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The Impact of Intercultural Engagement on Cultural Understanding Through Activities Offered in Confucius Institutes in Britain

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Abstract

The rapid development of the Chinese economy has strongly coincided with Chinese cultural expansion around the world in the last decade. The most significant aspect of China's cultural promotion is the establishment of the Confucius Institute (CI) overseas by Hanban (Confucius Institute headquarters) of the Ministry of Education in 2004, which is mainly responsible for Chinese language and cultural exchange activities. As overseas organisations funded by the Chinese government, Confucius Institutes (CIs) have seemingly received continuous suspicious views and criticisms particularly in political studies in the West. However, although concerns about CIs have been raised in the West for a number of years now, there arguably remains a lack of related evidence, especially given the dearth of empirical studies that examine what really happens in the day-to-day life of CIs.

Whereas a political discussion of CIs cannot be ignored in studies of CIs, there is arguably also a need to adopt a broader view to examine CIs so as to better understand the actual activities and operations of CIs. By focusing on intercultural engagement through the activities offered by CIs in Britain, this study represents a first attempt to provide a more comprehensive picture of the activity of the CIs in Britain. To address its three research questions, the study employed a mixed-methods approach comprising: a) eighty-two online surveys with activity participants; and b) thirty semi-structured interviews with activity participants and Chinese staff. By comparing the intercultural experiences between activity participants and Chinese staff, potential areas of concordance and discordance of their experience were examined. By investigating the CI activities from a critical intercultural communication perspective, the complex interplay of the power struggles from the macro context were explored to explain varying reasons behind e.g. selection of CI activities. By acknowledging the capacity of self-problematisation, self-transcendence and pluralisation with the critical cosmopolitan perspective from a personal and interpersonal level, this study has examined the self-transformational moments and individual levels of cosmopolitan competence from the activity participants and Chinese staff in the process of critically and reflectively understanding of Self, Other and World. In

the end, my study proposes a possible route to cosmopolitan competence through intercultural engagement in Confucius Institutes model. This model is intended to inspire the creation of similar practical models in future studies in other contexts in the field of intercultural communication.

This study presents a significant shift from the emphasis of prior research on political discussion of CI studies to the intercultural communication studies of CIs. In my research, the political dimension is regarded as one of many possible variables from the macro context, rather than as the starting point in my research. Meanwhile, this study focuses on person-to-person level communication and no longer views activity participants and Chinese staff as two distinct groups, but as comprising independent individuals. This shift, in turn, avoids methodological nationalism and moves to a broader paradigm, i.e. methodological cosmopolitanism.

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List of Abbreviations

CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CBBC	China-Britain Business Council
CC/CCs	Confucius Classroom/Confucius Classrooms
CI/CIs	Confucius Institute/Confucius Institutes
CI1 - CI28	Confucius Institute 1 – 28 (The 28 CIs in Britain)
CSSA	Chinese Students and Scholars Association
FSI	Foreign Service Institute
Hanban	Confucius Institute headquarters
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HSK	Chinese Proficiency Test (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi)
IOE	Institute of Education of University College London
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
IR	International Relations
P1 – P13	Interviewed activity participants 1 – 13
S1 – S17	Interviewed Chinese staff 1 – 17
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UCLan	University of Central Lancashire
Uni.1 - 28	University 1 – 28 (The 28 corresponding British universities)
UWTSD	University of Wales Trinity Saint David
YCT	Youth Chinese Test

Glossary

Alipay: Alipay is a very popular mobile and online payment platforms in China, established in Hangzhou, China in February 2004 by Alibaba Group, whose founder is Jack Ma.

Chinese bronze: The Chines bronzes are regarded as some of the most important pieces of ancient Chinese art.

Chinese chess: It (or Elephant chess) is a strategy board game for two players. It is one of the most popular board games in China.

Chinese diabolo: It is a juggling or circus prop consisting of an axle and two cups (hourglass/egg timer shaped) or discs derived from the Chinese yo-yo. This object is spun using a string attached to two hand sticks.

Chinese embroidery: Chinese embroidery has a long history going back to the Neolithic age. Due to the quality of the silk fibre, most Chinese fine embroideries are made of silk.

Chinese hot pot: It also known as soup-food or steamboat. It is a cooking method that originated in China, prepared with a simmering pot of soup stock at the dining table and contains a variety of Chinese ingredients.

Chinese knot: It is a decorative handcraft art that began as a form of Chinese folk art in the Tang and Song dynasty (960–1279 CE) in China. This art is also called "Chinese traditional decorative knots".

Chinese New Year festival: It also called Spring Festival or Lunar New year. It is the festival that celebrates the beginning of a new year on the traditional lunisolar Chinese calendar.

Chinese opera: Also called Xiqu in Chinese, is a form of musical theatre in China with roots going back to the early periods in China. In the 20th century the Peking opera emerged in popularity and has come to be known as the "national theatre" of China.

Chinese paper cutting: One of the oldest and the most popular folk arts in China. Usually, the artworks are made of red paper, as red is associated with festivities and happiness in Chinese culture but other colours are also used.

Chinese shuttlecock: Also called Jianzi in Chinese, is a traditional Chinese national sport in which players aim to keep a heavily weighted shuttlecock in the air by using their bodies, apart from the hands.

Chinese tea ceremony: It refers to the ceremony of how Chinese tea is prepared in some formal occasions, such as weddings.

Chinese traditional medicine: Also called Oriental medicine. Traditional Chinese medicine includes acupuncture, diet, herbal therapy, meditation, physical exercise and massage.

Chinese waist drum: Also called Yaogu in Chinese, is a medium-sized, traditional Chinese drum. It is used as part of a number of traditional customs and celebrations, including Chinese New Year and Lantern Festival.

Chinese zodiac: It is a classification scheme based on the lunar calendar that assigns an animal and its reputed attributes to each year in a repeating twelve-year cycle.

Confucius: Also called Kong Fuzi (551-479 BCE) in Chinese, was a Chinese philosopher, poet and politician of the Spring and Autumn period, who was traditionally considered the paragon of Chinese sages.

Dragon-boat festival: It is a traditional Chinese holiday which occurs on the fifth day of the fifth month of the Chinese lunar calendar.

Dragon and lion dance: It is a form of traditional dance in Chinese culture and other Asian countries, in which performers mimic dragon and lion's movements in the dragon and lion costume. It is intended to bring luck and prosperity to people.

Dragon boat race: It is a traditional competition sport activity in China. The boats are generally rigged with decorative Chinese dragon heads and tails.

Health Qigong: It is a system of coordinated body-posture and movement, breathing, and meditation used for the purposes of health, spirituality, and martial-arts training in China.

Kung fu: It refers to the Chinese martial arts also called Wushu or Quanfa.

Mah-jong: It is a tile-based game that was developed in the 19th century in China and has spread throughout the world since the early 20th century. It is commonly played by four players.

Mid-autumn festival: It also known as the Moon Festival or Mooncake Festival, a traditional festival celebrated in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and Vietnam, as well as by overseas Chinese people. The festival is held on the 15th day of the 8th month of the Chinese lunar calendar with a full moon at night.

Mooncake: A special Chinese bakery product traditionally eaten during the Mid-autumn festival.

Monkey King: Also known as Sun Wukong in Chinese, is a legendary mythical figure best known as one of the main characters in the 16th century Chinese novel journey to the West.

One Belt One Road Initiative: Chinese global initiative project on infrastructure development and collaboration strategy which started in 2013.

Qipao dress: Also known as Cheongsam, is a type of body-hugging dress of Manchu origin. It is a high-necked, closefitting dress with the skirt slit partway up the side.

Tai Chi/ Tai Chi Fan: It is an internal Chinese martial art practised for defence training, health benefits, and meditation. Sometimes people use a fan with the practice.

Tangram: It is a dissection puzzle consisting of seven flat polygons, called tans, which are put together to form shapes.

TikTok: Also known as Douyin in China, is a video-focused social networking service owned by the Chinese company ByteDance.

WeChat: Also called Wexin in Chinese, is a Chinese multi-purpose instant messaging, social media and mobile payment app that developed by the Chinese company Tencent.

Wushu: Also called Kung Fu, is a hard and soft and complete martial art.

Zheng He: He (1371-1433) was a Chinese mariner, explorer, diplomat, fleet admiral, and court eunuch during China's early Ming dynasty.

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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.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter sets out an overview of the study, including the background to the research and my personal motives for studying intercultural engagement in Confucius Institute activities. It introduces the research topic of this study, highlighting the potential research gaps in both CI studies and intercultural communication studies. Lastly, it presents the structure and substance of this thesis.

1.1 Research background

China's economy has enjoyed rapid growth since the "Open-Door Policy" was introduced by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, which required the Chinese government to actively engage with others as a responsible and benevolent stakeholder (Paradise, 2009). In 2001, China joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO), as the Chinese government strove to integrate the country's economy within the global economy and gain global recognition. Subsequently, similar to the UK's British Council, France's Alliance Française, and Spain's Instituto Cervantes, the Confucius Institute (referred to herein as CI) project was set up by China's Ministry of Education in 2004 to promote Chinese language learning and overseas cultural exchange. The CI project enjoyed particularly strong growth in its first decade. As of September 2020, after 16 years of development, 541 Confucius Institutes had been established in 162 countries across five continents; 187 CIs are located in Europe, with 29 CIs in the UK (Hanban, 2020c). However, this expansion has encountered a great deal of resistance and criticism, particularly from Western countries (Hartig, 2015b, 2018; Lo and Pan, 2016; Gil, 2017; BBC, 2020). The main concern from the West is that, in addition to their language teaching and cultural exchange agenda, the CIs may also serve to promote China's soft power, since the project and Hanban (the name of the CI headquarters) are controlled directly by China's Ministry of Education (Paradise, 2009; Hartig, 2012, 2015a; Zanardi, 2016; Zhou and Luk, 2016; Gil, 2017). According to Nye's (1990, 1991, 2004) explanation of "soft power" in the context of world politics, the term refers to a country's ability to attract and involve others by intangible means, such as by using culture, domestic values, or political ideas and policies, rather than through "hard power" means, such as coercion or payments.

The Chinese government has wielded this "soft power" in a variety of ways, applying it to 'all elements outside of the security realm, including investment and aid' (Gil, 2009, cited in Kurlantzick, 2006, p. 271). It is both interesting and strange to note that, despite the popularity of discussions of CIs as "soft power", few studies in Western academia and on social media have examined what CIs actually do (Hartig, 2012; Schmidt, 2013; McCord, 2019). The interesting part is that it seems unproblematic and unquestionable when the British Council describes itself as being able to 'contribute to UK soft power through Britain's most attractive assets, notably culture, education, language and values' (Cai, 2019, p. 53), and one can discuss 'the UK's soft power challenge' (British Council, 2019) in a fairly straightforward way. The strange part is that although it seems undeniable that all language promotion and cultural exchange projects at the national level cannot be separated from countries' soft power influence, it seems more unacceptable when the country engaging in such activities is China. It might be suggested that the apprehensions about and criticisms of CIs and China's soft power can be largely attributed to a world view of China as an entity rather than to the idea of "soft power" itself. As a politicised Other, China's use of soft power is viewed by most Western scholars as having 'negative implications of China's soft power, an assumption which follows a logic that all things democratic are good (as seen in the more positive portrayals of US soft power) and all things nondemocratic are bad' (Schmidt, 2013, p. 650).

Another concern of the West is that this project may jeopardise academic freedom in Western universities, given that the majority of CIs operate in partnership with local universities and are based within local universities (Mosher, 2012; AAUP, 2014; Sahlins, 2015; Peterson, 2017). CIs are referred to as 'Trojan Horses with Chinese characteristics' by Mosher (2012), 'academic malware' by Sahlins (2015), and 'a new threat to academic freedom' by Peterson (2017). Despite such accusations being heavy on complaints but short on proof, and 'largely been a form of anti-Chinese polemics rather than a result of careful study or analysis' (McCord, 2019, p. 428), these unfavourable and suspicious views of CIs have gradually become dominant in Western narratives. In recent times, this position has become more strident due to the deterioration of US-China relations resulting from the trade war during former President Trump's term in office and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic that started in Wuhan and subsequently spread around the world (Green-Riley, 2020). The

most obvious result of this deteriorating relationship is that 45 CIs in the United States have closed down for various reasons, with most of these (39 CIs) closing between 2018-2020 (Peterson, 2020).

In response to the West's constant suspicion of CIs, in June 2020, CIs were rebranded and are now run by the Chinese International Education Foundation, a new non-governmental organisation, so as to avoid government involvement (Zhuang, 2020). 'The move will better facilitate Chinese language teaching overseas and disperse the Western misinterpretation that the organization served as China's ideological marketing machine', according to the Chinese state-run social media outlet, the Global Times (Chen, 2020). Given that my research and fieldwork were conducted prior to the rebranding, I will continue to employ the name Hanban (the CI headquarters) in this study as it was valid at the time of the research.

The main objectives of CIs, according to Hanban's official statement, are to promote intercultural communication and enhance cultural understanding between China and other countries (Hanban, 2020d). In doing this, CIs regularly organise, host, cooperate, fund, and participate in activities within CIs as well as with the wider communities. For example, the most common activities in CIs' programmes are related to traditional festival celebrations, with the three main festival celebrations at CIs being the Chinese Mid-autumn Festival, the Chinese Dragon-boat Festival, and the Chinese Spring Festival. CIs also organise short trips to China every year for language students. Aside from that, each CI offers a variety of cultural workshops, ranging from Tai Chi, Wushu, calligraphy, and paper cutting to traditional dance and Chinese food-tasting, to name but a few, according to each CI's particular speciality. Some CIs host, participate in, or support series of seminars, talks, conferences, exhibitions, concerts, or films screenings centred on China and Chinese culture. Moreover, many CIs actively work to build short-term or long-term connections with local communities and institutions, such as by participating in local festivals and events, or by collaborating with local libraries, charities, and museums, etc. Despite the great efforts made by CIs to organise these activities, no systematic study has looked into the nature of these activities, the reasons behind their selection, and their potential impact on cultural understanding. Researchers appear to focus instead on the "grand" purposes and "hidden" political influences of CIs at the

governmental and institutional levels, with few investigations exploring the specifics of what really happens inside CIs on a day-to-day basis (Hartig, 2015a; McCord, 2019).

1.2 Personal background

My interest in enhancing intercultural understanding through Chinese cultural activities has grown as a result of both my work and my study experience. My initial exposure to the English language and English culture was in my high school English classes. After that, I entered the Guangxi University for Nationalities where I pursued a degree in international economics and trade. This four-year undergraduate experience provided me with a broader perspective of the diversity of domestic and world cultures. Living in Guangxi (an ethnic minority autonomous region) allowed me to appreciate the richness of Chinese culture. In addition, my major in international economics and trade enabled me to develop a deeper understanding of world cultures in economic terms. Furthermore, my experience of working in the Philippines and in China has sparked a keen interest in engaging in cultural activities for enhancing intercultural communication. In 2012, I was selected by Hanban to work as a Chinese language volunteer at Baguio Patriotic High School in the Philippines. During my two-year overseas term of service, besides my regular teaching work, I also participated in a variety of local cultural activities, and attended, planned, and organised many activities related to China and Chinese culture. These activities not only provided me with the opportunity to immerse myself in a variety of cultures, but they also made me realise that it is possible for diverse cultures to coexist and integrate with each other peacefully and harmoniously, at least at the educational level. For instance, the Flower Festival (also known as the Panagbenga Festival) is held every year in the city where I lived in the Philippines; I was invited to take part in the parade on a float that featured Chinese elements such as a Chinese longevity pavilion, the Terracotta Warriors, and people dressed in ethnic garb. Because of the substantial Chinese presence in this country, the Chinese Lunar New Year has become a new local holiday and there is a large parade and celebration every year, featuring many parties, and the participation of local businesses, communities, and organisations. One of the most memorable aspects of my intercultural experience was seeing how my school incorporated legendary Greek figures and Chinese zodiac signs into activities in its

US-style annual sports competition. All of the above activity experiences sparked my curiosity and deepened my interest in CI activities and how they could contribute to intercultural engagement.

While my experience in the Philippines taught me about cultural diversity, inclusiveness, and integration, my experience as an international communication officer in China taught me about the importance of understanding others in order to avoid cultural conflict and misunderstanding. In 2014-2015, I worked as an administrative secretary in the International Exchange and Cooperation Department at a college in southeast China, where one of my responsibilities was to organise training courses relating to China's tea culture for international officials and technicians. Participants came from all over the world to take part in the programme. One thing that particularly impressed me was when the college security guard told me that one of the participants might have particular spiritual needs, as he went to the gym every day and always kneeled in the same direction. Whereas we might well presume that this Pakistani man, a Muslim, was simply praying, rather than engaging in some bizarre behaviour, the security guard had no prior understanding and knowledge of Muslim customs and rituals because there is no Muslim tradition in the south of China and that particular college is not a particularly open-minded environment. This simple misunderstanding, which resulted from a lack of awareness of others' cultures, made me realise the importance of constantly taking the initiative to actively learn about different cultures so as to understand them in a more comprehensive way. This work experience prompted me to further study the use of activities and intercultural engagement in greater depth.

The master's degree programme (MSc in educational studies) at the University of Glasgow provided me with a broader ability to examine CIs' activities and intercultural engagement; that is, I was able to gain a cosmopolitan perspective. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Kleingeld and Brown, 2019), the term "cosmopolitan" stems from the Greek term for "citizen of the world":

> The word "cosmopolitan", which derives from the Greek word kosmopolitēs ("Citizen of the world") has been used to describe a wide variety of important views in moral and socio-political philosophy. The nebulous core shared by all cosmopolitan views is the idea that all human

beings, regardless of their political affiliation, are (or can and should be) citizens in a single community.

My first interaction with cosmopolitan theories and cosmopolitanism was during the modern education thought course I took while pursuing my master's degree in educational studies in 2015. I can still remember feeling extremely motivated to read about the various related educational theories, spanning from the enlightenment, liberalism, and critical pedagogy to postcolonialism, postmodernism, and cosmopolitanism, and to consider these theoretical positions in relation to my own educational and cultural experiences. In our class about cosmopolitanism, the professor asked the following question at the beginning of the session: 'How do you locate yourself in the world?' She drew a sequence of concentric circles, in the middle of which lay the self. She continued by asking: 'Do you consider yourself firstly to belong to your immediate family, and then to your extended family, local groups, nation, and finally the world, or the other way around?' This question made me think for the very first time about how to place myself in the world and start to comprehend the idea of being a citizen of the world. At the same time, I was aware that Hanban's stated purpose of Chinese language teaching and cultural exchange is to contribute to the development of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism (Hanban, 2020d). Thus, as a cosmopolitan perspective is in accordance with the official purposes of Hanban, I decided to write my dissertation on a comparison between the purposes of Confucius Institutes and the British Council. This prompted my subsequent PhD research focus on delving deeper into the cosmopolitan and intercultural aspects of Confucius Institutes.

1.3 Research rationale

Although it was my personal and previous research interests that guided me to examine CIs and CI activities from the perspective of intercultural communication and cosmopolitanism, it was the literature I have read that led me to the more specific research areas and research issues. First, after conducting a critical review of the literature on CI studies, I decided to conduct an empirical study of CI activities in the UK context. Second, after examining the intercultural communication and cosmopolitanism theories I uncovered when reviewing the literature, I decided to investigate CI activities with respect to their opportunities for intercultural

engagement and their impact on cultural understanding based on critical intercultural communication and critical cosmopolitan approaches.

There is currently a lack of close attention to and empirical research on CI activities and their potential for intercultural interaction between different cultural groups, namely, the CIs' Chinese staff and their activity participants in the West. Despite the fact that several empirical studies of CIs have been published in recent years, most are in the fields of international relations (IR) and political studies. For example, Amy Stambach (2014) explored the Confucius Institutes and the crisis in US universities, as well as the relationships between culture, capital, and diplomacy in public high school education in the United States. Falk Hartig (2015) investigates the emergence of CIs in Australia and Germany, and Chinese public diplomacy with respect to the CI project. Jeffery Gil (2017) looks into the soft power of CIs and the worldwide promotion of Chinese language learning, particularly in Australia. Xin Liu's (2019) book *Cultural diplomacy of CIs: China's Cultural Diplomacy: A Great Leap Outward?* also focuses on the IR discipline. I will not go into great depth about these studies because my research focuses on the topic of intercultural communication, and only one book on CI studies falls into this category: *Taking Chinese to the world: language, culture and identity in Confucius Institute teachers* by Wei Ye (2017), which examines the lives and work experience of CI teachers in the UK. In his study, Ye investigates the motivations, challenges, cultural adaptation and adjustment, transformative learning, and self-development of CI teachers by adopting Bourdieu's symbolic power theory. However, he only takes the individual intercultural experiences of Chinese teachers into consideration, without exploring the intercultural communication that takes place between different cultural groups. To respond to this gap in the literature on CIs, this study will investigate the intercultural engagement of CI Chinese staff and activity participants.

After researching the intercultural communication theories and taking into account the current studies on CIs, I decided to adopt a critical intercultural communication approach in this research, which considers the important concept of "power". According to Halualani's definition of the critical approach to intercultural communication:

A critical approach to intercultural communication provides a perspectival view of the world in terms of the structures and contexts of power that surround us and impact our lives and experiences. This approach examines the invisible dimensions of intercultural communication, or the taken-for-granted shapers of intercultural relations such as the media, governmental institutions, economic structures, historical memories, global markets and brands, and popular culture. (Halualani, 2019, p. 7)

For Halualani, the contexts of power include, but are not limited to, the economic context, the governmental context, the legal context, the educational context, the family context, the media context, and the tourism context. Furthermore, although the macro contexts of power often go unnoticed and are invisible, they can potentially 'constitute and frame our intercultural communication encounters, relationships, and everyday experiences' (Halualani, 2019, p. 7). There are three main reasons why I choose to address the macro context of power in my intercultural study of CI activities. First, the discussions and arguments regarding the political influences and the ideological conflicts cannot be ignored given the nature of CIs and the abundance of CI studies with this focus. Second, in many contexts, CI projects involve three cohorts: a Chinese university, a local university, and Hanban; hence, there is the potential for power dynamics to reside within activity selection and organisational procedures. Third, there may be some subtle and hidden influences at the macro level that affect both the CI Chinese staff and the activity participants, which might impact their cultural understanding of each other. For instance, the Western media's portrayal of CIs might affect the nature of communication between Chinese staff and activity participants.

The majority of existing studies on intercultural communication tend to focus on the micro level of interpersonal communication, without exploring the often hidden but potentially significant impacts of the macro structures. As these considerations influenced me when deciding the focus of my thesis, this study aims to shed light on CIs by taking the macro contexts of power into account. I noticed that the most common and "hassle-free" definitions of culture to be found in the work of some well-known intercultural communication scholars often referred to a neutral concept that comes with nation-based boundaries (Hall, 1976). They depict culture as the ways of life of people from different groups or countries. Many of the earlier well-known studies in the field of intercultural communication have adopted this idea of

culture, as is the case with the high and low culture contexts explored by Edward Hall (1989) and the six cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (2001). However, this approach came in for much criticism recently (Starosta and Chen, 2001), as they overlooked the complexities that can arise from macro influences from, for example, power, historical, social, and political contexts (Nakayama and Halualani, 2010). In my case, rather than viewing culture as a neutral and nation-based concept, I suspect, like Halualani et al (2009), that the culture manifested and represented through CI activities might be more about 'a site of struggle' for power and ideology for both the Chinese government and the CIs themselves. Hence, the lesser-used perspective of intercultural communication, that is, the critical one, was selected as my conceptual approach for this study of activity engagement in CIs, as I hoped that this perspective could assist me in understanding the role of power and contextual constraints on communication (Martin and Nakayama, 1999) between activity participants and CI Chinese staff and lead them to developing a better understanding of each other and of themselves.

After reviewing the available research literature on CIs from China and other countries and studying theories of cosmopolitanism, I decided to adopt a critical cosmopolitan perspective to examine the intercultural engagement between activity participants and Chinese staff. Delanty (2006, 2008, 2009) proposes a critical approach to cosmopolitanism that can 'invoke a sense of openness as opposed to a closed or particularistic view of the world' (Delanty, 2009, p. 14). The critical dimension highlights the 'essentially critical and transformative nature' (Delanty, 2009, p. 6) of cosmopolitanism. He sets out this approach as follows:

> [It] emphasize[s] a dimension of cosmopolitanism that is not normally discussed in the now extensive literature on cosmopolitanism, namely the capacity for self-problematization and new ways of seeing the world that result when diverse peoples experience common problems. (Delanty, 2009, p. ix)

This critical cosmopolitan approach emphasises two aspects: 1) a broader and more open view of the world, and 2) acknowledgement of individuals' capacity for self-problematisation, self-transcendence, and pluralisation (Delanty, 2009, p. 75). From researching social media and studies of CIs in the West, I found that people from the West still take a very standard and Eurocentric view of CIs. Instead, what is needed

in studies of CIs is the broader view rather than a closed or particularistic view: by recognising the capacity for self-problematisation, self-transcendence, and pluralisation during intercultural interactions between activity participants and Chinese staff. By adopting such a stance, I aim to discern patterns in how people understand each other in more depth.

The briefest of glances at the headline and contents of contemporary news stories about CIs in the Western mainstream media highlight what interests the Western media and the ways in which they portray CIs. Much of the news about CIs in the UK and the US focuses on concerns about CIs' potential political influence. For example, both BBC News (2020) and the Washington Post (Green-Riley, 2020) reported that the US was labelling CIs as a Chinese "foreign mission" in August 2020, even though. However, based on the findings of Green-Riley's (2020) empirical survey of 1,300 students at two high schools with Confucius Classrooms (CCs) during 2019-2020, 'these concerns over the ideological threat of these programs may be overblown'. BBC News described the CIs as 'the growth of China's controversial cultural branch', mentioning only in passing that CIs 'also run classes in culture, from calligraphy and cooking to Tai Chi' (Jakhar, 2019). The Los Angeles Times also reported on Beijing's response to the registration of CIs in the US as "foreign missions", in which China accused the US of demonising and stigmatising China and jeopardising relations between the two countries. Overall, Western media coverage of CIs seems, intentionally or unintentionally, to portray a different, othering, unwelcome, and even antagonistic image of China by drawing attention to political and ideological differences, rather than to similarities and opportunities for language learning and cultural communication. Such reports, which focus on the purposes and influence of the Chinese government at the macro level, not only ignore the real functions and impact of the everyday language and cultural activities provided by CIs, but also have the potential to further reinforce prejudices and stereotypes of CIs among Western people. Therefore, in order to strike a balance, closer attention should be paid to the activities offered by CIs and to the actual impact on people and society.

In An et al.'s (2014) analysis of studies on CIs between 2004 and 2014 inside and outside of China, it was found that there are divergent focuses. Specifically, scholars in the English-speaking world pay special attention to the external influences of CIs

in the political, economic, and cultural domains, while Chinese scholars tend to focus more on the internal development and influences of CIs themselves. This conclusion from their study is also in alignment with my own observation based on my review of studies of CIs. It can be argued that the divergent focuses of CI studies are due to distinct standpoints, different ideological structures, a lack of mutual understanding, and even different mindsets and purposes. In this sense, it seems that a certain number of studies of CIs in the West take a Eurocentric perspective, which views anything relating to the Chinese government negatively. As McCord (2019, p. 428) concludes, 'most of the anti-CI literature has largely been a form of anti-Chinese polemics rather than as a result of careful study or analysis', and therefore this literature 'has been long on concerns but very short on evidence' and takes the repetition of concerns 'as proof of the existence of problems' in respect of CIs. Meanwhile, many CI studies conducted by academics living and working in China take an ethnocentric perspective and attempt to avoid engaging in further explorations of controversial topics or ideological conflicts in the macro contexts. For this reason, it is important to develop a new, critical, and broader perspective to reach a deeper understanding of the potential of CIs and their activities.

By searching for, uncovering, and recognising where there is a capacity for self-problematisation, self-transcendence, and pluralisation through the diverse intercultural engagements of activity participants and Chinese staff at CIs, we may be able to discover new ways in which people can understand themselves and each other more deeply. Previous functionalist approaches to intercultural communication tended to focus on how cultural differences affect communication and attempted to apply models and methods for effective communication across cultures from an external position (Hall, 1976; Gudykunst, 1983a; Byram, Nichols and Stevens, 2001; Deardorff, 2006). This study takes a new approach by exploring how people can find their own routes into another culture and think and act beyond the local and the national (Hannerz, 1990; Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis, 2009). This study not only offers insights into effective communication with others but also examines how people understand each other in a broader sense by studying the impact on cultural understanding of the critical cosmopolitan perspective.

Thus, critical cosmopolitanism provides a different approach and goes beyond the limitations of Eurocentric and ethnocentric views of CI studies and the functionalist approaches of intercultural communication. In addition, it can encourage a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of CIs and promote dialogue across cultures and people. Critical cosmopolitanism is particularly important for today's interconnected world, as Delanty (2008) explains:

> Critical cosmopolitanism can be an alternative to nationalism and to a narrowly defined globalization. A major question is whether positive political forms of cooperation will develop along cosmopolitan lines, that will go beyond narrow economic and security concerns to address problems of global justice. This question is also a cultural question and concerns the capacities of a given society to transform itself in light of the perspective of the other. (Delanty, 2008, p. 227)

Overall, the critical cosmopolitan perspective provides an opportunity to build positive dialogue, to learn more about others and each other, and, most importantly, to bring about a better understanding of ourselves.

These considerations, derived from my personal and research background, led to my consolidation of this study's topic and title:

The Impact of Intercultural Engagement on Cultural Understanding Through Activities Offered in Confucius Institutes in Britain

I set out to explore whether intercultural engagement in CIs have the potential to exert a cosmopolitan impact on cultural understanding of each other. In my study, I am interested in this broad idea of intercultural engagement, in doing so, a range of the intercultural engagements and interactions through activities offered in CIs will be explored. In Chapter 2, I examine the existing literature around my topic to enhance my own awareness and understanding.

1.4 Thesis structure

The thesis is organised into six chapters. This first chapter is the introduction and overview of my study, and it sets out the research background and personal background that led to my decision to pursue this particular topic in my thesis

research. It provides early notice of potential research gaps in the research on CIs and in intercultural communication studies, as well as presenting the structure and substance of this thesis.

Following the introduction of the motivations for this research, the second chapter presents and examines the related literature and research that enabled me to widen my understanding of the background and operation of Confucius Institutes. I introduce general information about CIs and their development, along with the background to CIs in Britain and their development in the British context. I also explore studies of both CIs and intercultural communication, and examine the literature on critical intercultural communication and critical cosmopolitan approaches, which provide perspectives for my own research. These considerations lead to the specific research questions that frame this study.

The third chapter sets out the methodology chosen to address my research questions. It elaborates my research approaches and my reasons for selecting these approaches for this study. I adopt a pragmatic approach as my research worldview and a sequential contributions model as my research design. This chapter also presents the sample selection, fieldwork procedures, data analysis, ethical considerations, and the means for testing the validity and reliability of my study.

The fourth chapter presents the findings gathered from the 82 online surveys completed by the activity participants and the 30 interviews with the activity participants and Chinese staff, conducted as described in the methodology chapter. The results of the online surveys generated broad and interesting general information for understanding the participants and the activities of the CIs. The interviews produced data that allowed detailed thematic analysis, which provided more nuanced insights into the activity experience from both the activity participants' and Chinese staff's perspectives.

The fifth chapter consists of a critical analysis of the activity experience, CI activities, and cultural understanding of CIs that emerged in my research findings. Comparison of the intercultural experiences of activity participants and Chinese staff uncovered three areas of concordance and three areas of discordance. The reasons for the

activity selection are discussed and the impact on cultural understanding explored. The discussions in this chapter lead to the proposal of a possible route to developing individual levels of cosmopolitan competence through intercultural engagement in CIs in Britain. An illustrative diagram of my findings presents a possible model for further study of intercultural communication and cosmopolitan competence.

Chapter 6 summarises the potential theoretical and practical contributions of my study. The strengths and limitations of my study and directions for future studies are also considered. The chapter concludes with reflections on my personal development as a researcher and the potential future pathways opened up by my thesis.

Chapter 2 Research context and literature reviews

In this chapter I have examined literature and research to widen my understanding of the background and operation of Confucius Institutes, particularly in the UK, explored aspects of intercultural engagement in connection to CIs and considered applications of critical intercultural communication for their potential use in analysing engagements within CIs. I introduce general information about CIs and their development over the last 15 years. The background to CIs in Britain and their development in the British context are considered in the following sections.

2.1 Background of Confucius Institutes

China's economy embraced a rapid development after the "open-door" policy that was initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978. With the largest population and the second-largest economy in the world (World Bank, 2017), China successfully attracted the attention of international society in relation to several issues. On the one hand, China's rapid economic growth required the Chinese Government to engage actively with others as a benevolent stakeholder for alleviating suspicions and anxieties about its growing power on the world stage (Zheng, 2005; Leung and Du Cros, 2014). There had also been an urgent request for understanding of China from other countries in the world (Brown, 2019; Walker, 2019). In these contexts, the Confucius Institute project was initiated by the Chinese government in 2004 as one of their responses to these issues. In this section, general information about Confucius Institutes (CIs) and their development over the last 15 years are explained.

2.1.1 What are Confucius Institutes

Similar to the purposes of the British Council of the UK, France's Alliance Françoise and the Goethe Institute of Germany, Confucius Institutes (CIs) were established in 2004 as non-profit educational organisations for Chinese language teaching and for cultural exchange and cooperation overseas (Hanban, 2020d). The Confucius Institute Headquarters, usually referred to by its Chinese name, Hanban, is the governing body of CIs that is affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education. As the official statement of the purpose of Hanban indicates:

> [It] goes all out in meeting the demands of foreign Chinese learners contributing to the development of multiculturalism and the building of a harmonious world (Hanban, 2020d)

The main functions of Hanban range from setting up, examining, approving and establishing CIs, guiding teaching activities, approving budgets, to holding Chinese trips and language competitions, selecting, training, and dispatching the Chinese directors, teachers and volunteers for CIs into the organisation.

The Confucius Institute expanded exponentially over the years following its establishment, starting with the first CI set up in Seoul, South Korea in 2004. According to the Confucius Institute Annual Development Report of 2018 (Hanban, 2018), by end of 2018, there had been 548 CIs, 1193 Confucius Classrooms (CCs), and 5565 Confucius teaching sites around 154 countries and regions of the world. In particular, Europe came to have the largest number of CIs (182) among the five continents and the UK had the most CIs (29) in Europe. One of the prominent characteristics that distinguishes CIs from other cultural institutions is the joint venture model of most CIs (Starr, 2009), and the establishment of the CI usually included a partner overseas. This operational mode generally involved three parts: Hanban, Chinese universities, and local partners. Ren (2012) elaborates the three types of this mode: the first type is in partnership with a foreign university, the second type is in partnership with a public or social organisation overseas, and the third type is in connection with foreign corporations and business entities. Among these three types, the first one is the most common type. 27 out of 28 CIs in Britain fall into this category. In reference to the procedures for the establishment a new CI, it can be applied for by both Chinese and foreign institutions to Hanban, and then they need to sign up together to the Agreement for Establishment of the Confucius Institute once the Hanban has approved the proposal (Hanban, 2020a). The standard CI cooperation agreement is set up for a five-year period between Hanban and the two partner organisations. Specifically, Hanban normally undertakes to provide start-up funding and teaching materials, to dispatch teachers and volunteers from Chinese universities and schools, and the foreign institutions take charge of other works such as accommodation, infrastructure and administrative support.

It is interesting to notice that there is a difference in terms of the partner universities' level between those in China and in other countries (Starr, 2009). Chinese high-ranking universities as well as local universities are often proactive about this kind of cooperation, such as Peking University, Fudan University, Nankai University and Guangxi University for Nationalities. The Universities with language specialist backgrounds in China have greater cooperation with CIs, such as Beijing Language and Culture University, which has 19 CIs overseas. While a lot of internationally renowned universities seem reluctant to be involved, such as Harvard university and Stanford university in the US, and Oxford university and Cambridge university in the UK. Starr (2009) addresses the potential reason behind this differing approach:

> The very top foreign universities do no need to encumber themselves with the negative aspects of a CI in the hope of gaining official favour and collaborative access to China's top universities; they can have these for the asking. (Starr, 2009, p. 73)

Indeed, top universities never worry about lacking contacts from others, and the CI is not the only option for them for collaborating with Chinese universities and education sectors. Although all CIs have to abide by the Constitution and By-Laws of the Confucius Institutes, they do also have certain flexibilities and different CIs have distinct features and focus, depending on both the universities' or the partners' willingness and expertise for working together (Paradise, 2009; Zhou and Luk, 2016). Apart from the generic CIs with comprehensive aims, there are also some feature-oriented CIs and technical training-oriented CIs. Taking the UK as an example, the Business CI at the University of Leeds and the Scottish CI for business and communication at Heriot-Watt University are two examples of business-focused CIs, and their Chinese partners are the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing and Taijin University of Finance & Economics respectively. The CI for dance and performance at Goldsmiths, University of London, is in partnership with Beijing Dance Academy. The CI for traditional Chinese medicine at London South Bank University is in collaboration with Heilongjiang University of Chinese medicine and Harbin Normal University. The CI for publication at Oxford Brookes University is in cooperation with the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP) in China. Obviously, the feature-oriented CIs can range from business and dance to Chinese medicine and publication, and all of them have universities or partners with relevant

professional backgrounds for facilitating the teaching and operating of those CIs. Moreover, some CIs are responsible for operating and managing Confucius Classrooms (CCs) and Confucius hubs with local primary and secondary schools, providing language teaching and learning services within their school curriculum or supporting schools to start offering Chinese. Examples of this are the CI for Scotland's schools at the University of Strathclyde that works with primary and secondary schools in Scotland, and the Institute of Education (IOE) CI for schools at University College London specialises in Chinese language learning in primary and secondary schools in England. Some studies have explored the Confucius Classrooms and Confucius Hubs in great details, such as Jennifer Hubbert (2014, 2019), but the general CIs is the focus that has been explored and examined in this thesis.

Apart from the various types, forms and focus of CIs, language education and cultural activity are the two core responsibilities of the everyday work of most CIs. According to the Constitution and By-Laws of the Confucius Institutes (Hanban, 2020b), the CIs mainly provide the following five services:

a. Chinese language teaching.

b. Training Chinese language instructors and providing Chinese language teaching resources.

c. Holding the HSK examination (Chinese Proficiency Test) and tests for the Certification of the Chinese Language Teachers.

d. Providing information and consultative services concerning China's education, culture, and so forth.

e. Conducting language and cultural exchange activities between China and other countries.

A snapshot of the annual report of CIs in 2018 indicates, several Chinese language and cultural activities were presented and highlighted. From the Hanban level, Chinese teachers' and volunteers' training and dispatch projects, development and

promotion of teaching materials, Chinese language teaching conferences, Confucius China studies program and Chinese tests and scholarships are the regular projects of Hanban. From the CIs level, they organise the Confucius day celebration, "Chinese Bridge" Chinese proficiency competition, "Chinese Bridge" tours to China for language students, HSK examination (Chinese Proficiency Test), language teaching and tasting classes, Chinese festival celebrations, Chinese cultural workshops, academic talks and conferences and other activities on a regular basis. Albeit the primary attention of CIs is language teaching and learning, the diverse activities along with the various interpersonal interactions and engagements between Chinese staff and activity participants are the key focus of this study. These activities include but are not limited to the regular events of every CI, but also look at the distinct and featured exercises of each CI, particularly in the British context.

2.1.2 The development of Confucius Institutes

Gil (2015, 2017) provides a useful framework, arising from Held et al., (2000) in relation to types of globalisation, for mapping and evaluating the development of CIs and which contains the four components: extensity, intensity, velocity and impact. In details, the four types of global projects are: 1) thick global projects (high extensity, intensity, velocity and impact); 2) diffused global projects (high extensity, intensity and velocity, but low impact); 3) expansive global projects (high extensity and impact, but low intensity and velocity); 4) thin global projects (high extensity but low intensity, velocity and impact). Gil explains the component thus: the extensity represents the geographical coverage of the CI project; the intensity means the number of CIs, CCs and the range of their activities; the velocity denotes the speed of setting up of new CIs and the impact represents the potential influence and difference made by the CI project. He concludes that the CI project is a diffused project enjoying high extensity, intensity, velocity but low impact (Gil, 2017). With regards to the extensity and intensity of the CI project, there are 548 CIs and 1193 CCs around the 154 countries and regions involved. Among them, in Europe, there have been 182 CIs and 341 CCs covering 43 countries; in America, there have been 161 CIs and 595 CCs in 25 countries; in Asia, there have been 125 CIs and 114 CCs among 25 countries; in Africa, there have been 59 CIs and 41 CCs in 44 countries; and in Oceania, there have been 21 CIs and 102 CCs among 7 countries (Hanban,

2018, p. 13). In addition, there have been various cultural activities that have been held by CIs and CCs since 2008, and up to 220 thousand events with a total of 100 million participants have been involved in these activities (Hanban, 2018, p. 30). In reference to the speed of setting up new CIs, there has been a steady high growth rate over the last decade, which has already exceeded the original goal of 1000 CIs worldwide by 2020 (Pratik, 2019). Undoubtedly, the CI project 'has succeeded considerably in cultivating its global network', especially in Europe and North America (Yuan, Guo and Zhu, 2016, p.339). In fact, it is always very easy to find out these impressive numbers and successful rates from Hanban News and their annual reports, as very often these documents are produced with certain purposes other than research (Bowen, 2009, p. 31; Hartig, 2018, p. 706), especially in China's context. However, the impact of the CI project is not easy to determine as there is still some uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding the complex and controversial nature of CIs as a Chinese government funded organisation.

Growth of Confucius Institutes
Number of institutes in the world

Source: Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban)
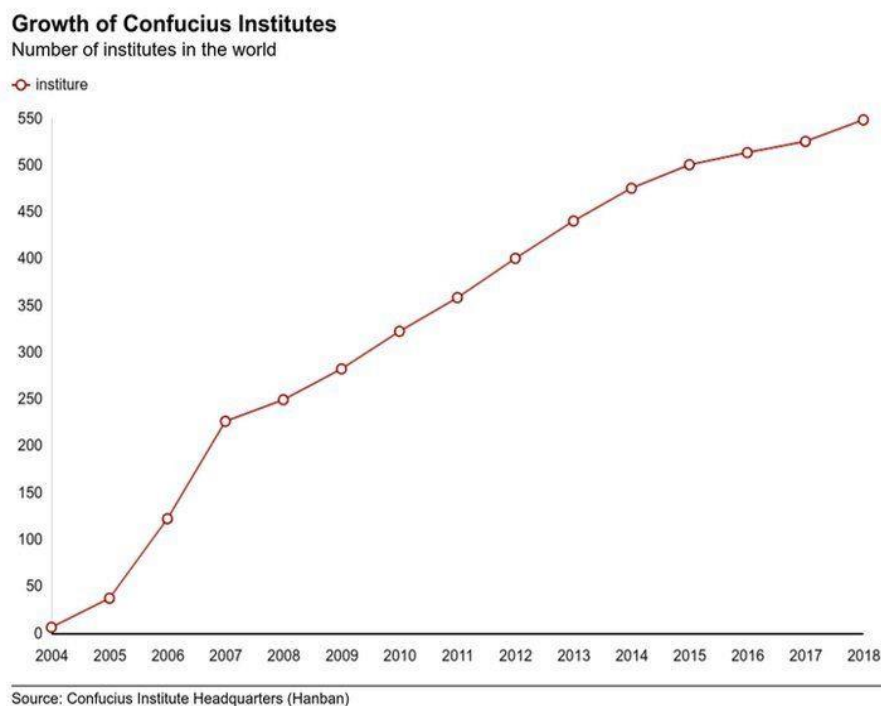
Figure 2.1 The growth of Confucius Institutes between 2004 and 2018

Albeit there has been a burgeoning growth of CIs around the world as we can see from Figure 2.1 (Jakhar, 2019), the CI project has not always been smooth sailing. Some CIs in France, Canada, the USA, Sweden and the Netherland have been shut

down due to some concerns and reasons such as the soft power of China and academic freedom of local universities. The closing of some CIs has been due to research strategy asymmetry, for example, the Lyon CI in France, as the first CI to be closed, ceased to operate in September 2013 as the CI wanted to search for deeper integration with the teaching and research of the university's degree programs (China File, 2014). The refusal of Hanban to support certain research projects as 'they were beyond the scope of the Institute's mission' resulted in the closure of the Pennsylvania state CI in 2014, according to the interview from a former director of that CI (Jacobs and Yu, 2014). Liu (2019, p. 269) contends there has been a "war of position" and a fight for power behind the two contradictory reasons behind the closures of these two CIs. Other reasons leading to the ceasing of contracts with Hanban can be political considerations or academic freedom scrutiny, as the universities where CIs are based might be restricted from talking freely about politically sensitive issues about China (Starr, 2009; Gil, 2015). A more recent case is the ending of the agreement with Hanban and closing the CI in one of Europe's top universities, Leiden University in the Netherlands. From the official statement of the University, it is stated that, 'the university has reached this decision because the CI's activities no longer align with the university's strategy and the direction this has taken in recent years' (Leiden University, 2019). Additionally, there has also been backlash from CIs in academia, particularly in the US. Mosher (2012) strongly resisted the CI project and contended there is a politicised mission in it, which is wholly antithetical to the values of democratic institutions and open markets. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP, 2014) reported boycotting CIs in their campuses as they worried that this kind of government related organisation could jeopardise the academic independence, autonomy and integrity of host universities. Sahlins (2015) depicted CIs as "academic malware", and Peterson (2017) claimed that CIs were a new threat to academic freedom on US campuses. In brief, the phenomenon of backlash to CIs was mostly from Western countries and the deeper reasons behind the closure of some CIs can be more complicated and subtle than what they have presented in public.

Apart from the external impediments of the CI project, some internal problems and practical issues have also shown up in CIs' endeavours to promote Chinese language and culture. Many studies have been aware of these problems over the years (Yang,

2010; Hartig, 2015b; Lo and Pan, 2016; Qili and Dong, 2016; Zhou and Luk, 2016; Gil, 2017), and meanwhile Hanban has gradually realised these problems and started addressing the issues to some extent. Broadly speaking, there are three aspects in terms of practical issues for CIs that have been considered, which are teachers, teaching materials, and administrative & cooperative complications. For example, some language learners noticed the lack of quality and skills of teachers in CIs and many teaching responsibilities were taken on by volunteers instead of by professional language teachers (Yang, 2010; Qili and Dong, 2016; Gil, 2017). Other studies showed that some teaching materials were not attractive enough for people and also not suitable to the local contexts, particularly for langauge teaching in the non-English speaking countires (Hartig, 2015b; Lo and Pan, 2016; Qili and Dong, 2016). Additionally, both Yang (2010) and Gil (2017) pointed out that there might be a lack of effective communication and cooperation between CIs and local unviersities in several dimensions, such as adminstration, quality assurance, research cooperation etc. Overall, the practical issues that have been raised are, to a large extent, from the langague teaching and learning cohort, despite the fact that the cultural communications through activity organisation and interaction are also the core part of CI's function. Hence, there is a research gap in relation to the ways in which activities and activities' engagements are conducted in the overall CI research.

2.2 Confucius Institutes in the British context

Three areas are explored in my study with respect to CIs in Britain, namely, the uniqueness of Britain, the relationship between China and Britain, and the role of CIs in the British context.

2.2.1 The uniqueness of Britain

As Charles Taylor (1994, p. 63) states, 'all societies are becoming increasingly multicultural, while at the same time becoming more porous'. In fact, Britain can be a clear demographic of a multicultural society by the coexistence of people of different race, ethnicity or national background. The capital city of London has become a symbol of a heterogeneous and culturally inclusive metropolis (Carly Chynoweth, 2013). Moreover, multicultural nationality and ethnicity in Britain

consists of not only great diversity of immigrants and their descendants, such as Pakistani, Caribbean, African, and Chinese, but also includes historical minority groups like Viking, Scottish, and Welsh. Migrants to Britain can also be categorised as labour migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, irregular migrants, students, and family-joiners for the purposes of classification (Dwyer et al., 2011). This combination brings about a multiplicity of various languages, religions and cultural practices in and across the country.

The British government has paid a lot of attention to multilingual education, since language is the fundamental tool for communicating and connecting among different groups. In the most-recently published report of Language for the Future (British Council, 2017), the top ten languages in terms of the UK's future prosperity under economic, geopolitical, cultural, and educational dimensions were analysed and identified. Compared to the previous report in 2013, the top ten languages remain the same, but the order did slightly change. In the 2013 report the top five languages were Spanish, Arabic, French, Mandarin and German, while in 2017, Mandarin Chinese became the second most important language. Arabic fell to fourth place, and the rest of the rankings remained the same. The reasons for the Chinese language becoming more significant might be related to the increasingly strong connections with business, trade, tourism, higher education and Chinese students studying abroad, especially after the UK's decision to leave the EU in 2016 (British Council, 2017, p. 46). Confronting this new situation, the authorities have developed a series of positive policies for new language challenges in the future. For instance, in England, the teaching of a modern or ancient language has been part of the English national curriculum since 2014. In Scotland, the Scottish government introduced the "1+2" language education policy for introducing two additional languages to Children in the primary school. In Wales, the Global Future strategy was implemented by the Welsh government with the ambition to make Wales "Bilingual plus one" (British Council, 2017, p.9).

Mandarin, which is the official language of the People's Republic of China (PRC), has been attracting a certain amount of attention from the British government, schools, and families in recent times. The former Prime Minister David Cameron urged more young people to learn Mandarin to ensure more success in the increasingly

competitive world, both for themselves and the UK's future (Watt and Adams, 2013). The government has already implemented some programmes to achieve this goal, such as the Mandarin Excellence programme and the Scottish Government's China Strategy plan. The Mandarin Excellence programme aims to cultivate at least 5000 young people into fluent Mandarin speaking in England by 2020 and was newly launched in 2016 by the Confucius Institute at the UCL Institute of Education (IOE), on behalf of the Department for Education and in cooperation with the British Council (IOE, 2020). Since then, pupils from hundreds of secondary schools have started intensive Mandarin lessons across England. In Scotland, the sustained update plan named A five-year strategy for engagement between Scotland and the People's Republic of China was launched in 2012. It explicitly demonstrated the priority areas on target 2.2 and 2.3, which aim to double the number of teachers of Mandarin working and double the numbers of students gaining a recognised Chinese language qualification, compared to the 2011/12 levels (Scottish Government, 2012). In short, benefiting from the diversity and plurality of multicultural Britain, the activities organised in the CIs also embraced many people engaging with language learning in Britain.

2.2.2 The relationship between China and Britain

Britain and China have become increasingly interconnected and interdependent nowadays, especially after the Chinese president Xi Jinping visited the UK in late 2015 with the announcement of starting a "new golden age" of cooperation between both countries. Besides that, the Brexit, referendum of 2016 which led to Britain's breaking away from the European Union, requires the UK to seek new partners and relationships in the global market. On the one hand, for British people, 'China remains remote, a place of curiosity value, somewhere they occasionally see on the news and in the newspapers' (Brown, 2019, p. 64). On the other hand, China and Chinese people are inevitably coming to them 'through investment, finance, students and tourists' (Brown, 2019, p.1). Among them, it is worth noting that Higher Education in Britain has been attracting massive numbers of Chinese students, particularly in pursuing one-year postgraduate studies in the UK. Referring to the data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency of UK (HESA, 2018), Chinese students have become the largest international student group in the UK since 2014-

2015, and it has reached to more than 12,000 Chinese students enrolled for study in the 2018-2019 academic year. This significant phenomenon indicates that the higher education sector in the UK is now strikingly reliant on China and Chinese students.

The China expert Kerry Brown (2019) at the London School of Economics explores what China and Britain want from each other from the engagements and what can potentially build a pragmatic, reciprocal and sustainable relationship in the future. Briefly, his view is: China wants investment, finance and intellectual partnership with Britain, while the desires of Britain seem more complicated and unclear. In particular, the intellectual partnerships that China want are not only from the individual level of higher education of UK in attracting Chinese students and scholars, but also from the tertiary-level of cooperation between institutions, such as CIs, the University of Nottingham in Ningbo campus, and the University of Liverpool in Suzhou campus. On the British side a more pragmatic approach is taken towards China and, from the government level, they simply just want money from China by good quality trade, investments, tourists, students, etc (Brown, 2019, p. 53). For British people, he argues, 'China has a respectable position for the UK – but largely niche and marginal' (Brown, 2019). He further explains:

> For them, China remains remote, a place of curiosity value, somewhere they occasionally see on the news and in the newspapers, but largely eclipsed by the latest antics of Trump, or the fight over Brexit. China's geographical and cultural remoteness, and its difference in terms of history, language and society, makes it difficult to embed in daily life. (Brown, 2019, p. 64)

Indeed, it is not easy to summarise what the British people want from China with a few words and the good engagement with each other, both at a national level and people's level, need to be what Brown describes as structurally balanced. Ideally, this balance requires alignment of interests, balance of needs and interests, respect of each other, alliances, domestic consensus about views towards each other, and values recognition (Brown, 2019, pp.101-102).

2.2.3 Confucius Institutes in the British context

There are 28 CIs in Britain and 29 in the UK (including one in Northern Ireland), which is the most CIs in any European country. All the CIs in Britain are in partnership with Chinese universities, with the exceptions of the CI for publication at Oxford Brookes University and the CI for Scotland's Schools. Furthermore, the London CI at the School of Oriental and African Studies, SOAS, of the University of London, is the first CI that was established in 2005 in Britain, and the CI at Coventry University is the latest one that was established in 2016. With respect to the distribution of CIs, there are 20 CIs in England, 5 CIs in Scotland, and 3 CIs in Wales. The Appendix 1 illustrates the details of all the 28 CIs in Britain.

Obviously, Mandarin teaching and learning in Britain have received much support from these CIs, as their core function is Chinese language promotion. Apart from teaching for people from universities and from wider society, two CIs have particular focus on primary and secondary schools' language teaching. In England, the Confucius institute for schools in the IOE is responsible for most of the Confucius Classrooms and Confucius Hubs in primary schools and it is also in charge of Mandarin Excellence Programme Schools in England. In Scotland, the Confucius Institute for Scotland Schools at Strathclyde University is mainly supportive of Chinese language and culture education in Scottish primary and secondary schools, which collaborate with Scotland's National Centre for Languages (SCILT). Additionally, students who attend Mandarin classes can also benefit from the extended opportunities offered by each Confucius Institute, such as the national Mandarin Speaking Competitions, Study in China programme, and China summer or winter study camps. In this case, Hanban and the British Council are the industry leaders for increasing the learning of Mandarin and Chinese culture in primary and secondary schools in the UK (Tinsley and Board, 2014). In addition, each CI provides a series of daily cultural activities, depending on their preference, expertise, audiences and external conditions. The traditional festival ceremonies include Chinese lunar New Year, Mid-autumn festival and Dargan boat festival; lectures and presentations contain book launch events, research seminar series; concerts and exhibitions, for example language live show, Chinese dress fashion show, Chinese orchestra concert; and theme activities, such

as Chinese calligraphy and brush painting, tea-art ceremony, traditional Chinese dance and music etc.

2.3 Studies on Confucius Institutes

This section will look at literature produced as a result of research type studies of Confucius Institutes. The CI project has received a lot of interest and been debated in a variety of ways in academic circles over the years, both from China's perspective and from that of the partner countries. One of the spotlights of focus for CI studies is related to the concept of soft power, a term that was coined by Nye (1991, p. 26), which is 'the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals and policies. There have been several articles written about the CI project through the soft power lens. Some studies look into the language education and language classrooms of CIs and others examine the cultural dimension of CIs. Apart from these, some studies explore and analyse different perceptions about CIs from mainstream social media outlets from the US and the UK, while other studies focus on economic connections and effects with CIs in different countries.

Several books have been published that indicate the fruitful achievements of CI studies. Their topics focus on public and cultural diplomacy in relation to CIs, soft power of China and CI teachers' identity and cultural acculturation in the UK context. It seems clear that political considerations are the main areas of interest for research when it comes to CIs, especially from the western scholars' perspectives. Some studies look in great detail at CIs with different approaches such as ethnographic and anthropological but there is a paucity of study engaging with CIs in the field of intercultural communication and in considering the views of CI staff and CI participants on the impact of their involvement with and activities in CIs.

2.3.1 Soft power and public diplomacy aspects of Confucius Institutes

The Chinese Government's motivations for establishing CIs and the purpose of CIs have been reviewed in several studies. Chinese public diplomacy and soft power became core focuses for research at the time of China's peaceful rise in economic and international prominence in the last two decades. Several studies acknowledged

that the CI project is one of China's public diplomacy strategies and that the role of CIs is to promote China's soft power (Paradise, 2009; Hartig, 2015a, 2016; Gil, 2017; Liu, 2019b). Some studies explored China's understanding of public diplomacy (Wang, 2008; Hartig, 2016) and others investigated China's views of soft power (Gil, 2009; Paradise, 2009) as both concepts were developed originally from Western thinking. There have also been studies examining different perceptions and interpretations of political concepts between China and West (Hartig, 2012; Liu, 2019b).

Public diplomacy can be 'broadly understood as a country's communication and engagement with foreign publics in order to support national interests' (Hartig, 2015a, p. 1), and one of the purposes of Chinese public diplomacy is to address its interests of altering and correcting negative images of China (Hartig, 2016). In order to achieving the national interests of projecting this peaceful and benign image and that of a responsible stakeholder, Hartig (2015a) contends that the CI project presents the desired vision of China rather than the real vision of China. This desired vision might intentionally or unintentionally invest China and Chinese culture with some specific aspects and positive dimensions and omit sensitive issues and controversial topics at the same time. Specifically, he argues the cultural activities that are organised by CIs mainly focus on traditional and representative ones such as the traditional Chinese festivals, workshops of Tai Chi, calligraphy, traditional dance, paper cutting, Chinese tea ceremonies etc. In contrast, the controversial topics that are frequently reported in Western media and social media are largely missing, such as the three Ts contentious issues: Tiananmen, Tibet and Taiwan. More recently there has been media speculation about the fate of the Uighur people. Besides this, the Chinese government usually adopts external propaganda (duiwai xuanchuan) concepts and stresses a cultural exchange approach regarding public diplomacy. Unlike the Western understanding of propaganda with a negative connotation, this propaganda has a positive meaning within the Chinese context, which can represent some essentially benign activities (Wang, 2008). However, when articles depict CIs as propaganda tools of the Chinese government, it often means the negative connotation of "propaganda" in the West context has been applied. In this situation, 'propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist' (Jowett and O'donnell, 2018, p. 7).

Soft power is an intangible power, that uses culture, values, education and policies to persuade others, and has attracted attention onto the Chinese government for mitigating the impression of a "China's threat". This concept has its distinctive features in China as examined by Gil (2017) , which are the scope, applications and sources of soft power, and the centrality of culture to soft power. In particular, Gil (2017) demonstrates that the sources of soft power in China are primarily on cultural and domestic values, policies and institutions in which the traditional culture and the values of China's economic model are the two important sources of soft power. Although Nye (1990) considers that culture largely cannot be controlled by government, the Chinese government still looks at its culture as the main way to increase China's soft power (Gil, 2017, p. 34). Unsurprisingly, CIs as language learning and cultural communication institutes have become one of the vanguards and show grounds in projecting China's soft power. Paradise (2009) investigates the divergent and contradictory attitudes and perceptions toward soft power in terms of CIs between political leaders and educational officials. It is interesting to see some educational officials preferring to think of CIs academically but not politically, while political leaders often emphasise the vital role of increasing China's soft power in many important conferences and public occasions. One of the reasons for the inconsistency might be that there always have been suspicious voices and resistance about the CI project and the soft power idea is not "soft" enough in Western's eyes. Therefore, the educational officials try to avoid the soft power side and place more emphasis on the academic and culture aspects of CIs.

There are some studies that examined different perceptions and interpretations of these political concepts in relation to CIs (Hartig, 2012; Liu, 2019b). In using the perspectives of cultural hegemony from Gramsci (1971), power relations theory from Foucault (1980) and the concept of orientalism from Said (1993), Liu (2019b) reveals the "power struggles" of CIs in the global cultural terrain underpinning these different perceptions. Comparing to the purposes of the British Council, the Alliance Françoise, the Goethe Institute, and the Cervantes Institute, it seems there is no difference in CIs for engaging in cultural diplomacy and improving the international status of its own country. Albeit 'cultural diplomacy is very much a political activity designed to serve national interests in an ostensibly cultural guise' (Taylor, 1997, p.

80), Liu (2019b) further argues why some Western academics and media understand CIs differently:

> Again, the hegemonic side controls power to leave their own activities under the cultural guise, and only unveils the political intention for the CI as if it is a special attribute: what "we" do is called cultural diplomacy, what "they" do is political inroads. (Liu, 2019b, p. 80)

Regardless of many different interpretations of political concepts such as public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, propaganda, and soft power, when it comes to CIs, most of the studies from the Western context were related to negative connotations of the interpretations. Foucault (1980) argues the "facts" can be constructed in different ways and adopts the term "discourse" to describe its language and interpretations. In this situation, as the hegemonic side, the West 'were able to use their power of discourse to determine their interpretation of the CI's purpose by highlighting the ideological connotations in the concept of culture to justify their resistance, and further use their power to turn their perceptions into "knowledge"'. (Liu, 2019b, p. 260). This argument resonates with McCord's (2019) observation about how the anti-CI literature as the perception from anti-Chinese polemics rather than the evidence from careful study has become the proof and "knowledge" of the existence of problems of CIs in the West. Large scale studies in the English-speaking world that focus on political discussion and some potential negative impact of Cis, reveals the power imbalance between the West and China in terms of cultural, economic and political discourses. While the focus of studies of CIs is mostly under the political lens, some studies do also delve into what really happens in CIs, i.e. the language and culture aspects of CIs.

2.3.2 Language and culture aspects of Confucius institutes

Although political consideration emerges as the central focus of studies of CIs, there also have been some studies looking into language and culture aspects, as these are the two main stated functions of CIs. In reference to the language teaching and language teachers in CIs, Starr (2009) elaborates on the pehenomenon of speading of CIs and Chinese langauge in Eurpoe before 2009. Zhao and Huang (2010) explore the policy history of Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) and the background of the establishment of CIs. In particular, the shortage of teachers and teaching materials

for CFL and the inappropriate style of curriculum within local culture have been pointed out in their article. Furthermore, Hua and Wei (2014) investigate how different groups of Chinese learners can be affected by CIs on changing hierarchies of Chinese language in the UK. They argue that ethnic minority Chinese groups with different dialects other than Mandarin (Putonghua) can feel anxities and marginalised, as CIs only provide the offical language, i.e. Mandarin, service. In addition, Ye and Edwards (2018) explore the motivation, challenges, intercultural experiences, and transformative learning on CI language teachers as intercultural encounters in the UK.

Apart from the langauge aspect of CIs, there have also been studies that have explored the culture aspect of CIs with different approaches (Schmidt, 2013; Stambach, 2015; Hartig, 2018). The racialized "Oriental Other" of China and Chinese culture from Canadian audiences and the racialized "Western Other" understanding of the West from CIs were critically examined by Schmidt (2013). In partiucualr, she noticed CIs often present perfomances of Chinese culture by non-Chinese bodies, which can meet the desire for the racialized Other from Canadian audiences and intertwine the notion of Canadian mulitculturalism at the same time. Stambach (2015) explores the Chinese culture and language ideology, hegemony manifestations from CI university classes by drawing on the mode of "linguistic fact". Additionally, Hartig (2018) reviews China's global image management by specifically presenting the traditional culture of China and avoiding political disscusion in CIs. He fairly notes that there are mutiple versions of the "real" China, either positive or negative ones, however, CIs display only selectively positive images.

2.3.3 Studies of views from social media about Confucius Institutes

Unsurprisingly, the CI project has attracted some attentions from social media outlets, particularly from those countries with a number of CIs, such as the US and UK. Some of these studies investigated and examined the diverse views and perceptions about CIs from media coverage. Specifically, Wang and Adamson (2015) compare the perceptions of CIs in media outlets both from China and USA. They found that there is a certain degree of ambivalent views towards CIs from social media both in China and USA. On one hand, the US is eager for collaboration, but on

the other hand, it regards the CI project as a threat to academic freedom. However, from China's point of view, although CIs can portray a benign image of China, concerns about the cost and transparency have been raised at the same time. A detailed analysis from the New York Times introduction of CIs from 2004 to 2011 was conducted by Lueck, Pipps and Lin (2014). By adopting the culturological perspective, it reveals that the news introduced the CI under the "China frame" as a communist Other, which is a modern stereotype with traditional news practices. Besides the studies of social media from the US, Cheng and Ran (2014) and Fei and Xiao (2016) examined the mainstream social media reports of CIs in the UK, and found that there are selective misinterpretations and exaggerated misinterpretations regarding the coverage of CIs.

In summary, it seems that most Western scholars tend to investigate CIs from the macro level, such as the political influence and soft power of China, but few of them examine what really happened of everyday life in CIs. On the other hand, many Chinese articles are prone to solving the internal problems of CIs, such as language teaching and learning qualities and effectiveness of cultural communication, while overlooking the difficulties from the complexity entailed in macro contexts. Apart from that, although the establishment of CIs is by learning and imitating the cultural institutions in Western countries, such as the British Council and the Goethe Institute, there are different perspectives and interpretations on it between China scholars and Western scholars. China scholars often seek the similarities of these institutes and try to find how to learn from the others while Western scholars searched for differences and then criticised CIs. Therefore, it can be argued that people with different values and perspectives are inclined to consider different things and interpret differently regarding the CI project, which can be divided into emic and etic views. Or in other words, Western scholars generally look into CIs under the Eurocentric worldview; however, Chinese domestic scholars typically study CIs with an ethnocentric worldview and, intentionally or unintentionally, avoid the ideological scrutiny.

2.4 A critical cosmopolitan approach to inform my study on Confucius Institutes

After reviewing the literatures of CIs, it is not difficult to discover that there are divergent interests and focuses regarding studies and reports on CIs. It seems that most Western scholars tend to view CIs starting from the macro level such as the political influence and soft power of China while disregarding what really happens in the everyday life of CIs. Conversely, the CI studies in the Chinese language are prone to solving only internal problems while overlooking the difficulties from the complexity entailed in macro contexts. My observation from the literature is also in alignment with the study from An et al. (2014) of the comparison work on CI studies between China and overseas during 2004-2014. By analysing the papers relating to CIs both in Chinese and English, it can be concluded that the scholars in the English-speaking world pay special attention to external influences of CIs, on political, economic and cultural aspects, while the domestic scholars focus more on internal development and influence on CIs themselves. Meanwhile, regarding the media reports and portrayals of CIs, as I elaborated earlier, there is a tendency for Western social media to view the CI project from a worried, suspicious, even hostile perspective, and they advertently or inadvertently depict CIs as a "Communist Other" with a negative connotation on soft power. In turn, the description and portrayal of CIs further reinforce the specific and stereotypical impression of CIs to the public. However, in China, you can rarely find any unfavourable reports on CIs partly because of censorship with the restriction of free speech. In addition, although the establishment of CIs is prompted by learning and imitating the cultural institutions in Western countries such as the British Council and the Goethe Institutes, the China aspect often seeks to find the similarities of these institutes and to try to find how to learn from others while the Western perspective tends to search for differences to use for criticism.

It can be argued that the divergent interests and focuses on CIs might be coming from distinct standpoints and purposes, distinct ideological structures and values, and different mindsets and perspectives. In this regard, there are a certain number of studies on CIs in the West that have taken a Eurocentric perspective, which views anything relating to the Chinese Government as inevitably being bad. As McCord

(2019, p. 428) concludes 'most of the anti-CI literature has largely been a form of anti-Chinese polemics rather than a result of careful study or analysis' and therefore this literature 'has been long on concerns but very short on evidence' and moreover takes the repetition of concerns 'as proof of the existence of problems' of CIs. Many CI studies by Chinese academia took an ethnocentric perspective and were reluctant to engage in further explorations of controversial concerns and ideological conflict from macro contexts for avoiding the ideological scrutiny, intentionally or unintentionally. It seems there is little confluence and even no communication between the two perspectives. Both perspectives failed to understand CIs comprehensively from the other side and could easily lapse into biased interpretation.

Due to the above reasons, it is imperative that a new, critical and broad perspective and approach needs to be developed for studying the effects of CIs. As I previously acknowledged from my personal educational experience, the cosmopolitanism view of the global citizen is able to 'reconcile complex, competing values and purposes' (Enslin, 2011, p. 91). However, most of the cosmopolitan ideas operate on a normative level of analysis such as moral and political philosophy on cosmopolitanism, which has little to contribute to empirical analysis (Delanty, 2009). Therefore, Delanty (2006, 2008, 2009) proposes a critical approach to cosmopolitanism that is empirically meaningful as well. This critical cosmopolitan approach can 'invoke a sense of openness as opposed to a closed or particularistic view of the world' (Delanty, 2009, p. 14) Meanwhile, the critical dimension highlights the 'essentially critical and transformative nature' (Delanty, 2009, p. 6) of cosmopolitanism. In short, he claims this approach to:

> [It] emphasize[s] a dimension of cosmopolitanism that is not normally discussed in the now extensive literature on cosmopolitanism, namely the capacity for self-problematization and new ways of seeing the world that result when diverse peoples experience common problems. (Delanty, 2009, p. ix)

Thus, the critical cosmopolitanism provides a different approach and goes beyond the limitations of Eurocentric and ethnocentric views of CI studies that are constrained by national boundaries. In addition, it can enrich more comprehensive and deeper understanding of CIs and promote potential dialogue across cultures and

peoples. Meanwhile, Delanty is also aware of the potential challenge for developing this kind of understanding and dialogue in today's interconnected world:

> When different national interests come into play, difficulties in developing cooperation and dialogue are increased. Overcoming major political and cultural divisions is one of the most challenging tasks of the present day. Foregrounded in this is the possibility of cosmopolitan dialogue. Unlike many approaches to inter-cultural dialogue, the idea of a cosmopolitan dialogue suggests a transformation in self-understanding and not merely a better awareness of the perspective of the other. (Delanty, 2008, p. 227)

In the context of CIs, does this cosmopolitan dialogue exist? To what extent do intercultural engagements via CI activities transform self-understanding of CI staff and activity participants? By employing a critical cosmopolitan perspective, this study goes beyond analysis of the awareness of the perspective from the Other. In particular, this approach requires a kind of imagination, a cosmopolitan imagination, by underscoring four constitutive dimensions: 1) the recognition of cultural difference as both a reality and a positive ideal for social policy, 2) the awareness that the cosmopolitan moment occurs in the context of global-local relations, 3) the negotiation of borders, and borders becoming more blurred, 4) the reinvention of a political community around global ethics (Delanty, 2009, p.7). By focusing on interactive moments that happened in CIs, my study attempts to analyse the impact of intercultural engagement on cultural understanding by acknowledging the capacity of self-problematisation, self-transcendence and self-pluralisation of CI staff and activity participants. This cultural understanding cannot be limited to Self and Other, and also can be observed between CIs, China, the UK and the world. Cosmopolitanism emphasises the fact that the journey into another culture can lead to the journey into the Self, and the process of understanding others is also the process of understanding the Self (Delanty, 2012b; Bardhan and Sobre-Denton, 2015). Specifically, the critical cosmopolitan perspective entails this kind of possibility, i.e. by encountering with the Other and opening up a new perspective, people and society not only can accept different views of the Other, but also can find some way to problematise one's own previous assumptions as well as those of the Other (Delanty, 2009). Through reflexive and critical self-understanding in the light of other's perspectives, people can reinterpret their own culture and transcend the old understanding of the Self. The self-problematisation and self-transcendence

processes can further cultivate the cosmopolitan view of individuals by self-pluralisation and 'living and thinking beyond the local and nation' (Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis, 2009, p. 121). My study attempts to find out these self-problematisation, self-transcendence and self-pluralisation moments from the activity participants and CI staff through analysing the changes and transformations of their understandings toward themselves, the Other and the World.

2.5 Studies on culture and intercultural communication

As mentioned in Chapter 1, if the promotion of intercultural communication is considered to be one of the main purposes of Confucius Institutes, then intercultural research should go beyond the mere gathering of factual information about programmes, events, and resources, by looking more deeply into the opportunities that exist in CIs and examining the practices and interactions that allow intercultural communication to take place.

2.5.1 The traditional approach towards culture and intercultural communication

> Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. This is so partly because of its intricate historical development, in several European languages, but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought. (Williams, 1985, p. 87)

The concept of "culture" is being increasingly studied in a wide variety of disciplines, such as anthropology, psychology, education, linguistics, sociology, international relations, international business, and intercultural communication. As a result, "culture" remains very difficult to define as it 'has migrated to different fields of study', and 'arguably, in the process of incorporation to different methodologies and research questions, its definition has been reshaped and changed' (Baldwin et al., 2006, p. xi). In *Redefining Culture: Perspectives across the Disciplines*, Baldwin et al. (2006) examine more than 300 definitions of culture, concluding that there have always been diverse preferable and prevalent definitions, dimensions, and understandings of culture in each discipline over time. However, in Moon's (1996) systematic review and interrogation of the history of conceptualising culture in the

field of intercultural communication, there is a call for 'more complex notions of "culture" into intercultural communication scholarship' (p. 75). Based on Moon's work, Table 2.1 presents a summary of the genealogy of intercultural communication before the 1990s.

Table 2.1 Summary of the genealogy of intercultural communication developed from Moon's work (1996)

Timeline	1950s	1970-1977	1978-1980s
Definition of culture	Treats "culture" in a pragmatic, goal-oriented manner, focuses on comparison of national cultures, more static and constrained	Diverse interpretations of "culture" in terms of nationality, race, social class, and gender identity	Predominantly conceptualised in terms of nationality in many positivist researchers' projects
Potential rationale for the definition	Political interests of Foreign Service Institute in the United States	N/A	1. Political and capitalist interests of the United States 2. International interest in diffusion studies 3. The development of "methodological rigor" in this field
Influential and representative scholars	Edward T. Hall's work on high-context and low-context cultures (Hall, 1976)	Gerry Philipsen's work on speech code theory (Philipsen, 1975)	William B. Gudykunst's work on anxiety/uncertainty management theory (Gudykunst, 1983a)

Initially, Moon discusses how the notion of "culture" was defined and configured in the 1950s by renowned anthropologist Edward T. Hall as a national-based concept, interconnected with the specific background of his work in the Foreign Service

Institute (FSI). Because of the political interests associated with applying "culture" in the practical settings of the foreign service for training diplomats, "culture" became a pragmatic and goal-oriented concept, which led to intercultural communication becoming a new field of inquiry (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990; Moon, 1996). Although between 1970 and 1977 there were diverse ways of defining "culture" and of examining intercultural communication in terms of nation, race, social class, and gender identity, in the 1980s, the "nation-state" view of "culture" once again became predominant and further entrenched, with a strong preference for positivist research. Most of the research in the 1980s placed emphasis on "objective" approaches and "methodological rigour" in studies of intercultural communication, as can be found in many of Gudykunst's works, such as Anxiety/Uncertainty management theory (Gudykunst, 1983a). Adopting an "objective" approach and "methodological rigor" involves paying close attention to theory development and testing with statistical models, rather than focusing on describing cultural patterns (Gudykunst, 1983b, 1983a; Shuter, 1990; Moon, 1996). In this sense, 'culture serves principally as a research laboratory for testing the validity of communication paradigms', rather than as a complex concept or phenomenon for description and further exploration (Shuter, 1990, p. 238). Leeds-Hurwitz (1990, pp. 263-264) summarised the main elements of Hall's work on culture and the intercultural communication research in the 1990s, as follows: 1) make comparisons of two different cultures rather than focus on a single culture or the impact of one culture upon another; 2) narrow the focus of study from macroanalysis to microanalysis, and place emphasis on specific interpersonal interaction moments; 3) depart from the qualitative methods of anthropology to the quantitative methods of intercultural communication; and 4) assume communication is patterned, learned, and analysable. However, these hegemonic and homogeneous assumptions of "culture" were met with a lot of criticism, and many intercultural communication scholars, including Moon, started to call for more complex, dynamic, and pluralistic definitions of culture within intercultural communication scholarship. In the following section, I will review the literature and two major approaches that seem problematic in this field, and then elucidate why it is important and necessary to insert "power" into culture and intercultural communication.

2.5.2 Critique of essentialist view of culture

The earliest and most influential study in the field of intercultural communication was anthropologist Edward T. Hall's work, which categorised cultures into two types: high-context culture and low-context culture (Hall, 1976). In high-context culture, the communication is 'pre-programmed information that is in the receiver and in the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message', while in low-context culture, 'most of information must be in the transmitted message in order to make up for what is missing in the context' (Hall, 1976, p. 101). According to this taxonomy, Japan and China can be treated as high-context cultures, while the United States and Australia fall into the low-context culture category. Such divisions of cultures by nation or country had a great impact on later studies in the field of intercultural communication, such as Gudykunst's (1983a) work on anxiety/uncertainty management theory, Kim's (1995) work on cross-cultural adaptation, Geert Hofstede's (2001) six-dimension model of national culture, and Stella Ting-Toomey's (1988) face-negotiation theory. These models and theories all have one premise in common, which is that they all assume that a certain group in a certain part of the world behaves in the same ways. However, the essentialist view that the nation lies at the basis of culture receives a lot of criticism in today's intercultural communication studies (Moon, 1996; Dervin, 2011; Piller, 2011; Holliday, 2012; Jackson, 2014). According to Moon, it is inappropriate to use a hegemonic notion of "culture" or one "shared" by certain cultural groups, since the result can be that 'the diverse groups are treated as homogeneous' and 'differences within national boundaries, ethnic groups, genders, and races are obscured' (Moon, 1996, p. 76). This claim resonates with the ideas expounded by Jackson, Holliday, Dervin, Piller, and many other recent interculturalists. Moreover, as Jackson (2014) contends, people might prefer one communication style to another due to their characteristics rather than because of a specific context or situation. Piller (2011, p. 68) argues that these monolithic and essentialist views of culture 'are not useful to understanding and appreciating difference and diversity', and they can easily fall into banal nationalism. Therefore, this kind of understanding might cause certain misconceptions in intercultural investigations. In addition, there are practical inadequacies inherent in this understanding of culture, especially in an age of globalisation and transnational mobility, when people can move around easily.

Holliday (2020, p. 45) comments that this type of exaggeration of the differences in behaviour and values of the "other" by dividing the world into separate cultural blocks often becomes the imagined "evidence" to support discriminatory practices. Given the growing awareness of this problematic simplification of culture, many scholars have proposed alternative approaches to viewing culture and investigating intercultural communication. Dervin (2011) calls for a "fluid" approach in research on intercultural discourses, while Holliday (2010, 2013, 2020) introduces the concept of "small culture" by viewing the notion of "large culture" as an ideological social construction. Martin and Nakayama (1999) explore a dialectical paradigm for thinking critically about culture and communication.

In my planned study of intercultural engagement for cultural understanding between CI Chinese staff and activity participants, it is important to remain aware of the multiplicity of identities, personal histories, and experiencing among the Chinese staff and the activity participants, rather than regarding each group as a homogenous community. Among the Chinese staff, some may be employed by Chinese universities and be working in the CI for just a short term of service; others might hold permanent positions and be employed by UK universities and may also be Chinese nationals; others might be postgraduate students who have come to the UK as language volunteers for one- or two-year working opportunities. Therefore, each of them will have their own narratives and perceptions in relation to China, Chinese culture, CIs, and CI activities. Similarly, the activity participants may come from different countries, and have different personal histories and views in relation to China, Chinese culture, and CIs. With this appreciation of the internal complexity and diversity, we can deepen the understanding of cultures and the interaction between them.

2.5.3 Functionalist approach to intercultural communication

In conjunction with nation-based essentialist views of culture, many classic studies on intercultural communication tend to adopt a functionalist approach, which had become the dominant approach by the 1980s (Moon, 1996). Martin and Nakayama observe that the functionalist paradigm 'assumes that the social world is composed of knowable empirical facts that exist separate from the researcher and reflect the

attempt to apply models and methods of the natural sciences to the study of human behavior' (1999, p. 3). This approach tends to view intercultural communication as interaction between two equal parties with different national backgrounds (Inuzuka, 2013, p. 86). Many intercultural studies in psychology and sociology have taken this approach, with particular attention placed on uncertainty reduction or intercultural competence research, to predict how culture can impact upon communication (Moon, 1996; Martin and Nakayama, 1999; Jensen, 2004). For example, in the area of uncertainty reduction, William B. Gudykunst (1983a) developed an anxiety/uncertainty management theory and Kim (1988) introduced a cross-culture adaptation theory. In the intercultural competence terrain, Byram (2001) proposed a model of intercultural communicative competence and Deardorff (2006) built a pyramid model of intercultural competence.

These studies share many similar features and characteristics. Firstly, the conceptualisation of culture in these studies consisted of a static idea that did not consider the internal complexity within cultural groups. Secondly, culture became a barrier, a variable, and a causal of communication (Moon, 1996; Jensen, 2004; Nakayama and Halualani, 2010). Thirdly, most of these studies put great emphasis on cultural differences between/among groups, potentially leading to them missing out possible cultural similarities across groups (Nakayama and Halualani, 2010; Inuzuka, 2013; Ferri, 2018; Holliday, 2020a). Lastly, but most importantly, the majority of these studies tended to focus on individual/interpersonal levels of culture and communication, without any consideration of how macro contexts such as historical, political, and social issues as well as power imbalance could impact communication (Halualani, Mendoza and Drzewiecka, 2009; Nakayama and Halualani, 2010; Holliday, 2012; Romani and Claes, 2014; Ferri, 2018; Halualani, 2019). This functionalist approach to intercultural communication is based exclusively on micro-level practices in intercultural communication has received much criticism, especially from the critical intercultural communication front. Critical scholars in the intercultural field argue that this approach failed to engage with the social, political, historical, or structural issues from a macro perspective, and mistakenly assumed that communication happens in power-neutral settings (Moon, 2010). In my study of intercultural engagement in CIs, I am neither trying to enhance the effectiveness of communication and interaction between the two parties nor seeking

to identify adaption patterns or models. Instead, I wish to investigate the kind of Chinese culture that CIs introduce and how it entangles with the interaction processes, and then understand how these interactions further impact cultural understanding of one other. In order to answer these questions, I will firstly introduce the concept of "power" into the notion of culture.

2.5.4 Power, power imbalance, and power dynamics

In the preceding section, I reviewed the history of the conceptualisation of culture in intercultural communication and criticised the classical and most common way of viewing culture, as it is a neutral, static, and homogenous concept with nation-based boundaries. Meanwhile, I also argued that it is problematic and inadequate to focus only on micro-level practices and functionalist aspects in intercultural communication. The literature examined in relation to this point on culture and intercultural communication has remained quite static even until recent times. For example, although some recent attempts have been made to conceptualise culture from a multidisciplinary perspective, such as by defining the concept based on the three key notions of cultural group membership, cultural group identities, and cultural patterning (Spencer-Oatey and Kádár, 2021), the notion of culture remains quite static and constrained at an individual level. The influence of power relationships is a newer area in studies of culture and intercultural communication. Therefore, in this section, I will explore the literature and consider to what extent larger contexts can make an impact on defining culture, and how power, power imbalance, and power dynamics can both constrain and enable us to conceptualise culture and people in different ways.

First of all, we should ask what power in fact is. According to the critical intercultural scholar Halualani (2019, p. 7), power is 'the constraining force by which larger dominant structures, groups, and individuals are able to gain in position and achieve their aims over/against the will of others'. There are several contexts in which power can play roles, such as in economics, government, law, education, the family, the media, etc. Three distinct features of the contexts of power are addressed by Halualani (2019, pp. 8-11), namely hierarchies of power, struggles for power, and independent and interdependent contexts of power. The hierarchy of power means

that there is always a visible or hidden hierarchy of dominant party/parties and subordinate party/parties in any power context, and the dominant parties usually have great influence and capacity to introduce certain views and values about the "truth". A struggle for power between the dominant party/parties and the subordinate party/parties constantly exists and is being modified. In different contexts, different parties are always both independent of and interdependent upon each other and contribute to the dynamic forms of struggle between dominant and subordinate parties. In other words, the hierarchy of power signifies that there have always been power imbalances among different parties in specific contexts, and a struggle for power implies there have always been power dynamics among the different parties.

In terms of power imbalance, for example, it is not difficult to see some subtle power differentials between central and periphery cultures, e.g. the West and the East. From Edward Said's celebrated book "Orientalism" (1978) to Stuart Hall's in-depth discussion of the discourse and power between the West and the Rest (1992), there have been historical investigations of the power asymmetries between the West and the East. In particular, Said reveals that the dominant party, i.e., the West, 'has depicted an imagined, Othering, exotic picture of the East [...] based more on Western preoccupations than with what is actually going on in the East' throughout the history of colonisation (Said, 1978; Holliday, 2013). This image of the "Others" as different subjects also resonates with some critical scholars in intercultural studies within various contexts (Holliday, 2013; Phipps, 2013; Piller, 2013; Halualani, 2019). For instance, Holliday (2013, p. 97) criticises the false imagination of 'an idealised Western Self [...] against a demonised non-Western Other', and proposes a new way of examining intercultural experience through small culture formation. He further states that these kind of 'judgements about exaggerated differences in behaviour and values' between the self and the Other 'will often become the imagined "evidence" for the need to discriminate' (Holliday, 2020a, p. 45). Phipps (2013) demonstrates the colonising prestige of consciousness through the example of Western feminism's view of veiling as a problematic practice of Muslim women, without considering what Muslim women's thoughts are about this practice. Piller (2013) critiques low linguistic proficiency and the fact that even one's accent in English may result in discrimination, stereotyping, and inequality in everyday life, as

English is now a "lingua franca" in today's world (p. 146). Halualani (2019) explores how Western social media selectively chooses certain "negative" images to represent other countries' history and culture and discusses the experience of a first-generation Vietnamese girl living in the US. The observation made by Halualani is consistent with Van Dijk's claim that 'most of what white Americans know about "Others" is gleaned from mass media' (Van Dijk, 1987, cited in Moon, 1996, p. 77). Overall, power imbalance can be found in any intercultural communication situation, and it can belong to the political context, the religious context, the linguistic context, and the cultural context, etc. Therefore, it is important and necessary to have an awareness of these imbalances when conducting intercultural research on different people and parties.

Similar to culture, power, too, is not a static or stable entity, which means the struggle for power between dominant parties and subordinate parties is constantly shifting and changing. In this sense, power dynamics can be found in almost every cultural context, such as in politics, economics, race, ethnicity, and gender. For example, at the national level, one of the most famous declarations in global politics and culture at the end of the twentieth century was Huntington's (1993) Clash of Civilisations, in which he highlighted the shifting balance and reconfiguration of civilisations from Western to non-Western countries after the end of the Cold War. This process of reconfiguration is consistent with the fading global power of the Western bloc and the resurgence of the non-Western powers in the post-Cold War era. The increasing economic and military power of non-Western states has enhanced their self-confidence, and in return, they 'trumpet the virtues of their own values, institutions and culture' (Huntington, 1993, p. 92). This is what Joseph Nye describes as the intertwined relationship between "hard power" and "soft power", in which 'soft power is power only when it rests on a foundation of hard power' (Huntington, 1993, p. 92). Furthermore, with respect to religion, some elements in the revival of religious forces, such as militant Islam, Hinduism, and even some aspects of Buddhism, etc., are also opposed to the processes of secular modernisation and democracy in the West. Cultural and power structures worldwide have become full of complexity and uncertainty. Broadly speaking, these intercivilisational issues have the potential to result in dangerous clashes due to 'the interaction of Western

arrogance, Islamic intolerance, and Sinic assertiveness' (ibid., p. 183). Thus, the struggle for power among different civilisations is constantly evolving.

2.5.5 Power-based perspective of culture

In response to the inadequacies of defining culture as a static, neutral, nation-based, homogeneous concept, which is adopted as if it were unproblematic in traditional approaches to intercultural communication, many critical scholars appeal for a taking of "power" into account when we describe and define culture in the intercultural communication field (Halualani, Mendoza and Drzewiecka, 2009; Moon, 2010; Nakayama and Halualani, 2010; Sorrells, 2010; Holliday, 2011, 2012; Piller, 2011; Ferri, 2018). After considering the power, power imbalance, and power dynamics that exist in diverse contexts, in combination with the previous reviews on CIs and CI studies, I would conclude that it is necessary and important to take a power-based perspective of culture into account in any study of CI activity engagement, since the various views on CIs, the specific Chinese culture that CIs promote, and other aspects all intertwine with visible or hidden forces of power in diverse contexts. So, what is a power-based perspective of culture? Halualani explains it as follows:

> Culture is a system of meaning and representations created in an entangled field of forces through which differently positioned entities (i.e., dominant government, legal, economic, mediate, institutional, and educational structures), groups, and persons compete for the power to define, represent, and even own a culture and its resources (land, artefacts, and cultural practices). (Halualani, 2019, p. 38)

As this statement suggests, culture is no longer a neutral notion, but one with an ideologically laden system of meaning and representations of the dominant party/parties. Moreover, culture is no longer a static notion, but can alter as power shifts from one meaning to another. Moreover, culture has become a field of forces and a site of struggle that rests on four premises, as elaborated by Halualani (2019, pp. 40-46): 1) the meaning of culture not only comes from the cultural group itself, but also from many competing structures and parties that try to define culture within their own interests; 2) this creation of meaning of culture by structures of power is mostly for the benefit of the dominant structures, rather than for the actual cultural

groups; 3) the meaning of culture can thus acquire more credibility and become the "real" representation of a culture; 4) the power imbalance between structures of power and the actual cultural group being represented can have a strong impact on the cultural group itself and its ability to define its own culture.

2.5.6 The macro and micro contexts of intercultural communication

As discussed above, power can be situated differently in different contexts (economic, political, legal, educational, etc.), and these contexts can be regarded as macro contexts of intercultural communication. In addition to the diverse power contexts, the historical, ideological, social, and political dynamics and relations can also be included in the macro picture as these can both constrain and enable intercultural/interpersonal communication. The micro contexts of intercultural communication can be viewed as actual interpersonal communication practices, such as the communication form, place, interlocutors, experience, conflicts, purposes, and expectations, etc. It is worth noting that the micro and macro contexts do not exist independently of each other, but are intertwined. Moon (2010, p. 35) contends that previous intercultural studies' 'lack of attention to "dialogue" between micro and macro practices' and ignoring of 'how structural constraints push and pull' also applies to micro practices. Equally, micro practices 'can re-inscribe or even be used to oppose and change structural configurations'.

2.6 A critical intercultural communication approach to inform my study on Confucius Institute activities

As a growing research area, critical intercultural communication has embraced diverse critical perspectives, dimensions, and topics. According to the explanations and conclusions provided by several influential intercultural communication scholars in The Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication (Nakayama and Halualani, 2010), this new research area foregrounds the following:

> [...] issues of power, context, social-economic relations and historical/structural forces as constituting and shaping culture and intercultural communication encounters, relationships, and contexts, a critical perspective is defined as one that addresses issues of macro contexts (historical, social, and political levels), power, relevance, and

the hidden and destabilizing aspects of culture. (Nakayama and Halualani, 2010, pp.1-2)

Moon (2010) sets out the contributions of the "critical turn" between 1997 and 2007 in intercultural communication in six areas: 1) historicising the field, 2) conceptualisations of culture, 2) theoretical/conceptual development, 4) expansion of foundational concepts, 5) critique of dominant ideologies, and 6) pedagogy as critical praxis. With respect to theoretical development, Martin and Nakayama (1999) worked on dialectics, Martinez (2006) on the phenomenological extension of dialectics, and Orbe (1998) on co-cultural theory. Firstly, Martin and Nakayama (1999) proposed a dialectic approach that went beyond paradigm constraints and could facilitate interparadigmatic dialogue in the intercultural communication field. This approach accepts that human nature can be both creative and deterministic, and the relationship between culture and communication can be both reciprocal and contested. Meanwhile, the approach 'makes explicit the dialectical tension between what previous research topics have studied (cultural differences, assumed static nature of culture, etc.) and what should be studied (how cultures change, how they are similar, importance of history)' (Martin and Nakayama, 1999, p. 19). The six dialectics identified by the authors are: cultural-individual dialectic, personal/social-contextual dialectic, differences-similarities dialectic, static-dynamic dialectic, present-future/history-past dialectic, and privilege-disadvantage dialectic. Furthermore, by adopting the dialectics approach of Martin and Nakayama, Martinez (2006) proposed a semiotic phenomenology for dealing with the challenges and complexities of racial, ethnic, and cultural difference. Another significant contribution was made by Orbe (1997), who applied co-cultural theory to phenomenological research to examine the communication strategies used in communication between marginalised group members and dominant group members. Specifically, 'co-cultural theory provides insights into how different factors (e.g., preferred outcome and communication approach) intersect to influence the specific communication practices that traditionally-marginalised group members enact in their interaction with others' (Razzante and Orbe, 2018, p. 355).

Besides highlighting the theoretical contributions to the critical intercultural communication field, The Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication

(Nakayama and Halualani, 2013) also presented the different critical dimensions in multiple disciplines. The first dimension involves theorising from a new critical intercultural perspective in a diverse context; the second dimension is related to language and its hierarchies of meanings and value; and the third dimension concerns historical memory in intercultural communication. For example, in Raka Shome's (2013) examination of critical race communication studies, the author criticises the US-centeredness of our racial lenses today. Kathryn Sorrells (2013) explores four areas for redefining culture: the roles of history and power, local/global connections, multilevel analysis, and social justice for re-imagining intercultural communication in the context of globalisation. Yoshitaka Miike (2013) elaborates on the Asiacentricity and Asiacentric approach for confronting traditional Eurocentrism in terms of both theory and methodology. Crispin Thurlow (2013) scrutinises the connections and differences between language, inequality, and interculturality. Melissa L. Curtin (2013) proposes "conculturation" as a new model of cultural adjustment, in contrast to traditional concepts such as cultural assimilation, acculturation, accommodation, adaption, integration, etc. Moreover, Jolanta A. Drzewiechka (2013) probes the divided memories and national identities in relation to the Polish nation and the Jewish Other. All of these studies have illustrated the possibilities of engaging with diverse dimensions in critical intercultural communication, and they 'underscore that the theories and tools we use are not neutral, they implicitly favour political agendas, certain cultures/values and research streams' (Romani and Claes, 2014, p. 129). Therefore, by drawing on these critical perspectives and dimensions, as well as these vanguard theories and methodologies, there is scope for further studies to contribute new insights into the realm of critical intercultural communication.

2.7 Chapter summary and Research Questions

This chapter has explored the research context of CIs in Britain and the literature on CIs and critical intercultural communication. With respect to the context selection, although there have been some empirical studies investigating CIs in Germany (Hartig, 2015a) and in US universities (Stambach, 2014), as well as studies of Confucius Classrooms in the US (Hubbert, 2019) and Australia (Gil, 2017), there is a paucity of research on the activities of CIs in the UK context. Considering that the UK has the

most CIs in Europe and the close relationship between the UK and China in tertiary education, Britain deserves some special attention in CI studies. Furthermore, CI activities are also the ideal vector for capturing the complexities entailed in intercultural engagement between groups with different cultural backgrounds.

After examining the literature on CIs, I propose to study CIs with a more contemporary, critical, and broader perspective, i.e. by applying a critical cosmopolitan perspective to overcome the limitations of Eurocentric and ethnocentric mindsets in the West and in China. Based on the review of the literature on culture and intercultural communication, I propose to examine engagement in CI activities taking the dimension of power and the macro contexts into consideration, that is, by using a critical intercultural communication approach. By adopting a critical perspective that takes account of both the macro contexts and micro levels of communication and by viewing culture as a power-based concept, my study on engagement in CI activities attempts to explore the "dialogue" between micro and macro practices. Specifically, this study aims to uncover how the macro contexts can influence CI activity practices, and conversely, to what extent these interactions and engagements can impact participants' and organisers' cultural understanding of one another.

Apart from the impact of the interactions and engagements within CIs and CI activities, some intrinsic factors at the individual level may influence people's cultural understanding of each other, such as, for example, personality. If we were to consider how 'personality' is conceptualised in cultural psychology, personality and culture are regarded as closely interlinked. For example, Triandis & Suh (2002) contend that 'ecologies shape cultures; cultures influence the development of personalities' (p. 133). However, there are also counter perspectives, which acknowledge individual differences and that cultures are not necessarily the primary determinants of personalities. For example, Cheung et al.'s (2011) study specifically examined personality in culture and also in some non-Western models, found that social and relational aspects also have some impact on personalities. Moreover, culture can also have an effect on different levels, such as display rules, characteristic adaptations, and life meanings, and on different aspects of assessment (McAdams & Pals, 2006; Cheung, 2009). Taken together, while culture is a very strong

influencing factor for one's personality, it can be argued that it may "influence" but does not determine the formation of people's perspectives and behaviours or their interpretations of the meaning of these behaviours (see also Spencer-Oatey & Kadar, 2021, p. 4). In my study, despite the potential influence from these intrinsic factors at the individual level, both as individuals and as members of different cultures, my study purpose and design are more focusing on the intercultural interaction and engagement process and on how these interactions and engagements can impact on people's cultural understanding through activities that are offered by CIs. By looking into interpersonal interactions and acknowledging the capacity of self-problematisation, self-transcendence and self-pluralisation when encountering with the Other between activity participants and Chinese staff, my study attempts to examine the critical reflections and transformative moments that they reveal when it comes to understanding themselves, the Other and the World. In summary, table 2.2 illustrates how these two critical theories and perspectives can be combined in my overarching research framework.

Table 2.2 My overarching research framework

Study approach	Critical cosmopolitan approach	Critical intercultural communication
Gaps	Eurocentric view Ethnocentric view	Essentialising generalisation of culture
Emphasis	Micro level interaction Interactive dimension Internal transformation through self-problematisation, self-transcendence and self-constitution	Macro level of influence Political, cultural, and economic dimensions Power difference, power imbalance, and power dynamics
Level	Micro	Macro
Assumptions	Individual contains immanent capacities for learning and societies have developmental possibilities	Foregrounds issues of power, context, social-economic relations, and historical/structural forces

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed CIs, the development of CIs, the UK-China relationship, the UK's language strategies, and the Chinese language learning

situation in the UK. I have also reviewed studies on CIs and intercultural communication. By employing a critical approach to CI studies and intercultural studies, this study sets out to address the following three research questions:

1) What are the areas of concordance and discordance between the activity participants and Chinese staff with respect to the intercultural experience of Confucius Institute activities?

2) How can Confucius Institute activities be shaped by larger contexts?

3) How can intercultural engagement within Confucius Institute activities have an impact on cultural understanding between activity participants and Chinese staff?

In order to attempt to answer the research questions and fill the potential research gaps in the extant literature, a mixed-methods approach was selected as my research design, including both online questionnaire and interviews. The worldview assumptions, methodology, methods, fieldwork, and data analysis of my study will be carefully presented and explored in the methodology chapter that follows.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Overview

After reviewing literature from both studies of CIs and intercultural communication in chapter 2, three research questions were generated and proposed as follows:

1) What are the areas of concordance and discordance between the activity participants and Chinese staff with respect to the intercultural experience of Confucius Institute activities?

2) How can Confucius Institute activities be shaped by larger contexts?

3) How can intercultural engagement within Confucius Institute activities have an impact on cultural understanding between activity participants and Chinese staff?

In endeavouring to address these questions, this chapter sets out my research approaches and why these approaches are chosen for the study. It starts with an explanation of my position as a researcher in this study, followed by a discussion of the research paradigm and the reason that I adopted a mixed methods approach as my research design. Then, the sample selection and fieldwork in Britain are introduced and the data collection procedures are presented. After that, both quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis conducted on the data are elaborated. Lastly, ethical considerations and the validity & reliability of this study are addressed in 3.7 and 3.8, respectively.

3.2 Position of the researcher

Although quantitative research can maintain a certain level of objectivity and neutrality, in qualitative research, it is widely acknowledged that there is a degree of impracticability of pure objectivity and neutrality because of the very nature of this approach (Jootun, McGhee and Marland, 2009). In particular, the different researchers' positions can potentially influence the study in three major ways: 1) The background and worldview of the researcher can affect the way he/she constructs the world, filters the information, makes meaning of the information, and

shapes the findings of the study (Kacen and Chaitin, 2006); 2) it can influence the access to the "field" since the informants may want to share more stories with the people who are familiar with their work or experiences; 3) the researcher and informants' relationship also can impact on the participants' willingness to share (Berger, 2015, 220). However, reflectivity in the researcher's position has been increasingly recognised as an effective position which can help the researcher to look beyond any "repressed reflexivity" and enhance the accuracy, trustworthiness and unbiased view of the research (Jootun, McGhee and Marland, 2009; Berger, 2015). Therefore, I adopted the reflectivity technique throughout all phases of my study by continuously self-evaluating my positionality as well as actively acknowledging that different positions may affect the result of the research.

First, I was fully aware of the fact that my personal background and worldview can affect the way I construct the world, filter information, make meaning of information and shape the findings of my study. Supported by an understanding of cosmopolitanism from my master's degree study and my wide overseas intercultural experience, I have been able to view myself as a global citizen. Additionally, as addressed in the search for literature gaps in studies of CIs in chapter 2, many CI studies either take a Eurocentric perspective or an ethnocentric perspective and we need to take a broader and more critical perspective on this topic. As a result, I employed critical cosmopolitanism as my standpoint to conduct this study, and wish to 'reconcile complex, competing values and purposes' (Enslin, 2011, p. 91) and 'overcoming major political and cultural divisions' (Delanty, 2008, p. 227). The critical cosmopolitan perspective can perhaps overcome nationalism and narrowly defined globalization and provides an opportunity to build positive dialogue for us across different cultural and civilisational worlds.

Second, I also noticed that my privileged position as both insider and outsider could influence my access to information from the respondents because they may have been willing to share their experience with someone who is sympathetic to their position and situation (De Tona, 2006). To ensure objectivity and neutrality, I positioned myself as an outsider and an independent researcher when I distributed the online survey. When I conducted interviews with Chinese staff, I located my position as an insider who is familiar with the work in CIs to some extent. During the

interviews, I shared my work experience as a Chinese language volunteer who was dispatched by Hanban in 2012-2014, so they can express their stories easily and in a relaxed way without worrying too much about explanation of the contexts of their work. One more key reason that I mentioned my experience is that some CI staff might be cautious about being interviewed because of the significant numbers of negative reports circulating in the western media. My position as an insider could let them be willing to share more authentic stories from their perspective as Chinese staff. I realised the importance of this point from one Chinese director in CI8, who rejected my interview because of a previous unpleasant experience of misrepresentative news reporting about their CI from the local media. When I interviewed activity participants, because many of them were university students or international students in UK universities, I introduced myself as an international student at the University of Glasgow for resonating with their own experience as university students or international students. Although from the insider's position I can benefit from the ability to understand the topic and get more subtle and in-depth information from respondents, I was fully aware of the potential risks such as blurring boundaries, value-imposing, and bias projecting (Drake, 2010). Hence, I cautiously detached myself from an insider to an independent researcher when I asked some questions and analysed the data findings.

Finally, it is important to recognise the possibility that different relationships between myself and the participants can have an impact on the information that they were willing to share, as shared experience might shape the power relationship between the researcher and participants (Berger, 2015). For example, it could create for Chinese staff a feeling of activity comparison since I also have previous experience on cultural activity organisation for oversea participants. In this situation, they might selectively exaggerate their achievements and hide the potential problems or conflicts of activity organisation. My awareness of these things was important, and I made efforts to be supportive but not influential when conducting interviews.

3.3 Research worldview and design

Researchers need to consider philosophical assumptions before they start research projects, as they can be determining influences on the processes of study and the conduct of inquiries (Creswell and Clark, 2017). Employing the term worldview of 'beliefs and assumptions about knowledge that informs their study' from Creswell and Clark (2017, p. 35), this study is consistent with a pragmatic worldview and adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods in the research design.

3.3.1 Research worldview: a pragmatic approach

Creswell and Clark (2017) highlight four general worldview assumptions for practising mixed method studies, which are postpositivist, constructivist, transformative and pragmatism. Each assumption contains different perceptions of the ontology and epistemology and in turn can influence the approaches of methodology and method that are selected. However, these assumptions are not mutually exclusive, and might be used in a combined or individual fashion, depending on what best fits the study context (Crotty, 1998; Creswell and Clark, 2017). The distinctions of these four worldviews are summarised by Creswell (2014, p. 6) as follows:

Table 3.1 Four research worldviews

Postpositivist worldview	Determination, reductionism, empirical observation and measurement, theory verification.
Constructivist worldview	Understanding, multiple participant meanings, social and historical construction, theory generation.
Transformative worldview	Political and activist, empowerment, human rights, social justice oriented, collaborative, emancipatory oriented.
Pragmatic worldview	Consequences of actions, problem centred, pluralistic, real-world practice oriented.

Each worldview represents a specific lens for seeing and understanding the world with respect to ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology and rhetoric. To sum up the explanation from Creswell (2014, pp. 7-11), regarding the four worldviews, postpositivist worldview holds a deterministic and singular reality rather than multiple realities assumptions and is useful for collecting data objectively using scientific methods such as experiment and measurement. In addition, it tends to reduce bias or avoid bias in epistemology and usually adopts the deductive approach to test an existing theory rather than theory building. Opposite to this is the constructivist worldview, which holds multiple realities in the world. Constructivists consider that 'individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work' (p. 8), and closely engage in interaction with participants. This view is often associated with bias in terms of axiology, since both participants' views are subjective as well as the researchers' interpretation. Consequently, it is often associated with qualitative and inductive approaches, and the theory can be constructed through the study process. In a transformative worldview, many groups belong to the specific paradigm, such as feminism, Marxism and postcolonial studies. Researchers who hold this view are required to actively involve participants as collaborators and advocate for social justice and human rights. It focuses on participation and involvement through the whole study process. The fourth worldview is pragmatism, which is concerned with research problems and ways of solving these problems. It is very flexible for selecting multiple realities, stances and methodologies, relying on whichever approach can be workable and is applicable to the actual context. Therefore, this pluralistic orientation approach is generally linked with mixed methods research design.

As a philosophical underpinning for mixed methods studies, pragmatism has been chosen as my research worldview and paradigm. Unlike other worldviews, this approach takes 'a middle road through these assumptions' and believes 'the world is both real and socially constructed' rather than relying on a single philosophical assumption (Morgan, 2014). Moreover, it is concerned about the research problem and how to 'use all approaches available to understand the problem' (Rossman and Wilson, 1985; Creswell, 2014). In my study, the answers to three research questions

need to be discovered: 1) the areas of concordance and discordance with respect to the intercultural experience of CI activities between the activity participants and Chinese staff; 2) how can CI activities be shaped by larger contexts? 3) How can intercultural engagement within CI activities have an impact on cultural understanding between activity participants and Chinese staff. With the intention of answering these questions, some basic information needs to be in place first such as the activity participants, the activities, activity contents, structures and interaction processes etc. Therefore, the postpositivist worldview can be the most appropriate approach at my first stage of quantitative data collection, as some facts about the activities and activity participants need to be discovered objectively rather than subjectively. After gathering holistic and general information about the activity participants and the activities, the constructivist worldview was applicable for my stage two qualitative semi-structured interviews for both activity participants and CI staff. In this situation, multiple realities and multiple understandings can be revealed from different experiences, perceptions and beliefs from several perspectives. The worldview transition from postpositivist to constructivist can fit my specific research purposes at each stage, which can maximise potentially significant outcomes and minimise unnecessarily insignificant data collection. By employing a pragmatism approach, these two worldviews no longer need to be taken as two opposite paradigms but can serve as 'complementarity between the knowledge that they produce' based on the mutual relevance assumption (Morgan, 2014).

3.3.2 Research design: a sequential contributions model

Three broad motivations for integrating qualitative and quantitative methods are discussed by Morgan (2014), and it can be seen that different purposes can lead to very different research designs. The first motivation is for producing convergent findings for the same research questions from different methods, which is also known as triangulation. The second motivation is for pursuing additional coverage, and each method contributes to separate parts of the whole project. The third motivation is for sequential contributions for which 'qualitative and quantitative methods serve separate but closely linked purposes so that the results of one can enhance the effectiveness of the other' (Morgan, 2014, p. 11). In the sequential contributions category, there are four basic research designs depending on the priority of methods

and sequence of methods: 1) preliminary qualitative inputs to core quantitative, 2) preliminary quantitative inputs to core qualitative, 3) follow-up qualitative extensions to core quantitative, 4) follow-up quantitative extensions to core qualitative. In my study, the preliminary quantitative inputs to core qualitative model is chosen as my research design for serving my research purposes, as the first stage online survey inputs can enhance the effectiveness of the interview data collection.

As one of the sequential contributions models, the preliminary quantitative inputs to core qualitative model 'are typically to assist in the selection of data sources for core studies that rely on qualitative methods'(Morgan, 2014). Specifically, the first stage of preliminary quantitative inputs can systematically examine many potential candidates and then allow me to purposefully screen out and select the most appropriate respondents for the stage-two core qualitative interviews. In my case, the online survey design for the activity participants cohort can contribute to the effectiveness of the core qualitative interviews in two ways. Firstly, it can help me to find and select respondents who could potentially provide the most useful and highest-quality data samples for the stage two interviews. As the activity participants are located in 28 CIs in Britain, it is very difficult to find a sufficient number of representative participants for the semi-structured interviews. However, online survey can provide fast access to the participants and simplify my task of searching for them, thus saving time and effort (Morgan, 2014). Secondly, the core qualitative interviews can benefit from the broad and general information about activities, activity experience and activity participants that had already been obtained from the preliminary online survey. Informed by the general information, the interview and the interview questions can be more precisely constructed to review and define the criteria for the stage two data collection.

In summary, after discussing the rationale behind my choices, figure 3.1 illustrates the worldview, research design and research method of my study.

Worldview		
Pragmatic worldview: combined postpositivist worldview and constructivist worldview	**Research desgin**	
	Mixed methods: Preliminary quantitative inputs to core qualitative research	**Research method**
		Stage one: online survey for activity participants Stage two: semi-structured interviews for both activity participants and CI staff
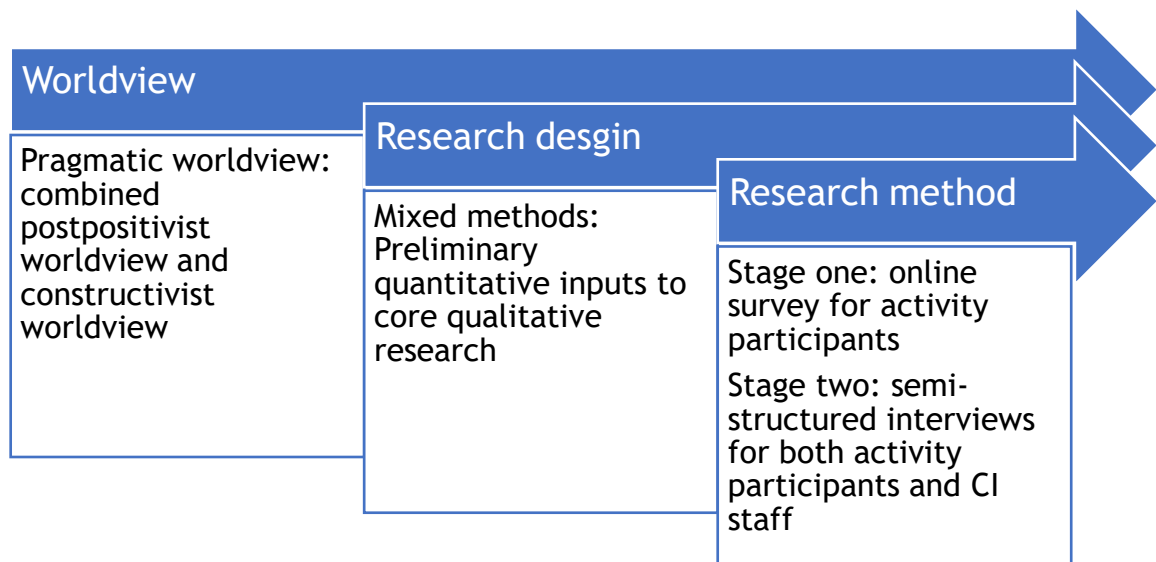
Figure 3.1 The worldview, research design and research method of my study

3.4 Sampling

After identifying the research questions and the research design, the next steps were to decide 'what, where, when and whom to observe or interview' (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015, p. 96). This section shows the criteria used for sample selection for my study and the process and difficulties that I encountered in my fieldwork.

3.4.1 Sample selection

In quantitative sample selection, four things need to be considered before recruiting participants: 1) sample size, 2) time availability, 3) access restriction and 4) good quality sample (Davies and Hughes, 2014). Firstly, different data analysis requires different sample size. For example, it should be enough with a 60-120 sample size for a descriptive or an exploratory survey but not enough for a hypothesis-testing one (Davies and Hughes, 2014, p. 56). Secondly, access to participants for a reasonable duration must be assured as there may be time restriction for a researcher such as your project funding period or your PhD time length. Thirdly, for obtaining the data legitimately within the limited time, it is important to 'make decisions based on "the art of the possible" by considering how you can recruit participants who are more immediately accessible' (ibid., p. 56). Finally, after taking

all practical considerations, you still need to find some ways to improve sampling quality as much as possible within the available time and resources.

In my study, being aware of the above requirements, cluster sampling and online survey were adopted to enable me to recruit participants. Although simple probability sampling can be generalised to the total sampling population, realistically, it is difficult to achieve in most cases. Alternatively, cluster sampling, which is random sampling with 'names of geographical locations, the branch names of companies, classes in a school, or streets in a city', can be a compromise route forward (Davies and Hughes, 2014, p. 60). In my case, the 28 CIs in Britain can be the ideal clusters and I contacted each of them by emails requesting their assistance in distributing the online survey through their internal email list and official social media. In terms of the online survey, many advantages have been widely described in the literature, such as time efficiency, flexibility, convenience, low cost, easy to facilitate data analysis, question diversity, easy to follow-up etc.(Evans and Mathur, 2005). Albeit the online surveys are less likely to achieve high response rates compared to paper-based surveys, on average 33% vs 56% (Nulty, 2008, p. 302), it is the most suitable method in my case as the potential sampling population are very dispersed (around Britain), and more crucially, I have no other means of direct connection with them. Comparing all the pros and cons along with the practical situation, I decided to distribute the survey online.

Eventually, 10 CIs gave their consents and helped me to distribute the online survey from September to December 2018, 103 surveys were collected from participants' official social media with some on each of Twitter, Facebook, internal email lists such as monthly newsletter and by direct request of the 10 CIs. As this survey is more descriptive and exploratory rather than for hypothesis-testing, the sample size is enough in my case. Detailed information can be found in table 3.2, and among the 103 participants, 35 participants did not mention which CI they belonged to.

Table 3.2 Online survey sample selection of activity participants

CIs with consent	CIs	Ways to distribute online survey	Sample collected
	CI1	Twitter & Facebook	4
	CI2	Facebook	21
	CI3	Twitter	0
	CI4	Internal social media	9
	CI5	Email	10
	CI6	Email & Facebook & Twitter	12
	CI7	Email & Facebook & Twitter	3
	CI8	Email & Facebook & Twitter	5
	CI9	Email	3
	CI10	Twitter	1
Others	Unclear	Unclear	35
In total	13 CIs	N/A	103

In the qualitative sample selection, 'the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question' (Creswell, 2014, p. 189). Considering that the nature of qualitative research is not for generalisation in a statistical sense, nonprobability sampling is the practical and rational choice in which purposeful sampling can be the most common sampling strategy for the qualitative researcher (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). There are many types of purposeful sampling, such as 'typical, unique, maximum variation, convenience, and snowball or chain sampling' (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015, p. 97). In getting as many information-rich cases as possible, my study adopted all mentioned sampling strategies. Typical, unique and maximum variation sampling strategies were conducted for the activity participant cohort, and convenience and snowball sampling strategies were employed with the CI Chinese staff cohort. In terms of the number of participants that should be involved in a qualitative study, there is no specific answer to be found on this as it may vary in different situations. For example, in grounded theory, there is no need to collect data when 'gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties' (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2014, p. 189). In my study, I also tried my best to contact as many participants as possible within my planed limited period (Jan. 2019 – July. 2019), and finally I successfully interviewed 30 people, in which there were 13 activity participants and 17 Chinese staff.

In terms of sample selection from the activity participants cohort, although there were 44 survey participants who left their email indicating their willingness to respond to further contact, I selected and contacted 20 participants primarily based on maximum variation sampling combined with typical sampling and unique sampling for maximising the potential richness of the data. Specifically, different occupation, age, nationality and the CI base were considered for maximum variation sampling. Meanwhile, some participants such as students, age between 20-40, and UK nationals were purposely chosen as typical sampling. Survey participants with interesting comments were also taken into consideration as unique sampling to some extent. My initial plan was to get approvals from the selected 20 participants and interview them all since they had already shown their willingness to help me by providing their email addresses in the surveys. However, things did not go as originally intended. I encountered some difficulties during participant recruitment with some who had agreed to participate no longer wishing to do so or not being available during the actual interview phase. Eventually I managed to interview 13 activity participants in person. This was a smaller number than had been intended but was arguably adequate because of my proposed in-depth approach to data collection and analysis. I attempted to mitigate the potential limitations by employing the three different sampling strategies selected for the activity participants cohort and by adopting different data collection methods for maximising the richness of the data. Table 3.3 shows the information gathered from the participants (P1-P13) that I interviewed from January to March in 2019.

Table 3.3 Interview sample selection of activity participants

Partici pants	CI base	Occupation	Age	Nationality	Comment	Interview date
P1	CI2	Other	20-40	UK	No	From
P2	CI2	Student	20-40	Kenya	No	9 Jan. 2019
P3	CI5	Teacher	40-60	Chile	Yes	to
P4	CI5	Student	20-40	Mexico	Yes	20 Mar. 2019
P5	CI5	Student	20-40	European countries	Yes	
P6	CI4	Student	20-40	UK	Yes	
P7	CI4	Student	20-40	UK	Yes	
P8	CI2	Teacher	Above 60	UK	No	

P9	CI6	Other	20-40	USA	No
P10	CI6	Student	20-40	European countries	No
P11	CI6	Student	20-40	British and Polish	No
P12	CI7	Student	20-40	UK	No
P13	CI2	Teacher	20-40	China	Yes

In terms of sample selection for the Chinese staff cohort, firstly, in order to obtain richer information from the diverse perspectives within this cohort, the term of "Chinese staff" in my study is taken as a very broad notion. As the joint model of CIs comprising one Chinese university and one local university, the sample includes not only Chinese teachers, volunteers and directors who are selected and dispatched by Hanban from China for short stays (normally 2-4 years), but also permanent staff who are employed by local universities, such as Chinese teachers and directors. Although some Chinese staff employed by local universities might have already lived in the UK for a long period and even become expatriates of China, I still regarded them as research participants if they were first-generation immigrants. Second, I employed convenience sampling and snowball sampling for avoiding repetitive work as I had already had connections with some CIs from the survey distribution. I contacted these CIs for further interviews and kindly asked them to refer me to other CIs' Chinese staff. In the end, 17 Chinese staff in 8 CIs have been involved in being interviewed during January to July in 2019, and I have used S1-S17 to represent them (see table 3.4).

Table 3.4 Interview sample selection of Chinese staff

Staff	CI base	Duration of tenure	Employer	Position	Interview date
S1	CI1	2 years	Hanban	Chinese director	From 21 Jan. 2019 to 31 Jul. 2019
S2	CI1	2 years	Hanban	Teacher	
S3	CI1	4 years	Hanban	Teacher	
S4	CI5	4 years	Hanban	Teacher	
S5	CI5	2 years	Hanban	Teacher	
S6	CI5	2 years	Hanban	Teacher	
S7	CI4	Permanent	Local Uni.	Local teacher	

S8	CI4	2 years	Hanban	Chinese director	
S9	CI4	Permanent	Local Uni.	Local deputy director	
S10	CI2	Permanent	Local Uni.	Local deputy director	
S11	CI6	Permanent	Local Uni.	Teacher	
S12	CI7	2 years	Hanban	Teacher	
S13	CI7	2 years	Hanban	Chinese director	
S14	CI3	2 years	Hanban	Teacher	
S15	CI3	2 years	Hanban	Chinese director	
S16	CI8	2 years	Hanban	Teacher	
S17	CI8	2 years	Hanban	Teacher	

3.4.2 Fieldwork in Britain

Several difficulties arose when I was conducting the fieldwork in Britain for my online survey distribution. Initially, my plan was to contact all of the 28 CIs in Britain by email and ask them to circulate the online survey link in their social media or/and official email. I searched on their official websites to find out the main gatekeeper in each CI, and some interesting things came up. Because of the unique structures of CIs, all of them have at least two directors, one local director and one Chinese director, and I could not predict which would have the power to issue me permission. At the same time, I also did not want to cause any confusion or conflict between them. Therefore, I randomly selected two local directors and one Chinese director from three CIs to send the first "open-door" emails to them on 13th August 2018. The results showed that one local director kindly considered my request, one Chinese director said she could not make the decision, and the last CI did not reply to me at all. In the end, after I discussed with my supervisor, I decided to send to the local directors first, since they may have direct power to issue the permission and be more familiar with social media in the Western context. Finally, the flexible strategy was adopted, and I prepared three email templates for the initial enquiry, first follow-up and second follow up. The ethical approval letter, the questionnaire link, and the e-poster of gifts were attached in these emails for further information. The detailed process involved in contacting the 28 CIs can be found in Appendix 2.

After finished the survey data collection, I started to contact people for the semi-structured interviews from both cohorts. I prepared semi-structured interview guides for both cohorts, for which the introduction, main interview questions, follow-up questions and probes had been included in the guides. Apart from that, the audio recorder, the relevant documents, and some gifts for survey participants were also already prepared before each interview. I contacted all of the informants by emails and confirmed the place and time to meet on the day. During January to April 2019, I travelled to seven CIs based in seven universities in England (3), Wales (1) and Scotland (3), and conducted 2 Chinese staff interviews online in July 2019. Finally, 30 people had been interviewed, among which 17 were Chinese staff and 13 were activity participants who had filled out the survey previously. The detailed fieldwork information is presented in table 3.5.

Table 3.5 Fieldwork for interviewing thirty people in Britain

CIs	Chinese staff	Activity participants	Approach	Place	Region
CI1	3	0	In person	CI premise	3 CIs in Scotland
CI2	1	4	In person	University cafe	
CI3	2	0	In person	CI premise	
CI4	3	2	In person	CI premise/ University premise	3 CIs in England
CI5	3	3	In person	CI premise/ University cafe	2 Cs in Wales
CI6	1	3	In person	CI premise/ University premise	
CI7	2	1	In person	CI premise/ University cafe	
CI8	2	0	Online	Online	
Total	17	13	In person / Online	All above	

3.5 Procedures

After I decided on the actual methodology plan and obtained ethical approval from the University of Glasgow, College of Social Science Ethics Committee, I then started the fieldwork in August 2018 and accomplished the two stages of data collection by

July 2019. For each stage, I went through three processes, the preparation, the question construction, and the actual implementation. In this section, the pilot study and the main study are outlined.

3.5.1 Pilot study

There are many benefits to conducting a pilot study before the actual work. It can identify potential flaws, problems and deficiencies of the research design as well as helping the researcher become thoroughly familiar with the procedures (Hassan, Schattner and Mazza, 2006). In my case, owing to time limitation and sample restrictions, only the measurement instruments, i.e., the online survey and interview were tested in the pilot study. I was then able to conduct five samples of pilot testing for the online survey and five samples of pilot testing for the interviews.

For the online survey, five friends at the school of Education in our university completed the survey and kindly provided me with some feedback. Considering the importance of having easy-to-understand questions and a clear layout for the survey, since there is no one to explain the meaning to the participants later (Kumar, 2011), some structures and survey questions were refined and modified for ensuring the survey was logically coherent, clear and sound. For example, the notes of "multiple answers" were added at the end of the multiple-choice questions. The sections of questions were shortened to three parts based on the time flow for the activity participation (before attending, while attending, after attending the activities). "I have no idea" or "Other" option was added to some questions for undecided answers. Furthermore, strategy issues of the online survey settings were optimised for a more comfortable and smooth experience for survey participants.

With regards to the interview questions, both activity participants and staff interviews were presented to the five persons. Among them, two of my friends have strong connections with CIs, and one is a teacher of the CI at the University of Glasgow, and the other one is currently doing her PhD about CI teachers in one UK university. Therefore, they provided me with more professional & insiders' suggestions. Meanwhile another three persons helped me with some general recommendations. Specifically, some practical strategies were proposed to improve

friendly engagement with the interview participants without losing control during the process, such as use of phrases such as "thanks for that" as transition language to encourage responses. In addition, the questions and structures also were amended to ensure that they could be clearly understood in a consistent manner. Finally, they also reminded me that constant attention should be paid to remaining as neutral as possible in interactions with the participants whether the responses were favourable or negative.

3.5.2 Stage one: online survey

The things I attempted to know from my stage one data collection were: 1) the various types of activities offered by CIs; 2) who participates in CI activities; 3) what the participants' general experiences are; and 4) as a means for selecting stage two interview participants. To address the four purposes within a limited time, after careful and full consideration, the online survey approach was implemented as the most appropriate method.

Preference for choosing online survey as the instrument in research studies has become increasingly popular along with increased technological innovation and internet permeation, and many strengths of online survey have been discussed in research literature (Evans and Mathur, 2005; Kumar, 2011; Olsen, 2011). Evans and Mathur (2005) set out the main values of online survey, such as global reach, speed and timeliness, convenience, ease of data entry and analysis, flexibility, question diversity, low administration cost and so forth. In my study, the purposes of my stage one data collection and practical consideration led me to choosing this instrument. Firstly, the geographical distribution of the activity participants tends to be very dispersed, and I could only reach them through each CI's online connections. The internet can easily reach out and make contact possible with potential respondents, thanks to its global reach and technological innovations. Secondly, even if I could have reached activity participants in person, it would have been a long and difficult process involving travel to each CI and asking the activity participants in person to participate in the survey. I addition, it was only stage one of the data collections. Online survey proved to be a convenient, low-cost and time-efficient tool for my study. Thirdly, by distributing the online survey through social media and internal

email lists from the participating CIs in Britain, it was made possible to produce a sample of data that allowed for preliminary and tentative predictions of the possible impact of CIs in Britain.

Compared to a face-to-face survey method, there are many weaknesses in online surveys and so I endeavoured to avoid or minimise these disadvantages. Firstly, the lack of being representative of the population has been widely debated in terms of the online survey method (Fricker and Schonlau, 2002; Evans and Mathur, 2005). In my study, the cluster sampling from CIs ensured that the source of the sample is 100% from CI participants, otherwise people were not qualified to complete the survey. Secondly, as I explained above, compared to a paper-based survey, the online survey is less likely to achieve a high response rate (Nulty, 2008). Therefore, I prepared 12 small gifts from the Forbidden City Museum as incentives to attract target respondents and encourage participation. I attached images of these small gifts in a poster with the survey request. Thirdly, I conducted the pilot study to discover if the survey structure was logically presented and the instructions were clear enough. Lastly, privacy and security issues were carefully considered in accordance with ethical principles. This was guided and informed by the process of applying for, and then receiving, approval from our University of Glasgow College of Social Science Research Ethics Committee. The plain language statement was clearly stated at the very beginning of the survey, and the participants needed to tick the "consent" answer before they proceeded to any questions. Moreover, no identifiable information was requested from the respondents except the email addresses and this only if they expressed willingness to have further contact.

As online survey is more about a descriptive and an exploratory rather a hypothesis-testing exercise, questions were designed to provide answers for the descriptive parts of the research questions. In terms of the structure and content of survey questions (see appendix five), there are 27 questions in total and the survey is arranged in a logical and chronological order for helping people to understand easily. It starts from broad and easy questions about themselves to the specific ones, from before attending CI activities (their purposes), during the activities (their experiences), to their possible future participations in activities (their expectations). Regarding the content of the questions, Q1 is designed to ask for consent to take

part in this study, and Q2 to Q7 and Q26 are the questions for collecting general personal information about the participants, such as their age, occupation, nationality, and Chinese language level. Q8 asks for their personal perspectives about CIs. Following that, moving to the CI activities themselves, Q9 to Q14 are created to collect data about activity participation and to generate ideas about their interests and purposes in attending those activities. Afterwards, the experiences of activities are probed through Q15 to Q18, and Q19 and Q20 enquire about the outcomes of the activities. After that, Q21 to Q24 move to their future expectations of CI activities. In the end, the open-ended question, Q25, is created to gather general comments about CIs and their participation in my study, and the last question, Q27, is designed to invite people for the follow-up interview.

3.5.3 Stage two: Semi-structured interviews

After comparing the strengths and weaknesses of different qualitative data collection methods, semi-structured interview was selected as the most appropriate way for obtaining my desired information. First of all, interview can 'provide in-depth information pertaining to participants' experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic' (Turner III, 2010, p. 754), both at factual level and a meaning level (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Secondly, unlike structured interview and unstructured interview, the high degree of flexibility of the semi-structured interview can allow both for general points of information to be collected and for a certain degree of adjustability and extensibility (McNamara, 2009). Moreover, this structure also 'allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic' (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 111).

The purposes of my stage two interviews for both activity participants and CI staff were: 1) to gain in-depth information of their intercultural experiences in CI activity participation and organisation; 2) to find out how the intercultural engagements between them could be shaped by the larger context and potentially have some impact on their cultural understanding of each other. Since the key concerns were to understand the intercultural experiences of both sides, as well as their viewpoints related to the activities and culture, the interview seemed to be the most suitable

type of strategy in my case. While observation could be another advisable option for me, it seemed less applicable given that the population scope is across Britain. Nevertheless, I have attended as many activities as possible in the CI at our university during my master's and PhD study periods, and casual and informal observations made there have been noted on each occasion. Furthermore, semi-structured interview has been chosen for both groups for obtaining a certain degree of adjustability and extensibility. In terms of the activity participants, the unique sampling and maximum variation aspects required that the interviewer needed to introduce different probes for eliciting different responses after the standard questions. For example, some survey participants, as unique samples, left interesting comments regarding their own particular CI and I wanted to know why they held those views. In terms of the CI staff, considering the internal diversification of position in this cohort, there was a need for space for improvising different questions to put to them for helping more information and ideas to emerge.

As a former volunteer teacher who was dispatched by Hanban to the Philippines during 2012-2014, I have experience of working with the Confucius Institute in another culture and so I was eager to know the views expressed on the differences and similarities and how those views can impact upon the understandings of each other. To do so, relevant questions had to be put into the general interview guide. Three parts were correspondingly set out in both interviews and during each interview, I briefly introduced the structure of these three parts to the interview participants. For the activity participants, the first part is about self-introduction and their understanding about China & Chinese culture before being involved in CIs, the second part is mainly about their activity experiences, and the third part is about their future expectations and suggestions about CI activities. For the Chinese staff, the first part is about their personal working status and their understanding about Chinese culture, the second part is about activity organisation and cooperation examples, and the last part is about their future expectations and suggestions about CI activities. Thus, they were similar but adapted for the different status of the respondents. In addition, each part had scheduled questions for securing basic information, and unscheduled probes for disclosing surprising answers or eliciting more hidden facets. For example, some unscheduled probes were brought up when interviewees talked about the image of China that they have been aware of on

Western social media or different attitudes toward China between USA and UK that they have noticed.

Regarding the data recording procedure, the interview protocol could be formulated for asking question and recording answers during each interview. It included basic information about the interview, introduction, opening question, content questions, probes, and closing instructions (Creswell and Clark, 2017). In reference to my study, I prepared informal interview protocols for both cohorts. After confirming the date, time and place with the informants, I put this basic information into the protocols. At the beginning of each interview, the self-introduction, the purpose my study, the consent form, the structure of the interview, and the confidentiality arrangements were introduced to the informant. After that, the basic and easy questions were posed to build confidence and trust with the interviewee, such as self-introduction, and how do you know about the CI. Following that, I started to ask some core questions like 'tell me about your experiences during the activity' to activity participants, and 'tell me about how to choose the activity to organise' to Chinese staff. Meanwhile, if there were any interesting or unexpected answers which could be particularly relevant to the research questions, the probes were asked to acquire more in-depth messages, such as 'so tell me more about the different attitude between USA and UK, from your experiences' to activity participants, and 'what do you mean by the practical strategy that you mentioned earlier' to Chinese staff. In the end, I thanked the interviewees and asked them if they have any final thoughts or questions as the closing sentences. During the interviews, I adopted some face-to-face interview strategies from literature. In the light of the suggestions from Braun and Clarke (2013), I tried to balance the feeling of interest without showing my position and personal evaluation. Despite my great familiarity with the activities that they referred to; I was careful not to give them the impression that I am an expert in the area so as not to influence their responses. During the interviews, some silences were kept for letting them develop their thinking without rushing. I also presented a friendly environment and attitude to encourage them to share their stories at the right moment.

Face-to-face interviews can achieve an optimal outcome compared to interviews by telephone or the internet since both verbal and non-verbal communication can be

used to reduce misunderstanding and can discern any discomfort directly. However, it costs more time and money for travelling. Telephone or internet interviews may be more convenient and encompass large participants from everywhere, but they might be compromised if the participants do not have access to the telephone or Internet or are not familiar with the technology. For these reasons I decided to adopt face-to-face semi-structured interview as my main approach and only 2 CI staff interviews were conducted by WeChat voice call because the respondents were in China during the summer vacation.

3.6 Data analysis

This section sets out my approaches and the various stages that the data analysis entailed for both the quantitative and qualitative data sets. For the quantitative data analysis, the online surveys were analysed using version 26.0 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), and the demographical information about activity participants and the descriptive results of their purposes, experiences and expectations in attending CI activities were partly revealed. For qualitative data analysis, the semi-structured interviews were coded and categorised using both the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) called NVivo and colour coding line by line by hand.

3.6.1 Quantitative data analysis

In order to process the raw data in an analytical and rigorous manner, both SurveyMonkey and SPSS software were employed for an in-depth investigation and evaluation of the data in November and December 2019. Although SurveyMonkey had already generated some preliminary results simultaneously with the online data collection, such as the numbers and percentages answering each option, I also adopted SPSS for further correlation and comparison analysis. As I mentioned earlier, the online survey was created to achieve certain purposes, such as to find as many as possible representable participants from a wide range of samples in Britain for the stage two interview. The questions of the online survey were designed to answer the first two questions: 1) what the activities are and who the activity participants are, and 2) what the purposes, experiences and expectations are in participating in the

various activities of CIs from the participants cohort. Hence, these two questions were hoped to be answerable after the SPSS data analysis.

Following the guide to the quantitative data processing procedure by Kumar (2011), three steps have to be conducted immediately after the end of the survey distribution. The first step is editing or "cleaning" the data, that is, 'free from inconsistencies and incompleteness' (p, 255). In my study, although there are 103 people who took part in the online survey between October 2018 to January 2019, some of them had not completed the entire questions. To achieve internal consistency, I examined all the responses from each respondent and observed 82 complete surveys. Having the 82 "cleaned" data, the second step was to code it, so I prepared a codebook (see appendix 3 of coding examples employed in the online survey data analysis) before entering the data into the SPSS software. The purposes for developing a codebook are 1) defining and labelling each of the variables and 2) assigning numbers to each of the possible responses (Pallant, 2010, p. 11). In my study, after entering all the data into SPSS, the last step was analysing the data. I created a data file in SPSS named participants survey, entered the data according to the codebook and then screened the data file for checking any errors. Following that, I did some descriptive statistical analysis to become familiar with data and software. Lastly, assisting with SPSS, some frequency distribution analysis and cross-tabulation analysis were conducted for responding to the two aforementioned questions.

3.6.2 Qualitative data analysis

The process of qualitative data analysis is 'the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented' (Flick, 2014, p. 5). Many approaches can be applied in qualitative data analysis for different research designs and research purposes, such as content analysis, discourse analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), grounded theory, and thematic analysis. Drawing from Braun and Clarke's (2006) work on thematic analysis, my study followed an inductive thematic analysis approach in keeping with the exploratory nature of my study. Different from IPA, that describes patterns for understanding people's everyday experience, or grounded

theory, that is for building up a new theory from scratch with a rigorous procedure, thematic analysis is 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Given the fact that there was no pre-existing coding frame on my data analysis, the inductive approach with a strong data driven nature (Patton, 1990) could be the appropriate way to conduct my data analysis. Most significantly, the inductive approach could assist me in identifying themes and patterns within the data, as well as providing a holistic picture of CI activities and intercultural experiences between activity participants and Chinese staff, which is essential to understand my research topic comprehensively.

In terms of my study, the various features and the purposes of my study are compatible with the thematic analysis approach. First, the most significate characteristic of thematic analysis is that it acknowledges the active role of the researcher's theoretical positions and values in identifying themes. In other words, themes should be actively generated by the researcher rather than emerging from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This feature of thematic analysis is in line with the qualitative approach and constructivist worldview taken in my study, as 'qualitative research involving human interaction between researchers and participants is always a co-constructed activity' (Cuthill, 2015, p. 63). As I mentioned in Section 3.2, I was fully aware that my positionality could potentially influence the analysis of the information and interpretation of the findings (Kacen and Chaitin, 2006), and I adopted the reflectivity technique throughout all the phases of my study, including in the data analysis. First, in terms of the research subjects, I positioned myself as an insider, since I was both an activity participant and had previously been an activity organiser of CIs. This insider's view could allow me to obtain more honest answers and to produce a more authentic or "thick" description (Geertz, 1973; Holmes, 2020). In my study, I examined the data not only from the surface level, but also from a critical and constructivist view with some important interpretations. In addition, by using Mandarin as the interview language with the Chinese staff, I was better able to understand and interpret their colloquial language, body language and non-verbal cues (Holmes, 2020). Second, I also acknowledged that my research context and values could influence the data analysis process. I employed the critical approach as my theoretical position and the cosmopolitanism as my value position to

conduct the study. I tried to overcome constraints from both Eurocentric and ethnocentric mindsets and examine the CIs and CI activities with a broader and critical view, i.e. the critical cosmopolitan view. This view allowed me to analyse the responses of the activity participants and the Chinese staff as individuals rather than as two groups with different cultural backgrounds. In this case, the themes were generated beyond the surface level of the data itself with more interpretative works from a latent level linked. Third, I was aware that I could never achieve the purest objectivity and neutrality in qualitative data analysis because of the very nature of this approach (Jootun, McGhee and Marland, 2009). However, by exploring my positionality actively throughout the whole study, I could reduce or avoid potential systematic bias and partisanship and be as neutral as possible to achieve 'empathetic neutrality' in my data analysis (Ormston et, al., 2014; Holmes, 2020).

In the light of the work from Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) on thematic analysis, seven phases were adopted as my data analysis procedure, which are 1) familiarising yourself with your data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, 6) producing the report. First, familiarisation with the data started right after each interview, and it continued throughout the transcribing, coding, reading, re-reading, and writing processes. In my study, I wrote down notes, memos, hunches and ideas after each interview, and then I compared these notes with the information from the next round of data collection. I was fully aware that it is vital to start analysis as early as possible in qualitative study, otherwise it can be overwhelming if you wait until after collecting all of the data (Creswell, 2014; Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). Therefore, I jotted down the notes and saved it as a "reflection of interview" document throughout the interviews process. In addition, I also kept immersing myself in data during the transcribing stage for identifying some potential interests related to my study. Although the transcription can be a time-consuming process, it was also a good opportunity for me to develop a close attention to and deep understanding of my data during the process (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). Secondly, after reading and re-reading the transcripts, some relevant and meaningful segments of data were marked and assigned with a series of rudimentary codes. I coded the data manually by writing notes on the transcripts and tried to find out the recurring patterns for potential themes. Thirdly, after I had coded all the data, the

initial themes had been generated in several ways. By using thematic maps with NVivo, some big codes were "promoted" to themes and some themes were synthesised with similar codes (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Fourth, the reviewing themes/categories and defining and naming themes/categories were conducted by following four criteria that are described by Merriam and Tisdell (2015, p. 213): 1) they should be exhaustive, 2) they should generally be mutually exclusive, 3) they should be sensitising, 4) they should be conceptually congruent. The resulting findings report of the data analysis is reported on in chapter 4.

3.7 Ethical consideration

Ethical issues were carefully considered throughout the whole process of this study. I began my study strictly conforming to the University of Glasgow Code of Good Practice in Research for meeting a high ethical standard. The codes of ethics have been defined (Flick, 2018) as the regulation of the relations between researchers and the people and field they intend to study. It requires that the researcher should minimise the possibility of harming participants by respecting their dignity, rights and interests, as well as conducting the research based on informed consent. In my case, I began to contact the individual CIs in Britain after obtaining approval from our College Research Ethics Committee in August 2018, and every stage of collecting, storing, analysing and reporting data were conducted paying particular attention to potential ethical issues.

3.7.1 Voluntary participation and informed consent

Before people agreed to take part in my study, sufficient information was provided to them in advance, including the purpose of the study, the identity of myself as a researcher, and what kind of data might be used in my study. Most importantly, the voluntary participation along with the opportunity to withdraw from participating freely messages were emphasised both orally and in writing. I took the advice of De Vaus (2001, p. 84) to encourage people rather than request or put pressure on people for participating and to avoid "false advertising" when it comes to the possible benefits. In my study, although the lucky draw of the traditional Chinese souvenirs from the Forbidden City was advertised for recruiting people at the survey stage,

cautious descriptions of the gifts were given to avoid overstating the incentives. I used phrases such as "small gifts", "compensating for your time", for reducing the responses that were only for self-interest. Moreover, the main purpose of preparing these gifts was because the target participants were people with interest in China or Chinese culture and these Chinese representative gifts would be attractive to these specific types of people. At the interviews stage, the interviewees from both the activity participants and the CI staff parts had shown their willing intentions before I proceeded to ask for their informed consent. To ensure the interviewees' right to be fully informed, I emailed them with the plain language statement and consent form in advance. I then brought the two documents with me and explained them to the interviewees in person or online when I conducted my fieldwork. All the interviewees read and signed the consent form before starting their interviews. During the interviews, I also tried to pay particular attention to the emotional, psychological, health and other issues of the participants, and was prepared to provide appropriate emotional support by pausing or stopping the interviews at any time. Equally, an effort was made to ensure that the interviewees could finish their conversations on a positive topic where possible.

The participants needed to be informed of certain information before they gave consent to be interviewed. However, it is also debatable about how much information needs to be told. Too little information may result in refusal of participation but also too much information which seems irrelevant and unnecessary could 'confuse, distract and overwhelm rather than inform' potential participants (De Vaus, 2001, p. 84). In my study, basic information such as purpose of the study, the foreseeable risks and benefits, the researcher's contact information for further questions, data usage, the level of anonymity and confidentiality, and the statement of voluntary participation were explained in the plain language statement and consent form. However, I did not mention the hidden political concern of my study to the CI staff, since it may have led to sceptical minds, and it also might have caused self-censorship of the Chinese staff during the interviews. For example, one of the Chinese directors was relatively familiar with my study project, and he refused to be interviewed.

3.7.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

Promising anonymity and confidentiality are important to protect the participants from harm as well as also stimulating them to answer frankly and honestly if people feel their answers are confidential (De Vaus, 2001, p. 85). In my study, at the survey stage, there was no identified data that could be revealed, so it was completely anonymous and non-identifiable. At the interview stage, in terms of the individual CIs that I approached, I applied code numbers to each CI, such as CI1, CI2, CI3, and these served as respective pseudonyms. For the interviews with activity participants and CI staff, their names were referred to by pseudonym in this thesis and will be in any publication arising from the research, so they cannot be identified at any stage. In addition, some Chinese staff showed their concerns about the purpose of my study and the level of anonymity either before or after the interviews. When this happened, I always honestly and specifically explained the purpose of my study and the different ways I adopted to ensure anonymity to them. I told them I will not disclose their information, such as which CI they worked with, and will ensure their anonymity when presenting the findings of my study.

The promise of confidentiality means that the information from a participant cannot be identified and traced. In my study, confidentiality is guaranteed subject to legal constraints and professional guidelines. All data that was collected were safely stored in a locked room and kept on my password-protected computer and OneDrive during my research period. In addition, the UK Data Protection Act 1998 and Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act also served as guidelines in my study. Any future re-using of the anonymised data will be in accordance with Data regulation guidelines.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

Quantitative study and qualitative study are not mutually exclusive in the mixed methods strategy and, indeed, it consists of merging, integrating and linking these two data sets for boosting comprehensive understanding of the topic (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). Although both study types need to search for validity and reliability for ensuring quality and trustworthiness, the definition, criteria and

importance of these two terms are different between quantitative and qualitative studies. Broadly speaking, validity refers to the appropriateness and accuracy that applies to a research process (Kumar, 2011), and reliability concerns 'the extent to which research findings can be replicated' (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015, p. 250). Focusing on the differences, I adopted multiple strategies and styles throughout the data collection, analysis and interpretation of both the quantitative and qualitative research in order to boost the validity and reliability of my study.

For quantitative research, three types of validity are discussed by (Kumar, 2011, p. 179): 1) face and content validity, 2) concurrent and predictive validity, 3) construct validity. Since the purpose of my online survey is to discover descriptive facts about participants without any scale on the questions or regression analysis on data, only the face and content validity is applicable to my case. The face and content validity require a logical link between the questions and the purposes of study and the questions should cover all issues in relation to the purpose of study (Kumar, 2011). For achieving the face and content validity of my online survey, I carefully and rigorously checked the content of each question and revised the structure of the survey after a pilot study as I discussed in section 3.5.1. To explore the intercultural experience of the activity participants, threes aspects with purpose, experience and expectation were designed in the survey in a logical and time sequenced manner. In addition, internal consistency and external consistency also were considered for enhancing the reliability of the survey.

Different terms of validity and reliability have been applied in qualitative research and I adopted the terms of credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity) and dependability (reliability) that have been proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The internal validity represents how the research findings can match reality. However, the reality can be 'holistic, multidimensional, and ever changing' rather than 'single, fixed, objective' in qualitative research (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015, p. 242). Thus, some strategies were adopted for enhancing the credibility of my study. I employed both online survey and interviews for confirming the actual activities and activity experience, and the triangulation of multiple methods that can enable the credibility of the study (Denzin, 2017). Apart from that, the half year data collection period also allowed me adequately to engage in data collection and trying to find

out the "reality" match of the contexts and data gathered. As elaborated by Merriam and Tisdell (2015, p. 246), 'the best rule of thumb is that the data and emerging findings must feel saturated'. In my case, I decided to stop interviewing after hearing many repeated things and only a few new pieces of information were being obtained if I continued to collect new data. Most importantly, I fully noticed how my position as a critical cosmopolitan researcher could influence the conclusion of my study and that this awareness of my particular values and expectations could add to the research integrity and credibility as well (Maxwell, 2012; Merriam and Tisdell, 2015).

Transferability is concerned with the extent to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other situations (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). The purpose of my study is not for applying to other contexts or settings as the British context is one of the main considerations in my study. Any potential extension in other contexts would require detailed consideration of new research arrangements and practices. However, through sufficient descriptive data in my study, this study also could give some insight and suggestion for studying CIs in other contexts, especially CI studies in developed countries. Finally, dependability refers to whether the research can be replicated (Trochim and Donnelly, 2001; Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). In qualitative research, the social world can be multifaceted and highly contextual, so it is almost impossible to yield the same results (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). Instead, to ensure consistency between results and data, I logged every stage throughout the whole inquiry and explained every stage meticulously in this chapter and in other chapters.

Following the detailed arrangements and procedures outlined above in this methodology chapter, I was able to gather sufficient data for my research purposes. The final findings from the survey and interviews are reported in chapter 4 below.

Chapter 4 Findings from the online survey and interviews

This chapter elaborates the findings from 82 complete online surveys of activity participants and semi-structured interviews from 13 activity participants as well as from 17 Chinese staff as was outlined in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3). The online surveys produced interesting general information and understanding about the participants and the activities of CIs (see Section 4.1). The interviews produced data that allowed detailed thematic analysis and provided a more nuanced insight into the activity experience and intercultural engagement from the activity participants and Chinese staff (see Sections 4.2 and 4.3).

4.1 Findings from the online survey of activity participants

Apart from the purpose of recruiting suitable activity participants for the stage two interviews, the online survey was mainly designed with the aim of answering the following two questions: 1) what are the activities and who are the activity participants? and 2) what are the interests, motivations, experiences, and expectations of the participants who are taking part in the diverse activities? Using the SPSS software for data analysis, the findings have provided a holistic understanding in responding to the above two questions.

4.1.1 The participants

The first thing needed was to know about the activity participants before investigating the activity experiences. By running the frequencies analysis in SPSS, some descriptive statistics of the activity participants were generated such as their ages, occupations and nationalities. I also wanted to know their level of familiarity with China and the frequency of their participation in CI activities, so the number of times of visiting China, whether they were language learners in CIs or not and their level of skill in using the Chinese language were asked in the survey. Demographic information about the participants is presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Demographic information of the activity participants (N=82)

Age of participants			Occupation of participants			Nationality of participants		
Age	Number	percentage	Occupation	Number	Percentage	Nationality	Number	Percentage
20-40	**58**	**70.7**	**Student**	**36**	**43.9**	**UK**	**42**	**51.2**
40-60	17	20.7	Other	23	28.0	China	17	20.7
Below 20	4	4.9	Teacher	18	22.0	EU	13	15.9
Above 60	3	3.7	Retired or Unemployed	5	6.1	Other	10	12.2
Total	82	100	Total	82	100	Total	82	100

As can be seen from the first red highlighted row of Table 4.1, most participants were those aged from 20-40 (77.7%), UK nationality (43.9%) and students (51.2%). The main reason for this trend might be that all of the CIs in the UK are based in universities, where it is much more convenient for university students to get in touch with CIs. With regards to occupation, apart from students, teachers and other occupations were also among the participants (28% and 22% respectively), which indicates that approximately half of the participants were teachers or from other occupations. Interestingly, when it comes to the nationality distribution, apart from UK people, which obviously is most of the participation, Chinese people and EU people also actively participate in CI activities (20.7% and 15.9% respectively). This is potentially related to the fact that Chinese and EU students are the two largest international student groups in the UK (HESA, 2018).

The levels of familiarity of the activity participants with China, CIs and the Chinese language were explored via Q4, Q5 and Q6 after gathering the demographic information of the participants. Noticing that there was little point in knowing the level of familiarity with China, with CIs and with the particular Chinese language of

people from China, I analysed the data excluding the 17 participants from China, as presumably all of them would know their country and language very well. In the following figures, Figure 4.1 demonstrates the times the activity participants have been to China before, Figure 4.2 shows their connections with language learning in CIs, and Figure 4.3 illustrates their Chinese language levels.
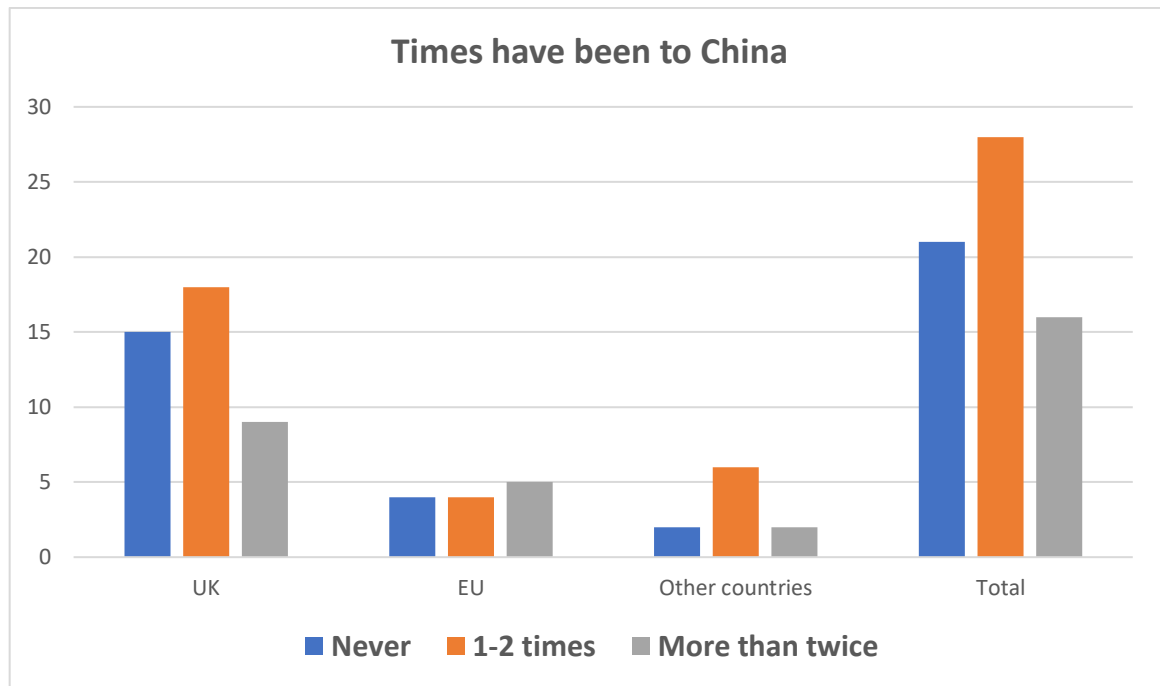
Figure 4.1 Number of times participants visited China (excluded Chinese participants)
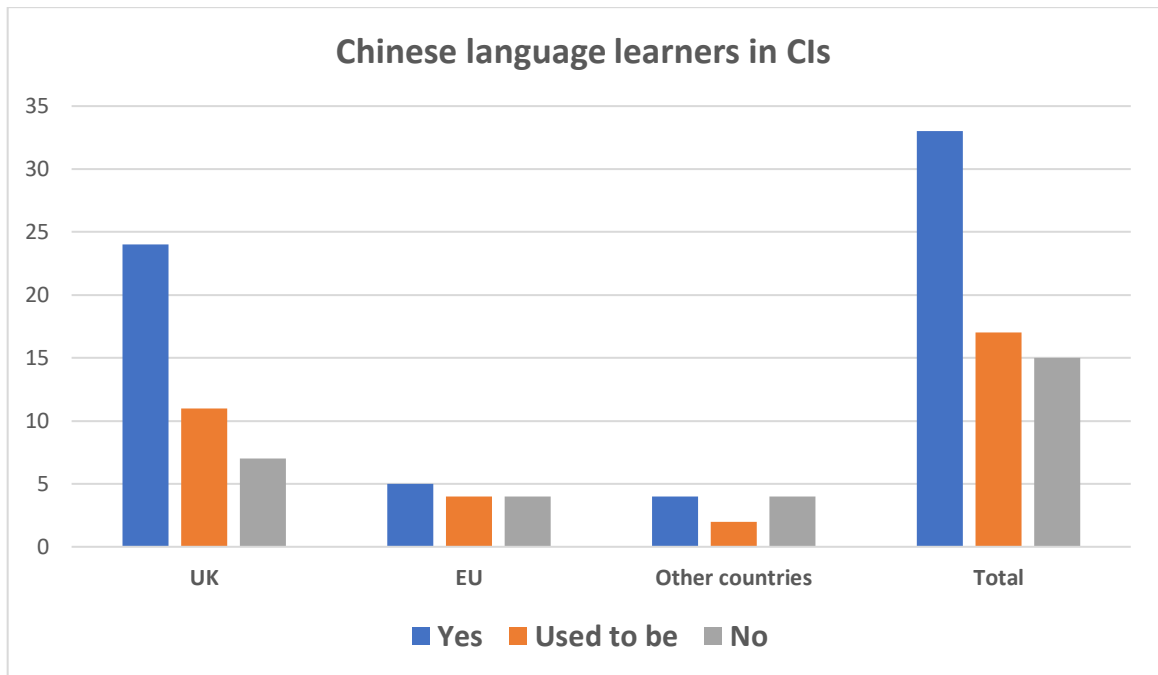
Figure 4.2 Chinese language learners in CIs (excluded Chinese participants)
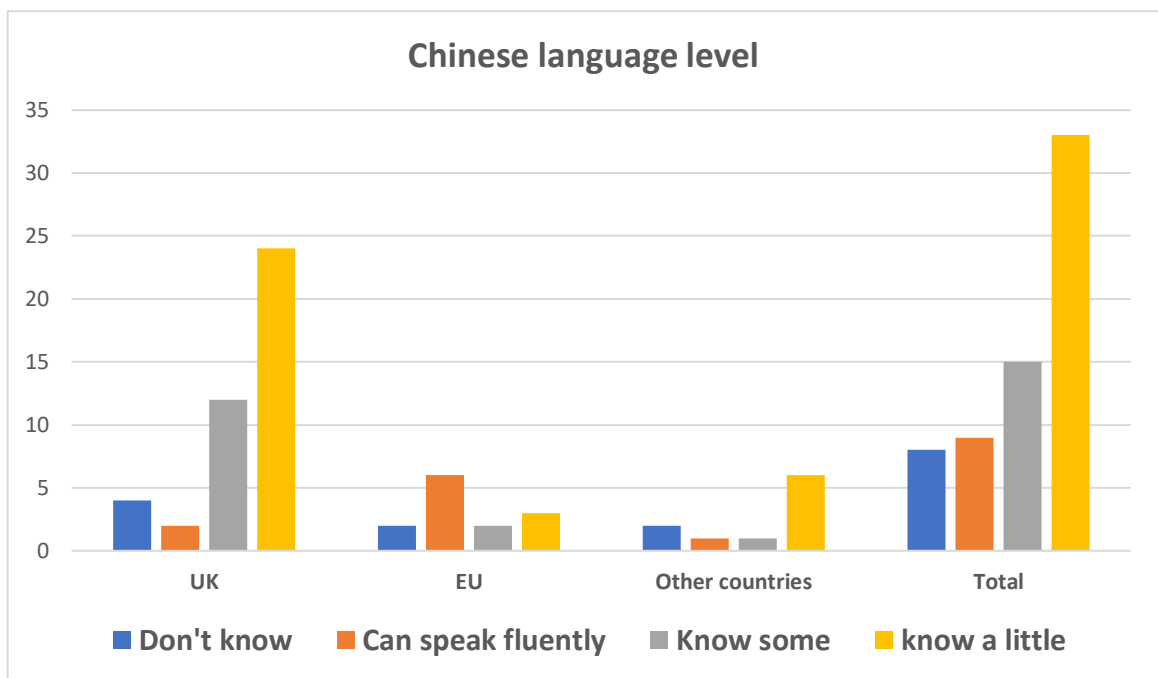
Figure 4.3 Chinese language level (excluded Chinese participants)

Figure 4.1 presents how many times the participants have been to China, and it seems the times are primarily equally disturbed among the three options. Most participants have been to China for 1-2 times (28 participants), many participants had no experience of visiting China (21 participants), and only some of them have been to China more than twice (16 participants). Although the CI activities seem to be more attractive to the people who have been to China for 1-2 times, the result shows no preference on attracting people with experience of visiting China or not. According to Figure 4.2, large numbers of the participants (50 out of 65) are or once were language learners in CIs which demonstrates the close connection between language learning and activity participation. This connection is easy to explain as the language learner in CIs often can obtain first information about CI activities from their teachers leading to them attending the activities. Figure 4.3 shows the Chinese language levels of participants. Most of the participants either know a little or some Chinese (48 in total), while a smaller number of participants either do not know Chinese or can speak Chinese fluently (17 in total). In short, apart from the Chinese participants, a majority of the activity participants have a certain knowledge of Chinese language, either they are/were the language learners in CIs or they know Chinese by other means, and whether, or how many times they have been to China. Apart from the overview of the activity participants, Figure 4.4 indicates the geographic spread of the survey participants in Britain.

The CI base of the survey participants
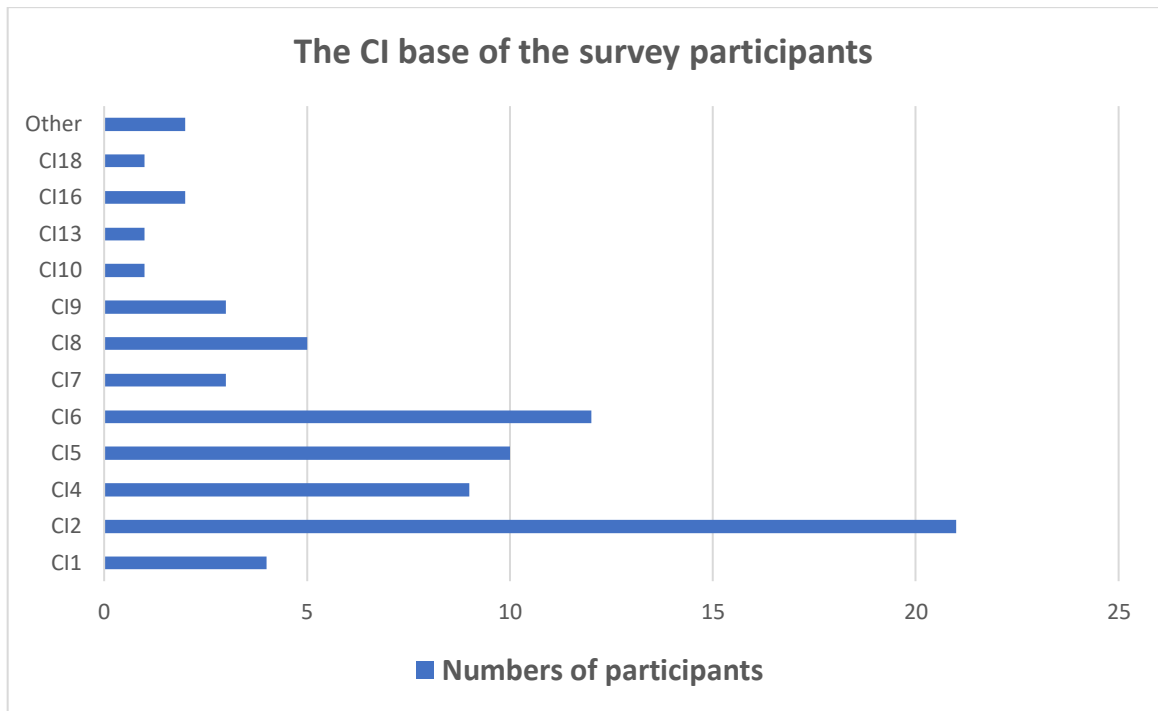
Figure 4.4 The CI base of the survey participants

4.1.2 The activities

After acquiring general information about the participants and their personal connections with China, CIs and Chinese language, the various types of activities were explored by asking what kind of activity/activities the participants have been participating in with CIs. Informed by the news and advertisements from the 28 CIs' websites and social media, the following 9 types of activities in Figure 4.5 were identified and categorised for understanding the degree of participation from the activity participants. The "online activities" represent any activity of CIs that organise online such as online talks or online exhibitions. The "competition activities" stand for any activity on competition such as the "Chinese Bridge" Chinese proficiency competition that is organised by Hanban annually. The "visit China activities" relates to any activity that requires going to China such as the summer camp or winter camp for language learners in CIs or university students in the UK. The cultural performances and exhibitions can be any performance and exhibition about Chinese culture such as Wushu or Tai Chi performance. Apart from these, some CIs regularly organise academic events and cultural workshops, for example

academic talks and traditional dance workshop. In addition, from my observation on CIs social media and websites, almost every CI is involved with Chinese festival celebrations and language learning events. Therefore, I compiled a list of 9 types of CI activities.

Figure 4.5 Activities that the participants have participated in

As shown in Figure 4.5, it is clear that the top 3 typical and popular activities organised by CIs are the language learning events, Chinese festival celebrations, and cultural workshops. These three popular activities seem quite in accordance with the official purposes of the CIs as Chinese language learning and cultural exchange organisations. However, excluding the language learning events, from my understanding in attending CI activity and my observation from the CIs' social media and website, most of the festival celebrations and cultural workshops are more relevant to the traditional culture of China. Apart from that, academic events such as lectures, talks and conferences are also very common in CIs, and the next most popular type of activity of CIs is cultural performances and exhibitions. Although we could not find out detail of the context of these activities by the online survey, it was further explored through the interviews. Moreover, other less general activities also received a certain attention from the participants, such as visit China activities, Chinese film screening, competition activities, and online activities. Particularly, it

is worth noting that there are 16 survey participants who have attended visiting China activities via CIs, which suggests that CIs already provided some opportunities to people who wanted to get a more in-depth understanding about China. Overall, the prevalent level of activity participation might be related to the priority of each CI's choice of activity organisation. It also might be related to the level of interest in each type of activity from the participants. Hence, the next section will analyse the participants' interests and motivations in attending CI activities.

4.1.3 Interests and motivations

Q13 and Q14 are designed to explore the main interest areas that attracted the participants to Chinese culture and their main purposes in attending CI activities. With reference to Chinese culture, I divided it into seven categories, which are: traditional culture; contemporary culture; economic development; political culture; language; social life; and others. The result is presented in Figure 4.6 as follows:

MAIN INTERESTS THAT ATTRACTED THE PARTCIPANTS TO CHINESE CULTURE

■ language　　　　■ traditional culture　　　　■ contemporary culture
■ social life　　　　■ political culture　　　　■ economic development
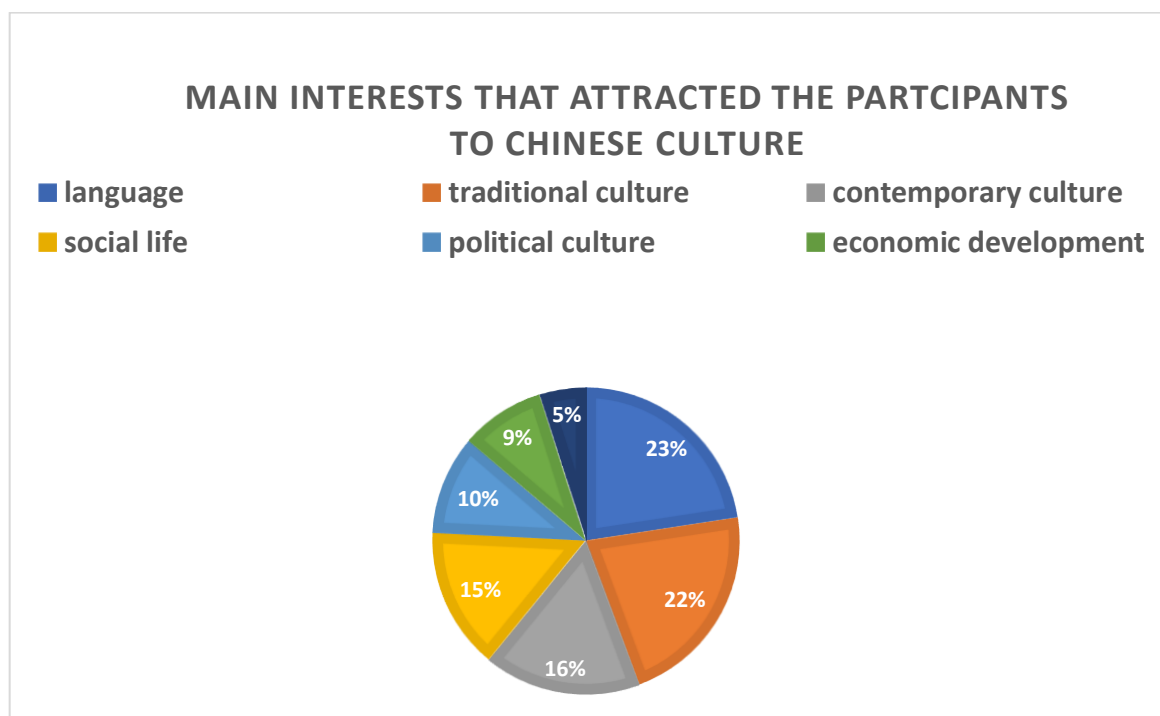
Figure 4.6 Main interests that attracted the participants to Chinese culture

As we can see from Figure 4.6, the largest two areas of interests that attracted the participants to Chinese culture are Chinese language and the traditional culture of China (23% and 22%, respectively). Apart from that, people also showed relatively strong interest in contemporary culture and the social life of China (16% and 15%, respectively). Interestingly, unlike the main concerns about political and economic issues of China from the academia and mainstream media in the West, participants expressed less interest in the political culture and economic development of China, which are only 10% and 9% respectively. Others include "make friends", "traveling" and some personal connections.

Q14 explores the main purposes of the participants in attending diverse CI activities by applying an open question. First, curiosity is the most notable reason of the participants for attending the activities. Some people indicated their reasons for attending these activities, such as for fun, leisure, passion, meet new friends and experience a different culture, as well as to enrich their extracurricular life. Other people listed more specific aspects of curiosity about China and Chinese culture. For example, one participant expressed the 'desire to understand the perspective of the Chinese government in Chinese affairs'. Second, many people indicated that their involvement with CI activities are related with their work and study. In this case, one person noted that part of his/her job 'is to promote languages and cultures in schools' as he/she is a language teacher, and yet another person mentioned Chinese language is a course for a linguistics degree at their university. Third, people also revealed their desire for some future connection with China and Chinese culture, such as travel to China and improving their resumes for future work engagement with China.

4.1.4 Experiences and expectations

After learning of the participants' interest areas on Chinese culture and their motivations in attending CI activities, their experiences and expectations of activities were probed next. Q15 and Q16 examined the participants' experiences by asking which aspects of the activities they found to be satisfactory or unsatisfactory (see Figure 4.7). Q9 & Q22 compared the differences between the selection of activities that participants had already attended and those planned for future

attendance (see Figure 4.8). Q17 & Q23 compared the differences of what participants have already learned and still want to learn in the future (see Figure 4.9). Furthermore, Q19 explored the changes of participants' perceptions about China after attending CI activities (see Figure 4.10), and the individuals' experiences and expectations about activities was elaborated with an open question Q20.
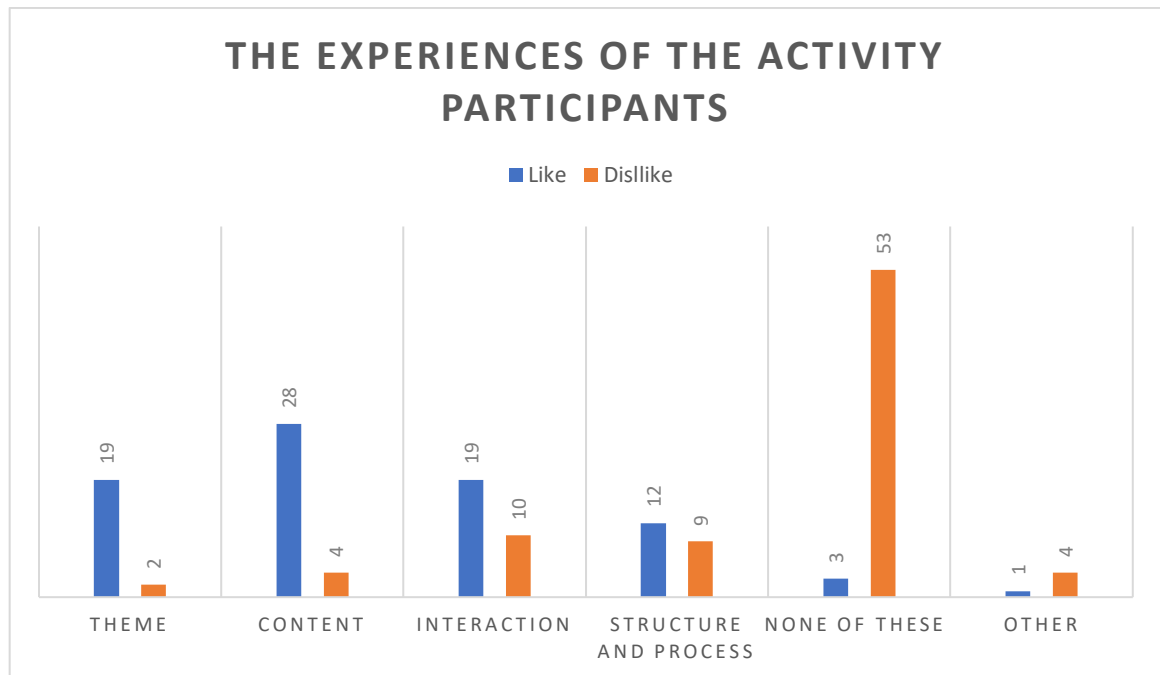
Figure 4.7 Experiences of the activity participants

Figure 4.7 illustrates the experiences of the activity participants, with the blue column representing the numbers of respondents who like the optional parts of CI activities and the orange column representing the numbers of those who dislike the options. The most significant finding is that only a small number of participants dislike anything of the listed parts of activities. In other words, most participants have a positive experience with CIs in general. Second, the contents of CI activities received the most credit. On the other hand, there are more improved spaces for interactions and structures of the activities. A probable explanation is that people went to the activities because of knowing the themes in advance, but the interaction and structures are more uncontrollable during the activities. Considering there are many different types of activities, the more detailed experiences with different activities were to be explored at the stage two interviews.

CI activities: participated before & want to participate in future

Figure 4.8 Comparison of activity participation

Figure 4.8 shows a high degree of consistency of the activities between "participated in before" and "want to participate in the future". As the core function of CIs, language learning events achieve the balance unsurprisingly, and other activities that seem to be more welcomed than the activities the participants have attended before. The reasons behind these intentions might be because some activities are organised less frequently than others and require more professional people, skills and places along with applicable times, or some activities are only available to certain participants, such as to students and teachers, rather than to the general public. Anyway, it is encouraging to see people want to attend more activities than they already have had, which shows a positive outcome in terms of popularity.

CI activities: learned & want to learn in future

■ Want to learn in future   ■ Learned via CI activities
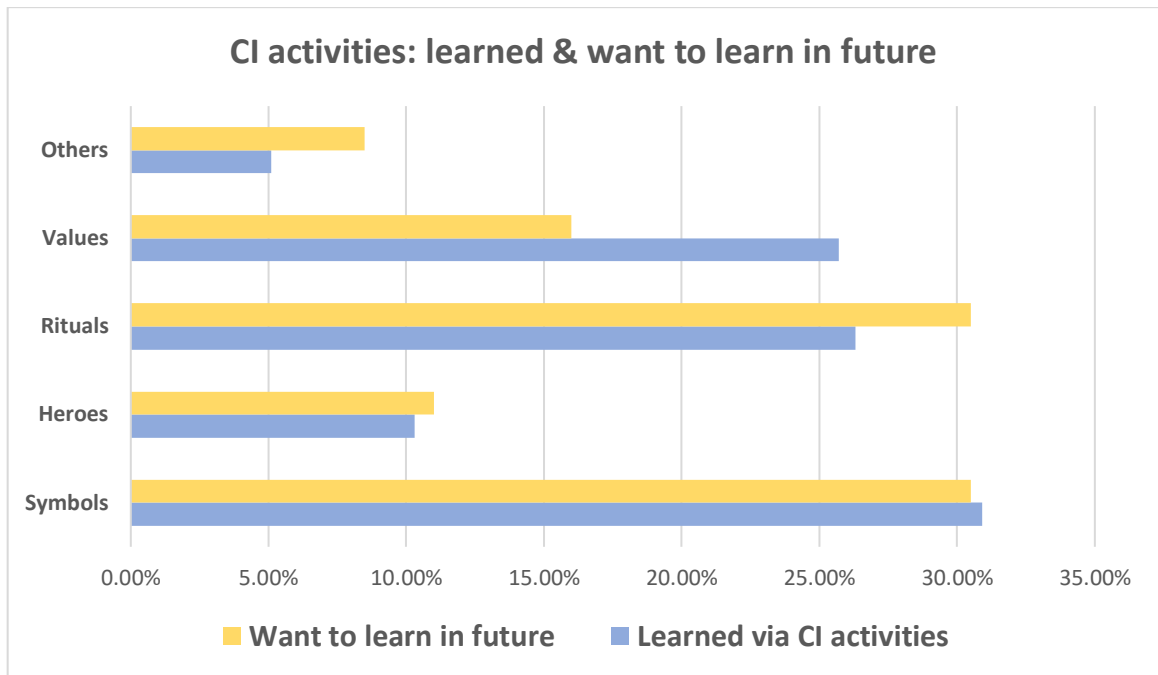
Figure 4.9 Comparison of learning from CIs

Inspired by the Hofstede's cultural onion model (1991) about four layers of culture, four elements have been borrowed for the comparison of what participants have learned about and what they want to learn in the future through CI activities in Figure 4.9. The four elements begin from the surface layer moving in gradually to the in-depth layer of culture. 'Symbols' stand for the specific symbols like words, gestures, pictures, objects that can represent Chinese culture. 'Heroes' stand for the specific persons, real or imaginary that can represent Chinese culture. 'Rituals' mean people's everyday life and collective social activities that are carried out in a predetermined fashion in China. 'Values' represent the core layer of the Chinese people's way of thinking of cultural preconceptions and values. In Figure 4.9, Symbols and Heroes are roughly the same between people who have already learned and people who want to learn in the future through CI activities. It means CIs basically fulfilled the needs or desires of the participants from these two outer layers. However, people want to know more about Chinese people's everyday lives and collective social activities in the future (see Rituals), while they felt they already learned a lot about Chinese people's way of thinking of cultural preconceptions and values (see Values). It suggests more activities relating to Chinese people's everyday life and culture need to be carried out in future.

PERCEPTION ABOUT CHINA FOLLOWING ATTENDING CI ACTIVITIES

- I don't know 5%
- Stay the same 22%
- Stimulated negative feelings 7%
- Stimulated positive feelings 66%
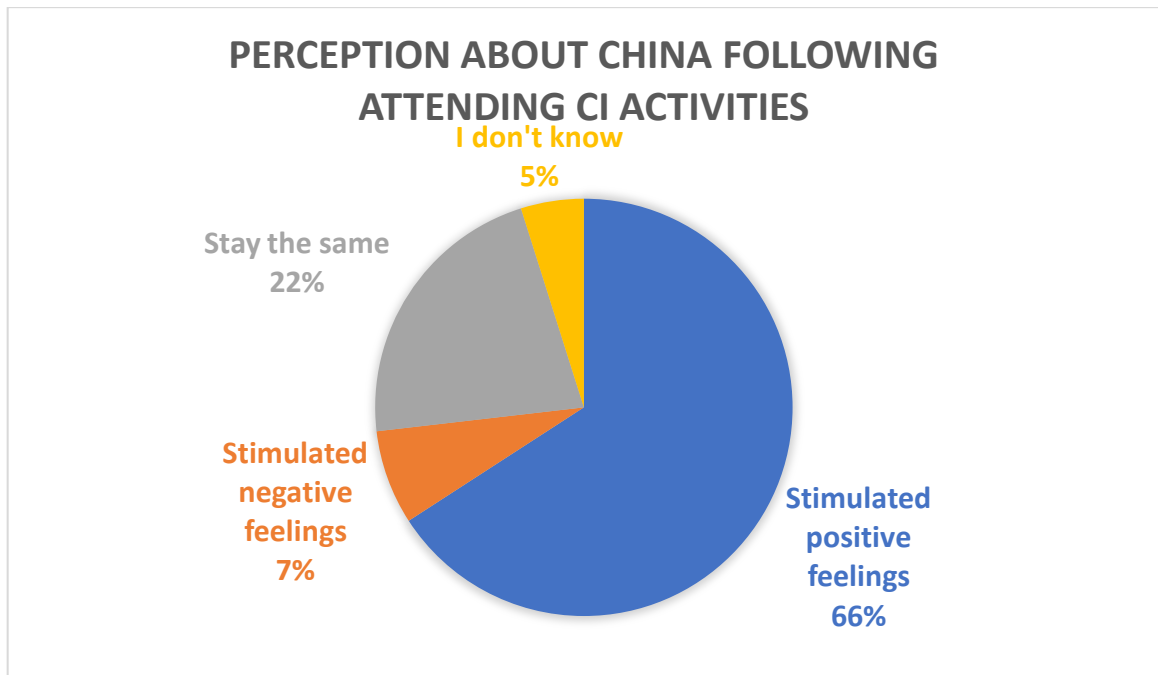
Figure 4.10 Perception about China following attending CI activities

Figure 4.10 depicts the changes of participants' perceptions about China following attending CI activities. One of the implicit purposes of the Chinese Government and CIs in organising these activities is to build a positive and benevolent image of China (Paradise, 2009; Hartig, 2015b). In this case, Q19 investigates the effectiveness and efficacy of these efforts by asking the participants about their changes of perception about China after attending CI activities. It shows that 66% of the participants obtained more positive feelings about China after attending CI activities, while 22% of the participants stay the same. One unanticipated finding is that almost one tenth of participants thought the activities had stimulated negative feelings, which is opposite to the original purpose of the Chinese Government and CIs. The data indicates a comparatively limited influence of CIs' effort in positive image building, and the detailed reasons behind the result need to be investigated through the stage two interviews.

Furthermore, the individuals' experiences and expectations of participants are asked about by the open question Q20 'did the outcomes meet your prior expectations?'. In total, 70 participants answered the question, in which 54 participants selected "yes", 9 participants chose "no", and 7 participants ticked "to some extent" option.

From their responses, the primary reason for selecting "Yes" is they learned something new from the activities, especially Chinese language and cultural related knowledge. For example, participants said 'I learnt basic Chinese phrases and culture', 'I use the knowledge gained in my job', 'I felt culturally enriched and I learned new things', and 'I can gain extra knowledge that I don't learn in classes' etc. The "language", "new", "knowledge" are the three most frequently mentioned words from the responses who selected "yes". Subsequently, respondents also praised the good service and nice interactions from CI staff and teachers. Comments like 'I was warmly welcomed', 'the teachers are very good', 'the coordinator is very kind…', and 'it offers all the services I have expected it to prior to joining' indicate their pleased experiences with people in CIs. Apart from that, a small number of responses demonstrated that they are satisfied because they had no expectations, so they were pleasantly surprised with the experiences. The responses from "no" and "to some extent" are more from individual reasons and sometimes the answers even produced contradictory comments. It is notable that the major concern from the responses is from the structure and process aspect of activities, on which five people gave negative comments. They noted that some activities are poorly designed and sometimes the instructions are not clear as well. The secondary concern from the responses is about the content of activities, with four people referring to this issue. Some participants considered some contents are not particularly interesting or just too simple, others thought the contents often very interesting 'but usually not enough for spending a prolonged time'. It was also striking to see some completely contradictory comments at the same time. One response mentioned 'some social issues people who have most interests in couldn't be discussed in the activities', while another response said that he/she does not like political discussion in language lessons. One participant believed the class is very fast, while another participant preferred to go to higher level language classes as he thought most classes are only for beginners. Overall, it is very difficult to predict to what extent the free speech and the quality of language classes can be considered in CIs only from a few people's viewpoints. Once again, it can largely depend on the specific activity and the personal interests, experiences and perceptions, which needs further discussion and analysis through stage two interviews.

4.1.5 Other interesting findings

Other additional questions are also examined for a more nuanced and holistic understanding of the participants. Specifically, since there is a discrepancy about the nature & definition of CIs between the Chinese world and the West as I discussed in Chapter 2, I was particularly interested in what the views on CIs were from the activity participants perspectives. Therefore, Q8 asked which was the most appropriate definition of CI from the participants' viewpoints, and Q25 explored anything or any comment they wanted to add to my study.

Figure 4.11 shows almost half of respondents considered the CI to be the Chinese cultural organisation and one third of respondents thought CIs are government related organisations. These two prevalent definitions of CIs from participants' views are very in line with CI literature. Albeit the first definition was more frequently mentioned in the Chinese literature on CIs, the second is more discussed in the Western context. Additionally, the same percentage of people think CIs are university related departments and Chinese academic organisations (11% and 10% respectively). This might be because CIs are often based in universities, and they also teach Chinese language and culture. However, further detail about the reasons behind their views needed to be scrutinised at the stage two interviews with the participants.

DEFINITION OF CI FROM SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

- Government related organisation
- Chinese cultural organisation
- Chinese academic organisation
- University related department
- Social organisation

32%
46%
10%
11%
1%
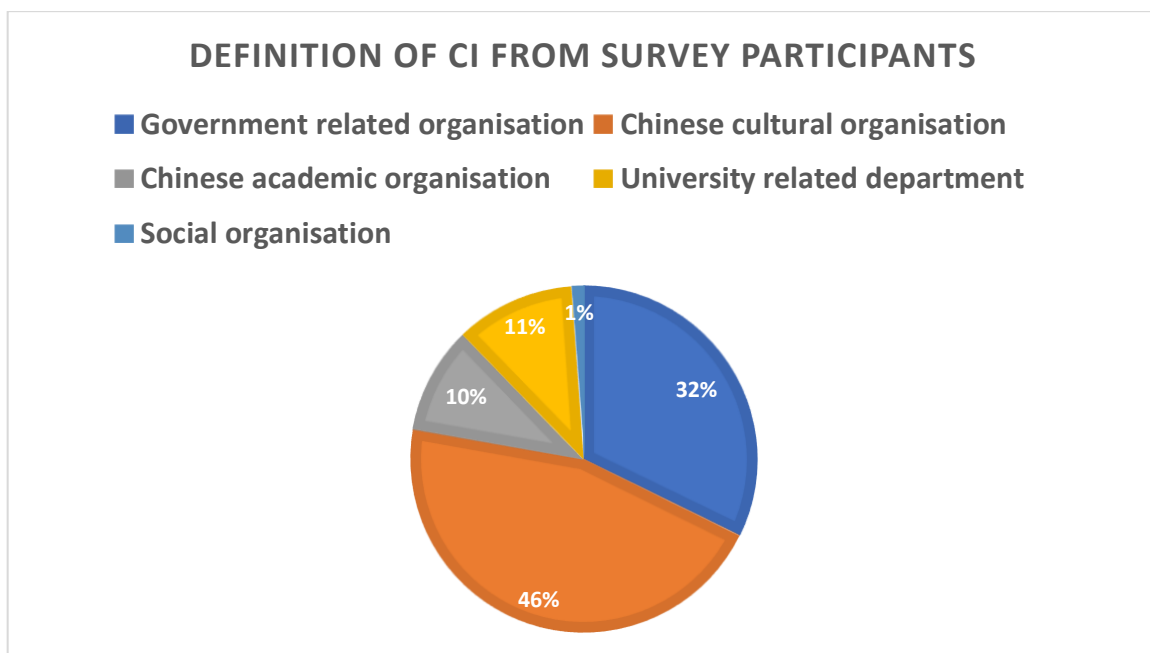
Figure 4.11 Definition of CI from survey participants

The open question Q25, inviting people to give any comment in relation to the study or to CIs, is asked at the end of the survey. In total, 47 comments were collected and most of them offered affirmative views of CI activities, and others also left constructive and critical suggestions. Many people enjoyed the experiences mainly because of 1) it is great to know Chinese and Chinese culture with different perspectives; 2) nice experience to make friends; 3) it can enrich extracurricular activities. Someone even acknowledged that 'it was a life changing experience and I afterwards spent 5 years learning the language' after he/she visited China with a CI scholarship. On the other hand, participants also provided some constructive and even critical suggestions. For example, one participant thought that 'CI programmes on Chinese culture tend to be very flat and boring', and he/she indicated that the programmes are not the best incentive to attract people. In brief, although most of the participants formed favourable impressions about CI activities, it is clear to see that there are still some issues that needed to be delved into through the in-depth interviews such as the procedure for selecting candidates for visiting China by CI scholarship.

In summary, section 4.1 presents the online survey findings with the activity participants. It revealed much descriptive information about the activity participants,

the activities, their experiences with CIs in Britain, and meanwhile it identified potential participants for the further interviews. Most importantly, it partially answered the first research questions on the activity experience from the participants cohort. At this point, the first-hand and rudimentary facts about activity participants have been obtained, discussed, and analysed. Although much of the detailed and in-depth information can only be obtained and analysed with qualitative interviews, it assisted me with the future enquiries and thinking. The quantitative data provides me with a general idea and background for my study and the open questions also guide me to explore a more nuanced and complex response to the intercultural engagements of the activity participants.

4.2 Findings from the interviews with activity participants

By conducting thematic analysis of the interviews from the activity participants cohort (see Table 3.3 of the 13 interview participants), four broad themes and eight sub-themes were generated from the transcripts. The four themes are motivations, experiences, impacts and views. The motivations are the participants' motivations for engaging with China, CIs and Chinese culture. The experiences represent the participants' activity and intercultural experience with CIs and CI staff. The impacts signify the diverse impacts of CIs and CI activities. The views mean the different views towards China, CIs and Chinese culture both from the West and the activity participants.

4.2.1 Motivations

The motivations for engaging with China, CIs and Chinese culture can be summarised into two aspects: the attractions from the traditional culture and economic development of China and enhancing personal connections and life trajectory.

4.2.1.1 Traditional culture and economic development of China

Almost all of the participants noted that either the traditional culture of China or the economic development of China, or both, had attracted them to get in touch with CIs, to learn the Chinese language in CIs, and to attend CI activities. With regards to the traditional culture, the area of attractiveness is very different from

person to person and people generally showed a great interest in knowing about the everyday lives of Chinese people. In relation to the economic development of China, many participants indicated their willingness to do business and work with China or to find a China-related job in the future.

Areas of interest in Chinese traditional culture can be very wide-ranging and different from person to person. They can range from traditional Chinese dance and martial arts to Chinese poems and history. Some participants showed a great interest in a particular cultural activity and signed up to the paid for cultural workshops that CIs organised. For example, P3 joined a Chinese traditional dance workshop in CI5, P5 participated in a health Qigong class in CI5, and P10 attended a Wushu class in CI6. P12 explored a passion for classic works and literatures in ancient China. In my study, P3 is a female dancer from Chile, and she came to the UK with her husband in pursuing his PhD. She shared with me her passion for dancing and especially traditional dance:

> Yeah, well, it's the music, the dance. Because it's traditional dance, so that means for me is about the traditional culture, you know. That was the first connection (with CI5) [...] so I want to know about the music, about that type of dance. (P3, Chile, dance teacher)

It is not surprising to see people engage with CIs because of their attraction to Chinese culture. However, it is surprising to see that all the elements of Chinese culture that the participants referred to and expressed interested in are traditional and classical. It seems the traditional ones are more attractive when it comes to the cultural factor, or maybe there is a lack of contemporary cultural elements presented in CIs, as participants have not particularly noticed any of that. Therefore, as discussed from the literature of CIs about soft power in chapter 2, if CIs want to have an influence in other countries, it seems that there is a lack of popular interest or appeal in the cultural element in contemporary China. In this specific situation, culture in today's China seems missing, and the soft power of Chinese culture only can be discovered in the traditional ones in the CIs' context. Examination of the reasons behind the selective representation of Chinese culture needs to be further elaborated in the discussion chapter.

Although culture in today's China seems missing, there are significant numbers of participants who chose to interact with CIs because of practical considerations. These are largely related to Chinese economic development today. Specifically, P1 worked in an English proofreading business for international students as a part time job while studying at business school in Uni.2. He has become aware that all of his Master's study classmates and his clients are Chinese; thereafter, he decided to learn Chinese in CI2. P9 is a staff member in the global experiences team in Uni.6, and she chose to study Chinese language as the university has a lot of connections with China and Chinese students. More examples of economically driven motivation can be found from the interviews of P2 and P5. P2 hopes to get a job in a China related area and to 'affect positive policies' when it comes to China-Africa relations. P5 plans to take the higher HSK Chinese language examination because of 'an ambition that's one day I might be able to work in China'. The economy development of China also can manifest itself in the fact of technological innovation of China. In this case, P4 is a PhD student in Biomaterials studies in Uni.5, and the stimulus of his involvement with CI5 is:

> Yes, and I decided to go there (CI5) because also when I was reading papers from my PhD, I found five papers about different topics related to biomaterials, and the authors [are] all from China. (P4, Mexico, PhD student)

In brief, from the above five participants views, economic development seems to be another important factor to them for engaging with CIs, and those who were driven by it are usually language learners in CIs too. It indicates some people tend to take practical considerations when it comes to their approach to CIs and these considerations are predominantly work and study related. In my study, 8 out of 13 participants chose to learn Chinese language first and then selectively participate in some CI activities for further exploration of China and Chinese culture.

4.2.1.2 Personal connection and life trajectory

Another theme that can be found from the interviews is the motivations from personal connection and life trajectory for people engaging with CIs. In this category, some participants' motivations were due to their families' and friends' connections, as well as their distinct life trajectories linked with China and Chinese people.

Specifically, P7 took a voluntary job in China when he was 17 years old, which became his primary motivation to study Chinese. After that, he continued to interact with CI4 and learn language since his wife is Chinese. A similar situation also happened for P8, whose family had lived in Hongkong before the respondent was born, and who also worked with a lot of Chinese people and students in Uni.3 later in the UK. P9 works in a global experience team in Uni.6 which requires engagement with Chinese universities and people. P12 has studied in China before as a high school student, and P13 participated in CI2's activities as a short-term exchange scholar from one Chinese university.

In short, the natural curiosity for people exploring different language, culture and activity can be the motivation of the engagement. However, the findings illustrate the traditional culture and economic development of China, and personal connection and life trajectory are the two main motivations for people engaging with CIs and CI activities. It is important to know the specific attracting elements and factors for people who want to engage with CIs. In this case, P8's story shows the perfect example of combining all the motivations together, and concludes with the following four reasons:

> Perhaps the first thing I'd say that it's the future of the world economy of China. Secondly, my father, mother and brother long before I was born from the war lived in Hongkong [...] And then the recent history of China. I'm very interested in the formation of Communist Party in 1924, and what happened to it [...] And the fourth reason was I suppose working at Uni.2, [and] there are a lot of Chinese people, especially sharing office, there was PhD. (P8, UK, retired teacher)

4.2.2 Experiences

Two sub-themes were generated under the 'participants experience of engaging with CIs and CI activities' category. With respect to the contents of the activities, the findings reveal that the traditional cultural and the economic development of China are the two main topics of CI activities. When it comes to intercultural communication with CI staff, the findings indicate very little misunderstanding between the activity participants and CI staff although sometimes language can be a barrier for effective communication.

4.2.2.1 Traditional culture and economic development of China

Echoing the motivations of the activity participants, the traditional culture and economic development of China were found to be the two main themes of the activities of CIs. The activities that participants have mentioned during the interviews are displayed in Table 4.2 below. According to popularity of the activities, traditional festivals, cultural workshops, and academic activities are the three major events that are organised by most of the CIs, except for language learning in CIs. As a multi-ethnic nation, it is worth noting that China has fifty-five minority ethnic groups besides the majority group, Han. Each group has its own distinctive costumes, festivals, customs, rituals, cuisines, architecture, and beautiful attractions etc. The complexity, richness and diversity of the multi-ethnic Chinese culture provide a variety of materials for the CIs to organise activities, particularly when it comes to traditional festival celebrations and traditional cultural workshops.

Table 4.2 List of activities that participants have attended from the interviews

Category	Types of activity	Who mentioned	Total
Traditional festivals	Chinese New Year festival	P1,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13	11
	Mid-autumn festival	P1,6,8,13	4
	Dragon-boat festival	P8,10	2
Traditional workshops and classes	Craft workshop	P6,12	2
	Calligraphy class	P6,12	2
	Traditional dance class	P3	1
	Health Qigong class	P5	1
	Wushu class	P10	1
	Painting class	P6	1
	Taichi class	P5	1
Academic activities	Exchange programme	P12	1
	Summer school or trip	P7	1
	Lectures and talks	P2,6,8,9,10,13	6
Others	Online competition	P8	1
	Tea ceremony	P6	1
	Film screening	P8	1

In terms of traditional culture related activities, the Chinese festival celebrations and the traditional workshops are the two typical forms in most CIs. As we can see

from Table 4.2, many CIs regularly host big events when it comes to the three representative festivals of China: Chinese New Year festival, Mid-autumn festival, and Dragon-boat festival. In reference to the traditional workshops, different CIs run distinctive workshops and classes and they are often organised professionally by CI teachers. These workshops and classes include but are not limited to Chinese calligraphy class, craft workshop, health Qigong class, painting class, Tai chi class, Traditional Chinese dance class, and Wushu class.

For traditional festival celebration activities, the diverse forms and performances, the vibrant and happy environment, the delicious and exotic Chinese food, and opportunity to interact with people from a different cultural background were highly rated among the interviewees. First, the diverse forms and performances of celebration activities were mentioned by several participants, for example, P6 praised the Mid-autumn festival event in CI4 and described it as "really good" as there are many performances you can attend like a tea ceremony, calligraphy, Chinese bracelet making and other cultural activities. This resonates with P11, who believed the interesting and exciting part of attending the New Year gala is the novelty, and this kind of novelty is 'unique for someone outside of China'. Second, the vibrant and happy atmosphere around the activities was also highlighted by some participants. They described the vibrant decorations and the "Chinese colour" of red of the activity, which made a great impression on the participants. P4 mentioned the vibrant and friendly atmosphere of one New Year event attended and thought 'the most impressive part is that everything looks to be connected' in that event. Moreover, the traditional Chinese food along with the festival events also attracted many participants' attention. P6 made a joke that many students attended the activities because they have free food. P8 praised the New Year event in CI1, reporting one of the most impressive things to be the fantastic dumplings. Last but most importantly, some participants believed the opportunity to interact with a lot of people from different countries through activity engagement can be the most fantastic experience. P1, P4, P6 and P8 shared that their favourite part of these festival activities is the interactions within an inclusive environment, for example, P1 expressed a preference for the Mid-autumn festival event rather than the Chinese New Year event in CI2, stating:

> I enjoyed the mooncake festival because I was a little bit more laid back, and we got time to talk to people, exchange languages [me: interact?] Yeah, and I think that makes all the better; whereas if I'm watching presentation and performance, sometimes you can just be like I'm at the theatre, you know I am not really learning about China. (P1, UK, graduated student)

Indeed, no matter how diverse the forms and wonderful the performances, how vibrant the decorations or how delicious the food arranged by the CIs in prepared activities, the opportunities to interact with others can be the most important point for cultural communication.

The participants have also attended a variety of traditional and culture related workshops and classes. In this study, seven workshops and classes were mentioned by the interviewees: craft workshops, calligraphy classes, painting classes, traditional dance classes, Wushu classes, health Qigong classes and Tai chi classes. Compared to the participants who attended the traditional festival events, those who signed up for the workshops and classes were largely self-initiated and showed a great interest in Chinese traditional cultural elements and skills. Experiences of a high standard of lessons and professional teachers, reasonable tuition fees and the opportunity for in-depth communication and interaction are the three prominent findings from the interviews. The high standard of the lessons and professional teachers were recognised by P3, P5, P6 and P10, and all of them are satisfied with the programs, as well as the teachers. P3 described having done traditional dance with an amazing teacher from Beijing Dance Academy. When I asked the participants whether their workshop is too easy for them, both P5 and P6 thought they are not easy once you actually get into them. P5 who has joined health Qigong class in CI5 for two years gave an explanation for that claiming:

> I would say superficially they might look simple because of their slow character, but the position in the movements and the pacing and coordination with movement, breathing mind, it's not that simple in the end, quite complicated. (P5, European countries, student)

Apart from that, participants only needed to pay low tuition fees for the classes, which is another enticing factor for enrolling. Most importantly, participants highlighted opportunities to engage and interact in-depth with teachers and peers

through the opportunities. For instance, P10 told me of greatly enjoying the Wushu class in CI6 as 'we were not too many students, so it's very easy to progress and interact with the teacher'.

In terms of academic activities, CIs also regularly organise a series of academic activities, such as language teaching and a learning conference, guest lectures and seminars etc. In the interviews, five people mentioned that they have attended this kind of activity organised by CIs. However, it is surprising to note that four out five were talking about the Chinese economy in particular the rise of today's China. Both P9 and P10 drew attention to a well-attended academic talk by a famous British author, who talked about the 'modern China and rise of China, and what it meant for the rest of the world' (P9). P8 also gave high praise for one talk that had been given by the former director of CI2, and it was about 'corporate science, local finances and things in the economy' in Shanghai, China. Apart from that, P2 mentioned experience of one academic talk in CI2 and how the different information provided about the One Belt One Road initiative of China from the Chinese presenter altered perceptions:

> Yeah, it's Chinese people presenting on Chinese subjects. So, even the
> Road and Belt Initiative, it was interesting to know that a Chinese person
> is actually saying that [...] which is very powerful. (P2, Kenya, student)

In short, it seems the rise of China, especially in economic aspects, has become a key focus of academic activities of CIs. The reasons for this preference can be that CIs want to search for more economic cooperation with other countries, but it also might be through a lack of enough attractive or popular cultural elements to present when it comes to contemporary China.

4.2.2.2 Interpersonal interaction with very little misunderstanding

In terms of the interpersonal interactions between CI staff and activity participants during activities, it is surprising to see that there is no big misunderstanding during intercultural engagements between them with almost all of the participants acknowledging the kindness and patience of the staff from CIs. Both P3 and P10 considered that the instructions and information that the CI staff provided are always

very clear. P3 and P8 noticed that they can speak slowly to avoid misunderstanding. In most situations, the communication is just as P4 stated:

> I think they are trying to do their best. Sometimes if you look in this, like the language barriers, you can try to do something and to improve [the communication]. Because they are always happy to help you. (P4, Mexico, student)

From the findings, it seems the communication from the person-to-person dimensions are quite smooth and effective. One reason might be that some participants already have a certain level of Chinese language, or some staff are good at English, so there is not such a big hindrance to good intercultural communication. Another reason might be that people from both cohorts engaged with each other with a positive attitude and expectation and so they tended to be actively involved in the interaction processes. However, less attention has been paid to these kinds of interpersonal interactions in CI studies.

4.2.3 Impacts

After investigating the participants experiences in activities and intercultural engagements, the theme of the impact of the CIs emerged from the interviews. Specifically, from the activity participants' viewpoint, there seems to be a limited impact on British society generally but a positive impact on intercultural understanding with people who have been engaged with CIs and CI activities.

4.2.3.1 Impact on British society

Contrary to the concerns and worries about the possible ideological influence of CIs from many social media outlets and CI literature from the West, the participants viewed it in a very different and more neutral way. Almost all of the interviewees considered that there is a small impact or limited impact on British society. Specifically, P4 was hesitant to acknowledge any impact of CIs in Britain, as the difficulty of Chinese language might be one of the barriers for people to engage with CIs. P13 thought poor performance on publicity and social participation might also limit the influence of CIs. P12 provided a clear reason for thinking that the impact of CIs is small:

> The thing is that Chinese culture isn't the only culture that's from outside of our culture […] You know I think it's made an impact at the level that Chinese people would have made the impact anyway. The thing is even if the CI wasn't there, there's a market incentive to study Chinese. (P12, UK, student)

This explanation suggests that it is the marketing incentive that drives people to study Chinese and to engage with Chinese culture instead of the existence of CIs. Similar to this view, P1 and P9 noted that CIs' influence is limited to opportunities for studying Chinese language and to raising awareness of Chinese culture. P9 stressed that the UK takes a more pragmatic approach and sees China as an opportunity rather than a threat (like US) and acknowledged there is a certain impact of CIs on universities' communication and cooperation, thanks to the CI's unique cooperation structure. P9 noted that the CI attended made China become 'a more accessible place to go', and the little things like the decorations of the CI on campus can raise awareness of China and Chinese culture. P5 was aware of the distinct function of CIs on the globalisation process with Chinese universities in Uni.5.

In short, as there are 28 CIs in Britain since the establishment of the first one in 2005, it is worth looking into the impact of these CIs in the British context considering the number and history of CIs in Britain. However, from the findings, it seems the impact of CIs on British society remains low, and unlike the discussion in studies of CIs, no political influence was mentioned from the participants. The reasons behind the limited impact can vary, and from my point of view, like P12 said, it might be that promoting Chinese culture and the CIs just 'made an impact at the level that Chinese people would have made the impact anyway.'

4.2.3.2 Impact on intercultural communication

Although the findings show that CIs have a limited impact on British society, they also revealed a positive impact on the intercultural understanding of the people who engaged with CIs. It seems that Chinese language learning can facilitate smoother communication between people from China and from other countries. Many participants were aware of this kind of language opportunity in Britain. For example, the impact on the education system in Britain of CIs and CCs were recognised by P1, who remarked that unlike previously, students often have the option to study

Mandarin in high school now. This is echoed by P5, who has volunteered to work as a teaching assistant for CI5 at a Mandarin Saturday school. Most importantly, CIs also provided a different view and standpoint for understanding China and Chinese culture, which might differ from what they have heard and understood from their cultures. Therefore, an opportunity is provided for people to perceive China and Chinese culture from an unique perspective. As a result, these different or even divergent narratives can facilitate a more comprehensive or critical understanding of China and Chinese culture.

Through communication with Chinese people, many participants view of Chinese people and China is no longer an abstract, which is "eye-opening" for them, as P9 expressed:

> So, I think seeing how open and welcoming they were, and how eager they were to share their culture was sort of eye-opening, cause again sometimes you hear about China, people used to be quite secretive and quiet, but that hasn't been the experience at all [...]. It's very interesting to see how Chinese people view China cause it's very different to how westerns are told to view China. (P9, USA, international officer at Uni.6)

This view also was raised with P2 and P7 during their interviews. P2 stressed that CIs are 'important for bridging the gap of understanding between China and the UK'. Most interestingly, when I asked P7 whether he consider that the CI reinforced the stereotype image of China as an "exotic other", he replied:

> Yes, I think they do to certain extent, definitely, but also, they are very good at breaking the stereotype once you actually get involved in CI, you will realise that's not everything. (P7, UK, student)

The findings do not deny that CIs generally present a considerably positive view of China rather than a multifaceted view of China (Hartig, 2015a), however, I believe it is still valuable for people to get to know it, considering the views of China from Western narratives are not completely accurate and precise from some other perspectives. In this situation, it seems the negative impact of CIs are exaggerated and the positive impact from intercultural engagements are neglected from the main Western narratives.

4.2.4 Views

Diverse views about China, Chinese culture and CIs can be found from the interviews. These diverse views can be divided into two dimensions: one is the views of China and CIs from the West, and the other one is the views of Chinese culture and CIs from the participants. The findings show that economic growth and politic difference are the two main topics when it comes to views from the West, while participants had a very specific understanding towards Chinese culture and CIs. This understanding includes but is not limited to their experiences with Chinese people and their familiarisation with Chinese culture.

4.2.4.1 Views of China and Confucius Institutes from the West

From the participants' observations, China as an emerging superpower with a different political system is the most prominent narrative in Western society. For example, P8 noted that some companies' stories, such as Huawei stories, are often heard in Western social media. P7 mentioned that the News often portrays China as a superpower in the West, and they 'generally didn't deal with cultural elements, it only dealt with political issues', such as voting rights, problems in the South China sea, as well as disputes with Japan, Korean and Taiwan. 'Whenever there is an argument between China and Western countries, I only hear about the arguments'. P9 also has a similar observation about Western views towards China, describing that people 'hear a lot how China is this emerging superpower, and how people are scared they are gonna be dominant country in the world'. Apart from that, P1 and P11 also mentioned that the unique polity of China, i.e., the Chinese Communist Party is an oft-mentioned subject both from history books as well as recent articles and news stories in the West. Overall, it seems that there exists an antagonistic attitude towards China in Western narratives from both of their descriptions and understandings.

Other descriptions and understandings further endorsed by P11, who said he needs to keep an open mind about Western articles' viewpoints about China, and doesn't follow opinions easily, as 'some journalists seemed to be biased in a way'. Or P2 discussed one of the things that China consistently complained about:

A lot of Western media take a very standard approach to China, [so] China is always doing the wrong thing, China is always, you know it's very particular. It's very biased towards China, never following the rules, China is always doing the wrong thing. (P2, Kenya, student)

Overall, as P2 said, the West takes a certain standard view of China at a society level. This narrative depicts China as an emerging superpower with a fundamentally different polity which creates a hostile and fearful atmosphere in the West. On the contrary, most Chinese people understand their own country in a quite different way. P9 thought 'it's very interesting to see how Chinese people view China because it's very different to how Westerns are told to view China'. Beyond that, she observed that most Chinese people are very surprised about how America looks at China as a superpower from her working experiences as an international officer in Un.6. In this case, once again, CIs potentially provide a platform to let people take a glance of another perspective about China.

4.2.4.2 Views of Chinese culture and Confucius Institutes from the participants

Despite the West taking a certain standard view of China, 13 participants showed a discursive and specific understanding towards Chinese culture and CIs from their personal experiences. They tended to give detailed answers when I asked them to describe their image about China and Chinese culture. In reference to Chinese culture, some Chinese elements, people, lifestyles, and even distinguishing features and values were brought up throughout the interviews. Moreover, the 13 participants also presented their own understandings about the nature of CIs which can be more complex than the standard view of the West.

When participants talked about their image of China and Chinese culture before attending any CI activities in the first place, most participants had general understandings about China at a relatively surface level. Informed by the Hofstede's cultural onion model (Hofstede, 1991), this surface level can be the symbols and heroes that can represent Chinese culture (see the full explanation in section 4.1.4). In detail, some representative elements of Chinese folk culture showed up, such as food, use of chopsticks, Kung Fu, Chinese movies, the Great Wall, and many things being made in China. Other participants had more deeper understandings about

Chinese culture in certain specific areas, depending on their individual interests. For example, P3 knew something about Chinese traditional dance as she is a dancer and performer. P4 perceived China as a country with an advanced technology, as many authors were Chinese when he read biomaterials related papers. Some participants have visited China before, and they shared their experiences of visiting and staying in China. For example, P7 was involved as a technical volunteer in China, and since then has a strong feeling that Chinese people are very disciplined and hard-working. Other participants were aware that they understand more about China and Chinese people now, as they got opportunities to interact with them since there are a lot of Chinese international students in the UK. Interestingly, both P1 and P6 who are from the UK thought Chinese students to be rich to some extent, since unlike them, they need to pay a large amount of their tuition fee for studying in the UK.

In terms of the nature of the CI, most participants considered it is a Chinese language and culture organisation, which is aligned with the purposes of the CI that is defined by Hanban. Some participants thought that it is a Chinese government funded initiative with certain purposes. Interestingly, both P4 and P9 noted that it is an agreement between universities and the Chinese government, which is illustrated by P9 here:

> Well, in my opinion, it's a government funded initiative, so I think it's definitely marketing exercise for the Chinese government. But I do know that there is also academic work in CI6, you know, professional academic work there, so it is an academic place as well. (P9, USA, international officer at Uni.6)

However, P9 went on to explain that CI6 is 'a marketing exercise at university', 'part of university community'. Meanwhile, some participants also considered the CI is the place for Chinese people to tell Chinese stories and to present Chinese subjects, and these stories and presentations are often prone to promoting positive attitudes towards China. For example, P7 expressed the view that the CI is a good way for the Chinese government to show a side of Chinese people that may not have been seen from Western perspectives, as 'Chinese government doesn't run news or broadcast in the UK'. This was echoed by P11, who pointed out that one purpose of CIs is to change people's attitudes about China. As commented on by P12, CIs sometimes

present 'a very rosy' and 'everything is great' view about China, which is not an accurate reflection of China and Chinese culture, having witnessed some undeveloped places when living in China.

4.3 Findings from the interviews with Chinese staff

After coding and analysing the transcripts of the interviews with 17 Chinese staff, four salient themes were generated: purposes, adaptations, connections, and views. Under each of these themes, two further sub-themes emerged for more detailed explanations.

4.3.1 Purposes

According to the official description on the Hanban website, CIs, as non-profit public institutions, 'aim to promote Chinese language and culture in foreign countries' (Hanban, 2020b). However, after close analysis of the staff's interviews, it can be found that there is a relative balance between the grand purposes of Hanban and the practical expectations of the Chinese staff. In particular, the staff expressed that there is no specific regulation and requirement from the Hanban level except that you need to apply for funding from it every year.

4.3.1.1 Grand purpose of Hanban

Although the cultural promotion conducted by the Chinese government and Hanban constitute grand purposes, the findings demonstrate that the main responsibility of Hanban is to provide funding support rather than supervision for each CI. Apart from the activities initiated by Hanban, such as the Chinese bridge competition, Confucius Day, and visits to China, each individual CI has a certain degree of flexibility in how it organises and conducts the activities it selects, as long as these activities are underpinned by the grand purposes of Hanban. In this regard, as S8, the dispatched Chinese director of CI4, noted, Hanban only acts in a guiding role at the macro level, which means CIs must submit annual budget reports to Hanban in order to apply for further funding. This view resonates with two local deputy directors, S9 and S10, who also highlighted the absence of specific requirements imposed by Hanban other than the submission of an activity plan when applying for funding. S16, a Chinese

teacher in CI8, noted that culture promotion is determined by local requirements. For instance, CI1 received firm support from Hanban when it organised a niche activity that focused on cutting-edge Chinese culture.

> Frankly speaking, while all the pioneering films are niche, we were glad to have had the firm support of Hanban. They [Hanban] said you should introduce this kind of cutting-edge art from China even if few people [will attend] right now. Audiences will expand if we persist in doing it. (S1, Chinese director in CI1)

4.3.1.2 Practical considerations of Confucius Institutes and activities

The staff's expectations of the activities seem to be very realistic and explicit. Firstly, most of the staff considered that the primary function of CIs is to provide language teaching, while activities represent only 'a very small part compared to the overall work' (S2, Chinese teacher in CI1). This statement was echoed by S12, who noted:

> I think cultural activities are carriers and should be organised in moderation, of course [...] Considering [our limited] time, energy, and other aspects, we still need to focus on teaching, which I think is the most important thing. (S12, Chinese teacher at CI7)

Other members of staff expressed a more practical view of the activities. They stressed that it is impossible to change people's attitudes and minds in relation to China and Chinese culture just through one or two activities at CIs. They proposed, therefore, that it is necessary to consider how to attract a wider audience, such as by offering more enticing and suitable activities. For example, S8 stressed that 'you cannot amplify the appeal of CIs just through one or two activities', adding that the public activities offered by CIs were merely intended to raise interest in certain aspects of Chinese culture. S12 and S16 also considered that CIs should serve just as platforms that present participants with the resources required to find out what they want about China in their own time (S12). These statements were also echoed by S5, who described the work of CIs as 'sowing seeds', stressing that what participants learned about Chinese culture should be connected to their personal life trajectories.

Some staff indicated what they expected the activities to achieve. S3 expressed the wish that since everyone has their own limitations when looking at things, it is to be hoped that 'the people who attend activities in the CI can view China and Chinese

people with more open eyes and attitudes'. S17 suggested that CIs could organise more activities related to contemporary Chinese culture, which might concern 'every aspect of Chinese society or the lifestyles of modern Chinese people'; this opinion was echoed by S7, as well. Some members of staff, such as S7 and S9, expressed their hope that the CI activities could reduce the prejudice against, and stereotyping of, Chinese people and hoped they could lead to finding common areas of humanity among different cultures:

> Because they [local people] also hold stereotypes [about China], and think Chinese people still have queue hairstyles [as they did during the Qing dynasty] or that Chinese people are very poor, we also try to reduce their prejudices. In addition, [the participants] like to understand how Chinese people think and what Chinese people's lives are like nowadays as well. (S7, local teacher at CI4)

Based on the above, it is clear to see that there is a relatively stable balance between the grand purposes of Hanban and the practical considerations of the Chinese staff at CIs. Although CIs are supervised by Hanban (CI headquarters), individual CIs are afforded a great degree of flexibility when designing and conducting their activities. Correspondingly, the staff hold no grandiose expectations of their work, and mainly focus on practical considerations. These practical considerations might include prioritising Chinese language teaching, which they view as the fundamental role of CIs, and the ultimate goal of attracting participants, as well as expectations of developing cosmopolitanism.

Drawing on the classification of CI work reports from Hartig's (2018) study about China's global image management, I classified the activities into three categories: 1) activities that represent traditional Chinese culture, 2) activities that represent contemporary Chinese culture, and 3) activities that encompass both traditional and contemporary Chinese culture. Specifically, traditional Chinese culture refers to the 'activities, practices, items, and/or components that have their origin in China's dynastic history or Republican era' (Hartig, 2018, p. 710), and contemporary Chinese culture implies the activities, practices, items, and/or components that emerge from the People's Republic of China (after 1949). The category of integrated activities represents those that include both traditional and contemporary Chinese culture. At the same time, I sought to identify the different cultural elements and dimensions

by adopting Hofstede's cultural onion model (1991). The model consists of four cultural layers (ranging from the surface to the deep level), as explained in 4.4.4: the symbols, heroes, rituals, and values. Specifically, in the Chinese cultural context, symbols are the words, gestures, brands, and objects that can represent Chinese culture. Heroes are people such as role models, or anyone, whether from ancient history or the present age, real or imaginary, who can represent Chinese culture. Rituals are the collective activities or behaviours of Chinese people. Values are the core layer, and represent Chinese people's ways of thinking, their cultural preconceptions, and their values. In most cases, these values cannot be observed by outsiders. The symbols, heroes, and rituals mentioned by the 17 members of staff were analysed in terms of their traditional, contemporary, and integrated facets.

Table 4.3 The traditional and contemporary elements that presented in the activities

Elements / Layers	Traditional	Contemporary	Integrated
Symbols	Chinese knot Chinese paper cutting Chinese paper folding Chinese calligraphy Chinese painting Chinese zodiac Chinese opera makeup Chinese embroidery Chinese shuttlecock Chinese waist drum Chinese lantern Chinese diabolo Chinese bronze Chinese acrobatics Traditional instruments Traditional dresses Tangram Dumpling Mooncake	TikTok app WeChat app Alipay app 5G network Chinese high-speed rail Chinese food Contemporary films Contemporary books	Chinese characters Chinese dance Chinese music Gunpowder and rocket science exhibition Qipao dress with high-tech elements Opera makeup with smartphone application Traditional architecture with digital media Silk Road with One Belt One Road Initiative
Heroes	Confucius Monkey King Zheng He	Famous movie directors Famous actors Famous writers Famous poets	
Rituals	Chinese chess playing Chinese traditional medicine Chinese tea ceremony Tai Chi Tai Chi Fan Kung Fu Wushu Dragon and lion dance Dragon boat race Dragon boat festival Mid-autumn festival Chinese New Year festival	Chinese travel Chinese cookery Chinese education Chinese transportation Chinese social habits Chinese people's life Chinese take away Chinese stage play Chinese consumption Chinese healthcare Chinese business etiquette Chinese industry	Chinese gardening Chinese hot pot Chinese geography Mah-jong

As Table 4.3 shows, the cultural elements most often mentioned by the staff during the interviews are related to traditional culture. At the symbols level, the staff frequently mentioned many kinds of objects or items that recurred in similar forms of activities. For example, Chinese traditional dress may encompass Han costumes, Qipao dress, and palace dress; traditional musical instruments may comprise the Zither, Guqin, or Erhu. At the rituals level, some traditional collective activities and behaviours were captured through the interviews, such as the dragon boat lion dance, festival celebrations, and tea ceremonies. On the other hand, the contemporary elements are largely related to technological developments and everyday life in China. For example, the most widely used applications in China were mentioned, such as TikTok (social media video app), WeChat (multi-purpose messaging app), and Alipay (online payment app). At the ritual level, most of the elements relating to contemporary China emerged in activities such as talks, lectures, or seminars. Interestingly, there were some integrated elements mentioned in the interviews, as well as some activities that merged traditional and contemporary elements together to present a more holistic and unique view of Chinese culture.

4.3.2 Adaptations

As I introduced in Chapter 2 about the structure of CIs, in general, most CIs consist of three parts: UK universities, Chinese universities and Hanban. In simple terms, the staff in CIs involve the people who are dispatched from China for a short-term stay and the people who are recruited for a long-term from local universities. Thus, a CI can be comprised of a Chinese director, Chinese teachers, Chinese volunteer teachers, a UK director, UK deputy director, local Chinese teachers, local managers, local administrators and other positions. This bicultural or even multicultural work environment requires a relatively different or unique structure for operating the institute in the local context. Meanwhile, in the British context, all CIs are in partnership with local universities and located in these universities. In this case, the findings indicate both CIs and Chinese staff were experiencing some adaptation processes to the local context.

4.3.2.1 Adaptation of Confucius Institutes

From the CIs perspective, two different adaptation processes were found from the staff interviews, namely structural adaptation and habitual adaptation. Structural adaptation is how the CIs adapt to local work structures and the allocation of duties. Most of the CI Chinese directors, Chinese teachers and volunteer teachers usually came to the UK for a short-term stay, the Chinese staff observed that they have restricted access to the works behind the scenes. S3 explained, CI1 'is more like a business organisation', and S3, S11 and S17 mentioned that it is the administration secretary or/and manager in their CIs who is responsible for connecting with diverse local partners like the university, primary or high schools and other business or culture communities and they only need to participate in what they ask for, such as preparing decorations and performance. The structure in CI8 is a good example to illustrate structural adaptation for CIs in the British context.

> We have Chinese director, foreign director, and foreign managers. We have two managers, and one is responsible for the works related to the university, another one is responsible for the works related to the local primary and high school affairs. So, if we hold activity that need to connect with local part, they are responsible for making connection with them […] Normally speaking, I think the organiser (of activities) are the foreign managers at our CI. (S17, Chinese teacher in CI8)

This kind of structural adaptation seems very common in the CIs in Britain, unlike the situation of the staff from China who can initiate or organise some activities such as in Africa countries, as S3 stated, the activity contact, organisation and selection are more often the responsibility of the local partners. In this case, the staff and teachers from China have less power in conducting these activities, compared to the staff and teachers that are dispatched to some African countries. The finding suggests there is a power imbalance between the Chinese organisers and British organisers in terms of the management and structure of CIs.

Another adaption of CIs that was found from the interviews is habitual adaptation, which means CIs need to be aware of the local traditions, customs and regulations when it comes to the organisation of activities. This awareness requires CIs to make some appropriate adjustments such as complying with local regulations that would not be required in China. For example, S11 gave an example of not being allowed to

take photos of children without permission and S12 explained that they need to write the teaching syllabus in English just like other teachers. The following excerpts from S10 outlined in detail about how they experienced habitual adaption in CI2.

> When we make plans, we need to plan activities in advance. For example, you can confirm something two weeks before in China, but you need much more time to confirm here, especially booking the place, sometimes you may need to book the place one year or half year ahead. In addition, when you spread the activity out, we often send the information at least one month earlier and send again two weeks before, and then we might send a reminder three days or one day before the activity. As people here are like to "plan ahead", so we need to adapt to local custom about time when we organise activities. (S10, local deputy director in CI2)

Besides this, as CIs are in partnership with local universities, the strategy plan of CIs also needs to be in accordance with university plans. Some staff noticed this consistency between CIs and local universities. For example, the local deputy director S10 emphasised that CI2 needed to work in accordance with the entire internationalisation strategy of Uni.2 since CI2 is part of the university service as well. Chinese teacher S4 also mentioned that they organised a lot of industrial, business and medical related activities because of Uni.5's disciplinary features. Moreover, the local deputy director of CI4 explained how the development strategy of CIs can fit with the university's overall mission:

> For example, our Uni.4 have three key missions: teaching, research and social responsibilities. Primarily, our language teaching is serving for the whole society, and it can support the language centre and Chinese language department as well [...] We also provide many scholarships that can let students to apply for and go to China can be part of the university mobility, and this is also a part of the different kinds of opportunities that the university created for students. For example, the university's emphasis on social responsibility as a part of this city, [you need to consider] how to engage with the neighbouring community, especially there are many very poor communities around the university. (S9, local deputy director in CI4)

In short, the adaptation of CIs in Britain can come from different aspects, such as from the CI's internal structure, from local traditions, customs and regulations, and from the relationship with the partner university. These findings offer important insights into the knowledge of CI structure and activity organisation in the British context. This is the first broad view of adaptation of CIs undertaken from the

perspective of Chinese staff, which can further help with understanding of the complex and deeply influential factors that can be behind the selection and organisation of CI activities.

4.3.2.2 Adaptation of Chinese staff

Apart from the adaptation of the Confucius Institute itself as an intercultural organisation, the Chinese staff also experienced all kinds of adaptations, particularly the staff who are dispatched by Hanban for a short-term role. Both local and Chinese staff expressed some adaptation experiences, and the two themes of intercultural adaptation and positioning adaptation were derived from the transcripts.

Intercultural adaptation is more related to self-reflection about intercultural experiences and the process of the development of intercultural sensibility. In this regard, Chinese teacher S4 put forward a reason behind the effective communication in CI5 as being that all the local staff are Chinese. Therefore, the staff can conduct communication with both sides well as they have all already adapted to the local environment at the same time. Another example is from the Chinese director S8 at CI4, who shared with me feelings of being addressed differently by local staff and Chinese volunteers.

> All Chinese teachers, include Chinese volunteer teachers, they call me "teacher Chen", right? But the teachers I mentioned before, like Sara, Helen, and John, we all call their English name directly because they are foreigners. Even though Helen is older than me [and she is originally from China], but our Chinese teacher call her Helen rather than Director He. But for me, although I have an English name and I told them my name is Sherry, but no one call me Sherry at all. (S8, Chinese director in CI4)

Subsequently, she also expressed that she is OK to be called "Sherry" but not her Chinese name, albeit some of the volunteer teachers are her students in China and it is uncommon to be called by name directly in China. Moreover, one local deputy director shared her intercultural experience during her work at CI4 over several years, and how this experience transforms her attitude towards Chinese medicine.

> I didn't know and believe the Chinese medicine before, however, there are many occasions that the CI invited doctors of Chinese medicine to give

us speeches, and Hanban also provided some training [that related to Chinese medicine] to directors. Gradually, it's not to say I have a professional knowledge about that now, but I don't refuse it anymore. Last year, first time I attempted the Chinese acupuncture as I got the frozen shoulder, and I felt it was very effective. I think if I am not working at the CI, I wouldn't ever go for Chinese acupuncture (she laughs). (S9, local deputy director in CI4)

Her working experience in CI activities made her become more open-minded and able to understand Chinese culture in more depth. This transformation process can be regard as a transformation towards more cosmopolitan attitudes and practices as an individual person, i.e. more openness to difference and diversity (Beck and Sznaider, 2006).

With respect to positioning adaptation, many Chinese staff indicated that they have limited or restricted opportunities to organise activities and the main duty for them is language teaching. For example, Chinese teacher S2 mentioned the activities in CI1 are only a small part of their daily work which most of the time they only need to participate in instead of organising them. Meanwhile, both S8 and S14 as Chinese teachers stressed that they only need to execute or participate in activities rather than organise them. This kind of view also resonated with another Chinese teacher, S3:

I've participated, how to say, because I am not very involved in these kinds of activities. For example, sometimes, you are simply do something like you are a service staff, how to say, I prefer to organise something by myself, but I haven't organised or handled things here. Personally speaking, I feel I am not very engaging with these activities. (S3, Chinese teacher in CI1)

As we can see from this very experienced Chinese teacher S3, he had very limited power to design and organise the activities in CI1 although he wanted to engage with the organisational process like he had done it before in other countries. He had to adapt to the local management arrangement and position allocation. These adaptations from the Chinese staff cohort can be found in other staff interviews as well. The reason behind this positioning adaptation is twofold: 1) there is a power imbalance between Chinese staff and local staff when it comes to activity organisation and management in CIs, 2) there is a potential impact from the micro

political environment of CIs in the British context. For example, one of the Chinese staff rejected my request for interview as she mentioned there was some misinterpretation of CI8 in local social media after an interview had been conducted with one of the staff in the CI, and both her and the CI involved were afraid that the same thing would happen again. S1 mentioned an incident when a well-known British newspaper contacted the CI1 for an interview. Despite not carrying out the interview due to scheduling issues, the newspaper nevertheless hastily ran a negative article the next day claiming that 'CI1 is closed to information from the public'. In these two examples, whether the local social media got the opportunity to interview CI staff or not, they seem to arrive at and present the same negative conclusions about CIs. This unfriendly and even sceptical attitude towards CIs from social media and from society generally in Britain further leads to more narrow focus on language teaching and self-censorship from the Chinese staff cohorts. S5 shared with me about an incident that happened in CI5 which also supports this assumption:

> You can see there is a bronze medal outside our CI, and I didn't notice at all, but the local director told me this bronze medal was smashed with a dent [...] and the local director told us we need to keep low profile when we do everything as someone must be unsatisfied with our work. (S5, Chinese teacher in CI5)

Like many other Chinese staff, she further emphasised that the main duty and focus of their work is language teaching. Overall, we can see that the reason behind this positioning adaptation, with more focus on language teaching, is not only from the internal power imbalance between Chinese staff and local staff, but also from the impact of the external political context, which results in a certain level of self-censorship and 'forced silence' that can be observed in the examples given.

Many CI studies from the West have paid a lot of attention to investigating the extent to which CIs can make an impact (often negatively) in the West and in local universities but failed to acknowledge the extent to which CIs and Chinese staff make efforts to adapt to local environments, customs, cultures, strategies, and regulations. The findings present a significant shift from previous political discussion to delve into what happens in CIs. The voices and views from Chinese staff also are equally important to know to avoid one-sided view when conducting research on CIs.

4.3.3 Connections

Benefiting from the language and activity organisation of CIs, different CIs also built up their own connections with diverse communities, such as with different departments of their local university and other wider communities. At the same time, as a Chinese organisation located in the UK, CIs also developed certain connections with Chinese people such as Chinese international students and local overseas Chinese.

4.3.3.1 Connection with diverse communities

Diverse communities that CIs worked with were mentioned from the staff's interviews, and it seems many CI activities needed to be conducted with the cooperation and communication of these communities. From the interviews, the communities can be divided into two sorts: one is the connection with the partner university, and the other is the connection with other wider communities.

With regards to the connection with a local university, the connections with university linguistic studies, university academic cooperation, and university development strategies were particularly mentioned by the staff. As some of the universities already had established Asian study departments or China research centres, the CIs in those universities can have cooperative academic relationships with them at different levels, such as CI1, CI2 and CI6. For example, in CI1 a close relationship with an Asian study department about teaching was indicated and they used the same building to teach as well. S11 also mentioned that CI6 has assisted the China centre in Uni.6 with publicity matters:

> The Asian study department [in CI1] and the CI1 cannot be separated, as the CI assists the Asian study department about sinologist seminar series, and the teachers in the CI also teach Chinese in Asian study department as well. (S3, Chinese teacher in CI1)

Since most CIs in Britain were founded in partnership with one Chinese university and one UK university, many British universities have consistent academic cooperation with their partner universities in China. It is hard to say which one came first, the academic cooperation or the CI, however, some staff mentioned that CIs

played a vital role in some academic events. For example, CI1 organised a "One Belt, One Road" conference annually. The Chinese director in CI3 has initiated two courses as optional classes in Uni.3, and CI2 also participated in some lecture series exchange programs between Uni.2 in the UK and M university in China.

> We organise some seminar series regularly [...] and there also are lecture series between Uni.4 and M university in China, and one year is in Uni.2 and one year is in M university. (S10, local deputy director in CI2)

As one of the main duties of CIs is Chinese language teaching, there also have been certain connections with language teaching and learning in some universities. However, the level of the effect may vary from one to another, and it largely depends on how teaching resources are distributed at the university level. Some CIs have no access to credit language courses such as that of CI4 and CI5, and so they can only be involved in optional courses. Uni.4 and Uni.5 have their own language department or language centre for teaching credit courses. It is also the case that some CIs have already integrated into a university's teaching design, and the CI teachers also teach on the core courses of Chinese language, such as CI3 and CI6. S14 mentioned experience in teaching a credit course in CI3. This case is echoed by S11:

> The Chinese teachers in CI6 are not only teaching non-credit courses, i.e., the classes at night, but also teaching seminars which are belong to the language and culture department [...] I know some CIs are only teaching non-credit courses and facing to public learners, but our CI belongs to our university. (S11, local teacher in CI6)

CIs also need to operate in line with the internationalisation strategy plan of each university. In CI4, there are some scholarships provided by the CI which can be a part of Uni.4 students' international mobility. In CI8, they organised some China trips for some of Uni.8's students to visit China every year. Moreover, some CIs also participated in and assisted with a series of in-depth communications between British universities and China. For example, CI2, CI4 and CI5 usually provided interpretation & translation services for universities if there were some visiting groups coming from China and some documents & agreements need to be translated between Chinese and English. In CI5, there is some evidence of industry communication between universities as CI5 focuses on industry. CI5 systematically translated the white paper of UK industry strategy and invited China social media to report on the opening

ceremony event of the 'Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre' (AMRC) in Uni.5. The reason behind the involvement was explained by S4 below:

> We hope they can communicate and learn from the AMRC. We always mention the [concept of] bridge, it means we want to introduce the ideas from each other. There are many [organisations] in China [we have contacted], for example, we contracted China Railway Group Limited, and it also joined the AMRC as a member. (S4, teacher in CI5)

In terms of connection with wider communities, three types of wider communications with different communities can be seen from the interview data. The first type is in collaboration with local organisations for cultural exchanges, such as carrying out activities in local libraries, museums, gardens and other local facilities. The second type is in collaboration with businesses, companies and industrial units for business and technology interactions such as providing some language and culture introductions for shopping malls, airports and with China-UK business associations. The third type is that some CIs have already integrated into local festivals as participants or even co-organisers, such as attending language, art, book or other festivals. The three types of wider communications are categorised and presented in table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4 Connection with the wider communities of CIs

Effect / CIs	Cultural Exchanges	Business & Technology Interactions	Local Integration
CI1	With local zoo With local community With local cinema	Premium business talks	Silent film festival International art festival International film festival International book festival
CI2	With local theatre With local library With local gallery With local Chinese community	With China-Britain Business Council With Association of Chartered Certified Accountants With business company	Language festival
CI3	With local charity	With local shopping mall With local tourist authority With local airport With Asian study centre	Art festival
CI4	With local garden With local cinema With local library With science and industry museum With local publisher	With local shopping mall With local company With local international airport	Literature festival Science festival
CI5	With local library With local museum With local garden	With China-Britain Business Council With manufactory research centre	Entrepreneur festival Literary festival Classic music festival
CI6	With city centre With local Chinese community	N/A	N/A
CI7	With City Council With local garden	N/A	Music festival Culture festival International harp festival
CI8	With local library With local community With City Council With local community	N/A	N/A

As we can find from table 4.4, the most frequent type of communication is with local organisations on cultural exchange activities. Many CIs have already built continuing connections with different local communities, and they were often invited to these communities to carry out cultural introduction workshops, particularly during Chinese New Year time. Some CIs also have networks with local libraries, cinemas, museums, and gardens. For instance, CI2 organised a photography exhibition in a local gallery, CI4 conducted a Chinese science exhibition in a local science and industry museum and CI5 held a 3D technology exhibition in a local garden. In addition, some CIs have already established stable relationships with local organisations and carried out activities in these organisations' venues every now and then. CI1 has collaborated with a local zoo on a Chinese lantern exhibition for over two years, CI4 regularly collaborates with a local garden for delivering Chinese cookery classes, and CI5 is in partnership with their local library in organising "China in libraries" cultural workshops every year.

Some CIs also focus on business and technology interactions with business companies and industrial units. Both CI3 and CI4 held some activities or workshops in local airports and shopping malls. For airports, they delivered some basic language and cultural workshops for airport staff as more and more Chinese students and tourists are coming to the UK to study and visit nowadays. For shopping malls, they presented Chinese elements with stalls to introduce Chinese culture for attracting more purchasers with Chinese backgrounds. CI2 and CI5 were also involved with business institutions between two countries, namely the China-Britain Business Council (CBBC), and participated or co-organised activities. CI2 and CI4 also organised some Chinese language and business etiquette workshops with companies. CI5 built the connection between a local manufacturing research centre and Chinese industrial units for further collaboration.

Another prominent feature of the connection with wider communities is the local integration of CIs. Many CIs actively engage in local activities as participants, sponsors and even co-organisers. From 4.3 we can find diverse festivals that have been remarked on by the staff, such as film, art, book, language or music festivals. For example, CI1 regularly attended a local silent film festival showing Chinese silent films. CI2 along with other local CIs attended language festivals to promote Chinese

language learning in Britain. CI4 and CI5 took part in literature and literary festivals to introduce Chinese contemporary literatures to British audiences. CI5 and CI7 also participated in a classical music festival and international harp festival for music communication.

In summary, unlike the activities that participants attended and mentioned that are mostly organised by a CI itself in section 4.2, the activity engagement and connection from Chinese staff's views are much broader and more diverse. It is important to know the existence of these connections and different cooperative models from CI to CI, as few studies have investigated this at such a detailed level. This kind of in-depth understanding can help facilitate the study of CI activities.

4.3.3.2 Connections with Chinese people

In the UK, Chinese international students have become the largest group of international students, which had come up to 106,530 students during 2017-2018 (UKCISA, 2019). Meanwhile, there are also several Chinese student associations in UK universities and one of the largest Chinese student groups is the "Chinese Students and Scholars Association" (CSSA). As stated in the CSSA-UK website, the CSSA-UK was established in 1988, and is 'a non-political, non-religious and non-profit organisation, which organises, sponsors and supports various social and cultural activities among Chinese students and Scholars in the UK'. Similar purposes and activities between CIs and CSSA offer them opportunities to interact with each other.

Interestingly, most of the connections are linked with Chinese traditional festivals including activities such as Chinese New Year galas and mid-autumn festival celebrations. For example, CI1 often sponsors and assists the CSSA at Uni.1 in organising activities by providing some Chinese ornaments, props and customs. CI5 organise and participate in the Chinese New Year gala with Uni.5's CSSA and local Chinese communities and partners every year. In addition, they also support and communicate with each other by inviting and attending each other's activities, for example, S11 shared the supportive relationship with CSSA in CI6:

> We have a close relationship with CSSA as well. When CSSA hold the Spring festival celebration, we are invited to the celebration activity. Likewise,

sometimes we need volunteers to help with the large activities, they will come to help us too. (S11, local teacher in CI6)

Some CIs have already started to pay greater attention to the Chinese international students in their universities as they had become one of the largest international student groups over the years. Staff noticed that traditional festival celebrations attracted a lot of Chinese students to attend so they can feel at home and alleviate a little bit of their homesickness. Furthermore, CI4 actively helped the Chinese students to adapt and integrate to local life and study in the UK by organising a Chinese film club, a chorus club, language partner activity and cookery classes. CI5 also provided Chinese medicine workshops for local university GPs to assist them with understanding and serving Chinese students better in their healthcare needs:

> Our original intention is to help the international Chinese students to integrate and adapt the local community better [...] In this case, there are a lot of interactions and engagements between Chinese international students and local people, and it can help the students to understand the British culture better. (S7, local teacher in CI4)

With the increasing numbers of Chinese international students coming to the UK for study in university, naturally, some CIs started to consider these groups' needs and built connections with the Chinese students. In this sense, these connections not only expand the function of CIs as a Chinese culture promotion organisation, but also create a friendly platform for cultural communication between Chinese people and others with different cultural backgrounds.

4.3.4 Views

From the interviews, many staff shared their experiences of working in Britain and their attitudes towards different voices commenting on CIs. Compared to CIs in other countries, some distinct features in the British context were acknowledged by the staff, such as the supportive and inclusive environment for Chinese language learning from the British government and the friendly attitudes of British people. Meanwhile, staff also shared some of their personal opinions and attitudes towards the different or even unfriendly voices commenting on CIs from the West, and, perhaps surprisingly, most staff revealed a very open-mind attitude towards these different voices.

4.3.4.1 The distinct context of Britain

From the staff's interviews, the distinctiveness of Britain was mentioned from time to time, and this distinctiveness was manifested in the fact of 1) the sense of inclusiveness in Britain and the friendliness of British people, and 2) the supportive attitude to Chinese language learning from the British government. The inclusiveness and supportive environment might be attributed to several factors such as the friendly already established UK-China relationship, Brexit, the Chinese economic rise.

Almost all the staff expressed a comparatively positive feeling about their encounters with British people. They felt the British people to be very friendly and open-minded towards different cultures and people. S4 considered the development of CIs in the UK as doing better than in other western countries, 'as the British people are more practical oriented, however, if you go to Canada and America, they don't like CIs very much as they think there is an ideological export in it.' Apart from the practicalities, both S11 and S15 deemed the local people to be very friendly, and 'they allow you to present and show your cultural elements in their land'. S2 described her experience of teaching local people about making a Chinese knot at one Chinese New Year activity:

> I feel local people are very friendly. Sometimes I don't know how to express the action [of making the Chinese knot] as my English is not good enough or cannot come up with the suitable word to describe the movement, they will help you with a compete sentence, which I feel very friendly and kind of them. (S2, Chinese teacher)

Apart from the friendly attitudes towards Chinese culture and CI activities of British people, the supportive and inclusiveness environment of Chinese language learning in Britain was recognised by most staff. For example, S6 indicated that the reason he had selected the UK as a destination is that the UK is a China-friendly country. This statement aligned with S7 and S10 as the permanent local teachers in CI4 and CI2 respectively, and both considered that the beneficial business and trade relationship between the two countries enhances communications with CIs in Britain. S10 considered the Golden-era of bilateral relations of UK-China will encourage more people to learn Chinese for trade and cultural exchange between the two countries. On the other hand, S7 thought both the economic development of China and the

Brexit in the UK can further enhance the business relationships between them since 'they (the Britain) urgently need to find an alternative business partner.' Additionally, this supportive environment can also be seen in the level of attention given to Mandarin teaching and learning. The Government initiative of the "Mandarin Excellence Programme" for schools in England, which was mentioned in Chapter 2, was highlighted by staff. Most staff talked about the connections between their CIs and the Confucius Classrooms (CCs) and Confucius Hubs (CHs) with local schools, and the workload of some staff in CIs being primarily focused on schools rather than universities, such as in CI7. S17 mentioned that Mandarin had become one of their optional language courses after the formation of CCs and CHs, then added 'there are hundreds of students participating in Youth Chinese Test (YCT) every year, and the pass rates are very high'. In addition, both S6 and S10 noticed the supportive settings from the British government.

> I remember that the mandarin has become one of their guaranteed optional languages in their primary and high schools. There are many people to select it, and you can also get the credits by taking the exam as well. This is what I think the CIs in the UK develops well as it integrates better in education environment than other countries. (S6, teacher in CI5)

> For example, in England, [the government] invested 20 million pounds [it should be 10 million pounds] grants for cultivating 5000 speakers of Mandarin by 2020. In Scotland, the government also grants 7.45 million sterling for prompting Mandarin education in primary and high schools. (S10, local deputy director in CI2)

In summary, two distinct features in the British context have been mentioned in the staff's interviews, which also correspond with the facts of the government policies and strategies in the UK and the current relationship between the two countries. The amicable and reciprocal relationships both at country-to-country level and people-to-people level underpin the CIs' stable status in the British context and the favourable Mandarin language policies and strategies for future generations that enhance the development of CIs in Britain.

4.3.4.2 The staff's attitudes towards different voices commenting on Confucius Institutes

Another theme that was generated from the interviews is the staff's attitudes towards different voices commenting on CIs. This theme is primarily derived from one of my interview questions: 'What is your opinion of the different perspectives of CIs in Western society?' The reason I asked the question is that there are many critiques about CIs especially from western society, which I explored within the literature in Chapter 2. Surprisingly, most staff presented a very open-minded attitude and considered these voices to be normal as different people have different viewpoints. In addition, some staff also expressed their worries about certain prejudice from western society and the negative impact of ideological differences and conflicts between Britain and China.

Most staff showed a very open-minded attitude towards different voices and thought it is totally fine for them to understand, recognise and even accept these voices. Specifically, S5 noted that 'everyone has his/her different standpoint, and it should be allowed to have different voices', and all they can do is 'to do our best at work and let more people to know China and Chinese culture in a more positive way.' This was echoed by S11, who suggested 'you can regard he/she (people with different views of CIs) as a person with different opinions and political views rather than as an opponent'. In addition, S3 and S8 indicated they can absolutely understand the different voices.

> It's normal, everyone views things with different angle, and everybody looks at problems in different depth, so all views are understandable. You can neither strike back when people disapprove CIs nor self-satisfied when people compliment CIs as well. (S3, Chinese teacher in CI1)

> I can introduce Chinese culture with a very inclusive and open mind, and I want to get to know British culture as well [...] so I absolutely recognise the difference voices. I think it depends on individual's different level and purpose when he/she looks the same thing with different view and vision [....] I think all these voices are acceptable for me. (S8, Chinese director in CI4)

Furthermore, S7 explained that it is a normal thing to promote one's culture in another country, which conforms to the needs and development of today's world

saying: 'it's not to say we force them to learn (Chinese), but they came to us and willing to learn by paying the fees.' Following that, the fact of some unavoidable misunderstandings as CIs are funded by Chinese states were admitted which might relate to espionage or having some political purposes, but also refuted that as follows:

> However, our attitude is that we are not going to retort for retorting as it seems a little bit over-reacting [...] We are doing these decent works for over decade, and they will put their prejudice and doubtfulness down slowly by the time. (S7, local teacher in CI4)

From S10's depiction of seven years working experiences as a local staff member in CI2, no political agenda was mentioned or instructions about gagging some sensitive topics from Hanban, and they do not attempt to change people's mindsets or views at all. This statement was echoed by two Chinese directors from CI2 and CI7, and both suggested CIs should deemphasise the pollical and government background of CIs.

> Although it [the CI] may have an official background, but the government do not interfere with our work, and it allows us to do our work freely. [We] hope it [the mode of this communication] can switch to the cooperation between the two universities, no matter the academic communication or cultural communication, and then the two universities can become inseparable units of each other. In that case, changes of the political relationship from different countries [such as US and China] cannot impact on the development of CIs. (S15, Chinese director in CI3)

However, S6 disagreed with the dissemination strategy from Hanban and thought it too rigid which can give people from other countries an offensive impression. The approaches to cultural communication of America and Korea were appreciated as they seem more natural and imperceptible rather than forceful or deliberate.

> Since [you use the words of] promotion and propagation, there is a subjectivity in it. You may give people of other countries the impression that your cultural communication is not cultural exchange, integration and conversation but rather imposing these concepts to them, which is what I believed as the less successful part. (S6, teacher in CI5)

Some staff also expressed worry about certain prejudice from western society and the negative impact of ideological differences and conflicts between Britain and China. For example, S7 felt that the hostile views from USA or other countries are a

little bit biased and personally thought that misunderstanding might come from fearfulness of Chinese development. Additionally, S4 noticed that the ideological difference between China and western countries can also result in holistic attitudes in western society:

> I think there are ideological differences [beneath the critiques], along with the play up from mainstream social media [in western society]. Just like you are unable to see any good stuff about western countries from Chinese social media, you are unable to see anything good about China here. They have a strange sense of each other, and it mainly because the ideological differences. (S4, teacher in CI5)

Overall, the findings show most staff presented a very open-mind attitude and considered these voices to be normal and acceptable. Although they provided different perspectives to explain the reason behind the unfriendly voices in the West, it is worth noting that there are certain critical reflections and examinations of their opinions and suggestions.

4.4 Chapter summary

This chapter outlines the findings from 82 online surveys and interviews from 13 activity participants and 17 Chinese staff. From the online survey, the general information of the participants and the activities were revealed from the activity participants' viewpoints. After that, the interviews provided a more nuanced and holistic understanding about CI activities and intercultural communications from both sides. After identifying the eight themes and 16 sub-themes from the stage two interviews, it is possible to find that there are some areas of concordance and discordance within the intercultural experiences between activity participants and Chinese staff, and this will be further compared in the next chapter in relation to answering the first research question. Second, by investigating the findings under a critical intercultural communication perspective from the macro level and a critical cosmopolitan perspective from the interpersonal level, the themes can also be examined from both larger contexts (macro level) and person and interpersonal communication (micro level) dimensions for answering the second and third research questions in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Critical analysis of intercultural experience, activities undertaken, and cultural understanding when engaging with Confucius Institutes

Based on the research findings obtained from the activity participants and Chinese staff (presented in Chapter 4), this chapter attempts to understand the effects of their intercultural experiences, the reasons for their activity selections, and the level of potential impact on cultural understandings between the activity participants and Chinese staff. By highlighting the critical dimension of the intercultural engagement process, this study endeavours to address the following three research questions:

1) What are the areas of concordance and discordance between the activity participants and Chinese staff with respect to the intercultural experience of Confucius Institute activities?

2) How can Confucius Institute activities be shaped by larger contexts?

3) How can intercultural engagement within Confucius Institute activities have an impact on cultural understanding between activity participants and Chinese staff?

By comparing their intercultural experiences of CI activities, Section 5.1 attempts to uncover the areas of concordance and discordance between the activity participants and Chinese staff with respect to their experience. There are several factual comparisons that can be made. Moreover, it is important to note that this type of close examination and comparison of the intercultural experience of CI activities does not seem to have been carried out previously, as no such similar activities were found in the research literature on CIs. Previous related studies have paid attention to the intercultural experience of CI teachers in the UK (Ye and Edwards, 2018) and Chinese global image management through CI activities (Hartig, 2018), but no study has examined the interconnectedness among CI activities, CI Chinese staff (including teachers), and local activity participants together. Moreover, these areas of concordance and discordance can potentially have an impact on participants' and staff's cultural understanding of each other. Hence, this factual knowledge is key for

exploring my first research question. Inspired by critical intercultural communication (Nakayama and Halualani, 2010; Halualani, 2019) and critical cosmopolitan perspectives (Delanty, 2009, 2012a), Section 5.2 begins by seeking to unpack how CI activities can be shaped by larger contexts. This leads on to a discussion of how intercultural engagement with CI activities at the personal and interpersonal levels can have an impact on cultural understanding in Section 5.3. Most studies of CIs in the West have mainly explored how the organisation can be used by the Chinese government as a diplomatic tool and instrument of soft power at a macro level (Mosher, 2012; Lueck, Pipps and Lin, 2014; Lo and Pan, 2016; Pan, 2016; Zhou and Luk, 2016), ignoring the complexities of the power imbalance that are involved in its actual operation.

In Section 5.4, having identified a self-improvement process based on the intercultural experiences of some activity participants and Chinese staff, I seek to explore this process from the perspective of critical cosmopolitan competence, as outlined in the literature review. I searched for responses from the participants and the Chinese staff that might indicate the developments of cosmopolitan competence and sought to examine whether their experiences with CIs could serve to provide a development path for achieving cosmopolitan competence.

In order to assist with the following the discussions relating to specific feedback from the respondents, I have provided a reminder of the coding used to anonymise the responses: P (1-13) refers to the 13 interviewed participants, S (1-17) refers to the 17 interviewed staff, CI (1-8) refers to the participating Confucius Institutes, and Uni. (1-8) refers to the corresponding British universities.

5.1 The intercultural experience of the activity participants and Chinese staff

In comparing the findings of intercultural experience between the activity participants and Chinese staff as outlined in Chapter 4, this section attempts to offer more nuanced and holistic insights and identify areas of concordance and discordance between the participants and the staff. Section 5.1.1 indicates three

areas of concordance and section 5.1.2 indicates three areas of discordance emerging from the intercultural experience, as identified from analysing findings.

5.1.1 Areas of concordance between activity participants' and Chinese staff's experiences

Three areas of concordance were identified after comparing and evaluating the findings regarding the activity participants' and Chinese staff's intercultural experiences: 1) language teaching and learning is the central focus, 2) CI activities are mostly about raising awareness of China, and 3) relatively little misunderstanding occurred during the intercultural interaction between the activity participants' and Chinese staff's practice at a micro level.

5.1.1.1 Language teaching and learning is the central focus

Although language teaching and learning is not the central focus of this study, it is clear from the official statement of Hanban that language acquisition is in fact the central goal of CIs (Hanban, 2020b). This prioritising of language teaching and learning also emerges in some studies of CIs (e.g. Hartig, 2012; Hubbert, 2014, 2019; Gil, 2017). In Hartig's (2012) research on German CIs, one CI director and one CI manager stated that language is the main focus and essential task, and they are unable to do everything given the limited resources available to the CIs. This comment is in line with my observations of my Chinese staff interviewees. As I addressed in Section 4.3.2.2 regarding the adaptation of Chinese staff, those teachers who have been dispatched from China may have a limited or restricted remit to conduct activities beyond language teaching, and these activities are only a small part of their daily work. In most cases, it is the local director and staff who, after liaising, decide on and organise the activities. Moreover, different CIs conduct different teaching tasks and have different relations with their university language or Asian study departments. There can be wide variations in the circumstances of each university and CI, such as the universities' teaching credit and non-credit courses, the independent language classes offered by CIs, the language courses for local schools, customised language courses for companies or institutions, etc. In addition to this aspect, the teaching workload was also mentioned by some of the

staff interviewees, who said they might have insufficient time and energy to conduct a wide range of other activities.

This issue was also highlighted by the activity participants, who stressed the importance of CIs offering language instruction. From the online survey of activity participants, it emerged that 50 out of 65 participants were or had once been language learners in CIs. Moreover, language learning events are the most popular service from the survey, regardless of whether they had previously participated or wanted to participate in the future. From the interview with the participants, it was found that 10 were or had one been language learners in CIs, and some of them were even able to speak Chinese fluently. Their motivations for learning Chinese were essentially aligned with the motivations for engaging with CIs and CI activities that I elaborated in the findings (see Section 4.2.1).

Although some internal issues regarding language teaching were raised in previous studies of CIs, such as problems with the quality of teaching materials and of teachers (Yang, 2010; Siow and Wey, 2011; Lo and Pan, 2016; Gil, 2017), I am not going to discuss here whether these problems have been addressed in British CIs as my research does not focus on language learning and teaching activities. With respect to external issues, many studies of language teaching in CIs have noted that ideological infiltration might impinge on the academic work of the university itself and be a threat to academic freedom (Mosher, 2012; Davies and Hughes, 2014; Peterson, 2020). I would suggest that this concern is to some extent overestimated, although I am unable to measure how much ideological influence actually exists in specific classroom environments with individual teachers. Rather, this study suggests that most language learning and teaching in CIs in the UK is still at a rudimentary level. Both the activity participants and the Chinese staff mentioned the small number of students in higher level Chinese language classes in CIs. Therefore, it can be difficult for language teaching to reach the level of ideological penetration that worries critics. It seems that each university in the British context has full autonomy to make decisions about whether the CI is allowed to work with the university language department or Chinese studies department, whether the CI can be involved in credit-bearing language courses, and how much they can deal themselves with credit-bearing language teaching. Based on P12's previous experience of an

undergraduate Chinese studies programme in a UK university, the CI only had responsibility for teaching language courses, with all other courses (e.g. history) taught by university teachers. Since language can be used to express, embody, and symbolise a cultural reality (Kramsch and Widdowson, 1998), it is very hard to measure the value, culture, and lifestyle within a language and how much Chinese language teaching might constitute a form of ideological infiltration from the Chinese government.

5.1.1.2 Confucius Institute activities mostly focus on raising awareness of China

As shown in my review of extant studies on CIs in Chapter 2, there has been an upsurge of interest in studying the influence of CIs in the West, particularly at the macro level investigation (Gil, 2009; Paradise, 2009; Hartig, 2015a; Zhou and Luk, 2016). Many studies have found that CIs may have a limited or even a negative impact at this level. For example, Gil (2009, 2017) considers CIs to have less impact at the state-to-state level than at the society-to-society level. Yuan, Guo and Zhu (2016) contend that CIs have an uneven geopolitical influence, and even have a negative impact on bilateral cooperation in some specific regions. Although earlier studies assumed that CI aim to project a benign image of China (Paradise, 2009), Zhou and Luk (2016, p. 628) assert that CIs have failed to do so and have even 'triggered another version of "the China threat"'. However, considerably less attention has been paid to investigating what CIs can achieve in reality by conducting empirical studies. As I shown in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1.2, my study findings indicate that CI activities only serve to raise awareness of China, rather than to achieve any "grand purpose" of the Hanban and the Chinese government. This raised awareness concerns Chinese people's everyday lives, Chinese rituals and customs, the Chinese economy, Chinese international relations, Chinese philosophy, among other topics. In most cases, the activities tend to be presentative, performative, and entertaining, rather than ideologically oriented, and are more focused on providing general and simple introductions to some specific aspects of China. This phenomenon was also recognised by the activity participants, some of whom had possessed limited knowledge or understanding of China before attending CI activities. Many participants said that the CI appeared to offer a good opportunity to open their eyes and to get to know China a little bit more. Some other participants possessed a

relatively large amount of knowledge about China as they were/had been long-time language learners in CIs or had personal connections with China. From their points of view, the CI activities seemed too simple and repetitive, which may have turned them off in the long term. Although the general and simple activities are an effective way of attracting people with limited knowledge about China, CIs also face the predicament of maintaining the people with some knowledge of Chinese or who have already participated in numerous CI activities. The lack of attractiveness of CI activities was mentioned by several of the active participants, such as P11, who had been studying Chinese for two years in CI6:

> There are two ways of persuading people in a way or telling them something. You have something called like a peripheral route of persuasion, which is just based on, like, surface level information, and, like, the central level of persuasion, which is kind of based on, like, deeper levels of reasoning and thinking. And I just feel, like, there might be some events, most of them are quite surface level, and they assume that you have zero knowledge of the Chinese culture. But once you attract such people, how can you keep engaging them? But you can't be showing surface level messages repeatedly because it's just not that stimulating anymore. (P11, student with dual British and Polish nationality)

This opinion was echoed by P9, who felt that the CI focused more on raising awareness and on making China 'like a more accessible place to go'. Although the CI staff were already aware of the problems, and even some CIs had attempted to made changes and try out some niche activities, the orientation of CI activities was still found to be very general and practical-focused. As shown in the findings on practical considerations of CIs and activities (Section 4.3.1.2), many CI staff expressed their views that CI activities are just about raising more awareness of China in order to attract more new people to engage with them. There are four possible reasons for this view and expectation of CI activities. First, many CI staff indicated that their central focus is on language teaching and learning; therefore, they may have not enough time and energy to conduct different kinds of activities. Second, some CI staff believed that CI activities are only a vehicle for interesting people in China and Chinese culture (S12). Hence, the remit of CIs should not be overstated (S8), as the activities are more a form of sowing seeds for the long term (S5). These view of CI activities might be considered realistic and logical since it is very difficult to change people's minds just through one or two activities, as Chinese director S8 noted. Third,

some CI staff considered that the purpose of CI activities is to counter the stereotypes and prejudices that many people in the UK still hold regarding China. Consequently, raising awareness is a central part of CI activities (S6 and S7). Last, and perhaps most importantly, the CIs have practical considerations, as they wish to attract as many participants as possible to attend their activities.

In short, contrary to the fears in the West about CIs being the tools for ideological infiltration (Leung and Du Cros, 2014), CIs are in fact taking a more practical and safe approach in how they perceive their purposes and expectations when conducting activities. As Selmier (2016, p. 265) points out, CIs can stimulate greater interest in the Chinese language and in Chinese culture, and it is this interest that 'will lead many students to read and study more, thereby exposing them to the broad and sometimes contradictory points of view' in the future. Another possible explanation for CI's focus on merely raising awareness might be that CIs are unable to discuss the broader topics in depth because of internal constraints, such as censorship, and an underlying unfriendly external environment. Thus, China and the CI project have become 'relatively more strategy-oriented rather than ideology-oriented' (Lo and Pan, 2016, p. 517), an approach that will possibly rule out the effectiveness of CIs in the long term (Wang, 2008; Paradise, 2009).

5.1.1.3 Very little misunderstanding during intercultural interaction

In terms of the interpersonal interaction between CI staff and activity participants during activities at the micro level, it is surprising to see that there was very little misunderstanding in evidence during intercultural interactions. While the phenomenon of power imbalance can be found from the literature about CI studies between the West and China and the Chinese staff's interviews of their intercultural experience, the findings suggest there is no evidence of power imbalance when it comes to the communication and interaction between the Chinese staff and the activity participants. On the contrary, almost all participants acknowledged the kindness and patience of CI staff. Both P3 and P10 considered that the instruction and information provided by the CI staff was always very clear. P3 and P8 noted that the staff took pains to speak slowly to avoid causing misunderstanding. The following extract is illustrative of the friendly communication:

> I think they are trying to do their best. Sometimes, if you look at this, like the language barriers, you can try to do something and to improve [the communication]. Because they are always happy to help you. (P4, student from Mexico)

Although there are certain critiques of the CIs at a macro level, it seems that the person-to-person communication was conducted quite smoothly and effectively. The participants generally recognised the effectiveness of the communication and appreciated the kindness of the staff. The Chinese staff also expressed positive feelings about British people and the activity participants. One reason for this positive interaction might be that some participants already possessed a certain level of proficiency in the Chinese language, or that some staff were proficient in English, all of which fostered good intercultural communication. Another reason might be that people from both cohorts engaged with each other actively with positive and open attitudes.

Although there was very little misunderstanding observed during the intercultural interactions between the activity participants and Chinese staff, the latter did mention having to deal with certain misunderstandings and adaptation issues during their work in the CIs. The misunderstandings mostly stemmed from differences between the working cultures of China and Britain. For example, in Britain, CI staff need to book a venue, set a time, and invite people far in advance of an event. Staff need to publicise an activity online in advance, otherwise people will not attend. There are also many rules and regulations that must be followed in the UK that may not exist in China, and Chinese staff need to conform with these when cooperating with local institutes. In addition, while British people have clearer work-life boundaries, China has an overtime work culture, with more blurred boundaries between people's work and their lives. These differences can sometimes cause conflicts and require adaptation on the part of the Chinese staff. Nevertheless, many members of the Chinese staff were in fact able to comprehend the differences and adapt well to the local culture, as S9 explained:

> I think that in our daily work, whether we are from the same culture or different cultures, there are many situations that can arise, you can call it a misunderstanding, or sometimes people have different opinions, it's fine. I think the CI itself is a very good place for intercultural communication. (S9, local director in CI4)

Many members of CI staff shared similar views to S9, observing that as the CI itself is a multicultural workplace, it is necessary to consider and understand their colleagues' different ways of working and the cultural differences. Overall, given the lack of empirical research exploring such interpersonal interactions and experiences at a micro level in CI studies, more nuanced insights will be provided in Section 5.3 later.

5.1.2 Areas of discordance between activity participants' and Chinese staff's experiences

After comparing and evaluating the findings, three areas of discordance were identified between the activity participants' and Chinese staff's intercultural experiences: 1) activity engagement is much broader from the Chinese staff's perspective, 2) different attitudes exist towards traditional culture-related activities, 3) different opinions exist regarding the political engagement of CIs.

5.1.2.1 Activity engagement is much broader from the Chinese staff's perspective

When comparing the activities mentioned by the activity participants and Chinese staff, it is not hard to see that activity engagement is much broader from the latter's perspective. This activity engagement is not only limited to the activities that organised by the CIs themselves, but also includes the activities that CI sponsored or in which they participated or cooperated within the wider communities. From the findings in Chapter 4, and by comparing Table 4.2 (the list of activities in which the participants have attended) with Table 4.4 (the connections with the wider communities of CIs), it is clear to see the differences between those activities highlighted by the participants and those mentioned by the staff. Specifically, the activities mentioned by the activity participants are more related to the activities mainly organised by the CIs themselves, such as traditional festival celebrations, traditional workshops and classes, language activities, and academic activities. These activities tended to be the general and regular activities organised in CIs. In contrast, the range of activity engagement mentioned by the Chinese staff cohort is more diverse, and each CI has unique connections and forms of cooperation with its wider community. For example, with respect to cultural exchanges, each CI has

established long-term or short-term connections with local communities to hold cultural events on their premises, such as local libraries, zoos, museums, cinemas, galleries etc. In terms of their business and technology interactions. CIs also collaborate with many institutes and companies, such as with local airports, local shopping malls, local tourist authorities, the China-Britain Business Council, etc. In addition to cultural exchanges and business and technology interactions, some CIs play an active role in local festivals, as participants, sponsors or even co-organisers. Here, too, the forms of the activity engagement are more diverse, and can include exhibitions, storytelling, theme-related performances, translation, workshops, stall presentation, etc.

The different scope of activity engagement between the two cohorts can primarily attribute to the selection of the activity participants in my study. As I contacted them through the CI networks, it was highly likely that they would have only participated in activities directly organised by the CIs. Prior to the study, I had no means of contacting those participating in other activities within the wider communities. As a result, most of the participants are the ones who attended activities that mainly organised by CIs in their premises. Therefore, there is potentially an unavoidable gap between the perceptions of the activity participants and of the Chinese staff regarding the CI activities. Such wider connections and engagements with diverse external communities and people also can be found in other countries (e.g. Australia and Germany) from Chinese staff's perspective (Flew and Hartig, 2014). However, considerably less attention has been paid to the wider cultural engagements and collaborations of CIs. This has led to criticisms that CI activities place more emphasis on the traditional Chinese cultural activities that were organised by CIs alone, and the critics considered that these traditional cultural activities tend to be 'rather kitschy and unrepresentative' (Hellkötter, 2011, p.202). However, my findings show that some CIs may indeed have more complex and diverse cultural engagements and collaborations with wider communities in Britain, which also needs to be recognised by future studies of CIs.

5.1.2.2 Different attitudes towards traditional culture-related activities

The research findings from both the survey and the interviews revealed that traditional culture-related activities are the most common in CIs. However, the attitudes towards these activities differ between activity participants and Chinese staff. Almost all of the activity participants showed a positive and appreciative attitude towards traditional Chinese activities, while Chinese staff expressed more complicated and mixed feelings about these activities.

For the activity participants, they believed that the traditional cultural aspect was the best part of learning about Chinese culture. Some participants stated that they found traditional culture more interesting (P6) and displayable (P5). When I asked them about which contemporary Chinese cultural elements attracted them, after much hesitation, they said it could be Chinese food or traveling in China. Some participants had also experienced learning traditional skills through workshops offered by CIs, such as on health Qigong and Chinese calligraphy. These workshops are often organised by professional and specialised teachers; indeed, the participants noted that they were very satisfied with the outcomes. The distinctness of traditional Chinese culture fascinates, and presents an exotic and different perspective of the "Other". (Said, 1978) However, the lack of contemporary popular and representative cultural elements in China also contributed to a lack of recognition of contemporary culture among the activity participants.

For the Chinese staff, this emphasis on traditional culture-related activities in CIs raised mixed feelings. They expressed concern about the repetitiveness of the same traditional culture-related activities every year and articulated diverse attitudes in this regard. Some staff members admitted that these kinds of traditional performative activities aimed at general audience are often the most effective and attractive of those offered by the CIs, despite presenting Chinese culture at a somewhat superficial level. Some members of Chinese staff told me about some experimental changes that had been made to CI activities, such as by offering more activities related to contemporary culture. Some of these attempts at change have worked quite well, such as the Sino-English corner in CI5, which combines cultural and festival elements from China with cultural and festival elements from the

English-speaking world. Others have not worked out so well, such as an intercultural choir club at CI4, comprising both Chinese international students and local students, or the independent Chinese cinema show at CI1. Some staff expressed concern about the difficulty of finding attractive elements of contemporary Chinese culture, since China still lacks a globally popular and recognised cultural industry, such as Hollywood in the US, animation in Japan, and K-pop music in South Korea. Other Chinese staff members did try to find the potential elements of pop cultures in China and promote them through CIs, such as Chinese science fiction, Chinese technology, and Chinese comedy, etc.

In brief, it was observed that there are differences between the two groups in terms of their attitudes to and perceptions of activities related to traditional culture. In fact, the themes and contents of these activities are not as problematic as some Chinese staff think. This is evident from analysing the activity participants' opinions presented in the survey findings (see Chapter 4), which reveal that the participants were relatively satisfied with the themes and contents of the activities. However, more of them were dissatisfied with the interaction that takes place in the activities and their structure. This outcome is compatible with the findings from the participant interviews. For instance, P1 expressed a desire to know more about the cultural background to the beautiful traditional performances in Mid-autumn festival celebration activity, and P7 shared a disappointing experience of a Chinese New Year event when the structure and process were chaotic and confusing. Therefore, apart from seeking a balance between elements of traditional and contemporary culture in the activities, this study shows that more thought should be invested in finding ways to improve the quality of the activities. Enriching the activities would not only enable the participants to know more about the background to the activities, but also attract more participants who already have a relatively rich knowledge about China and Chinese culture. Moreover, CIs could integrate elements of both traditional and contemporary culture in their activities. For example, some CIs had already conducted a series of innovative integrated activities, such as displaying Qipao dresses featuring high-tech elements during a catwalk show in CI1, and a gunpowder and rocket science exhibition in CI4. These innovative combinations of traditional and contemporary culture can further attract people from diverse backgrounds and with different interests to attend the CI activities.

5.1.2.3 Different opinions regarding the political engagement

Although there have been many discussions about and accusations of CIs having a hidden political agenda (Paradise, 2009; Mosher, 2012; Sahlins, 2015; Zhou and Luk, 2016; Peterson, 2017), it was surprising to find that there were in fact few or no politically related activities or engagements taking place in CIs in Britain. This apolitical tendency also echoes with the findings of a study of CIs by Hartig (2018), in which he systematically reviewed and analysed internal work reports on CI activities at 50 CIs in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the US in 2015. The findings show 'a clear agenda to present an apolitical version of China by emphasising elements of traditional Chinese culture and mostly avoiding controversial political topics' (p, 701).

Hartig's conclusion is also in line with my findings from analysing the interviews with the Chinese staff. Almost all of the interviewees avoided discussing or didn't want to talk about any political agenda at the CIs. This reluctant attitude was also evident in an activity participant's observation, as P7 stated:

> Lots of universities in America I know are closing the CIs because they believe they Chinese government is using this to have as a wide influence on the university or maybe to spy on the Chinese students studying. But the CIs in the UK don't say anything about this, they don't say this is not true, this is what we are doing. They don't say this is true, but here is why we do it. They just don't say anything about this. (P7, student from the UK)

P7's observation is largely compatible with the Chinese staff's attitude towards political engagement, with most viewing the CI's main function as not relating to political issues, particularly not contentious ones. In this vein, the Chinese staff provided me with different reasons for not being involved in political discussions, although they also expressed their understanding of why the West views CIs with suspicion. Specifically, some Chinese staff felt that as their work concerned language teaching and cultural exchange, there was no need to engage in political issues. Other Chinese staff member said that, since they were not very familiar with the political issues, it would be inappropriate for them to speak about them, given that it might lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Almost all of the Chinese staff stressed that their focus was on working to the best of their abilities within their remits.

By contrast, some participants argued that CIs should be actively engaged in the political field in order to explain issues and make an impact on people and society:

> I think it would be good if they could talk about the good things they do, sort of tell everyone these are the good things we are doing, these are the things we provide, rather than just let them, maybe people who are not so friendly, talking about them (CIs) all the time. (P7, student from the UK)

> I think you're going to need political discussion if you're actually going to be able to control or make the desired inroads in the countries where you have CIs. (P2, student from Kenya)

It is interesting to see the contrasting opinions of the activity participants and Chinese staff members regarding political engagement. A possible explanation for this difference might be their different perspectives and ways of thinking about CIs. A more detailed analysis and discussion of the reasons behind the apolitical tendency of CIs and CI staff members will be presented in Section 5.2.1.3 below.

5.2 A close look at CI activities from a critical intercultural communication perspective

By viewing culture as a site of struggle and an ideologically laden system (Halualani, Mendoza and Drzewiecka, 2009; Nakayama and Halualani, 2010), this section takes a close look at CI activities and attempts to understand the kinds of Chinese culture and views that the CIs intend to present through those activities and why. Drawing from both the literature and my findings, three salient features of CI activities have been identified: 1) traditional culture-related activities; 2) contemporary economics-related activities; 3) an apolitical tendency in CI activities. Overall, I contend that, although the CIs present a certain stereotypical view of China and of Chinese culture, they also break another stereotypical view at the same time. In this case, the Chinese culture presented in the CIs has become the site of a power struggle between China and the West.

5.2.1 Reasons for conducting traditional culture-related activities

Traditional culture-related activities were highlighted by both activity participants and CI staff. Almost every CI I contacted organised activities for Chinese traditional

festival celebrations and traditional cultural workshops, with some CIs also holding concerts, exhibitions, or talks related to aspects of traditional Chinese culture. This focus on traditional cultural activities has also been identified in other studies of CIs (Schmidt, 2013; Hartig, 2018). Many elements of traditional culture are presented, and activities conducted in relation to Chinese festivals, contingent on each CI's capacities and form of organisation. These elements of traditional culture range from Chinese paper cutting, Chinese calligraphy, Chinese lanterns, Tai Chi, traditional Chinese dresses, and traditional Chinese food to Chinese traditional dance, and so forth. These elements are often embedded in various forms of activity, such as Chinese traditional dance performances, Chinese calligraphy workshops, mooncakes or dumplings making, and dragon boat race activities etc. These festival celebrations are often conducted for public audiences, while the traditional culture-related workshops are usually organised in small settings and are designed for learning specific skills. The workshops range from Chinese traditional dance, Tai Chi, Wushu, and Kung fu to Chinese mah-jongg and chess. In addition to these two major forms of activity – workshops and festival celebrations, different CIs also organised other types of traditional culture-related activities as well, such as talks on Chinese palace dresses in CI2, and talks on Chinese traditional medicine in CI4.

Although much CI-related literature proposes the idea that one purpose of CIs is to promote Chinese culture, only a handful of studies have taken a close look at what these activities actually consist of (Schmidt, 2013; Hartig, 2018; Liu, 2019b). This aspect has too often become an incidental fact only mentioned among in the context of political discussions regarding CIs (Yang, 2010; You, 2012; Leung and Du Cros, 2014; Gil, 2015; Hartig, 2015b; Zhou and Luk, 2016). Such studies argue that CIs and their activities are aimed at presenting a "benign image of China" (Paradise, 2009), and act as "China's Charm Offensive" (Kurlantzick, 2007). Instead, viewing this phenomenon from a critical intercultural communication perspective, my study goes a step further by examining the potential reasons why CIs include such a large proportion of traditional Chinese culture in their activities. After investigating the literature and the findings, the emphasis on traditional culture can mostly be attributed to the following three reasons: 1) the cultural context of China; 2) the cultural context of Britain; 3) the balance in a political context.

First, the rich nature of Chinese history and traditional culture provides a central reason that CIs choose to allocate considerable time and energy to activities that focus on traditional culture. According to the participants' accounts, the festival celebrations often take place amidst rich, colourful, and happy decorations and feelings, and through engagement in a whole series of different interactive games. The infinite possibilities provided by such a rich traditional culture are extended through the inclusion of a wide range of activities. These include talks concerning Chinese philosophers, exhibitions, and cooperation with local libraries. The staff members were, however, aware of the paucity of contemporary cultural elements in CI activities, due to the challenges of obtaining them. For example, both S4 and S6 admitted that, unlike South Korean's pop music industry, Japan's anime, and the US' film industry, it seems hard to find widely known elements of China's contemporary popular with which people can identify naturally (S4). S8 and S9 commented that science fiction might become a future icon of contemporary China. In addition, the staff member also struggled to find appropriate ways to present contemporary culture. As S11 observed 'Something like Chinese technology and high-speed rail…you can only introduce them in classes.' This concern was echoed by S2 and S6. Hartig's (2018) findings from studying the work reports relating to the activities of 50 CIs in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas are consistent with my findings on traditional activities in CIs (Hartig, 2018). Hartig's study found that 63.6 percent of activities can be categorised in the "Traditional China" category, based on the CI reports. Moreover, the activities referred to in the reports are much the same as those mentioned in my interviews. Overall, although there have been some attempts to integrate elements of both traditional and contemporary Chinese culture in CI activities, such as an exhibition titled "From gunpower to rocket" in the local museum of CI6, the lack of "soft power" possessed by contemporary Chinese culture still hinders the expansion of CI's activities related to contemporary culture in CIs. By "soft power", I mean the ability to attract others through some intangible means, such as culture, domestic values, or political ideas and policies (Nye, 1990, 1991, 2004), (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1).

Given the cultural context in Britain, most British people view China as remaining 'remote, a place of curiosity value' (Brown, 2019, p. 64). This claim resonates with the findings from my interviews. Most of the research participants had a very general

and superficial understanding of China before engaging with the CIs, with impressions relating to such things as Chinese food, chopsticks, Kung fu, and a general perception of everything made in China. However, one European director in a CI in Budapest remarked that the activities do not meet the demands of a foreign public, which 'tend to like song and dance shows that we might find rather kitschy and unrepresentative of real Chinese culture' (Hellkötter, 2011, p. 202). This comment is in keeping with a view expressed (during a personal discussion) by the local director of CI2, as well as by P12 during an interview. The newly arrived local director from Australia in CI2 attempted to introduce activities that were more educational, classic, and in-depth, but struggled to attract participants. Also aware of the dilemma, P8 from C12 pointing out that the director 'was a bit disappointed' about the attendance. P12 shared with me that he was fed up with the same traditional culture-related activities every year. In my opinion, these statements are understandable when you take their individual backgrounds into consideration. Presumably, both the European directors and the local directors of CIs were relatively knowledgeable about and interested in China. P12 had a rich experience of engaging with China, Chinese studies, and CIs since being selected as a funded high school exchange student to learn Mandarin at a Chinese high school when aged 17. Undoubtedly, these perspectives are not representative of the whole considering their views are 'rather elitist' (Hartig, 2015a). In contrast, some participants considered it important to start with easy things, as many know relatively little about China. Other participants expressed how much they loved the traditional activities and felt that traditional Chinese culture is the best and most interesting aspect of China. It can be argued that activities related to traditional culture can effectively attract general participants as they present a different and exotic picture of the "Other" (Said, 1978).

Finally, even though there is little evidence from my interviews that explicitly shows a balance in terms of political considerations when selecting traditional activities, some studies of CIs have pointed out the potential considerations that CIs must make (Schmidt, 2013; Hartig, 2015a; Liu, 2019b). Both Schmidt (2013) and Liu (2019) note that displaying traditional Chinese culture in CIs can counteract any fear or threat that China might project as a superpower, particularly in terms of economic development. Therefore, portraying a harmless, benign, and harmonious image

through activities related to traditional culture seems a much safer strategy than exposing participants to certain controversial topics (Paradise, 2009; Shambaugh, 2013; Liu, 2019b). However, I argue that while political considerations are one reason for selecting traditional activities, it cannot be the only one or even the main one. The reason for making such political considerations might be attributable to the fact that the West still presents itself in terms of 'positional superiority' in the political context (Liu, 2019b, p. 270), and the balance can vary from country to country, and from CI to CI. Taking CIs in Britain as an example, P9 (who is from the US and is now working in Uni.6) noted that the UK and US have very different attitudes toward China, with the former viewing China as a threat to its status while the latter sees China 'more as an opportunity, sort of, as a trading partner'. S3 (who had worked in an Africa CI before joining CI1) repeatedly expressed disappointment at not being involved in organising the CI activities in CI1, despite wanting to, whereas the situation was exactly the opposite in Africa. This was explained as follows: 'In Africa, it is the Chinese side that takes the lead; we have a lot of activities, and we are the one who organise them.' This view is consistent with my experience when obtaining fieldwork consent for my study at each CI, during which I found that in Britain the local CI staff are the decision makers rather than the Chinese staff. For China, Britain still sees itself as enjoying 'positional superiority' (Liu, 2019b), and the power of CIs in Britain is also largely in the hands of local staff. As a pragmatic actor, Britain is also seeking economic opportunities from its cooperation with China (Brown, 2019). All in all, given the factors and issues discussed above, it seems understandable that political considerations cannot be avoided when the power of two countries comes into play.

5.2.2 Reasons for conducting contemporary economics-related activities

In contrast to traditional activities, which tend to focus on China's cultural aspects of China and Chinese life, contemporary activities in CIs tend to highlight the achievements of the Chinese economy. As we saw in Chapter 4's findings regarding the activity participants' experiences (see Table 4.3) related to traditional and contemporary elements of activities, the second-most-popular activities organised by CIs in Britain are related to contemporary economics. These activities usually deal

(explicitly or implicitly) with the development of the Chinese economy in a multifaceted manner. It should not, perhaps, be surprising that CIs organise so many economics-related activities, since multiple studies of CIs have pointed out that China's economic development has been one of the driving forces behind the establishment of CIs (Hartig, 2012; Mikhnevich, 2015; Lo and Pan, 2016; Zhou and Luk, 2016). Moreover, scholars (e.g. Lien, 2013; Lien, Yao and Zhang, 2017) have also found that the establishment of CIs in certain countries have had some degree of positive influence on international travel to China.

By inviting academic scholars, CIs organise various lectures, talks and conferences, featuring academic scholars, that are primarily focused on the contemporary economic development of China today. For example, CI1 holds an annual *One Belt One Road* conference, to discuss this Chinese global infrastructure development and collaboration strategy, which started in 2013 (World Bank, 2017). Besides organising such academic events on economics-related topics, some CIs also actively engage in business co-operations. For example, they provide Chinese language courses and business etiquette training for local companies, they host Chinese delegations wishing to visit local businesses, they assist with translation work, such as for tourist brochures or industrial white papers, etc. Interestingly, while some CI activities may not directly belong to the economics-related category, the reason for organising them is still business-oriented. For example, CI5 ran a workshop - *The idea of the Chinese medical experience*, designed to help Uni.5's doctors better understand the mindset of Chinese students when accessing health care, with the aim of better supporting their Chinese international students. Many CIs cooperate with local shopping malls and airports to introduce Chinese traditional culture during festival seasons and attract more Chinese consumers. In short, after meticulous analysis of the interviews and the literature, the reasons why CIs organise economics-related activities can be attributed to two macro factors: 1) The development of the Chinese economy and 2) The need for mutual economic reciprocity between China and Britain.

As I elaborated in the Introduction chapter, the Chinese economy has enjoyed rapid growth since the start of its "open door" policy in 1978. In my study, this rapid economic development was mentioned frequently in both the participants' and the staff's interviews. Different aspects of China's economic development were

mentioned or alluded to when the participants spoke of their motivations for learning Chinese and with regard to attending activities at the CIs, and also when discussing their encounters with Chinese people, and in sharing their views of the Western news coverage of China. Specifically, some activity participants expressed a desire to work in China (P5) or to find a job that had the potential to positively impact China-Africa relations (P2) in the future. Some of them discussed the significant and growing number of international Chinese students at their universities (P1, P6, P7, and P8), and others spoke about the business news and coverage of Chinese companies on Western social media (P10). Additionally, many of the Chinese staff also spoke proudly of their country's achievements, such as China's technological and economic development in different areas (e.g. high-speed railway, online shopping, express payment technologies, etc.). It is thanks to this economic development that the demand for learning Chinese has been growing over the years (Wang and Adamson, 2015), with Chinese now being considered the second-most-important language for UK future prosperity (British Council, 2017). It can be argued that China's economic rise underpins the country's elevated status, the increased interest in the Chinese language, and the development of CIs (Zhou and Luk, 2016). Therefore, it is not surprising to discover that CIs conduct many economics-related activities.

There is a certain need for economic reciprocity between China and Britain. China requires British investment, finance, technology, and intellectual partnership, while Britain requires quality trade, investments, and tourists from China (Brown, 2019). My findings related to both the activity participants and the Chinese staff highlight the existence of such mutual needs. These needs are also evident in the various activities carried out by CIs, ranging from talks, business activities with wider communities, language and business workshops, as well as other events. If we analyse the talks held by CIs mentioned in the participants' interviews, four out of five of the presentations are related to the topics of Chinese economy and the rise of modern China. From the interviews with the Chinese staff, it emerges that some CIs started to organise, co-organise, or fund talks and conferences on the *One Belt One Road* theme. Other CIs also established a series of connections with wider business communities in Britain, such as the China-Britain Business Council, local tourism offices, local advanced manufacturing research centres, and local healthcare centres, etc. (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.3.1). In addition, Chinese

language and business etiquette workshops are provided to companies and institutions upon request. Other CIs undertake translation work for different organisations, such as for tourist brochures and industry reports. Overall, these highlighted economics-related activities further underline the will to search for mutually beneficial relationships between China and Britain, particularly in the business area. Significantly, this relationship may be further strengthened in the post-Brexit age, since the UK is now eager to build new business connections beyond the EU (Brown, 2019).

5.2.3 Reasons behind the apolitical tendency of Confucius Institute activities

While there have long been accusations of CIs serving as propaganda tools for promoting Chinese soft power (Mosher, 2012; Hartig, 2015a; Sahlins, 2015; Zhou and Luk, 2016), there were few activities directly linked to any political agenda in the 10 CIs that I studied. This finding is consistent with Hartig's study of CIs in South Africa, which also failed to find any topics that could be labelled as "propaganda" (Hartig, 2014). In my study, in the activity participants' cohort, P10, P11, and P12 all indicated that they had encountered no opportunities or need to approach sensitive topics in the activities, although it was considered acceptable to speak about such matters with the staff privately. P12 suggested that the reason for this lack of discussion of politics may be due to the fact that the staff do not in fact know what is going on politically in China or 'they don't want to be in trouble'. P2 agreed with this view, saying: 'No one wants to touch it; everyone is very scared.' This apolitical tendency was also found from analysing the content of the Chinese staff's interviews, in which they made almost no explicit reference to any politics-related activities. The apolitical nature of the CI activities is also discussed by Hartig (2015a, 2018), who, after investigating the internal working reports of CIs, concluded that only 1.8 percent of activities at CIs in Europe can be classified as relating to politics.

However, there are also some exceptions to this apolitical tendency, based on my personal experience of attending the *One Belt One Road* conference at CI1. On the first day of the conference, the panel of the global governance session engaged in a fierce debate regarding the Uyghur concentration camps and the human rights issues

in Xinjiang, China. Also, after the first day of the conference, an exhibition of textiles from the Chinese revolutionary period was displayed in a local library hall for all the participants. It was very unusual for me to see a textiles exhibition from such a turbulent time (1950-1980). I accidentally overheard one attendee, who was enjoying the exhibition, express how impossible it was to see this kind of historical display in China. This observation resonates with the investigation by Hartig (2018, p. 715), in which he remarks that CIs 'from Germany, the UK or Spain have much more leeway and would normally not shy away from addressing issues and problems their countries are facing'. It is therefore useful to note that CIs do offer a certain amount of space for this kind of discussion; it largely depends on the people who are in charge of the individual CIs (Hartig, 2015a). In summary, it seems that the apolitical nature of the CI activities might be due to two main reasons: 1) the fact that CIs are primarily cultural organisations; and 2) the power imbalance in world politics.

The nature of CIs, as government-funded cultural organisations, determines the particular portrayal of China in the institutes. This portrayal is more a cultural one than a political one. As S13 suggested, it might be that political issues are beyond their remit, and it could cause misunderstandings if they were to address these issues without possessing sufficient relevant knowledge. Further, this apolitical portrayal might also serve to present a more positive image of China than the widespread one; a politically correct depiction might be spread, rather than a real depiction of China (Hartig, 2015a). Many Chinese staff noted that, as is the case with the British Council, the Alliance Françoise, the Goethe-Institute, etc., the purpose of CIs is also to promote China's language and culture, in the hope of enhancing its soft power in the world. P12 supported this view, noting that the British Council and CIs essentially serve the same purpose, the only difference being that the British Council no longer relies on government funding as it already has many self-sustaining projects, such as IELTS exams, while the CI project is still largely funded by the Chinese government and in its early stages of development. As I discussed in Chapter 1, it seems unproblematic when Western cultural organisations present a positive image of their countries and seek to convey certain values to others. However, when it comes to CIs, the same practice has become problematic and questionable to some extent (Cai, 2019). The criticisms of CIs often overstate the differences while overlooking the

similarities. Therefore, it is reasonable to assert that criticisms of CIs can be largely considered criticisms of China, rather than criticisms of this use of soft power. This is not to deny that the Chinese government's restrictions with respect to freedom of speech has influenced the attitude of the West to China. On the contrary, such internal restrictions do have a significant impact on Western attitudes towards CIs (Hartig, 2018). However, it is also undeniable that the nature of CIs, understood as primarily cultural institutions, implies that they will not actively engage in discussions that do not present a positive image of China, even if they do in fact provide certain spaces for such discussions, as is evident from my personal observations.

From the external environment perspective, I would argue that the power imbalance between China and the West in the global political discourse has led to some extent to a predicament for CIs in Britain. Most significantly, my research finds that the sceptical attitude of the West towards the purposes of CIs and China's intentions more broadly may be the cause of the forced silence with respect to the Chinese staff in CIs. For instance, S1 mentioned an incident when a well-known British newspaper contacted the institute for an interview. Despite not carrying out the interview due to scheduling issues, the newspaper nevertheless hastily ran a negative article the next day claiming that 'CI1 is closed to information from the public'. A further example is provided by my own experience with CI8, where the Chinese director rejected my request for an interview due to a local policy of not accepting requests for private interviews. Ironically, this very restriction resulted from a negative description of CI8 in the local media due to a misinterpretation of the work in CI8. S5 was once informed by her local director to keep a low profile in order to avoid causing dissatisfaction among others. All of the above examples indicate that the restrictions placed on the Chinese staff's freedom of expression may not stem solely from censorship or self-censorship (which is of greater concern in the West), but also from an inability to receive more evidence-based and unbiased media coverage about their CIs. Consequently, it seems that CIs and the Chinese staff gradually chose to take a more traditional Chinese approach in order to avoid such attacks, i.e., by finding a happy medium. From my findings, as presented in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.4.2, the Chinese staff noted that while they could understand and accept different opinions of CIs, they would not 'fight back for the sake of fighting

back' against these (S7, local teacher). Rather, they felt that they simply needed to do their very best in their work, without feeling the need to explain themselves (S3, S7, and S9). This silent, non-active attitude was also noted by an activity participant (P7), who stated that 'all of the negative media coverage about the CI is the only media coverage about CI' in the West as CIs 'just don't say anything about this'.

Additionally, both the findings from the staff interviews and my personal experience when contacting CIs in Britain show that decision-making power in CIs is largely held locally. This power imbalance at the institutional level is also evident in Hanban's attitude towards applications for activity funding. As S1 observed, CI1 received the full support of Hanban with respect to the funding of its activities, which enabled the institute to explore more pioneering initiatives. It can also be seen in the CIs' different relationships with Chinese language departments at universities – the extent to which CIs can become involved in language courses that carry credits is largely dependent on each university's policies and thus this provision varies from CI to CI.

On the one hand, the West criticises CIs for not discussing political issues and for not allowing freedom of speech, while, on the other hand, if CIs were to take the initiative to discuss such topics and presented different viewpoints about China, then they would be accused of acting as tools for spreading Chinese propaganda (McCord, 2019). On top of that, the political issues proposed by critics of CIs are often confined to the most contentious, narrowly defined areas, such as the three Ts (Tibet, Tiananmen, and Taiwan), rather than encompassing a broader scope of political issues, such as the *One Belt One Road* initiative. This power imbalance in political discourse is highlighted by Liu (2019), who observes that the Lyon CI and the CI at Penn State University were closed for two completely opposite reasons. In the first case, Hanban demanded Lyon CI engage with research activities, while the reason given for the latter's closure was that Hanban refused to provide resources for research activities at Penn State University given that this fell outside of its duties. Hence, the US and Europe still hold 'positional superiority', as Liu points out:

> It seems that no matter whether the CI wants to be actively engaged in research or passively refuses to get involved, it all leads to the same discord in the partnerships, which reveals the hidden power relations at

the core of these interactions: the hegemonic side holding vantage positions can easily manoeuvre a blocking action based on the CI's location on campus, which was translated as a threat to academic freedom and has become a recurring criticism of the CI. (Liu, 2019b, p. 270)

For Chinese staff at CIs, it seems that a silent and inactive attitude to sensitive political topics is the safest approach in Britain. After all, as I mentioned in the first reason of the fact that CIs are primarily cultural organisations for the apolitical tendency with respect to CI activities, given that the main function of CIs is to provide language teaching as a cultural promotion institute, this implies that controversial political issues do not necessarily need to be addressed within the institutions. After all, as McCord (2019, p, 430) argues, it is unfair to blame CIs for not addressing an issue 'when other, and more appropriate, units in a university or college are free to present these topics'.

5.2.4 Confucius Institutes are building the stereotype and breaking the stereotype at the same time

Based on the understanding that culture 'is a system of meaning and representations created in an entangled field of forces' (Halualani, 2019, p. 38), this section takes a close look at the activity selection of, and through such the culture represented by, the activities at CIs. Moreover, it takes a critical intercultural communication perspective to scrutinise the macro-context power struggles shaped by political, cultural, social-economic, and historical forces. My study shows that CIs in Britain create a specific narrative about China and present a selective version of Chinese culture. In my study of CIs in Britain, this version of China and Chinese culture highlights the richness of traditional Chinese culture, the country's rapid contemporary economic and technological development, with an apolitical tendency of China.

It is arguable that the narratives presented by the CIs depict a more positive and more 'correct' version of China (Hartig, 2015a), or perhaps a 'rosy' view of China, as was suggested by P12. This narrative is consistent with the goal of both the Hanban and the Chinese government of presenting a benign image of a peaceful rise of China as a whole (Zheng, 2005; Paradise, 2009). However, the activity participants also noted that the CIs' narrative about China provides opportunities for Chinese people

to tell Chinese stories and present information about Chinese subjects within what is very much a Western-dominated cultural terrain. These stories can sometimes be 'very different to how Westerners are told to view China' (P9, international officer from Uni.6). These different depictions between CIs and Western society on Chinese related topics can be manifested in two aspects: 1) a different choice as to which aspects of China are focused on; and 2) different interpretations of the subjects and issues with respect to China. Give that the descriptions and meanings of a culture reflect not only those of the cultural group in question, but also those of other, often competing, groups and related narrative structures that wish to define a culture in ways that reflect their own interests (Halualani, 2019), it is very difficult to identify which cultural focuses and interpretations are more correct, important, or real: those of the West or those of the CIs. Taking CI activities as examples, activities related to traditional culture present an othering, different, and exotic image of the East, which can potentially reinforce stereotypical images that stem largely from Western preoccupations (Said, 1978; Holliday, 2013). When it comes to activities related to contemporary economics, many activity participants noted that they had obtained a very new and deep understanding of China's modern-day economic and technological development. This might go some way to breaking the stereotypical image of China. Most importantly, by interacting and communicating with Chinese staff at CIs and in CI activities, activity participants were able to obtain a better understanding of how Chinese people think. P7 from Uni.4 suggested that, while CIs might be reinforcing the stereotypes, they are also 'very good at breaking the stereotypes once you actually get involved in the CIs'. Regardless of whether CIs reinforce or break a certain stereotype, as a peripheral institute in Britain, CIs constantly struggle for recognition and endeavour to 'establish visibility against the dominant imagination of the Centre-West' (Holliday, 2011, p. 3).

5.3 A close look at cultural understanding from a critical cosmopolitan perspective

As reviewed in Chapter 2, Section 2.5.3, there has been broad criticism from contemporary interculturalists of the functionalist approach of employing intercultural communication to accentuate cultural differences between two equal parties and examine how those cultural differences impact communication and

intercultural competence. Built on an essentialist view of culture, this approach fails to recognise the internal complexity within cultural groups and possible similarities across cultural groups, and also gives little consideration to the influence from macro contexts (Bjerregaard, Lauring and Klitmøller, 2009; Holliday, 2012; Inuzuka, 2013; Jackson, 2014). In existing studies on the CI as an intercultural institution, there is a lack of any comprehensive or broad view to understand the processes of intercultural engagements and how they can impact cultural understanding within CI activities. Therefore, with the aim of overcoming the above limitations and addressing my last research question, this section takes a close look at cultural understanding between activity participants and CI staff at a micro level from a critical cosmopolitan perspective.

By acknowledging the capacity for self-problematisation, self-transcendence, and pluralisation of the activity participants and Chinese staff from a critical cosmopolitan perspective (Delanty, 2009, p. 75), I found that self-transformative moments emerged in some cases through interaction and engagement with the Other. Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis (2009) expound three types of cosmopolitan thinking, feeling, and acting in everyday cultural fields: the sampling style of cosmopolitanism, the immersive style of cosmopolitanism, and the reflexive style of cosmopolitanism. Critical cosmopolitan is concerned with identifying moments of self-transformation in contexts in which there is an expansion of reflexive capacities (Delanty, 2012a, p. 45). The expansion of reflexive capacities can be considered a form of reflexive cosmopolitanism, whereby individuals show a genuine commitment to living and thinking beyond the local or the nation, and a greater likelihood to act in cosmopolitan ways that are ethnically directed (Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis, 2009, p. 121). In my study, such transformative moments on both sides are identified and discussed in the context of the expansion of reflexive capacities.

By no longer comparing the activity participants and Chinese staff as two distinct groups, and instead viewing them as comprising independent individuals, this study has discovered some moments of self-transformation and individual levels of cosmopolitan competence, manifested in the processes of critical and reflective understanding of Self, the Other, and the world. I believe that cosmopolitan competence goes beyond skills and knowledge related to intercultural competence

to a deeper level of competence in areas of cultural understanding and intercultural communication. This competence is 'a personal ability to make one's way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting' (Hannerz, 1990, p. 239).

5.3.1 Understanding Self

One notable finding from analysing the interviews is that both the activity participants and the Chinese staff kept very open-minded attitudes toward different people, events, and perspectives, and enjoyed the experience of encountering new people, new things, new ideas, and new views. This openness of attitude plays an essential role in becoming cosmopolitan as 'a more genuine cosmopolitanism is first of all an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other' (Hannerz, 1990, p. 239). Based on the findings of the survey and interviews with the activity participants, one of their favourite parts of the activities was the interaction they afforded with people from different cultural backgrounds. Although some participants mentioned that there were certain unavoidable language barriers, there was nevertheless very little misunderstanding during the interaction processes (see Section 5.1.1.3). Among the Chinese staff, almost all expressed positive feelings about the local people who attended the CI activities, commenting that they found them very friendly and open-minded. This openness to new ideas, experiences, and perspectives when engaging with one another leads to further self-reflection, self-understanding, and even self-problematisation (Delanty, 2009). These self-reflections and self-examinations involve looking at the self and the broad group to which one belongs through the lens of the Other.

In terms of the aspects of themselves that they were able to better understand, some activity participants reported having developed deeper and clearer views about their future work and life aspirations in relation to China after engaging with CIs and CI activities. They mentioned that they wished to work in China (P5), find a job that can have an impact on China-Africa relations (P2), and continue to practise Chinese traditional dance (P3), etc. Although such realisations and understandings can also be gained from other life experiences, it can be seen that participating in CI activities and interacting with Chinese people had made the participants' views more concrete and clearer. Meanwhile, self-reflection practices were even more evident

among the Chinese staff cohort. They reported having deepened and broadened their understanding of certain research areas and of Chinese culture. For example, it is interesting to see that local director S9's attitude towards traditional Chinese medicine changed after carrying out many traditional Chinese medicine workshops over the years in CI4. She gradually became 'less resistant' to traditional Chinese medicine, and even tried acupuncture to alleviate her frozen shoulder pain. She admitted to me with a smile: 'If I wasn't doing this job at CI4, I certainly wouldn't be going for acupuncture.' In her case, cosmopolitanism had become internalised in her attitude to transformation (Beck, 2006; Delanty, 2009). This attitude does not merely consist of 'a better awareness of the perspective of the other' (Delanty, 2008, p. 227), i.e., regarding the popularity of Chinese acupuncture, but involved a form of self-transformation, i.e., she accepted and tried Chinese acupuncture. By introducing Chinese culture to others, the Chinese staff found that they were engaging not only in a process of in-depth understanding and learning about their culture, but also had the chance to adapt and learn from other cultures. They realised that as many of the Chinese staff were university postgraduates working at CIs on a short-term voluntary basis, their limited knowledge and teaching abilities might present barriers to the delivery of Chinese culture. However, they also acknowledged that, as part of the younger generation, the volunteers could easily adapt to British culture and British working styles and learn fast. It seems that the Chinese staff had developed a more rational and holistic view of the potential problems that CIs might encounter. It could be argued that the process of encountering others had led them to engage in greater critical self-understanding and self-pluralisation.

In terms of the broad groups to which the individuals belong, the activity participants showed a critical awareness of various aspects, such as an understanding of social media, national identity, international relations, and CIs. Based on the findings presented in Chapter 4 Section 4.2.4.1 regarding the Western views of China and CIs, some participants observed a certain standard narrative that Western social media portrays about China, which views China as an emerging superpower with a different political system. They noted that Western social media often dealt with political issues, and 'whenever there is an argument between China and Western countries, I only hear about the arguments' (P7). P9 also exhibited critical thinking when

contrasting the subtly different attitudes towards China in the US (her home country) and in the UK (where she was working). She believed that the US perceives China more as a threat than the UK does. P2 observed that most news reports about China in Kenya (home country) come from the West, rather than directly from China itself; hence, she greatly appreciated the opportunity to see Chinese people telling the Chinese story in CIs. Interestingly, as a student who had studied Chinese since the age of 17 and possessed a relatively rich knowledge of China, its culture, and its history, S12 thought that CIs present a 'rosy view' of China, just as British history books glorify the British Empire by downplaying the aspects related to colonial invasion. The various forms of critical awareness and examination regarding the broad groups to which the individuals belong demonstrate a reflexive style of cosmopolitanism, whereby they not only view things from the perspective of their own culture and group, but also consider matters beyond local and nation frames of reference (Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis, 2009, p. 121).

From the Chinese staff's perspective, the reflexive style of cosmopolitanism can also be found in the CI activities and in the different voices emerging from the CIs. First, critical self-reflection was found in some of the Chinese staff's comments about the activities, purposes, and adaptations of CIs. For example, they noted that CI activities are often perceived as repetitive and superficial, as highlighted by other studies of CI (Hartig, 2012; Mosher, 2012; Schmidt, 2013). They also acknowledged some problems regarding the content and organisation of activities, stating that they had attempted to address these issues by adopting different approaches in CIs. Specifically, S6 criticised Hanban for organising large-scale 'grand' events that did not produce the anticipated results for cultural exchange. This concern prompted him to set up a well-received weekly "Chinese corner" project in CI5, which focused more on 'small and beautiful' cultural aspects and current social phenomena in China. These tentative or niche activities were also to be seen in other CIs. It is worth noting that CIs in Britain no longer limit themselves to activities organised solely by CIs; indeed, they are already actively reaching out to various sectors and people, as highlighted in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.3.1 about the connection with diverse communities. Although some experimental activities might not be as successful or attractive as others, efforts continue to be made to improve in this regard. These ongoing attempts at improving CI activities are often overlooked in studies of CIs.

Also among Chinese staff, there was evidence of a critical understanding of different or antagonistic attitudes towards China. They acknowledged that ideological differences and bilateral relations between China and the West can have significant impacts on CIs, as is the case since the deterioration of US-China relations, which has led to successive closures of CIs in the US since 2017 (Peterson, 2020). In this regard, S13 suggested the need to downplay the political background of CIs, and S4, S9, and S10 felt that CIs need to put more emphasis on university-level cooperation. University-level cooperation also can be seen in the selection of activities at CI2, CI4, and CI5. As the CI activities are in line with the local universities' missions (e.g. the pursuit of internationalisation and social responsibility), closure of CIs can be avoided when there is political unrest between China and the host country.

In short, critical self-understanding, self-reflection, and even self-problematisation were all in evidence in some of the activity participants' and Chinese staff's engagement with different cultures and people. This critical dimension seemed to 'invoke a sense of openness as opposed to a closed or particularistic view of the world' (Delanty, 2009, p. 14). Referring to the work of Delanty (2009), adopting a critical attitude by problematising one's assumptions at an individual level can be regarded as taking a critical cosmopolitan perspective. By going beyond the Eurocentric and ethnocentric views presented in CI studies, this cosmopolitan perspective has the potential to 'reconcile complex, competing values and purposes' among different people and nations (Enslin, 2011, p. 91).

5.3.2 Understanding the Other

Through exposure to each other's cultural fields and engagement between cultural promoters (Chinese staff) and cultural receivers (activity participants), both sides obtained a more comprehensive, holistic, in-depth, and even critical understanding of the Other. This understanding was not limited to acquiring knowledge about the activity contents, but was also manifested in more subtle areas, such as in the communication itself. Thus, the activities became vectors for opening people up to more cosmopolitan and pluralistic perspectives. In my study, the transformative moments for the activity participants and Chinese staff were found in the process of

understanding people, social norms, and countries with different cultural backgrounds.

In the process of developing an understanding of other people, it is worth noting that some activity participants and Chinese staff became better able to see the inherent similarities with the Other, who they came to see at a more human level, rather than merely noticing differences. Positive recognition of other cultures and people can be found in the observations of both cohorts, who mentioned encountering such qualities in the Other as friendliness and warmth when interacting with them during the activities. P7 viewed Chinese students as very similar to local students, who also 'have certain things they want in their life' and 'want to be happy, the same as anybody else'. P3 noted that the Chinese staff are also curious to know about the other culture. P12 described the Chinese staff as being normal people rather than "patriotic thieves" and found that it was possible to make friends and discuss anything privately outside of the activities. This cosmopolitan perspective also emerged from analysing the staff's comments. For example, after twenty years of working in an intercultural environment at Uni.4, S9 pointed out that beneath the superficial cultural differences lie common human experiences. Some of them were also critically aware of the cultural differences among people. While some activity participants described Chinese people as being very hard-working and disciplined, some Chinese staff members made the critical observation that there might still exist a certain level of "cold war mentality" and a sense of superiority in some British people's mindsets. Overall, it can be argued that the interaction process enabled the participants and staff to understand each other more beyond the actual range of the CI activities themselves.

In the process of understanding the social norms of the Other, some activity participants and Chinese staff also learned about some of their social norms through the intercultural engagement with the Other. First, the wide range of topics included in the CIs' academic activities allowed participants to access a significant amount of knowledge about Chinese social norms. In addition to the talks, seminars, and conferences, the CIs also regularly organised exchange student programmes and summer or winter camps to allow those participating to immerse themselves in Chinese culture in China. Similarly, when Chinese staff organised activities jointly

with different local entities, they realised the need to adapt to local norms, even if it meant experiencing a certain level of cultural shock or conflict. For example, both S1 and S8 experienced rejection to attend the CI activities with their friends as they did not realise that it is the common practice to book events in advance in the UK. S8 told me about the constant adjustment process in which she was engaged as she was caught between her Chinese efficiency-focused style and the British work-life balance style of working. In this case, cosmopolitanism is not a fixed category, but 'an emergent and processual dimension of social life' (Woodward and Skrbis, 2012, p. 127), as we can see from these intercultural experiences.

In the process of understanding the country of the Other, some activity participants and Chinese staff also obtained a more comprehensive understanding of the political and social media biases and stereotyping to be found on the other side. On Western social media, China is normally depicted as a superpower with an autocratic regime that is opposed to democratic traditions. A similar phenomenon is also to be found on Chinese social media, as S4 noted: 'You can barely find any good descriptions of the West in China because of the ideological conflict'. By engaging with the Other, they came to no longer view the other's country from such a narrow perspective. By participating in the CI activities, the participants were able to understand various aspects of China from very different, even opposite perspectives. This is not to say that the Chinese perspective is more true or more false than the Western narratives, as 'there are multiple "real" Chinas – positive and negative – and the crucial question is who decides what this "real" China is all about, and why' (Hartig, 2018, p. 714). At the very least, the activity participants are presented with a new perspective to consider. Similarly, when the Chinese staff learned of the different descriptions and perspectives of China, they also started to critically reflect on both their own country and other countries and moved towards a more cosmopolitan view of seeing the world.

5.3.3 Understanding the World

By accepting the view of the Other and problematising one's own assumptions as well as those of the Other (Delanty, 2009, p. 16), some activity participants and Chinese staff moved towards developing a better understanding of the world. The

activity engagement became one of the many ways to enhance this kind of better understanding in each person's life trajectory. Both sides became more open to accepting new ideas, views, and things. Based on the findings, most activity participants showed a willingness to learn new things about Chinese culture. Meanwhile, the Chinese staff demonstrated a more tolerant, understanding, and critically reflective attitude towards the different views expressed by the Other. Moreover, the interactions between the activity participants and Chinese staff through CI activities became just one of the many intercultural experiences in their lives, and some of them managed to critically connect, compare, and reflect on those experiences. This critical connection, comparison, and reflection might constitute a form of cosmopolitanism, given that it involves 'the creative interaction of cultures and the exploration of a shared world' (Delanty, 2012a, p.6); this interaction can further enhance the activity participants and Chinese staff's understanding of the world.

In details, as many participants are not originally from Britain, some had different views of China and CIs than those commonly found in Britain. For example, P2 (from Kenya) indicated that Kenyans know little about China 'because most of the news and most information we receive is from Western society'. P9 (from the US) noticed the different attitudes and strategies towards China and CIs to be found in the US and Britain. P13 (from China) identified a difference in the depth of activities in China and in Britain. Similarly, critical awareness and comparisons were also evident in the Chinese staff's interviews. For example, Chinese director S1 argued that even though the West places more emphasis on individualism, it seems to be very afraid of violations of political correctness and is more reliant on certain values than Chinese people are, adding that Chinese people seem more open to other values to some extent. As a Chinese language teacher who had been sent to many countries by Hanban, S3 compared the experience of working at CIs in Africa and in Britain, noting that Africans are more willing to let Chinese staff organise activities because they think the Chinese are more diligent and believe Chinese people will do a great job. By contrast, S3 felt that British CIs seemed to not want much Chinese involvement because they tended to hold more sceptical and questioning attitudes towards China. S4 discussed why Taiwanese culture is more popular in the West than in China, suggesting that a main reason might be their shared democratic

organisation, which makes Westerners feel psychologically closer to the Taiwanese. S13 (a Chinese director at CI7) also expressed an opinion regarding the different attitudes towards China in the West, suggesting that certain negative perceptions of CIs might be the result of partisan interests and the knowledge they learned and perceived before. He further stressed that these understandings are not necessarily an objective reflection of the actual work that CIs carry out.

I do not intend here to judge which view is more or less accurate. Nevertheless, it would seem that a more comprehensive understanding of the world can result from intercultural interaction with the Other through CI activities. This constant accumulation of new perspectives and development of greater understanding can also contribute to enhancing one's cosmopolitan competence to some extent. This cosmopolitan competence is the 'ability to make one's way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting' (Hannerz, 1990, p. 239). By listening and looking at other people's different views and patterns of behaviour with an open attitude, most activity participants and Chinese staff were able to obtain a better understanding of the Other. What's more, by critically comparing and reflecting on their previous individual intercultural experiences, previous knowledge of themselves and the Other, and their new intercultural experiences and understandings obtained through the CI and CI activities, some were able to develop a better understanding of themselves. And by creatively interacting with cultures and exporting a shared world (Delanty, 2012a), they gained a better understanding of the world as a whole. In my study, I identified that some activity participants and Chinese staff achieved this kind of cosmopolitan competence to some extent.

5.4 A possible route to cosmopolitan competence through intercultural engagement in Confucius Institutes

By examining the CI activities and intercultural engagement from both the critical intercultural communication and critical cosmopolitan perspectives, my study has constructed a possible route to cosmopolitan competence through intercultural engagement in CIs model (see Figure 5.1). The traditional functionalist approach to intercultural communication views culture as a static and nation-based idea and intercultural competence as a taken-for-granted concept for effective

communication (Moon, 1996; Holliday, 2011). However, I contend that culture is more about an ideologically laden system of meaning and representations of the dominant party/parties, which can be modified when power shifts from one dominant party/ parties to another (Halualani, 2019). In this study, CIs in Britain presented a unique image of Chinese culture, which could differ from both Western depictions and the Chinese government's grand narrative. Premised on this understanding, culture is no longer viewed as a barrier to communication but instead provides for more flexible meanings. Competence is no longer a functionalist idea for facilitating communication between different groups, but a self-improvement process of building up the 'ability to make one's way into other cultures' as individuals, i.e., cosmopolitan competence (Hannerz, 1990, p. 239). In my study, by acknowledging the one's capacity for self-problematisation, self-transcendence, and pluralisation from a critical cosmopolitan perspective (Delanty, 2009, p. 75), I identify the self-improvement process evident in some activity participants' and Chinese staff's intercultural experiences, albeit the level of cosmopolitan competence achieved may vary between individuals. In this vein, I have identified three factors that can contribute to developing cosmopolitan competence based on my findings: 1) exposing oneself to another culture, 2) being open-minded and having a friendly attitude, and 3) making connections with one's previous related experience and knowledge of the Other. More importantly, I argue that the main point of achieving this kind of cosmopolitan competence is that the activity participants and Chinese staff need to actively connect and critically reflect on their CI activity experience along with their previous related experience and knowledge when engaging with the Other with openness and a friendly attitude.

The first factor that can contribute to developing cosmopolitan competence is exposure to another culture. Since cosmopolitan competence is the 'ability to make one's way into other culture, through listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting' (Hannerz, 1990, p. 239), it is essential to first come into contact with another culture. Urry (2016) argues that certain types of individual mobilities are key to promoting cosmopolitan outcomes as these mobilities can push people into transcultural interactions. In my study, both the activity participants and the Chinese staff had the types of mobilities required to expose themselves to the other culture as they could attend or organise activities in the CIs. We know from Section 5.2 that CIs in

Britain organised and presented traditional and economics-related activities (characterised by an apolitical tendency), thus, providing the activity participants with a different cultural setting.

The cultural differences can be interpreted in three ways: 1) culture which differs from one's original culture, 2) different focuses on the other culture, 3) different interpretations of the same focus. First, the Chinese culture presented by CIs might differ from the activity participants' own cultures, as most were from the UK and Europe. Although one of the activity participants is Chinese, the culture presented by the CIs was still not the same as what the participant previously perceived in China. Second, besides certain fundamental differences, people may also focus on different aspects of the other culture. In my study, it was found that when the West and CIs talks about China, they may have different focus points and concerns. Section 4.2.4.1 in Chapter 4 investigated the views of China and CIs in the West and in China. The activity participants observed that the most prominent narrative presented in the West is of China as an emerging superpower with a different political system. P7 also noted that social media in the West 'generally didn't deal with cultural elements; it only dealt with political issues'. Such political concerns were significantly different from the benign image of China presented by CIs from an apolitical position. Lastly, even though there were in fact some overlapping concerns discussed, such as China's economic development, it appears that the West and CIs have different interpretations of these phenomena. Both P2 and P9 pointed out that when Chinese people talk about Chinese projects, it can be very different from what is presented in the West. For example, when depicting China as an emerging superpower, the West often views it as a threat and adopts a vigilant attitude, whereas CIs tend to describe this development as a cooperative and peaceful manner phenomenon. Likewise, differences in the three dimensions can also be found in the Chinese staff's transnational experiences in Britain. Confronted by differences between British and Chinese culture, the Chinese staff had to go undergo a lengthy process to adapt to the British working style and environment, as discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2.2. Meanwhile, the Chinese staff may also have different concerns about Britain and different understandings and explanations when it comes to the same topics.

The second factor that can contribute to developing cosmopolitan competence is an open-minded and friendly attitude. Many studies on cosmopolitanism highlight that an attitude of openness is an essential part of understanding cosmopolitanism (Hannerz, 1990; Vertovec and Cohen, 2002; Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis, 2009). Hannerz (1990, pp. 238-239) explains that cosmopolitanism is a perspective, a state of mind, and an orientation of willingness to engage with the Other. Delanty (2012b, p. 42) considers the cosmopolitan spirit as a desire to engage with the perspective of the Other rather than reject it. Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis (2009) believe cosmopolitanism to be the endeavour of seeing the value of the other. Some studies also define cosmopolitanism as an attitude of openness in individuals (Hannerz, 1990; Vertovec and Cohen, 2002). However, Skrbis, Kendall and Woodward (2004, p. 127) argue that defining cosmopolitanism as openness might be 'vague and diffuse', and lacking in analytic value. In my study, I view this kind of open attitude as one of the key factors for developing cosmopolitan competence, rather than equating it simply with cosmopolitanism. This kind of open attitude was to be found in both the activity participants and the Chinese staff cohorts. In the interviews, they displayed a broad willingness to learn from the other in an open-minded way. In particular, many of the activity participants expressed an eagerness to learn something new and have fun through the activities. They also acknowledged the friendly and helpful attitude of the Chinese staff and smooth interaction. Both sides benefited from having open and friendly attitudes as it led to very little misunderstanding between activity participants and Chinese staff (see Section 5.1.1.3). Meanwhile, the Chinese staff also presented an open attitude towards the different views of CIs in the West, as elaborated in Section 4.3.4.2. In short, with this openness and friendly attitude, the study found there was very little misunderstanding between activity participants and Chinese staff during the interpersonal interactions.

The third factor that contributes to developing cosmopolitan competence is the forming of connections with one's previous related experience and knowledge of the Other. Based on this study's findings, I would argue that individuals related intercultural and transnational knowledge and experience are also important for the development of cosmopolitan competence. In my study, most of the activity participants and Chinese staff had some degree of previous related life experience and knowledge of the Other and of CIs. The interview findings (Section 4.2.1.2)

indicate that most of the participants had some connections with and understandings of China before attending CI activities. For example, both P7 and P8 have family connections with China, P2, P9, P10, P11, and P12 had previously visited China, and some of them also had experience and knowledge of Chinese films, Chinese modern technology, Chinese international students, and Chinese studies programmes, etc. As for the Chinese staff, most of them also had some intercultural experience before joining CIs in Britain. For example, as deputy directors, both S9 and S10 had experience of working in international departments of universities before prior to joining CI4 and CI2, respectively. Both S3 and S6 were full-time teachers working for Hanban, with some overseas teaching experience before being dispatched to Britain. In addition, some Chinese staff also shared their individual experiences of visiting, studying, and teaching in different cultural settings.

However, the key to the activity participants and Chinese staff achieving individual cosmopolitan competence is having an open attitude while critically reflecting on their CI activity experience and actively connecting it with their previous related experience and knowledge when engaging with the Other. By acknowledging the capacity to self-problematise, self-transcend, and pluralise from a critical cosmopolitan perspective (Delanty, 2009, p. 75), I have identified self-transformative moments and self-improvement processes in some of the activity participants and Chinese staff, whereby they were able to critically understand themselves, the Other, and the world (see Section 5.3). The moments of self-transformation took place in a context in which there was an expansion in reflexive capacities (Delanty, 2012a, p. 45). In this case, the expansion of reflexive capacities constitutes a reflexive form of cosmopolitanism, whereby the individual makes 'a genuine commitment to living and thinking beyond the local or national and is more likely to act in cosmopolitan ways that are ethnically directed' (Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis, 2009, p. 121). I believe that people with only the reflexive style of cosmopolitanism can eventually achieve a certain level of cosmopolitan competence, as finding one's way into other cultures requires thinking and acting beyond the local and the nation.

It is also worth recalling that not every activity participant and Chinese staff member that I interviewed had achieved this level of cosmopolitan competence, based on my

observations. Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis (2009) expound three types of cosmopolitan thinking, feeling, and acting in everyday cultural fields: the sampling style of cosmopolitanism, the immersive style of cosmopolitanism, and the reflexive style of cosmopolitanism. The sampling style of cosmopolitanism involves 'engagement and contact, but only as a form of temporary, fleeting connection'(Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis, 2009, p.115). In my study, this type of cosmopolitanism often occurred in people's previous related life experience. For instance, some participants noted that there were many Chinese international students at their universities, or that they had bought many products made in China. The same was found in participants of CI activities who had only participated once or twice on a casual basis without having any previous knowledge of China. The immersive style of cosmopolitanism 'reflects a conscious pattern of action which is based on learning and cultivating engagements for the purpose of change, self-knowledge or improvement' (Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis, 2009, p. 119). This type of cosmopolitanism is the most common one observed in the interviews with both the activity participants and the Chinese staff. For example, some activity participants immersed themselves in language learning, Wushu, or Chinese traditional dance workshops, where they learned new skills and developed further knowledge. Other Chinese staff members also actively engaged with others in order to improve their teaching and organisation skills. However, only a limited number of the activity participants and Chinese staff members achieved a reflexive style of cosmopolitanism, which 'shows a genuine commitment to living and thinking beyond the local or nation and [being] more likely to act in cosmopolitan ways that are ethnically directed' (Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis, 2009, p. 121). I would argue that this reflexive style of cosmopolitanism, by constantly adding a new perspective to one's life and possessing the ability to think beyond the local and the national, can contribute to self-improvement in cosmopolitan competence. Section 5.3 of this study identified those individuals from both sides who critically understood themselves, the Other, and the world, and discussed this matter in the context of the expansion of reflexive capacities.
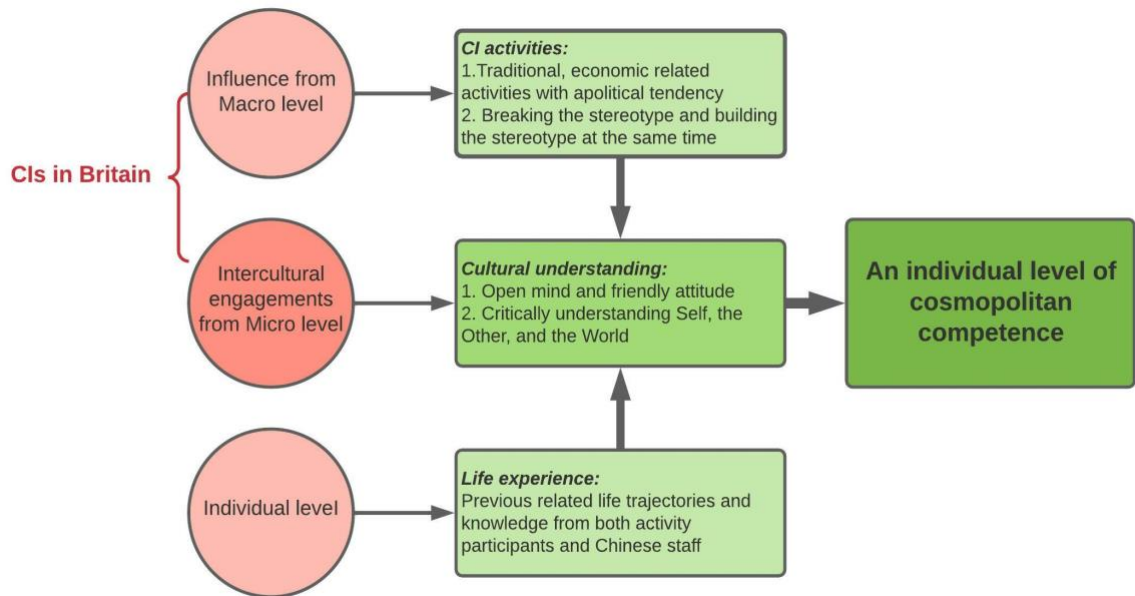
Figure 5.1 A possible route to cosmopolitan competence through intercultural engagement in Confucius Institutes

Based on my findings and analysis, I constructed Figure 5.1 to depict how the diverse intercultural engagements in CIs can lead to achieving an individual level of cosmopolitan competence. From the top down, left to right, the three red circles represent the three levels that can make an impact on cultural understanding between activity participants and Chinese staff. The three green rectangles represent the specific traits at the three levels. The arrows represent the possible route to achieving an individual level of cosmopolitan competence, i.e., the darkest rectangle. To be specific, the influence of the macro level (first light red circle) can be manifested in the selection of CI activities and Chinese culture. My findings suggest that CI activities present traditional, economics-related aspects of China with an apolitical tendency, which may serve to either break or build stereotypes in the minds of the participants (first light green rectangle). The individual level (third light red circle) from my findings shows that every activity participant and Chinese staff member has their own unique previous related life experiences, knowledge, and understanding of the Other (third light green rectangle). Most importantly, the micro-level intercultural engagements (second darker red circle) provide opportunities for interaction with the Other through the activities offered in CIs in

Britain. This study found that almost all of the activity participants and Chinese staff members had open-minded and friendly attitudes when encountering one another, with some of them even coming to understand themselves, the Other, and the world better through their critical reflection on their activity experiences, their previous related life experiences, and their prior knowledge (second darker green rectangle). As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Section 2.7, the different cultures and personalities of the activity participants and the Chinese staff may have some influence but are not the determining factors in the formation of their perceptions, attitudes and understandings toward one another, supporting or impeding the attainment of cosmopolitan competence. Therefore, my research is more focusing on the intercultural engagement between the activity participants and the Chinese staff. In this case, the findings did not highlight the impacts of such personalities and other non-cultural factors from the cultural psychology and cross-cultural psychology perspectives. Alternatively, from the intercultural communication perspective, my finding shows that some of them eventually achieved an individual level of cosmopolitan competence, thereby developing the ability to make their ways into other cultures and to think beyond cultural and national boundaries (darkest green rectangle).

Looking at this aspect in greater detail, it can be seen that, by engaging with CI Chinese staff and Chinese people through CI activities, the activity participants not only expanded their knowledge about China, Chinese people, and Chinese culture from different angles, but more importantly, by encountering the Other, they started to understand the values that shape Chinese people's ways of thinking. In particular, the knowledge that the activity participants gained tended to reflect a positive and apolitical version of China, and its rich traditional culture and great recent achievements in the economic and technological fields. In this sense, the CI activities reinforce the stereotypical image of an imagined, Othering, exotic picture of China (Said, 1978), while also creating a new, advanced, peaceful, and friendly narrative about China. This hybrid image presented both familiar and unfamiliar facets of China to the activity participants. Therefore, it can be said that it both breaks the stereotypes and deepens the stereotypes of China at the same time. However, the participants' cultural understanding of China was not limited solely to the knowledge dimension. Most activity participants stressed that the key aspects they had learned

was to better understand how Chinese people think by engaging with Chinese people through the activities offered in CIs. In the same vein, by immersing themselves in new cultural settings and working with staff from Britain and other countries in CIs and beyond, some Chinese staff were also able to develop an individual level of cosmopolitan competence, which stemmed from constantly adapting and rethinking their views of themselves, the Other and the world. They began to adapt to the new culture and their new multicultural working environments. Notably, Section 4.3.4.2 highlighted the attitudes of Chinese staff towards different opinions of CIs, where they showed an attitude of openness towards other cultures and to different perspectives among the Chinese staff. This attitude of openness is an essential part of understanding cosmopolitanism (Hannerz, 1990; Vertovec and Cohen, 2002; Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis, 2009). Furthermore, by attempting to combine and compare their previous intercultural experiences and knowledge of CIs and other cultures with their current working experiences, they were able to develop a certain level of 'self-problematisation, self-transcendence and pluralisation' capacity (Delanty, 2009, p. 75) in the process of engaging with the activity participants and people from other cultural backgrounds. In short, S9's reflection on her personal experience as a local director for 14 years at CI4 can concisely sum up this kind of self-improvement process and development of cosmopolitan competence and of 'thinking and feeling cosmopolitan' (Cheah and Robbins, 1998):

> No matter food or film, they seem to belong to a different culture and have their own distinctive features on the surface; but when you see more things and think more deeply, maybe you can see the common humanity that lies beneath the surface. By communicating and discussing with others, we can slowly find out that there is a common area of humanity. (S9, local director in CI4)

In this vein, the constructed illustration of the possible route to cosmopolitan competence through intercultural engagement in CIs context can potentially serve as a model for other intercultural studies when looking for pathways to achieve cosmopolitan competence in different contexts. Indeed, it is difficult to deny that regardless of the type of intercultural interaction, and cultural symbols, heroes, or rituals presented by people from different cultural backgrounds, we can always find some deeply shared 'common humanity beneath the surface'. The model (Figure 5.1) derived from this study stresses the importance of this kind of thinking and

encourages more attention to studying cosmopolitan competence in the field of intercultural communication. The importance of an awareness of cosmopolitan competence has also been highlighted by other studies. For instance, Jackson (2011) examined how one international student cultivated a cosmopolitan self through critical and deep reflection on her studying and learning experience overseas, and Sobre-Denton and Bardhan (2013, 2015), exploring cosmopolitan pedagogy in intercultural communication, proposed a new perspective for communication as global citizens through interculturality and cosmopolitanism. My study enriches these previous related studies by providing a practical model for a possible route to cosmopolitan competence through one specific intercultural setting, i.e., intercultural engagement in activities offered by CIs in Britain. This model can inspire the creation of similar models for investigating cosmopolitan competence in other different intercultural settings, such as in intercultural classrooms and on intercultural social media platforms. Meanwhile, this model also suggests a new fresh understanding of intercultural competence, i.e., the competence no longer serves merely as a tool for effective external communication but also for building a more sophisticated and cosmopolitan self and a broader way of thinking and living in today's globalised world.

5.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have attempted to answer the study's research questions, presented at the beginning. By critically analysing the findings from Chapter 4 and the related research on CIs, intercultural communication, and cosmopolitanism, Section 5.1 explored the first research question, and Sections 5.2 and 5.3 examined the second and third questions as follows:

1) What are the areas of concordance and discordance between the activity participants and Chinese staff with respect to the intercultural experience of Confucius Institute activities?

After comparing and evaluating the findings from Chapter 4, three areas of concordance and three areas of discordance between the activity participants' and the Chinese staff' experiences were identified and discussed. These areas of

concordance are: 1) language teaching and learning is the central focus in CIs, 2) CI activities mostly focus on raising awareness of China, and 3) there is very little misunderstanding at the micro level between activity participants and Chinese staff during intercultural interaction. The areas of discordance are: 1) activity engagement is much broader from the Chinese staff's perspective, 2) different attitudes exist towards activities related to traditional culture, 3) different opinions exist regarding the political engagement of CIs.

2) How can Confucius Institute activities be shaped by larger contexts?

Based on a critical intercultural communication approach, which involves highlighting a series of forces from macro contexts and viewing culture as a site of struggle, the rationales behind the selection of CI activities are explored carefully and meticulously in 5.2. First, the selection of activities related to traditional culture can be attributed to the unique cultural contexts of China and Britain, as well as to the imbalance in the political domain. Second, the selection of activities related to contemporary economics can be attributed to the development of the Chinese economy and the need for mutual economic reciprocity between China and Britain. Third, the apolitical tendency evident in CI activities can be explained by the nature of CIs as government-funded cultural organisations, as well as the power imbalance between China and the West in the global political domain. Although CIs often opt for a pragmatic approach when choosing specific contents, forms, and other aspects of their activities, it is the macro factors from historical, cultural, economic, ideological, and political contexts that eventually determine the broad types and directions of the activities in CIs.

3) How can intercultural engagement within Confucius Institute activities have an impact on cultural understanding between activity participants and Chinese staff?

Based on a critical cosmopolitan approach of acknowledging that culture contains potential capacities for learning and the individual has the capacity to self-problematise, self-transcend, and pluralise (Delanty, 2009), the impact on cultural understanding of the intercultural interactions and engagements were explored in detail in 5.3. First, there is clear evidence of understanding the self in both the

activity participants' and Chinese staff's self-reflections and self-examinations, as well as in their considerations of the broad groups to which they belong. Second, both sides showed an understanding of the Other, as well as critical understanding, reflected in their understanding of people and social norms from different cultures. Finally, by connecting the understanding of themselves and the Other with their previous intercultural experiences in a more critical way, both the activity participants and the Chinese staff further enhanced their understanding of the world and adopted a more cosmopolitan perspective. I would conclude that this understanding potentially goes beyond the national frames of Eurocentrism and ethnocentrism, and can potentially lead to achieving cosmopolitan competence in individuals (Hannerz, 1990) and the building of a new way of seeing the world, i.e., from a critical cosmopolitan perspective (Delanty, 2009).

Beyond answering the three research questions, this study also constructed a model of a possible route to cosmopolitan competence through intercultural engagement in CIs, based on my discussion, which can support further studies on CIs, intercultural communication, and cosmopolitan competence. This study constitutes the first attempt to combine critical intercultural communication with a critical cosmopolitan view in one specific intercultural context, i.e., CIs in Britain. As explained when discussing the rationale behind my selection of research approach in Chapter 2, it is important to examine my research through the lenses of critical intercultural communication and critical cosmopolitan. With respect to the field of intercultural communication, this study overcomes the limitations of a traditional intercultural approach by capturing the complexity entailed in intercultural engagement in several ways. First, this study avoids essentialism, which views the Other as a simplified unit according to culture or nationality. By recognising the internal complexity within each cultural or national group and the potential external similarities across groups, I have investigated the individuals' cultural understandings according to each of their individual unique intercultural experiences. Second, this study attempts to take into consideration the fact that the diverse macro context and structures that 'constituting and shaping cultural and intercultural communication encounters, relationships and contexts' (Martin and Nakayama, 1999, pp. 1-2), rather than only focusing on micro-level intercultural practices (Ferri, 2018). Therefore, the multiple dimensions of power imbalance and power dynamics present

among China, Hanban, CIs, Chinese staff, partner universities, and UK are considered and analysed comprehensively in my study. In its investigation of CIs, this study goes beyond Eurocentrist and ethnocentrist constraints to take a wider, more holistic and critical view of the CIs and their activities in Britain. As I discussed in Section 2.4, some previous studies of CIs have pointed out the divergent focuses between China and the Western world (e.g. Starr, 2009; An et al., 2014; Liu, 2019). It would seem that there has been a lack of communication between the two perspectives (China and the West), which has potentially resulted in a failure to comprehensively understand CIs, particularly from the other side's point of view. This study reveals a holistic picture of what really occurs in CI activities in the British context and potentially fills a substantial part of the research gap in CI studies. In doing so, this study might also help to overcome some political and cultural divisions between China and Britain and find some common ground.

Most importantly, the illustrated in Figure 5.1 above provides a new way of seeing intercultural communication in CIs and a possible means of achieving an individual level of cosmopolitan competence when people engage in intercultural settings. It is crucial to cultivate this kind of ability to make one's way into another culture and to live and think beyond the local or the national (Hannerz, 1990; Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis, 2009). Although people may possess different levels of this ability and have different ways of thinking beyond the local or the national, cosmopolitan competence is nevertheless vital for real and effective intercultural communication, particularly in today's globalised but seemingly divergent world. Finally, as Delanty (2012a, p.2) points out, 'the world may be becoming more and more globally linked by powerful global forces, but this does not make the world more cosmopolitan'. Therefore, we need 'a transformation in self-understanding and not merely a better awareness of the perspective of the other' (Delanty, 2008, p. 277). The proposed model provides a potential way of achieving this goal.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Following my analyses and discussions in Chapter 5 of Confucius Institute activities, the intercultural experience and the impact on cultural understanding between activity participants and Chinese staff in CIs, I am now in a position to summarise the theoretical and practical contributions of my study. In terms of its theoretical contributions, this study is the first endeavour to comprehensively examine intercultural engagement using the two unique perspectives of intercultural communication studies. Although there has been an upsurge of interest in critical intercultural communication approaches in the US (Halualani, 2019) and a strong call for a critical cosmopolitan approach to intercultural studies in British academia (Holliday, 2020b), few empirical studies actually combine the two perspectives together. In terms of the study's practical contributions, some constructive suggestions can be made for the CI as an intercultural institution and for people wishing to achieve an individual level of cosmopolitan competence through CIs and other intercultural sectors in today's interconnected world. These contributions are laid out in Section 6.1. Following that, I present an overview of the various aspects of research covered in my thesis in Section 6.2, and then reflect on my development as a researcher in Section 6.3.

6.1 Theoretical and practical contributions of my study

As was discussed in Chapter 2, "culture" has conventionally been defined as a national-based and static concept in the field of intercultural communication (Moon, 1996). Although some attempts have been made to conceptualise culture from a multidisciplinary perspective, such as by defining the concept based on the three key notions of cultural group membership, cultural group identities, and cultural patterning (Spencer-Oatey and Kádár, 2021), the notion of culture remains constrained at the individual level. This study deploys a more fluid view to examine "culture" by taking power imbalance and dynamics into consideration (Nakayama and Halualani, 2010; Sorrells, 2010; Piller, 2011; Ferri, 2018). By adopting a power-based view of culture to examine the Chinese culture presented within CI activities (see Section 2.5.5 in Chapter 2), this study provides a concrete example of how the Chinese culture within CI activities is selected and defined, not only from the

perspective of Chinese culture itself, but also from the perspective of the many competing structures and parties that try to define it based on their own interests (Halualani, 2019, p. 40). This study enriches the research on CIs by offering a detailed and comprehensive examination of the reasons behind CIs' selection of activities in Britain. It first reveals that CI activities present a traditional, contemporary economics-focused, and apolitical image of China and of Chinese culture. This kind of image and cultural dimension is challenged by some of the dominant Western narratives about China, which are more politically related. I then argue that, even though these depictions may reinforce stereotypes and lead to an othering, different, and exotic image of China (Said, 1978), they can also break certain stereotypes about contemporary China and Chinese people. Most significantly, the activity participants were given the chance to learn about China from a different perspective. I further found that, as a periphery institute in Britain, CIs are continuously fighting for recognition and attempting to 'establish visibility against the dominant imagination of the Centre-West' (Holliday, 2011, p. 3). Rather than examining CIs mainly from the Chinese perspective alone, as occurs in many extant CI studies (Yang, 2010; Hubbert, 2014; Hartig, 2015b; Shuto, 2018), this study uncovers the complexity of the power dynamics and struggles within CI activity selections, thereby providing a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of engagement than other studies.

Based on an essentialist view of culture, a functionalist approach to intercultural communication fails to recognise potential internal differences and diversities within cultural groups and external similarities between/among groups (Ferri, 2018). This study rethinks this approach to intercultural communication and employs a critical cosmopolitan approach to examine intercultural interactions among people in the context of CIs in Britain. Compared to a functionalist approach of applying models and methods for effective communication and intercultural competence (Hall, 1976; Gudykunst, 1983a; Byram, Nichols and Stevens, 2001; Deardorff, 2006), the critical cosmopolitan approach that I adopted has two unique features. First, it redefines the aim of intercultural communication in CIs. In my study, the purpose of this communication is no longer only to facilitate effective communication between/among different groups, but also to understand oneself, the Other, and the world in a more cosmopolitan way through self-problematisation, self-transcendence, and pluralisation when encountering the Other (Delanty, 2009). Second, it redefines

the competence in intercultural communication targeted by CI activities. The competence is no longer considered an ability that is limited to effective communication across cultures externally, but also includes an internalised ability for self-development as a cosmopolitan citizen. By considering the activity participants and Chinese staff as independent individuals rather than as two distinct groups, this study identified several self-transformative moments experienced by some of them in the process of critically and reflectively understanding themselves, the Other, and the World. It is crucial to stress the individual distinctiveness of individuals, as many of them may not come from just a single cultural background anymore, particularly in today's globalised and interconnected world (Piller, 2011). Moreover, this way of rethinking the aims of intercultural communication and competence also generates some fresh and nuanced insights into intercultural communication studies.

Building on the aforementioned understanding of culture and competence, my study developed a Model for a Possible Route to Cosmopolitan Competence through intercultural engagement in Confucius Institutes, which is designed to raise awareness of cosmopolitan competence in the field of intercultural communication and provide a new practical model for achieving cosmopolitan competence through intercultural interaction. This model suggests not only a new way of engaging with others effectively but also a new route to developing a deeper understanding of others, and offers more nuanced insights into intercultural communication by adopting the postmodern paradigm of a critical cosmopolitan approach to interculturalism (Holliday, 2020b). First, although there are several extant studies in intercultural communication that explore diverse types of competence, such as plurilingual and pluricultural competence (Coste, Moore and Zarate, 2009), cross-cultural competence (Li, 2020), symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2006), and communicative competence (Savignon, 2018), few studies take cosmopolitan competence into consideration. Bardhan and Sobre-Denton (2015, p. 135) argue for the importance of examining cosmopolitanism with its cultural dimensions, 'given the proliferating intercultural spaces of interaction in our world', and they view cosmopolitanism as being 'well suited to illuminate the concept of interculturality within intercultural communication'. Thus, my study suggests that cosmopolitan competence is no less important than other competences in the field of intercultural

communication, and, therefore, merits further exploration. Second, the model provides a detailed and practical way to achieve cosmopolitan competence through intercultural interactions and engagements in one specific institution, i.e. the Confucius Institute. It can inspire the creation of similar models for different contexts in the field of intercultural communication aimed at searching for ways to develop cosmopolitan competence in individuals. For example, studies could examine the relationships between intercultural encounters, attitudes, and previous personal experience, and how the diverse relationships can impact the achievement of different levels of cosmopolitan competence. Studies could also look into the ways in which people develop cosmopolitan competence in different intercultural contexts, such as at international universities, in language classrooms, on intercultural social media platforms, etc.

In addition to the study's theoretical contributions to intercultural communication studies, its findings related to the first research question also offer new practical support for CIs, activity participants, and Chinese staff. As my research findings highlight, the Chinese staff tend to pay greater attention to the practical need to attract more participants to the activities (see Section 4.3.1.2). However, despite the apparent practical significance of this consideration, the findings indicate that the activities may be unable to attract more participants in this way in the long term. Many CI activities remain somewhat simple and only introduce Chinese culture at a surface level. Moreover, they seem to lose their appeal over time for the more experienced participants and for people who already possess a certain amount of knowledge about China. However, if CIs were to focus on offering activities only for people with a certain knowledge about China and Chinese culture, this would be unlikely to attract the general public, leading to lower attendance as people will feel it is not suitable for them to participate such activities. This is what happened in CI2, where the local director was left feeling rather disappointed by the poor level of attendance at events presenting new and niche activities. In this case, the local director seems to have failed to the make practical consideration that not everyone has a wealth of knowledge about or a strong existing interest in China and Chinese culture.

Faced with the above dilemma concerning CI activities, the findings relating to the areas of concordance and discordance between the activity participants and Chinese staff can offer some constructive ideas for improving activities in CIs. First, regardless of whether the CIs offer activities related to traditional culture, contemporary economics, cultural workshops, or academic talks, this study shows that almost all of the themes and contents of the activities were well received by the activity participants. However, the interactions and structures incorporated in the activities may require strategic adjustments. For example, when conducting activities relating to festival celebrations or cultural performance, more explanation should be provided about the history of the festivals and elements of the performance so as to facilitate the participants' understanding of Chinese culture. CIs should also explain the structures and processes involved in each activity in advance so that attendees can follow what is taking place during the activity. Second, considering that few misunderstandings derived from intercultural interaction were found (see Section 5.1.1.3), CIs should provide more opportunities for participants to interact and communicate with each other, such as through informal social activities online and offline. Third, since each CI has a unique focus, such as on business, Chinese dance, Chinese medicine, language teaching for local schools, the CIs need to strike a balance between the different types of activity, based on each CI's specific situation and focus.

Additionally, the proposed model incorporates three levels related to cultural understanding, as well as the process by which the three levels can come together to achieve individual cosmopolitan competence (see Figure 5.1). Drawing on the discussion of the model's three levels, some practical suggestions are made for CIs' long-term development to ensure better understanding. In my study, I argue that this better understanding is not only based on greater knowledge of or a changed attitude towards the Other, but also derives from thinking and acting so as to better understand oneself, the Other, and the world in a more cosmopolitan way. First, more innovative activities should be considered by CIs in order to break the stereotypical images of China. For example, they might try to combine traditional and contemporary elements together in a single activity, as was the case in the exhibition From gunpowder to rocket, organised by CI4, which displayed one of four great ancient Chinese inventions, gunpowder, and the development of aerospace

technologies in contemporary China. This kind of activity design can avoid the reinforcement of certain stereotypes about traditional China. Second, CIs should also have an open-minded attitude and create a friendly communication environment in which people can interact. CIs must openly embrace different views and actively engage in political discussion by organising academic activities. As P2 stressed: 'You are going to need political discussion if you're actually going to be able to control or make the desired inroads.' If CIs were to allow the expression of different perspectives in a friendly environment (e.g. by organising academic discussions with scholars holding different political views), they can become authentic platforms for intercultural engagement that can potentially 'reconcile complex, competing values and purposes' (Enslin, 2011). Lastly, considering the unique context of Britain, some local people may have limited previous knowledge and experience of Chinese culture and Chinese people; hence, CIs should take this into consideration by continuing to organise some general but interactive activities targeting such people. One good example of this kind of activity is the Sino-English corner organised by CI5. During this weekly activity, people can discuss certain hot topics, current affairs, and cultural phenomena from both countries and learn the related language. This form of exposure to the other culture and people is essential for achieving an individual level of cosmopolitan competence in the long term. It is also worth noting that the benefits to be gained from experiencing cosmopolitanism first-hand through cultural immersion should be considered when selecting and designing CI activities. Sampling and immersion styles of cosmopolitanism are indispensable stages that people must go through in order to achieve reflexive cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitan competence. Conversely, it is not possible to achieve cosmopolitan competence without exposure to others or without possessing a certain previous knowledge of others, as individuals need to critically combine them and reflect on them together. Therefore, some general and interactive activities with a critical awareness of avoiding reinforcing the existing stereotype are required to encourage the sampling and the immersive styles of cosmopolitanism. This could be achieved by organising such activities as exhibitions of Chinese cultural elements in malls or cultural workshops for those wishing to learn some specific skills.

6.2 Overview of research processes of my study

This section outlines aspects of the research processes of my study. Section 6.2.1 introduces the strengths of my study as a mixed-method research design, the unique context of CI studies, and the perspective of CI studies. Section 6.2.2 reflects on the limitations of my study in terms of fieldwork, research scope, and data analysis. Lastly, section 6.2.3 suggests some directions for futures studies on CIs and intercultural communication.

6.2.1 Strengths of my study

Considering the relative lack of information provided by extant studies regarding the activities and intercultural communication that take place in CIs, I chose a pragmatic worldview and sequential contribution model for conducting my fieldwork and successfully obtained both holistic and detailed data from the activity participants and Chinese staff. The sequential contribution model I selected is for preliminary quantitative inputs to the core qualitative model, in which the preliminary quantitative inputs can 'assist in the selection of data sources for core qualitative methods' (Morgan, 2014, p. 123). In my study, the data gathered from the online survey not only served to present a holistic and broad picture of the intercultural experiences from the activity participants' perspective, but also assisted in selecting representative activity participants from each CI for the stage-two interviews. In my study, I managed to interview 13 activity participants from diverse cultural backgrounds with different knowledge and understanding of China and obtained more nuanced information from the interviews. In addition, by adopting reflectivity techniques and continuously self-evaluating my positionality as an insider or outsider during the interviews, I was able to obtain a wealth of valuable information from the interviewees. For example, the activity participants were prepared to share their significant intercultural experiences in the UK with me as I am also an international student at a UK university. Similarly, the Chinese staff members felt comfortable discussing CI activities in depth and expressing personal thoughts about the activity organisation processes as I was once a Chinese language volunteer working for Hanban, and they therefore thought I may be familiar with some of the activities.

Within the context of research on CIs, this study is the first empirical work on intercultural communication in CI activities to be conducted in Britain. By distributing the online survey within 10 CIs, undertaking 30 semi-structured interviews (13 with activity participants and 17 with Chinese staff) in 8 CIs across Britain (2 in Wales, 3 in England, 3 in Scotland), this study obtained first-hand information about CI activities, intercultural experiences, and the level of cultural understanding of activity participants and Chinese staff in the British context. Although some empirical studies of CIs have been conducted, most of them focus on soft power (Gil, 2017; Hubbert, 2019), public diplomacy (Hartig, 2015a), and cultural diplomacy (Stambach, 2014; Gil, 2017; Liu, 2019a). As I noted earlier, these studies tend to treat the activities and cultural exchange that takes place in CIs as incidental facts, only mentioned in passing during the lengthy political discussions. Moreover, although one book on CIs explores the intercultural adjustments and experiences of CI Chinese teachers in the UK (Ye, 2017), no intercultural study has focused on CI activities, let alone from a comparative perspective. It is useful and important to know what is really happening in everyday CI activities and in people's intercultural experiences at CIs, since one of the functions of CIs is intercultural communication. Therefore, this study can potentially fill some of the voids in the research relating to our knowledge about CI activities and intercultural communication. Finally, as indicated in my ethics application statement, once I complete my PhD, I will produce a report for CIs and provide some suggestions and recommendations for further development of CI activities. The purpose of providing these suggestions and recommendations is not to promote a more positive image of China but to build a more positive and engaging environment in which people can achieve individual cosmopolitan competence in today's interconnected world.

In terms of the study's unique perspective, as I discussed in Section 2.4 after the review of the literature on CIs, this study goes beyond Eurocentrist and ethnocentrist constraints to take a wider, more holistic, and critical view of CIs and their activities in Britain. Some scholars point out the differences between the focus of CI studies in China and the Western world (Starr, 2009; An et al., 2014; Liu, 2019b); for instance, scholars in the English-speaking world tend to pay special attention to the external influences of CIs on political, economic, and cultural aspects, while domestic Chinese scholars tend to focus more on internal development and the influence on CIs

themselves. It can be argued that these divergent focuses might stem from different standpoints and purposes, different ideological structures and values, or different mindsets and perspectives. Based on my observations during this study, it seems there is little communication between these two perspectives, which potentially results in a failure to comprehensively understand CIs, particularly from other points of view. By employing the critical intercultural communication perspective (Nakayama and Halualani, 2010; Halualani, 2019), this study embraces the more holistic, complex, and multifaceted reasons behind the activity selection and operations of CIs, rather than scrutinising CIs mainly from a political perspective. By acknowledging, from a critical cosmopolitan perspective, the capacity of the activity participants and Chinese staff to self-problematise, self-transcend, and pluralise (Delanty, 2009), this study has attempted to overcome major political and cultural divisions and uncover some common ground through intercultural engagement with CI activities.

6.2.2 Limitations of my study

While most studies of CIs focus on political aspects such as soft power and public diplomacy at the government and institutional levels, this study takes a cultural perspective, whereby politics becomes a part of the discussion through the lens of critical intercultural communication. Nevertheless, I would like to have gained greater insight into the hidden political purposes of CIs from the interviews with Chinese staff. This may be due to the sensitivity of the topic for Chinese staff, due to self-censorship on their part, or because the nature of their work does not allow them to fully explore this topic. Even though much of the literature on CIs focuses on the political agendas of CIs, my study found little evidence of any hidden political or ideological infiltration at the interpersonal communication and engagement level.

Due to the time constraints imposed on this PhD research project, I was only able to explore the activities and intercultural engagement of CIs in the British context. Moreover, it only focuses on a comparative analysis of the intercultural experiences of the activity participants and those of the Chinese staff at CIs. Although the term "Chinese staff" in this study encompasses a rather broad concept, which includes local Chinese teachers and staff, no attempt was made to interview directors,

managers, and staff who had come from other countries in the partner universities in Britain. Hence, I am fully aware that the views and perspectives of the Chinese staff cohort may not represent those of staff from different backgrounds.

Finally, after analysing the data, I realised that the activity participants that I had identified based on the results of the online survey could not represent all activity participants at CIs. The reason for this was that, despite the great help I was afforded by the 10 CIs, after distributing the online survey through each CI's social media and email list, I did not receive as many responses as I had expected due to the smaller number of followers of CIs' official social media accounts. Based on my experience, it would appear that the CIs' social media activities are not attractive enough to publics, a point that I could not have anticipated prior to conducting my fieldwork. Hence, most of the activity participants that I recruited were individuals who only attended activities organised by CIs. However, based on the findings from analysing the interviews with Chinese staff, it can be seen that the CI activities do in fact attract a wider audience in various communities, such as in government, university departments, charities, and other institutes and sectors of society.

6.2.3 Directions for future studies

With respect to further studies on CIs, future attempts could take local staff's views into consideration, and conduct comparative analysis focused on Chinese staff and local staff in CIs. Moreover, further research in the field of CI studies should get in touch with more specific communities, sectors, groups, and people. For example, studies could examine intercultural engagement between CIs and government sectors/business, and the potential impacts on British society. Considering my study has only examined the situation in the British context, further research might explore the activities and intercultural communication in other countries, particularly in developing countries in Africa or South America. In addition, comparative research could be conducted in two or more countries. From the interview data, we learned that the organisation of CI activities in Western countries and in other regions may be completely different due to power and structural differences. Further research might usefully explore the roles of power and other macro factors in organisational

patterns in CI activities and search for similarities and differences in activity organisation and intercultural communication among different countries.

In the field of intercultural communication, I would stress the importance of investigating cosmopolitan competence in today's interconnected world. Hence, future studies on intercultural communication and cosmopolitanism could adapt my model for diverse contexts. Based on my findings and discussions, I have identified three factors that can potentially contribute to developing individual cosmopolitan competence: 1) exposure to other cultures, 2) being open minded and having a friendly attitude, and 3) forming connections with one's previous related experience and knowledge regarding the Other. Future research can look into other factors at a more individual level, such as the diverse personalities and traits of people that are shaped by people's culture, and how those factors can influence the development of an individual level of cosmopolitan competence. Moreover, future studies also can explore how these three factors interact with one another and lead to different impacts on individual cosmopolitan competence. Taking social media usage as an example, scholars could examine how people can actively move away from algorithmic recommendations and expose themselves to other information that is different from their existing perceptions, interests, and life experiences. Other studies could explore the diverse ways in which international students or transnational groups might connect their previous related experience in new cultural settings and the potential influence of these connections. Further studies could also investigate the strategies adopted by international universities to cultivate global citizenship and the relationship with cosmopolitan competence.

6.3 My development as a researcher

I can still remember my first day as a master's student in educational studies at the School of Education, listening to my supervisor Cathy introducing the programme in the school gym. As the programme leader at that time, she spoke of how students feel about themselves during the course. One comment by a student that particularly resonated with me at that time was: 'I think I had a kind of guilty feeling, wondering if I should be there at all, due to my background.' I also experience this kind of guilt every now and then during my PhD study, despite gaining an MSc degree with merit

as a postgraduate student in this programme in 2016. However, I am glad to say that the Imposter Syndrome I experienced at the start of my postgraduate studies has faded during my PhD journey. By reading extensively within my project-related areas as well as more broadly and by conducting research projects, I have finally found a way to conduct my research. Writing and revising my thesis has made me more confident about my English academic writing. By conducting fieldwork alone in Britain, I have become a more independent researcher. Moreover, presenting my study at several international conferences has enabled me to enjoy sharing ideas rather than feeling afraid to discuss them. Likewise, through my collaborative publications with fellow PhD students and my supervisor, I have obtained more knowledge about academic publishing. Each individual milestone has spurred me on to where I find myself now, at the end of my thesis research but also at the beginning of my next steps as a researcher, whatever they are to be.

The doctoral journey can be viewed as a "twin" process that consists of both a doctoral development journey and doctoral research journey, as my second supervisor discussed with me. Many things are involved in a doctoral development journey, such as identity formation, personal growth, personalised socialisation experience, psychological wellness, and professional development, as well as specific aspects of the doctoral research journey, including disciplinary knowledge, thesis writing, and research skills (Elliot, 2021). Looking back on these two journeys, despite some ups and downs along the way, I believe I have achieved a considerable level of growth in every dimension. On the top of that, after experiencing birth accidents, parenting stress, graduation pressure, health problems, and lockdown life in 2020, I have come to realise how important it is to retain a healthy body and mind. I am very grateful for the strong support and extra time provided to me by my two supervisors so that I could complete this journey.

Finally, many genuine scholars that I have encountered throughout this journey have also guided my development as an authentic researcher, and they have served as role models in my academic life. Even as the world and our lives become ever more closely linked, it seems that we are living in an increasingly divided world because of a failure to listen and engage with people that different from us. In this sense, I agree with the US sociologist, the former director of the Fairband Centre for Chinese

Studies at Harvard University, Professor Ezra Feivel Vogel's comment in a Thirteen invitations interview (Thirteen invitations, 2021), when he said: 'Human civilisation is not just about business interests, economic growth or new technology breakthrough, it's a broader conception. It's kind of that the intellectual development of trying to think a big picture of what is happening.' This view has inspired me and will continue to inspire me to pursue the truth as a researcher and our common humanity.

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Appendix One: The 28 Confucius Institutes in Britain (in chronological order)

Name of CI	Date	British university	Chinese university
1. London CI	2005	SOAS University of London	Beijing Foreign Studies University
2. CI at University of Manchester	2006	University of Manchester	Beijing Normal University
3. CI for Scotland	2006	University of Edinburgh	Fudan University
4. CI for Business London	2006	The London School of Economics and Political Science	Tsinghua University
5. CI at the University of Sheffield	2006	University of Sheffield	Beijing Language and Culture University & Nanjing University
6. IOE CI for Schools	2006	University College London, Institute of Education	Peking University
7. CI at UWTSD	2006	University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD)	Beijing Union University
8. Cardiff CI	2007	Cardiff University	Xiamen University
9. CI for Traditional Chinese Medicine	2007	London South Bank University	University of Chinese Medicine & Harbin Normal University
10. Nottingham CI	2007	University of Nottingham	University of Shanghai
11. UCLan CI	2008	University of Central Lancashire	Beijing International Studies University
12. CI at University of Liverpool	2008	University of Liverpool	Xi'an Jiaotong University
13. CI for Scotland Schools	2010	University of Strathclyde	Tianjin Education Commission
14. CI at Lancaster University	2011	University of Lancaster	South China University of Technology
15. CI at University of Glasgow	2011	University of Glasgow	Nankai University
16. University of Southampton CI	2011	University of Southampton	Xiamen University
17. CI for Dance and Performance	2011	Goldsmiths, University of London	Beijing Dance Academy
18. CI at University of Newcastle	2012	University of Newcastle	Xiamen University

19. CI at Bangor University	2012	Bangor University	University of Political Science and Law
20. Business CI at the University of Leeds	2012	University of Leeds	University of International Business & Economics
21. CI of the University of Aberdeen	2012	University of Aberdeen	Wuhan University
22. Edge Hill University CI	2012	Edge Hill University	Chongqing Normal University
23. De Montfort University CI	2013	De Montfort University	University of Science and Technology Beijing
24. CI for Business and Communication	2014	Heriot-Watt University	Tianjin University of Science and Technology
25. CI at Queen Mary University of London	2015	Queen Mary University of London	Shanghai University of Finance and Economics
26. CI for publication	2015	Oxford Brooks University	Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press
27. CI at University of Hull	2016	University of Hull	Tianjin Normal University
28. CI at Coventry University	2016	University of Coventry	Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics

Appendix Two: The process involved in contacting the 28 Confucius Institutes in Britain

CIs	Contacted gatekeeper	Result	Time
CI1	Both directors	Approved	30/11/2018
CI2	Local director	Approved	27/08/2018
CI3	Local director	Approved	6/10/2018
CI4	Local director	Approved	9/10/2018
CI5	Local director	Approved	6/11/2018
CI6	Local director	Approved	16/10/2018
CI7	Local director	Approved	31/10/2018
CI8	Local director	Approved	31/10/2018
CI9	Local director	Approved	29/10/2018
CI10	Local director	Approved	22/10/2018
CI11	Local director	Rejected	22/10/2018
CI12	General email	Rejected	9/10/2018
CI13	Local director	Rejected	29/10/2018
CI14	General email	Rejected	8/11/2018
CI15	Local director	Approved without further information	N/A
CI16	Local director	Willing to help without further information	N/A
CI17	Local director	No reply	N/A
CI18	Local director	No reply	N/A
CI19	Local director	Confirmed busy recently	5/11/2018
CI20	Local director	No reply	N/A
CI21	Local director	No reply	N/A
CI22	Local director	No reply	N/A
CI23	General email	No reply	N/A
CI24	Local director	No reply	N/A

CI25	General email	No reply	N/A
CI26	Local director	Replied without further information	13/11/2018
CI27	Local director	No reply	N/A
CI28	Local director	Replied without further information	31/10/2018

Appendix Three: Coding examples employed in the online survey data analysis

Variable	SPSS Variable name	Coding instructions
Occupation	Occupation	1 = Student
		2 = Teacher
		3 = Other occupations
		4 = Retired
		5 = Unemployed
Age	Age	1 = Below 20
		2 = 20-40
		3 = 40-60
		4 = Above 60
language learner in CI	Lan learner	1 = Yes
		2 = No
		3 = Used to be
Level of your mandarin	Level mandarin	1 = Don't know
		2 = know a little
		3 = know some
		4 = Can speak fluently

Appendix Four: Coding examples employed in the interview data analysis

Interview extract	Codes
Participant: Yeah, I am America, so you, when I was growing up in the States, I heard a lot about China, it always seems like a bit of mystery, it wasn't very well understood. So and now you hear a lot how China is this emerging superpower, and how people are scared they are gonna be dominate country in the world, you know what I mean. So I just wasn't too sure about China I guess, I knew it was an emerging country and you hear about communalism as well **Interviewer:** Once you involved in these activities, what's your image and impression about (CI)? **Participant:** Well, the first thing you learn the sort of Chinese people are very friendly and nice, at least the one who work in the CI. So I think seeing how open and welcoming they were, and how eager they were to share their culture, was sort of eye-opening cause again sometimes you hear about China people used people being quite secret and quiet, but that wasn't hasn't been the experience at all. Anything it's very interesting to see how Chinese people view China cause it's very different to how westerns are told to view China like the narrative... **Interviewer:** Can you give me some examples? **Participant:** So, ok when I met to Chinese people that (unclear) like America, China seems like a big superpower, it gonna to take over the world all these things. Most people are pretty surprised, most Chinese people are pretty surprised about that, and they don't sort of see China in the same way, (I: they don't think so) that so power, yeah, in sort of you know, (unclear) level as the United States, which was surprising. **Interviewer:** OK, as you know, Uni.6 has a CI, and in the UK, there are 29 (CIs) recently, and in America there are more CIs, so what do you think about this kind of burgeoning development of CI around the world? **Participant:** I think it's really a good idea, and I think it's a really good way to spread the word about China and to kind of put the sort of put more correct information there and make China seem like more accessible place to go. Yeah, some other thought about soft power initiatives you hear about China doing, but I think it's a good way to make marketing places.	• Personal connection and life trajectory • Views of China from the participants (before) • Views of China from the West • Activity experiences • Impact on intercultural communication • Views of CIs from the participants

Appendix Five: Online Survey Questions

Section A Personal and background information
1. Do you agree to participate to this study?

Yes ☐

No   ☐

2. What is your current occupation?

☐ Student

☐ Teacher

☐ Other occupations

☐ Retired

☐ Unemployed

3. How old are you?

☐ Below 20

☐ 20-40

☐ 40-60

☐ Above 60

4. Are you a Chinese language learner in Confucius Institute (CI)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Used to be

5. What is the level of your Mandarin Chinese language?

☐ Don't know how to speak Chinese

☐ Know a little of Chinese

☐ Know some of Chinese

☐ Can speak Chinese fluently

6. How many times have you been to China?

☐ Never

☐ 1-2 times

☐ More than twice

7. What is your nationality?

☐ China

☐ UK

☐ European countries

☐ Other countries (Please specify) _____

8. Which one do you think is the most appropriate definition of CI (Confucius Institute) ? *One answer only*

☐ Government related organisation

☐ University related department

☐ Chinese cultural organisation

☐ Chinese academic organisation

☐ Chinese language organisation

☐ Social organisation

☐ Other (Please specify) _____

Section B General information about the activity that you attended
9. What kind of activity/activities have you participated in with CI? *Please tick all that apply*

☐ Language learning events (e.g. Language corner etc.)

☐ Festival celebrations (e.g. Confucius day, Chinese New Year or Mid-autumn festival etc.)

☐ Cultural workshop (e.g. Calligraphy, Chinese Brush Painting, traditional dance)

☐ Academic event (e.g. Lectures, seminars, conference etc.)

☐ Cultural performances and exhibitions (e.g. Theatre, drama, concert, exhibitions, shows etc.)

☐ Visit China activity (e.g. Summer or winter camp etc.)

☐ Competition activity (e.g. Chinese bridge etc.)

☐ Online activity (e.g. Online CI learning, social media etc.)

☐ Chinese film screening

☐ Others (please specify)_____

10.   How many times have you attended CI's activity?

☐ 1-2

☐ 3-4

☐ More than four times

11.   How did you know about the activity/activities of CI? (such as university official social media, CI's email, friends etc.) *Please mention them all*

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12.   Which language was mainly used in CI's activity/activities that you attended?

☐ Chinese

☐ English

☐ It depends on the activity

Section C Your personal views of CI's activity
13.   Which is the main interest that attracted you to Chinese culture? *Please tick all that apply*

☐ Interested in traditional culture of China (e.g. traditional art or ancient philosophy etc.)

☐ Interested in contemporary culture of China (e.g. contemporary art or innovation etc.)

☐ Interested in economic development of China

☐ Interested in political culture of China

☐ Interested in Chinese language

☐ Interested in social life of China

☐ Other (Please specify) _____

14. **What is your main purpose in attending CI's activity/ activities? (e.g. work related, study related, for curiosity, for travel to China)**

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15. **Which part did you like most about the activity/ activities that you attended?** *One answer only*

☐ The activity themes

☐ The content of activities

☐ The interactions during the activities

☐ The structure and process of the activities

☐ None of these

☐ Other (Please specify) _____

16. **Which partdo you not like?** *One answer only*

☐ The activity themes

☐ The content of activities

☐ The interaction during the activities

☐ The structure and process of the activities

☐ None of these

☐ Other (Please specify) _____

17. What have you known via CIs' activity/activities that you attended? *Please tick all that apply.*

☐ Symbols - Specific symbols like words, gestures, pictures, objects that represent Chinese culture

☐ Heroes - Specific persons, real or imaginary that represent Chinese culture

☐ Rituals - Collective social activities that carried out in a predetermined fashion in China

☐ Values - Represent cultural preconceptions about what is desirable/undesirable in China.

☐ I have no idea

☐ Other (Please specify) _____

18. What have you gained via CI's activity/activities that you attended? *Please tick all that apply.*

☐ Knowledge - Enriched cultural knowledge of China

☐ Attitudes - Improved cultural understanding and attitudes toward China

☐ Skills - Learned some skills that are related to China and Chinese culture

☐ Engagement - A desire to further engagement with China and Chinese culture in the future

☐ I have no idea

19.   Have your perceptions about China changed after you attending to CI's activity/activities?

☐ Yes, it stimulated positive feelings

☐ Yes, it stimulated negative feelings

☐ Stayed the same

☐ I don't know

20.   Did the outcomes meet your prior expectations? If so, in what way? *(Please complete the sentence to explain)*

☐ Yes, because _____

☐ No, because_____

☐ To some extent, because_____

Section D Your furture expectations of CI's activity
21.   How would you like to receive information about the activities you might be interested with CI in furture? *Please tick all that apply*

☐ University official social media

☐ CI official social media (Facebook, Twitter etc)

☐ CI email notification

☐ Friends or CI staff

☐ Other related communities

☐ Other (Please specify) _____

22.   What kind of activity/ activities in CI do you want to attend in future?

Please tick all that apply.

☐ Language learning events (e.g. Language corner etc.)

☐ Festival celebrations (e.g. Confucius day, Chinese New Year or Mid-autumn festival etc.)

☐ Cultural workshop (e.g. Calligraphy, Chinese Brush Painting, traditional dance)

☐ Academic event (e.g. Lectures, seminars, conference etc.)

☐ Cultural performances and exhibitions (e.g. Theatre, drama, concert, exhibitions, shows etc.)

☐ Visit China activity (e.g. Summer or winter camp etc.)

☐ Competition activity (e.g. Chinese bridge etc.)

☐ Online activity (e.g. Online CI learning, social media etc.)

☐ Chinese film screening

☐ Others (please specify)_____

☐ None of them I want to attend in future

23. **Which one of the following best describes your desrie to attend the activity in furture?** *One answer only*

☐ I wish to know about the symbols that can represent Chinese culture, such as words, gestures, dance, pictures and objects.

☐ I wish to know about well-known persons who can represent Chinese culture, both from history and the present age.

☐ I wish to know how Chinese people enagae in their popular culture and everyday social activities.

☐ I wish to know about Chinese peoples' way of thinking of cultural preconceptions and values.

☐ Other (Please specify) _____

24. **Which of the following do you want to obtain via CI's activity/activities in future?** *Please tick all that apply*

☐ Enrich my cultural knowledge of China

☐ Improve my cultural understanding and attitudes toward China

☐ Learn some skills that are related to China and Chinese culture

☐ Engage with China and Chinese culture in the future

☐ Other (Please specify) _____

Section F Conclusion
25. **Do you have any comment to CI or to this study?**

26. Which CI organised the activity/ activities that you attended?

☐ CI based on_____ (which university, e.g. University of Glasgow)

27. I wish to contact a small number of respondents to invite you to a follow-up interview, if you would be happy to be interviewed, please leave your email address below

☐ Yes, my email address is _____

☐ No, thank you.

* All respondents who provide an email address will be entered into a lucky draw to get a chance to receive the a Chinese souvenir from the Palace Museum (the Forbidden City). Please note that your email address will solely be used for contracting you in relation to this research study.

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey!

Appendix Six: Interview Questions

Part 1 Interview questions for the Chinese staff

- **Biographical and background information**

  1. Can you briefly introduce your work in the Confucius Institute/ in China?

  2. What has motived you to work in the UK?

- **The activities**

  3. What kind of activities did the CI organise every year?

  4. Is there any stipulated regulation about these activities? If so, please explain.

  5. Who organise these activities in your CI?

  6. Who are the participants?

  7. What did the CI do to adapt to the local environment (university, culture, etc)?

  8. In your view, which of these activities is the most successful one? Why?

  9. What do you think participants learned from these CI activities?

  10. Was there any awkward moment, misunderstanding or even moment of conflict that happened during the activity? Please tell me more about it.

- **Expectations**

  11. What are your future expectations and suggestions in relation to CI activities?

  12. Do you think CIs have made an impact on UK society? Why or why not?

  13. What is your opinion of the different perspectives of CIs in Western society?

Part 2 Interview questions for the activity participants

- **Biographical and background information**

  1. Can you briefly introduce yourself? (Occupation, interests, hometown, interest in learning Chinese etc.)

  2. Have you ever been to China? Please tell me more about it.

  3. Where did you learn the Chinese & English course?

- **The activities**

  4. How did you find out about the Confucius Institute in the first place?

  5. What do you think the Confucius Institute is about?

  6. What kind of activities have you attended in the CI?

  7. Do you think the activity is attractive? If so, please explain.

  8. Was there any awkward moment, misunderstanding or even moment of conflict that happened during the activity? If so, please explain.

  9. What did you learn from the CI activities?

- **Expectations**

  10. Which activity do you want to attend the most in the future?

  11. Do you think CIs have made an impact on UK society? Why or why not?

  12. What are your future expectations in relation to CI activities?

Appendix Seven: Plain Language Statements

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

Plain Language Statement - Questionnaire

Study title: The impact of intercultural engagements on cultural understanding via Confucius Institutes (CIs) in Britain.

Researcher: Liexu Cai, l.cai.1@research.gla.ac.uk, School of Education, University of Glasgow

Supervisors: Dr Catherine Fagan, Catherine.Fagan@glasgow.ac.uk

Dr Dely Elliot, Dely.Elliot@glasgow.ac.uk

You are being invited to take part in a 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

Although Britain has the most number of CIs in Europe, i.e. a total of 28 CIs that are in partnership with universities from both China and Britain, there is no comprehensive study undertaken to date that focuses on intercultural engagement arising from the CI activities organised in Britain. Since intercultural communication has become increasingly important in this pluralistic and multicultural world nowadays, this study aims to explore the different views on cultural engagements from both the CI organisers and the cultural activity participants' aspects, to achieve the goal of better cultural understanding for everyone involved.

Participation criteria and voluntary participation

If you are 18 years old or above and have attended/ participated in any kind of cultural activity via Confucius Institutes in Britain, we would like to invite you to take part. It will take about 8 minutes to complete this survey. Please note that participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate or withdraw from participating at any point and without giving a reason.

Confidentiality and research involvement

No identifiable information is requested from you except email to help arrange the follow-up interview if you express willingness to take part in the face-to-face or Skype interview component of this research (this will likewise to be used in contacting participants who win in the raffle draw). Personal data (i.e. names and postal addresses) acquired solely for the purpose of sending gift will be appropriately destroyed/deleted immediately after the gifts are successfully distributed to the winning participants. All data obtained from you as research participants during the course of my PhD research will be carefully safeguarded. All personal data (both electronic and paper versions) will be deleted from all computers or shredded at the end of my PhD research study. Data are to be held for 10 years in the University of Glasgow following completion of the research project to enable future publications. Participants are being made aware that data may be shared/archived or re-used in accordance with Data Sharing Guidance. Confidentiality will be respected subject to legal constraints and professional guidelines.

This survey will require you to answer a set of questions relating to your aims, purposes, expectations and outcomes to attend the cultural activity/ activities organised by Confucius Institutes in Britain.

Incentives

There will be a lucky draw of 12 gifts once the data collection is completed; all the gifts are exclusively from the Palace Museum (the Forbidden City) in China. Of these gifts, the first prize (one item) is the New Year "Good Luck" package; the second prize (two items) are the "Waterlilies" watches; the third prize (three items) are the "Crown" series of canvas handbags, and participation prizes (six items) are the thematic notebooks.

Further contact information

This research study has been reviewed by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. For any queries, Please do not hesitate to contact me, Liexu – l.cai.1@research.gla.ac.uk, or my supervisors Cathy Fagan – Catherine.Fagan@glasgow.ac.uk and Dely Elliot – Dely.Elliot@glasgow.ac.uk Additionally, if you want further information, please contact College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston - Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

Plain Language Statement – Interview with activity participants

Study title: The impact of intercultural engagements on cultural understanding via Confucius Institutes (CIs) in Britain.

Researcher: Liexu Cai, l.cai.1@research.gla.ac.uk, School of Education, University of Glasgow

Supervisors: Dr Catherine Fagan, Catherine.Fagan@glasgow.ac.uk

Dr Dely Elliot, Dely.Elliot@glasgow.ac.uk

You are being invited to take part in a 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

Although Britain has the most number of CIs in Europe, i.e. a total of 28 CIs that are in partnership with universities from both China and Britain, there is no comprehensive study undertaken to date that focuses on intercultural engagement arising from the CI activities organised in Britain. Since intercultural communication has become increasingly important in this pluralistic and multicultural world nowadays, this study can shed light on the effective intercultural communication and understanding between China and Britain. Therefore, this study aims to explore the different views on cultural engagements from both the CI organisers and the cultural activity participants' aspects, to achieve the goal of better cultural understanding for everyone involved.

Participation criteria

This study will involve a maximum of 10 participants for the semi-structured interview. You will be invited to take part in this study if you meet the following criteria: 1) you completed the questionnaire, 2) you have given consent to take part in the follow-up interview.

Voluntary participation

Please note that participation is completely voluntary. Each semi-structured interview will require approximately 30 minutes and take place in a quiet café near the university (or alternatively via Skype). Even after deciding to participate, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. This includes withdrawing any data previously supplied. The general report of this study will be available on request in the future.

Confidentiality

All data obtained from you as research participants during the course of my PhD research will be carefully safeguarded and will be stored in the University of Glasgow's secure server, i.e. OneDrive. I will use pseudonyms when referring to you in my PhD thesis and any publication arising from the research. If you are taking part in a Skype interview, it will only be recorded for the purpose of transcribing the interview leading to the data analysis of transcripts. Video recordings will only be accessed by the main researcher. Personal data (i.e. names and postal addresses) will be appropriated destroyed/deleted immediately after the gifts are successfully distributed to the winning participants. Any remaining personal data (both electronic and paper versions) will be deleted from all computers or shredded at the end of my PhD research study. Anonymised data are to be held for 10 years in the University of Glasgow following completion of the research project to

enable future publications. Participants are being made aware that data may be shared/archived or re-used in accordance with Data Sharing Guidance. Confidentiality will be respected subject to legal constraints and professional guidelines.

Ethics review and further contact details

This research study has been reviewed by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. For any queries, Please do not hesitate to contact me, Liexu – l.cai.1@research.gla.ac.uk, or my supervisors Cathy Fagan – Catherine.Fagan@glasgow.ac.uk and Dely Elliot – Dely.Elliot@glasgow.ac.uk Additionally, if you want further information, please contact College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston - Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

Plain Language Statement - Interview with Chinese staff

Study title: The impact of intercultural engagements on cultural understanding via Confucius Institutes (CIs) in Britain.

Researcher: Liexu Cai, l.cai.1@research.gla.ac.uk, School of Education, University of Glasgow

Supervisors: Dr Catherine Fagan, Catherine.Fagan@glasgow.ac.uk

Dr Dely Elliot, Dely.Elliot@glasgow.ac.uk

You are being invited to take part in a 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

Although Britain has the most number of CIs in Europe, i.e. a total of 28 CIs that are in partnership with universities from both China and Britain, there is no comprehensive study undertaken to date that focuses on intercultural engagement arising from the CI activities organised in Britain. Since intercultural communication has become increasingly important in this pluralistic and multicultural world nowadays, this study can shed light on the effective intercultural communication and understanding between China and Britain. Therefore, this study aims to explore the different views on cultural engagements from both the CI organisers and the cultural activity participants' aspects, to achieve the goal of better cultural understanding for everyone involved.

Participation criteria

This study will involve a maximum of 20 participants for the semi-structured interview. You will be invited to take part in this study if you meet the following criteria: 1) you are a Chinese teacher or staff in CIs, not a Chinese volunteer, 2) you have worked at CIs for at least one year, 3) you are familiar with the cultural activities in this specific CI.

Voluntary participation

Please note that participation is completely voluntary. Each semi-structured interview will require approximately 30 minutes and take place in the Confucius Institute's premises / a quiet café nearby (or alternatively via Skype). Even after deciding to participate, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. This includes withdrawing any data previously supplied. The general report of this study will be available on request in the future.

Confidentiality

All data obtained from you as research participants during the course of my PhD research will be carefully safeguarded and will be stored in the University of Glasgow's secure server, i.e. OneDrive. I will use pseudonyms when referring to you and the specific CI in my PhD thesis and any publication arising from the research. If you are taking part in a Skype interview, it will only be recorded for the purpose of transcribing the interview leading to the data analysis of transcripts. Video recordings will only be accessed by the main researcher. All personal data (both electronic and paper versions) will be deleted from all computers or shredded at the end of my PhD research study. Anonymised data are to be held for 10 years in the University of

Glasgow following completion of the research project to enable future publications. Participants are being made aware that data may be shared/archived or re-used in accordance with Data Sharing Guidance. Confidentiality will be respected subject to legal constraints and professional guidelines.

Ethics review and further contact details

This research study has been reviewed by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. For any queries, or request for the final copy of the study, Please do not hesitate to contact me, Liexu – l.cai.1@research.gla.ac.uk, or my supervisors Cathy Fagan – Catherine.Fagan@glasgow.ac.uk and Dely Elliot – Dely.Elliot@glasgow.ac.uk Additionally, if you want further information, please contact College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston - Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

Appendix Eight: Consent Forms

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

Online Survey Consent Form

Title of Project: The impact of intercultural engagements on cultural understanding via Confucius Institutes (CIs) in Britain

Name of Researcher: Liexu Cai

Supervisors: Dr Catherine Fagan and Dr Dely Elliot

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement 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. In addition, I give consent regarding:

- The questionnaire data may be used in future academic research and publications (both print and online), according to the ethics guidelines.

- The data for future re-use may available from the researchers by personal request.

- The questionnaire data held for 10 years in accordance to the University Code of Good Practice in Research - https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_490311_en.pdf

I agree to take part in this research study ☐

I do not agree to take part in this research study ☐

"Agree" must be ticked to allow access to the online questionnaire page.

"Do not agree" leads to a "thank you for your time" page.

Interview Consent Form

Title of Project: The impact of intercultural engagements on cultural understanding via Confucius Institutes (CIs) in Britain

Name of Researcher: Liexu Cai

Supervisors: Dr Catherine Fagan and Dr Dely Elliot

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement 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 acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym in any publications in arising from the research.

In addition, I give consent regarding:

● Interviews being audio-taped
● The data for future re-use may available from the researchers by personal request.
● Research data held for 10 years in accordance to the university Code of Good Practice in Research –https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_490311_en.pdf

I agree to take part in this research study   □

I do not agree to take part in this research study   □

Name of Participant …………………………………………

Signature …………………………………………   Date …………………………………

Name of Researcher …………………………………………

Signature …………………………………………   Date …………………………………

Appendix Nine: Ethics Approval Letter

10 August 2018

Dear Liexu Cai,

Project Title: **The impact of intercultural engagements on cultural understanding via Confucius Institutes (CIs) in Britain**

Application No:

The College Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. It is happy therefore to approve the project, subject to the following conditions:

- Research can only begin once permissions have been obtained from the University of Glasgow.
- Project end date: _ 09/01/2021
- The data should be held securely for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project, or for longer if specified by the research funder or sponsor, in accordance with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research:

(http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_227599_en.pdf)

- The research should be carried out only on the sites, and/or with the groups and using the methods defined in the application.
- Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted for reassessment as an amendment to the original application. The *Request for Amendments to an Approved Application* form should be used:

http://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/

Yours sincerely,

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