or British foreign language learners acculturated in the host countries, particularly how they dealt with the many differences but also the similarities between the two cultures and environments.

Vignette 2

Joanna has just completed her year abroad experience in China. On reflection, she says: "Honestly, to study and to live in a foreign country is not easy for me, even though I'm interested in the host language and culture and I've been learning them for some time. I appreciate getting a lot of help since I encountered a lot of challenges. At the same time, I also feel that I benefited a lot from this experience."

In this vignette, the foci were generated from the second and third research questions. It allowed participants to identify and define the facilitators, barriers, benefits or challenges during their acculturation experiences.

Vignette 3

Helen, another year abroad student in China, says, "After coming to China, I intentionally used phrases the way local people used them, did things their way and tried to make myself speak and act more Chinese rather than merely listening, seeing, and learning a new language. As a result, at the end of the Year Abroad programme, I felt that I had become more like the Chinese."

This vignette, along with the final one, focused more specifically on the key term "foreign language learners" in the research questions. It attempted to explore how participants experience acculturation with their particular role as foreign language learners who were simultaneously exposed to the target language and culture. This echoed Vignette 1, but with a more specific focus on their roles as foreign language learners.

Vignette 4

Harry, who has just completed his year abroad in China, says: "When I was learning Chinese in the UK, I was just a foreign language learner, but when I came to China, I felt I was becoming a bridge or a mediator between these two cultures when I started interacting with local people."

The final one, similar to Vignette 3, also focused on the participants' roles as foreign language learners, but also as SAP sojourners. This one focused more on how these foreign language sojourners view their social actions and interactions with the host environment when exposed to the target language and culture, and the potential changes in their understanding of the target language and culture or their identities.

4.5 Research Participants

As was stated in Chapter One, this study aims to investigate the acculturation experiences of two cohorts of language learners in two different, yet related contexts:

c) Chinese students in English Studies degree programmes who come to the UK through SAPs;
d) British students in Chinese Studies degree programmes who go to China through SAPs.

Although the cultural, economic, political or religious factors embedded in potential participants' backgrounds may make it difficult to compare these two cohorts, this study still attempts to examine them as a relatively reasonable 'mirror image'. It attempts to explore the potential similarities and differences between 'what happened' and 'how it happened' in the acculturation experiences among both cohorts in order to capture the essence of the common meaning from this phenomenon. With this in mind, there were three key considerations in setting the sampling criteria: a) the degree level of potential participants; b) their length of stay; c) the main purpose of the Study Abroad Programme. After searching for and provisionally contacting potential universities and institutions which provide SAPs that meet the study's specifications (see Section 4.6.1.1), the following sampling criteria were set for this study:

a) Chinese English Studies undergraduates and British undergraduates in Chinese Studies;

b) Taking a one-year SAP in the host country (the UK and China respectively) for the academic year 2017/18 (from September 2017 to June 2018);
c) To study as full-time non-degree-oriented students at a British or Chinese university.

Ultimately, the participants in this study came to be: a) 15 Chinese undergraduates (Year Three) in English Studies degree programmes from seven Chinese universities (all are Chinese "985" or "211" universities, meaning they are Tier One or Tier Two universities), and b) 18 British undergraduates (Year Three) in Chinese Studies degree programmes from four Russell Group British universities. These 15 Chinese participants went to seven British universities (six of them are Russell Group members, the other is a member of the N8 Group of research universities) through one-year SAPs; and the 18 British participants went to seven Chinese universities (all "985" or "211" universities) for the same academic year through SAPs. There was a little overlap between their home universities and host universities, and all participants in both groups were in the 'direct enrolment' (i.e. major or full orientation from host HEIs) type of SAPs (Norris & Dwyer, 2005) (Demographics see Appendix 4).

4.6 Research Procedures

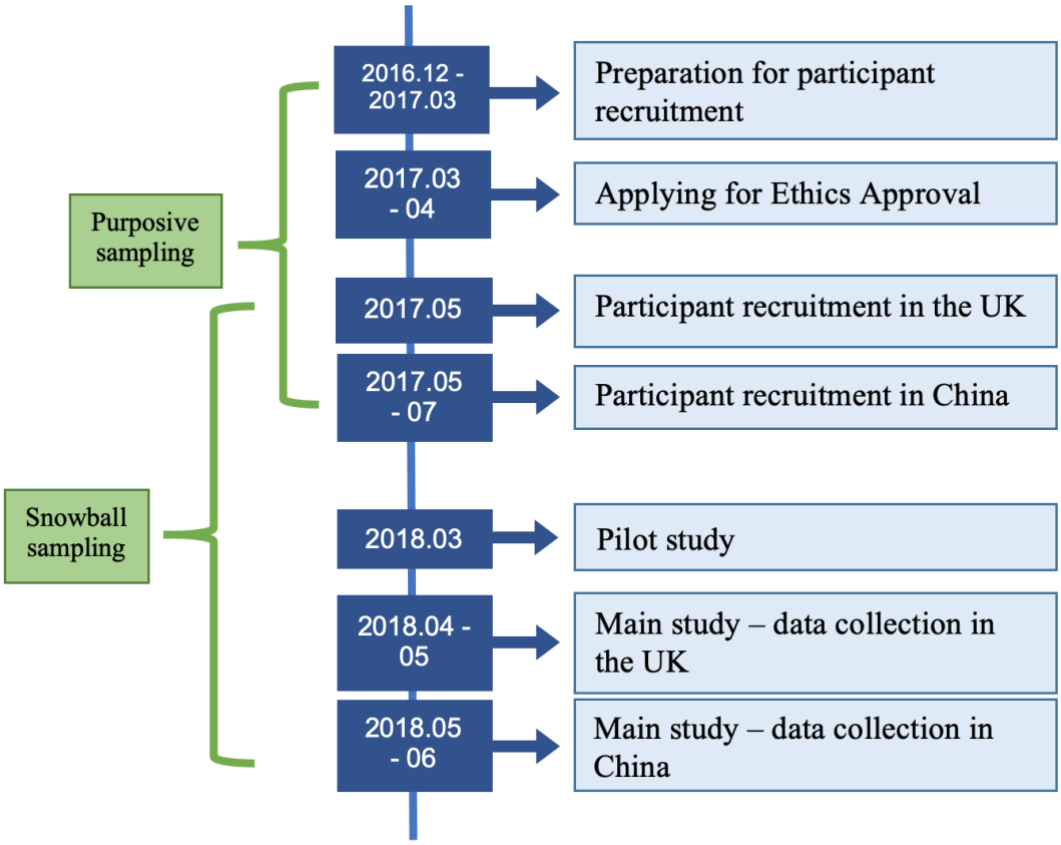

Figure 4-1 Timeline of research procedures

4.6.1 Participant recruitment

4.6.1.1 Preparation for participant recruitment

Based on different suggestions regarding the number of participants for a phenomenological study, a possible range for the sample size could be three to 25 (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Dukes, 1984).

In order to find potential participants that met my study criteria, I started with purposive sampling in order to search for potential participants with clear, feasible and reasonable sampling criteria in mind. Purposive sampling is a strategic way for researchers to build up a sample that can satisfy their specific research needs or purposes (Cohen et al., 2007). It particularly helps the investigation of a specific research problem in qualitative research by selecting and accessing to the most relevant and information-rich informants who are knowledgeable about the situation, topic or experience being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). From December 2016, I started manually and systematically searching for information about previous and forthcoming SAPs (i.e. those starting in September 2017) on Chinese and British universities and institutions' official websites. The purpose of this search was to find out if there were relevant SAPs for foreign language learners to study abroad in the UK or China for academic year 2017/18, and how many places the SAPs offered.

I started with the Chinese universities that provide English Studies and the British universities that provide Chinese Studies as undergraduate degree programmes. Then I contacted the relevant degree programme offices or departments as well as members of my personal network (i.e. family and friends and their network) via emails, phone calls and WeChat messages to inquire about potential programme plans and the number of SAP participants. A provisional invitation letter by me and a letter supporting and further explaining my provisional invitation from my principal supervisor were prepared to help potential participants or relevant officers understand the aim of this study and my purpose in contacting them. Initially, both undergraduate and graduate students were considered in order to ensure a sufficient sample size. However, although I received several positive responses containing programme information, I also got many rejections from people and institutions who did not wish to provide information or permission to access potential participants or had no relevant SAPs, while other people and institutions did not reply at all

(see Table 4-1 and 4-2). Based on the programme information I received from institutions that sent positive replies, most of which offered undergraduate programmes, the target group was narrowed down to the sampling criteria presented in Section 4.5.

	Number of institutions contacted (via emails or phone calls)	Number of institutions with relevant information and ***positive replies***	Number of institutions with relevant information but ***rejections***	Number of institutions ***without*** relevant information	Number of institutions ***without replies***
China	36	6	4	17	9
UK	10	3	1	3	3

Table 4-1 Information on contacting institutions for potential participant recruitment

	Number of individuals contacted for snowballing technique	Number of individual potential participants found
China	> 200	1
UK	>30	0

Table 4-2 Information on contacting individuals for potential participant recruitment

4.6.1.2 Participant recruitment in the UK and China

After I had received a few positive responses from both Chinese and British universities or individuals, I applied for Ethics Approval in March 2017. In order to successfully recruit participants, I needed to confirm the number of students in relevant SAPs, ask for formal permissions from the SAPs' convenors/co-ordinators (the 'gatekeepers'), access potential participants and formally invite them. However, considering the limited number of positive replies and potential participants as well as the difficulties in accessing them, it seemed necessary to have face-to-face interactions with both the gatekeepers and the potential participants to make my study invitation clearer and more convincing. Although face-to-face participant recruitment might not be crucial in other studies, it was pivotal in my process of securing sufficient participants. I contacted the gatekeepers and the individuals in both the UK and China who had responded with positive replies to negotiate a schedule (arranged after I had obtained Ethics Approval) for me to visit them, explaining my study and purpose, asking for their formal permissions, and formally inviting the potential participants.

However, although there were six positive replies from Chinese institutions, as was mentioned in Chapter One, unlike in the UK, it is not mandatory for students of foreign languages in China to spend a year abroad, which meant the number of potential participants at those institutions that had expressed willingness to help was very limited, with only one or two at each institution. This increased the difficulty of recruiting sufficient Chinese participants for this study. For this reason, snowball sampling became another significant strategy in this study. Snowball sampling starts with the researcher identifying a small number of potential individuals who have the characteristics relevant to the investigation topic, then use them as the informants to establish contact with other potential participants (Bryman, 2008; Cohen et al., 2007). Although snowball sampling has been called problematic due to the limited representation of the population it can offer, this qualitative study focuses on the in-depth experiences of individuals rather than looking at a large population with the aim of seeking generalisability. Therefore, snowball sampling was deemed a useful and appropriate strategy for this study, as its strength is that it helps researchers access participants when they are difficult to find (ibid).

After obtaining Ethics Approval in late April 2017, I conducted formal participant recruitment in both the UK and China. In May 2017, I visited two of the three British Russell Group universities (in different cities) that had responded with positive replies and met two gatekeepers (the Study Abroad Programme co-ordinators). The two gatekeepers helped arrange meetings in university classrooms with British undergraduates in Chinese Studies who would go to China for the academic year 2017/18. Students were asked to make free decisions about whether they wanted to come to the meetings. 21 students attended, and fourteen British students who met the study criteria and were willing to participate were recruited. Three British students who were taking SAPs for one academic year in Taiwan were also recruited for the pilot study (see Section 4.6.2), which would follow them for the first part of their experiences. The third British institution that gave a positive reply helped pass the invitation information to SAP students but received no positive replies; thus, the third institution was abandoned. Afterwards, from May to July 2017, I went to five Chinese cities to visit five Chinese "985" or "211" universities and one Study Abroad institution that specifically provides SAPs for individual students through partnerships with many Chinese universities. I met six gatekeepers and participants in university offices and classrooms and secured nine participants, with one more recruited through my personal network. In that way, ten Chinese students who met the sampling criteria and were willing to participate in this study were successfully recruited. In addition, three Chinese students who were taking the Study Abroad Programmes for only one academic term (from September 2017 to January

2018) in the UK were recruited for the pilot study (for the participants' demographics, see Appendix 3).

The sample changed slightly when one British participant decided not to take the Study Abroad Programme to China in September 2017 for an academic year, but five more Chinese participants and another five British participants were recruited through snowball sampling (see Table 4-3).

Participant recruitment		China	UK
Number of institution visits		6	2
Number of individual meetings		1	0
Pilot study	Number of participants recruited from institutions	3	3
	Number of participant withdrawals	0	0
	Final number of participants	3	3
Main study	Number of participants recruited from institutions	9	14
	Number of participants recruited from personal network	1	0
	Number of participants recruited from snowball sampling	5	5
	Number of participant withdrawals	0	1
	Final number of participants	15	18

Table 4-3 Information on participant recruitment

4.6.2 Pilot study

A pilot study is a small-scale study conducted prior to the main study with the aim of testing the research instruments to ensure their function as a whole (Bryman, 2008, p.247). It is carried out with smaller number of people who are not among the main study participants but are comparable to them (Bryman, 2008). Although a pilot study is usually recommended in quantitative research (e.g. surveys, experiments, etc.), it can also be used in qualitative research (e.g. semi-structured interviews) to seek feedback in order to clarify and adjust the content and wording of the interview questions, estimate the approximate time needed to conduct interviews, and help the interviewer gain greater confidence (ibid). I conducted a

pilot study in March 2018. Piloting the interview questions helped me figure out both the good points and deficiencies in the interview questions' design, and the pilot study participants were also asked to comment on the design of the interview questions so I could polish them. Because interview questions can be developed while piloting them, the idea of what is an appropriate question may change when the researcher proceeds in reality (Bell & Waters, 2018; Robson, 2011).

The pilot interviews were conducted individually via WeChat audio calls, Messenger audio calls and phone calls as telephone interviews, which allow researchers to interview people who are geographically difficult to access (Opdenakker, 2006) (For data protection considerations, see Section 4.7 Ethical Considerations). Because the Chinese group were in two different cities in China and the British group were in Taiwan, it would have been difficult to meet in person. Additionally, the main goal of these pilot interviews was to collect feedback on the clarity of the interview questions, so it was appropriate to carry them out via telephone interviews. Each interviewee was informed of the purpose of the pilot study before each pilot interview started. Five of these six pilot interviews were noted to be about 20-40 minutes, while one pilot interview with a British participant lasted for 50 minutes. Although she was only asked to provide feedback on the interview questions only, she also shared her experiences in Taiwan and answered two thirds of the interview questions. This proved helpful in estimating the approximate length of the actual interviews (about 60 to 90 minutes).

Five aspects of the questions were commented upon in the pilot participants' feedback. These aspects are listed below, along with details of how I addressed them.

a) Some questions sound repetitive, although are slightly different. For example: following a vignette, I asked, "How do you compare your experience with Helen's?" and "What did you do in terms of adjusting to studying and living in China/the UK?". It was suggested that these two questions be merged.

Researcher's response: I merged these two questions: "Compared with Helen's experience, what did you do in terms of adjusting to studying and living in China/the UK?"

b) The wording of some interview questions is confusing. For example, following a vignette story, I asked "can you relate to her reflection?" The participants got confused about what exactly the question meant.

Researcher's response: I changed the question to include more detail: "Relating to Joanna's reflection, could you please tell me more about your experience here? What was it like for you?"

c) Some questions needed time to think about; they could be hard to answer immediately upon being asked. For example, a metaphor was asked for to describe participants' overall impression of their experience abroad. It was suggested that it would be hard to think of one quickly, so participants needed to be asked to prepare one before the interview.

Researcher's response: I messaged each participant in the main study one day before their scheduled interview dates, asking them to review their experiences in the host country from the very beginning until the date they received the message, focusing especially on the most remarkable or unforgettable experiences, and prepare a metaphor (a word or a phrase) to describe their overall impression of their experiences.

d) Four vignettes were used as scenario stories in the interview design, and I sent the written stories to the pilot interviewees and asked them questions when they finished reading. The pilot participants suggested it would be better for the vignettes to be read aloud by the researcher.

Researcher's response: I read the vignette stories to the participants instead of presenting them with written ones.

e) A question was designed to ask about participants' experiences from four different aspects: "Can you tell me a surprising/annoying/amusing/confusing experience that made a strong impression on you?" It was suggested that I prepare four cards with these four categories to make it easier for participants to review and pick an experience for each category.

Researcher's response: Four cards with the words "surprising", "annoying", "amusing", and "confusing" on them were prepared before the main study.

As I discussed at the beginning of this section, a pilot study is a strategic way to help researchers find out what works and what does not in their research design. I received feedback on not only content and wording, but also, unexpectedly, very practical tips which reminded me of the importance of keeping questions clear and short, and to think from the interviewee's position when asking interview questions. Some necessary advance preparations are also important for both the interviewer and interviewee. This is the advice I gained from the pilot study and bore in mind during the main study.

4.6.3 Main study

4.6.3.1 Data collection

The main study was scheduled to take place in April to June 2018, near the end of the participants' SAPs. Thus, there were eight months between participant recruitment and data collection. The reason for this time gap was because, as was explained in Participant Recruitment (Section 4.6.1), the difficulties in accessing and securing sufficient participants made it pivotal for me to ascertain who they were, where they were from, where they were going, and whether they would be willing to participate in my study before they left for their host countries. Also, since this study investigates their whole-year study abroad experiences, the participants needed to spend the time (i.e. one year) in the UK/China so that they would have adequate experiences to share. Given this time gap, keeping in touch with the participants was deemed a vital step in the design of my research to retain their willingness to participate in the formal interviews. Thus, I decided to send deliberate greetings at three important points during the long wait to maintain a positive relationship with them: the first time was in September 2017 when they arrived in the host countries; the second point was during Christmas (end of December 2017); and the third greeting was during Chinese Spring Festival (February 2018). These three points were chosen based on my own experience as a Chinese student studying in the UK for years. The beginning was very chaotic since everything was novel but really unfamiliar to me; I felt overwhelmed when I first arrived in the UK. Also, Christmas and Chinese Spring Festival are the most important national festivals to British students and Chinese students respectively. To enjoy a foreign national festival in a foreign country can be an interesting experience but spending one's own national festival period in a foreign country where few people care about it might intensify

homesickness. Hence, I strategically used this knowledge to select the best times to send greetings to my participants.

Shortly before the data collection, I made appointments with the participants to negotiate a schedule that would suit all of us. When confirming whether these 33 students were still willing to participate in my study, it turned out that one British student had abandoned her academic year abroad in China after the first term. She suffered a mental health and psychological wellbeing issue, but she did not mention it or asked for my help when I greeted her at Christmas and during Spring Festival. After discussing with my principal supervisor, it was decided that if she was still willing to participate in my study and talk about her experience, an unsuccessful experience could be equally significant. With her personal decision to still be part of this study and no other participants dropping out, the sample size remained at 33 in total.

All the interviews were conducted individually (see Table 4-4). Fifteen interviews were conducted in six universities, spanning seven cities across the UK from April to early May 2018 with fourteen Chinese participants and one British participant (the one who had abandoned her one-year SAP and returned to the UK). Afterwards, I conducted eighteen interviews with seventeen British participants and one Chinese participant in seven universities, and four major east coast cities in China from May to mid-June 2018. This Chinese participant did her SAP from January 2017 to December 2017 due to an uncoordinated SAP arrangement at her home university; although she had a slightly different sojourn timeline from the other participants, she had still completed a one-year SAP sojourn in the UK. Also, her unique case could arguably provide valuable lessons, so she was still included in this study. She had already returned to China in January 2018, so I conducted the interview with her in China in May 2018. Most of the interviews (seventeen out of eighteen) were conducted face to face in safe and quiet places agreed by both interviewees and me (Cohen et al., 2017), such as cafés within or near their host universities, etc. (more discussion in Section 4.7). Face-to-face interviews ensure "synchronous communication" (Opdenakker, 2006, p.3) in time and place between the interviewer and interviewee, which brings advantages such as generating a more natural interaction, capturing emotions, behaviours or body language, using visual aids (e.g. showing cards), and keeping interviewees focused on the conversation (Dialsingh, 2011; Opdenakker, 2006). One interview was conducted via a WeChat video call because the interviewee had forgotten the appointment (although I reminded and confirmed with her four days before the scheduled interview date), and we did not manage to find another mutually suitable date and time to

meet in person. Although they cannot replicate in-person interactions, video-conferencing interviews can be an effective alternative as they offer visual and time-synchronous communication when place-synchronous is impossible (Nehls et al., 2015; Sedgwick & Spiers, 2020).

Time	Location (country)	Number of interviews	Interview location	
			universities	cities
2018.04 - 05	UK	15 (with 14 Chinese and 1 British participants)	6	7
2018.05 - 06	China	18 (with 17 British and 1 Chinese participants)	7	4

Table 4-4 Information on the main study data collection

Since these participants were studying the Chinese or English language and culture as their degrees (or as part of their degrees), they were each given the choice before the interviews of which language they felt comfortable expressing themselves in, either in Chinese or English or a mix of the two. All fifteen Chinese participants did it in Chinese, seventeen British participants did it in English, and one British participant chose Chinese because he is a British-Chinese who immigrated with his family to the UK at the age of eight, so he speaks Chinese at home and wants to learn more about Chinese. Probes were used as follow-up questions for two main purposes: a) to ask for more information, and b) to ask for a clearer explanation; for example, I asked interviewees "Can you please tell me more about…?" or "Sorry, what do you mean by…?".

The length of most interviews was between 60 and 90 minutes, as estimated, but some lasted between 90 minutes and two hours, and a few were about two and a half hours. Although some of them were much longer than the estimated interview length and made my transcription work more time-consuming (see Limitations of the Study - Section 7.4), some interviewees were, very kindly, enthusiastic to share every detail of their experiences, which contributed to enriching the overall research. Also, if some of these details were not relevant to the research topic, or if it was relevant but the interviewee was repeating himself/herself, I tried to guide them back to the topic by continuing with the next question or using probes to dig deeper into what they had said. Apart from being a researcher in this study, I reckon the nature of my role as a Chinese student studying in the UK for years helped both me and

participants (both Chinese or British) get engaged in the interviews more quickly and smoothly, since we shared empathy for each other as international students studying and living in a foreign country. My empathy for them helped me understand certain circumstances more easily when they found it hard to express or explain, and my shared experience as an international student made them feel close to me and comfortable when talking about their personal experiences. However, it also caused notable problems during the interviews. Some interviewees would say things such as "you must know that" rather than expressing in detail about what happened and how they viewed it and felt. Nevertheless, my role as a researcher is more vital than my role as an empathetic international student in this study; I would interpret their own views of their experiences, but I could not construct that interpretation based on my own understanding or experience. In such cases, I smiled at them to show my empathy but also encouraged them to talk more about their personal views and feelings. Moreover, because I did not actively engage in their experience or frequently contact them, I did not note any obvious sign that they were trying to please me as the researcher during the interviews by figuring out the points I was looking for (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) rather than talking fully about their actual experiences. At the end of an interview, the interviewee may get a "feeling of emptiness" as they have "been open about personal and sometimes emotional experiences" but "may not have received anything in return" (ibid, p.154). Thus, I asked interviewees if they had any questions for me to relieve this kind of feeling. In addition, a conclusion question was asked – "are there any points that you would like to raise in connection with my interview focus?" – to provide an additional opportunity for interviewees to add missing or further information (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

All the interviews were audio recorded. The interviewees' voices, facial expressions or body language could provide richer information to supplement their statements (ibid), so these were noteworthy aspects that needed to be noted down. However, because I was concentrating on the conversations and interactions with the interviewees during the interviews, I only wrote down those noteworthy points and my reflections after each interview. There were no sensitive issues directly relevant to the research topic per se, but a couple of interviewees spoke about their mental health and psychological wellbeing, and one interviewee even cried three times during the interview. I then paused and asked if they wanted me to stop recording before continuing the interview (see Ethical Considerations - Section 4.7).

4.6.3.2 Data analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research "involves organising, accounting for and explaining the data, making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, [and] noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.461). Thematic analysis was conducted in this study to make sense of the data collected in the semi-structured individual interviews. It is a widely used "fundamental method for qualitative analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.78) which illustrates data and analyses and identifies patterns or themes from the data, even with diverse subjects, in great detail through interpretations (Boyatzis, 1998). There are two primary ways of approaching and making sense of qualitative data. One is an inductive way, which is strongly data-driven; themes or patterns are identified from the data without using or trying to fit in perceived or predetermined categories. The other way is to deductively identify themes from the data based on the researchers' theoretical or analytical interest in the research area. The deductive way allows researchers to examine a pre-existing theory with a different sample or in a different context by coding with predetermined codes, elements of theory or categories (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The decision of which way to choose, as Braun and Clarke (2006) claim, is made based on how and why the researcher codes the data.

I started the data analysis using the deductive approach for this study. This was chosen because in terms of this study's research questions and theoretical framework, the exploration of international students' experiences or second language learners' experiences abroad is not a new research area. However, the use of this study's theoretical framework (i.e. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development and its extended work – Elliot et al.'s Academic Acculturation Model) in this particular research context is relatively new. Additionally, the structure of the theoretical framework and research questions are relatively complex (two overarching bioecological systems with five subsystems in each of them, and four factors under each subsystem) (see Appendix 5). Therefore, starting with deductive thematic analysis allowed me to focus more specifically on the aspects of data I was attempting to explore rather than examining the description of the collected data overall (Brank & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, the data that could not be coded into predetermined categories was identified and analysed to see whether they were an important and representative new code or category which could help confirm, modify or refute the adopted theoretical framework (Boyatzis, 1998); this was also a key aspect in the data analysis that enabled me to further extend the adopted theory or model in this study.

4.6.3.3 Data analysis steps

In the data analysis, I followed the process of thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006): "a) familiarise yourself with the data; b) generate initial codes; c) search for themes; d) review themes; e) define and name the themes; and f) produce the report" (p.87). Explanations of each step of this process in analysing my research data are as follow.

I started to familiarise myself with my data by transcribing them into written text. As Braun and Clarke (2006) claim, it is vital for researchers to immerse themselves in data to ensure they are familiar with both the depth and the breadth of the data content. Transcription is a time-consuming but beneficial "interpretative process" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.203) for researchers who do it by themselves. Researchers can recall social or emotional aspects of the actual interview and interview situation during this process, and this can help them start identifying the meaning of what was expressed in oral form (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Hence, I did all the transcriptions (n=33) by myself word by word with the technical assistance of F5 Transcription PRO software (audiotranskription) and a foot pedal. F5 Transcription PRO is one kind of transcription software which has the feature of changing voice speed, automatic short rewind, and marking the transcript with the point in time for each sentence or each word as needed. In addition, the foot pedal helped free my fingers and allow them to focus on typing by allowing my feet to control the rewind.

As has been mentioned, sixteen interviews were conducted in Chinese and seventeen in English. Language issues are noteworthy in cross-language qualitative research like this study. As Temple and Edwards (2002) argue, language is not simply a tool to convey words and phrases but "an important part of conceptualisation, incorporating values and beliefs" (p. 3). A single word can be understood differently by different translators or in different contexts. This means the task of translation in cross-language research cannot be done well merely with advanced translation skills, but the understanding of the certain context and the idea of how to interpret within the context are also important. The role of the translator is more likely to be that of an interpreter, and it is pivotal in cross-language research (ibid). In this regard, I decided to do the translation work by myself. Besides, as a Chinese native speaker, reading Chinese participants' transcripts in Chinese is, in fact, a privilege for me as it allows me to understand the meaning of what they said more easily. Therefore, I decided to keep each transcript in the language in which its interview was conducted. The translation work was conducted on selected quotes or codes while producing the final report (i.e. writing this thesis).

I did the data analysis with the assistance of QSR International's software, NVivo 12. It is computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) which affords efficiencies for researchers to manage data, ideas, queries, etc. (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The memo and annotation in NVivo 12 also helped my data analysis process particularly, since one of the most common critiques of coding in qualitative data analysis is that the process entails data fragmentation that can lead to the loss of the context, depth and complexity of what is said (Bryman, 2008). NVivo 12 not only helped me organise the data but also assisted me in keeping the context, fieldwork notes and my own ideas together with the data during interpretation.

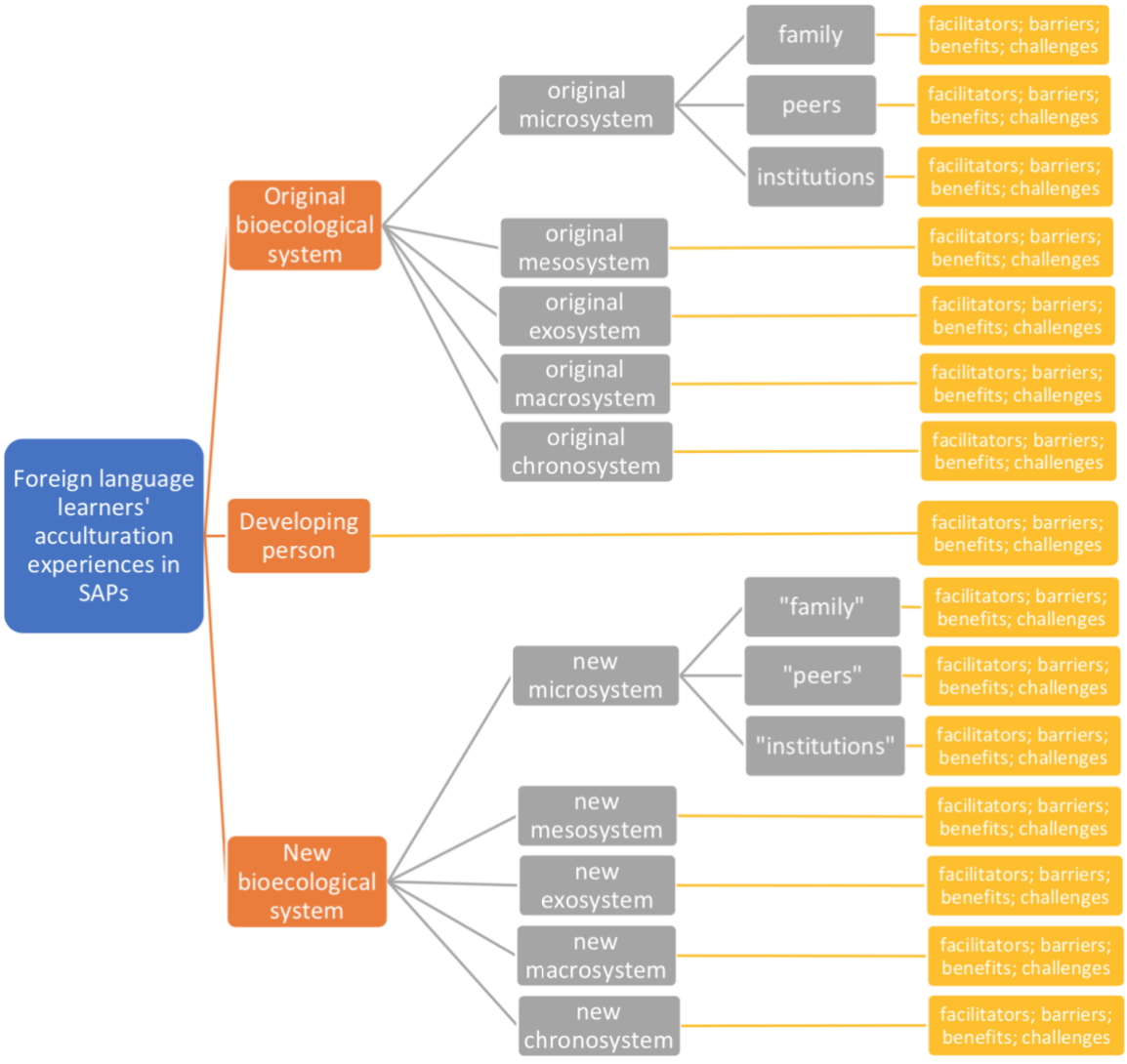

Figure 4-2 Structure for deductive data analysis

I started to generate initial codes from four randomly selected transcripts (two from the Chinese group and two from the British group). Since I conducted thematic analysis deductively in this study, I developed the structure with pre-determined elements from the adopted theoretical framework (see Chapter Three, Section 3.5) and research questions in

this study. Specifically, as is shown in Figure 4-2, I set *original* and *new bioecological systems* as the parent codes (or main themes), each layered system (*microsystem – family/"family", peers/"peers", institutions/"institutions", mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem* and *chronosystem*) as their child codes (or sub-themes), and the categories *facilitators, barriers, benefits* and *challenges* from the research questions as the grandchild codes (or sub-sub-themes). As was discussed in the outline of the Theoretical Framework (Chapter Three), I left another pre-determined parent code, *developing person*, for emerging child codes from the data in this particular cohort and context, but the four grandchild codes from the research questions (*facilitators, barriers, benefits* and *challenges*) are still involved.

Then I identified the data in these four transcripts while thoroughly reading and re-reading them and organised them into "meaningful groups" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.88) with the predetermined structure by marking and naming them in NVivo 12. For example, when an interviewee talked about his/her parents hardly understanding his/her real daily life in the host country, which sometimes aggravated his/her loneliness, it was coded as *'lack of understanding'* as a *barrier* from *family* in *original microsystem*. After having the initial codes cross-checked by an experienced researcher (I will discuss this more in next section), I continued coding with the rest of the transcripts (n=29). Once the first round of coding was completed, I checked each code and searched for themes by sorting different codes into potentially relevant themes or subthemes. When "a set of candidate themes" or themes for initial categories (ibid, p.91) had been devised, I did the second round of analysis as a form of review and cross-checking. This step revealed that some themes did not have enough supportive codes, while other themes could be collapsed into one. Both the themes and extracts were reviewed and refined to better fit the predetermined structure. Next, the themes and subthemes were defined and named in order to capture "the 'essence' of what each theme is about" (ibid, p.92). A final list of themes and subthemes can be found in Appendix 5.

Also, since I asked the participants to describe their overall acculturation experiences in a metaphor, a list of metaphors (see Chapter Five, Section 5.2.2) was organised to assist with the data analysis. As has been mentioned, metaphors were used as a tool for the participants to construct meanings for their acculturation experiences in the host countries as a significant whole. Therefore, this list of metaphors was used to assist my data analysis in two ways. Firstly, the metaphors helped me understand each participant's acculturation experience better, especially when I analysed the data deductively and disassembled it into different predetermined codes and categories. These metaphors helped me picture their experiences in a holistic way. Secondly, they helped me grasp the essence of the participants'

acculturation experiences, showing how each group (i.e. the Chinese group and the British group) experienced acculturation in the host country, which allowed me to make comparisons between these two groups to address my research questions.

4.6.4 Validity, reliability and trustworthiness

Validity and reliability are important criteria for conducting effective research (Bryman, 2008; Cohen et al., 2007). Validity concerns the integrity of research, whether the adopted "particular instrument in fact measures what it purports to measure" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.133), while reliability concerns whether the results are repeatable (Bryman, 2008). However, with the stand that the social reality cannot be viewed as a single absolute account, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose an alternative assessment criterion to specify validity and reliability in qualitative research: trustworthiness, which comprises credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility refers to the confidence and value in the findings of a study according to the research participants and context setting. In this study, data was collected from the people who experienced acculturation themselves in their social lives, which means the constructed meanings of the experiences came from their own experiences. The accuracy and richness of information about shared lived experiences help increase the credibility of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All transcripts were sent back to the interviewees to verify and check the wording and content in his/her transcript. They were also allowed to modify the content if necessary. Transferability examines whether the findings can be applicable in a different context with different participants. In this regard, "space triangulation" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.142) as a cross-cultural technique powerfully demonstrated transferability in my study and helped "overcome the parochialism of studies" (ibid, p.142) which are conducted in the same country or similar subcultures. This study involved two groups of participants – the Chinese group and the British group – and their experiences took place in two different countries and cultures, and eleven cities and subcultures. Moreover, the findings chapters (Chapters Five and Six) contain qualitative evidence, i.e. descriptive quotes extracted from data, and the detailed step-by-step and transparent descriptions involved in the data collection, as well as the pilot study, aimed to increase this study's transferability and credibility.

Dependability examines whether the research findings can be replicated with the same participants in the same context, and confirmability examines whether the researcher's

biases, personal experiences, interests or opinions have influenced the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Cross-checking can help address the validation of research data, findings or interpretations, etc., verifying and ensuring the research is reliable (Cohen et al., 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since the interpretation and translation work were all my own, the dependability of this study could become flawed. Thus, my principal supervisor, an experienced qualitative researcher, assisted with the cross-checking of the initial themes and sub-themes to increase the dependability of this study (see a de-identified copy of an analysed transcript and the coding verification document in Appendices 6 and 7). Finally, with respect to the confirmability of this study, I did note that my personal identity and experience are important factors in the data collection, but the fieldwork notes made during the data collection stage and the code verification of the initial themes and sub-themes in the data analysis stage are both helpful to increase the confirmability of this study.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

When conducting research involving people, the ethical principal of ensuring that the subjects' rights or values will not be threatened is as crucial as obtaining valid and reliable data (Cohen et al., 2007). In this study, before I started my participant recruitment by asking for formal permissions from SAPs' gatekeepers and formally inviting potential participants, I applied for Ethics Approval following the University Ethics Guidance Notes (the Ethics Application was fully completed after all formal permissions were obtained and submitted to the Ethics Committee, College of Social Science, University of Glasgow). Following Ethics Approval, formal permissions were sought from the SAPs' gatekeepers in two British universities, five Chinese universities, and one Study Abroad institution in China.

Next, the gatekeepers assisted in arranging meetings for me and potential participants (i.e. students in SAPs). All students were reminded that attending the meetings was completely voluntary. Participant Information Sheets (see Appendix 8) were distributed to the students who came to the meetings, along with a formal invitation letter prepared by myself and verified by my principal supervisor. I explained the general purpose of the study, and the potential risk to them was also explained as being very low. Additionally, students at the meeting were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and that they were allowed to withdraw at any time before or during the interviews or refuse to answer any of the questions. Moreover, questions from students at the meeting were answered. After giving their oral consent, some students at the meeting were recruited as participants for this study.

Participants recruited through personal networks or snowball sampling were also provided with the same information. The contact information of successfully recruited participants was kept safely and privately in a Word document on my personal laptop, which was password-protected and accessible to me only.

Interview places were agreed by both participants and the researcher – often a comfortable, convenient, quiet but neutral and safe place (Cohen et al., 2007), including cafés within or near their host university campuses, a café in the city centre of their host city, a classroom at the host university, or the common room in a participant's dormitory. Before each interview, the participant was provided a Consent Form (see Appendix 9) and Participant Information Sheet and asked to sign the Consent Form if they fully consented. One participant, as mentioned in section 4.6.3.1, did the interview via WeChat video call (audio recorded only), so an electronic copy of the Consent Form and Participant Information Sheet were sent to her prior to the interview. I signed her Consent Form on her behalf on a hard copy with her recorded oral consent.

Additionally, three interviewees from both groups mentioned their mental health and psychological wellbeing issues. In those instances, I paused the recorder and asked if they wanted me to stop recording before continuing the interview. One of these three interviewees briefly talked about an aspect of her previous mental and psychological issues as part of the background information for her current experience in the host country. Another interviewee abandoned her one-year SAP after one academic term due to her mental health and psychological wellbeing and was taking mental and psychological therapy. I also double-checked with her whether her condition permitted her to participate in the interview, and she was reminded that she was free to withdraw or refuse to answer any questions or at any points if she was not happy with them. She confirmed that she had recovered to a good enough level to talk about her experience without any potential mental or psychological harm to herself. The last interviewee did not show any sign of this issue before the interview but cried three times during the interview due to her unpleasant experiences in the UK. Apart from checking if she wanted the recording to be stopped, I had to change my role as a "qualitative research interviewer" to "a friend, an empathetic and caring researcher" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.97) who had had similar experiences as an international student. "Empathy" (ibid, p.98) and understanding (e.g. my personal and similar experiences) were offered to help calm her. Afterwards, she showed appreciation that I had shared my experiences and decided to complete her interview.

In order to relieve the pressure on interviewees to have to "disclose experiences and emotions they later decide they may have preferred to keep to themselves" (ibid, p.98), which is likely to be stimulated by empathy from the researcher, transcripts were provided to all participants for verification, allowing them to modify or decide freely whether or not to have their interviews included as study data. Additionally, data was collected before GDPR regulations were introduced. All collected data were de-identified and kept privately and safely on my password-protected personal laptop (the recordings were deleted from my phone) and can be accessed only by myself and my two supervisors. The participants in this study are all referred to by pseudonyms, and both their home universities' and host universities' names are also de-identified as, for instance, "China-a University" for Chinese University A or "UK-b University" for British University B to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

4.8 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has outlined and discussed the methodology of this study in detail in accordance with the research questions. The rationales behind the selection of my philosophical worldview, research approach and research instruments have been thoroughly discussed. This chapter has also carefully explained the sampling criteria and research participants. This entailed a step-by-step discussion of the participant recruitment, the pilot study, the main data collection and the associated analysis of the data. Finally, the issues of validity, reliability, trustworthiness and ethical considerations have also been discussed. In the following two chapters, I will present my research findings. Chapter Five will provide an overview of the environmental factors in Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences through SAPs, and Chapter Six will explore the personal factors in their experiences.

Chapter Five: Findings (A): Overview of and Environmental Factors in Chinese and British Foreign Language Learners' Acculturation Experiences in SAPs

5.1 Introduction

As was previously discussed in Chapter Two, this study aims to provide an in-depth exploration of the "process" (Wang, 2010, p.50) of Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation and interactions in their new environment through SAPs in the UK and China respectively, as well as the significant factors in this process. The data in this study was collected through qualitative semi-structured individual interviews (see Chapter Four). The current chapter and the next one present the findings drawn from the analysis of this qualitative data to meet these research aims. This chapter focuses on an overview of and the environmental factors in Chinese and British foreign language sojourners' acculturation experiences in SAPs, while the next chapter primarily presents the findings in relation to personal factors and unique cases.

In this chapter, Section 5.2 provides the demographics and general backgrounds of the interviewees in this study, then presents the analysis of the metaphors collected in each interview to address Research Question 1: *How do Chinese foreign language learners experience acculturate in the UK through Study Abroad Programmes? How does it compare with British foreign language learners' experiences of acculturation in China?* Next, in Section 5.3, the findings on the intertwined influential factors and first-hand lessons focusing on sojourners' original and new environments are presented in order to address Research Question 2 – *What factors facilitate Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences? What factors serve as barriers?* – and Research Question 3: *What are the first-hand lessons (benefits and challenges) when foreign language learners are exposed to the target language and culture?* The data was analysed deductively according to the structure of the theoretical framework (see Chapter Four). Hence, the findings on the environmental factors are presented according to the predetermined categories from Bronfenbrenner's theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; See also Elliot et al., 2016a) (see Figure 4-2, Chapter Four).

Due to the comparability between Chinese and British groups' experiences, the data collected from both groups are presented together to avoid repetition, while differences are highlighted. Therefore, in presenting the findings in this chapter, each quotation is attributed

to an interviewee using his/her pseudonym, followed by a letter indicating his/ her gender (M=Male, F=Female) and nationality (i.e. Chinese or British); for example, Eva_F_British refers to a British female interviewee whose pseudonym is Eva.

5.2 An Overview of Chinese and British Foreign Language Learners' Acculturation Experiences in One-year Study Abroad Programmes

This section will begin by providing detailed information on the demographics of the participants, which can help with the understanding of their experiences. Next, it will present the interviewees' chosen metaphors, which were asked for in order to allow the participants to convey their overall experiences in a holistic way (see Chapter Four).

5.2.1 Demographics

Fifteen Chinese participants were invited to participate in individual semi-structured interviews. All of them were female within an age range of 20-23. They were undergraduates (Year Three) from seven Chinese universities, thirteen of whom were taking BAs in English, while the other two were doing BAs in Business English programmes. The BA earned in the Business English degree programme is equal to the BA earned in the English degree programme, and they are both provided by the School of Foreign Languages in Chinese universities. These two programmes both focus on English language, but whereas a BA in English focuses more on language and literature, a BA in Business English pays more attention to the language of the business world. These participants picked English as their degree programme because they found it was the only and/or best choice when they were selecting their universities (e.g. if they wanted to be offered a place in their dream universities) (n=8), because of personal interest in the English language and culture (n=7), because it suited their career plans (n=3), or based on suggestions from parents (n=1) (some participants had multiple reasons). They were all provided with the choice between a one-year or one-term SAP, and they each decided to take a full year. Most of them (fourteen out of fifteen) were very happy with their chosen duration, but one participant (Zai_F_Chinese) became seriously homesick during her one-year experience in the UK and regretted not having chosen a shorter duration. All fifteen Chinese participants had been learning English for a long time before they went to universities (six to twelve years during their primary or secondary schooling). Only three of them had studied and lived abroad, albeit for short periods (Yu_F_Chinese and Jin_F_Chinese had been to three-week summer schools in the

UK, and Hu_F_Chinese had been to the US for a four-week summer programme). All three of these participants noted that they had a "good impression" of being abroad, especially Yu_F_Chinese, who said it was her "familiarity with the UK" that encouraged her to take the SAP in the UK this time.

In the British group, eighteen participants were interviewed. As with the Chinese group, all of them were within the 20-23 age range, but half of this group were female, and the other half were male. They are undergraduates (Year Three) from four British universities. Twelve of them were enrolled in BA programmes in Chinese Studies, and the other six were doing joint degrees (i.e. two in Chinese and French, one in Chinese and Spanish, one in Chinese and Business Management, one in Chinese and International Relations, and one in Chinese and Economics). Their primary reasons for selecting Chinese as part of their degree programmes were "personal interest in Chinese language, culture or history" (n=10), "wanting the challenge of learning a very different language" (n=8), "future plans" (n=10), and "already having some foundation in Chinese/previous experiences in China" (n=5) (some of them provided multiple reasons). Quite unlike the Chinese group, twelve British participants had previous experiences of learning Chinese prior to university (nine of them had been learning Chinese for 18 weeks to five years before university, Jack_M_British had been learning Chinese for seven to eight years, Quinn_M_British had immigrated with his family from China when he was eight, and Sally_F_British's mother was Chinese), while the other six participants only started learning Chinese during university. Eleven of the participants in this group had previous experiences of living or studying abroad (four of them had gone to China for short language programmes, two of them had lived in China with their families for three years, Mary_F_British was from a British family but was currently living in another European country, Karl_M_British's family was from another Asian country but he was born in the UK, Nala_F_British lived in a West Asian country for two years, Cara_F_British was from another European country but doing her undergraduate degree in the UK, and Kate_F_British had been to different places for less than a month each time). All of these eleven participants mentioned that their previous experiences abroad were "helpful" this time in China (e.g. making it "easier to adjust to a new place" ((Nala_F_British)) and making them "more excited to see the changes [in China that he remembers]" ((Aaron_M_British))). Fourteen of them were mandatorily required to take the one-year SAPs to China as part of their degree programmes, while the other four made their own choices to spend one year in China because "Chinese is a harder language for us to learn" (Louis_M_British). However, two of the fourteen participants who were mandatorily required to take the one-year SAPs wished they could have had shorter durations in China

because “the weather is nicer…in the second semester and it is time to go home” (Andy_M_British) and Jack_M_British found his SAP experience “useless”.

Given the detailed demographic information provided above, it seems that although the Chinese participants did not have much previous experience of living or studying in another country, they had acquired good levels of English language since they had all been learning it for years. The British participants had quite impressive experiences of living or studying abroad, and some had even been to China previously. Several British participants had had long contact with China or Chinese learning (i.e. family backgrounds, Chinese learning experience). Also, all the participants had been learning the English/Chinese language and culture as part of their university degree programmes for at least two years. With these foundations, would they find it easy to acculturate and interact in the UK/China? The answer begins to be revealed by the metaphors collected in this study.

5.2.2 Analysis of the metaphors

All interviewees in this study were asked to use a metaphor (i.e. a word or a phrase) to describe their overall impression of their own one-year experiences in the host countries. The collected metaphors were categorised into four classifications: *fruitful experience, fruitful but transitory experience, trying experience and inessential experience*. Notably, although some metaphors use different words/phrases, they share similar meanings. For example, the most typical type of metaphor chosen is exemplified by Scott_M_British, who used the metaphor “an out of body experience”, while Xing_F_Chinese thought her experience in the UK was like “an in-game side quest”, and Karl_M_British used “once in a lifetime” to describe his experience in China. These three metaphors have similar meanings as the participants’ experiences in the host countries were transitory and did not follow the set paths of their lives. The “out of body experience” metaphor was chosen to represent this group of metaphors because it demonstrates the meaning most clearly.

Fruitful experience	Fruitful but transitory experience	Trying experience	Inessential experience
"a box of chocolates" (Cn=2; Bn=2)	*"an out of body experience"* (Cn=3; Bn=2)	*"hell"* (Cn=1; Bn=1)	*"freedom"* (Cn=1)
"Open a door" (Cn=2; Bn=2)		*"mice trying to pull a turtle"* (Bn=1)	
"a rollercoaster" (Bn=3)		*"being exhibited in a zoo"* (Bn=1)	
"an adventure" (*"being thrown into a deep end of the swimming pool"*) (Cn=2; Bn=1)		*"a bird"* (Bn=1)	
"best school" (Cn=1; Bn=2)			
"mountaineering" (Cn=2)			
"reading a book" (Cn=1)			
"my glasses" (Bn=1)			
"coming of age" (Bn=1)			

Table 5-1 Classification of metaphors sequenced based on the number of times they were used (C=Chinese, B=British, n=number of interviewees, e.g. Cn=2 means two Chinese interviewees used this metaphor)

Fruitful experience. Most interviewees (22 out of 33, ten Chinese and thirteen British) found their acculturation experiences in the host countries quite fruitful, with nine remarkable metaphors falling into this category. Sojourners noted that their experiences provided important opportunities for them to learn and experience new things, regardless of ease or difficulty, enjoyability or unpleasantness, which facilitated their development in different aspects (e.g. linguistic and cultural understanding, etc.).

One of the most used metaphors in this category was "a box of chocolates", which was selected by two Chinese and two British interviewees. As they explained:

> *…life…in China is like a box of chocolates, you don't really know what you're gonna get…some days are just incredible…you get to see some amazing things,*

> *and other days…you do just really wish you were back at home…everyday has just been something different.* (Andy_M_British)

> *…I feel that I like it here, but I also don't like it here…The lifestyle…many new academic ideas, these are really good. But I don't like the food here, and sometimes you find yourself…really hard to get involved…* (Yang_F_Chinese)

When sojourners go abroad, especially when there is a large cultural difference between their home and host countries (e.g. China and the UK), they may find that everything is new and different, and they may enjoy some things while being upset by others. Although it is not the case that people are able to predict what is going to happen each day in their home country, it can arguably be even harder for sojourners in a foreign country. Because they have left familiar environment and moved to an unfamiliar one, the new environment is likely to increase their feeling of losing control of their lives, which is what the interviewees were describing when they said they did not know what piece of chocolate they would get from the box next. Although it offers opportunities to experience different things, the unfamiliar environment presents challenges to sojourners. A very similar metaphor raised by three British interviewees is "a rollercoaster". This also implies the mix of ups and downs in their experiences in China. However, it suggests a series of stages during the year:

> *…my time in China has been a rollercoaster ride… the first three months…was surreal…Then December and January, kind of missed home…but I was really excited to go back to the UK [during Christmas holiday] to just live British life for a little bit…Then going back and travelling was amazing but…March and April were bad because I was so homesick, but now May has come around, it's been really positive… adapting to new experiences is constantly affecting you, it's just been very up and down.* (Nala_F_British)

> *It's...quite chaotic at the beginning, then you get used to it so it's smoother…when it comes to the end, actually I feel a bit more anxious, because I'm feeling…I'm about to leave where I just got familiar with.* (Quinn_M_British)

Although no Chinese interviewees described their experiences in the UK as a rollercoaster, there were notable differences between the different British interviewees' responses. The beginning of their sojourn in a foreign country was commonly described as "surreal" and "chaotic", requiring a lot of effort to get settled. However, Nala, for example, felt homesick during the middle part of her journey in China, and although she went back to the UK for a short break, it did not help long-term, then she found the period towards the end of her sojourn in China positive, which may be because she knew that she was going home soon. On the contrary, Quinn found that life in China became much more under control when he became more settled, but he became anxious, rather than excited as Nala did, to leave the place where he just settled in. It should be noted that this difference does not specifically

suggest gender differences, which are not a main focus or variable in this study (see Limitations of the Study in Chapter Seven). What this difference does suggest is the different possible statuses of sojourners even at the same stage of their sojourns.

Instead of using a rollercoaster as her metaphor, one Chinese student (Ting_F_Chinese) used "reading a book" to describe the different stages of her experience in the UK. In her description, it was similar to the experience of "a rollercoaster" because she found her sojourn consisted of different phases like "reading a book" (i.e. reading the same English novel three times):

> *…the first time I read this English novel, I was really excited…when I did it again, I had to try to understand it, and learn new grammar or vocabulary…I was not enjoying it and I didn't understand the grammar…it was tough, but you still have to finish it…now it comes to the third time, I accept the differences whether I understand them or not, I just need to accept it because it's a different country…now I feel much better…* (Ting_F_Chinese)

Ting's experience is somewhat similar to Nala's; they both experienced a process of "exciting – difficult – positive" during their years. However, some senses of initiative can be identified in Ting's description. Even though she found the novel hard to read the second time, she persisted to understand and finish it. She might still find this book hard to read, but when she kept at it for a third time and built upon what she had learnt, she reached the stage of accepting the differences between different countries. The slight but still important differences between "reading a book" and "a rollercoaster" are likely to be that when reading the book, the reader (i.e. sojourner) can make his/her own decisions about whether to continue or give up on this book. In Ting's case, she persisted and eventually learnt to accept the cultural differences. On the other hand, the rollercoaster metaphor suggests that the passenger (i.e. sojourner) has to experience ups and downs as the train travels, and that he/she sometimes might barely have time to prepare or react properly before the next exciting or annoying thing comes along. Even if students have been learning the Chinese/English language and culture for years, sojourning in real life in the target country is still likely to be overwhelming.

Another most commonly used metaphor was "open[ing] a door", which was picked by two Chinese and two British interviewees. This metaphor highlights the opportunity to see and experience novelty and differences as a feature of sojourning in a foreign country. As the interviewees described:

> *…I'm here to broaden my horizons, to experience something you can hardly have in China. Now I feel I'm more open-minded, I won't think about issues only from a Chinese perspective, but from the worldwide [perspective]…* (Mu_F_Chinese)

> *…China has opened my eyes…different people and different possibilities…many new experiences…I've met people from so many countries and learnt about what they do…It's…not just helped my language…It opened a lot of other doors for me…for opportunities and ideas.* (Eva_F_British)

Similarly, Sally_F_British stated that her "door" to China helped her as she "gained something more, understood more, and it gave me more confidence". At the same time, this door does not only provide the opportunity for sojourners to see a new and foreign world, but also to understand their home countries from another perspective. As Mao stated:

> *You have to go through the door and go outside, then you can realise there are both good and bad things everywhere…Then you can see your own country from a more macro perspective…what is very advanced in China now…and what we can learn from other countries…* (Mao_F_Chinese)

On the other hand, apart from the eye-opening aspect of sojourning in a foreign country, another feature might be the unknown and its associated challenges, as the metaphor "an adventure" suggests, although it is somewhat similar to "a box of chocolates". One British and two Chinese interviewees used this metaphor:

> *…it's like an adventure…I know I'm going to a foreign country and I really want to, but I didn't think too much…about what it would be like…There are so many difficult and confusing things, especially when I just got here…Maybe it's because I'm like a visiting student…you know nobody here. You have to learn and deal with lots of things on your own…* (Qiang_F_Chinese)

Louis used a more vivid phrase, although one with a similar meaning to "an adventure", to describe his experience in China, saying it was like "being thrown into the deep end of the swimming pool":

> *… it's almost you've been put into a situation where like you feel you're out of your depth, and you just have to try and survive, and you need to keep yourself floating and not drown under the pressure…because you're given very little information…you're like being thrown into the middle of the sea without a lifejacket.* (Louis_M_British)

Sojourning to a foreign country can be daunting and challenging, and the larger the cultural differences are between home and host countries, the more challenging this experience is likely to be. As Qiang raised in her excerpt, going to a foreign country through an SAP is likely to make her experience in the UK harder since she neither had any network nor much

information or idea about what would happen in the foreign country. However, the difference between this metaphor and the "box of chocolates" is that sojourners have to try, to learn, and eventually, to survive in the unfamiliar environment. Meanwhile, despite the possible difficulties and challenges the sojourn brings, it also provides great opportunities for them to learn. For these foreign language learners, in particular, going to the real context of the target language and culture in which they have been interested and learnt for years becomes the "best school" (as was said by two British and one Chinese interviewees) or "my glasses" (one British interviewee).

> *…living every day in the scenario is the best school…[my host university] maybe wasn't the best school for me to learn my Chinese…[but] the experience I've had outside of class in China…you do need to go to classes to be taught how to use the grammar and the new words, [but it's] also important to be able to go out into society and use these words and understand its concepts…in real life situations…* (Caroline_F_British)

> *…I'm short-sighted so I can only see a very short distance without my glasses…[in China] I started to get improved in language, I met new people, I travelled around the city more…sort of that very limited field vision and the isolation I felt slowly began to go away…the surroundings became clearer…I knew more, I felt more, everything was all familiar and clearer and more comfortable.* (Sarah_F_British)

Particularly for foreign language learners, gaining a more realistic and deeper understanding of the language and culture could be arguably as both the expectation for and benefit from going to this "best school" or wearing this "glasses". Spending some time being immersed in the country of their target language and culture seems to provide them the opportunity to observe the linguistic and cultural differences from their own perspectives, minimising potential risks of misinterpretation or ethnocentric judgements based on the information resources they have access to at home (UCML, 2012). This is conveyed in specific quotes from the interviewees: "The more you immerse yourself in the culture, the more you get out of it" (Aaron_M_British), and "when you understand more, it will be easier for you to accept [the differences]" (Kang_F_Chinese).

Additionally, two Chinese interviewees offered "mountaineering" as a metaphor for their experiences in the UK. This metaphor has a somewhat similar ethos to being persistent and hardworking, like the previous "reading a book" from another Chinese interviewee. It could be because the principle of Chinese education emphasises perseverance and diligence, so when mountain-climbers (i.e. sojourners) meet difficulties while climbing the mountain (i.e. while sojourning in the UK), they are likely to encourage themselves to keep going until they reach the top (e.g. the end of the SAP or their own goals). As Yan_F_Chinese stated,

"it's like a process of keeping yourself progressing". "The views [at different height of the mountain] are very different…[when you reach the top,] you then suddenly realise that you have quite a different way of thinking" (Jin_F_Chinese).

Notably, moving to a foreign country is likely to be a special change in one's chronosystem (i.e. milestones in time), which can be contributory to the sojourner's development (Elliot et al., 2016a), as the last metaphor in this category – "coming of age" – demonstrates:

> *"…it's been…coming of age…[before came to China] I was very comfortable, I'd never been challenged, whereas coming out here, I've had to work harder…I've had to actively try to make friends, I think that whole process has really been help me to [become] a maturer person… discovering myself coming out of my comfort zone".* (Mike_M_British)

As has been presented and discussed above, taking an SAP and sojourning to a foreign country is a special opportunity for foreign language learners to observe, to learn and to understand what they have learnt, missed or misunderstood about the language and culture while at their home institutions (i.e. universities or other educational institutions), as well as themselves as a language learner, an international student, and a human being in the world. Arguably, it is the mix of exciting, surprising, upsetting and challenging gains and pains in their experiences that makes their sojourns fruitful.

Fruitful but transitory experience. Five interviewees (three Chinese and two British) used the metaphor of "an out of body experience", which also described their experiences in their host countries as fruitful ones. However, since it highlights the transitory feature of sojourning in a foreign country through SAPs, it is categorised and discussed separately here. The interviewees who used this metaphor considered their experiences in the host countries to be like a sideroad that deviates from their main life paths in their home countries, as the following excerpts depict:

> *…being in China is…like having a little out of body experience, because you leave your home…all the hobbies…friends…family…throughout the year, I've been able to identify certain parts of myself that I didn't like…[or] I did like...things I most cared about back home…everything [here is] in a complete different way…Although when I'm here, it doesn't feel like reality...* (Scott_M_British)

> *…this experience won't have a radical influence on my life back home or future direction…You are lucky to have this…It's like you can learn what would take you two or three years to gain on your normal life …But there must be an ending, it's not your main path, you will finish it at a certain point and then go back to your normal life.* (Xing_F_Chinese)

To these interviewees, sojourning seems to be a good opportunity for them to get away from their familiar daily lives, go to a new place and have some new interactions. It allows them to "flee from the high pressure at home" (Hu_F_Chinese), and "concentrate on myself and my own interests or studies without any distractions" (Yuan_F_Chinese). On the other hand, this metaphor also implies the transitory nature of this opportunity compared with their main life paths in their home countries. Although one year may seem like a long time when compared with other shorter-term SAPs (e.g. a two-week summer school), it is still just one single episode in the sojourner's life, and they know they will and must go back home when the SAPs finish. For some sojourners, it is even a "once in a lifetime" experience, as Karl_M_British claimed: "I honestly can't see myself [going] through anything like this again". Therefore, it is a fruitful but also transitory experience in their life.

Trying experience. For this classification and the following one, these are a few notable and somewhat unique cases which are worth highlighting. Four metaphors from five interviewees (four British and one Chinese) are categorised in this classification. As it suggests, these sojourners found their experiences quite tough and unpleasant, or even negative. The metaphor "hell" was used by two interviewees: Kate_F_British and Zai_F_Chinese. Kate found her time in China to be "unhappy" and it caused mental health and psychological wellbeing issues for her; she abandoned her one-year SAP in China after the first term (she also explained that these were her feelings when she was in China, but not towards China). Zai, although she insisted on staying with her one-year SAP until the end, felt "unhappy and it's like [having] to endure until the end"; she even could not help crying during her interview when she was talking about her experience in the UK (see Ethical Considerations – Section 4.7).

The strong alien feeling is likely to make sojourners' experiences in host countries difficult. Gabrielle felt her experience in China was like "being exhibited in a zoo", because "even though the [host city] is pretty busy, [the local people] don't have much experience with foreigners", and when she needed help, "they just stand and look at you and go '*waiguoren, waiguoren'* (foreigner, foreigner)" (Gabrielle_F_British). Likewise, although Jack had been learning Chinese for over ten years and he was hugely passionate about the Chinese language and culture, he found that he had quite a strong alien feeling in his host city. He felt he was like "a bird watching people go by", although he was "kind of integrated" and had "done my best to do it", he was still "feeling very different" as "it's still like part of my identity [which makes this hard]" (Jack_M_British). Although being immersed in the target language and

culture has been deemed an effective and powerful way to learn the language and culture, it is also likely to aggravate language learners' "outsider" feelings, which may or may not have a potential impact on their language and culture learning. Harry described his experience in China as being like "mice trying to pull a turtle":

> *…something is very…small trying to catch…something bigger than you can understand…like a mouse can't really grab on the shell of a turtle…it's a good attempt, but it's never gonna fully [get it]…no clue where to start…trying to grasp hold of the huge lenses of Chinese history or culture as an outsider…it's very difficult…to fully grasp…* (Harry_M_British)

Inessential experience. One more metaphor is "freedom", which was used by a Chinese interviewee (Wei_F_Chinese). Although she was the only interviewee who had this kind of experience, and it is highly likely due to her personal characteristics, some implications are still worth highlighting. Wei thought her experience in the UK was quite "free" because she could "leave her parents", and she "don't want to stay in the same place [home university and city] for four years". She wanted to experience the life and education system in the UK, but she did not try to get involved with local or other international students. She spent and enjoyed most of her time staying in her room alone, with little interactions even with her roommates. Also, she did not think cultural differences were something notable or worth learning, nothing impressed her, and nothing changed in her during this year. This experience in the UK seemed inessential to her.

However, it is notable that the inessential experience does not suggest that Chinese sojourners are inactive in their interactions with their new environment, nor do the trying experiences suggest that British sojourners have relatively more negative experiences than Chinese ones. It is neither the conclusion nor the attempt of this study to make this arbitrary comparison and judgement. Individual sojourners from the same group could have quite different experiences even at the same stages of their sojourns in the same host country. Similarly, although their overall impressions, either in the same or different groups, are similar, the influential factors they encountered or the first-hand lessons they learnt might be different. Hence, this study attempts not only to understand how Chinese and British foreign language learners experience acculturation in their host countries, but also to find out in detail what happened in their experiences and what they can possibly learn from each other, both as members of the same group or between these two groups. Therefore, findings about the specific facilitators, barriers, challenges and benefits associated with the environment will be presented in the following sections, and personal factors will be covered in the next chapter.

5.3 The Original and New Environments: The Environmental Factors in Chinese and British Foreign Language Learners' Acculturation Experiences in SAPs

This section presents the influential factors (facilitators and barriers) and first-hand lessons (benefits and challenges) observed among Chinese and British foreign language sojourners' in both their original and new (i.e. home and host) environments, following the structure of the theoretical framework for data analysis (see Table 5-2) based on Bronfenbrenner's theory. Specifically, all the subsystems that form both the original and new environments and impact individual sojourners in different ways. Before presenting the themes and subthemes using the four key terms – *facilitators, barriers, benefits* and *challenges* – it is necessary to clarify them. In this study design, *facilitators* and *barriers* refer to the influential factors which helped or hindered these foreign language student sojourners' learning, interactions and development during their sojourns, making their acculturation experiences easier or more difficult. They are considered in order to answer Research Question 2: *What factors facilitate Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences? What factors serve as barriers?* Meanwhile, *benefits* and *challenges* are related to Research Question 3, which focuses on the first-hand lessons foreign language learners might learn when they are exposed to the target language and culture. Specifically, *benefits* are the fruitful outcomes they gained or things they learnt from this experience of acculturation, and *challenges* can be understood as things that required great effort on the part of the sojourners, although they may also have provided meaningful lessons. As was discussed in detail in Section 2.2.1, *acculturation* in my study simply refers to the processes of interaction, learning and development that individual foreign language learner sojourners undergo in a new cultural environment. The following sections present salient findings related to the environmental aspect.

Environmental factors	**Microsystem** - the closest surroundings	Original microsystem	Family Peers Institutions
		New microsystem	"Shield" Peers Institutions
	Mesosystem - the connections between the closest surroundings	Original mesosystem	
		New mesosystem	
	Exosystem - the wider connections and community	Original exosystem	
		New exosystem	
	Macrosystem - the underpinning ideas and practices from culture and subculture	Original macrosystem	
		New macrosystem	
	Chronosystem - the temporal milestones	Original chronosystem	
		New chronosystem	

Table 5-2 Overview of Section 5.3

5.3.1 Microsystem – the closest surroundings

The microsystem is the innermost level in an environment, where direct face-to-face interactions with the individual's closest surroundings initially happen on a regular basis (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Following Bronfenbrenner's suggestions (see Chapter Three), the basic and dominant elements in this system for student sojourners in SAPs are likely to be their family, peers (i.e. their friends or schoolmates) and institutions (i.e. their home and host universities and/or the third-party organisations which provides SAPs in partnership with home/host universities; two Chinese participants in this study took their SAPs through third-party organisations). In this study, these three elements are found to be the ones that had the most immediate and regular interactions with both the Chinese and British participants.

Microsystem		
Original		**New**
Family		**"Shield"**
• Emotional support and factors for "resetting" • Family background and previous experiences of being abroad	**Facilitators**	• Common ground and connections
• Lack of understanding • Schedule differences • Difficulties in reconnection	**Barriers**	• "Stay in a bubble"
• Understanding the importance of close relationships	**Benefits**	• Friendship and support
• New ways of communication	**Challenges**	• Break out of the "shield"
Peers		**Peers**
• Emotional support • Tips from previous sojourners	**Facilitators**	• Friendliness and shared initiatives
• Lack of understanding • Schedule differences	**Barriers**	• "Different pace of life" • No natural friendship • Cultural boundaries • Distinct role in SAPs
• Preparation before departure	**Benefits**	• Linguistic and cultural interactions and improvements
• New ways of communication	**Challenges**	• Building close friendships
Institutions		**Institutions**
• Linguistic and cultural knowledge • SAP design • Support and resources	**Facilitators**	• Academic and administrative support • SAP design and new academic style • Special care and support from teachers
• Lack of realistic and practical learning resources • Lack of support • SAP design	**Barriers**	• "Being treated differently" • Lack of support
	Benefits	• Linguistic benefits and academic achievement • Changes in attitudes and thinking
• Lack of support and understanding	**Challenges**	• Different educational settings and campus lifestyle • Studying in real context with local students

Table 5-3 Themes and subthemes for original and new microsystems

5.3.1.1 Original microsystem

Although the British and Chinese foreign language sojourners physically moved to another environment, the original microsystem from their home country arguably remained active in their interactions. The key elements in the original microsystem as observed in this study were their family, peers and institutions (i.e. home universities and/or third-party

organisations), which were the closest surroundings that continued interacting with the sojourners and influencing their development while they were abroad.

Family – Facilitators

Emotional support and factors for "resetting". For both the Chinese and British groups, given the large geographical distance between China and the UK, one salient role the sojourners' families were found to play was to provide them with emotional support. Notably, in this study, no Chinese participants went home during the holidays or had family visits over the year, while half (n=18) of the British participants took a short trip back to the UK or had family visits in China. Some British participants noted that this reunion with their families, either in the UK or in China, offered them great emotional support and made them feel "reset" (i.e. ready to continue their sojourns in China again).

> *…I had a really low period…my mum felt [something was wrong with me] and insisted on having video calls with me quite often…she talked to me, cheered me up…I feel it was a great support for me.* (Ting_F_Chinese)

> *… [When I met problems], first choice may obviously be my parents, because that's just the special support.* (Andy_M_British)

Family, particularly parents, are the closest people to sojourners. When they had emotional needs because of difficulties or homesickness, their parents would be their first choice for support and comfort. This is similar for both the Chinese and British participants in this study. The continuous connection with their family brought them familiarity and a sense of security from home, which provided great emotional support. However, unlike the Chinese interviewees, who merely received this kind of emotional support via phone calls and video chats, half of the British participants reported being 'lucky' to have an in-person reunion with their families, either at home or in China. Such reunions provided not only emotional support, but also a stronger sense of familiarity, as Caroline stated:

> *…I really needed to go home [during Spring Festival], just to have that link back with my family…I haven't seen them for six months and it's quite a long time…once I'd gone back to England, I was kind of reset again, and I was able to come here and think, 'Okay, I have six months left now, and I just need to enjoy it'…then I felt it's okay.* (Caroline_F_British)

As the metaphors demonstrated, sojourning in a foreign country is challenging and daunting. The sojourners "have missed all the festivities at home [which is difficult]" (Scott_M_British), they would encounter different things each day, both enjoyable and

annoying, and had to make themselves strong in order to survive in the host countries. Also, as Caroline claimed, six months or even a whole year might sound short, but it was still quite a long period, especially for those trying to survive in an unfamiliar environment. Thus, the reunion with their families brought them a short respite, which allowed them to recharge with the energy and courage they needed to be ready for the rest of their sojourns.

One possible reason that only the British group members had reunions with their families could be because of the different attitudes towards travel and holidays held by Chinese and British parents. It could be due to the comparatively frequent travels British parents are used to having within Europe or other parts of the world, and Chinese parents' greater emphasis on work rather than holiday breaks. Also, for most Chinese participants, it was their first time traveling abroad alone, while many British participants reported being used to travelling around by themselves. Although the family reunions brought great emotional support for British sojourners, the connection via the internet with parents sufficiently acted as an important resource of emotional support as well.

Family background and previous experiences of being abroad. Another notable difference between the British and Chinese groups is their family backgrounds and previous experiences of being abroad. As was demonstrated in demographics (Section 5.2.1), about two thirds of the British sojourners (n=18) had previous experiences of living or studying abroad, either in China or other countries, and a few of them had direct family relationships with China (e.g. Sally_F_British's Mum was Chinese). These family backgrounds and previous experiences were likely to facilitate British sojourners to adjust to the new environment due to their familiarity with different cultures or living in a different environment. On the other hand, there were other family background factors that were noted as interesting facilitators by some British sojourners. For example, Harry described his personal motivation for thoroughly enjoying his sojourn in China:

> *…mostly is I want…a change…I come from the middle of the countryside, at times [I] don't get away from what I'm familiar with. I find I want to get away from what I'm familiar with much as possible. So, it seems like I'm making the most of my time [in China]…just…do as many different things as possible.* (Harry_M_British)

It is interesting to find that family background or previous experiences encouraged British participants to enjoy life in China, although for different reasons. Harry, in particular, took the opportunity to get as far away from his most familiar environment, which became his motivation to make the most of his sojourn in China. Regardless of whether they were

familiar with life in China or other countries or just wanted to get away from home, these factors all seem to have played significant roles in facilitating and motivating British sojourners to interact in the new environment.

Family – Barriers

Lack of understanding. Given the large geographical and time differences between China and the UK, there are problems observed between sojourners and their families. One of the most notable barriers is the families' lack of understanding of the students' contextual situations in their host countries, as is illustrated by both Chinese and British participants:

> *…I had a really terrible day…then I talked to my mum…but she just couldn't understand…I missed two buses when I was trying to explain to her, and I had to wait at the bus stop for another hour…It was absolutely my worst day here [in the UK].* (Xing_F_Chinese)

> *…you can tell…your parents, but they haven't been here, they don't…have that language issue in their lives…they sympathise but they don't quite understand it.* (Eva_F_British)

This is a common barrier raised by both Chinese and British interviewees. Many of these sojourners' families have little or no experience living and studying in a foreign country. Thus, although sojourners are close to their families and would turn to parents for support when they encountered problems, it could be difficult for their parents to understand exactly the situation and problems these participants were facing.

Schedule differences. Another barrier noted by members of both groups was schedule difficulties because of the time differences between China and the UK, which is seven or eight hours depending on the time of year. This could make it difficult for sojourners to communicate with their families back home.

> *Because my parents are far away in China, and the time difference…sometimes it's difficult to call them [because they are sleeping]…sometimes [I] feel quite lonely because of this.* (Kang_F_Chinese)

> *…the time difference…That was certainly something to get used to in terms of communicating with my family and friends…because you…have to work around these people's schedules. If there was a problem or something you needed to talk about, often you'd have to either wait or either deal by yourself…* (Sarah_F_British)

Both the Chinese and British groups had to deal with this time difference, thus, the schedule differences became a common barrier for both groups. Sarah claimed that this difference is "certainly something", saying that although it appears small, it had an important influence on the interactions between sojourners and their families. Sojourners had to either repress their feelings and needs for hours until their parents were back online or find other ways to deal with the problem they were facing. Regardless of what they chose, they would likely feel somewhat helpless at the point when they needed support but found that their parents were offline.

Difficulties in reconnection. This barrier was specifically raised by a British sojourner. No Chinese participants in this study went home during breaks so it remains unclear whether this was the case for them, but it seems significant to both Chinese and British future sojourners and is thus worth highlighting in this section. After Nala had gone home to the UK for three weeks during the Spring Festival break, she found it quite difficult to re-adjust when she returned to China:

> *…being at home for three weeks, getting familiar again with all…aspects of life…I felt…at home, so comfortable…like I hadn't left…Then coming back here [to China] was really difficult…that was the first time that I felt like homesick, knowing what I was missing out at home...it really hit me...* (Nala_F_British)

Her experience is important to mention to sojourners who might plan to take a holiday break back home or have a family visit in the host country. Although in the previous section it was noted that the reunion was likely to make them happier and braver, potential barriers, like Nala described, might be triggered by such reunions because the sojourner has to leave their familiar environment again. In the process of re-adjustment, they could become more confident and energetic, as in Caroline's example of being 'reset', or they could become more homesick as in Nala's case, which is likely to hinder the sojourners' interactions with the new environment.

Family – Benefits

Understanding the importance of close relationships. Similar to the above section, this benefit was noted by a British participant specifically. Scott put forward the "out of body experience" metaphor, and he is the only participant who kept emphasising the important opportunity this sojourn to China provided him to reflect. This seems to be a significant benefit worth presenting:

> *…that's main thing I've learnt this year, the importance of people…while I've been here, I still have friends and family communicate with me throughout the year…having that support network is invaluable, can help me do any of these other things…problems…When I go home…I've already made plans of the people that I wanna go and spend time with.* (Scott_M_British)

As Scott claimed, his sojourn offered him a chance to step away from his familiar environment and what he might have been taking for granted for a long time. Sojourning in a foreign country and encountering trivial but annoying problems made him realise the importance of close relationships – his family and friends – that need to be treasured.

Family – Challenges

New ways of communication. This is another important finding noted by a British participant. However, although it was raised by Sarah in particular, this challenge was also mentioned briefly by a few (n=3) Chinese participants when discussing barriers. Ways of communication with family are likely to be changed when moving to a faraway country.

> *…because everything has to be done over Skype, so if there were any problems…anything going on with my family…the only way you can sort that out is by over Skype and only by talking…the only support you can offer to someone and the only support you can receive in return is through words…* (Sarah_F_British)

From this excerpt, it seems that the challenge is not merely about the technical change to the communication methods, but more importantly, the ways in which sojourners and their families communicate and support each other. Sarah concluded that is important "to communicate effectively because it's really important in terms of support[ing] other people and receiv[ing] support", a lesson she learnt from her sojourn in China. This was a similar challenge for the Chinese group, who had to move all their communications to WeChat (e.g. Xing_F_Chinese).

From the findings presented above about the role family played during both the Chinese and British participants' sojourns, family can be seen to have served as the key element that provided sojourners with emotional support. Despite the geographical distance, sojourners in both groups still had quite close connections and frequent interactions with their families. On the other hand, the potential reason for fewer Chinese participants discussing lessons related to the family could be the parent-child relationship in Chinese families. Larger power distances might be found in Chinese families than British ones; in other words, Chinese

parents are usually more powerful in conversational or decision-making contexts, and Chinese children are more likely to accept their parents' ideas or decisions without arguing or questioning as much as their British peers do. This is likely to make Chinese students feel shy about reflecting on the role their families played, or even take it for granted.

Peers – Facilitators

Emotional support. Like family, peers are an important source of emotional support for both Chinese and British sojourners. However, the findings suggest slight differences between friends and schoolmates, both of which fall under the category of *Peers*. The emotional support both groups of sojourners got were likely to come from their close friends at home, those who they could talk to about their feelings and personal problems. Both groups noted the important help they received from their close friends in "comforting me" (Mu_F_Chinese), or "encouraging me…when I felt so lost [in the UK]" (Yu_F_Chinese), and showing that trivial but difficult things could be "easily solvable if you have a group of people [even from a distance]" (Scott_M_British). Their support traversed the geographical distance via the internet and helped the sojourners.

Tips from previous sojourners. Interestingly, some participants from both the Chinese and British groups brought up helpful tips they had received from students who had previously done SAPs. These previous sojourners were likely to be schoolmates rather than close friends, and they provided practical suggestions based on their own experiences of being abroad. These basic tips included "module selection and student accommodation" (Mao_F_Chinese) and information on different cities and host universities (e.g. teaching style, availability of vegetarian food) (Sarah_F_British). These practical tips crucially helped the sojourners in making decisions about their host cities/universities, SAP applications and where to start their lives in the host country (e.g. accommodation and food), which might seem trivial but can pose significant challenges to sojourners.

Peers – Barriers

Lack of understanding. The barriers associated with peers in the original microsystem were similar to the ones experienced with family members. One of the most notable barriers was the lack of understanding of the contextual situations and problems sojourners encountered. This was cited as a common barrier by members of both groups. Regardless of whether they

were close friends or schoolmates, "they could hardly understand or help if they didn't have same experiences" (Yan_F_Chinese), such as language difficulties in daily life (Eva_F_British).

Schedule differences. Another barrier related to peers was the difference in daily schedules between both groups and their peers at home universities. This problem applied to both their close friends and schoolmates. As some participants said:

> *…Sometimes I feel like I'm being left behind by my friends and schoolmates, I can't keep up with what's happening at home…It makes me quite upset.* (Kang_F_Chinese)

> *…I find it quite difficult to…[be] on a daily basis update [with friends] on my life…they have their own lives back in England.* (Nala_F_British)

Both barriers noted above were likely to aggravate sojourners' feelings of loneliness and helplessness, especially when they needed support during their sojourns. Their lack of understanding and experience would make it hard for sojourners' peers empathise with their situations and problems, while the time difference was a practical hindrance for sojourners to maintain regular communication with their peers at home. Participants from both groups knew that they would go back home when they finished their SAPs, so the feeling of being left behind from lives at home could make sojourners feel anxious, which may have had negative influences on their sojourns.

Peers – Benefits

Preparation before departure. Based on practical tips from peers who had previous experiences of SAPs, or some who had even been to the same host city and university as she planned to go to, Sally noted the benefit of "prepar[ing] [her]self":

> *…I spoke a lot with previous students from my university who had come to China…they told me all the fun they had, like amazing stories…I have to say actually it was quite similar to what they said.* (Sally_F_British)

This excerpt depicts that regardless of what tips the previous sojourners share (as discussed in previous Peers – Benefits section), any information can be useful in helping sojourners prepare in advance of their departure. This preparation was an meaningful benefit from the interactions between sojourners and their peers, which enabled them to be both psychologically and practically prepared for the possible difficulties they could encounter.

Peers – Challenges

New ways of communication. As was the situation with family, new ways of communication through internet also posed a challenge for sojourners and their peers. With scheduled plan to go home and continue their degree education with their peers at home, sojourners need to learn new effective communication to liaise with peers at home in order to stay updated and connected.

Based on these findings, the active role peers played in both the Chinese and British sojourners' experiences in their host countries was identified. These peers continued interacting with them while they were abroad. However, it is notable that although peers provided both emotional and practical support, the former came from close friends while the latter was usually from previous sojourners (schoolmates) who had been to the same host country/city/university.

Institutions – Facilitators

Linguistic and cultural knowledge. As foreign language learners, members of both the Chinese and British groups claimed that the linguistic and cultural knowledge they had learnt at their home universities helped their acculturation experiences in host countries. As they put it:

> *We had classes taught in English [at home university] and training courses on how to write literature reviews or proposals…presentations and group work…I'm really lucky to have acquired and known [information on education here] before I came here.* (Yuan_F_Chinese)

> *…We learnt about Chinese festivals, and what they mean…having that background knowledge before I came here…I think it really helped.* (Nala_F_British)

This can be regarded as an advantage of being a foreign language learner, since they had opportunities to undertake professional training courses on both linguistic and cultural knowledge. Thus, this background knowledge was noted as a facilitator for their acculturation in the environment of their target language and culture.

SAP design. Since 36 of the 38 participants in this study took their SAPs through their home universities and the other two participants did theirs through partnership SAPs co-organised by their universities and a third-party education organisation, it is reasonable to classify the

programme factors as part of the institution element, which forms a part of the sojourners' microsystems. Both the Chinese and British participants found the SAP design to be a facilitator for their sojourns, although the help they received was comparatively different. Chinese participants had to apply and compete for the SAP places, and they were also offered different durations and destinations (host countries). There was no strict requirement for the modules they took in the host countries. Some Chinese universities required their students to take courses relating to English language and culture, while others accepted any courses their students selected because "all courses [in the UK] are taught in English" (Kang_F_Chinese). This design was likely to provide Chinese sojourners greater opportunities to experience a variety of courses in the UK.

On the other hand, the SAP design for British sojourners was quite different. The one-year SAP was a compulsory part of their degree programmes; they all had to spend one year in China to learn Chinese, and the courses were primarily on language (with culture courses available for SAP students at a few Chinese HEIs). The British interviewees found this design helpful, as Louis stated:

> *…Chinese is a harder language for us to learn compared to others… there's so much more to adapt to in China, if you do your year abroad in Spain…it's not that much to adapt to, whereas you live in China, it's completely different…I think a year is a good amount of time.* (Louis_M_British)

Although sojourners may have different views on the SAP design because of their different personal interests or needs, it is still notable that a reasonable and practical SAP design could be a facilitator for both Chinese and British sojourners.

Support and resources. Some support and resources were mentioned as helpful by both the Chinese and British interviewees. However, the only Chinese interviewee who noted this took her SAP through a partnership between her home university and a third-party organisation. She found support from the third-party organisation "really helpful, quick responses…" (Jin_F_Chinese).

For the British interviewees, since there was no third-party organisation involved in their SAPs, they contacted either their home or host universities if they needed support from institutions. Four participants from three (out of four) different British universities noted examples of helpful support, with some receiving a long list of "what happens if you have culture shock" (Nala_F_British) or a "weekly wellbeing check" (Quinn_M_British). Sally's

home university was the only British university in this study which had a tutor visit China to meet its students, as she described:

> *My tutor actually came towards the beginning of the year abroad…She was doing a pastoral visit...[the tutor and all students in the same host city] met for dinner and we were all talking about our experiences which was really…a good idea…you can hear about what everyone else was going through…if they had any advice or suggestions, that was really beneficial…*(Sally_F_British)

Sally's home university provided an outstanding example of supporting YA students when they were abroad, especially at the beginning of the YA, which tends to be the most chaotic period due to the unfamiliar environment and many different things sojourners need to adjust to. The tutor's visit not only brought sojourners a sense of security but also offered beneficial opportunities for them to share experiences and suggestions with each other.

Institutions – Barriers

Lack of realistic and practical learning resources. A common barrier mentioned by both the Chinese and British interviewees was the lack of realistic and practical learning resources on the language and culture they were studying. They found that much of the content they learnt at home universities did not match with or help in real-life situations in host countries. As they claimed:

> *…We need realistic linguistic and cultural knowledge which is from real daily life in foreign countries rather than out-of-date textbooks…when you are [in the UK], you realise what you've learnt as very professional things do not work, they're just for exams [in China]…*(Xing_F_Chinese)

> *I think the university really didn't prepare us for that at all. We learnt about language and Chinese history…But they didn't really teach us what life is like in modern China…the ways and things happen in everyday life, we didn't know anything…* (Kate_F_British)

As the excerpts above illustrate, the lack of realistic and practical language and culture knowledge is likely to be one of the main reasons that foreign language learners have language difficulties during their sojourns. Although they had been learning English/Chinese for years and trained professionally, living in the real-life situations was still challenging for them due to the gap between what they were taught in classes and real-life situations. However, given the many differences in subculture (e.g. local dialects, cultures in different cities/regions) in both China and the UK, it would be difficult for home universities to

prepare students for every different situation in daily life in the host country, as Gabrielle argued:

> *…[local Chinese people] speak super quickly, their accents and dialects…things are different [in different cities]…I don't think [home university] could prepare us…It's just too different.* (Gabrielle_F_British)

Nonetheless, this is still a notable barrier that both home universities and sojourners need to recognise and try to deal with in order to facilitate students' sojourns in the context of their target language and culture. For example, foreign language learners might benefit from learning more about the hot social issues in the host country or more specific local customs or dialects before departure, which are likely to lead them to a better understanding of how everything functions and what is happening in the new environment.

Lack of support. Another major barrier many Chinese and British interviewees raised is the lack of support from their home universities. Taking an SAP involves many trivial tasks and is a longitudinal process, starting with the selection of the host university, the visa application, to opening a bank account or meeting emergencies during the sojourn. However, many sojourners in both groups reported that they were not fully supported with the necessary and practical information and resources, and in some cases, some problems they encountered in their host countries were even caused by their home universities due to the lack of support. As the following excerpts show:

> *…Our [SAP] programme officer did nothing for us…he said to us: "…you should be capable of dealing with these since you're about to sojourning abroad"…it's ridiculous. How can we deal with it without enough information?* (Mu_F_Chinese)

> *…We emailed [home university to]… find out why we were having to pay for the insurance here when we've already paid [home university]…[then] we got an email saying that [the SAP officer] had left six weeks before we left…[for] China, and there was no replacement…[because of this] people missed registration…deadlines or something…*(Scott_M_British)

The problems continued during their sojourns. "I don't feel like they had a very useful support system at all…They don't really check in on us to see how we were doing..." (Andy_M_British), even if sojourners "sent multiple emails to [the home university] and they just haven't replied" (Mike_M_British). In Louis' case, the home university replied, but offered no helpful support:

> *…It's a health and safety risk, because the lab electrical wires went down the stairs [in the student hall]…But I basically got an email back say, '…hope you*

> *have insurance', I was like, 'Hmmm, thank you… I do, but that's not the point'.* (Louis_M_British)

However, given the large geographical distance and academic or administrative differences between sojourners' home and host universities, their home universities might deem that host universities are in a better position to offer practical help. However, it is arguable that this could bring more difficulties to sojourners if there is no clear agreement between home and host institutions has been negotiated on who should provide proper support for sojourners, and how they should do it. Such a chaotic and uncertain situation could worsen the difficulties sojourners encounter in the unfamiliar environment, since sojourning abroad involves challenges not only in studies and daily life. As Yang said, "it's not just about academic, but also our psychological wellbeing…but nothing, we are just on our own" (Yang_F_Chinese).

SAP design. The barrier related to SAP design primarily came in the form of issues related to course credit transfer and exam results recognition. The course credit transfer was a major barrier for the Chinese participants. Although the Chinese group was freer than the British group in terms of course selection in that they were allowed to choose the courses they were interested in, their credits could not necessarily be transferred for equal credits at their home university, which meant they had to take the risk of "taking an extension in order to get enough credits for graduation at [the] home university" (Kang_F_Chinese). Thus, nearly all of them were reluctant to take this risk and selected only the courses for which the credits could definitely be transferred.

On the other hand, the SAP design barrier for British participants was related to the issue of exam results recognition. Some British universities have no specific requirements or merely require their students to pass the exams in China. This incentive was likely to demotivate British sojourners in their studying. As Louis stated:

> *…Whether you pass or fail, [the grade] literally means nothing, it's quite demotivating and quite sad…no one [in my home university] really cares.* (Louis_M_British)

Another problem in relation to SAP design was the issue of administrative arrangements (e.g. schedule and accommodation). Although it was only pointed out by one Chinese and one British participant, it could be regarded as important reference for both Chinese and British SAP institutions. Yan is the Chinese student who started her SAP in the second term and

continued into the first term of the following academic year in the UK. This unusual situation was caused by the SAP design at her home university:

> *…we were informed about this SAP quite late, and we had to meet certain requirements to apply, like the IELTS test…the very tight timeline made it impossible for us to start the SAP from the first term…It made my schedule really chaotic, I had the more advanced courses in the second term first and went back to the basic courses in the first term in the following academic year…I missed all the orientation workshops, I didn't have resources or information as normal newcomers would have…* (Yan_F_Chinese)

While Yan's home university's arrangements caused chaotic situations for her sojourn, Mary's home university's accommodation arrangement made her sojourn in China disappointing. "I think it was actually your university to decide then, but they didn't ask [us]…you don't really have any say in it" (Mary_F_British). She was put in the same accommodation as Louis, who raised the health and safety risk of the electrical wires going down the stairs. Being unhappy with the student accommodation, they then all decided to move out and live off-campus after the first term. Although living off-campus might have provided them with more various experiences in China, it brought more unexpected difficulties and challenges for them, since they had to deal with various trivial issues (e.g. rent payment, bills, etc.) on their own, which they would not have had to if they had stayed on campus.

Institutions – Benefits

Interestingly, no benefits related to the institutions were noted by either the Chinese or British groups in this study. This suggests the urgent need to improving support at sojourners' home institutions, since they played a significant role in both the Chinese and British sojourners' acculturation experiences during the year.

Institutions – Challenges

Lack of support and understanding. Based on the presented barriers due to the lack of support and understanding, sojourners, either Chinese or British, had to deal with their own difficulties in order to survive in the host countries. For example, Ting "had to contact the previous sojourners and search for all relevant information by [her]self because the SAP officer didn't do that for us" (Ting_F_Chinese). Scott_M_British also complaint that his home university "treated the year abroad students all as those who are still in Europe, but

people who come to China, it's completely different" in terms of either time difference or the education system and schedule. He found it "massive" and "stress[ful]" when his home university emailed them to submit a dissertation proposal just one week before the deadline while he had "got exams [at host university] starting in two days". These two examples highlight the differences of sojourning abroad and sojourning abroad in a faraway country. The lack of proper support and understanding of student sojourners' actual experiences in the faraway and unfamiliar environment is likely to challenge sojourners' skills such as problem-solving, time-management, etc. Although it is crucial for home institutions to learn better understanding of sojourners' experiences and needs and provide better support for them, arguably, these 'massive stress' also bring meaningful lessons to sojourners to develop.

In summary, institutions in the original microsystem include two aspects: teaching and learning, and SAPs (i.e. programme factors). The programme factors were found to be important factors in both the Chinese and British foreign language learners' sojourns, since they pictured a more specific context for sojourners' experiences in host countries. As in Yan's example, if there had been a more reasonable and feasible timeline for her SAP application and schedule, or as in Mary's case, if she had not been assigned by her SAP to a student hall which she did not enjoy, they might have had different experiences. This is not to say that their experiences in China and the UK were bad; it is only to highlight that, as an important part of institutions in the original microsystem, programme factors are important ones which are likely to have direct and significant influences on sojourners in both groups, although they are physically distant.

5.3.1.2 New microsystem

When the foreign language sojourners moved to the new environment in their host countries, the new direct and regular interactions they had tended to create new microsystems. The key elements of these new microsystems observed in this study remained "family", peers and institutions (i.e. host universities). The placing of "family" in quotation marks stresses that these were not their real families because they did not move with these sojourners into the new environment. Instead, a new "shield" was built by the sojourners in both the Chinese and British groups as a replacement for the "family" element. A "shield" can be understood as being similar to a comfort zone, which is "a place, feeling or situation of comfort" (Prazeres, 2017, p.908). However, the term "shield" came from a British participant (Sally_F_British), who described these sojourners' feelings of being behind a shield (i.e. providing the sojourners with a sense of security and comfort) while being abroad. Their

peers in the new microsystem tended to only be the sojourners' schoolmates in their host universities, instead of the close friends and schoolmates in their original microsystem. Their close friends in the new environment were likely be part of their "shields".

"Shield" – Facilitators

Common ground and connections. Most participants in both the Chinese (eight out of fifteen) and British (twelve out of eighteen) groups mentioned that common ground and connections were the keys for them to build their own "shields", as well as important factors that helped their interactions with the new environment. The common ground and connections were found to include: 1) similar cultural backgrounds, common language, shared topics/interests and senses of humour; 2) similar lifestyles, pace and needs; and 3) similar hobbies and societies.

While sojourning abroad, student sojourners often seek a sense of belonging and support from their co-national peers or peers with similar cultural backgrounds to theirs (Bodycott, 2015). It has likely become a stereotype about Chinese international students that they only stay with other Chinese people while in foreign countries like the UK. Although this was not the whole picture, this claim is somewhat true for most of the Chinese participants in this study. Additionally, the findings of this study also indicate that like the Chinese group, the British participants also relied heavily on peers with similar cultural backgrounds in the new environment. Because having similar cultural backgrounds and a common language, topics and sense of humour were likely to foster their familiarity and comfort when communicating with each other, "it's tempting" (Eva _F_British) and "natural and easier to just spend time with your own group" (Yang_F_Chinese).

However, it is interesting to find in this study that the "own groups" formed by the sojourners did not exclusively consist of people from the same country (i.e. that the Chinese sojourners' group included only Chinese people, or vice versa for British group). Other international students in the same host country were found to be another significant source for the sojourners' "own groups" and part of their "shields". Connections such as having similar lifestyles, pace, needs, hobbies and societies were found to be other important factors for both the Chinese and British groups when building their "shields", although the situations the Chinese and British groups faced in new environments were different. The Chinese sojourners shared classes and flats with other undergraduate degree students in their host

universities, which gave them more opportunities to meet and interact not only with other Chinese students and local British students, but also many other international students of different nationalities. On the contrary, the British sojourners in Chinese universities were arranged in specific student halls and classes for international students in SAPs only, so they were primarily surrounded by students from the UK or other foreign countries. Only six of the eighteen British sojourners in the same Chinese host university were provided options to stay in a student hall which housed Chinese students and international sojourners as language partners. Within these contexts, the people who share similar lifestyles, pace, needs, hobbies and societies would easily have immediate interactions with sojourners, in either the Chinese or British group, as the examples below show:

> *…When you went to register, you met all of the international students, and that's where I met all of my friends I had now probably…we all [got] so tired after having to wait in line…We were just like ranting at each other, that's how we bounded basically.* (Scott_M_British)

> *I joined the debate club…I went to their training…social event…had a competition together…I made friends with really lovely people [of other international nationalities]...They are…my best…friends here, and [this friendship] actually pushed me to adjust as much as I can.* (Qiang_F_Chinese)

However, members of both groups noted that it was easier for them to make friends with co-national peers and other international students than with the local students. This was because regardless of nationalities, having the same role as a sojourner in a foreign country meant their co-national and other international peers could "actually relate to [my experience] because they've had the similar things" (Louis_M_British). Consequently, sojourners were likely to find "a connection to here [the host country and people]" (Yang_F_Chiense), which helped them to build their own "shields". Interestingly, their connections were not only formed with their peers, but also with local residents. For example, Kang_F_Chinese joined some church activities in the UK and received help on both her knowledge of Christianity and speaking skills from people in the church; also, Louis and Scott found "familiarities" (Louis_M_British) in regular interactions with people working in local restaurants (i.e. having meals there as a routine), saying "sometimes when things have been really tough…I can go and speak to them, and they're super friendly" (Scott_M_British). These cases show that the "shields" created by sojourners in their new environment were mixes of people with different nationalities and positions, rather than only peers from the same country. Importantly, building their own "shield" was found to be a significant facilitator during their sojourns, which played a special role as their families in the new microsystem, as Scott concluded:

> *…this year I've relied on people to keep me sane…making me feel I belong somewhere…[although] sometimes I feel like I do not belong here at all…whether they're Chinese or foreign here [it] is wonderful to have [them] because it makes you feel like you're home…* (Scott_M_British)

"Shield" – Barriers

"Stay in a bubble". Although the "shield" played a significant role in helping both the Chinese and British sojourners find familiarities and a sense of security and comfort in the new environment, the hindrances it brought were also noted. The majority of them in both groups tended to "stay in a bubble" (e.g. Caroline_F_British; Zai_F_Chinese) within their "shields" and this was especially true given the large cultural differences between China and the UK, as Mike noted:

> *…people tend to do what's easiest for them…it is difficult to push yourself in a social situation…and make a friend that you wouldn't normally do, whereas if it's a Chinese student, they'll go to the Chinese students, and if it's a Western student, they'll go to others of them…I can't see an easier way of doing it…*(Mike_M_British)

This shows that "as much as I've been trying to escape…'international students bubble', it's kind of inevitable" (Louis_M_British), because it was a strong and important connection with people with whom the sojourners had immediate and regular interactions, as well as being the ones they relied most on in the new environment. Additionally, they would be likely to "get tired and lose interest" (Jin_F_Chinese) in trying new things and making new friends, and easily "started to feel more homesick" (Caroline_F_British). When it came to the end of their SAPs, many of the students in both groups regretted not insisting on trying to engage with more different people and things and fully immersing themselves in the new environment.

"Shield" – Benefits

Friendship and support. As a strong and significant connection in the new environment for sojourners, members of both the Chinese and British groups found friendship and support to be the benefits they gained from their interactions with their "shields". They had made new friends, although primarily co-national and international, and the "shield" provided opportunities for them to have friendships with people from various cultural backgrounds; as Qiang_F_Chinese put it, "it's miraculous actually, you meet people from all over the world and you're all here in this city in the UK, and actually there're common ground

between you…". The sojourners in both groups also noted that they had received much support from these friendships, in either academic learning or daily life, especially when they encountered difficulties or challenges. People in their "shields" were "such a support network here for me" (Andy_M_British), and "we've been through all these good and bad days together" (Mu_F_Chinese). Also, an interesting common point raised by many interviewees in both groups was that the friends they made in their host countries were not just one-year friends but friends for years. This was likely an important benefit they gained from the new environment.

"Shield" – Challenges

Break out of the "shield". Given the above discussions on the "shield", it might not be surprising to find that the major challenge of the "shield" was to break out of it, pushing themselves to learn, interacting and acculturating more with different things and people in the new environment. This was a common challenge raised by almost half of the interviewees in both the Chinese and British groups. As Zai_F_Chinese realised that "I felt it's not right, I may never learn anything if I [stay in the "shield"], and her British peer Kate_F echoed "that's rude…you're not in England…you have to make an effort, don't just be lazy and speak English in China". Notably, as has been mentioned in the metaphors section, Zai and Kate were the two interviewees who used "hell" to describe their overall impressions of their sojourns in the UK and China. Although they might have had difficult experiences in their new environments, they recognised the importance of not constraining themselves to their "shields" but interacting with different elements of the new environment. Indeed, this could be a great challenge for sojourners who had left their home and re-built their own strong connections in the new environment, as Louis realised:

> *I always thought that Chinese students in the UK…always spent so much time together, but we do the same here as international students...we have the opportunity to speak to Chinese students, but we feel that we are so grouped together and isolated, that makes it very difficult to get out of that.* (Louis_M_British)

Interestingly, nearly one third of the British interviewees (n=18) echoed Louis, recognising the difficulties for Chinese students to break out of their "shields" and make British friends in the UK based on their own experiences in China. They realised that "it's quite the same for us in China [to stay together with international students]" (Mike_M_British) and the difficulty in interacting with local students, which they said could be difficult to understand "until you experience it yourself" (Scott_M_British). In this way, they seemed to have learnt

an interesting lesson by developing "empathy" for Chinese students in Britain (Mike_M_British; Mary_F_British).

Based on the above findings, regardless of whether it played a beneficial or hindering role in these Chinese and British foreign language learners' sojourns, the "shield" tended to be regarded as an important replacement for family in the new microsystem for both groups. Mixes of people with different nationalities and positions were built into the new microsystem by sojourners based on their own personalities, lifestyles, interests and needs. Importantly, it was observed to provide a strong connection and the most immediate and regular interactions between sojourners and the new environment.

Peers – Facilitators

Friendliness and shared initiatives. A few interviewees from both groups (two Chinese and four British) noted the friendliness and shared initiatives of their schoolmates in their host universities as a helpful factor in their daily lives when they were sojourning abroad. The schoolmates referred to in this theme were primarily the local British/Chinese students in the UK or China respectively. Although they were not close friends like the people in the sojourners' "shields", these peers were "very nice people actually, they're happy to help and you may still have some kind of basic conversations" (Ting_F_Chinese). Additionally, their shared desire to learn about each other's languages and cultures facilitated the interactions between sojourners and the local students. As Eva said:

> *… I want to know about … [Chinese students'] lives and what they do. They're also quite interested in my experiences and what life is like in Britain…they want to practice English with me, then…I [also want to] practice some Chinese with them…both get something on that.* (Eva_F_British)

Peers – Barriers

Surprisingly, the interactions with their peers (i.e. local schoolmates) were primarily found to be difficult for the majority of both the Chinese and British interviewees in this study. Sojourners in both groups noted their disappointment at the difficulty of making friends with local Chinese or British students. The following major barriers were reported.

"Different pace of life". The "different pace of life" (Sally_F_British; Yan_F_Chinese) was identified as a major barrier for sojourners in both groups in interacting with local

schoolmates. This refers to the differences in daily schedules between sojourners and their local peers. Notably, the situations of the Chinese and British sojourners were somewhat different due to their SAP arrangement in their host universities. The Chinese sojourners did their courses and shared their flats with local undergraduates (both British and other nationalities), meaning they were put into an integrated context with the opportunity to meet local schoolmates. However, the different education system and study habits still made it hard for them to interact with local British students. As Mu said:

> *the British education puts more emphasis on autonomy in learning, so we learn on our own… no fixed class, no fixed classmates, you don't feel a connection from 'classmates' at all.* (Mu_F_Chinese)

Generally, undergraduates in Chinese universities are assigned to fixed classes with certain classmates; they might take different optional courses, but they would meet quite frequently in daily compulsory courses and class activities. Also, Chinese undergraduates share dorm rooms of four, six or eight beds, and their roommates are usually their classmates. This means Chinese students are used to sharing a similar schedule in both their academic and daily lives with their classmates, which they could hardly experience in the UK. Also, the different schedules of social life tended to be viewed as another difficulty by Chinese sojourners. They got annoyed by their schoolmates or roommates who "finish a party after like 1am or 2, so noisy" (Ting_F_Chinese). Most Chinese universities have curfews for student halls, and it is uncommon for Chinese undergraduates to have parties or drink alcohol often, so the Chinese sojourners found it difficult to join in with their local schoolmates' social activities. However, because there were only female Chinese participants recruited in this study, it remains unclear if this is a common barrier for both female and male Chinese sojourners (for more discussion, see Section 7.4 the Limitations of the Study).

On the other hand, two thirds of the British sojourners in this study were mandatorily assigned to student halls that were for international sojourners only, and only six (in the same host university) were given the choice of having a Chinese-International mixed student hall so that they could have a Chinese roommate. All the British sojourners in this study had their courses separately from the local Chinese students. This situation was likely to aggravate the difficulty of them meeting and interacting with local Chinese students. Although they managed to meet some Chinese students on campus, it was still hard for them to have regular interactions with them because "their schedules are just so much busier than mine" (Sally_F_British). Even the several sojourners who had Chinese roommates found the different pace of life a significant barrier for them, as Aaron stated:

> *"They're always out…always working…you actually don't really have too much contact time with them…I've been in that dorm for a term and a half, and I have probably only spoken to my roommate for more than two minutes once or twice…I just never see him."* (Aaron_M_British)

These different paces of daily life made it hard not only to meet Chinese peers on campus but also to keep up regular interactions with them. It could be speculated that this was a reason for them to stay in their "shields" since their attempts to integrate with local Chinese students were disappointing.

No natural friendship. As has been presented above, having shared initiatives (i.e. learning the target language and culture) was likely to be a facilitator for both Chinese and British sojourners to interact and integrate with their peers in host universities. Interviewees in both groups mentioned that the language partner activities they joined (e.g. the Buddy Scheme for Chinese sojourners in the UK, and Language Partners for British sojourners in China) did not actually help. The friendship was not built up naturally; they felt "it's just awkward, really embarrassing when you sit there and talk to each other" (Mu_F_Chinese). Louis agreed with this point based on his experience in China:

> *…it's like you're forced to make friends with someone…[merely] because they're learning [English] and you're learning Chinese'…not because they wanted to be your friends.* (Louis_M_British)

It seems that although these activities provided opportunities for the sojourners to meet and communicate with local Chinese/British students, it did not meet their expectations of making Chinese/British friends. The shared initiative might have been helpful for them to start the conversation with local Chinese/British who are also interested in learning English/Chinese, but if there was no common ground or close connection like they had with people in their "shields", it would remain difficult for them to make friends naturally with each other. As Louis said, "[we can't] go to someone and say, 'Hi, I'm learning Chinese, let's be friends', that's not how it usually is". Also, as Mike_M_British echoed, "you see [Chinese students] in the canteen or something, but you're never gonna go and sit down with people you don't know". Thus, this was likely to be another barrier which could bring about psychological pressure and make it more difficult for both Chinese and British sojourners to step out of their "shields" and have more interactions with local peers.

Cultural boundaries. A major barrier raised by both groups when it came to interacting with their local peers and making friends naturally was the cultural boundaries that exist between

Chinese and British cultures. The different social culture was noted as one of the main cultural boundaries in this study. Half of the Chinese sojourners noted that partying and alcohol were the key components of local British students' social culture, which is quite contrary to Chinese participants' social culture (as mentioned before, there would be likely to be potential gender differences among sojourners, but only female Chinese participants were recruited in this study). This difference led to difficulties in their interactions and integration with the local British students.

> *…[my roommates are] all British, I felt cool when I came…I tried to join their social activities, but it's always drinking…boring topics…even about sex…really noisy…I don't want to join them anymore…the guy next door took drugs that night…the police and ambulance were all here…it's so horrible [that I changed my dorm]…* (Mu_F_Chinese)

Mu's experience may seem extreme, but it is surprisingly similar to other Chinese sojourners' experiences in the UK in this study. Most of them felt "annoyed" because of this different social culture and found it quite difficult for them to integrate with local British people. Likewise, many British interviewees also brought up this difference in social culture as a barrier in their interactions with local Chinese people. Kate_F_British noted that local people kept a certain distance from her because she was "the only girl in the whole school that smoked, and everyone felt that was really bad", and she "found that really difficult", not being used to it.

Nala noted based on her experience that the cultural boundaries are not only about social culture, but also other aspects that were likely to confuse sojourners:

> *I think making really strong connections with Chinese people has been difficult because there're still those cultural boundaries that you have to get over…But for me…there're still so many aspects of Chinese culture that [even] I know why they happen, but...I wouldn't do the same way [because it's very different].* (Nala_F_British)

As the above excerpt demonstrates, apart from the different social cultures, the cultural boundaries might also include: 1) lack of shared understanding and sense of humour, and 2) language difficulties. It was surprising to find that although they had been taking professional training in the language and culture as part of their undergraduate degrees, nearly the majority of participants in both groups said it was still quite difficult for them to fully understand local people and express themselves properly. As Yan_F_Chinese said, "because of the cultural differences and my English not being good enough, it's difficult [to fully understand them], I may feel reluctant to make contact with local British people

actively". Scott_M_British echoed this in his experience that "I don't mean it's the ability to use the correct vocabulary and grammar…It's the actual conversation…that you might not [could] follow entirely".

It seems that the different styles of socialising brought strong unfamiliarity to both the Chinese and British sojourners, and even though they tried to interact with their local peers, the language and cultural differences were still barriers for them to fully and properly understand the conversations and situations. These hindered their interactions with local peers in their new environments.

Distinct role in SAPs. Since both the Chinese and British sojourners went to the host countries through SAPs, their roles were quite distinct in the sense that: 1) they were not doing a degree in their host universities, and 2) they had a scheduled time to return to their home universities. This role was reported as a barrier to interactions with their peers in the new microsystem. Because they knew they would be in the host country for only one year and they would go home after the short sojourn when their SAPs finished, they said, "I don't think it's necessary to integrate, it's just a short period" (Wei_F_Chinese), and "if I'm going here to do, like, [my] undergraduate degree…I would…expect that I really get integrated. But if you're just sort of coming and leaving, it's difficult" (Mary_F_British). In addition, when they moved to an unfamiliar environment, they had to try hard to survive first before thinking about other issues such as making friends with local people. However, "once you feel about settled, it's already been three months, [local students] already have their own groups" (Xing_F_Chinese) and "they aren't like us, they're here for a degree…it's hard to get into their group" (Quinn_M_British). Thus, their distinct role in SAPs became a barrier for both their initiatives and the real-life situations of interacting and making friends with local peers.

Peers – Benefits

Linguistic and cultural interactions and improvements. Several sojourners in both the Chinese and British groups noted common linguistic and cultural benefits that they gained from their interactions with their peers in the new microsystem. Since their sojourns in the host countries provided them with opportunities to meet, communicate and interact with local peers, they could "learn what this word means…or how to reply to an email properly in English, I'll imitate the expressions I get from emails or messages from friends" (Kang_F_Chinese), and "we help each [other] [with homework]…and we do share a lot of

ideas about [Chinese and British cultures]…[when it finishes] I think you'll take some more Chinese ideas away with you" (Eva_F_British).

Peers – Challenges

Building close friendships. As the barriers discussed above have shown that their interactions with peers in the new microsystem were difficult, it is not surprising that building close friendships with local peers was one of the challenges both groups' sojourners encountered. It might still be somewhat "bizarre how you can be surrounded by so many Chinese students but actually meeting them and making friends with them is quite difficult" (Mike_M_British), or even "we may have conversations, but that's not being friends" (Mu_F_Chinese). However, in order to fulfil one of the main expectations for the sojourn (i.e. meeting and making friends with local students/people), sojourners from both groups needed to put effort to learn how to cross the discussed barriers (e.g. language, different pace, etc.). Then, the more proper interactions with local students they had, the closer friendships they might build, and the more important lessons (e.g. target language and culture, personal development) they could learn.

Based on the above presented findings, it was found that although both groups claimed that interactions with peers (i.e. local schoolmates) were difficult, it is evident that *peers* is an important element in sojourners' new microsystem. The findings in this study indicate that peers in the new environment seemed to have immediate and regular interactions with and influences on both Chinese and British sojourners.

Institutions – Facilitators

Academic and administrative support. Both the Chinese and British interviewees found the academic and administrative support from their host universities to be an important facilitator during their sojourns. The British sojourners primarily noted the practical teaching content in class, such as "practic[ing] colloquialism and common things people say here" (Andy_M_British), and "insights of Chinese culture rather than things just in textbooks" (Sarah_F_British). The support Chinese sojourners gained was mainly administrative. They found administrative staff members in British universities to be "more reachable" (Mu_F_Chinese) and felt they had good attitudes and helpful materials in student services (e.g. Mao_F_Chinese).

SAP design and new academic style. Nearly the majority of both the Chinese and British interviewees noted that the SAP design and the new academic style in their host institutions helped their acculturation in terms of academic adjustment and development. However, the situations in the two groups were different. As has been mentioned when discussing their original microsystems, although some of their home universities might have required them to choose courses relevant to English Studies while in the UK, the SAP design for the Chinese sojourners in British universities did not have specific requirements for them. Thus, apart from their home universities' requirements, they were more flexible in terms of module selection at the British universities. In this way, they might be able to try new courses in which they were interested (e.g. Qiang_F_Chinese) and experience real British undergraduate education (e.g. Yu_F_Chinese), particularly since they shared their classes with local undergraduates.

On the other hand, the British sojourners in Chinese universities were arranged into specific classes for international sojourners only, and the main course content focused primarily on language learning. However, although they could not experience full Chinese undergraduate education with local Chinese students, they still found this SAP design and the new ways of learning Chinese helpful: "[because] courses [in China] were more intense [than in my home university], it really helped my language come along" (Eva_F_British). Also, Mary added that she "feel[s] that people take it more seriously [in China] …having students from all different places and come specifically to learn Chinese…it feels more important" (Mary_F_British). Thus, this SAP design and the new ways of learning Chinese were likely to be helpful for their academic improvement.

Special care and support from teachers. Many of the Chinese interviewees (ten out of fifteen) and several British ones (five out of eighteen) received help from teachers in their host universities. The care and support both groups received were primarily based on the host university teachers' understanding of international students. These teachers might "encourage us to talk more in class" (Kang_F_Chinese), "provide feedback with lots of encouragement, which really made me more confident" (Xing_F_Chinese), understand that international students are likely to encounter more difficulties and challenges and so try to help them (e.g. Louis_M_British), and explain more about cultural differences in their lessons for international sojourners (e.g. Caroline_F_British).

Institutions – Barriers

"Being treated differently". This complaint was primarily made by the British interviewees. It is likely because their classes and student halls were separate from local Chinese undergraduates, which led to a scenario where they "don't have…any Chinese friends…because I didn't really have a chance to meet [local Chinese students]" (Cara_F_British). Additionally, they raised the point that the host universities did not help provide opportunities to integrate with local Chinese students, saying "there's no information posted anywhere for going to clubs" (Gabrielle_F_British). The British sojourners in Chinese universities found it difficult to find activities or societies for them to meet and interact with local Chinese students, and some of the host universities even separated them into specific clubs which were for international students only. This separation is found to be an influential barrier for their sojourns in China and might make them feel "disappointed" (Gabrielle_F_British).

Lack of support. Many of the British interviewees (eleven out of eighteen) and one Chinese sojourner (Xing_F_Chinese) mentioned that lack of support was a barrier for their sojourns in their host universities. Xing noted the lack of academic support while her British peers found a lack of administrative support. Xing thought there were not enough support and information for international sojourners in SAPs, and she was not able to talk with any staff members about course selection: "undergraduates here [in the UK] have tutors…but we don't". On the other hand, her British peers in China found the lack of administrative support to be an influential barrier. The British sojourners noted that they had not had "any contact [in host universities] apart from [their] teachers" (Kate_F_British), no information on courses, "no hobby groups" for them to join (e.g. Mary_F_British), and there was even a local reception staff member who only spoke the local dialect, and when sojourners went to her for help, she usually turned them away because she could not understand them (e.g. Louis_M_British). As Caroline argued:

> *I think there needs to be, in China, a more accessible support system for international students…there should be somebody that international students can go and speak to when they do have problems…the frustrations just boom…but you can't talk to anyone about them*. (Caroline_F_British)

Institutions – Benefits

Linguistic benefits and academic achievement. Five Chinese and four British interviewees mentioned the linguistic benefits and academic achievement they gained from their studies in their host universities. They found that they had learnt more authentic expressions from

communications or emails (e.g. Kang_F_Chinese) and put more effort in learning the target language in terms of time and workload (e.g. Gabrielle_F_British). Then, after their sojourns, they undertook more critical thinking in their academic writing (e.g. Yu_F_Chinese) and reached higher levels of competence with the target language and culture (e.g. Mike_M_British).

Changes in attitudes and thinking. Another benefit is the personal development, which was primarily noted by some Chinese interviewees. They found that the new ways of learning and teaching helped them change their attitudes toward studying and gain different ways of thinking. When they were at their home universities, they might "easily pass exams if you have learnt or prepared everything in textbooks, even if you didn't listen to classes carefully" (Mao_F_Chinese), but their experience in the UK was different: "I realise I need to work as hard as I can…If you want to learn something, you have to be prepared so you can ask good questions and discuss in class" (Hu_F_Chinese). Additionally, by experiencing British academic culture, which encourages various ways of thinking, they came to "know more about the British mindset" (Jin_F_Chinese) and could "see an issue from so many different perspectives" (Mao_F_Chinese).

Institutions – Challenges

Different educational settings and campus lifestyle. The majority of both the Chinese and British interviewees (27 out of 33) stated that the different institution-specific educational settings and campus lifestyles were challenging for them to adjust to. For instance, the Chinese students had been used to Chinese institutional features and settings such as more teacher-oriented classes and shared rooms in dormitories without a kitchen, while the British students were more familiar with student-centred classes and private rooms with a shared kitchen, as are more common in British HEIs. When they sojourned in each other's educational settings, they were likely to feel that the features and settings in their host institutions, as well as campus life, were very different and unfamiliar (e.g. Zan_F_Chinese; Nala_F_British), not only between Chinese and British HEIs, but also among different institutions within China and the UK. These differences were more likely to be part of the institutional context rather than arising from the interactions between institutions and peers in the mesosystem, and they were reported as notable challenges they needed to overcome in order to experience, learn and gain academic achievements.

Studying in real context with local students. Many of Chinese sojourners chose English literature courses in order to transfer the credits back to their home universities. However, they realised that it was too challenging for them to have literature classes with native speakers since they were arranged in the same classes as local undergraduate students in host universities. Although they were English learners, they still found that "you can hardly finish the workload, it's for native speakers" (Zai_F_Chinese), "I can't fully understand the lecture" (Mao_F_Chinese). Xing_F_Chinese thought it was unfair for one of her lecturers in the host university to mark the assignment with the same standards as local students, and a lecturer in one of her classes even commented that she was "not doing as good as local British students". The findings suggest that Chinese sojourners are likely to find it challenging to have classes with local students and be tested/marked with the same standards. However, this is not to suggest that Chinese sojourners should have separate classes as their British counterparts do in China or be held to a lower standard; the findings primarily highlight the challenges Chinese sojourners are likely to encounter and show they may need more academic help from their host institutions.

In summary, although the Chinese and British sojourners in this study had quite different experiences in their host universities because of the different SAP designs, the differences in academic and administrative conventions and campus life were reported by both groups to be influential in the interactions between sojourners and their host institutions. Notably, it is not the intention of this study to judge which way of teaching and learning for student sojourners in SAPs is better, but to suggest that there are both beneficial and difficult influential factors from host institutions that require more attention.

Environmental factors	Key similarities	Key differences
Original microsystem	Family & Peers – • Important emotional support. • Lack of understanding, schedule differences, and the new ways of communication make the interactions challenging. • Tips from previous sojourners (schoolmates) are helpful.	Family – • British group had more family reunion during sojourns, while Chinese group had none. • British group has more China-related or multicultural family background and previous overseas experiences.
	Institutions – • Helpful acquired foundation in linguistic and cultural knowledge but lack of realistic and practical learning resources.	
	Institutions – (both similarities and differences) • SAP design: (facilitator) no requirement on module selection for Chinese group, while British group only had Chinese language module; (barrier) credit transfer for Chinese group and exam result recognition for British group. • Lack of support and understanding from home universities before and especially during sojourns.	
New microsystem	"Shield" – • Common ground and connections facilitate interactions and building the "shield". • Friends in "shield" include co-nationals, other internationals; they will be friends for years or life. • Easy to "stay in a bubble" and regretted not insisting on trying to engage with more different people and things in new environment.	"Shield" – • British group's "shield" also includes some locals. • British group realised the difficulty of breaking out of the "shield" and developed empathy for Chinese students in the UK.
	Peers – (mainly schoolmates) • Very difficult to have natural friendships with local students. • Still gain linguistic and cultural development from limited interactions with local peers.	
	Institutions – • Different academic culture and campus lifestyle brings challenges in adjustment. • Helpful understanding of needs of international students and proper support from teachers.	
	Institutions – (both similarities and differences) • Beneficial SAP design and new academic style: flexible module selection and mixed classes broaden Chinese group's horizons; intense language course in designated classes help linguistic improvement for British group. • Helpful academic and administrative support: practical lessons for British group; better student service for Chinese group.	
		Institutions – • New academic style changed attitudes towards learning and developed critical thinking for Chinese group; but challenging to study in same classes with local students. • "Being treated differently" in designated and separate classes and student halls for British group and lack of administrative support.

Table 5-4 Summary of key similarities and differences between original and new microsystems

5.3.2 Mesosystem – the connections between the closest surroundings

According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), the mesosystem is comprised of the connections and interactions between the closest surroundings of the person in microsystem. As was presented in the above section, the closest surroundings in the original microsystem for both Chinese and British sojourners are their family, peers (i.e. friends and schoolmates at home) and institutions (i.e. home universities and other third-party SAP organisations), while the key elements in their new microsystem are their "shields", peers (i.e. local schoolmates) and institutions (i.e. host universities). The original mesosystem is where the interactions among the key components in their original microsystem occur (e.g. the interactions between a Chinese/British sojourner's family and his/her home university), whilst the new mesosystem is for the interactions among the key elements in the sojourner's new microsystem (e.g. between a Chinese/British sojourner's local schoolmates and his/her host university).

Mesosystem		
Original		New
	Facilitators	• Platforms for integration
• Partially shared experience	**Barriers**	• Lack of confidence
	Benefits	• Inspiration
	Challenges	

Table 5-5 Themes and subthemes for original and new mesosystems

5.3.2.1 Original mesosystem

Barriers

Partially shared experience. Although the practical tips both Chinese and British sojourners received from their peers have been discussed as very helpful (see Section 5.3.1.1), some participants in both groups mentioned the potential barriers that can be presented if their peers only share part of their experiences. This situation was likely to particularly occur when previous sojourners were invited by the home university to give a talk at pre-departure meetings, in which they were likely to share the basic facts (e.g. how to select courses) or positive and interesting experiences they had during their sojourns. Both Zai and Jack noted the barriers associated with their peers only partially sharing their experiences:

> *…[at] pre-departure meetings…previous sojourners…only talked about the good parts…it made me feel that it's easy, I didn't expect and prepare for so*

> *much pressure here, in all aspects…I wish they had told us the possible difficulties we might have…* (Zai_F_Chinese)
>
> *…You also need acknowledge that you might not enjoy the experience…I don't think it's fair to a student to just say, 'Oh, this is the best experience of your life…it's really easy to integrate.' It's not…it's dangerous to…portray your year abroad just positively…* (Jack_M_British)

Both of them were notable cases because, as was presented in the metaphors section, they had trying experiences in the UK and China respectively. Sojourning in a foreign country involves not only excitement but also challenges, which could be arguably the more important issue that sojourners wished and needed to be made aware of before their departure.

Surprisingly, except the barrier from the pre-departure interaction between their peers and home institutions, no important findings emerged in this study about the Chinese or British sojourners' original mesosystems during their sojourns. This means the connections and interactions between their family, peers at home and home universities or third-party SAP organisations have no evidential influence on the sojourners in either group when sojourners are away. It might be speculated that each sojourner him/herself was the tie between those connections and interactions, so when the sojourner moved away from the original environment, the connections became weaker and the interactions were less frequent, or provisionally paused, without the tie to bind together these key elements in original microsystem.

5.3.2.2 New mesosystem

Facilitators

Platforms for integration. The main facilitator noted by many interviewees in both the Chinese and British groups was the various platforms for them to integrate. These platforms were likely the outcomes of the connections and interactions between the sojourners' peers (i.e. schoolmates) and institutions (i.e. host universities). The platforms were found to include social activities and meetings (e.g. Yuan_F_Chinese; Eva_F_British), and social media communication groups (Sally_F_British). These platforms offered various opportunities for the sojourners to get involved in the new environment; as Sally put it, these are "great resources…[sojourning in a foreign country] really like being thrown in something new, so having that kind of platform is really helpful."

Barriers

Lack of confidence. The negative influences triggered by interactions between peers and host institutions were raised by a Chinese interviewee (Zan_F_Chinese), who claimed that she might lose confidence when her local schoolmates did excellently in replying to questions or doing presentations in class. Since their local peers were likely to exemplify or model how the students could behave, participate, engage and even excel in the host universities, consciously or subconsciously, these sojourners might have learnt from their local peers and imitated their interactions with the host institutions. Although these might not be direct interactions with sojourners (as in the new microsystem), the student sojourners were still likely to suffer from pressure when they found the standard of the examples/models to be quite high, in which case they might lose confidence and start to doubt whether they could manage to do well for the whole sojourn. That lack of confidence could arguably be a significant barrier until they regained their confidence from other interactions and realised that they were capable of surviving and having good interactions in the new environment. The possible explanation for no British sojourners noting this barrier might be that they had their classes with other international sojourners who would have similar language and knowledge levels rather than being mixed with local schoolmates who were likely to perform better. Although no British interviewees mentioned similar barriers to Zan's during their interviews, it might be speculated to be a potential common point for both groups and require attention.

Benefits

Inspiration. One Chinese and five British interviewees gained inspiration from the interactions between their "shields"/peers and the host institutions in the new mesosystem, which stimulated their desire to achieve new goals. Yan_F_Chinese noted the inspiration that she gained on developing her thoughts on different cultures and behaviours, which made her "more willing and braver to talk in class and let people know what I think". Similarly, the British sojourners received similar inspiration, feeling that they needed to work harder so as not to be left behind by their "shields" and peers, either in the same or different host universities, or with the same or different cultural backgrounds. As Mike_M_British concluded, "I think that helped push me to study harder and improve."

Based on the above findings, it is likely that with the tie (i.e. the Chinese or British foreign language learner) moving away from the original environment, the connections and

interactions between key components in the original microsystem become weaker so that the original mesosystem is not found to be an important influential element for the sojourner from his/her original environment. However, the new mesosystem is found, to some extent, to play an active role in the sojourner's experience abroad and development. Nevertheless, it is notable that the findings in this study do not suggest significant influences from the new mesosystem. It might be speculated that this is because: 1) the sojourners in this study were all adult learners, meaning they took responsibility for their development in the new environment; and 2) having only a one-year transitory sojourn is likely to make it more challenging for sojourners' newly built "shields" and newly contacted local peers and host institutions to have regular and significant connections and interactions.

5.3.3 Exosystem – the wider connections and community

The exosystem is a further level where the closest surroundings interact with one or more settings where the individual may not have direct interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In the original framework, the original exosystem included a sojourner's parents' workplace or neighbourhood in the original environment. However, given that Bronfenbrenner's work primarily focuses on children and their home environment, while this study focuses on adult learners and brings the context to an intercultural perspective, the findings of this study suggest that the sojourners were likely to rely more on themselves and have relatively more active interactions with their wider settings. For example, the sojourner might take public transport by him/herself or explore the host city and meet or even communicate with local people who are strangers to him/her. Therefore, if the original exosystem necessarily consists of the interactions with the closest surroundings from original microsystem, it is arguable that it might not be necessary for new exosystem to do so. It is more likely to be the wider connections and local community in the host city that have indirect or direct but occasional interactions with the sojourner (e.g. the sojourner's friends' social networks or the local community in the new environment).

Exosystem		
Original		New
	Facilitators	• Connection and familiarity in new environment • Engagement in local community • Friends' social network • Unanticipated conversation and kindness
	Barriers	• Standing out as a foreigner • Language barrier in real-life context
	Benefits	• Engagement and new friendships • Linguistic improvement and realistic understanding of target culture
	Challenges	• Target language in real-life context • Unexpected culture shock • Unanticipated incidents

Table 5-6 Themes and subthemes for original and new exosystems

5.3.3.1 Original exosystem

No significant findings on the original exosystem were reported by either the Chinese or British groups in this study. This suggests that the sojourners' wider connections and community at home do not evidentially continuously influence their development when they have moved away from the original environment. It might be speculated that this is because the original exosystem is where the sojourner's original closest surroundings (i.e. family, peers and institution at home) interact with one or more settings with which the sojourner does not directly interact even before he/she moves to the new environment. Then, when the sojourner becomes physically distant from his/her original closest surroundings, although the interactions between the original closest surroundings and other more remote settings might continue, the influence on the sojourner become less, or provisionally paused, and might restart and become stronger when the sojourner goes back to his/her original environment.

5.3.3.2 New exosystem

Interestingly and also surprisingly, the majority of this study's findings on the new exosystem emerged from the interviews with the British group, with less than half of the Chinese interviewees (six out of fifteen) describing interactions with their new exosystem in the UK, which mainly posed challenges for them.

Facilitators

Connection and familiarity in new environment. Nearly half of the British interviewees (n=18) noted that as they gradually became familiar with their new environment, they found some helpful connections and familiarities, specifically in their host cities. For example, they came to know certain places in their host cities (e.g. Caroline_F_British), learnt more Chinese language, particularly the local dialects (e.g. Cara_F_British), or built up their new routines, as Louis described:

> *…there's a place me and [my co-national friend] always go to for lunch…the old lady who works there…every time we went there, and she's like '噢！你好你好!' [ni hao, nihao – Hello! Hello!]…Just little things that have made being here special…because we have these familiarities…it felt like 'I'm home' in a way.* (Louis_M_British)

Sojourning is likely to be a process of moving from unfamiliarity to more familiarity within the new environment. When sojourners acquire certain information about their new environment, they might feel connected to it (their host city in particular), and find familiarities in people, places or other aspects which are likely to help them feel at home.

Engagement in local community. Three Chinese (n=15) and eleven British (n=18) interviewees found engagement in local communities to be a helpful facilitator for their sojourns. The Chinese participants tried church activities (Zai_F_Chinese and Kang_F_Chinese) and worked part-time in a local Chinese restaurant (Yuan_F_Chinese). They noted that their engagement in these activities and places helped them "meet friendly local people" (Zai_F_Chinese), and "have different experiences [than in the host university]" (Yuan_F_Chinese).

The British sojourners had more various experiences of engaging with the local communities, such as going to certain local Chinese restaurants regularly (e.g. Nala_F_British), having part-time English teaching jobs to local kids (e.g. Louis_M_British) or visiting local museums and art galleries (e.g. Harry_M_British). Interestingly, seven out of these eleven British interviewees moved out of student halls and stayed in local apartments. That meant they had to engage in more interactions with local people, dealing with issues such as "negotiating with the agent" (Mary_F_British) or "buying vegetables from local Chinese people" (Sarah_F_British). They found this kind of engagement provided them with opportunities to immerse themselves in the local lives and practices of the Chinese people

because “none of them [neighbours] speak any English…it’s probably the first time I had a real experience…I’ve had to use my Chinese” (Scott_M_British). It might be speculated that British students are more used to living on their own (e.g. renting a flat/house off-campus and cooking for themselves) because of the lifestyle in British universities; undergraduates in China have shared rooms and canteens on campus, and the majority of them stay on campus until they graduate (also, they are not allowed to cook in their rooms). This difference in campus lifestyle is likely to encourage British sojourners to engage in more real ways of living a local life in the host city, rather than being somewhat sheltered within the bubble of the university campus.

Friends’ social network. The wider and further connection with key elements in the microsystem is an important component in the exosystem. Two Chinese and four British sojourners mentioned that their friends’ (e.g. peers or members of their “shield”) social networks helped their interactions with the new environment. For example, Qiang_F_Chinese was invited to visit the hometown of a local British friend in her “shield”, where she met her friend’s family and friends; Aaron_M_British appreciated the help from the roommate of a co-national friend from his “shield” in terms of practicing the Chinese language, taking him to local restaurants and helping him when he encountered problems: “it’s definitely made it easier and opened us to more things”. Likewise, as Mary suggested:

> *…the more people you know, the more likely you’ll find another organisation…you just need to find out through knowing people…and make some more friends.* (Mary_F_British)

Unanticipated conversation and kindness. Some interesting findings show that being a foreigner in host countries sometimes brought unanticipated conversation and kindness to sojourners in both groups, especially the British group. Four Chinese interviewees found local people were nice and friendly to them and would talk to them briefly on the train or in local restaurants (e.g. Hu_F_Chinese), and some of the local people would even greet them in simple Chinese (Yan_F_Chinese). The majority of the British interviewees (fourteen out of eighteen) echoed their Chinese peers. They found local Chinese people in their host cities to be nice and willing to help: “in China…people…know you’re a foreigner… [they] make more of an effort to try to help you, which is really nice” (Kate_F_British). When the sojourners were trying to ask for help in Chinese, local Chinese would try to understand their Chinese or reply in simpler terms (e.g. Karl_M_British). Also, it is interesting that four British interviewees said the taxi drivers were the people they practiced their Chinese with

(e.g. Gabrielle_F_British), and another two British sojourners practiced with local shop owners or cashiers (e.g. Sarah_F_British).

Barriers

Standing out as a foreigner. Many British interviewees (eleven out of eighteen) observed that standing out as a foreigner in China could sometimes hinder their acculturation experiences. For example, they were likely to be assumed not to understand Chinese even though they spoke it with local people (e.g. Nala_F_British) or be asked to take photos as if they were "animals in a zoo" (e.g. Gabrielle_F_British). These experiences were likely to make part of their sojourns unpleasant in China and discourage and demotivate them to interact with local Chinese people. However, it might be speculated that in a collectivistic and largely monocultural country like China, the cultural distance between Chinese and British people is quite large. It is likely that while the British sojourners felt unfamiliar with China and the local Chinese people, dialects and customs, the local people also found them as foreigners unfamiliar and novel. However, the findings from the Chinese group suggest that this is likely to be a common difficulty, as it also arose between Chinese sojourners and local British people. One Chinese interviewee, Yan_F_Chinese, reported an unpleasant racist incident when she was travelling in northern England. She felt "really offended and terrible, it might because we're Asian or foreigners, that's their attitudes toward us". Such findings suggest that the host society's attitudes toward foreign sojourners are likely to be an important influential factor in their sojourns. Since these attitudes could bring either psychological pressure or relief from the unfamiliar environment to sojourners (i.e. making sojourners feel unwelcome or welcome), they are likely to demotivate or encourage them to interact with the new environment.

Language barrier in real-life context. Even for these foreign language learners, the target language they were learning sometimes served as a barrier in real-life contexts; this was especially noted by several British interviewees. For example, the differences between different local dialects and the Chinese they had learnt in class were likely to make their communications with local people quite difficult. It was not only that the British sojourners found it hard to express themselves properly, but the local Chinese also found it difficult to understand them and reply in terms which the sojourners could understand. It could become quite difficult and even dangerous when there was an emergency, as in Kate's case:

> *[When she encountered some mental health and psychological wellbeing issues in China]…cultural barrier like the paramedics didn't know what to do, nobody could understand me because I'm speaking English…[the situation] just got worse and worse*. (Kate_F_British)

Benefits

Engagement and new friendships. Although the Chinese sojourners in this study tended to have relatively far fewer interactions with the local community, several gained benefits from their interactions with a local church or friends' social networks, which were observed to be important elements of the new exosystem. The British sojourners had more interactions with their friends' social networks and local communities, and they gained a lot from these interactions. The sojourners (both Chinese and British) noted that during their interactions with their wider connections and local communities, they felt "more integrated" (Yuan_F_Chinese), and "made more local friends" (Caroline_F_British). As Sarah suggested, "often when people find you can speak Chinese, they're very keen to talk to you…I have made friends just sitting on the metro or going to places" (Sarah_F_British).

Linguistic improvement and realistic understanding of target culture. Half of the British interviewees (n=18) mentioned the linguistic and cultural gains they made from their interactions with local people, either from friends' social networks or in the local community. As Andy_M_British said, "…when you spend more time listening and understand[ing] more words. My confidence has grown as well, massively here…". Likewise, Harry enjoyed visiting local museums and art galleries, and also discussed Chinese culture and history with local people he met in those places:

> *it's good to be able to speak to people actually in the culture context…about something you're interested in…they can reply in some substance.* (Harry_M_British)

Interactions with local people were greatly beneficial to the foreign language learners because they could learn more authentic Chinese expressions, and they could also gain ideas about certain cultural topics from the actual people who are in that context, rather than from textbooks or other secondary resources.

Challenges

Target language in real-life context. Using the target language in a real-life context was raised as a challenge by several British sojourners. As Eva explained:

> *…it's a lot easier in the classroom…the teacher knows what you're about to say…[but] in certain situations, like in a shop where you don't know the name of what you want…maybe the person working there isn't used to hearing the weird accent I have…it's definitely different in real life than classroom.* (Eva_F_British)

The local dialects and accents could be quite different from what the students had learnt in their classes and could easily make them feel "so confused" (Andy_M_British) in real-life contexts, especially when interacting and communicating with local Chinese people who could have different accents. Although this challenge was primarily noted by the British group, it would be fair to speculate that Chinese sojourners in the UK also encountered this challenge with their English. However, because the Chinese group had far fewer interactions with local people than their British peers did in this study, no salient findings support this speculation. Nevertheless, it might be speculated that the challenge of using English in real-life contexts was a reason why the Chinese sojourners had fewer interactions with local British people, as they could be afraid of making mistakes and were lacking in confidence when they found the differences between the English used in real-life situations and what they had learnt in their classes.

Unexpected culture shock. One third of British interviewees felt quite surprised when they encountered unexpected culture shock, such as when they were stared at (e.g. Gabrielle_F_British) or asked by people to take photos with them (e.g. Aaron_M_British) because they were identifiable as foreigners. As Sarah experienced:

> *I think I was more aware of people looking at me when I first arrived, I've had some people asking to take my picture or to add me on WeChat, which I wasn't really anticipating, but it's not been very common.* (Sarah_F_British)

Some of these British sojourners might find it "funny" (Eva_F_British), "confusing" (Aaron_M_British) or even "annoying" (Gabrielle_F_British) because they had not been prepared for these types of culture shock by either the culture lessons they had had at their home universities or by other information sources. Regardless of how they felt, these instances of culture shock were likely to be challenges that the sojourners had to overcome in order to support their own survival in and interactions with the new environment.

Unanticipated incidents. As the metaphors illustrated, sojourning in a foreign country could be like "a box of chocolates", with the sojourners not knowing what would happen in the

next minute. Almost half of both groups' sojourners (18 out of 33) encountered unanticipated incidents which were likely to make their sojourns challenging. These challenging incidents included cash and ID cards being stolen (Yuan_F_Chinese), being bitten by a dog when travelling in a European country and the complicated subsequent procedure of getting rabies shots (Yang_F_Chinese), being attacked by drunk people (Andy_M_British), experiencing food poisoning (e.g. Nala_F_British) and so on. Spending one year in a foreign country could seem short because time flies quickly, however, it is also likely to feel quite long and hard when there are unanticipated incidents happen. The sojourners were distant from their family and friends and all their familiar society systems (e.g. health services), and they had to learn to deal with these unanticipated incidents by themselves in an unfamiliar environment.

Taken together, although the original exosystem is found to be somewhat absent in this study, the findings suggest that the British sojourners in this study had notable interactions with the new exosystem, which was likely to influence their sojourns and development while they lived and studied abroad in China. However, despite the Chinese sojourners being found to have far fewer interactions with their new exosystem, this does not suggest that the new exosystem had no influence on them. It might be speculated that the difference is because the British sojourners were relatively more independent and used to living, working and even cooking on their own. However, sojourning is arguably a process of learning by experiencing, especially for foreign language learners. Regardless of whether they have positive or negative experiences, the more they experience through real-life situations in the country of their target language and culture, the more they are likely to learn. Also, teachers and peers as well as activities on campus form just a part of the real-life situations in the host country; there are wider communities and connections in their host cities and countries where they could have more interactions, as the experiences of the British sojourners show. Thus, this study's findings suggest that in terms of having significant interactions with the new exosystem, the Chinese sojourners might be encouraged to learn from their British counterparts.

5.3.4 Macrosystem – the underpinning ideas and practices from culture and subculture

The macrosystem is the furthest level in this bioecological system, serving as "the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic" or "a societal blueprint for a particular culture or subculture" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p.40). Although it is the

remotest and broadest level, the macrosystem comprises the underpinning ideas and practices from the culture and subculture in a particular country or race (e.g. the belief systems, customs, public policy, etc). It provides the basic norms and directions for each subsystem in a person's bioecological system. In this study, the macrosystem in the original environment encompasses the sojourner's home country's belief system, lifestyle, etc., while the new macrosystem is the culture and subculture(s) of the host country.

Macrosystem		
Original		**New**
• Access to home culture	**Facilitators**	• Avoiding 'being alien' • Bravery from being a foreigner
• Habitual mindset and lifestyle • Identity and patriotism	**Barriers**	• Alien feelings • Mismatched expectations
	Benefits	• Realistic understanding of target language and culture • "Being in the middle" • Influenced by host culture
• "Difficult to readjust"	**Challenges**	• Being in limbo • Sociocultural differences and mismatched expectations • Language challenges and retrogress

Table 5-7 Themes and subthemes for original and new macrosystems

5.3.4.1 Original macrosystem

Facilitators

Access to home culture. It is interesting that Scott_M_British mentioned that modern technology allowed him to maintain access to his home culture and people at home. As he said, "you can all access whatever social media that we need to keep us sane…I get enough exposure here to home, that keeps me not feeling too homesick." In his case, access to his home culture was a facilitator which helped him maintain continuous contact with the familiar environment rather than the interactions in the new environment. Arguably, access and exposure to their familiar environment are likely to hinder sojourners from fully immerse and explore the new environment. However, for these sojourners in one-year SAPs, continuous contact with their home culture tended to be an important facilitator for their mental health and psychological wellbeing, keeping them from "feeling too homesick", as Scott noted. This finding also echoes the significance of the closest surroundings in the

original microsystem playing crucial and active roles in both the Chinese and British participants' sojourns.

Barriers

Habitual mindset and lifestyle. The underpinning ideas and practices from a person's home culture and subculture provide the basic norms and directions for his/her ways of thinking, behaviour, lifestyle, etc. When a sojourner moves to a foreign country, he/she is likely to bring his/her habitual mindset and lifestyle, which is shaped by his/her home culture and subculture, because they have been deeply embedded in his/her psyche (Elliot et al., 2016b). This is a similar barrier noted by both the Chinese and British interviewees in this study, as in Yang and Nala's examples:

> *…it's something [buried] deeply in your daily behaviour, like when you take a seat in a lecture theatre, you won't take either the first row or the last one, you just go for the middle…* (Yang_F_Chinese)

> *…living in one culture so you pick up a lot of…small traits, but you're also still so firmly rooted in your own culture back home…you're never gonna fully accept Chinese culture.* (Nala_F_British)

The mindsets and lifestyles shaped by the sojourners' home cultures are likely to have become part of them (e.g. behaviour, etc.). These deeply rooted thoughts and behaviours might become barriers to them interacting with the new environment because their habitual mindsets and lifestyles are likely to influence their subconscious reactions and decisions during their sojourns. For example, as Yu_F_Chinese said, "things like what you eat and your work and rest timetable, they won't be changed…[the Chinese way] is in every inch of you". When the sojourners encountered different mindsets and lifestyles, their feelings of alienness were likely to be aggravated.

Identity and patriotism. Likewise, the underpinning ideas and practices from a sojourner's home culture and subculture are likely to not only provide directions for him/her, but also a stronger sense of belonging in his/her identity. However, when interacting with a new culture and subculture, this strong identity could somewhat lead to patriotism, which was likely to be a barrier for them to be open and accept new things in the new environment, as was found in both the Chinese and British groups. "[British sojourners] are very stuck in their own ways, they think the English ways are the best ways…sometimes maybe they are not willing to adapt to the new situation" (Caroline_F_British). Also, especially for sojourners in SAPs who had a relatively shorter stay in their host countries, "I'm interested in British culture,

but I never want to be like the British, I'm Chinese, and I'll go back to China and continue my life, this won't change" (Xing_F_Chinese).

Benefits

Interestingly, no benefits from the original macrosystem were noted by either the Chinese or British interviewees. It might be speculated that in the context of an intercultural sojourn, especially in countries with large cultural differences (e.g. China and the UK), the sojourner's home culture would be likely to act as a hindrance or challenge to their acculturation and interactions in the new environment. This might be because they had to negotiate the cultural differences and make decisions to learn different ways of thinking, expressions, knowledge, skills and behaviours in order to better acculturate in the new environment (Elliot et al., 2016b).

Challenges

"Difficult to readjust". It is also interesting that a few British interviewees noted the challenge of readjusting when they went back to the UK for a break. Caroline gave one such example; she went back to the UK for a short break during the Spring Festival holiday after sojourning for almost six months in China, but she found it difficult to re-adjust to the environment which had long been familiar to her.

> *…When I first got back, I found quite difficult to re-adjust…I heard people speak in English all the time, and I've found really like 'ohh, I don't like it'…because I'm used to hearing Chinese all the time now…I found it…difficult because people [at home] don't really understand my experiences…* (Caroline_F_British)

Because she had already established some familiarity with her new environment, when she came back home, she found that her familiar home environment had become somewhat unfamiliar. The sudden change meant she was required to acculturate again back to her home culture. The question of whether re-acculturation is difficult when sojourners go back home is an interesting one, but answering it is not the aim of this study, and none of the Chinese interviewees went back to China during their sojourns. Thus, the findings in this study only suggest that it is likely to be somewhat challenging for sojourners to readjust to their home culture. Notably, from Caroline's experience, it seemed not to be too difficult for her, as she said, "it was very strange to go back, but…I quickly fitted back into my old life".

Based on the above presented findings, it is evident that although the macrosystem is the furthest layer in a person's environment, it is different from the mesosystem and exosystem as it continues influencing and interacting with the person when he/she moves to a new environment. The original macrosystem acts as the underpinning ideas and practices from the person's home culture and subculture, which are likely to be deeply rooted in the person's ways of thinking, behaviours, etc.

5.3.4.2 New macrosystem

Facilitators

Avoiding 'being alien'. Several British interviewees mentioned that trying to avoid being alien (i.e. saliently different from local people) in the new environment helped their acculturation experiences, and one Chinese interviewee (Kang_F_Chinese) echoed this intention by citing the collectivist idea of "合群" (*he qun*, which means to follow the group's behaviour, trying not to be the different one). For example, Kang would "slightly change my behaviour in order to not stand out as a foreigner…I don't want to be an alien here [in the UK]". This intention acted as a motivation to encourage these foreign language learners to learn their target language and culture by "copy[ing] what local people say, because if I say [in my own way]…that can be wrong" (Andy_M_British), and doing things as "everyone does it…because that's what you have to adapt to, that's the kind of thing, the Chinese culture thing you have to adopt, and that's definitely gonna be helpful" (Karl_M_British).

Bravery from being a foreigner. Interestingly, the findings from some interviewees in both groups suggest that they were encouraged by the feeling of unfamiliarity in their new environment. The cultural differences positively offered them bravery as foreigners in a different country. They felt encouraged to "express yourself freely" (Yuan_F_Chinese) and "experience whatever you'd like, to give it a try" (Yu_F_Chinese) because they "have to be bold, that's how you adapt…they're just strangers" (Karl_M_British). Interacting with a foreigner (i.e. local people in the host country) and sojourning in a foreign country could be daunting, but also quite exciting because the sojourners were able to try new things and interact with strangers. This was likely to be a freer context for them because they would feel "less embarrassed if I did something wrong" (Mu_F_Chinese).

Barriers

Alien feelings. One of the major barriers mentioned by most of the Chinese and British interviewees was having alien feelings. Cultural differences were likely to be reflected in trivial aspects of daily life, for example, "even something really basic like eating…Chinese people go to a restaurant and buy little dishes and share, whereas we just kind of buy our own, eat our own" (Mike_M_British). These trivial differences are likely to exist everywhere from the ways of thinking and communicating to behaviours and lifestyle. These differences could remind the sojourners, both Chinese and British, that they were different, emphasising their foreignness. This was noted by Yang and Kate:

> *Even though I've been here for months, you'll still feel you're marginalised, you just can't integrate in the life here…no matter how hard you try…* (Yang_F_Chinese)

> *…people just know you're a foreigner from looking at you, it's obvious, isn't it?…you draw more or less attention... I was still really conscious of myself and being uncomfortable...* (Kate_F_British)

These strong feelings of alienness might have been stimulated by the sojourners' self-consciousness or the host society's attitudes toward foreign people. This kind of feeling could be likely to aggravate negative emotions such as homesickness, and even demotivate and hinder their interactions with and immersion in the new culture and subculture.

Mismatched expectations. Almost half of the Chinese interviewees (n=15) and three British interviewees found their experiences in the real-life contexts of the host countries mismatched with their expectations. These gaps were likely to disappoint and demotivate them during their sojourns. Interestingly, the common words used by most Chinese interviewees to describe their impressions of British people before their sojourns were "gentlemen, polite, and elegant" (e.g. Mu_F_Chinese), then they were disappointed and annoyed by the "noisy" (e.g. Zai_F_Chinese) British people and social culture (e.g. talking loudly in corridors, etc.). The British interviewees said their disappointments were primarily about the lack of things which they expected to be able to easily get; for example, Kate_F_British wished to easily find some Chinese Christians in her host city and make friends with them, but she did not manage to meet any. The sojourners might have generated their perceptions and expectations of the host countries from TV shows, lessons in schools/universities, etc. However, regardless of the sources of their expectations for the host countries, if there are large gaps between their expectations and reality, those gaps are likely to be a significant barrier for their experiences abroad, and they could cause psychological wellbeing issues, as Hu had when she encountered these gaps:

> *…When you found the real world [of the UK] was not like what I'd expected…I felt badly disappointed, I went through…a depression period [because of this disappointment], I said no to any social activities, I didn't want to talk to anybody…I just wanted to go home.* (Hu_F_Chinese)

Benefits

Realistic understanding of target language and culture. Nearly all of the interviewees in both the Chinese and British groups (29 out of 33 in total) claimed they gained more realistic understandings of the target language and culture they had been learning. This is likely to be one of the major purposes for a foreign language learner to sojourn to his/her target language and culture, so that he/she can relate what they have learnt to real-life situations, and explore the similarities and differences between reality and what they have imagined. It could be exciting to find out "everything, the Tai Chi, the traditional dancing is the same as what we've learnt, but now I can see it with my own eyes" (Cara_F_British), or surprising to realise that "everything is completely different to what I've learnt or been told back home" (Scott_M_British), or interesting to learn more authentic ways of expressing and communicating (e.g. Hu_F_Chinese), or confusing to encounter some specific cultural differences (e.g. the health system) (Yang_F_Chinese). However, regardless of how the sojourners felt about the similarities and differences, whether they enjoyed them or not, they gained a more realistic understanding of the reality of the host country and the target language and culture. As Yuan and Kate said:

> *It's the experience of reality…it becomes more real…when you experience it by yourself, you'll know what you didn't know before you came here, or what you just knew part of it, what details you missed…* (Yuan_F_Chinese).

> *…I had maybe an idea of what Chinese culture is like…what China should be like…the longer I've stayed there, the more I understand…* (Kate_F_British)

"Being in the middle". The majority of both the Chinese and British interviewees (23 out of 33) noted the benefits they gained from "being in the middle" (e.g. Yang_F_Chiense; Scott_M_British) of two different cultures. Due to the large cultural distance between these two countries, and as Kate_F_British put it, "…if I went to France or Spain it probably won't be the same…I went so far and just by myself and covered all these things…I did benefit definitely". Being in the middle of two quite different cultures offered these sojourners meaningful opportunity to reflect from a certain distance on themselves (e.g. Qiang_F_Chinese; Harry_M_British), their lives and relationships at home (e.g. Zan_F_Chinese; Nala_F_British) and the cultural differences between their home and host

countries (e.g. Yang_F_Chinese; Cara_F_British). Additionally, this opportunity allowed them to keep the trivial distractions at home away and focus solely on their interests, either academic or personal (e.g. Yu_F_Chinese), and to pause their normal life tracks at home because "coming to China is like a year out, and I don't need to think about [the rest of my life in the UK]" (Gabrielle_F_British). This seems to echo the metaphor of "an out of body experience", which suggests that sojourners have had a short break from their familiar life tracks. Although they might have encountered many difficulties and challenges during their sojourns, their lives during their temporary sojourns were likely to be lighter than their main life tracks. Furthermore, a few Chinese and British interviewees also mentioned that when sojourning in a foreign country, "you're…a representative of your country…When people [are] curious about your culture…you're explaining what the UK is like…like bridging cultures" (Mary_F_British). This example shows that being in the middle was likely to make the sojourners become something of a bridge linking two different cultures by communicating with local people and sharing more authentic information about the language and culture of their home country (Yan_F_Chinese).

Influenced by host culture. The interviewees in both groups noted the influence they gained from the host culture, saying they learnt a different lifestyle from the one they were familiar with. They all reflected on their own lifestyles. The Chinese sojourners realised that they had been carrying the great burdens of life and the future, which might have come from themselves, their families or their home society. They thought they should learn from the British lifestyle such as by taking more time to relax rather than working all the time (e.g. Jin_F_Chinese). On the other hand, the British interviewees realised their lives back in the UK were much more relaxing and included a lot of free time, and they had not been as hardworking as Chinese students. They found themselves inspired by Chinese culture having "much more…hustle and ambition" so "it makes me think 'what am I doing with all my time' when I can see people actually achieving the high quality" (Scott_M_British). This exemplifies the "mirror-image" influence of both cultures; by seeing how their peers or other Chinese/British people live, they compared these two different lifestyles and realised what they could or should learn from each other.

Challenges

Being in limbo. Being in the middle brought not only opportunities for the sojourners to reflect, but also challenges. Several interviewees in both groups (four from each group) claimed their experiences of being in the middle were like being put into limbo, where they

could not fully integrate into the new culture but were outside the context of their home culture. Accordingly, "we're actually in a situation where we feel completely distant from everything" (Louis_M_British). Likewise, Yang described her feelings in vivid detail:

> *…you're physically away…[and] not following well what's going on at home…you're also not integrated in [the host culture]…it makes you feel like a lonely strange creature…an outsider, you may feel there are two indistinct things in front of you…familiar and unfamiliar, there're connections, but you're detached from both of them…it's not because you don't have companions, but you don't have the sense of belonging to either culture*. (Yang_F_Chinese)

Sojourning in a foreign country is likely to cause alien feelings in sojourners every now and then. Being 'alien' does not merely refer to being a foreigner in the host culture, but also, like Yang said, "a lonely strange creature…an outsider" which is detached from both their home and host cultures. In such instances, sojourners' negative feelings, including homesickness, loneliness, etc., are likely to be aggravated, and they might easily feel lost during their sojourns. This is likely to be a major challenge which sojourners have to try to overcome in SAP sojourns so that they could better enjoy their time and gain more meaningful lessons and development in host countries.

Sociocultural differences and mismatched expectations. Half of the Chinese interviewees and two thirds of the British ones stated that the differences between their home and host socio-cultures brought them challenges during their sojourns. The findings suggest that it seems not to be the culture in terms of history or economics, but the culture in social and daily life that challenges sojourners. The socio-culture is likely to be the one manifested in different and trivial ways in the sojourner's daily life. This might include food culture (e.g. Mu_F_Chinese; Andy_M_British), customs and behaviours (e.g. Xing_F_Chinese; Nala_F_British), basic facilities in the host city (e.g. Hu_F_Chinese; Mary_F_British), etc. Sojourning in a foreign country is likely to be a challenging process of learning or relearning the differences in sojourners' home and host socio-cultures, as Mike and Ting said:

> *There's a lot of times when I have been confused in China… from the way they eat…how they eat, what they speak, how they speak…everything about Chinese culture is different…your culture is your life, if someone is so different, it can be difficult to integrate…* (Mike_M_British)

> *…Even if…there's zero difficulty in communication [in English], I might still be an outsider, there's huge differences in daily life, customs and all the cultural things.* (Ting_F_Chinese)

As has been mentioned, the macrosystem provides the underpinning ideas and practices from a certain culture and subculture for a person who lives in that cultural context; it affects the

ways and directions of the person's every trivial mindset and behaviour, as well as the social models in the environment (e.g. food, transport, etc.). That is to say, people in a certain macrosystem have their own way of living: "your culture is your life", as Mike put it. Sojourners are likely to have to negotiate between their own and new ways of living, then they might be able to adjust to the new socio-culture and survive their sojourns.

On the other hand, foreign language learners' ideas and expectations of the host socio-culture are likely to come from, for example, the knowledge and information they have learnt in their classes or through social media (e.g. Yang_F_Chinese), or from Chinese/British people they met before their sojourns (e.g. Jack_M_British). However, when the sojourners came to the real context of the socio-culture, there likely to be differences between it and what they had imagined, which brought about notable challenges for them to overcome. As Yang put it, "when you have an expectation for it, then you find the differences, the differences will be extremely exaggerated in your mind" (Yang_F_Chinese), and as a result, you would feel "quite disappointed" (Jack_M_British).

Language challenges and retrogress. Even these foreign language degree students found language – both target language and mother tongue – to be a challenge during their sojourns. One third of the Chinese interviewees (n=15) and ten out of eighteen British interviewees noted the using the target language in real-life situations was "like learning Chinese in a totally different new way" (Sally_F_British), saying "I was so confused when I first came here, like I'd never learnt English" (Hu_F_Chinese). The challenges they found included local dialects and accents (e.g. Hu_F_Chinese; Gabrielle_F_British) and real-life conversations rather than dialogue practices in class (e.g. Qiang_F_Chinese; Harry_M_British). In addition, a few participants in both groups also noted that after listening and speaking a foreign language for a year, their mother tongues were likely to retrogress. This was because "the way of thinking and expressing in English is different [from Chinese]" (Hu_F_Chinese) and "I use a lot of Chinese concept when I'm speaking, English is not as good as it used to be" (Caroline_F_British). Due to these challenges related to the cultural differences in languages and dialogues, the sojourners needed to negotiate between their target language and mother tongue, as an important part of their home and host cultures.

Overall, the macrosystem involves the underpinning ideas and practices from people's cultures and subcultures, which provide the basic norms and directions for people. It might manifest in various different and trivial aspects of life such as language, ways of expressing

and thinking, behaviours, etc. Arguably, it is the influence of the macrosystem (i.e. cultural background) that identifies people as being from different countries and races. When both the Chinese and British sojourners moved to their new environments, the influences from their original macrosystems accompanied them, and the new macrosystem brought both opportunities to learn a new culture and subculture as well as difficulties related to cultural differences.

5.3.5 Chronosystem – the temporal milestones

The chronosystem brings the environmental factors into a time dimension. It could be understood as the temporal milestones in an individual's development, including the significant changes in both the characteristics of the individual him/herself and the environment he/she is in (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). As was mentioned in the metaphors section, a sojourn per se is likely to be a special and significant milestone in the time dimension for a sojourners' development (Elliot et al., 2016a). However, if the time dimension is taken into the intercultural perspective, the findings in this study suggest that apart from the sojourn per se being an important temporal milestone for sojourners, there are likely to be two parallel timelines in the individual sojourner's chronosystem: the temporal milestones from the person's 1) original environment, and 2) new environment. Also, the changes in him/herself and the sojourn per se could arguably be brought with the sojourner and occur in the new environment. Hence, although the time dimension is a relatively intangible element in a person's bioecological system, when a person takes a sojourn to a new environment, there are likely to be two parallel chronosystems. The original chronosystem includes the temporal and influential changes in the sojourner's original environment during their sojourn period, while the new chronosystem consists of the milestones in the new environment, changes of characteristics in the person, and the sojourn per se.

Chronosystem		
Original		New
	Facilitators	• Academic achievement • Changes in dietary habits
• Relative's death • Status of relationships	**Barriers**	
	Benefits	• New understanding of degree subject and future plans
	Challenges	

Table 5-8 Themes and subthemes for original and new chronosystems

5.3.5.1 Original chronosystem

Barriers

In relation to both the Chinese and British sojourners' original chronosystems, this study's findings only report two significantly influential changes over time as barriers to their acculturation experiences in the host countries. These two changes occurred and were related to people in the sojourners' original environments.

Relative's death. The unexpected death of Mao_F_Chinese's grandmother was particularly influential on her. It happened when she had spent about three months in the UK and considered herself almost settled in the new environment. As she stated:

> *…My family only told me [about my grandmother's health condition] one week before [her death]…it's so out of control if things like this happen and you're far away from home…And I'm alone in a foreign country…you would feel safe and everything is in control if you're at home…*

The change occurred in the same time dimension but in a different spatial dimension (i.e. her original environment), which was far away from the environment she was living in. This sudden loss in her family influenced her emotionally and psychologically; she would sometimes "feel very low suddenly without any [apparent] reason". This influence became a barrier to her interactions with and immersion in the new environment because she might not be emotionally and psychologically positive or strong enough to deal with the difficulties and challenges which she encountered in the UK.

Status of relationships. Another reported barrier was a change of relationship status. Andy_M_British's relationship with his girlfriend at home was influenced and changed when he was sojourning in a faraway country. As he said:

> *…I went through a break-up here, I was in a long relationship, but the distance just got a bit too much. And that was really tough not being around family, when you are somewhere like this…*

This was also a significant change which influenced him emotionally and psychologically, especially when he was alone in an unfamiliar environment, dealing with different challenges on his own, and without the company of his family. This change would be likely

to intensify his negative feelings such as homesickness and hinder his active interactions with the new environment.

Although this study only identified barriers associated with the original chronosystem, this finding still suggests the important role a person's original chronosystem plays even when he/she is away from his/her original environment. It could be speculated that if there is positive temporal change in the person's original chronosystem, it would be likely to facilitate the sojourner's experience in the new environment. For example, hypothetically, if a sojourner's hometown has made a successful Olympic bid during his/her sojourn, the sojourner might be encouraged to introduce his/her hometown to people in the new environment and have more active interactions with them through those conversations.

5.3.5.2 New chronosystem

Facilitators

Academic achievement. A similar facilitator from the new chronosystem was raised by two interviewees from each group. Yuan_F_Chinese and Harry_M_British both felt that certain personal remarkable academic achievements (not merely the general ones in their new microsystems; see Section 5.3.1.2) could be an important milestone for them during their sojourns, either in the UK or China. Yuan felt that she had "achieved something when [the first time] I got an A [for an assignment]", while Harry achieved "a linguistic milestone" when he could "being able to convey what I want the first time without having to repeat myself". These achievements were likely to encourage them to be more confident and engage in more active interactions with the new environment.

Changes in dietary habits. A British interviewee, Louis_M, reported the change in his dietary habits as a significant milestone during his sojourn in China. Louis was from a strict vegetarian family, and when he came to China, food became one of his biggest challenges because "if I do [keep my dietary habits], it's very limited, it would literally be me just eating plain bowls of rice for the entire year". He had a conversation with his parents and surprisingly but luckily got their understanding and permission to change his dietary habits to facilitate his adjustment in China. "They were understanding that I'm living in a completely different place and having to get used to what life [is like] here." This was an important dietary milestone for Louis, and this change helped him to better survive in his new environment.

Benefits

New understanding of degree subject and future plans. Almost two-thirds of the interviewees (n=33) in both groups said that the sojourn per se brought important changes to them. They were offered the opportunity to reflect on their degree subjects (i.e. Chinese or English) and consider their future plans carefully.

> *I'm actually not interested in English literature anymore…because when I came here, it's kind like a disillusionment about here…* (Jin_F_Chinese)

> *It's more real here…being abroad makes it more relevant to everything you're learning.* (Mary_F_British)

Many of them gained a clearer picture of the target language and culture they had been learning, from which they understood more about not only the subjects but also their own interests, needs for life and personal plans for the future. For example, some of them decided they might give up their plans to continue their postgraduate education abroad because they did not enjoy education and life in the new environment (e.g. Mu_F_Chinese), while others might decide to set up their future careers or lives in the host country (e.g. Eva_F_British). As Yuan_F_Chinese said, "only when I'm really here [in the UK], I have more thoughts about whether [my future plan] is a good one for me".

Based on the above findings on both the original and new chronosystems, it can be seen that the time dimension is likely to be a significant element even when the person is sojourning to a new environment. The changes in the two parallel timelines of both the original and new environments are emerged to be important factors for the sojourner's experience abroad and development.

Environmental factors	Key similarities	Key differences
Original and new microsystems (see Table 5-4)		
Original mesosystem	• Absent original mesosystem during the sojourn. • Partially shared SAP experience at pre-departure meetings.	
New mesosystem	• University platforms to communicate with peers.	• British group was somewhat inspired to be more hard-working like their Chinese peers in the future.
Original exosystem	• Absent original exosystem.	
New exosystem	• Friends' social networks helped enhance social interactions in new environment. • Friendly conversations with local people. • Unanticipated incidents in daily life presented challenges for both groups.	• British group had much more interaction and engagement with local people and gained helpful connections, familiarity, friendships and interaction opportunities in new environment. But they also experienced more and unexpected culture shock. • Challenges for British group due to standing out as a foreigner in China and using Chinese in daily life. But they also gained linguistic improvement and more realistic understandings of Chinese culture.
Original macrosystem	• Habitual mindset and lifestyle, strong home cultural identity and strengthened patriotism from home culture hinder interactions and learning in new environment.	
New macrosystem	• Gained bravery in using target language in daily life from being a foreigner. • Strong alien feelings due to sociocultural differences, mismatched expectations and daily life differences became a major barrier. • Gained more realistic understanding of target language and culture and influenced by host country lifestyle. • Important senses of "being in the middle" and 'being in limbo'. • Linguistic challenges in both target language and (retrogress in) mother tongue. • Food as a pathway of retaining or changing cultural identity.	• More British participants wanted to avoid 'being alien' in China. • More Chinese participants were disappointed by their mismatched expectations for the UK.
Original chronosystem	• Sudden changes at home (e.g. relative's death, broken-up relationship) badly impacted sojourners' experiences in new environment.	
New chronosystem	• Important changes or achievement (e.g. academic achievement, changes in dietary habits) have important influences on sojourners. • Gained new understanding of degree subject and future plans.	

Table 5-9 Summary of key similarities and differences for original and new mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems and chronosystems

5.4 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has presented an overview of the findings on the environmental factors in both the Chinese and British foreign language student sojourners' acculturation experiences in SAPs. Although there are likely to be different experiences or influential factors among

individuals and groups, the findings in this study suggest that environmental factors are crucial in both Chinese and British student sojourners' acculturation experiences and development. During their sojourns, student sojourners' original environments continue influencing their development although they are physically distant, whilst the new environment begins its interactions with and influences on sojourners upon their arrival in the new context.

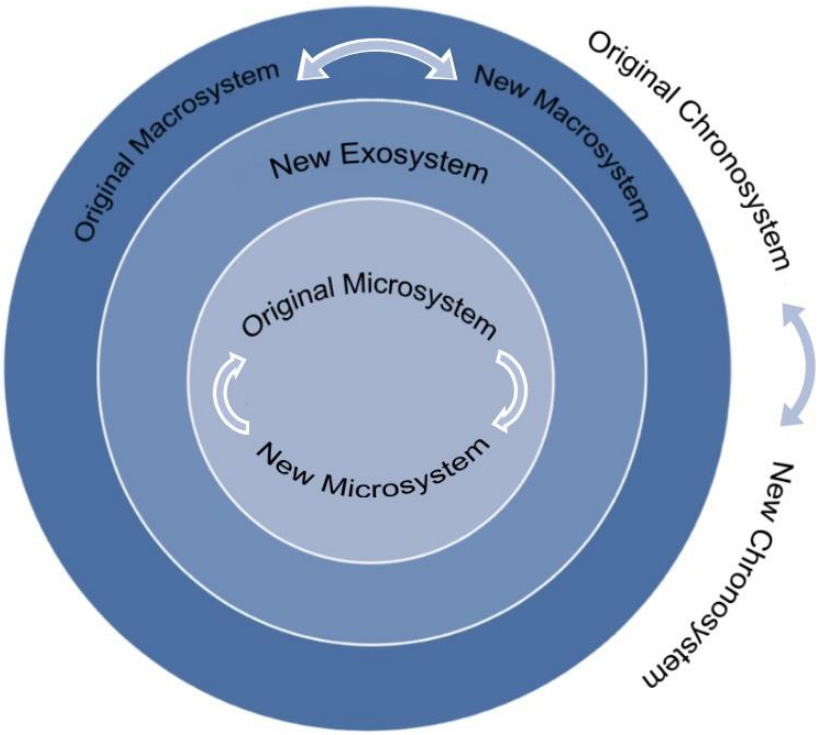

Figure 5-1 Environmental factors in Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences in SAPs

Importantly, specific layers in both the original and new environments are reclassified based on the findings of this study (see Figure 5-1). Both the original and new microsystems play important roles because they have the most immediate and regular interactions with sojourners. Family, peers and institutions at home remain the key elements in the original microsystem, while sojourners' closest surroundings – their "shields", peers and institutions – in the new environment are emerged as the dominant components of the new microsystem. Notably, the "shield" is a significant replacement for family, and it comprises the people sojourners are likely to heavily rely on and have the most frequent interactions with during their sojourns in the new environment. The original mesosystem is found to be somewhat absent in the interactions with sojourners when they are abroad. However, although the new mesosystem is found to have some influence on sojourners, the findings show that it is likely

not to be as significant as other layers. Also, since the tie between the key components in the new microsystem is a sojourner who has just moved to and is unfamiliar with this environment, the limited duration of his/her SAP is not likely to be conducive to the sojourner building his/her own "shield", getting familiar with new peers and host institutions in the new environment, or establishing strong connections and regular interactions. Thus, the mesosystems (both original and new) could arguably be merged into the microsystems. In other words, the microsystem, either original or new, in this study is where the key components have the most immediate and regular interactions with the sojourner, as well as being where the interactions among the key components take place. Furthermore, although the original exosystem is found to have been absent, similarly to the original mesosystem in the Chinese and British students' sojourns in this study, findings in this study identify that the new exosystem plays a salient role in the sojourners' acculturation experiences and development. Notably, although Chinese sojourners are found to have far fewer interactions with the new exosystem than their British peers, it is not likely to suggest that the new exosystem is merely important for British sojourners, but rather that this is likely to be a notable layer in the new environment, and Chinese sojourners could learn from their British peers and be encouraged to have more interactions in it. Hence, the new exosystem is identified as a middle layer where sojourners interact with the wider connections and communities in their host cities. Additionally, both the original and new macrosystems are found to be the furthest layer, which consists of the underpinning ideas and practices from the sojourners' cultures and subcultures, and it provides the broad and overwhelming context for the cultural difference the sojourners are likely to encounter. Finally, the chronosystem, as the time dimension, is found to be significant in the interactions between both Chinese and British sojourners and their environments. Since sojourners move away from their home environment, there are likely to be in two parallel timelines; the original chronosystem involves the temporal milestones at home, and the new chronosystem consists of the important changes to sojourners themselves or the new environment, with the sojourn per se as an influential factor.

Overall, as is shown in Figure 5-1, the findings of this study suggest that environmental factors are crucial to sojourners' acculturation experiences and development when Chinese and British foreign language learners live and study abroad through SAPs. Furthermore, personal factors are also emerged to be important and influential factors during their sojourns, and these will be presented in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter Six: Findings (B): The Personal Factors in Chinese and British Foreign Language Learners' Acculturation Experiences in SAPs

6.1 Introduction

In this study, acculturation can be understood as the processes of interaction, learning and development that individual foreign language learner sojourners undergo in a new cultural environment. The previous chapter presented the findings in relation to significant environmental factors, whereas this chapter now turns to the individual sojourners' personal experiences to address Research Questions 2 and 3 (intertwined influential factors and first-hand lessons). Section 6.2 follows the data analysis structure of the previous chapter to report the personal influential factors (i.e. *facilitators* and *barriers*) and first-hand lessons (i.e. *benefits* and *challenges*) of both the Chinese and British foreign language sojourners' acculturation experiences in SAPs.

In the light of Bronfenbrenner's theory, personal factors (as the "bio" in Bioecological Theory) are given prominence as influential indicators in the process of development because, as Bronfenbrenner claims, the individual him/herself acts "both as an indirect producer and as a product of development" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p.xix) (for a detailed explanation, see Section 3.3). However, as was discussed previously in the outline of the theoretical framework (Chapter Three), the three types of person characteristics (force, resource and demand characteristics) proposed by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) are primarily based on observations of young children on a long-term development basis, meaning they are neither constructed for short-term/intercultural contexts (e.g. a one-year SAP sojourn) nor for adult learners (e.g. foreign language undergraduates). Also, "demand characteristics" (ibid, p.812) (e.g. age, gender, skin colour, etc.) are not the main variables that are applied in this study (see Section 7.4 Limitations of the study). Thus, the predetermined concept of the *developing person* from Bronfenbrenner's theory was left open so that the data analysis could deal with emerging and salient themes rather than adopting Bronfenbrenner's three person characteristics as predetermined subcategories. This decision also represents part of the attempt of this study to explore the personal contributions in the context of Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences and development in SAPs. In this study, the individual person (i.e. Chinese or British foreign language sojourner) in this particular context (i.e. one-year intercultural sojourns in China/the UK via SAPs) is an adult learner who moved to a new environment and had to

overcome challenges in order to – hopefully – thrive from simultaneous interactions with both the original and new environments on his/her own. Hence, the individual person is likely to play a relatively more active role in his/her own adjustments, interactions and development during the sojourn. Therefore, key personal acculturative factors were identified from the data analysis in this study and are presented in Section 6.3.

6.2 The Personal Facilitators, Barriers, Benefits and Challenges in Chinese and British Foreign Language Learners' Acculturation Experiences in SAPs

Again, in this study, *facilitators* and *barriers* are the factors which helped or hindered these foreign language student sojourners while they were taking SAPs to host countries, making their acculturation experiences easier or more difficult. *Benefits* refer to the fruitful outcomes they gained or learnt from their acculturation experiences, and *challenges* are those which required sojourners' efforts to achieve or overcome, and from which they learnt lessons.

Personal factors	
Facilitators	• Personal interest and educational background • Future plans • Previous experiences of being abroad
Barriers	• Lack of language proficiency and confidence in real-life situations • Dispositions and personal preferences • Distinct role in SAPs • Mental health and psychological wellbeing
Benefits	• Fruitful experiences • Linguistic and academic improvement • Personal development • Future plans
Challenges	• Mental health and psychological wellbeing • "Being on my own" • Mismatched expectations • Pressure from being a foreign language learner
Key personal acculturative factors	• Dispositions • Goals • Attitudes • Awareness • Knowledge • Skills

Table 6-1 Themes and subthemes for personal factors in Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences in SAPs

6.2.1 Facilitators

Personal interest and educational background. Twenty-eight of the 33 interviewees from both the Chinese (twelve out of fifteen) and British (sixteen out of eighteen) groups raised two important facilitators for their acculturation in the host countries: 1) their personal interest in the target language and culture, and 2) their educational backgrounds (i.e. doing undergraduate degrees in programmes relevant to English/Chinese Studies).

As was mentioned in the demographics section (Section 5.2.1), seventeen of the interviewees (seven Chinese and ten British) chose English/Chinese as part of their undergraduate degrees primarily due to their personal interest in the language and culture. Some of them had a specific interest in British accents (e.g. Mu_F_Chinese) or wished to challenge him/herself with the Chinese language since "it is a completely different language [from all other European languages]" (e.g. Sarah_F_British). They would then "try to learn and understand more about [the target language] consciously or subconsciously [during the sojourn]" (Hu_F_Chinese). Others had their interest in British culture aroused by, for example, English literature (e.g. Yang_F_Chinese) or found their passion for Chinese culture because it is "exotic [with] a very strong sense of otherness" (Jack_M_British), leading them to "always want to learn more about China" (Louis_M_British). Interestingly, as part of the target culture, two sojourners (one from each group) also mentioned their personal interest in the education system (HE in particular) in their host countries. For example, Quinn_M_British, a Chinese immigrant who moved to the UK with his family when he was eight, had a great interest in the Chinese higher education system which he would have experienced if he had stayed in China. He even changed his undergraduate degree to a China related programme by the end of his first year, specifically so he could take the relevant SAP in China. Likewise, Xing_F_Chinese echoed her British peer with her desire to experience the British education system, which encouraged her to take her SAP in the UK. Thus, this personal interest in Chinese/British language and culture is likely to provide significant motivations for these Chinese/British language and culture fanciers, encouraging them to actively "explore…and really experience it fully" (Andy_M_British) in the real context of the language and culture in which they are interested.

On the other hand, although some interviewees made their degree choices based on other reasons (e.g. career plans), the other eleven of them (out of the 28) from both groups had developed their interest in the English/Chinese language and culture after studying them as part of their degree programmes. As the findings from both groups suggest, the sojourners' educational backgrounds facilitated their acculturation experiences in three distinct aspects. Firstly, the courses they had taken at their home universities provided them with basic

knowledge and skills in the target language and culture, as Kang said, "it might be…easier for [foreign language learners] to adjust [in the UK] than those in other disciplines". With this foundation of knowledge and skills in English/Chinese, sojourners might better interact with local British/Chinese people and facilitated their adjustment and acculturation experiences. They would "always try [the] Chinese way [host language and culture] first" during their sojourns with their acquired knowledge and skills in the target language and culture, and they found that when "it works out, that'd be very nice" (Andy_M_British).

Mao pointed out an important difference from doing an SAP as an English Studies undergraduate, which was that it offered her greater opportunities and motivations to take more language and culture relevant courses in her host institution:

> *…if I were doing Business or [other disciplines], I might not…take any courses in [English language and culture at the host university], I think it's a big difference [doing English for a degree programme].* (Mao_F_Chinese)

As was presented in the previous chapter, the British learners of Chinese were provided Chinese language courses primarily at their host Chinese universities. Hence, they were not given choices to select other courses (e.g. Business, the example Mao mentioned), although a few British interviewees noted that they found this arrangement helpful for their linguistic improvement (e.g. Mary_F_British) (see Section 5.3.1). However, regardless of whether their choices were driven by interest or mandatorily built into the SAP design, these foreign language learners were offered opportunities to learn their target language and culture not only in the country of origin of the language and culture but also in a more authentic way at the higher education level (i.e. British students learned Chinese language and culture at a Chinese university with Chinese academics, and vice versa for Chinese English learners).

Thirdly, their distinct roles as Chinese/English language degree students who were doing one-year SAPs in their target countries were also reported to motivate and encourage them to actively use the knowledge and skills they had learnt. For example, Xing_F_Chinese reported that her motivation was enhanced by her role as an English Studies undergraduate, which "pushed me to have more motivation [to learn English language and culture]". She would observe and even imitate how British people speak or write because she wished to learn more about the British accent and British English during her sojourn in the UK. Also, Mary_F_British mentioned that being a Chinese Studies undergraduate who was doing a one-year SAP in China stimulated her to "put a lot of efforts into it" in order to achieve her goal of "improv[ing] my Chinese…that's the reason I'm here".

Thus, these foreign language undergraduate sojourners were likely to have greater encouragement and motivation as well as clearer goals for them to learn, achieve and explore the authentic environment of their target language and culture, which would facilitate their acculturation experiences.

Future plans. Half of the interviewees from both groups (n=33) raised the point that their future plans served as an important facilitator for them to choose Chinese/English as part of their undergraduate degree (n=13, three Chinese, ten British), take part in SAPs in the UK (n=3), or select their courses at their host universities (n=1). The latter two actions were primarily noted by Chinese interviewees, and it could be speculated that this was because it was compulsory for the British participants to take SAPs to China and Chinese language (and culture) courses, so they did not have as much choice as their Chinese peers did. The findings of this study show that 'future plans' primarily include career plans and future education plans.

Interestingly, all ten British interviewees who reported that future plans were important made their decisions based on their career plans. They reckoned that "having Chinese under my belt would be beneficial when finding a career after university" (Nala_F_British) since "[China] is getting more important" (Kate_F_British). On the other hand, four of the Chinese interviewees considered career plans while the other three made decisions based on their future education plans. They chose English Studies degree programmes or participated in SAPs because, for example, their future education plans included doing their postgraduate education overseas (e.g. Yuan_F_Chinese). Notably, although there were some shifts in a few sojourners' personal interests (e.g. Yan_F_Chinese wanted to develop her career in Business so she selected some Business relevant courses at host university), it is arguable that their future plans motivated them to learn, engage in and interact with the new environment. For instance, they might try to meet people with similar interests in subjects such as Business, as in Yan's example, or participate in relevant activities.

Previous experiences of being abroad. As was mentioned in the demographics section (Section 5.2.1), only three Chinese participants (out of fifteen) had short-term (i.e. 3-4 weeks) experiences of being abroad before this sojourn. Although these experiences were brief, they noted that they got a "good impression [of the host country]" (Yu_F_Chinese). Arguably, those good impressions were likely to facilitate the sojourners in terms of having a basic idea of what life in the host country is like or even alleviating their fear of living and studying in

a foreign country, which was evidentially revealed from their British peers' experiences. Eleven British interviewees (out of eighteen) had previous experiences of being abroad, with some having gone to various destinations for short trips (e.g. Kate_F_British) or a long-term sojourn (e.g. Nala_F_British), or even having gone to China before (e.g. Harry_M_British). They all raised the point that their previous experiences of being abroad facilitated their sojourns in China this time, as Nala stated:

> *…if I hadn't had [previous] experience…I didn't think I would be practical about everything, that would be a lot more…emotional things, like 'aww, I've left my family…all my friends'…there's just so many things to adapt to…[without previous experience] it's so overwhelming.* (Nala_F_British)

Those who had been to China before found that their previous experiences were even more helpful with a "context": "it definitely affected my expectations of China, I knew what I was coming for" (Harry_M_British). In such cases, they would have a much less "fearful attitude…with my knowledge [of China], it prepared me to have a really good mindset" (Sally_F_British). Additionally, some of them, like Nala, gained skills to make them "practical" and "mak[e] sure that things were done like my bank account". Hence, all contextual knowledge, attitudes, mindset, motivations, skills and other benefits gained and developed from their previous experiences of being abroad were likely to significantly facilitate the sojourners' acculturation experiences in their host country, helping them become "find your feet in the new country…to build the life essentially in a new city with new people" (Sarah_F_British).

However, having helpful previous experiences of being abroad did not mean their sojourns in the faraway host countries (i.e. China/the UK) would be easy, as Kate_F_British argued: "I think nothing can prepare you…China is like another world…it was…completely different". Also, although some of them had been to China for short-term study programmes (i.e. Chinese language summer school), they felt that they were "still kind of on holiday", whereas when they "came here for the whole year" this time, it was comparatively "very real [and challenging]" (Scott_M_British). Nonetheless, their British peers' experiences, as presented above, still suggest that having previous experiences of being abroad is likely to be somewhat helpful in enabling them to shape a vague but still meaningful picture of what life in a foreign country is like and, to some extent, facilitate them to "build the life essentially" in the unfamiliar environment.

6.2.2 Barriers

Lack of language proficiency and confidence in real-life situations. Some interviewees from both groups (six Chinese and four British) reported that lack of language proficiency and confidence in real-life situations was a notable barrier during their sojourns. Although these sojourners were all third-year undergraduates who had been learning English/Chinese for years or had been trained professionally for at least two years at their home universities, living in real-life situations could still be challenging and daunting for them. According to Eva and Qiang:

> *…I've never been to China before this time…when you can't get what you want, because you don't know how to say it…that's mostly being annoyed at myself for not being able to express myself…very frustrating…* (Eva_F_British)

> *…many times I'm not confident enough [in Engsh]…this self-consciousness has been annoying you…in some situations, when you meet strangers…it makes you nervous, then you just can't do it fluently.* (Qiang_F_Chinese)

As these quotes illustrate, lack of language proficiency had a negative influence on their confidence and hindered them from communicating and interacting with people in real-life situations such as when they joined a group conversation/activity (e.g. Zai_F_Chinese) or even in emergent situations such as going to the doctor (e.g. Eva_F_British). Additionally, when there was a strong accent in the host city, as Hu_F_Chinese said, it is likely to be even more "confusing as if I've never learnt English…I couldn't understand anyone". In such cases, they would "get quite stressed" (Zai_F_Chinese) so that they might "force [themselves] to spare being silly" (Sally_F_British) and "become less active and willing to join activities" (Zai_F_Chinese) or interact with different people.

Dispositions and personal preferences. Nearly one third of the interviewees from both groups (n=33) noted their dispositions and personal preferences (e.g. the behaviours, feelings, choices, etc. individuals tend to have or make rather than others) were likely to hinder their acculturation experiences during their sojourns. Some of these sojourners, despite being quite interested in English/Chinese language and culture, might still not encourage themselves to interact with the new environment in certain situations if that interaction would bring tension and discomfort due to their individual dispositions and personal preferences. As in Jin's case:

> *…even when I was in China, I'm not a fan of social activities…I didn't even have any expectations or plans of that when I came [to the UK], no matter [with] Chinese or British or other nationalities…I just don't really like that…I'm here for the education…I can still learn about different cultures from books…or whatever, that makes me more comfortable…* (Jin_F_Chinese)

Jin's example might seem somewhat extreme, but it still suggests a notable barrier for interacting with people in the new environment based on the sojourners' dispositions and personal preferences. Additionally, some of them might refuse to learn certain parts of the target language or culture if it challenged their cognitions or acceptance levels or required them to compromise in certain ways. For example, Kang_F_Chinese enjoyed communicating and interacting with local people during her sojourn in the UK, but she would never join her friends at bars because "it's not like a food or something…I can eat it. But going to a bar…I won't do it if it's really beyond my [acceptance] level". Her British counterpart, Jack_M_British, echoed this when discussing his experience of learning the Chinese language in China. Quite unlike some of his Chinese peers, who would observe and imitate how British people speak and write to improve their English proficiency (e.g. Xing_F_Chinese), Jack did "not force myself to do it…[even if] it's most natural'…". Also, as Nala commented:

> *…it's quite difficult, there're still so many aspects of Chinese culture that I know why they happen, but I don't [do it] myself, I wouldn't do the same way.* (Nala_F_British)

In this case, although the sojourners recognised and understood that these certain parts of the target language and culture would be helpful for their acculturation experiences, they might still reject to learn certain new ideas, behaviours, etc. if they did not gel with their dispositions and personal preferences. Some of them might realise that their dispositions and/or personal preferences hindered their interactions with the new environment, since "I'd feel so lonely and homesick…but I still just can't do that [communicate with my roommates] [because of my dispositions/personal preferences]" (Mao_F_Chinese).

Notably, dispositions and personal preferences in this study should not be narrowly understood as referring to having introverted or extroverted personalities, but more broadly includes any ideas, feelings, behaviours, etc. that make the individual unique. Arguably, sojourners who are shy or less interested in social activities might also meet and interact with local people on certain occasions and make friends with them, as was the case for Jin_F_Chinese. Likewise, those who are more outgoing and enjoy communicating and interacting might still refuse some interactions opportunities if they do not like them (e.g. Kang_F_Chinese). Thus, the findings of this study only suggest that it is likely to be a barrier for sojourners to interact with the new environment in certain situations or activities when their dispositions and personal preferences do not encourage them to learn, interact or integrate more.

Distinct role in SAPs. Echoing the previous chapter (Section 5.3.1.2), some interviewees in both groups (four in each group) noted that their distinct roles in SAPs negatively influenced their attitudes and motivations towards acculturation during their sojourns. Since both Chinese and British sojourners went to their host countries through SAPs, their roles as SAP students were quite distinct in the sense that 1) they were not doing a degree in their host universities, and 2) they had a scheduled time to return to their home universities after their respective SAPs. Thus, they could regard their one-year SAPs as "an out of body experience" (see Section 5.2.2 for an analysis of the metaphors) because they knew "when it comes to the end, you'll go home" (Xing_F_Chinese). In that case, they might "always [have] in my head that this is a year abroad, so I almost catch myself from [getting] too involved…in that same way of being really integrated with them" (Nala_F_British). Likewise, they would not "become too worried if I can't integrate in [the new environment]" (Mao_F_Chinese), and some of them might lower their goals of integration, feeling that "it's good enough to just do part of [immersion and integration] rather than fully" (Mao_F_Chinese). They thought that "it's quite like a passing experience…that's hard to [fully integrate]" (Mary_F_British) and "at the end of the day, I'm not Chinese…it could potentially be detrimental, especially when I'm here [only] for a year…" (Jack_M_British).

Mental health and psychological wellbeing. Although only two interviewees from each group raised their mental health and psychological wellbeing as a notable barrier to their acculturation experiences, it is still worth highlighting. When they encountered unpleasant experiences such as being "discriminated" (Kang_F_Chinese) against, it would have a negative influence on their wellbeing, as in Kang's case:

> *There's a "College Family Scheme" [at the host university]…for international students and British students to interact with each other… at the first "family" dinner…I wasn't really following my British "family sisters and mum" and I was shy…but none of them talked to me…the whole night!...that night was so bad that I don't want to experience it again.* (Kang_F_Chinese)

It might be speculated that this issue arose due to Kang's limited English proficiency in real-life conversations or a lack of common topics, or perhaps that her somewhat 'shy' personality hindered her from actively joining the conversation. Also, the behaviour of her "family sisters and mum" might have been because they were somewhat unfriendly, or they did not have knowledge, skills or experiences in interacting with international (or Chinese) students properly. These potential reasons led to her unpleasant experience and made her develop a "psychological precaution", which is likely to have somewhat negatively

influenced her attitudes toward interactions with this certain group and, potentially, other local people.

The other three interviewees (Jack_M_British, Zai_F_Chinese and Kate_F_British) were those whose metaphors for their sojourns were classified under *trying experience* (see Section 5.2.2). All three of them were very unhappy with their one-year experiences abroad. Although Jack_M_British had been learning Chinese for over ten years and was hugely passionate about the Chinese language and culture, he felt strongly alien in his host city. His real-life experiences in China did not match his knowledge and initial expectations. Also, the culture shock he encountered aggravated his awareness of the cultural differences and his own "otherness", which he said, "makes me feel very out of place, it reminds me that I'm not at home…[and] does make me long for home a lot". Because of his "unhappy" acculturation experience in China, he decided to go home much earlier than the other interviewees in the same British group once his courses and exams were complete (many British interviewees in this study chose to stay days longer for travel).

The metaphor "hell" was used by the last two interviewees who noted this barrier (Kate_F_British and Zai_F_Chinese) since they both found their experiences in their host countries to be "really unhappy". Zai expected her to achieve "great academic progress…and speak as fluently as the natives" during her sojourn, which was unfortunately not fulfilled. Consequently, she experienced "a lot of stress" and "lost my confidence…I don't want to join any activities…[or] talk to people". Hence, it is likely to be her inapposite goal that made her challenging sojourn even more difficult and led to additional pressure and negative feelings (e.g. unhappiness, homesickness, etc.), meaning she ultimately "wasted many opportunities to practice [English] and communicate with people". Likewise, Kate found life in China to be "really different, it's hard to get your head around". Although her language proficiency did not hinder her, her "self-conscious[ness]" and lack of a realistic understanding and preparation for cultural differences (e.g. ways of thinking, social activities, etc.) made it "really hard to get used to…[after] a few months…I was still really conscious of myself and being uncomfortable…I learnt [about the cultural differences] quickly, but it still bothered me".

Notably, Kang tried to interact more with other international or co-national students, even joining several activities at a local church that helped her alleviate the strong "psychological precaution" that resulted from her initial unpleasant experience. Unfortunately, the other three sojourners – Jack, Zai and Kate – did not manage to find effective coping strategies

and ended up "suffering" (Zai_F_Chinese) throughout their sojourns. It was even worse in Kate's case, as she said, "actually I'm really…stress[ed] and not dealing with that stress and pretending it didn't exist", so it eventually "expressed itself physically" and made her suddenly quite sick: "it's just one episode and…exploded it." After that, Kate found that the mental health and psychological wellbeing issue overwhelmed her and she abandoned her one-year SAP in China after the first term.

Based on these examples, sojourning in an unfamiliar environment, as Yang_F_Chinese (see Section 5.3.1.1) claimed, is "not just about academics, but also our psychological wellbeing…" When mental health and psychological wellbeing issues have great negative influences on a sojourner, it might be a notable barrier to his/her daily interactions and development during the sojourn and, potentially, even his/her future development.

6.2.3 Benefits

Notably, there might be slight overlap in the benefits sojourners gained from their acculturation experiences in their respective SAPs in this subsection and the benefits in relation to each layer in the environment (see Chapter Five). However, this subsection specifically provides a more holistic picture based on Chinese and British sojourners' personal perspectives (i.e. their personal summaries of gains), rather than the discussion of any specific layers in the environment.

Fruitful experiences. One third of the interviewees in both groups (n=33) noted that they had benefited from their sojourns, enjoying quite fruitful experiences. This finding echoes most of the interviewees' metaphors as which were classified under *fruitful experiences* (Section 5.2.2). They experienced various situations and encountered many different people and circumstances during their sojourns; for example, they experienced a different education system (e.g. Mu_F_Chinese), or "experienced a different side of life, both academical and social…" (Mike_M_British). They might also have gained a sense of familiarity and confidence from the fruitful experiences they had, as Louis put it:

> *…if I have to come back to China, it's not gonna be daunting…[or] scary…I'll just carry on what I left off, it gives you the advantage…when people hear that they'd be like, 'Oh! China!' (surprised), and I'm like 'Yeah, I lived there…' (confident).* (Louis_M_British)

Linguistic and academic improvement. Half of the foreign language learners from both groups (n=33) reported linguistic and academic improvement as a result of their sojourns, which would be one of their main purposes of taking a one-year SAP. Although this may seem like a less surprising outcome, interestingly, most of the interviewees who reported it were from the British group (n=11). It could be speculated that this was because British learners of Chinese had relatively fewer experiences of learning Chinese than their Chinese peers had learning English, as some of them had only started learning Chinese during university (see Section 5.2.1 Demographics). Therefore, their linguistic and academic levels might have been at relatively more preliminary levels and likely to gain somewhat more obvious improvement after one year of contact with their target language and culture.

Still, as is reported in this study, both the Chinese and British foreign language learners gained linguistic and academic improvements because they had to use the target language in daily practice (e.g. Xing_F_Chinese; Louis_M_British). They learnt more Chinese/English authentic expressions (e.g. casual phrases or idioms) in real-life situations (e.g. Kang_F_Chinese; Karl_M_British) or developed confidence in using the foreign language in daily life (e.g. Aaron_M_British). Also, they may have developed a deeper and more realistic understanding of the target culture (e.g. Yan_F_Chinese; Caroline_F_British). As Andy_M_British commented, "the best way [of learning a foreign language and culture] is just go to the country and study properly…there's no other way to help you better than being around locals".

Personal development. Apart from linguistic and academic improvement, nearly all of the interviewees from both groups (31 out of 33) cited their personal development as another major benefit of their one-year sojourns. This benefit also echoes the metaphor *coming of age* (see Section 5.2.2) since moving to a foreign country is likely to be a special change and milestone in the time dimension (i.e. in new chronosystem) in sojourners' development. Their personal development was primarily reported in relation to: 1) changes in personal characteristics, and 2) certain skills they learnt.

As the metaphor – *coming of age* – suggests, sojourners in both groups found themselves become "maturer" (e.g. Ting_F_Chinese; Quinn_M_British). For example, some of them became more independent, self-reliant and self-sufficient (e.g. Xing_F_Chinese; Sarah_F_British), more confident in communicating with strangers (e.g. Yan_F_Chinese; Aaron_M_British); some became more tolerant and patient regarding cultural and personal differences (e.g. Ting_F_Chinese; Sally_F_British). Also, some developed a more realistic

and a new understanding and realisation of their home and host countries (e.g. Jack_M_British; Mao_F_Chinese). Additionally, some sojourners even changed their attitudes and perspectives toward life (e.g. Andy_M_British), whilst others gained new understandings of themselves and other people, such as better self-recognition (e.g. Jin_F_Chinese; Nala_F_British). Additionally, they also learnt certain life skills such as cooking skills (e.g. Zan_F_Chinese; Sarah_F_British), social skills in terms of interacting, making friends or living with people from multicultural backgrounds (e.g. Yu_F_Chinese; Mike_M_British), self-care and adjustment skills for "fit[ting] in the system…in [the host city]" (Karl_M_British) since "I went so far…and covered all these things by myself" (e.g. Kate_F_British), especially when it came to overcoming challenges and dilemmas (e.g. Hu_F_Chinese; Andy_M_British).

Future plans. As was presented in previous chapter, the sojourn per se is an important milestone in sojourners' new chronosystem (Section 5.3.5.2), and some interviewees in this study (four from each group) gained development in their personal future plans. As the findings of this study suggest, they were likely to develop a clearer picture of their personal future plans. For example, they made decisions such as giving up their plans to study abroad for postgraduate education because they did not enjoy the education and life in the host country (e.g. Mu_F_Chinese) or realised various opportunities and possibilities for the future (e.g. Caroline_F_British). Regardless of what decisions they made, as Yang_F_Chinese stated, they "had a clearer target for future".

6.2.4 Challenges

Mental health and psychological wellbeing. Notably, nearly two third of the interviewees (n=33, twelve out of the fifteen Chinese and nine out of the eighteen British participants) mentioned their mental health and psychological wellbeing as significant challenges for their sojourns. Although sojourning in the country of their target language and culture could be exciting, unfortunately, the challenges posed to their mental health and psychological wellbeing throughout their sojourns were also likely to make their experiences challenging and daunting, as Louis said:

> *…being in a different country and being so far away from home, sometimes it does hit you…it's quite mentally hard just being in a different country…sometimes…it can because of no reason, it just becomes overwhelming.* (Louis_M_British)

Words and phrases like "*homesickness", "depression", "anxiety", "alienation", "marginalisation", "isolation/self-isolation", "loneliness", "discrimination", "lack of confidence", "annoyance", "pressure",* and *"being overwhelmed and exhausted"* were frequently used by sojourners in both groups in this study to describe their mental health and psychological wellbeing challenges. Notably, many times, these unpleasant feelings did not arise individually but were clustered. For example, the findings of this study reveal that both groups were likely to experience their toughest period in terms of *depression, anxiety* and *homesickness* around two to three months after arrival, after the "honeymoon stage" (Oberg, 1960, p.143) when they were "fascinated by the new" (ibid) (e.g. Ting_F_Chinese; Mike_M_British). At that time:

> *…when you're in the middle…you have been here for two months and still get another two months left in this term…that was when it's toughest.* (Mike_M_British).

Additionally, they – primarily the Chinese interviewees – experienced strong *loneliness* and *homesickness* from being an international student doing an SAP with a different accommodation style, while it seemed to be slightly easier for the British sojourners in terms of their accommodation style. This might because Chinese undergraduates share dormitories with four/six/eight-bed rooms, but these Chinese sojourners were put into single-room dormitories when they sojourned in the UK (e.g. Kang_F_Chinese), while their British peers still had their familiar single rooms on the Chinese campuses in student halls designated for international students or they moved out and rented a flat with friends (usually co-nationals and/or a few other internationals).

Also, they were likely to have strong feelings of *isolation/self-isolation, alienation, marginalisation* and *annoyance* due to cultural differences (e.g. Mao_F_Chinese; Kate_F_British), when they found themselves being marginalised in a group discussion/activity (e.g. Yang_F_Chinese), or social activities (e.g. parties): "nobody would talk to me, maybe because I'm an Asian" (Zan_F_Chinese). Also, sometimes feeling left out from their familiar daily life in their home country (e.g. Kang_F_Chinese; Sarah_F_British) while they also "found it more difficult to fit in" (Caroline_F_British) in the host country despite having developed a new routine could stimulate or aggravate these negative feelings.

Moreover, studying a foreign language and culture in an unfamiliar environment was likely to bring *pressure, lack of confidence* or *feelings of being overwhelmed and exhausted* to both Chinese and British foreign language learners. These could result from continuous contact

with linguistic and cultural differences (e.g. Louis_M_British) and academic difficulties because of the unfamiliar academic style (e.g. Jin_F_Chinese). Additionally, they might also experience *discrimination* when encountering racism (e.g. Qiang_F_Chinese; Jack_M_British), or *anxiety* and *homesickness* when they encountered unanticipated incidents such as handling emergencies alone (e.g. Yuan_F_Chinese; Nala_F_British). They could also have intermittent, sudden and strong feelings of *homesickness* during their sojourns, sometimes for no apparent reason (e.g. Hu_F_Chinese; Mary_F_British).

"Being on my own". Some interviewees from both groups highlighted the challenge of "being on my own" (e.g. Andy_M_British), which echoes the challenge of *being in limbo*, which was discussed in reference to the sojourners' new macrosystems in Section 5.3.4.2. A notable feature of 'being in limbo' was often that the sojourners were on their own. They had to face and handle all the difficulties and challenges they encountered in the unfamiliar environment by themselves most of the time, as Sarah described:

> *if there was a problem…often you'd have to either wait [because of time differences] or either deal by yourself or by the immediate community around you, which often were people that you didn't know very well…[since you only know each other] for a couple of months…you certainly have to become very self-reliant, very self-sufficient.* (Sarah_F_British)

In these cases, the sojourners would be very likely to find themselves detached from both environments (i.e. original and new), and they had to figure out certain information or skills (e.g. where to buy food) in order to survive in the new environment. Having to learn to face and deal with all the trivial or big things in life (e.g. opening a bank account, different social life) completely on their own, sojourners could easily come to feel "helpless and homesick" (Zan_F_Chinese). However, as the metaphor *coming of age* (see Section 5.2.2) suggests, these challenges were also likely to present opportunities for development. "When you're completely on your own, you force yourself to be independent and self-reliant" (Yuan_F_Chinese), then "you learn to stand on your own feet" (Karl_M_British).

Mismatched expectations. This challenge was only raised by a few interviewees in both groups (three Chinese and two British), but some implications are still worth highlighting. The sojourners' mismatched expectations were reported primarily with regards to: 1) their own linguistic and academic improvement, and 2) this one-year abroad experience. Some of them had quite high expectations of achieving great linguistic and academic improvement, such as "having many foreign friends and speaking English every single day, then I can speak English very fluently or make great achievements in my academic progress"

(Xing_F_Chinese), but "I've not really found that" (Jack_M_British). Others might have expected China/the UK "would be a utopia" (Jack_M_British) where they "have no pressure in life…travel around all the time…a really easy life" (Zai_F_Chinese). However, when they found it "surprising" (Jack_M_British) and "disappoint[ing]" (Karl_M_British) because of the mismatch between their expectations and their lives during the year, it was likely to demotivate them to interact with the new environment or to aggravate their homesickness.

Pressure from being a foreign language learner. A notable challenge highlighted by four Chinese interviewees was the pressure they found from being a foreign language learner and sojourning in the country of English language and culture. Having "been learning English for years" (Zai_F_Chinese) and "doing English Studies, people feel you're very professional" (Yuan_F_Chinese), which proved to be a double-edged sword for these foreign language sojourners. Immersion in the target language and culture could be exciting but also frustrating. Also, as was mentioned before, their acquired foundation of knowledge and skills in the target language and culture might have helped their acculturation, but the pressure was likely to be enhanced when they found "I still can't understand…and I don't know how to respond" (Zai_F_Chinese). For these sojourners, "many classmates in my English language or culture classes [in the UK] are native speakers, and I'm learning their language and culture with them, it's really frustrating" (Yan_F_Chinese), then "I lost my confidence…so I don't like to join them for activities" (Zai_F_Chinese) or "even let others know I'm doing English Studies" (Yan_F_Chinese). It might be speculated that since most of the Chinese interviewees had had quite long experiences of learning English (the language at least; see Section 5.2.1 Demographics), they were likely to have high expectations for their English proficiency, which led them to place pressure on themselves.

Interestingly, two of their British counterparts provided some contextual information on this challenge based on their own experiences in China. When they "speak Chinese to Chinese people, they're very impressed, they're like, '哇，说的很棒' (*wow, your Chinese is really good*)…whereas in England you don't necessarily have [that positive feedback] all the time" (Jack_M_British) because "[British people] have the quite ignorant idea that everyone speaks English" (Louis_M_British). Thus, apart from the internal pressure Chinese English learners place on themselves, there is also likely to be pressure from society in the UK. Based on Jack and Louis's reflections, Chinese foreign language sojourners might not get similar praise even if they speak good English, and they might feel stressed and even lose confidence in their English proficiency if they do not.

In summary, the findings presented above suggest that for adult sojourners (as opposed to the child participants in Bronfenbrenner's work), personal factors are likely to become more salient and influential during short-term (i.e. one-year) acculturation experiences. Seemingly, the individual sojourner is likely to play a relatively more active role in and have more direct influences on his/her own survival, adjustments, interactions and development. The next section continues exploring the key personal acculturative factors that have been identified in this study to offer a more nuanced insight into what key personal factors support the individual sojourner to become a more 'direct producer' in his/her own acculturation and development.

6.3 The Developing Person: The Key Personal Acculturative Factors

Six intertwined key personal acculturative factors were identified as common influential factors for both Chinese and British groups in this study to reveal what key personal factors actively or even somewhat directly influence their acculturation experiences. They are identified as *dispositions, goals, attitudes, awareness, knowledge* and *skills*. Notably, given the focus on the individual sojourner in this chapter, some examples are drawn from unique cases and emphasis is not necessarily placed on the sojourner's particular cultural background (i.e. differences between Chinese and British groups) unless there are significant implications worth highlighting.

6.3.1 Dispositions

In this study, dispositions are understood as the sojourners' preferences and ways of thinking, feeling or behaving when they interact with and manage both the original and new environments. It has been presented as a potential barrier for some sojourners from both groups in Section 6.2.2. However, notably, this study does not suggest that one's disposition merely has negative influences on the sojourn but identifies it as a significant personal acculturative factor which plays an important role in sojourners' acculturation experiences. It somewhat aligns with the "force characteristics" (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006, p.810) in Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, which refers to individual differences in emotions and behaviours (e.g. temperament, etc.). These force characteristics "can set proximal processes in motion and sustain their operation, or – conversely – actively interfere with, retard, or even prevent their occurrence" and influence children's future development (ibid).

However, in this study, rather than influencing the sojourners' future development, it is more likely to be a significant factor which relatively more immediately influences their adjustment, interactions and development during their short-term sojourns. Arguably, sojourners are likely to make their own decisions on whether or not, or to what extent, they "learn, unlearn or relearn" (Elliot et al., 2016b, p.1183) different ways of thinking, expressions, knowledge, skills and behaviours and interact with the new environment based on their dispositions.

As was illustrated in Section 6.2.2, some sojourners refused to have certain interactions or learn certain expressions, ideas or behaviours if "I don't like it" (Jin_F_Chinese) or "[it's different from] how I do things" (Jack_M_British). They would not even put effort in doing certain things although those things might be helpful in terms of their language and culture learning. For example, Scott_M_British chose a relatively more internationalised host city in China because he did not want to "give up" his contact with international elements (e.g. international art exhibitions), "probably it's not a good idea, [especially] for trying to come to learn a language…[but] I'd never wanna give up that freedom just to learn a little bit better Chinese". Some others tried new cultural elements but rejected them, such as Xing_F_Chinese, who tried mixing milk in her tea in the traditional British way but found "I don't like it…if it's not for me, I won't learn it…I get the knowledge of it, but I don't do it [in the same way]". This raises two interesting questions: should sojourners imitate the host culture as much as they can for the sake of acculturation? Also, in order to achieve successful acculturation, is it necessary for sojourners to interact with local people, make friends with them or join their groups/activities? Arguably, to interact in a relatively more implicit way or just to a certain extent does not mean that sojourners have failed in their acculturation, as the following two examples would support.

Harry_M_British grew up "in the middle of nowhere [the countryside in the UK]", so he claimed that he was "used to…being isolated". When he came to China, he brought "[his] natural status…to spend more time alone". However, this did not mean that he remained stuck in his room for the whole sojourn; he had his own way of exploring, experiencing, and acculturating: "I spent most of my time, the weekends, going around the [Chinese] galleries…trying to see almost everything there". Wei_F_Chinese provided another interesting example. She was the only interviewee in this study who used "freedom" as her metaphor, which seemed to suggest that her sojourn in the UK was quite an *inessential experience* to her (see Section 5.2.2). She wanted to experience the life and education system in the UK, but she did not try to get involved with local or other international students.

However, that is likely to be her own way of acculturation; as she explained, “I don’t enjoy crowds…I’m happy to be alone…I don’t even feel lonely”.

Again, it is not the intention of this study to judge which way of acculturation is better or more successful. The findings of this study primarily attempt to offer insight for potential explanations on the individual different ways of acculturation and to highlight the important influence an individual sojourner’s dispositions might have on his/her acculturation experience. For adult learners in short-term sojourns (e.g. Chinese/English undergraduates doing one-year SAPs in the UK/China respectively), “I can do it actively or I can choose not to if I’m not willing to” (Mao_F_Chinese), but the key point is to “do it in the way I’m comfortable with” (Zan_F_Chinese).

6.3.2 Goals

The second key personal acculturative factor identified in this study is the goals sojourners have for their sojourns. Goals refer to the things sojourners plan or hope to experience or achieve (i.e. their ‘to-do list’), which is likely to shape how they experience and interact with the environment during the sojourn. Sojourners’ goals might be developed based on their personal interests, expectations or the motivations they have for the sojourn, which inspire and motivate them to learn and interact in the host country. As Hu suggested:

> *The most important thing [in the sojourn] is don’t waste your time, you only have one year…you need to know what you’re aiming for, some specific goals…this will make your everyday more real and [you will] gain something more real.* (Hu_F_Chinese)

For most of the sojourners in this study, regardless of whether they were Chinese or British, one of the primary goals for their sojourns was to practice their Chinese/English and learn more about the target language and culture by experiencing and interacting in its real context (e.g. Kate_F_British; Yuan_F_Chinese). With these goals, sojourners could keep in mind “the reason I’m on a year abroad” (Mary_F_British) and “have a plan for it” (Zan_F_Chinese). For example, Harry_M_British “tried to go to as many places as possible”, while Xing_F_Chinese observed and imitated how British people speak and write to improve her English proficiency. Additionally, Yu raised an interesting point:

> *I’m here to study [for the education experience at host university], so I didn’t have many plans for social activities or else…if you’re here…to experience a different world, then you enjoy…travelling around…that’s fine if that’s your goal…just make sure you know what you want.* (Yu_F_Chinese)

The above excerpt suggests that sojourners might have various goals which can directly influence their decisions on how and to what extent they acculturate. Again, it is not the intention of this study to make an arbitrary judgement on which acculturation experience is more successful, and arguably, it would be difficult to make a standard for the judgement since each sojourner has his/her own goals to fulfil. However, regardless of their different goals, having a clear mind to guide their acculturation experience is likely to be helpful for the sojourners' wellbeing, such as to alleviate loneliness and homesickness, as in Scott's example:

> *…you have certain things you can focus on to get you through whatever else is going on…I felt lonely a couple of times, but for very short amount of time, because I've had either other things…or the people to distract me…* (Scott_M_British)

On the other hand, Mary_F_British warned that if the goals are too inapposite or unrealistic, such as expecting that "you're gonna completely immerse yourself", then "it's easy to be disappointed". As was mentioned in Zai_F_Chinese's example in Section 6.2.2, she hoped to achieve "great academic progress…and to speak as fluently as the native" during her short sojourn, which was, unfortunately but not surprisingly, not fulfilled. Consequently, she became much unhappier each day and found her experience in the UK to be as terrible as "hell" (the metaphor she used; see Section 5.2.2) at the end of her SAP. Thus, having clear goals for the sojourn is likely to be helpful, no matter how various the goals may be, but they need to be practical and feasible because otherwise the failure to achieve them might make an already challenging sojourn even more frustrating.

6.3.3 Attitudes

Attitudes in this study refers to how sojourners view and feel about the cultural differences (e.g. different ways of thinking, behaviours) in the host country and the sojourn per se (i.e. the unknown and challenging experience they have as foreigners). As one of the mostly used metaphors in this study – *rollercoaster* (see Section 5.2.2) – suggests, sojourning in an unfamiliar environment might challenge sojourners with various ups and downs, which might be intensified or alleviated by their own attitudes. Gabrielle and Mary described being photographed or being asked to be photographed by local Chinese people during their sojourns "because I'm white, and blonde, so I'm obviously foreign" (Gabrielle_F_British). Gabrielle found this kind of experience "quite annoying and also time-consuming", saying

it gave her a strong feeling of alienness and made her feel "like [I was] being exhibit[ed] in a zoo" (see Section 5.2.2 Analysis of the metaphors), while Mary_F_British found it "amusing". As Mary said:

> *I accepted it's gonna be different, you can't have the same life as you would have…don't have too high expectations about completely immersing…it's quite difficult and not that realistic…take all the opportunities you find to interact with people, either Chinese or just people from different nationalities than yours.* (Mary_F_British)

A more "open and positive attitude" (e.g. Yuan_F_Chinese; Cara_F_British) is likely to encourage sojourners to "be braver…don't afraid of making mistakes [in communications] since nobody here knows me" (Mu_F_Chinese), to "respect the cultural differences…it's unnecessary to make everyone the same" (Ting_F_Chinese), and "the more 'yes' you say to things, the more fun you have…the better you experience this" (Aaron_M_British). With that attitude, even when sojourners encounter challenges or difficulties in daily life, they are likely to be better able to cope with the situations. For example, when she experienced a period of depression, Hu_F_Chinese would cheer herself up by "telling myself, 'you're already here, so you need to do something…to make your life more meaningful'"; similarly, when she was disappointed that the classes at her host university did not meet her expectations, Caroline_F_British decided to "still go out into [the host city], into different areas, and try to speak with local people to…get that understanding of the country". On the other hand, a negative attitude towards the cultural differences and the experience of being a foreigner in the host country might make the sojourn "a very trying time", as Jack described: with "no network there, I can't even go out without being told that I'm foreign, I don't like that" (Jack_M_British). In that case, the sojourn is likely to have a "very big impact on my general mood, I've become a lot more cynical…[and] negative" (Jack_M_British). Thus, sojourning in an unfamiliar environment does not merely bring challenges from the perspective of cultural differences, but also a much – sometimes overwhelmingly – different life in daily practice, such as not having a familiar supportive network, being recognised and treated as foreigner, etc. In this case, different attitudes are significantly influential for sojourners' learning, adjustments, interactions and development. As Nala_F_British commented, "you should almost mentally accept…things that are different…[then] you don't feel so overwhelmed".

6.3.4 Awareness

Awareness is another key personal acculturative factor; it refers to how and what sojourners recognise and are conscious of in the new environment. It includes awareness of both differences and similarities between the home and host cultures, as well as daily life as a sojourner. The awareness of differences is likely to help sojourners prepare for the different ideas and practices they will encounter in the host country both psychologically and practically. As Mike suggested:

> *…make sure you know [what] you get into…some people would probably not realise how different life would be…life in China is completely different to life in the Western countries…you can't escape that, you have to be prepared…to enjoy life here, you have to recognise and appreciate that.* (Mike_M_British)

For example, when Nala_F_British went to a Chinese café for a sandwich, she was aware that "they're not gonna have your regular sandwich…It's a different country, they must just do it differently", so she prepared herself "to be quite realistic" and was not disappointed when she did not find the British style sandwich she wanted. Also, since some differences "are gonna be [things] that make you feel…uncomfortable" (Caroline_F_British), Zan_F_Chinese was aware of the reason for the differences, saying "people have been living in completely different ways for, like, twenty years…it must be different", an understanding which made it "easier to accept [the differences]". However, although having an awareness of differences might facilitate sojourners' acculturation experiences, an excessive awareness of them is likely to worsen their feelings of alienness and otherness in the unfamiliar environment, as in Kate_F_British's case. Kate was the only interviewee in this study who abandoned her one-year SAP after one academic term because her strong awareness of differences had a negative influence on her wellbeing. When she found that "the campus life…nightlife…social experience…everything was different", she "thought…a few months I [should] get over it, but I was still really conscious of myself and being uncomfortable". Ultimately, she became too unhappy to complete her one-year SAP in China.

On the other hand, the awareness of similarities is likely to be equally important for sojourners' acculturation, as it might help alleviate their feelings of alienness in the unfamiliar environment. Despite the large language and cultural differences between China and the UK, interviewees in both groups still found similarities in the sense that "the way we live and things like the shops" (Louis_M_British), "the younger generation…we all like going to sing karaoke…reading books" (Caroline_F_British), feelings and emotions (e.g. Yang_F_Chinese), etc. "It's a different environment, but we're all human, we're still similar in a sense, it's more like just to change a place to continue life, so I adjusted quickly" (Mu_F_Chinese).

6.3.5 Knowledge

Knowledge refers to having fundamental background information and an understanding of the ways of thinking, expression, ideas, behaviours, etc. in the host country and/or the host city specifically, as well as of what the sojourn will be like. This key acculturative factor and the next one – skills – somewhat align with the concept of a person's "Resource characteristics" (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006, p.812) in Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory. They are examples of "developmental assets" which "influence the capacity of the organism to engage effectively in proximal processes" (ibid). That is to say, in the context of this study, with a certain foundation of information and understanding, sojourners are likely to survive and acculturate more effectively in the unfamiliar environment. As Yuan said:

> *I had a basic idea of what [the host country] was like, I felt psychologically prepared myself, it's easier to accept many things…* (Yuan_F_Chinese)

Notably, both Chinese and British interviewees noted that the knowledge needed to be "realistic" (e.g. Ting_F_Chinese) in order to help moderate culture shock (Jin_F_Chinese) and support the sojourner's adjustments and development. It is likely to not only include the information and understanding of the language and culture that sojourners have learnt before their sojourn, but also trivial details in everyday life. Apart from the necessary sufficient language proficiency (e.g. Mary_F_British), sojourners also "need to know what real life is like there" (Yu_F_Chinese) such as "the ways and things [that] happen in everyday life" (Kate_F_British). It is likely that sojourners have to learn as if they are young teenagers, who need to learn everyday ideas and practices such as how to make an international call (Hu_F_Chinese), or certain rules in the host city/university (e.g. no bikes are allowed on campus on Tuesdays) (Caroline_F_British). Hence, although a one-year sojourn is quite brief when compared with the sojourner's whole life, sojourning in an unfamiliar faraway environment is likely to involve adjusting to many different and complex everyday ideas and practices, so sojourners need to rely on all the information they can access about real life in the host city/country in order to piece together a picture of their sojourns.

Nevertheless, for these foreign language learners, much of the information and understanding they had gathered in advance of their sojourns was likely to come from the courses they had taken at their home universities (or even before university), social media, TV shows, etc. It is dubious that all of this knowledge is suitably realistic to be effectively

"used in real situations" (Louis_M_British). Thus, as Caroline stated, "people need to not have too much [of a] romantic view about study abroad because it just has difficulties as well as positives". When sojourners discover the gap between their romantic views and the real-life situations, "the gap will be amplified infinitely" (Yang_F_Chinese). Jack_M_British's case offers a good example. He had his knowledge of Chinese people and life in China from "my British stereotype of the Chinese", a Chinese teacher he had courses with at middle school, the information book from the SAP, and the (potentially partially) shared experiences of previous students in SAPs (see Section 5.3.1.1). Before he came to China, his upcoming experience had been "painted in a very rosy colour, very positive, like culture shock is a small thing", but he found he "was quite disappointed in the way things are…It's just not lived up to that image that I had in my head", which made his sojourn "very trying".

6.3.6 Skills

The last key personal acculturative factor – skills – refers to the certain ways or directions that sojourners put effort into gaining or applying the knowledge in order to enable them to interact with and develop in the new environment more effectively. These foreign language learners in this study were likely to put a great deal of effort into gaining and applying their knowledge of their target language and culture in various ways/directions.

These ways included imitating and learning from emails or messages from local people (Kang_F_Chinese), actively participating in local events and consciously learning about each cultural event (Yu_F_Chinese), always talking/replying to Chinese people in Chinese to make them comfortable and encourage them to communicate further (Karl_M_British), exploring new areas in the host city and, in the case of Caroline_F_British, even managing to make friends with some elderly local Chinese who were dancing in the park when she walked by and joined them. Thus, with these various communication skills, learning skills, social skills etc., sojourners are likely to more actively and effectively engage in interactions with the new environment, which can be significantly influential on their survival and development during the sojourn.

Key similarities	Key differences
• Dispositions - The emotional and behavioural preferences that influence the sojourner's own decisions on their acculturation process and the specific pathways. - A critical 'psychological boundary' hindered both groups' experiences. • Goals - Primarily based on personal interest, motivations and expectations (e.g. future plans, distinct role in SAPs). - Directly influence their own decisions on the ways and the extent of their acculturation. - Common goals include linguistic, academic and intercultural development, and potential benefits for future careers or education. - Facilitate sojourners to make the most of their sojourn and might distract from their negative feelings. - Unrealistic goals disappoint and demotivate both groups. • Attitudes - Toward 1) the cultural differences and 2) the sojourn per se. - Distinct role in SAPs hinders and demotivates both groups' proactivity in acculturation. - Both groups gain personal development (e.g. more tolerant/positive towards cultural differences and trivial everyday challenges). • Awareness - How and what sojourners recognise and are conscious of in terms of 1) both differences between and similarities in the home and host cultures, and 2) daily life as a sojourner ("being on my own" challenge). - Previous experiences of being abroad helped both groups develop awareness. - Both groups gained more critical awareness. • Knowledge - Necessary and especially realistic knowledge about 1) language and culture, and 2) the sojourn per se. - Knowledge is primarily from education background of the target language and culture, and from previous experiences of being abroad. - Language difficulties for both groups in real-life situations. • Skills of gaining or applying their knowledge facilitate active and effective interaction and learning.	• The British group used their skills in the wider environment off campus while the Chinese group was mainly on campus. The British group seemed to have benefited more in terms of linguistic and academic improvement. • The Chinese group is found to have higher academic goals for their sojourns in the UK and bore higher pressure from being foreign language learners than the British group. • Future plans for the Chinese group include both career and further education, while only career plans were mentioned by the British group. • The British group seemed to have stronger and excessive awareness of the cultural differences in China and developed relatively stronger feelings of alienness than the Chinese group.
• Fruitful experiences for both groups – personal development (changes in personal characteristics; certain skills), linguistic and academic improvement. • Both groups also experienced great mental health and psychological wellbeing challenges, which negatively influenced them, especially two to three months after arrival.	

Table 6-2 Summary of key similarities and differences for personal factors

6.4 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has presented the findings on the personal factors affecting both the Chinese and British foreign language student sojourners' acculturation experiences in SAPs. In Bioecological Theory, the individual's personal characteristics are regarded as "an indirect

producer" and "a product" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p.xix) of his/her own development; in other words, personal characteristics indirectly affect the person's development and are also the outcome of that person's development process. However, the findings of this study reveal and highlight that within the context of intercultural short-term (i.e. one-year) SAPs, personal factors are likely to play a more salient, active, proactive and determinant role in the process of development during the sojourn. This significant role might make the individual adult sojourner (i.e. Chinese/British language undergraduate) a more direct, rather than "indirect", producer, as well as a product of development.

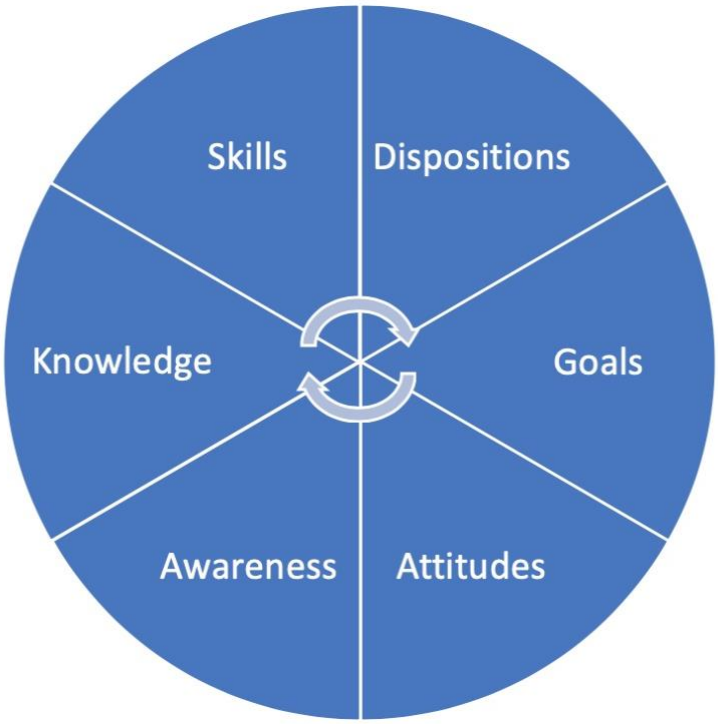

Figure 6-1 Personal factors in Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences in SAPs

Based on the findings of this study, six intertwined key personal acculturative factors – *dispositions, goals, attitudes, awareness, knowledge* and *skills* – were identified to offer a more nuanced insight of what – and how – personal factors support sojourners to more directly produce their own development during their sojourns (see Figure 6-1). *Dispositions* refers to the preferences and ways sojourners tend to feel or behave in accordance with; *goals* provide the plans or the 'to-do lists' for the sojourns, giving them something they hope to achieve or complete; *attitudes* reveal how sojourners view and feel about the cultural differences and the sojourn per se; *awareness* refers to how and what sojourners recognise and are conscious of in the new environment, which includes both differences and similarities between the home and host cultures, as well as daily life as a sojourner; *knowledge* acts as the foundational or fundamental background information and

understanding of the ways of thinking, expressions, ideas and behaviours in the host country and/or host city specifically, as well as of the sojourn per se; and *skills* refers to the certain ways or directions for sojourners to put effort into gaining or applying the knowledge in order to enable them to survive in and interact with the new environment more effectively.

Additionally, an interesting metaphor, "transplanting", is used by Elliot et al. (2016a, p.2201) to describe international PhD students' sojourn experiences. Although a PhD student's sojourn is much longer (normally three to four years) than the foreign language undergraduates in SAPs in this study, interestingly, the findings of this study echo the idea of "the special care provided by its gardener during its growing years" (ibid). Building on this, an interesting question would be: Who is the gardener? The findings of this study suggest that apart from other support from the environmental factors (see Chapter Five), the sojourner him/herself is very likely to be an important gardener, directly providing special care for his/her own growth and development during the sojourn. Like Andy_M_British stated: "Your year abroad is what you make of it." These six intertwined key personal acculturative factors are likely to be the gardener's most essential tools, which have significant influences on the gardener's work (i.e. his/her acculturation experience during the sojourn).

To bring the environmental and personal factors together, the next chapter will discuss the Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation proposed by this study and draw the final conclusion.

Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

Based on the research findings presented in Chapters Five and Six, this study attempts to understand the distinct features that characterise acculturation experiences in the context of Chinese and British foreign language learners where language and culture learning take place simultaneously during short-term sojourns. The present qualitative phenomenological study endeavours to provide a 'mirror-image' comparison of these two cohorts' experiences to address these three research questions:

1. How do Chinese foreign language learners experience acculturation in the UK through Study Abroad Programmes? How does it compare with British foreign language learners' experiences of acculturation in China?
2. What factors facilitate Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences? What factors serve as barriers?
3. What are the first-hand lessons (benefits and challenges) when foreign language learners are exposed to the target language and culture?

This chapter will first discuss the key findings of the present study in relation to the extant literature (Section 7.2). It then highlights the theoretical contribution of this study by proposing a Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation in Section 7.3. It also identifies the limitations and strengths of this study in Section 7.4, as well as detailing the implications and recommendations for further areas of research, practice and policy (Section 7.5). Finally, Section 7.6 concludes with a personal reflection and some final thoughts on the present study and this research journey.

7.2 Contribution to the Extant Literature on Chinese and British Foreign Language Learners' Acculturation Experiences in SAPs

This study provides an in-depth comparative investigation of the acculturation processes and experiences of Chinese and British foreign language undergraduates who sojourned in the UK and China respectively through SAPs for one academic year. It has looked at both personal and environmental aspects to explore the crucial influential factors and first-hand

lessons that Chinese and British sojourners learnt from their time in the country of their target language and culture. This section discusses the key similarities and differences that arose in this comparative investigation and its empirical contribution to the extant literature.

7.2.1 Key similarities in both Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences in SAPs

The findings on personal and environmental factors (Chapters Five and Six) in this study have identified six key personal acculturative factors – *dispositions, goals, attitudes, awareness, knowledge* and *skills* – and four distinct subsystems in both groups' home and host environments: *original and new microsystems, new exosystem, original and new macrosystems* and *chronosystems.* Key similarities in both the Chinese and British groups have been noticed in all six of these pivotal personal factors and these four distinct subsystems, and these will be discussed in the following subsections.

7.2.1.1 Key similar personal factors

Dispositions

The individual sojourner's dispositions (i.e. emotional or behavioural preferences) tended to be an important influential personal factor for both the Chinese and British groups when it came to each sojourner's decisions about his/her own specific pathways of acculturation (i.e. how they learn and interact). A few prior studies on language learning have noted that having an extroverted or introverted personality is influential on foreign language sojourners' willingness and proactiveness in seeking opportunities to use the target language (e.g. Dewaele, 2013; Ehrman, 2008). However, this study does not indicate specific differences between extroverted or introverted personalities, but rather suggests that dispositions are influential factors for sojourners' language learning and use, as well as for interactions during their sojourns. Arguably, the role dispositions played in both the Chinese and British groups' acculturation experiences in SAPs was to set a critical 'psychological boundary', which differentiates the ideas or practices that each sojourner likes or dislikes, can or cannot accept based on his/her personal preferences. This might help explain why some sojourners had positive or negative responses to certain learning or interaction opportunities. It is very likely because they liked/could accept these opportunities (i.e. they were within their psychological boundary) or disliked/could not accept them (i.e. they were beyond their psychological boundary) based on their own dispositions.

Goals

Motivations and expectations have been regarded as important influential factors in sojourners' SAP participation decisions and interaction experiences (e.g. Allen & Herron, 2003; Cai et al., 2015). However, goals, as identified in this study, has a broader definition which includes the things the sojourner plans or hopes to experience or achieve (i.e. the 'to-do list' he/she would like to tick from). Sojourners' personal interests, motivations and expectations are the fuel for their goals in shaping the pathways of how and to what extent they learn and interact with the new environment. The findings in this study echo previous research which shows that the common goal foreign language learners in SAPs want to achieve is to gain more realistic knolwedge about the target language and culture (e.g. Allen, 2010; Dixon, 2013). Other important goals sojourners want to achieve include intercultural and professional development such as open-mindedness, intercultural communication skills, potential benefits for future education and/or careers, as well as experience and immersion opportunities in the target language and culture (e.g. Bandyopadhyay & Bandyopadhyay, 2015; Dwyer, 2004). Only a few sojourners in both groups took their SAPs as a chance to escape from setbacks in their current lives (Cai et al., 2015) and to focus on their own interests or other personal plans. No participant in either group in this study treated their SAP as a holiday-style break (e.g. Bandyopadhyay & Bandyopadhyay, 2015). Having goals for their one-year sojourns was likely to motivate both groups to make the most of their short-term sojourns and might even have helped distract them from negative feelings (e.g. homesickness).

However, unrealistic goals (i.e. goals that were too high) were found to be a hindrance to both groups' acculturation and mental health and psychological wellbeing. These findings further support the idea that some foreign language sojourners are likely to construct an "imagined self" (Penman & Ratz, 2015, p.51) who could have fluent communications with local people, make many local friends, etc. Although these ambitious goals might motivate sojourners to deliberately and initiatively seek or create opportunities to interact with local people, both groups in this study agree that they also come with great pressure, causing anxiety and increasing the likelihood of being disappointed in themselves and demotivated during their sojourns (Chen et al., 2018; Dervin, 2009; Penman & Ratz, 2015).

Attitudes

The influences that foreign language learners' attitudes toward cultural differences have upon their sojourns have been commonly addressed in previous literature (e.g. Byram, 1997; Goldoni, 2015). Echoing the previous literature, this study's findings indicate that physical exposure to the target language and culture per se does not guarantee intercultural learning and development, and both groups' distinct roles as short-term SAP students sometimes made them feel it was unnecessary to interact in some circumstances (Dervin & Härkönen, 2018; Chao & Yen, 2018; Vande Berg et al., 2009; Williams, 2005). The findings in this study are also in line with previous studies which show that sojourners with more open and respectful attitudes toward cultural differences are likely to experience better acculturation with more learning and interaction opportunities and gain deeper understandings of both their self, home and host cultures (e.g. Conner & Roberts, 2015; Dewaele, 2013; Jackson, 2011), as well as experiencing improved wellbeing. Additionally, the sojourn per se is a significant temporal milestone in the sojourner's development (Elliot et al., 2016a), and this study suggests that another key similarity is their attitudes toward the sojourn per se (i.e. the unknown and challenging experience he/she will have in an unfamilar environment). Likewise, having an open and tolerant attitude towards the sojourn facilitated members of both groups to be better prepared for and resilient in the face of trivial daily-life challenges during their sojourns, as well as to gain significant personal development (e.g. becoming more independent). The findings in this study further support that conscious or unconscious host conformity pressure from the new environment (e.g. adjusting to host cultural norms) (Kim, 2001) had the potential to change the attitudes of members of both groups because they wanted to be less alien in their new environment.

Awareness

How and what sojourners are aware of in the new environment emerged to be another crucial influential factor for both groups. This is in line with previous studies' findings that the differences in, for example, language, daily practices (e.g. dietary habits) and academic culture (e.g. teaching style) create strong alien feelings, loneliness and stress for sojourners (e.g. Arthur, 2017; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Savicki, 2013). For both the Chinese and British sojourners in short-term SAPs, the fear of missing out on what is happening with their family, friends or home HEIs intensified their loneliness and alien feelings (Hetz et al., 2015). However, the findings in this regard are somewhat contrary to previous studies which have shown that sojourners have stronger alien feelings when they first arrive in their host countries (e.g. Arthur, 2017; Baba & Hosoda, 2014). Although this is not a longitudinal study and cannot provide more evidential analysis on the changes at

different stages (see Limitations of the Study: Section 7.4), retrospective data from some sojourners' experiences (in both groups) potentially suggest that they were excited and fascinated by the differences when they first arrived, and they felt stronger alien feelings, loneliness and stress during the middle of their sojourns (i.e. the fourth to sixth months), although they were actually more settled and used to the environment by that time.

The findings support previous studies by showing that both groups gained improved intercultural awareness and self-confidence from their one-year sojourns (Black & Duhon, 2006; Williams, 2005). Developing increased critical awareness of their home and host countries, or even other cultures and countries, is likely to help both groups develop an openness and global mindedness, facilitating their reflection, recognition and appreciation of these differences between their own and other cultures and countries (e.g. Byram, 1997; Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Douglas & Jones-Rikkers, 2001). These findings are consistent with Medina-López-Portillo's (2004) claim that sojourners' previous experiences abroad impact their intercultural proficiency development (i.e. intercultural awareness). Many of the British and a few of the Chinese sojourners had had previous experiences abroad, and most of them found those experiences helpful in relation developing their critical awareness of differences between cultures and countries and, to an extent, preparing them for challenges during the sojourns.

Another interesting similarity highlighted in this study is the awareness of similarities between the sojourners' own and host or other cultures, which, arguably, is just as important as their awareness of the differences. Both groups reported similarities they found in the common ideas and practices of Chinese and British people as human beings, such as feelings and emotions, as well as common daily practices such as shopping and reading. Arguably, an open and globally minded perspective does not merely facilitate sojourners' learning about cultural differences, but also helps them identify similarities among the differences. Recognising similarities has been suggested to help alleviate sojourners' acculturative stress in the unfamiliar environment.

Knowledge

The findings from both groups further support the importance of necessary knowledge (e.g. cultural differences between home and host cultures, target language, etc.) to facilitate better intercultural communication, adjustment, social interactions and personal development, which has been commonly mentioned in previous literature (e.g. Alred & Byram, 2002; 2006;

Carlson et al., 1990; Clarke III et al., 2009). Notably, the findings in this study highlight the importance and necessity of this knowledge being 'realistic' (i.e. true and practical information that can help sojourners learn and interact effectively). Echoing previous studies (e.g. Allen & Herron, 2003; Bastien et al., 2018; Beaven & Spencer-Oatey, 2016; Church, 1982; Savicki et al, 2013; Trenchs-Parera, 2009), both the Chinese and British foreign language learners still encountered language difficulties as well as stress and anxiety in understanding, communication and interactions during their sojourns despite having been learning the target language for years. The sojourners in this study specifically reported their lack of realistic knowledge of the language and culture in real-life situations. Additionally, apart from the linguistic and cultural knowledge, this study also suggests the significance of having knowledge about what the sojourn will be like (i.e. life in host country) in short-term SAPs. It can aggravate sojourners' culture shock if they are not prepared with such knowledge. Lacking necessary knowledge might decrease their confidence and willingness to communicate and interact with local people and actively adjust to the new environment (Amani & Kim, 2017; Beerkens et al., 2016; Church, 1982).

Knowledge acquired through textbooks and tests might provide language sojourners with an imagined picture in which they fluently communicate, easily and successfully interacting with local people by using the knowledge they have learnt in classrooms (Badwan, 2017). Sojourners in both groups also generated their knowledge of Chinese or British people, daily life, language and culture from resources such as novels, films (Li, 2009), their previous experiences abroad, the shared experiences of previous sojourners, etc. However, the knowledge they had acquired from these resources did not guarantee effectiveness in facilitating sojourners' learning and interactions. Sojourners might easily be disappointed, shocked and anxious due to the gap between their imaginary and their experienced life in the host country, which is likely to deprive them of confidence and desire to communicate and interact, hindering their acculturation and development (Penman & Ratz, 2015).

On the other hand, realistic knowledge of the language and culture, as well as the sojourn itself, was an important gain both groups in this study made. This echoes previous studies' findings that sojourners are likely to become more knowledgeable about the language and culture they are learning, and more confident in using this knowledge to interact in daily life by experiencing real-life situations during their sojourns (e.g. Allen & Herron, 2003; Almarza et al., 2015; Cubillos et al., 2008; Dewey et al., 2012; Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Ife, 2000; Jackson, 2008). Both groups' experiences further support the idea that the more realistic the knowledge that sojourners have is, the more confident they will be and the more

opportunities to use the knowledge and social support they might have, and, in turn, the more confident and knowledgeable they are likely to become (Bastien et al., 2018; Church, 1982).

Skills

Previous studies indicate the significance of having skills to effectively use appropriate expressions to interpret cultural differences, discover significant phenomena and understanding its meaning, cope with unfamiliarity, solve problems and so on in communications and interactions during the sojourn (e.g. Byram, 1997; Bandyopadhyay & Bandyopadhyay, 2015). The findings from both groups in this study further support this significance; having various communication, learning, interaction or other necessary skills meant the sojourners could more actively and effectively apply the knowledge they had and engage in interactions with their new environment. This echoes previous studies (e.g. Kinginger, 2011; Vande Berg et al., 2009) which found that mere physical immersion in the environment of the target language and culture is not enough for sojourners' to develop their language and intercultural competence, but that skills through which sojourners can apply their knowledge of the language, culture and sojourn are crucial to their acculturation and development. Sojourners in both groups also learned more effective skills applying their knowledge to their learning and interactions, which helped them improve their interaction abilities and ease their acculturative stress (e.g. Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Lindsey, 2005; Savicki, 2013).

7.2.1.2 Key similar environmental factors

Original and new microsystems

For both groups in this study, the key elements in their microsystems were similar: *family, peers* (friends and schoolmates) and home *institutions* (for the original microsystem), and *"shield", peers* (schoolmates) and host *institutions* (for the new microsystems). The findings from both groups support previous literature which has shown that the absence of familiar surroundings such as family and friends can lead to loneliness, homesickness and other forms of acculturative stress that negatively influence sojourners' overall wellbeing and adjustment in their host countries (Arthur, 2017; Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Both groups reported their strong need for emotional support from continuous connections and interactions with family and friends in their original microsystems, which was facilitated by modern technologies (Costello, 2015; Montgomery, 2010). This emotional

support was significantly helpful not only when they first arrived in the host country (e.g. Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Salin, 2018), but especially when they encountered challenges to their physical or psychological wellbeing in their daily lives in new environment (e.g. Haslam et al., 2005; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). It also helped ease their fear of missing out on what was happening in their original environment (Back, 2013; Hetz et al., 2015). However, members in both groups highlighted that their family and friends sometimes lacked realistic and contextual understandings of the sojourners' real-life experiences, their daily-life scheduling differences and the new ways of communicating (i.e. moving all communications online), which intensified their difficulties in receiving support from home in a proper and timely manner. Additionally, both groups benefited from the tips or experiences shared by their schoolmates who had gone on previous sojourns, while at the same time, they encountered challenges if the experiences that had been described to them were partial or only focused on the positive aspects. The participants in this study also suggested that it was a great benefit to continually connect and interact with their family and peers back home, and none of the sojourners reported that using their mother tongue for these interactions was a barrier to their target language learning, as has been suggested (Goertler, 2015).

Previous literature has paid a good deal of attention to pre-departure preparation and orientation at the home HEIs on practical and pragmatic information and practices, intercultural training on academic and sociocultural differences, and negotiation of own and others' identities (e.g. Bacon, 2002; Carlson et al., 1990; Holmes et al., 2015; Morgan, 2012). Both the Chinese and British groups recognised the helpful foundation knowledge they had acquired from this training and their language education. Their language and culture education at their home HEIs equipped them with an important 'tool' or "mediator" (Cherednichenko, 2009) to more effectively adjust and interact in the country of their target language and culture. However, the findings from both groups emphasise the significant gaps between the language and culture the sojourners had learnt at their home HEIs and the actual linguistic and cultural knowledge used in real-life situations in the host countries (Badwan, 2017; Palmer, 2013). Lacking realistic and practical knowledge of the language used in real-life situations posed great challenges to both groups' daily interactions and their confidence in language use. Additionally, both groups were in 'direct enrolment' (Norris & Dwyer, 2005), meaning that all courses, services and support were expected to be offered by the host HEIs. However, rather than turning to their unfamiliar host HEIs, sojourners in both groups tended to seek help from their familiar home HEIs (e.g. SAP co-ordinator at their home HEI) when they encountered challenges, especially before they had become familiar

with their host HEIs. Nevertheless, both groups complained about the lack of support from their home HEIs before and especially during their sojourns; institutions lacking understanding of students sojourning in a faraway country where sojourners might encounter difficulties and need support (Belford, 2017; Fritz et al., 2008; Li & Gasser, 2005; Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1993) presents more challenges for their students. Additionally, SAP design, such as requirements from the home HEI on module selection at the host university, was a common facilitator for both groups, while recognition of academic results was a common barrier for both Chinese and British foreign language learners in this study.

When sojourners move to a new environment, their "shield" – understood in this study as a comfort zone, "a place, feeling or situation of comfort" (Prazeres, 2017, p.908) – emerged as an important similarity between both groups in this study. It is the replacement for family in original microsystem, which sojourners re-build initiatively. Social contact and support from co-nationals or international students from other countries is commonly cited in previous literature as significant on sojourners' emotional, psychological, sociocultural and academic adjustment (e.g. Bastien et al., 2018; Bochner et al., 1977; Bodycott, 2015; Church, 1982; Lee & Robbins, 1995; Yeh & Inrose, 2003). Echoing the previous literature (e.g. Miyafusa & Godwyll, 2009), the common ground and connections (e.g. similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds, life pace, etc.) between sojourners and their co-nationals or other international students provided a strong foundation for building their "shields". Both groups agreed that these friendships were important gains they would have for years or lifelong (Dwyer, 2004). Apart from social support, they also received significant support and personal development thanks to their "shields" (e.g. Douglas & Jones-Rikkers, 2001; Kehl & Morris, 2008; Maundeni, 2001; Smith & Yang, 2017). However, the findings in this study are consistent with the warning that co-national friendships might pose potential barriers, leaving sojourners less willing to overcome the challenges and interact more with local people, which can ultimately lead to them regretting their limited use of the target language in daily life (e.g. Church, 1982; Ife, 2000; Vande Berg, 2009; Ward & Searle, 1991). Although the "shield" may include other international students and some local people, sojourners are likely to 'stay in a bubble', which might hinder their further engagement with different people and things in the new environment (Yu, 2010). This was a common regret expressed by members of both groups in this study.

Peers in the new microsystem for both groups primarily referred to local Chinese/British students. The findings are in line with previous studies which have shown that intergroup

contact with local students alleviates sojourners' loneliness and homesickness and promotes their satisfaction (e.g. Hendrickson et al., 2011) with their linguistic and cultural interaction opportunities and improvements. However, the findings in both groups also highlight and support the great difficulty of actually making friends with local students even though they share the same campuses (Alred & Byram, 2002; Byram & Feng, 2006; Dervin, 2007; Kinginger, 2011) since these local students already have their own solid connections with families, friends and other groups and stable daily routines (Beaven & Spencer-Oatey, 2016). This study further suggests although some friendliness and shared initiative (e.g. interest in each other's home culture) somewhat facilitates both groups to build connections with local students, the different paces of daily life, cultural boundaries and sojourners' distinct roles in short-term SAPs are crucial barriers to building natural and close friendships with local students. In line with the previous literature, physical immersion in the target language and culture does not guarantee that foreign language learners will make more local friends and learn better; it is more pivotal to make conscious and deliberate efforts to discover learning and interaction opportunities (e.g. Alred & Byram, 2002; Meier & Daniels, 2013; Vande Berge et al., 2009).

New academic styles and campus life, as well as the SAP design in the host HEIs, present both significant benefits and challenges to both groups. Previous studies indicate that it is challenging for sojourners to move to a new environment where the academic culture and campus life are quite different from what they are used to (e.g. Engle, 2013; Li, 2005; Sato & Hodge, 2015; Turner, 2006). Both groups in this study experienced similar challenges in adjusting to the very different university environment in terms of learning and teaching, administration, campus activities and accommodation. However, these differences also brought benefits to both groups' linguistic and cultural development, as well as important eye-opening opportunities. They also received help from some academic or administrative staff members who recognised international sojourners' acculturative needs and provided support and advice to help with their adjustment, especially when they encountered difficulties.

New exosystem

In this study, the interactions between sojourners and their new exosystems (e.g. local community in the host city) greatly influenced both the Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences. However, sojourners' interactions with their new exosystems and its influence on their acculturation experiences have received limited

attention in the previous literature. A few studies (Arthur, 2017; Kim, 2001; Marginson, 2012; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007) indicate that the local people's openness towards sojourners and willingness to help and interact with them have influences on sojourners' acculturation in relation to their opportunities to access local people, communities and societies. It also influences their potential chances of experiencing isolation and discrimination in academic or social interactions, which might cause acculturative stress. Both groups' experiences in this study further suggest that friends' social networks and friendly conversations with local people help enhance social interactions in the new environment, while unanticipated negative incidents in daily-life interactions present challenges. Local people's attitudes toward foreign sojourners can bring either psychological pressure or relief (i.e. make sojourners feel unwelcome or welcome), which might discourage or encourage their use of the target language and further interactions with the new environment.

Original and new macrosystems

The continuous connections with and influences from the original macrosystem were regarded as major barriers by both Chinese and British groups since the deeply rooted ideas, behaviour, lifestyle, etc. they had learned in their original macrosystems (Elliot et al., 2016a) were likely to shape their habitual mindset and lifestyle. Also, the findings from both groups further support that the larger the cultural distance is between the original and new macrosystems (i.e. Asian and Western countries), the more challenges sojourners are likely to encounter (Li & Gasser, 2005). Although they had been learning the target language and culture for years, both groups still found it to be 'a completely different world'. The negotiation between their habitual mindset and lifestyle from their original macrosystems and the new ideas and practices in the new macrosystems impacted sojourners' senses of identity (i.e. their understanding of who they are). It can enhance sojourners' understandings of themselves and others, intercultural awareness, or solidify their senses of their Chinese/British national identities, with many in both groups likely to experience increased patriotism (e.g. Alred & Byram, 2006; Goldoni, 2015; Gao, 2011; Kinginger, 2013). The sojourners' habitual mindsets and lifestyles and strengthened patriotism mostly served as barriers since the negotiation between oneself and others often involves discomfort or anxiety, and the roles they decided for themselves might have influenced their use of the target language and their interactions with the new environment (e.g. Benson et al, 2013; Baker-Smemoe et al., 2014). Interestingly, some sojourners in both groups were likely to stick to or change their daily food as pathways to retaining their home cultural identity or

adjusting to the host cultural identity (Conroy, 2016; Ciliotta-Rubery, 2016; Taylor & Ali, 2017).

In line with previous studies (e.g. Antonakopoulou, 2013; Church, 1982; Gill, 2007; Goldoni, 2015; Oberg, 1960; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Zhou et al., 2008), both groups in this study encountered strong feelings of culture shock during their sojourns (e.g. discomfort, anxiety, confusion, strangeness, etc.) when interacting with the new environment. The potential tensions and negotiation between the original and new macrosystems impacted both groups' attitudes and understanding of 'self and others' and further influenced their actual target language use and learning and interactions in the new environment (Baker-Smemoe et al., 2014; Gallucci, 2014; Norton, 2000). It has also been suggested that experiences of culture shock can provide valuable opportunities for people to become "intercultural speakers" (Byram, 1997, p.38), who critically reflect on their home culture while learning the host culture, which might help sojourners to learn, interact and develop (e.g. Elliot et al., 2016b; c; Goldoni, 2015; Montuori & Fahim, 2004; Savicki, 2013). Their 'liquid' roles (Dervin, 2007; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002) in short-term SAPs are likely to encourage them to be braver in interactions with the new environment since they might feel less embarrassed when making mistakes in their "passing" (Dervin, 2007, p.119) experiences. Seemingly, this finding of this study does not fully support previous literature which claims that short-term sojourns might demotivate sojourners to actively adjust and interact (Chao & Yen, 2018). However, the findings in this study suggest that both groups are likely to experience critical senses of "being in the middle" when they feel strong connections with both their home and host cultures, or 'being in limbo' if they feel disconnected from either culture. The former is likely to strengthen their sense of belonging and encourage them to learn, interact and reflect between both macrosystems, while the latter might intensify their loneliness and acculturative stress and demotivate them to actively learn and interact during the sojourns. Therefore, as this study suggests, their 'liquid' roles might both motivate and demotivate their learning and interactions.

The findings in this study also suggest an interesting 'mirror-image' influence from the tension and negotiation process. Both groups agreed that they had gained a more realistic understanding of the target languages and cultures and were influenced by the host country's lifestyles by participating in the culture itself (Almarza et al., 2015; Elola & Oskoz, 2008). Also, the findings support previous literature which has claimed that both groups have certain expectations of the new environment based on what they have learnt in classes or from other resources, but many of them are disappointed with the mismatched

expectations and reality when they arrive in the real-life context (Penman & Ratz, 2015). Moreover, the sojourners in this study raised the challenge of retrogressing in their mother tongues after staying in the host country for several months; this interesting finding also suggests the need for sojourners to effectively manage between their home and host languages and cultures during their sojourns.

Original and new chronosystems

Given the short durations of SAPs, previous studies have paid little attention to the impact of temporal milestones on sojourners' acculturation experiences. However, the findings in this study suggest that both the original and new chronosystems play significant roles because of the changes in terms of "stability, consistency, and predictability" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p.820) in both the individual sojourner and his/her original and new environments during even a short-term sojourn. Bronfenbrenner (1986) proposes two types of life transitions in the chronosystem: normative (e.g. marriage, retirement) and nonnormative (e.g. death, divorce). However, the findings in this study do not address these profound life transitions but suggest remarkable and influential temporal milestones in short-term SAPs both at home and in host environment, which might include sudden incidents (e.g. changes of dietary habit, sudden loss of a family member). Echoing previous literature which claims that the sojourn per se is an important temporal milestone for both groups (Elliot et al., 2016a), although one academic year is not a long proportion of a person's lifespan, it is still a significant amount of time to spend in contact with the new environment (e.g. Bastien et al., 2018; Dwyer, 2004; Leong & Ward, 2000; Vande Berg, 2009). Within the one-year contact, positive changes such as academic achievement facilitate sojourners' acculturation and development, while negative changes such as the sudden loss of a family member can become barriers.

7.2.2 Key differences between Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences in SAPs

The key differences between the Chinese and British groups are identified in fewer personal and environmental factors than the key similarities outlined above. There were key differences observed in their *goals, awareness* and *skills* (personal factors), and *original and new microsystems, new exosystem* and *new macrosystem* (environmental factors), as will be discussed in the following subsections.

7.2.2.1 Key different personal factors

Goals

One salient difference between the Chinese and British groups was their goals toward their one-year sojourns. Compared with the majority of their British counterparts, most Chinese sojourners seemed to have higher linguistic and academic goals for their sojourns in the UK. A possible explanation for this might be that Chinese students are more virtue-oriented and value hardship, perseverance, concertation and final academic achievement (Li, 2005), as the metaphor "mountaineering" used by some Chinese sojourners in this study echoes, demonstrating their perseverance and hard work during their short-term sojourns. The Chinese group also bore higher pressure from being foreign language learners than the British group. With pressure from people at home (e.g. family, friends, schoolmates) and themselves to achieve great linguistic and intercultural competence, they might feel ashamed when they fail to achieve their goals (Dervin, 2009) or do not perform well in academic activities or linguistic interactions. Also, many of the Chinese sojourners expected their sojourns to have positive influences on their future education and career, while the majority of the British sojourners in this study paid more attention to the influence on their future career. This may be due to the fiercely competitive labour market in China where, contrary to the UK, graduates with an undergraduate degree are not as likely to find a satisfying job, meaning many Chinese students choose to continue their education after earning their bachelor's degree.

Awareness

Few studies have paid attention to British students' short-term experiences in China. The findings in this study suggest that although both groups were aware of cultural differences during their sojourns, members of the British group were likely to have relatively stronger alien feelings than the Chinese group, which could lead to serious wellbeing problems, especially when they were excessively aware of differences. A potential explanation might be that China is relatively more monocultural while the UK is more multicultural; although there are 55 minorities in China, the cultural distance is not as large as between Chinese and other countries (e.g. the UK). Thus, while British sojourners felt unfamiliar with China and the local Chinese people and dialects, the local people also find the British unfamiliar and novel, providing relatively lower host receptivity (Kim, 2001). Additionally, Chinese campuses are less multicultural communities with relatively few international students. All

these factors taken together might have made some British sojourners more aware of strangeness in themselves and caused more stress and challenges.

Skills

Another interesting difference between the Chinese and British groups in this study relates to their skills. The findings report that the British group had more initiative and flexible interactions and connections with the wider environment outside campus (i.e. in their new exosystems) than their Chinese counterparts. Although their new exostystem itself had an impact on their acculturation, arguably, it was their skills at applying the knowledge they had acquired that facilitated these interaction opportunities. Although several Chinese sojourners also had some activities outside campus, most of their interactions were still within campus or during their travels to different cities/countries, while their British counterparts were likely to have more various and regular interactions outside campus (e.g. having a part-time job teaching local kids English). Through these skills for initiatively building connections with the local community and seeking more interaction opportunities, the British group was more likely to step out of their comfort zone (Douglas & Jones-Rikkers, 2001) (i.e. the relatively less complex and challenging environment within campus). They agreed that proactively exploring and facing challenges from the wider environment helped them gain more knowledge and skills for further interactions, stronger confidence and willingness to interact, maturity and independence (e.g. Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Lindsey, 2005; Yu, 2010).

7.2.2.2 Key different environmental factors

Original and new microsystems

A key environmental difference between the Chinese and British groups was related to their original microsystems. The British group strengthened their connections and interactions with family and friends by having more reunions during their sojourns (i.e. returning home during holiday breaks or having family visit China), while no Chinese sojourners had such reunions. As was mentioned above in the section on *Awareness* (key differences), the British group was likely to have a stronger awareness of foreignness in China. Such strong uncomfortable feelings may have stimulated British sojourners' desire to take a short break (Oberg, 1960) from the stress of continuously experiencing unfamiliarity and putting effort in building new connections in unfamiliar environment. In turn, they gained courage and energy from the reunions to continue with the rest of their sojourns in China. However, this

does not indicate that Chinese foreign language learners had no such uncomfortable feelings during their sojourns in the UK. Another key differences in their original microsystems might hint at an explanation: the British group had more China-related or multicultural family backgrounds and previous experiences of being abroad, either short-term or long-term. Therefore, it might have been easier for both the British sojourners and their families to travel back home or to China to have such reunions. On the other hand, the value placed on perseverance in Chinese education (e.g. Hofstede et al., 2010; Li, 2005) and the relatively fewer previous experiences of traveling abroad that both the Chinese sojourners and, possibly, their parents had might help explain why no Chinese sojourners went home or had family visits in the UK during their one-year sojourns.

A key difference in new microsystem is related to the sojourners' "shields" – the replacement of family that includes co-nationals, other international students or local friends. The findings further support that the British group in China found it more difficult to 'break out of the shield' and suggest why Chinese students in the UK tend to stick to their intragroup friendships (e.g. Bodycott, 2015; Church, 1982; Miyafusa & Godwyll, 2009; Ward & Searle, 1991). This is also likely because far fewer British students go to study and live in China than Chinese students come to the UK, meaning British sojourners have less understanding and experience of how challenging sojourning in a country with large cultural differences might be. The findings in this study indicate that the British group also have a need, perhaps even stronger than their Chinese peers, to build and stay with their "shields" in China because of their stronger alien feelings in a more monocultural country. Also, since the British group had more interactions with local people in their new exosystems, their "shields" included an important additional element – some locals – that was relatively absent for the Chinese group. The findings suggest that regular interactions with some local people also helped them build connections and familiarity and alleviate their acculturative stress.

The findings on the host HEIs in the new microsystem suggest other major differences between the Chinese and British groups related to SAP design and academic and campus life. Different SAP designs affect sojourners' education abroad experiences and outcomes (Kehl & Morris, 2008). Previous literature indicates that student sojourners in 'direct enrolment' programmes are more likely to stay with host-country nationals (Norris & Dwyer, 2005), which is only partially supported by the experiences of the Chinese group in this study. The Chinese sojourners in the UK shared their classes and accommodation with a mix of co-nationals, host-nationals and other international students. However, unlike their Chinese counterparts, the British students' experiences in China echo other previous studies

which show that many student sojourners, especially European students, are likely to be 'treated differently', having specially designated classes and accommodation with only co-national or other international non-degree-oriented students (Dervin, 2007; 2009). The British participants agreed that this SAP design, while it might have provided a less challenging environment, led to surprising difficulties in their actual interactions and integration (e.g. joining activities or even meeting and having a proper conversation) with local Chinese students who shared the same campus, which made them feel isolated (Byram & Feng, 2006; Dervin, 2009; Goldoni, 2015). Seemingly, the British group's on-campus learning and interactions were limited to their co-national and other international students in SAPs. Arguably, a lack of proper administrative support at Chinese HEIs to facilitate British sojourners meeting and integrating with local students was likely to make this restricted interaction more difficult. On the other hand, somewhat contrary with previous studies that have shown that sharing classes and accommodation with local students brings more learning and interaction opportunities (Hendrickson, 2018; Ife, 2000; Savicki, 2010), the Chinese students in this study actually had less interaction and integration opportunities with local students than they expected from a mixed SAP design. The discussion on similar difficulties in making friends with local peers in Section 7.2.1.2 might help explain.

The SAP design for Chinese sojourners had no strict requirements regarding the modules selected at their host HEIs, although several home HEIs preferred the modules to be English Studies-related. The findings in this study do not fully support the previous literature's assertion that the credit transfer between home and host HEIs is dramatically valued by sojourners (Huang et al., 2018). The Chinese sojourners in this study held various attitudes toward this issue. Some of them paid more attention to the credit transfer when selecting modules because they do not want to take the risk of delaying their graduation (e.g. Beerkens et al., 2016), while several Chinese sojourners took their sojourns as an attempt to explore new disciplines for their future education and would still choose the modules they wanted to try even if the credits could not be transferred back home. The British group's experiences somewhat echo Huang et al.'s finding that the issue of exam results recognition might demotivate SAP students to work hard because the results do not count at their home HEIs.

The academic and campus life challenges in the new microsystems brought different benefits to the Chinese and British groups. Although the Chinese group experienced a good deal of pressure and challenges in mixed classes (Hendrickson, 2018), especially in English Studies-related professional courses, they seemed to change their attitudes toward learning and develop critical thinking skills based on the eye-opening opportunities made possible by the

small-power-distance academic style in the UK (e.g. Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Douglas & Jones-Rikkers, 2001; Hofstede et al, 2010). The existence of better student services at British HEIs was another facilitator for their acculturation. For the British group, the findings in this study suggest that having classes with other international students who shared the same purpose helped their Chinese learning. Surprisingly, even the intensive, more rote-learning classes with more 'distant and powerful' teachers (Engle, 2013; Hofstede et al., 2010) were beneficial for their academic achievement in Chinese language, as many of the British sojourners learnt useful practical lessons in classes that facilitated their acculturation in daily life within or outside their campuses.

New exosystem

As was discussed above in *Skills*, the British sojourners had many more interactions with local people and engagement in their new exosystems than the Chinese group in this study. This might be because British undergraduates are relatively more independent and used to living outside campus, having part-time jobs and even cooking on their own as part of their university life than their Chinese peers. However, British sojourners were likely to experience relatively stronger alien feelings than the Chinese group because they had more interactions with local Chinese people in a more monocultural environment (i.e. China) and were treated differently because they were foreigners. These unpleasant experiences in the host societies might have made aspects of their sojourns challenging and discouraged them from interacting with more local people (e.g. Arthur, 2017; Marginson, 2012). However, although sojourners are studying abroad, the sojourn per se is arguably a process of learning by experiencing, and sojourners, especially foreign language learners, are also expected to benefit from having experiences outside their classrooms and enjoying wider connections and interactions (i.e. a new exosystem) (e.g. Kim, 2001). Similar to previous studies on intergroup interactions with local students, the findings further support the idea that the British group also gained significant benefits from these intergroup interactions with local people in their new exosystems. From these interactions, they built strong connections and found familiarity, friendships and more learning and interaction opportunities in the new environment, which was likely to help them feel at home, make more linguistic gains and attain a more realistic understanding of the target language and culture (e.g. Bochner et al., 1977; Dewey et al., 2013; Fraser, 2002; Li & Gasser, 2005; Ward & Kennedy, 1993).

New macrosystem

Another major difference between these two groups was found in the new macrosystem. More of the Chinese foreign language sojourners found that their experiences in the real-life context of the UK mismatched with their expectations. In line with previous studies, the Chinese sojourners seemed to have generated some misinformed or even stereotypical views about the British people, culture and environment by watching television programmes or other entertainment forms (Li, 2009). The gaps between their expectations and reality were likely to disappoint and demotivate them during their sojourns. Also, many British sojourners in this study wanted to avoid feelings of alienation in China. Previous studies indicate that the lower the host receptivity is, the more isolated sojourners may feel (Kim, 2001). In a more collectivist country like China, which emphasises similarity and harmony within a group, British sojourners seemed to experience stronger host conformity pressure to adjust their original cultural norms to the host culture's (Hofstede et al., 2010; Kim, 2001). Also, as was discussed above in the section on *dispositions*, many Chinese sojourners might also have paid more attention to their personal needs and targets and might have refused to adjust to certain host cultural norms. The British group's stronger need to stay in their "shield" groups in China and the Chinese group's somewhat stronger care of 'self' might not be in line with the traditional concepts of collectivism and individualism (Shi, 2006). Arguably, the findings may potentially suggest that in the modern world, with the rapid development of international interactions, dividing people into categories such as individualist or collectivist is likely to be dangerously absolute, and can potentially lead to mismatched expectations and stronger culture shock. People from individualist cultures can also care about and need a sense of belonging to a group, while those from collectivist cultures might also be personal-oriented and focus on 'me'. Although cultural differences are still notable, influential and challenging, arguably, individual differences deserve more attention when discussing cultural differences in the modern world.

Overall, based on its comparative investigation of Chinese and British foreign language sojourners' acculturation experiences in the UK and China respectively through one-year SAPs, the findings in this study suggest more similarities than differences in both the personal and environmental aspects. Both groups experienced 'challenges, amusement and gains' (Elliot et al., 2016a) during their sojourns in the context of their target languages and cultures. Arguably, these intertwined and synergetic key personal and environmental factors significantly influenced the interactions sojourners had with both their home and host environments during their sojourns. Thus, to gain a more nuanced insight into how these intertwined factors interplay and synergise with each other and meaningfully impact Chinese

and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences in short-term SAPs, the next section will discuss a proposed Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation.

7.3 The Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation

This section introduces and discusses the Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation proposed based on the findings in this study. This model is a more concrete extension which is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory (1994; 2001; 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and in the light of the Academic Acculturation Model (Elliot et al., 2016a; b; c) which is also extended from the Bioecological Theory. Although Bioecological Theory has been seldom applied to intercultural academic contexts and the Academic Acculturation Model has not yet been examined within a short-term acculturation and development period, overall, the research findings support this theoretical framework as being well suited to the research aims and questions in this study. Bronfenbrenner's theory reveals the "growing chaos in the lives of children, youth, families…" (Bronfenbrenner, 2001, p.6969); likewise, this proposed model provides a more nuanced insight to further conceptualise and understand the 'sojourn chaos' (that is, the complexity and intricacies in the process of how Chinese and British foreign language learners interact, learn and develop in the new environment during short-term SAPs). Specifically, this model helps unpack the synergistic interactions and interrelationships among the three key components (i.e. influential factors): the individual sojourner and his/her original (home) and new (host) environments. Notably, although Chinese and British foreign language undergraduates are the target cohorts for this study, meaning that academic acculturation was my starting point, the findings in this study suggest that the participants' experiences actually go beyond merely the 'academic' within their host HEIs. Also, sojourning in a new and intercultural environment is a transformative, life-changing and complex experience which involves a variety of multi-factorial, multi-dimensional, and multi-level adjustments (Antonakopoulou, 2013; Beaven & Spencer-Oatey, 2016; Elliot et al., 2016a; b). Both groups in this study experienced a broader acculturation in which elements both within and outside the academic context (e.g. family, peers, home/host HEIs, local communities, host cities/countries) were all linked and interrelated in the construction of the sojourners' comprehensive and complex acculturation processes. Hence, the title of this model uses the word 'acculturation' than the more specific 'academic acculturation'.

Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1994; 2001; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) describes the development as an integrated system – the PPCT model – which comprises four interrelated components: process, person, context and time (see Chapter Three). In their extension work built upon Bronfenbrenner's theory, Elliot et al. (2016a; b; c) incorporate the intercultural concept of co-existing original and new (bio)ecological systems for the environment component (with context as the social environment, and time as the natural third dimension). The findings from both the Chinese and British short-term student sojourners in the particular setting of SAPs in this study are in line with these key components – process, person, context and time – within an intercultural context (i.e. with both original and new bioecological systems involved). These four interrelated components are also the key overarching components for proposing the Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation in this study.

As Figure 7-1 shows, in the proposed Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation, the left circle stands for the *Person* (i.e. the individual sojourner) and his/her personal factors, which is consistent with the person in the PPCT model. The right circle is *Environment*, which combines the environmental factors – context and time in the PPCT model (i.e. the multi-layered nested system that forms the ecological settings for human development: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem) – from both the original and new environments. The lines and arrows between these two circles indicate the dynamic *Interactions* among the *Person* and *Environment*, echoing the process in the PPCT model (i.e. the complex and reciprocal interactions between the developing person and the environment he/she lives in). Each component will be explained and discussed in the following subsections. The Figure 7-1 also demonstrates the general mode of interactions in this proposed model, which will be explained in Section 7.3.3.

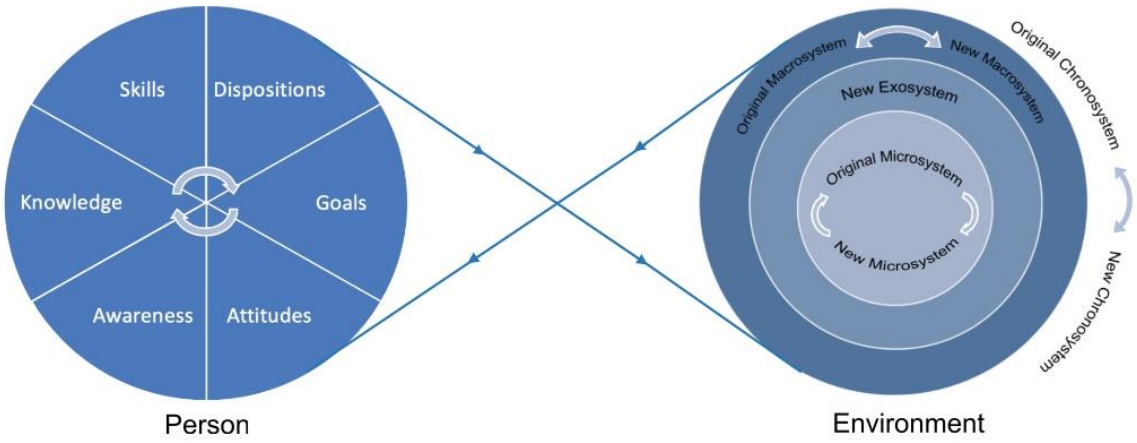

Figure 7-1 Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation (The general mode)

7.3.1 Person – the 'in-between direct producer'

Given the title of the proposed model – the Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation – the discussion starts with the *Person* component. 'Person' in this model refers to the individual sojourner and his/her personal factors that directly participate in the process of interactions, learning and development during his/her short-term sojourn.

The findings from both the Chinese and British groups suggest that sojourners in short-term SAPs have relatively more notable and distinct roles – as "liquid strangers" (Dervin, 2007, p.119) – and acculturation experiences than other intercultural sojourners such as immigrants, international degree students or tourists. Arguably, sojourners in SAPs are likely to be in a critical 'in-between' position, where they might feel 'detached' or 'attached' to both the home and host environments during their short-term sojourns. The findings in this study explain that this is because when compared with immigrants and international degree students who have longer or permanent stays in new environment, these SAP sojourners' sojourns are transitory. Since they usually have scheduled plans to return home (Dervin, 2007; Dervin & Dirba, 2008), they might still have strong connections and interactions with their original environment although they are physically sojourning in their new environment. With this 'liquid' role in transitory sojourns, sojourners might be somewhat demotivated to learn and interact (Chao & Yen, 2018) and have a relatively looser, more 'detached' relationship with the new environment (Murphey-Lejeune, 2002) while still being somewhat "attached" (Dervin, 2007, p.119) to the home environment. On the other hand, due to these foreign language learners' strong interest and formal experiences (i.e. degree education) in language and culture learning, they might be more motivated and actively engage in learning and interactions in the new environment. Compared with tourists, in particular, who primarily visit places in a new environment for pleasure and leisure, both the Chinese and British one-year SAP sojourners in this study were likely to be more 'attached' to and have relatively more intensive interactions with the new environment. Also, since they were physically away from their home environments, both groups often found themselves 'detached' from home environments. This discrepancy seems to put sojourners in short-term SAPs into distinct 'in-between' positions.

According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), 'person' is a distinctive property who "must engage in an activity" in order "for development to occur" (p.798). The personal attributes are both "indirect producer[s]" and "product[s] of development" (Bronfenbrenner,

2005, p.xix). However, this "indirect producer" concept has been criticised by scholars that an individual's ability to actively and proactively influence their own development is undervalued (e.g. Christensen, 2016; Paquette & Ryan, 2001). Additionally, Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013) argue that sojourning in a new environment and the negotiation between home and host cultures are likely to require sojourners' "determination and tenacity" (p.136). Arguably, in the present study, these foreign language undergraduate sojourners are adult learners who are likely to have their own distinct characteristics, which might not be found – or might at least be less prevalent – in children. For example, they might "intentionally" (Mezirow, 1990, p.1) and "critically" (ibid, p.2) examine, reflect and "mak[e] a new or revised interpretation of the meaning" (ibid, p.1) of the language and culture they are learning. Also, they might have more 'direct' – active and proactive – engagement and control of the "direction and power" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 795) of the processes of their interactions, learning and development. For instance, they might proactively seek learning and interaction opportunities, or make their own decisions to "learn, unlearn or relearn" (Elliot et al., 2016b, p.1183) new life conventions. In this sense, they are more than "an active agent" (Elliot et al., 2016a, p.2215; Bronfenbrenner, 2005); arguably, they are more 'direct producers' in their own development during their short-term sojourns. As Elliot et al. (2016b) argue, when adult sojourners develop in intercultural contexts and manage original and new bioecological systems, their "proactivity is critical" (p.1193). Arguably, the 'proactivity' is the fuel for and also requires sojourners' 'direct' participation and engagement in their new environment, as well as management between their home and host environments. Therefore, in this proposed model, the distinct roles of these 'direct producers' are highlighted with a particular circle (i.e. left circle for *Person*, see Figure 7-1), which suggests that it has an equally significant impact on individual sojourner's acculturation and development as the *Environment*.

Moreover, arguably, the 'in-between' position and the role of 'direct producer' are likely to reinforce each other in individual sojourners during their short-term interaction, learning and development process. The 'in-between' position might provide more autonomy for sojourners to make their own decisions about learning, interaction and development between their home and host environments. While the role of 'direct producer' is likely to strengthen sojourners' feelings of being 'detached' or 'attached' to both their home and host environments with the "direction and power" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 795) of learning, interactions and development they decide upon during their sojourns. For example, with the 'in-between' position, a sojourner might feel 'detached' from both the home and host environment, then he/she might become braver to interact with the new environment

because people who know him/her are far away, while people in the new environment are not familiar with him/her, making him/her less afraid of making mistakes. Then, with more 'direct' participation and engagement in the new environment, he/she might build stronger connections with the new environment and, at the same time, encounter more challenges which could lead to him/her having a stronger need to stay connected with his/her home environment – feeling more 'attached' to both environments.

As was discussed in Chapter Three, the three personal characteristics in Bronfenbrenner's theory are primarily observed in children; although Elliot et al.'s model focuses on adult learners, they seemed not to identify crucial personal characteristics (Xu et al., 2020) that impact adult sojourners' acculturation experiences. The proposed model in this study further explores and suggests six common and intertwined key personal factors directly contributing to both Chinese and British sojourners' acculturation and development in short-term SAPs: *dispositions, goals, attitudes, awareness, knowledge* and *skills* (see Figure 7-1, left circle; see also Chapter Six). These six contributors emerged as the driving forces which sojourners are most likely to take control of or monitor so that they are able to more effectively and directly 'produce' their own learning, interactions and development in the 'in-between' positions. These six synergistic personal factors could fuel the person – 'direct producer' – in his/her initiative, proactivity and response to learning, interaction and development opportunities. In other words, these six personal factors might 'initiate, activate, limit or disrupt' (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) the person's development during his/her short-term sojourn. For example, with clear goals, the sojourner might be more proactive in seeking learning and interaction opportunities which could help him/her achieve his/her goals. At the same time, as Bronfenbrenner (2005) argues that the person characteristics are also the "product of development" (p.xix), the sojourner would also gain development in these six personal factors from his/her 'direct' learning, interactions and development process (e.g. acquire more knowledge about the new environment). Therefore, these six crucial intertwined personal contributors facilitate, and are also influenced by, 'in-between direct producers' in shaping their own acculturation and development and affecting the "direction and power" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 795) of their interactions with both the home and host environments during their short-term sojourns.

7.3.2 Environment – "being in the middle" or 'being in limbo'?

The *Environment* component (the right circle in Figure 7-1) in the proposed model combines *context* and *time* in Bioecological Theory (i.e. the multi-layered nested system: the

microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem) since they can be understood as the social environment and the natural third dimension in the environment. In the context of intercultural short-term sojourns, the findings in this study further support that the *Environment* component contains co-existing invisible but influential (bio)ecological systems (Elliot et al., 2016a; b; c) – both the individual sojourner's home and host environments. The proposed model further suggests specific subsystems functioning as the driving forces in the co-existing environments to generate influences on the person's acculturation experiences in short-term sojourns: *co-existent original and new microsystems*, *new exosystem*, *co-existent original and new macrosystems* and *chronosystems* (see Figure 7-1; see also Chapter Five).

An interesting finding in this study is the 'absent' original and new mesosystems as well as the only new exosystem identified from both groups. As was explained in Chapter Five, when sojourners are physically away, the impact of interactions among key elements in microsystems and the wider communities seems to be too weak to notably influence their acculturation and development. Also, given the short durations of the sojourns, it might be difficult for the key elements in the new microsystem to develop regular interactions, shape the new mesosystem and influence the sojourners. The microsystems in this proposed model, either original or new, contain both the key elements in the microsystem and the interactions among these key elements. Notably, the new exosystem represents a key difference between the Chinese and British groups (see Section 7.2.2.2). Although the sojourners were on Study Abroad Programmes, arguably, their learning, interactions and development are not restricted to campus. For these foreign language learners in particular, wider communities and connections in their host cities and countries (i.e. their new exosystem) provided, arguably, equally or even more meaningful learning and interaction opportunities for their target language and culture. The findings in this study suggest that the more direct interactions sojourners have with the wider environment outside campus, the more learning, interaction and development opportunities they may have. These two interesting findings regarding the environmental aspect strongly support the importance of both Chinese and British sojourners – the 'direct producers' (see Section 7.3.1) – pursuing direct participation in and interactions with their environments (the new environment in particular) to seek learning and interaction opportunities.

Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) claim that the environment is one of the major sources that stimulates "chaotic systems", which leads to "a general lack of routinisation and structure in daily life" (p.121). That is, although it might be difficult to predict every second

of daily life, the trivial, surprising, amusing or challenging incidents in the daily life environment are likely to form the 'chaotic systems' for the developing person to encounter, adjust and cope with in his/her development process. Arguably, when it comes to an unfamiliar environment in the intercultural context, the 'chaotic systems' become even more complex and challenging. Elliot et al. (2016a) suggest that the sojourn is a "decontextualising tool" (p. 2215) which disrupts what sojourners have long taken for granted at all levels in their home environment. For example, sojourners might have less, or even lose the direct support of or interactions with their immediate connections in their original microsystems and mesosystems (i.e. family, peers, institutions, and interactions between these elements). Their deeply embedded consciousness of identity, belief, value, etc. shaped by their original macrosystems is also "disturbed" (ibid) by the sojourn. Thus, this "decontextualising tool" requires and also facilitates sojourners to critically reflect and effectively manage between their original and new environments, causing them to either: 1) cling to their familiar ideas and practices from their original (bio)ecological systems, 2) learn and be accepting of new things from the new (bio)ecological systems, or 3) have a combination of these two systems (Elliot et al., 2016a).

However, echoing the discussion in the *Person* section (Section 7.3.1), the findings in this study suggest that a short-term SAP sojourn for both Chinese and British foreign language learners seem to be a 'bi-contextualising' tool for them. The idea of 'bi-contextualising' suggests a strong two-fold feature of the sojourn (i.e. connections and disconnections with both the home and host environments), as well as highlighting the 'in-between' position that the individual sojourner seems to occupy. Sojourners in this 'in-between' position, as emerged in this study, do not only bring their "accepted norm" (Elliot et al., 2016a, p.2214) from their home environment to the new one and manage between the original and new norms; seemingly, they also have continuous influential interactions with parts of their original bioecological systems (i.e. their original microsystem, macrosystem and chronosystem) during their short-term sojourns. Arguably, they therefore tend to have stronger connections with both environments, having interactions and being influenced and supported by both their home and host environments – as if "being in the middle". At the same time, they might also feel lost, disconnected and 'detached' from either of these two environments when they struggle with the disparity of daily ideas, practices and resources of support from the two different cultural environments – as if 'being in limbo' between their home and host environments. Sometimes sojourners may simultaneously have both feelings, stimulating "puzzlement" or "serendipity" (ibid, p.2215), which may lead to critical reflection or introspection during the sojourn.

Arguably, whether "being in the middle" or 'being in limbo', the influences from the *Environment* are crucial to the person's acculturation and development during the sojourn. The 'bi-contextualising' tool (i.e. environment) is likely to impact upon sojourners' experiences of learning, adjustment, development, wellbeing, etc. in the host country (Dervin, 2007) since these challenging experiences might be stimulated and intensified by the frenetic, unpredictable daily challenges of the transition and interactions between both the original and new environments. In this 'in-between' position, the sense of "being in the middle" (i.e. 'attached' to both environments) arguably encourages and facilitates sojourners to actively and proactively learn, interact, explore and manage between both environments during the sojourn; while the feelings of 'being in limbo' ('detached' from both environments) might discourage or hinder sojourners' acculturation and development during short-term sojourns.

Arguably, it is pivotal for sojourners to scrutinise the key components (i.e. both their home and host environments) and specific elements (i.e. subsystems) involved in the environment so they can better understand the structure behind the 'chaotic systems'. The *Environment* component in the proposed model in this study could arguably provide a possible structure for sojourners to locate available resources to effectively "build up a new social support system" (Taylor & Ali, 2017, p.15) and routinise daily life in an unfamiliar environment. As Taylor and Ali (2017) argue, the earlier sojourners build up new social connections, and the stronger the connections are that they develop with local people, the smoother their acculturation could be. Arguably, knowledge about the "culture, area and language" (p.15) is not the only useful tool to help sojourners "participate effectively" (ibid) in academic and social activities. A more comprehensive understanding of the structure behind environments (i.e. subsystems and key elements involved) might impact sojourners' ability to effectively manage and function in the new environment and "shape" (Taylor & Ali 2017, p.14) the pathways of their learning, interaction and development processes during short-term sojourns. For example, when sojourning in an unfamiliar environment, sojourners are physically away from their original important "sources of support" (Elliot et al., 2016a, p.2214) (e.g. family and friends). In this case, knowing there is a potential significant replacement for family and friends – a "shield" – could arguably provide directions for sojourners to effectively locate and build up connections to develop new 'sources of support' (i.e. intragroup or intergroup friends) in the new environment. Consequently, by rebuilding their "shield", sojourners could "become committed to each other's wellbeing and

development" (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p.122), which can facilitate their acculturation experiences.

Having discussed the two key components – *Person* and *Environment* – in the proposed Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation, the next section will further discuss the interactions among *Person* and *Environment* which form a 'liquid' process for both Chinese and British sojourners' acculturation and development during short-term sojourns.

7.3.3 Interaction – the 'liquid' process

The general mode

The third key component in the proposed model is *Interaction*, demonstrated by the lines and arrows between the *Person* and *Environment* circles in the model (see Figure 7-1, 7-2, 7-3) as an infinity symbol (∞). *Interaction* in this model is built upon the process (or proximal process) in the PPCT model in Bioecological Theory, referred to as the driving force of complex bidirectional interactions between the individual and the (immediate) environment that operate regularly over time to produce development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 2005). In this study's specific context of short-term SAPs, *Interaction* in the proposed model can be understood as the continuous, complex, reciprocal and dynamic interactions between the individual sojourner and environments he/she interacts with. Both personal and environmental factors synergistically and naturally interplay with each other and influence the "direction and power" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 795) of acculturation and development, referred to as the basic form of *Interaction* in the short-term sojourn: *the general mode* (see Figure 7-1). Specifically, through individual sojourner's direct participation and engagement in the environments and the available sources of development – "persons, objects, and symbols" (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 2005, p.178) – provided by the home or host environments that sojourner interacts with, the interactions and development seem to occur naturally. For example, the sojourn per se is arguably a natural interaction wherein the sojourner moves to a new environment, encountering new sources of development. In turn, interactions with these new people, objects or symbols in the new environment bring new "developmental capacities" (e.g. knowledge, skills) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p.798) to impact the sojourner's acculturation and development during his/her short-term sojourn.

Notably, in Bioecological Theory, interactions in the process – or proximal process – are between the individual and "persons, objects, and symbols in [his/her] immediate environment" (i.e. microsystem) (ibid; Bronfenbrenner, 2001; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). However, as was discussed in the sections on *Person* and *Environment* (Sections 7.3.1 and 7.3.2), both Chinese and British foreign language sojourners in SAPs are likely to have more direct participation and engagement in not only their immediate environment (i.e. original and new microsystems) but also wider subsystems (e.g. new exosystem). Thus, arguably, *Interaction* in this proposed model places more emphases on the broader interactions between the *Person* and all the proximal and distal subsystems involved in his/her *Environment* (i.e. original and new microsystems, the new exosystem, original and new macrosystems and chronosystems).

Additionally, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) claim that to ensure their effectiveness, the interactions should be "on a fairly regular basis over an extended period of time" (p.796). Nevertheless, in the particular context of short-term SAPs, although a one-year period is not too short (especially compared with four-week summer schools), not all meaningful interactions can emerge on a fairly regular basis over a long enough period. The findings in this study suggest that for sojourners in short-term SAPs, significant interactions can take two types: 1) on a relatively regular basis over a certain period of time; or 2) within a shorter period or in irregular, occasional or even accidental circumstances. For the first type, the interactions between sojourners and their home and host environments are relatively regular and over a certain period (e.g. weeks, months). Although the sojourn period in an SAP is transitory, the sojourners in both groups still had relatively regular interactions with certain people (e.g. friends in their "shields", neighbours, etc.), objects (e.g. classrooms, local restaurants, etc.) or symbols (e.g. the target language, local dialect, etc.). Given the regularity of these interactions, it seems unnecessary for them to be exceptionally strong or impressive since the sojourners had to interact with them on a regular basis during their time abroad. For example, if a sojourner goes to a local restaurant every day for dinner, then he/she might not only interact with the object (i.e. restaurant) and the symbol (i.e. local food), but also meet and communicate with the restaurant's owner/employees (i.e. people). The second type of effective interaction is different. Irregular, occasional or accidental interactions that take place over a much shorter period (e.g. once only or a few times) need to be strong, impressive and powerful to have an effective and meaningful impact on sojourners' acculturation and development. For instance, when a sojourner experiences food poisoning once, he/she may

become cautious or reluctant about trying new local food throughout the rest of his/her sojourn.

As has been argued, individual sojourners directly participate in their environments and interact with the available sources of development the environments offer. Through these crucial interactions, both Chinese and British sojourners might observe, discover, "learn, unlearn or relearn" (Elliot et al., 2016b, p.1183) different ideas and practices; keep, build, interrupt or manage connections and interactions between their original and new environments; and seek, embrace or reject opportunities and resources during their sojourns. The synergistic effect of the general mode of interactions between *Person* and *Environment* drives and supports sojourners' acculturation and development during their short-term sojourns.

Also, Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (2005) claim that "the form, power, content, and direction" of these interactions "vary systematically" according to "the characteristics of the developing person and the environment" (p.178) in which the interactions take place. This study further supports this idea as *Interaction* in this proposed model is unfixed but, arguably, is likely to be a 'liquid' process, which is likely to change among the continuous, complex, reciprocal and dynamic interactions between the *Person* and *Environment* components. In this case, this 'liquid' process seems to generate two variations of the general mode of interactions: *the person-directed mode* (Figure 7-2) and *the environment-directed mode* (Figure 7-3). Detailed discussion of these two variations will be provided in the following subsections.

The person-directed mode

One variation of the person-environment interaction is *the person-directed mode*, which means the *Person* (i.e. the individual sojourner) plays a more significantly active and proactive role in creating, responding and selecting learning, interaction and development opportunities. Specifically, the *Person* becomes the dominant driving force in the 'liquid' process of interactions, influencing the directions of pathways in his/her acculturation and producing development in certain circumstances during the short-term sojourn (see Figure 7-2).

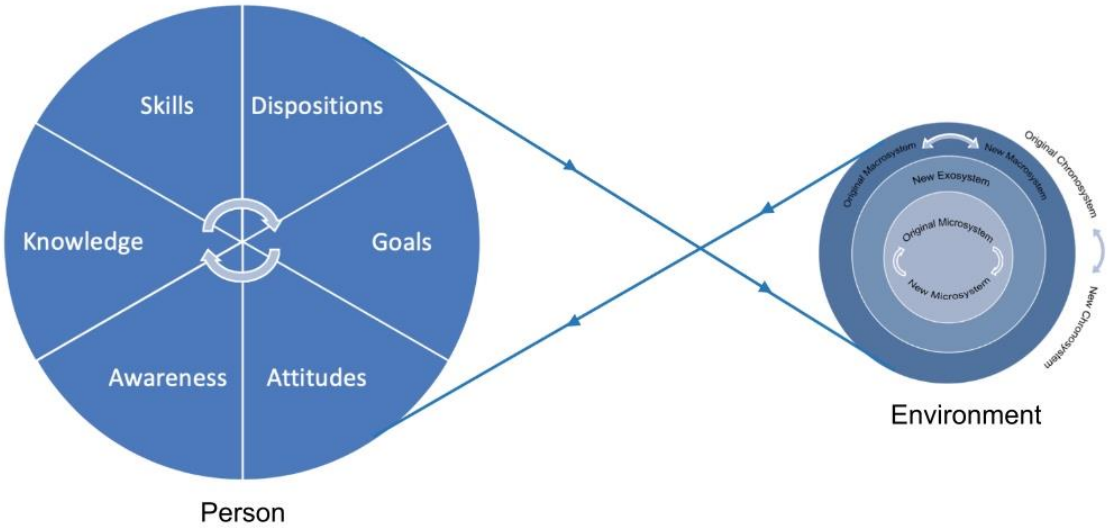

Figure 7-2 Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation (The person-directed mode)

As Bronfenbrenner claims, genetic potentials, dispositions and resources (e.g. knowledge, skills, ability) play strong and significant roles in "selective patterns of attention, action, and response" (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 2005, p.177), "affecting the direction and power" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p.795) of interactions when the individual engages in "solo activities" (ibid, p.814) without the presence of other people (e.g. reading). However, apart from 'solo activities', this proposed model further suggests that these 'direct producers'' own preferences, needs, targets, plans and available resources are also crucial in influencing and deciding the direction of the pathways for their interactions with their environments. For example, if the sojourner thinks it is unnecessary to interact with local students during his/her short-term sojourn, he/she might be much less proactive in seeking interaction opportunities with local students and spend most of his/her time with co-nationals, in which case the key people in his/her new microsystem are likely to be co-nationals. In that case, he/she might miss many valuable opportunities to interact with local students. As Christensen (2016) echoes, "we see limited parts of reality, partly what we want to see and observe. Some problems are chosen, and others ignored" (p.22); consciously or unconsciously, "selective perception" (ibid) characterises the environments (e.g. 'staying with co-nationals' instead of 'proactively interacting with locals' during a short-term sojourn).

The six synergistic personal factors in the proposed model (dispositions, goals, attitudes, awareness, knowledge and skills) emerged as pivotal personal contributors. They are crucial in creating, responding to and selecting what sources of development in the environments the sojourner tends toward, wants and feels comfortable taking to shape his/her pathways of acculturation and development. During the interactions, "the internal becomes external and

becomes transformed" (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 2005, p.177). That is, the sojourner selects, influences and shapes the environment(s) based on his/her own preferences, needs, targets, plans and available resources, and in return, the environment(s) impact the sojourner's learning, interaction and development opportunities and outcome with different selected sources of development. Arguably, interactions in this mode are likely to be more intentional. A possible scenario might be the following: if a sojourner sets a goal for him/herself to make many local friends in the new environment, he/she will proactively and intentionally seek opportunities to meet and interact with local people, then he/she is likely to become more knowledgeable about the target language and culture and receive more social support from these connections with local people.

Different individual sojourners have their own various personal factors. This person-directed mode suggests that sojourners need to critically reflect and be more clearly aware of their own preferences, needs, targets, plans and available resources during, or even before, their sojourns. In this way, they are more likely to be able to find, select or create appropriate and suitable interactions for their own acculturation and development in short-term sojourns.

The environment-directed mode

The other variation is *the environment-directed mode*. It refers to the interactions where the *Environment* or one or more subsystems in either or both the home and host environments play more dominant roles in influencing the direction of pathways for sojourners' acculturation and development. In this mode, the *Person* becomes somewhat passive in shaping the pathway of acculturation and development, and the *Environment* becomes the determinant in the 'liquid' process; interaction opportunities are primarily determined by the available sources of development (i.e. people, objects, symbols) in the environments (see Figure 7-3).

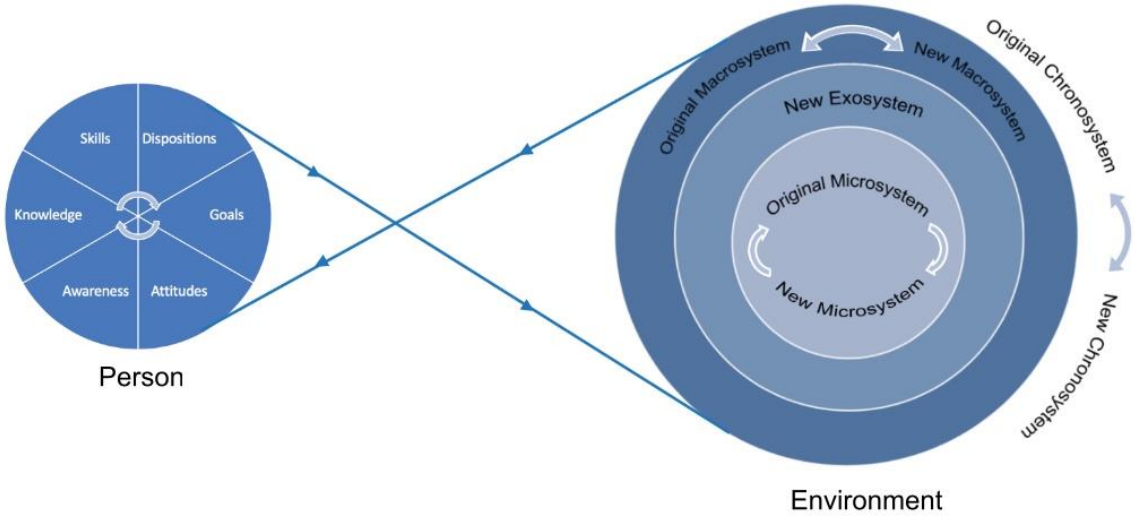

Figure 7-3 Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation (The environment-directed mode)

As has been previously discussed, sojourning in an unfamiliar environment can cause 'sojourn chaos', which makes sojourners confront the lack of routine and structure or the unpredictable circumstances that arise in daily life during their sojourns. Although Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) are discussing situations based in the classroom or residence, for foreign language learners in both groups in this study, the chaos was also observed to exist in wider interactions through all the subsystems in both the original and new environments. In this environment-directed mode, interactions seem to occur less intentionally (as in the person-directed mode) and more unexpectedly or even unwillingly. That is, the sojourner would be unable to predict the learning, interactions and development opportunities or the sources of development the environments might offer. This mode somewhat echoes the "a box of chocolates" metaphor used by participants in both groups in this study to describe their unpredictable, amusing but also daunting sojourns. For example, when a sojourner waits for a bus at a bus stop and a local person comes to talk to him/her, this interaction opportunity is quite unexpected; they might become friends and have further interactions during or even after the sojourn. When the sojourner has been asked to be photographed on the street, making him/her feel like he/she is "being exhibited in a zoo", this unwilling interaction might change his/her attitudes toward interacting with local people, and he/she may restrict his/her interactions to his/her "shield" with, for example, co-nationals during the short-term sojourn.

Given the lack of structure and predictability in the *Environment*, it might be difficult for sojourners to take full control of their daily lives in an unfamiliar environment and manage both the original and new environments effectively. However, this environment-directed

mode highlights the potential "puzzlement and challenges" as well as "serendipity and amusement" (Elliot et al., 2016a, p.2215) that the environments might bring. Also, the suggested subsystems in both the original and new environments in the proposed model can arguably facilitate sojourners to better understand the 'chaotic systems' behind the environments they interact with, better preparing themselves for the potential challenges or opportunities. In that case, they might react to unpredictable interactions more effectively and properly, seize and utilise the available sources of development and "invisible learning opportunities" (Elliot et al., 2016c, p.745) embedded in each subsystem within – and the interactions between – the sojourner's original and new environments.

Arguably, in the 'liquid' process of interactions in this proposed model, these three modes of interactions are likely to dynamically interchange and alternate during the short-term sojourn according to specific circumstances. The overall direction of the sojourner's acculturation might be influenced by different modes that occur or are adopted in each circumstance based on personal or environmental factors. All these together, arguably, shape the unique and meaningful pathway for an individual sojourner's acculturation and development during his/her sojourn. A hypothetical example might help explain: when a sojourner arrives in the new environment, the general mode of interactions begins. He/she goes to the local park because he/she wants to explore and seek learning and interaction opportunities (person-directed mode), and he/she meets a lovely local lady who kindly invites him/her to a party (environment-directed) and he/she is very happy for the interaction opportunity and accepts the invitation (general mode); however, he/she does not like the local food, so he/she refuses to join the next party (person-directed). Arguably, a possible metaphor for the 'liquid' process of interactions in short-term sojourns might be "find way out of a maze", with the whole pathway leading to the exit being shaped by the available options at each turn. Sometimes the person might pick all the left turns because he/she prefers to, or sometimes there are multiple options (maybe two, three or more) available at different turns. Each person picks his/her own turns, which shape his/her unique pathway out of the maze, that leads to his/her final acculturation and development outcome from the short-term sojourn.

However, Elliot et al. (2016b) note that for some sojourners (e.g. PhD students in their work), "a good chance of winning" (p.1192) at acculturation might be the completion of their degree programme. This leads to an interesting question: for non-degree-oriented sojourners in SAPs who will not be awarded a degree or certificate as the 'proof' of their 'winning', what demonstrates their successful acculturation? Does 'successful' mean they survive the whole

year regardless of how much they immerse themselves in and interact with the new environment? Alternatively, should they fully integrate themselves to be considered successful? The proposed model suggests that given the different personal and environmental factors and various interactions between the person and both the original and new environments, there is hardly one standard for all experiences. Questions worth asking could arguably be how the sojourner would like to personalise his/her own sojourn during the limited SAP period? Do you (i.e. the individual sojourner) have a clear insight of yourself and the environments as well as the potential connections and interactions you would/could have? Although the process of acculturation in an unfamiliar environment is complex and daunting, this Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation could potentially facilitate sojourners to unpack the 'liquid' process of and influential personal and environmental factors in their sojourns (for further discussion see Section 7.5: Implications and Recommendations). Thus, they might be better guided to personalise their own pathways in the pursuit of meaningful acculturation and development.

7.3.4 Theoretical contributions

This study has made several theoretical contributions. A few previous applications of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory have paid attention to intercultural academic (i.e. HE) contexts such as international degree students' acculturation or transition experiences (e.g. Elliot et al., 2016a; b; c; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013; Xu et al., 2020). This study contributes by applying this theory to an investigation of international non-degree-oriented students' complex acculturation experiences in short-term sojourns – as 'in-between direct producers' in 'bi-contextualising' environments. The proposed Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation further reinforces the value of investigating the complexity and intricacies of intercultural short-term sojourns from a developmental psychological perspective. Drawing on the various personal and environmental factors identified from the shared experiences of two distinct cohorts of SAP students, the proposed model in this study provides a more concrete and robust framework to picture these fragmented factors together and help unpack the complex interactions and interrelationships among them. This framework could arguably provide valuable scientific insights for researchers in this field, sojourners and their home and host HEIs to better understand this complex, transitory but meaningful journey. For example, one interesting issue that emerged from the findings in both groups was that despite being foreign language degree students, they still reported language to be a major challenge for their sojourns. This further extended model potentially offers a fresh scientific insight to understand what leads to the language

difficulties these foreign language learners still encounter, as well as what factors aggravate or alleviate their challenges in the country of their target language and culture during their short-term sojourns. Of course, the experience of students from other disciplines, cultural backgrounds, levels of education, in different sojourn destinations, or with different lengths of SAPs might differ from these two cohorts' experiences in this study. However, the proposed model aims to lay valuable groundwork for future research into other student sojourners in different SAPs, or, potentially, even some from the wider international degree student cohorts, who might have the 'liquid' roles and experiences inherent in their short-term sojourns (e.g. one-year postgraduate taught students in the UK but with scheduled plans to return home after graduation).

7.4 Limitations of the Study

Although this study has many strengths and offers various contributions, it is unrealistic to regard any study as 'perfect' and, thus, it is necessary to be critical and transparent about the limitations of the present study. First, this research was unable to be designed as a longitudinal study. This is important because, as Tudge et al. (2016) argue, research to appropriately test Bioecological Theory should be longitudinal so that the process and time dimension can be evidentially explored. However, given the focus on two cultural groups (Chinese and British foreign language undergraduates), the large geographical distance between the two research sites (China and the UK), the large number of cities involved (eleven), and my role as the sole researcher for this project, it would not have been feasible to enact a longitudinal design. A longitudinal design for this study might have been helpful to investigate the various processes of person and environment interactions (i.e. the three modes proposed above) more evidentially. Nevertheless, notwithstanding this limitation, a certain amount of attention has been paid to temporal milestones (i.e. chronosystem) in both the original and new bioecological systems through participants' retrospective interviews, allowing the time dimension over the year to be reviewed. Also, the close investigation of each layer in both the original and new bioecological systems as well as the key personal factors somewhat mitigated this limitation and supported the research aim of exploring the process of both Chinese and British sojourners' acculturation experiences. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner recognises the complexity of his theory and the difficulty of examining it in its totality in a single study; he states that his purpose is to provide a theoretical framework for further research rather than "establish a set of criteria that every research should strive to meet" (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p.305; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 2005).

The second limitation, which has been repeatedly mentioned in the previous chapters, is that although half of the British participants were female and the other half were male (n=18), no male Chinese participants were successfully recruited. Although gender is not a main focus of this study, a better balance of male and female participants in both groups might potentially have enhanced the investigation and strengthened the comparison between the two groups since a few findings from the British group might be related to gender differences that affected sojourners' acculturation experiences (e.g. see Section 5.2.2). However, the six personal acculturative factors (e.g. dispositions, goals, etc.) that were identified and explored based on the research findings were capable of supporting this study's exploration of how personal factors affected both groups' accluturation experiences.

The final point is not a genuine limitation of this study but more an issue related to my time management and research skills. As was mentioned in Methodology (Chapter Four), some interviewees were very kind and enthusiastic about sharing every detail of their experiences, which led to their interviews being much longer (e.g. upwards of 90 minutes, with a few being two and a half hours) than the estimated interview length (i.e. 60-90 minutes), which made my transcription work quite time-consuming. However, this also provided an opportunity for me to polish my interview skills. For example, I have learnt to effectively guide interviewees back when they are talking about irrelevant topics or repeating themselves. Although these much longer interviews led to an extra burden in my transcription work, I, as the researcher, still greatly appreciate these interviewees' kind contributions to the overall richness of my research data.

7.5 Implications and Recommendations

The findings in this study respond to the research questions and achieve its research aims of exploring and comprehensively comparing the processes of Chinese and British foreign language sojourners' acculturation experiences in SAPs. This section discusses the crucial implications and recommendations these findings have for theory and future research, practice (i.e. Chinese and British foreign language sojourners in SAPs) and policy (i.e. SAP designers at home or host HEIs).

7.5.1 Implications and recommendations for theory and future research

As was discussed in the Theoretical Contribution section (Section 7.3.4), the findings in this study echo the PPCT model in Bioecological Theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner and the extension of Bioecological Theory provided by Elliot et al.'s work (i.e. co-existing (bio)ecological systems). The key influential personal and environmental factors affecting student sojourners in SAPs have been investigated in this study, as well as the interrelations among them. This study has several implications and recommendations for further research that can adopt the Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation. First, this model is proposed based on the findings regarding Chinese English undergraduates and British learners of Chinese language and culture and their acculturation experiences in one-year SAPs in the UK and China respectively. Because it is rooted in 'mirror-image' findings that emerged from the two groups and it focuses on language learners, the model is not exclusive to only one group; the similarities in their experiences suggest that this proposed model has relevance and wider implications for various groups of SAP learners, or potentially learners in similar settings but not necessarily only within an SAP context. Further research could explore or compare student sojourners from different disciplines, cultural backgrounds, levels of education, in different destinations or locations (i.e. host country and city) and with different SAP (or other academic programme) durations.

Second, further studies could also explore the applicability of this model from a longitudinal perspective and investigate the variations of this model (i.e. the three modes). A longitudinal investigation could help understand how the intertwined personal and environmental factors in the proposed model interplay with each other at different stages/period of the sojourns. Will there be more concrete and regular changes between the three modes at different stages/periods? A better understanding of these issues could assist sojourners in better preparing themselves and taking control of their sojourns, and it could help home and host HEIs better support their students at different stages/periods. Additionally, echoing the longitudinal investigation, one interesting finding from the British group in this study is that when sojourners go back home during their sojourns (e.g. during a holiday break), there seems to be potential difficulties involved in their re-acculturation to their original bioecological systems. This is likely to remain a question about the re-acculturation experience and its potential impact on sojourners' overall acculturation experiences, as well as the interactions and interrelationships among these key factors/components in the proposed model.

Also, as has been mentioned before, the proposed model might lay valuable groundwork for future research into other student sojourners in different SAPs. This model is proposed based

on findings related to foreign language learners' acculturation experiences in the context of their target language and culture; however, it might be further extended with investigations of SAP sojourners from non-language disciplines, or perhaps those who experience poor mental health and wellbeing during short-term SAPs. Are there particular elements or other potential modes of interactions that impact their experiences? These questions might also be worth further exploration.

7.5.2 Implications and recommendations for both Chinese and British foreign language sojourners in SAPs

As 'direct producers' in their own development, both Chinese and British foreign language sojourners in SAPs should recognise their own responsibility to initiatively and proactively prepare themselves, seek or create opportunities, and engage in interactions to support their own acculturation and development during their sojourns. The findings in this study have several practical implications for both groups.

The different academic culture and campus lifestyle was found to be one of major challenges for sojourners to adjust and build their new routine in both academic and daily life. Sojourners need to more proactively seek information on and engage in available platforms and activities such as social activities and social media communication groups, which could help them get involved in the new environment more effectively. Second, the above-mentioned differences, cultural boundaries and lack of natural friendship-building opportunities have been found to make it difficult for sojourners to meet and make friends with local students/people. In this case, sojourners could be more reflective and selective when they start building connections and interactions with local students/people, seeking as starting points those with similar cultural backgrounds, common language, shared topics and senses of humour, similar lifestyles, pace, needs, hobbies or societies. Additionally, due to their distinct roles in SAPs, some sojourners might regard it as unnecessary to engage with many people and have many interactions, but many of the participants in both groups regretted this issue at the end of their SAPs. These findings remind sojourners that although the sojourn is transitory and challenging, they should encourage themselves to embrace or even create opportunities to learn and interact. As some sojourners in this study noted, some friends they made during their sojourns were not merely one-year friends but important friends for years.

Potentially, the retrospective data in this study based on some sojourners' experiences (in both groups) suggests that sojourners might experience stronger alien feelings, loneliness and stress in the middle of their sojourns (i.e. the fourth to sixth months) although they are actually more settled and used to the environment by that time. Sojourners need to be aware of this potentially challenging period and prepare themselves psychologically and socially. For example, joining some activities or societies might help distract them from loneliness, and having regular communications with family and friends in their home or host countries or other close people might help alleviate their stress, homesickness, etc.

Both Chinese and British foreign language degree students still encounter language difficulties in the context of their target language and culture. They still lack realistic knowledge and understanding of the target language and culture in real-life situations, such as the local dialect and lifestyle. Based on this finding, it is suggested that foreign language sojourners prepare themselves by looking for more comprehensive information about the target language and the culture in the host city/country from books, social media or communications with previous sojourners to generate more realistic understandings and knowledge in advance. Also, when they arrive in the new environment, proactively observing, discovering and seeking opportunities to learn and interact in real-life situations could help them gain more realistic and authentic knowledge and understandings of their target language and culture. However, it is notable that the information gained from books, social media or shared experiences from previous sojourners might be not comprehensive or realistic enough, and the findings suggest that sojourners need to be critical, reasonable and open when gathering information about host city/country or setting expectations or goals for their forthcoming sojourns. In this way, sojourners can be better prepared for the potentially interesting or challenging interactions and set reasonable goals for themselves, which might reduce the potential stress they would otherwise experience as a result of setting unrealistic expectations or goals.

Also, learning by living in the country of the target language and culture is believed to be the best way of getting realistic and authentic knowledge and understanding. Sojourners are encouraged to be proactive and open to interactions not only within campus but also with the wider environment outside campus. One major difference between the Chinese and British groups reported in this study is that members of the British group had relatively more interactions with their exosystem (e.g. local community) by renting a house in a local neighbourhood, doing a part-time job at a local company, proactively starting conversations with taxi drivers, etc. Seemingly, their various skills in applying the knowledge they had

acquired helped the British group to take advantage of the interaction opportunities offered by the new exosystem. This is particularly crucial for SAP sojourners given the limited time they have in their host country. Having meaningful interactions with the new exosystem not only offers foreign language sojourners an authentic learning experience – both in terms of language and culture – but also enables them to maximise their entire acculturation experience. This is an important implication for both groups, especially Chinese foreign language sojourners.

Additionally, the 'in-between' position held by sojourners, as suggested in this study, has important implications for both groups. It provides sojourners with valuable opportunities to reflect on their own culture and life as well as to learn a new and different culture and life from the people in the host country. If they actively engage in broader interactions in the new environment, communicate and share authentic information about their home culture with local people, they can contribute to building a bridge to link their home and host cultures; both they and the local people would benefit from these interactions. For example, sojourners could go to local museums and communicate with local people they meet there, discussing or introducing similar exhibits to them. In that way, both the sojourners and the local people may benefit. Nevertheless, the 'in-between' position could also have a negative influence on sojourners' mental health and psychological wellbeing. Sojourners might experience greater stress and loneliness when they feel 'detached' from both their home and host environments. The findings suggest that sojourners can and should positively utilise their in-between position, be brave and maintain a positive and open attitude during the sojourn, and most essentially, they need to proactively seek and learn knowledge and skills that might be helpful for their life during the sojourns.

New insights from this study support foreign language sojourners in SAPs undergoing the necessary preparation and seeking information or opportunities for interactions to personalise their own enjoyable, beneficial, meaningful and healthy experiences during their sojourns. Arguably, these findings and recommendations might also have potential implications beyond the SAP context, being at least partly useful to groups like Chinese and British foreign language degree students and language learners of other languages or levels, from other countries, or in other short-term sojourns.

7.5.3 Implications and recommendations for home and host HEIs

As discussed in Chapter One, SAPs are expected to provide authentic, effective and fruitful paths for both Chinese and British foreign language sojourners to learn, interact and develop in the context of their target languages and cultures. Better knowledge and skills that could potentially strengthen their employability in worldwide arenas also are the expected benefits of these exchanges for students, while the home and host HEIs are expected to benefit from increased international cooperation. The findings have specific implications for home and host HEIs in two major aspects: language education (primarily at home HEIs) and SAP design (including pre-departure preparation and training). Arguably, the proposed Person-Environment Interaction Model of Acculturation could potentially facilitate improvement in these two aspects and help sojourners be better prepared.

Starting with language education at home HEIs, the foreign language learners in both groups found their acculturation in the country of their target language and culture to be challenging because they lacked realistic and practical language and culture knowledge that could be applied in daily real-life situations. Although gaining more authentic understanding, knowledge and skills regarding the target languages and cultures is one of the key aims in this cross-cultural learning opportunity, arguably, language degree programmes at home HEIs also need to reflect and consider necessary adjustments to their course content and teaching materials in language education. Some textbook-based information might be outdated and ineffective in real-life situations. Thus, more deliberate consideration of the essential knowledge and skills taught in the degree programmes is needed, focusing on material that can realistically equip language degree students to better adjust and develop in the country of their target language and culture. For foreign language degree students, key professional knowledge and skills would not only support their acculturation experiences more effectively (e.g. allow them to have more meaningful person-directed interactions), but also differentiate them from non-language degree students in their future careers.

A key issue that emerged from the findings regarding SAP design in both home and host HEIs is that sojourners in both groups needed a more supportive environment and system; since their distinct roles in SAPs made them relatively more ‘invisible’ than degree students, their needs and encountered difficulties were sometimes neglected. As has been mentioned, having sojourners on the same campus as local students does not guarantee effective interactions, so sojourners still need meaningful environment-directed interactions (e.g. opportunities and helpful platforms to build connections and interactions with local students/people) so that they can have more mutually beneficial learning and interaction opportunities. Thus, host HEIs should pay more attention to facilitating and providing

helpful opportunities and platforms both within and outside campus (i.e. in each possible subsystem identified in the proposed model), built based on cultural background, shared topics, similar needs or hobbies (e.g. university singing competitions, city tours, charity activities with the local community, etc.). Also, by providing a 'mirror-image' investigation of both Chinese and British cohorts' SAP experiences, this study's findings provide meaningful mutual learning and understanding implications for Chinese and British HEIs (within/without a partnership) so that they could improve SAP designs and offer better support for student sojourners. For instance, one major difference between Chinese and British groups' experiences was that they had completely different SAP designs at their host HEIs in terms of classes, accommodation and campus activities. Both groups reported that their either mixed or unmixed designs were both beneficial and challenging. This study does not aim to judge which design is better since there is no standard for all SAPs, but the findings suggest that host HEIs need to engage in more consideration and discussion of these two – or maybe there are more than two – different designs and reflect on their aims of the design they decide to provide. This is vital because certain SAP designs may provide specific settings for the sojourners in their new microsystems and directly influence the learning environment and on-campus activities and life sojourners have. Different SAP designs could lead to different experiences or even different learning outcomes. Therefore, the findings of this study highlight the importance of deliberate SAP designs at both home and host HEIs, including pre-departure preparation and training. Essential transferable skills (e.g. problem-solving, reflexivity, effective communication with people from multicultural backgrounds) acquired at home or host HEIs could play a meaningful role in SAP sojourners' study abroad experiences; in turn, they could also be strengthened by the acculturation experiences and contribute to sojourners' degree education at home HEIs, future education or career in worldwide arenas. Potentially, with the help of the proposed model in pre-departure preparation and training sessions, a clearer reflection on their own dispositions or whether their goals for the sojourns are reasonable might directly impact the specific pathways or starting points they choose for their sojourns.

Additionally, not only are student sojourners key players in SAPs, but so are the staff members at both the home and host HEIs, as they form the sojourners' immediate environment. Sending students abroad or having student sojourners on campus could present challenges, but also important opportunities for both home and host staff members to understand, learn and practice more effective intercultural teaching through their daily interactions with student sojourners, likely learning new knowledge and skills in the process. Both groups reported that staff members who better understand the needs of international

students facilitated them to learn more useful and practical knowledge or even helped them when they encountered difficulties, while those staff members who had less intercultural training would, even unconsciously, bring extra stress and challenges to the sojourners. For example, they might require sojourners to perform equally well as their local peers or could not speak the language (e.g. English) to have proper communications with the sojourners; or ignore the large geographic distance and time difference between China and the UK and treat their students similarly to those who are still in Europe or Asia (e.g. set deadlines that overlap with exam time or deadlines at home/host HEIs). Also, although students are physically in another country, they still need support from their home HEIs during their sojourns. Regular check-ins or more practical support resources could be beneficial to their mental health and psychological wellbeing, and to their adjustment in the unfamiliar environment. This study suggests that when previous sojourners were invited by universities to share their experiences in pre-departure meetings, they were likely to highlight positive aspects while downplaying or ignoring the challenging aspects. This partially shared experience might cause future sojourners to have unrealistic expectations and goals for their forthcoming experiences and negatively influence their adjustment and wellbeing. Home HEIs could consider facilitating or encouraging groups for previous and future sojourners to communicate both in public and private so that they can have a fairer and more open information exchange. Another issue noted by both the Chinese and British sojourners in this study was that their home HEIs did not have any specific requirements for their exam results or that they merely required a pass. This design might demotivate a few sojourners, who may become lazy regarding their studies since there is no discipline for their academic achievement. The findings suggest that home HEIs need to give careful consideration to this design to better facilitate students in SAPs gaining more academic benefits. Thus, proper intercultural training for both academic and administrative staff members at home and host HEIs is crucial for better understanding and support for SAP sojourners. Arguably, the better the support systems and practices are that home/host HEIs provide, the more reliable SAPs and more meaningful environment-directed interactions student sojourners could have, and the better benefits they could gain. Ultimately, this means the exchange partnerships and activities would be more attractive and provide more meaningful international cooperation.

The last implication for both home and host HEIs is related to student sojourners' psychological well-being during sojourns. Both the Chinese and British sojourners in this study raised experiences of serious temporal circumstances such as the loss of a family member or serious mental health and psychological wellbeing issues. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic is sweeping across the globe while I am writing this thesis. Although this

pandemic had no impact on the SAP experiences of my participants in this study because it broke out after their respective SAPs, it undoubtedly had a strong impact on those who were in the middle of their SAPs and on future SAP sojourners, bringing up, for example, health and safety issues, racist attacks, strong anxiety or other serious wellbeing issues. These influential circumstances in chronosystems could have strong negative impacts upon sojourners' experiences and require both their home and host HEIs to provide effective support for them.

7.6 Personal Reflections and Some Final Thoughts

This final section, not surprisingly, deals with my reflections and encapsulates my thoughts and feelings about this surreal research journey. Singlehandedly conducting participant recruitment and fieldwork in eleven cities across two countries and making 33 visits to fourteen sojourners' host universities and cities, as well as transcribing and coding data, have made this journey quite challenging, sometimes overwhelming, for me. However, it has been so interesting and rewarding to gain a deeper understanding of both Chinese and British sojourners' experiences and different SAPs in various universities, cities and countries. Looking back to the beginning of my doctoral journey, I encountered great difficulties in recruiting participants, which made this proposed study felt as if it was nearly over even before I had started. However, with my principal supervisor's encouragement and support, I made my best endeavours to search for relevant information, making dozens of phone calls, sending dozens or perhaps hundreds of emails, and visiting seven cities in both China and the UK to recruit my participants. During this period, I frequently felt lost and powerless. However, I have learnt from this experience to prepare well with a plan B, C and even D. I met different people, some of whom were very kind and willing to help even though we did not know each other, and some others who were indifferent or even a bit rude to me. The importance of being positive, confident and persistent was another important lesson for me, especially when encountering unanticipated challenges, no matter how terribly difficult they were or how badly they impacted on me. Every time I found it difficult or even struggled to continue, this lesson reminded me to keep my original intention in mind, and that curiosity, passion and perseverance are the best companions for research, and maybe life. All my pains and efforts were paid back. After the interviews, many interviewees thanked me for conducting this study, trying to bring this 'transparent' cohort of 'in-between sojourners' and their needs, voices and experiences to people's attention. They also appreciated the valuable opportunities enabled by my study for them to engage in deeper introspection on

their one-year experiences; many omitted bits and pieces incidentally emerged from the participants' memories under the guidance of the interview. I am very delighted that this study could be a mutually beneficial opportunity for both the researcher and participants.

Although my proposed model was not generated from the experiences of PhD students like me, my own life and experience of the doctoral research journey sometimes, surprisingly, echoed the person-environment interactions described in my study. Sometimes I encountered different people or circumstances, pleasant or unpleasant (from my environment) that greatly impacted my understanding or emotions, learning and interaction opportunities, while sometimes my own personal factors (e.g. passion as a stimulus to achieve goals) had a strong impact on this journey; especially when I suffered and felt reluctant to continue my research, my 'goals' pushed me to keep going. In turn, I have made friends with some people with whom I had never expected a friendship, and I have accomplished many targets which were so challenging that I nearly gave up at a particular point. In the end, I can confidently say that I have learnt and gained more than I wished and expected before I started this journey. However, it is all these interactions and experiences, people and circumstances in my own environment, as well as all the parts of myself that contributed to my development and made me who I am now. I have also gained a deeper understanding of myself, as a Chinese person, an international student, a PhD candidate, a future researcher and/or teacher, and as a human who is simultaneously an important and insignificant part of the planet.

The British participant Jack gave a lovely quote in his interview which I would like to borrow to conclude this thesis:

> *…to [an] extent, we share the same experience, but the main differences…depend on a lot of factors, like where you go…like how you view other cultures as well…a lot of things along…lines which make up who you are as a person that [are] gonna affect how you view [and experience] your year abroad.* (Jack_M_British)

I hope this study helps dissect the invisible liquid process of both Chinese and British foreign language learners' acculturation experiences in SAPs, as well as providing valuable and meaningful insight for sojourners to better personalise and control their own acculturation experiences, and for both home and host HEIs to provide better support for their students.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Themes

1. Motivation and reasons for decision to learn English or Chinese as a major area of study for an undergraduate degree
2. Knowledge and skills of the target language and culture before, during and after participation in the Study Abroad Programmes
3. Perceptions of the host language and culture before, during and after their experience of studying and living abroad
4. Factors, both contributors and constraints, influencing their intercultural experience, particularly language development and cultural learning before, during and after participation in the Study Abroad Programmes

Appendix 2: Interview Questions and Vignettes (English and Chinese versions)

1. Could you tell me about your
   - Age
   - degree programme
   - previous experience of learning Chinese
   - previous study or living abroad experience
   - future study or career plans

2. Could you tell me more about your
   - decision to study Chinese language and culture for an undergraduate degree
   - decision to participate in a one-year study abroad programme in China

3. With respect to your experience, using a word or a phrase, can you think of a metaphor, which describes your year abroad experience? Please discuss your overall impression.

Now, I'd like to present you with some stories followed by questions:

4. (Vignette)

   Andy, a Year Abroad British student confides to his friend. He says: "The classes, campus life, academic activities, as well as living styles and the whole environment are just so different! It's not what I thought it would be at all, I felt quite disappointed. I felt discouraged to make Chinese friends and communicate with local Chinese. I just want to stay with my British friends and go back home as soon as possible."
   - What do you think of Andy's experience? Do you have any suggestions for him?
   - What were your initial expectations for the year abroad study experience? Have you achieved them?

5. (Vignette)

   Joanna has just completed her Year Abroad experience in China. On reflection, she says: "Honestly, to study and to live in a foreign country is not an easy bite for me, even though I'm interested in the host language and culture and I've been learning

them for some time. I appreciate getting a lot of help since I encountered a lot of challenges. At the same time, I also feel that I benefited a lot from this experience."

- In relation to Joanna's reflection, could you tell me more about your experience in the host country, i.e. China. What was it like for you?

6. (Vignette)

   Helen, another Year Abroad student in China, says: "after coming to China, I intentionally used phrases the way local people used them, did things their way and tried to make myself speak and act more Chinese rather than merely listening, seeing, and learning a new language. As a result, at the end of the Year Abroad programme, I felt that I had become more like the Chinese."

   - Compared to Helen's experience, what did you do in terms of adjustment to studying and living in China?

7. (Vignette)

   Harry, who has just completed his Year Abroad in China, says: "When I was learning Chinese in the UK, I was just a foreign language learner, but when I came to China, I felt I was becoming a bridge or a mediator between these two cultures when I started interacting with local people."

   - How would you relate to Harry's perception after also being in China for a year?

8. On reflection, how do you think your study abroad experience in China has influenced you in general (e.g. personalities, attitudes)?

   - Are there other remarkable influences in any aspects of your future plan?

9. Could you tell me about a _____ study abroad experience that made a strong impression on you? Please tell me more about it.

   - surprising
   - annoying
   - amusing
   - confusing

10. - What do you consider to be the most outstanding academic differences between your home and host country?

- What do you consider to be the most outstanding sociocultural differences between your home and host country?

11. After the one-year Study Abroad experience, could you give a significant piece of advice for
    - future British learners of Chinese Studies in a Study Abroad Programme in China
    - both teaching and supportive study abroad programme staff team in the UK, and the staff team in China

12. Finally, are there any points that you would like to raise in connection with my interview focus? Likewise, are there any questions that you would like to ask about my research?

1. 请你告诉我你的
    - 年龄
    - 本科专业课程
    - 之前学习英语的经历
    - 曾经在海外学习或生活的经历
    - 未来的学习或职业规划

2. 请你聊一下为什么你会
    - 决定选择英语（语言及文化）作为你的本科专业
    - 决定参加到英国的一年海外学习交流项目

3. 根据你这一年的经历，你能否用一个词或者短语来比喻形容你这一年在英国学习的经历？请你聊一下你的整体印象。

4. （故事一）
   小明是一个参加了一年海外学习交流项目的中国学生，他跟他的朋友吐槽说：“这里上课也好，校园生活，学术活动也好，还有生活方式，甚至整个环境都太不一样了！这根本不是我以为的那样，我太失望了。我完全提不起兴致去结交英国朋友或者跟英国本地人交流。我就想跟中国人呆在一起然后尽早回家。”
    - 你对小明的经历有什么看法？你对他有什么建议吗？
    - 你最初对于这次一年海外学习交流经历的期望是什么？你觉得它们都实现了吗？

5. （故事二）
   小佳刚刚结束她在英国的一年海外学习交流，回想起这一年，她说：“讲真，即使我很喜欢英语和英国文化，而且我学习了很长时间，但是在海外学习和生活对于我来说真的不算一件很容易的事。这一年我遇到了不少困难和挑战，

但是我很感激我得到的所有的帮助，而且，我真的觉得我从这一年的经历中得到了不少收获。”

- 跟小佳的回顾相比，你能详细聊聊你这一年在你的目的语国家（也就是英国）的经历吗？

6. （故事三）
小晶是另外一个在英国参加一年海外学习交流项目的同学，她说：“到英国之后，我不想自己仅仅只是来听，来看，来学习一门外语，而是有意识地去像本地人那样说话用词，学他们的行为方式，想要努力让自己言行举止都更像个英国人。所以，在这一年海外学习交流项目结束的时候，我觉得自己好像变得更像个英国人了。”
   - 跟小晶的经历相比，为了适应在英国的学习和生活，你又做了哪些，经历了哪些呢？

7. （故事四）
小凯是另外一位刚结束在英国一年学习交流生活的中国同学。他说：“我之前在国内学英语的时候，我觉得我仅仅只是一个语言学习者。但是当我到了英国之后，在跟这里的本地人交流的过程中，我开始觉得自己似乎变成了两种不同文化之间的桥梁，或者说是传递者，协调者。”
   - 同样在英国学习生活了一年的你对小凯的想法有什么看法呢？

8. 回顾一下你这一年的经历，总体来说，你觉得在英国学习生活这一年对你有哪些影响呢？（例如：性格方面，态度方面）
   - 或者对你未来的规划有产生什么重大影响吗？

9. 在这一年中，是否有让你印象最为深刻的令你_____的经历呢？请你详细聊一聊。
   - 惊讶的
   - 烦恼的
   - 有趣的
   - 困扰的

10. - 你觉得英国和中国学术方面最大的不同是什么呢？
   - 社会文化方面最大的不同又是什么呢？

11. 通过这一年在英国学习生活的经历，你能否给_____一条你认为最重要的建议？
   - 未来可能会参加来英国学习交流项目的英语专业的中国同学
   - 在中国的专业或交流项目的教职员工，以及在英国的专业或交流项目的教职员工

12. 最后，还有什么我们没有聊到但是你很愿意分享的经历或想法吗？
或者，关于我这项研究课题你有什么问题吗？

Appendix 3: Demographics for Pilot Study

NO.	PSEUDONYMS	NATIONALITY	GENDER	YEAR OF STUDY	DEGREE PROGRAMME	LENGTH OF STAY	HOME UNIVERSITY	HOST UNIVERSITY
1	YZ	Chinese	Female	Year 3	BA in English	One academic term	C-b	B-h
2	NC	Chinese	Female	Year 3	BA in English	One academic term	C-b	B-h
3	YH	Chinese	Male	Year 3	BA in English	One academic term	C-g	B-f
4	HK	British	Male	Year 3	BA in Chinese Studies	One academic year	B-b	C-m (Taiwan)
5	AB	British	Female	Year 3	BA in Chinese Studies	One academic year	B-b	C-m (Taiwan)
6	EG	British	Female	Year 3	BA in Chinese Studies	One academic year	B-b	C-m (Taiwan)

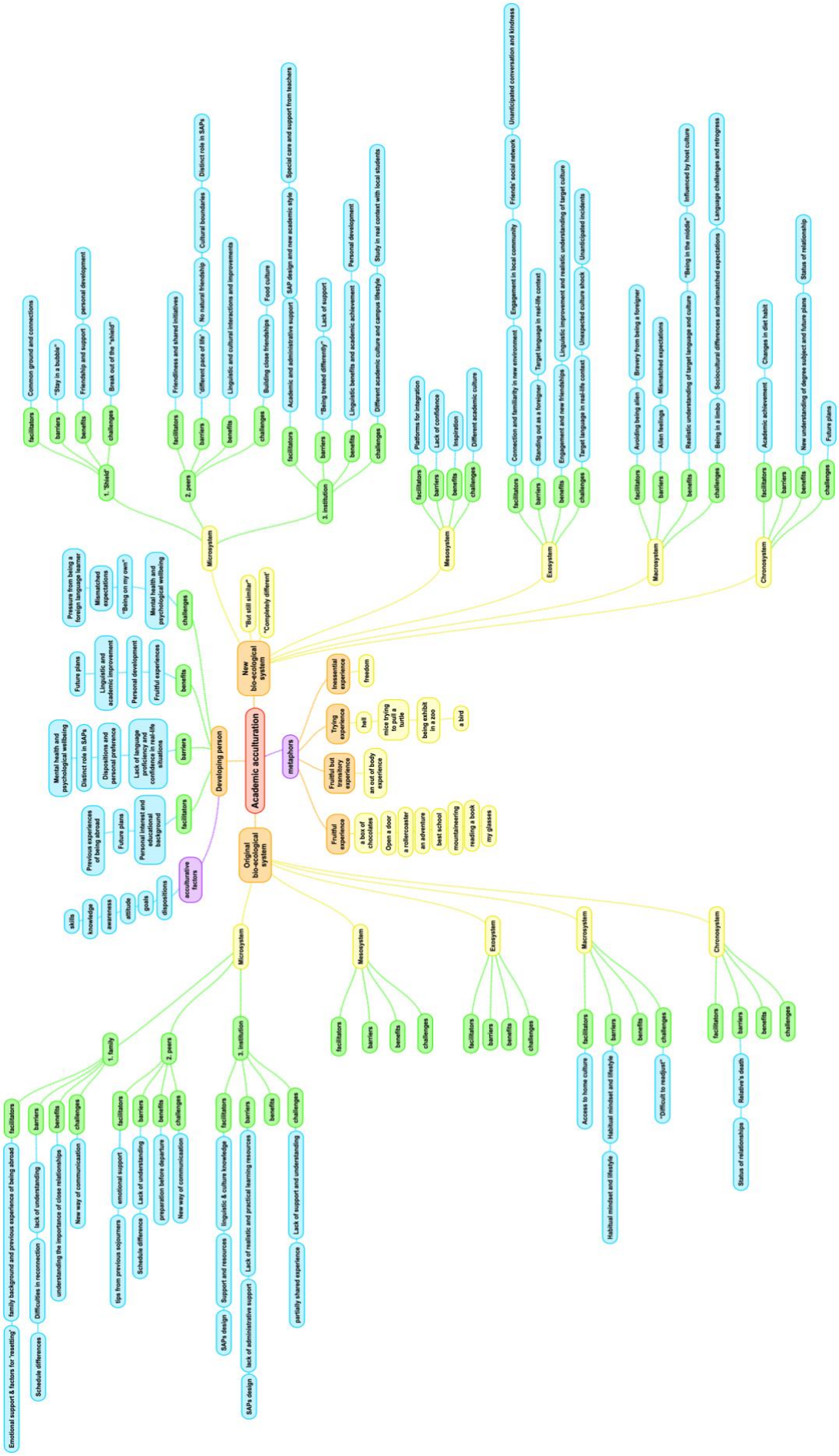
Appendix 4: Demographics for Main Study

NO.	PSEUDONYMS	NATIONALITY	GENDER	AGE RANGE	YEAR OF STUDY	DEGREE PROGRAMME	LENGTH OF STAY	HOME UNIVERSITY	HOST UNIVERSITY	NOTES	FUNDING/SAP
1	Mu	Chinese	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in English	One academic year	C-a	B-a		University Partnership Funded (tuition fee)
2	Ting	Chinese	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in English	One academic year	C-a	B-a		University Partnership Funded (tuition fee)
3	Zai	Chinese	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in English	One academic year	C-a	B-a		University Partnership Funded (tuition fee)
4	Wei	Chinese	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in English	One academic year	C-a	B-a		University Partnership Funded (tuition fee)
5	Mao	Chinese	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in Business English	One academic year	C-a	B-a		University Partnership Funded (tuition fee)
6	Xing	Chinese	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in Business English	One academic year	C-a	B-b		Third-party education institution; Self-funded
7	Qiang	Chinese	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in English	One academic year	C-b	B-b		CSC Funded (living costs)
8	Zan	Chinese	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in English	One academic year	C-c	B-c		University Partnership Funded (tuition fee)
9	Kang	Chinese	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in English	One academic year	C-c	B-c		University Partnership Funded (tuition fee)
10	Yu	Chinese	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in English	One academic year	C-d	B-d		University Partnership Self-funded
11	Yuan	Chinese	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in English	One academic year	C-e	B-e		CSC Funded (living costs)
12	Yang	Chinese	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in English	One academic year	C-e	B-e		CSC Funded (living costs)
13	Jin	Chinese	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in English	One academic year	C-f	B-f		Third-party education institution; Self-funded
14	Hu	Chinese	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in English	One academic year	C-g	B-f		Third-party education institution; Self-funded
15	Yan	Chinese	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in English	One academic year	C-b	B-g	She did YA from January 2017 to December 2017, instead of September 2017 to June 2018 as others because of the uncoordinated programme arrangement at her home university	CSC Funded (living costs)

NO.	PSEUDONYMS	NATIONALITY	GENDER	AGE RANGE	YEAR OF STUDY	DEGREE PROGRAMME	LENGTH OF STAY	HOME UNIVERSITY	HOST UNIVERSITY	NOTES	FUNDING/SAP
16	Kate	British	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in Chinese Studies	One academic term	B-b	C-b	She abandoned from one-year abroad (RA)	RA
										after an academic term because of mental health and psychological wellbeing issue	(discounted tuition fee; self-funded living cost)
17	Andy	British	Male	20-23	Year 3	BA in Modern Languages and Business Management - Chinese	One academic year	B-b	C-h		RA
18	Mary	British	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in Chinese Studies	One academic year	B-c	C-h		YA (discounted tuition fee; self-funded living cost)
19	Nala	British	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in Chinese Studies	One academic year	B-c	C-h		YA
20	Louis	British	Male	20-23	Year 3	BA in Chinese Studies	One academic year	B-c	C-h		YA
21	Gabrielle	British	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in Chinese Studies	One academic year	B-c	C-h		YA
22	Cara	Cypriot	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in Chinese Studies	One academic year	B-b	C-i		RA
23	Sally	British	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in Chinese and International Relations	One academic year	B-h	C-j	This interview was conducted via WeChat video call because the participant forgot her interview schedule and we didn't manage to find a date/time suitable for both of interviewee and interviewer.	YA
24	Eva	British	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in Chinese Studies	One academic year	B-b	C-j		RA

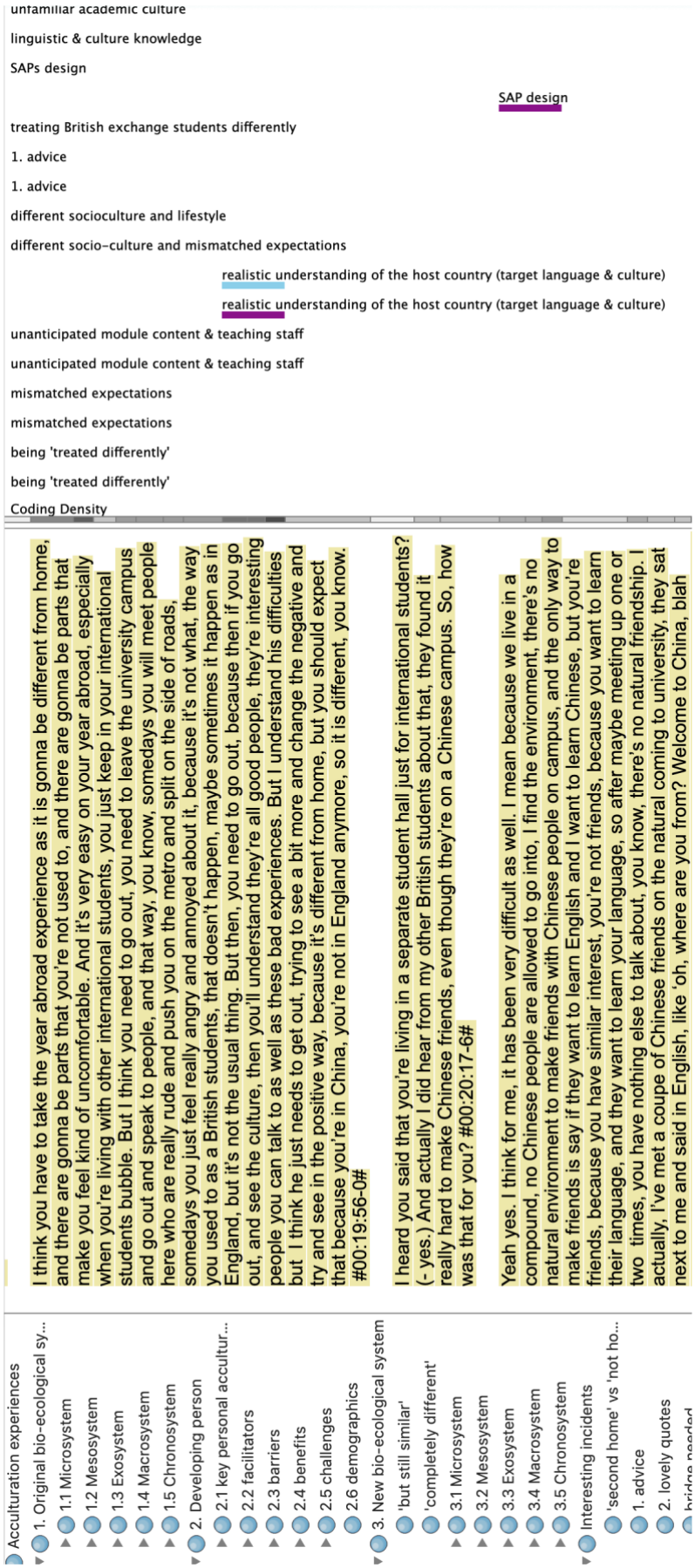
NO.	PSEUDONYMS	NATIONALITY	GENDER	AGE RANGE	YEAR OF STUDY	DEGREE PROGRAMME	LENGTH OF STAY	HOME UNIVERSITY	HOST UNIVERSITY	NOTES	FUNDING/SAP
25	Harry	British	Male	20-23	Year 3	BA in Chinese Studies	One academic year	B-c	C-k		YA
26	Quinn	British (Chinese immigrant)	Male	20-23	Year 3	BA in Chinese Studies	One academic year	B-b	C-j		RA
27	Mike	British	Male	20-23	Year 3	BA in Chinese and French	One academic year	B-h	C-j		YA
28	Aaron	British	Male	20-23	Year 3	BA in Chinese and French	One academic year	B-h	C-j		YA
29	Jack	British	Male	20-23	Year 3	BA in Chinese Studies	One academic year	B-c	C-j		YA
30	Karl	British	Male	20-23	Year 3	BA in Chinese Studies	One academic year	B-c	C-c		YA
31	Sarah	British	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in Chinese and Spanish	One academic year	B-f	C-l		YA
32	Scott	British	Male	20-23	Year 3	BA in Chinese and Economics	One academic year	B-f	C-l		YA
33	Caroline	British	Female	20-23	Year 3	BA in Chinese Studies	One academic year	B-b	C-l		RA

Appendix 5: Data Analysis – Themes and Subthemes (mind-map)

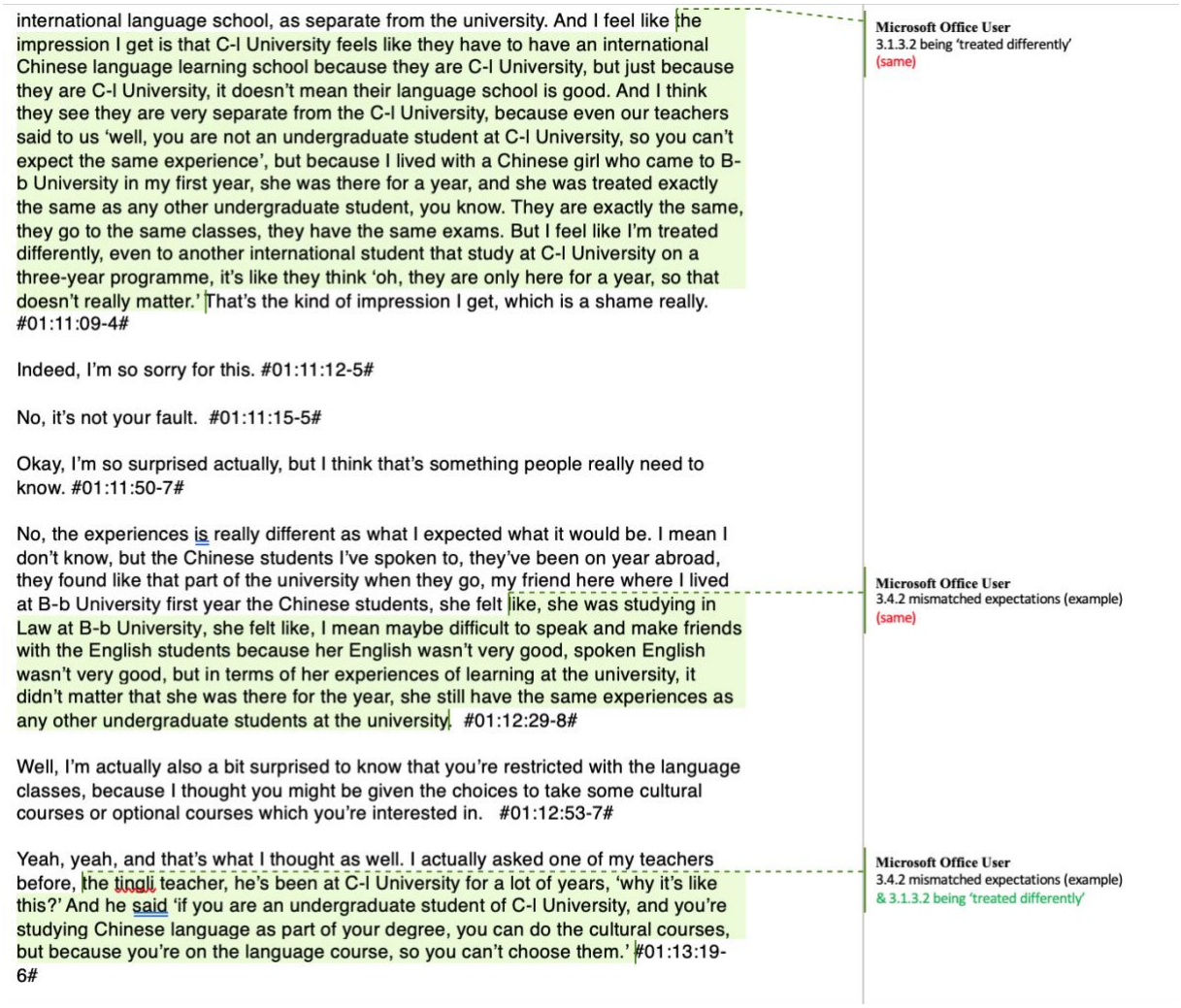


Appendix 6: Example of Data Analysis Using NVivo

(Repeated codes on right column are from both 1st and 2nd rounds of coding)



Appendix 7: Coding Verification (Cross-checking)



Appendix 8: Participant Information Sheet

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

Participant Information Sheet

Foreign Language Learners in Chinese and British Study Abroad Programmes: A Comparative Study

Researcher: Rui He ·

Supervisors: Dr Dely Elliot - Dely.Elliot@glasgow.ac.uk & Dr Catherine Fagan - Catherine.Fagan@glasgow.ac.uk

You are being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

Purpose of the study

Due to the rapid development of globalisation, a one-term abroad or a one-year abroad programme is now embedded in Foreign Studies programmes in many universities all over the world. These experiences in the host country with the target language and culture are expected to generate greater influences upon foreign studies major students in many different ways, including their perceptions of the host country's language and culture, their own identities, their intercultural interaction and language learning processes. Therefore, this study aims to investigate and compare the 'mirror-image' experiences of the two groups of foreign language major students (English language learners in China who come to the UK and British learners of Chinese Studies who go to China) as part of the one-year Study Abroad Programmes (or at least one term experience). Understanding this dimension will contribute towards improving academic acculturation and pedagogy in Chinese and British higher education institutions, as well as assisting students with their potential requirements for intercultural support before, during and after their study abroad experience.

Research involvement

I am inviting you to participate in this study because you are an undergraduate student in Foreign Studies (English or Chinese) and are taking a Study Abroad Programme, which enables you to study your target language and culture for a year (or at least one term) in either China or the UK. Your participation entails taking part in semi-structured interviews. Interviews will last a maximum of one hour and will be audio-recorded.

Voluntary participation

Please note that participation in this study is completely voluntary and all your questions will be answered beforehand. Please note that you may refuse to answer any questions if you choose not to. Even after deciding to participate, you are still free to withdraw at any time without prejudice (e.g. to your studies or well-being) and without giving a reason. This also includes withdrawing any data previously supplied.

Strict confidentiality

All information obtained from you as a research participant during the study will be carefully safeguarded. Any personal information or identifiers such as names will be replaced by a pseudonym of your own choice. Other pertinent information such as the name of the Chinese/British University where you studied before or for your Study Abroad Programme, which might reveal your identity or university will be concealed through

the use of 'a central Chinese University', 'an ancient British University', etc.. All paper files will be stored securely in a locked cabinet and electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer. Data will be kept confidential where necessary, especially in archiving, sharing and re-using data. Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to except if evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is revealed. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.*

Use of data

Data collected will be used for analysis to address the research questions of this comparative study. Research findings will be presented in a PhD thesis, and possibly in various publications, e.g. journal articles, book chapters, conference papers or presentations, or postgraduate research seminars. Written summary of results, thesis, article, conference papers, posters and other publications arising from the data collected will be made available to participants if requested. Data and identifiers will be kept secure in locked cabinet, access to computer files to be available by password only during the research. Personally-identifiable data and original audio files will be permanently deleted from computers and all hard copies will be shredded at the end of the project. All de-identified research data will be held for 10 years in compliance with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research, to enable further publication and possible comparison with data that might be accrued in similar/related areas over the years.

Ethic review and further contact details

This project has been approved by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. For any queries or if you would like to get further information about the outcome of this research, please contact Rui He - or Dr Dely Elliot, principal supervisor for this research project - Dely.Elliot@glasgow.ac.uk.

Additionally, should you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research project, please contact Dr Muir Houston, College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer - Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

*Confidentiality will be respected unless there are compelling and legitimate reasons for this to be breached. If this proves to be the case, we will inform you of any decisions that might limit confidentiality.

Appendix 9: Consent Form

University of Glasgow
College of Social Sciences

Consent Form

Title of the Project:

Foreign Language Learners in Chinese and British Study Abroad Programmes: A Comparative Study

Name of Researcher: Rui He **Supervisors: Dr Dely Elliot & Dr Catherine Fagan**

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I consent / do not consent (delete as applicable) to interviews being audio-recorded.

4. I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym in the thesis or publications arising from the research.

5. I agree to waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project in relation to the publishing, archiving and sharing of qualitative data.
   (I acknowledge that research data will be held for 10 years in accordance to the University Code of Good Practice in Research - http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/postgraduateresearch/pgrcodeofpractice/)

6. I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date