LIVING THROUGH AMBIGUITY

The Cross-Cultural Experience of Chinese Students in London

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Declaration and Word Count

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Abstract

This thesis tells the stories of four mature Chinese students' journey to the West. It explores their expectations, discoveries, frustrations and dilemmas during their one year postgraduate study in London. In view of the recent trend of mainland Chinese students coming to study in Britain, I examine what they encountered upon arrival and how they coped with an unfamiliar environment. Central to my concern is how they perceived and interpreted their experiences.

Ethnography and narrative analysis served as methodologies for this inquiry. In-depth interviews were conducted and participants' narrative accounts subsequently analyzed. The combination of approaches was innovative as well as effective in unlocking how the impact of their journey influenced the construction of their identities. The study reveals that newcomers faced difficulties and ambiguities in academic, social and cultural dimensions. How they negotiated conflicting values and sought self-understanding was highlighted in the analysis. Findings from the research raise two questions: on a practical level, what support can be provided for Chinese students in their transition to the British education system? I emphasize that their predicaments are not adequately acknowledged at the moment. On a theoretical level, I argue that, when theorizing postmodern identity, the socio-cultural and political contexts in which individuals are historically positioned should not be neglected. Depending on who and where you are, different levels of flexibility are required for new mobility.

This study shows that participants' coming to terms with their cross-cultural experience involves active engagements in making the adjustment and constructing reflexively meanings out of it. The research concludes that meeting Chinese students' need for support is as important as the strategy of recruiting them. UK higher education institutions should respond to the new challenge so that possible change can take place to improve the quality of their educational and cultural experience.

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PART ONE   BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Chapter One: Autobiography and the Origin of the Inquiry

Every voyage can be said to involve a re-siting of boundaries. The travelling self is here both the self that moves physically from one place to another, following 'public routes and beaten tracks' within a mapped movement, and the self that embarks on an undetermined journeying practice, having constantly to negotiate between home and abroad, native culture and adopted culture, or more creatively speaking, between a here, a there, and an elsewhere.

<div align="right">Trinh T. Minh-ha (1994:9)</div>

1.1 The Enigma of Arrival

No journey is started without a reason. Mine was an escape from the mundane routine and the issues I no longer wanted to tackle or tolerate. I desired change, or rather, another way of being. When everything was predictable and nothing controllable, I chose to flee rather than to fight though it was never an easy decision, quitting my job and leaving my parents behind. For I by no means possessed an adventurer's spirit and was then bound by the traditional thought that one with elderly parents to look after should not travel far away (fumu zai, bu yuanyou). But their unfailing support as always eased my feelings of guilt. I believe, after careful considerations, I would be brave enough to face a future of uncertainty with both risks and possibilities. Due to a combination of luck and effort, in particular the timely completion of my MA degree and the obtaining of an ORS award,

my dream eventually came true on 28 August, 2003 with a ten-hour flight landing me at a destination that in my imagination was the country of beauty, peace and freedom.

Once on British soil, or rather in London, I discovered that the culture shock I was experiencing was much more intense than prepared for. I felt enormously handicapped and disoriented. I had thought that learning and teaching English for years would have been an advantage for me to cope with an unfamiliar environment. In fact, the beginning of my life in a new country was characterized by anxiety, frustration and confusion. I felt like a stranger in Metropolitan London and suffered a deep sense of homelessness. Books written by such writers as Eva Hoffman, Nabokov, and V.S. Naipaul provided insights into my experience and were spiritual sources for my psychoanalysis and self-therapy. Newly acquired words like displacement, Orientalism, and otherness contributed to the apprehension of my circumstances. The necessity of giving coherence to my life and clarifying the quandary of 'where am I from' and 'who am I' was essential for the newcomer's psyche and my 'sojourn in the wilderness' (Krupnik, 1983), only this time from a different vantage point, the perfect paradox of attaining distance to understand the familiar.

1.2 Family Background

I was born in the early 1970s in a small village in the northeast of China. My parents both being the eldest of two extended families lived in harsh conditions during their childhood and adolescence. In spite of hardship, my father managed to go to a Marine college in the

coastal city of Dalian. However, his education was cut short abruptly because it was said that Chiang Kai-shek who escaped to Taiwan in 1949 was going to make a comeback attack on the mainland. So my father was enlisted at the age of 20 first to the Navy and then the Army for in total eight years.

Apparently the war never started and the prime time of my father's youth was gone. But the sacrifice in a way saved him from the Great Famine, which occurred between 1959 and 1961 due to both natural and political misfortunes. The whole nation suffered a fatal starvation and around 30 million people died of hunger and malnutrition. Nevertheless, the authorities did realize that soldiers would not be able to defend the country if they went hungry. Finally the army was dismissed and in return my father was offered a job as a mechanical engineer in the same city.

Similarly, my mother was also forced to drop out of high school. When millions of people in the country were desperately looking for anything edible, it was unlikely for one to sit in a classroom and amass knowledge. She was later lucky enough to be trained as an accountant in the local government. My father got to know my mother through the matchmaker. On the day they got married, my father simply picked up my mother by bike from her home to his, a quite unceremonious process but which was what many others did at that difficult time. My parents started their own family life from scratch and for a considerable period they lived under great financial pressure.

With my brother and me coming along, everyday life became extremely difficult for my

mother alone in the countryside while my father worked away in the city and only travelled home during weekends, especially in winter times when she had to draw water from a well with all the slippery ice around it. There was no bus transportation then between Dalian and the village, and a visit home had to take my father four or five hours by riding a bike. He had no choice but to transfer to a salt refinery near home so that he could help my mother out. By doing this, he lost the chance of developing a good career in the city and I believe he was never really happy in his new position, though he was honoured many times for good performance.

Now thirty years has passed and life, especially in terms of living conditions, has changed dramatically. My brother and I have grown up, graduated from college and found good jobs. It seems that my parents have fulfilled their task and are quite content with their life in retirement, taking care of an orchard and two dogs. They have things to be proud of, well-educated children, a self-built house and respect from the neighbours. Years of struggle and hard work seem to have paid off. The bitter past turns somehow into sweet memories. Sometimes they mention what they have endured, only to remind us not to forget the past and cherish the present. The difficult side of their life does not lead to any sense of cynicism or pessimism in them. The only thing that worries me is that they should not feel hugely at a loss when suddenly having so much free time at hand, for hedonism is a philosophy they never had a chance to cultivate since life to them means more to sacrifice than to satisfy.

From my parents, I learned honesty, kindness and the value of good life coming from

hard work. For them, today should be better than yesterday as long as you work hard for it. However, somewhere in my mind I am convinced that there is something important missing in their life which I neither want to lose nor to regret until too late. There is no denying the truth that their generation was the victim of a tragic time, when life did not seem to have enough options. They had endured the unendurable thrown at them ruthlessly and unfairly. The political and socio-economic conditions left them with no other choice but to struggle for survival. There was no possibility of developing their educational potential and fulfilling personal dreams. While recognizing the constraining forces that still more or less exist in my time, I do believe that my generation should have more freedom and life chances in the pursuit of happiness.

1.3 Childhood and School Education

The village where I spent my childhood had a beautiful name, 'the village of Fragrant Rice', just like the same name I found when reading *the Dream of the Red Chamber*. The story goes that there used to be vast green rice fields before the land went dry. The scene remained only in my imagination. In reality, villagers grew corn and a variety of other plants for a living. The entire yield belonged to the collective before being distributed equally to families. My memory about the landscape and this very early period of life was bleak and vague just like all the black and white photos took then.

Nevertheless, poverty did not necessarily prevent a child's chance of embracing nature and developing a sense of freedom. Both fully occupied with work, it was impossible for

my parents to give us the kind of attention and care like today's parents. For the most part, my brother and I were left alone, so we roamed around, visiting surrounding fields and had lots of adventures. In summer we went swimming in a pond or fishing in the river. Winter was the season for skating, using a self-made skateboard. Sometimes we travelled far away to pick mushrooms in the woods or knock oysters off rocks at the seaside.

But there was a place I never dared to go near. It was the old village temple named 'Golden Dragon' situated on the middle of the hill. It was built during the Qing Dynasty by a local squire, but badly damaged during the Cultural Revolution. In my child's mind, I believed the place was possessed by a huge snake hidden in the broken statues, slanting tombstones and high grass. Only recently, the local government has had the building restored and ever since it has become a place where villagers can worship gods and pray for a promising harvest, safe fishing out at sea, good health or fertility. As an educated and modern-minded daughter, I have never made negative comments in front of my parents about these local activities. I know I cannot simply call that superstition or ignorance. There is nothing wrong for people to have something to believe in and hope for.

The most exciting thing in my childhood memory was the annual Spring Festival. We counted the days and waited eagerly for it to come. This special holiday meant good food and new clothes for children, which were rarely obtainable most time of the year. My mother would buy a piece of red flannel cloth and ask my aunt to make an outfit for me.

Red was always the colour chosen, for it was auspicious and would bring happiness and good luck. Most importantly, on the first day of the Festival we children would get up early, put on our brand new dresses and go to relatives' and neighbours' houses, saying 'Happy Spring Festival' to them. They would treat us to sweets and occasionally with a small gift of money.

Looking back, the village, in spite of all the fun in the eyes of an innocent child, has never been a place I wish to live in forever. I remember I used to look into the starry night sky, wondering what my future would be and what the outside world looked like. As I grew older, I began to recognize its isolation and deprivation. I feared to live the rest of my life on this barren land. I desired to leave. Strangely enough, once I wandered off, the village began to haunt me. The hills, the trees and our old house keep coming back to my dreams when sojourning in a foreign country. It reminds me of a poem 'My Native Village' from my reading experience.

This is my village

From which I have left

Which I will remember always

Wherever I may travel

(by Aurel Balan, cited in Kideckel,1997:55)

I guess this is what displaced people mean by roots. It is part of you. No matter how much you think you have changed, it is still in your blood, in your unconsciousness. For

people embarking on an uncertain journey, home provides sweet and warm memories, albeit often in a romanticized way. It does not matter how much effort you once made in order to leave it.

The truth was that it did not take me long to realize how, as a girl from a small village, I could possibly change my fate. The Chinese government adopts a policy of 'household registration' (huko) to differentiate between those from the urban and those from the rural. There are restrictions for people born in the poor and backward rural areas so that they can not choose to live officially in the cities where the quality of life is much better. That is why to become a city person has become the dream of millions of young people with rural backgrounds. For them, education provides the only route to get out of poverty and have a good future.

I went to primary school at the age of 6 thanks to my mother's insistence, as the official school beginning age was 8 for the local village school. The next important thing was to change my name. My brother's name and mine together had the literal implication of 'defending the red regime'. My father gave us the names simply to follow the trend. Many children born in the late 1960s and early 1970s were given politically-associated or patriotic names under ideological influence. However, as times have changed, these names became inappropriate. To make things easier, my father retained one character of my previous name 'Hong' which means the colour of red, a common name for girls. As for my brother, my father gave him a completely new one - 'Yong' which means bravery.

The school trip took me about forty minutes by climbing over a hill. It was generally peaceful, picking flowers, following a grasshopper or simply enjoying the beautiful sunrise or sunset until a snake came along from nowhere, which made me too frightened to move. On my first day of school, I was full of curiosity and excitement. Teachers were quite mysterious to me. It never crossed my mind that I could question them. I happened to learn more quickly than my fellow classmates and the boy sitting beside me always needed my help. Instead, he would ignore my using more space of the shared desk. I was really thrilled at being chosen as the first young pioneer in my class. Every night I would fold the red scarf and put it under my pillow before going to sleep. So the next day, when I tied it around my neck, the knot would look the best shape. I remember, at the end of my writing assignments, I often said things like 'I will study hard to realize the four modernizations' or 'I will study hard to make our country stronger'.

We had a new maths teacher in the fourth grade, a tall handsome young man. The clear memory was due to the comments he wrote on my notebook, quite a surprise for me. They looked like part of a poem (hui dang ling jue ding, yi lan zhong sha xiao). Of course, as a ten year old, I could only understand that these were the teacher's encouragement or compliment for my work. Many years later, I found out that Du Fu, a famous poet in the Tang Dynasty, created the verse from his experience of climbing the Mountain Tai. The two lines literally meant some day you were sure to climb up the highest peak (refers to the Mountain Tai, the highest of the five main mountains in Central China) and by that time all the others would seem so small and you would have them all under your feet. There have been many times in my life especially in the face of

difficulty when this poem gave me hope and resolution to conquer.

At this stage, my father bought a black and white TV for the family, the very first one in the village. In the early 1980s, not many households in China could afford to buy a TV. I remember it was a cool summer evening. My father put the TV set on the windowsill and many villagers gathered in our yard, watching the programmes. It might not be exact to say that I belonged to a generation growing up with TV, given the limited channels and their content. But it helped eliminate a great deal of isolation and provided the functions of, to use the cliché, both education and entertainment. Those were exciting moments when I waited for my favourite Japanese cartoons or Hong Kong TV dramas to start.

Once in a while there were films shown in the open air. Local people arrived with their own stools and from all directions. Some came very early to secure a good position. As a child, never did I fall asleep on these occasions. I was fascinated by those characters' fate, feeling that the film should not have ended so soon. The earliest form of literature available to me was a circulation of storybooks with the same size as my hand (xiao ren shu). Stories were illustrated in black print drawings with sentences below explaining the plots. Many of the stories were about folklores and historical tales. These cultural aspects of my early memories were rather humble but important for my literacy development.

Despite financial constraints, my parents tried to take us every year to the beautiful seaport city of Dalian, which my father loved dearly. These visits left me deeply impressed. I was amazed at seeing so many tall buildings and felt dizzy when looking up

at them. We travelled in electric trolley buses, shopped in big department stores and saw all kinds of animals in the zoo. My favourite place was the merry-go-round in the Children's park. From my view, city people lived a different life. They seemed to have more interesting things to enjoy. They dressed and talked in a nicer manner. However, when a decade later I did succeed in becoming a member of it, the city was no longer that perfect. I perceived shallowness under its pretty clothes, the cultural desert and spiritual emptiness which could not be compensated for by its wonderful seaside, beautiful architecture and leafy streets. I sensed vanity and narrow-mindedness from its seeming glamour and prosperity featured with luxurious hotels, numerous restaurants and karaoke bars. This contradiction puzzled me: Has the city changed or have I changed?

By the time I entered Junior Middle school, I had been fully aware of the inescapable destiny for me — either toil in the fields like those villagers or do well in school and go to university. I remember the celebration held for my brother when he succeeded in gaining a place at a college. All his teachers were invited to a big dinner prepared by my overjoyed parents. This convention was described, as the saying goes, 'The carp jumps over the dragon gate' (liyu tiao longmen). It symbolized the fact that my brother had freed himself from the confines of a rural birth and won a passport to the prospect of a stable iron rice bowl (tie fan wan). As for me, my parents knew they did not need to prompt me since I was always conscientious and diligent. True as it was, my daily task was to deal with over ten subjects plus their assignments, most of which involved a great deal of rote learning. In those days, electricity was often cut off in the countryside. Doing school work by candle light thus became part of routine. The truth was that I could make

myself work hard to stay at the top of the class. However, this purpose inevitably diminished the pure joy of learning because of the pressure it caused. What was worse, I would soon forget everything crammed into my head just to get good marks in the exams.

In the second year we started to learn a new subject: English. Wasn't it fascinating to know another way of speaking? I want an 'apple' instead of 'ping guo'? Our English teacher was a young and energetic woman. I remember vividly her slender figure in a bright summer dress and how she shook her long straight hair when talking to us. She brought the smell of fragrance every time she walked into the classroom. We adored her. She smiled a lot and was friendly and relaxed. All these were in sharp contrast with other subject teachers. But on the whole, teachers in that local school were not sensitive or professional enough to provide the kind of psychological care that was so important to teenagers. I was mostly in a state of confusion and rebellion. I felt my school days were rather suffocating. In fact, I was so preoccupied by my own little problems that I did not notice much about the political movement in Tananmen Square in June 1989 other than a few glimpses of shocking scenes on national TV. It was only many years later that I was able to grasp what had really happened largely from Western media. The final exam for graduation was a great relief for me. After three years of burying my head in piles of books, I finally said goodbye to junior middle school.

To my surprise, I was selected to join a top class by a key senior middle school in the district, which meant I had to leave home and start boarding school. My new school days were quite systematic and military like. We were taught to follow closely the rules and

time tables such as when to exercise and when to have meals. As for my study. I spared no effort as I was more than ever conscious about my situation. That is, since I left home the only choice for me was to pass the National College Entrance Examination (gaokao) and go to university. There was no turning back. Just imagining the shame of failure and my parents' disappointment was too much for me. So immediately, I embarked on my three-year preparations for the 'dark July' in 1992 (7, 8 & 9 July used to be the days chosen for the yearly College Entrance Examination in China but now the dates have been changed to 7 & 8 June to avoid the hot weather). Competition was fierce and falling behind meant disastrous results. Everyday life was about rushing between dormitory, classroom and the dining hall. In retrospect, I was then like a learning machine trying to store as much information as possible. It was a time when I pushed myself to both physical and mental limits. If only I could live those days again. So many precious things have been missed. But I did not see any alternative at that time.

English was a demanding subject. I spent plenty of time learning new vocabulary, reciting texts and doing grammar exercises. I should say language learning was interesting and the reading was enjoyable. However the method of teaching was pure translation, which means the teacher did most of the talking, analyzing patterns of grammar and linguistic structures in a text, so called 'chalk and talk'. We students meanwhile were busy taking notes for later memorization. The goal was to ensure a high level of accuracy in multiple choice assessments. I built a solid foundation for vocabulary and grammar resulting from this kind of English teaching. Yet, there was never any emphasis on communication skills, a concept completely missing in the language

learning process.

Constantly, there was the fear and those 'what ifs' haunting me. If I failed, could I go back to the village? How could I afford to bring shame to the family? Or shall I, like my childhood friends, try to seek employment as assembly workers in Japanese joint ventures in the nearby economic development zone? Work for a few years since they only employed young people, come back home to find a husband in neighbouring villages and then bring up children. That seemed to be the foreseeable life choice in reality. That is in fact their life now.

I knew that I could only have the final peace in my mind when the exam finished. I waited with trepidation and increasing anxiety as the dates drew near. But when those fateful days did come I felt incredibly calm. I did not faint nor did my mind go blank. On the last day of the exam when I came out of the building, I saw a crowd of anxious parents waiting at the gate and then surprisingly I found my brother walking towards me, smiling. Suddenly I was overwhelmed by emotions and tears came into my eyes. Was it because I did not expect anyone there or was it because my ordeal had finally come to an end? I did not know. But anyway my life was going to change. For better or worse, it was only a matter of two more months' miserable wait.

1.4 Entering the Ivory Tower

It turned out that I got a much higher score in the National College Entrance Exam and

would have been qualified for the most prestigious universities in the capital city Beijing if the application advisor had had more confidence in me. But when I was admitted to Dalian University of Foreign Languages, my parents were happy, especially my father because I was going to the same city where he once studied and worked for years and which left him with many unforgettable memories. In a sense, I fulfilled his dream. Every time I visited home he would ask me the usual questions 'how is the city?' 'Have they put up more tall buildings there?' The journey now takes less than two hours thanks to an improved bus service.

The first day I set foot on campus in the autumn of 1992 I was surprised at how small the university was. Yet it was beautiful with flowers everywhere and more importantly situated right in the centre of the city. English and Japanese Departments were the largest compared to German, French, Russian and Spanish. I was enrolled in the course of English in education, designed for those who would teach English after graduation. There was no head teacher any more. Students were in the charge of a so-called political advisor assigned by the Department. There were 20 students in my class and only three of them were boys. Likewise, the whole university was female dominated, one major feature of a language institution. Campus life was marked by sharing a room with 7 other girls, running to lectures, queuing for lunch in a busy cafeteria, showering in an often packed basement bath house and catching up with some popular dances.

Having survived the plight of high school, I could relax and enjoy learning nothing but English. Though there were still some compulsory courses in the curriculum like politics,

I did not have to take them seriously as long as I could get a pass. Soon I got used to managing my own time. Mornings were excellent for listening to English programmes from a shortwave radio or reading aloud in the garden. An American accent was popular at that time due to its superpower status. Everyone was trying hard to achieve the best imitation. English was a fashionable subject as a result of the English craze in China in the earlier 1990s. As students of English, we definitely felt privileged in this atmosphere.

Different course modules were provided to improve our abilities of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating. I recalled our oral English teacher tried to organize different activities to get us to talk. However, the class still remained uncomfortably quiet. Pretending to be someone in imagined situations did not initiate authentic conversations nor did we want to speak what we did not really mean to say. Language lost its meaning if we did not have much knowledge of the culture it represented. Yes, we were hopelessly passive. Writing was much better. At least I could express my genuine ideas using the phrase and structures I had learned. From the good comments once even made by the American 'expert', my confidence gradually grew.

My favourite course was the audio-visual class, given by an American woman who had a Chinese name, spoke fluent Chinese and married a local Chinese engineer. Her class was fun and rewarding. She showed us classic English films such as Tootsie, French Lieutenant's Woman, the Lion King and Amy Tan's Joy Luck Club. We watched how the actors spoke, behaved and communicated with each other in different social contexts. The English language suddenly became alive to us. Her class provided us an opportunity

of knowing different lifestyles and cultures. I can still remember the few sentences she once wrote on the blackboard: 'He learns every word by heart; he pronounces every word perfectly; the only problem is that he has nothing to say'. As time went by, I came to realize that what she said did ring true in terms of learning to speak a foreign language.

During the summer holiday of my third year, I, along with three other college girls, made a trip first by ship then by train to the hometown of Confucius in Shandong Province. As a teacher-to-be, I thought it would be a shame not to pay tribute to the greatest educator and thinker in Chinese history. I also took the chance to climb up Mountain Tai and wake up at 4 o'clock in the morning just to see the magnificent view of a rising sun emerging from a vast sea of white clouds. At that moment, not only did I totally understand Du Fu's poem but felt the greatness of it.

The last year of my university life saw a growing restlessness as graduation was looming near and the search for employment became real. Everyone racked their brains to see if there were any powerful relations and social networks that they might turn to for help. Money and gifts could lead to the opening of the back door. Foreign business, Joint ventures, or banks and import and export companies were the most desirable places with the lure of making good money. As students majoring in English in Education we were, according to the system, doomed to be poorly-paid teachers, a profession no ambitious graduate would like to choose particularly in a time of fast growing economy. When news came that I was recommended by the English Department to teach English at the best high school in the city of Dalian, my feelings were indeed mixed. Thus, in

September, 1996, with reluctance and uncertainty, I went back to an environment which often evoked unhappy memories. What was it going to be like this time for me as a teacher?

1.5 A Teacher's Dilemma

To be frank, my attitude towards the Chinese education system is rather critical. I regard myself as a victim of its endless and excessive exam system. No one would like to pass their tender years dealing with one examination after another, though I am uncomfortably aware that I have changed my own destiny through the heavily exam-oriented education system. The whole situation is very paradoxical.

Fortunately, at that time of the year, the Ministry of Education was starting a reform in English Education. Communicative language teaching was adopted to take the place of the traditional grammar translating approach, which had dominated language classrooms for decades. New textbooks were introduced with more emphasis on listening and speaking activities. In a word, they were much better in terms of content and structure compared to the old ones in use for years. Teachers were asked to play the role of a facilitator instead of a commander. As a new teacher, I embraced the change with great enthusiasm and was determined to offer an interesting English learning experience for my students.

Much time was devoted to the design and delivery of lesson plans. I aimed to get every

student involved in activities such as dialogues, group discussion or role play in spite of a large class size. They enjoyed my teaching and the feedback was positive. However, there was the reality we all must face. Namely, a student's fate was still decided by the National College Entrance Examination. And the English exam paper was composed of 5 fixed sections with full marks of 150. Teachers needed to make students familiar with these test formats so that they could give as many correct answers as possible and achieve a high score. In short, teaching had to fulfill the ultimate goal of ensuring that more students could go to university. Hence, on a daily basis, teachers and students had to deal with piles of supplementary exercise books, containing mainly multiple-choice questions.

The situation worsened when exam results were considered as the only criteria of evaluating a teacher's work. The ranking of every major examination put enormous stress on teachers as no one would like to stay behind. Consequently, teachers tended to give extra workloads to students to practise mechanically so that they could improve their performance in exams. This led to the exhaustion of both teachers and students. A vicious circle was thus formed. The truth was that as long as everything was exam-oriented, 'quality education' still remained very much a slogan. It still kept turning out students with 'high marks and low ability'. So this was my dilemma. What was the point of education? And what was the mission of English teaching? I once even observed an English class given in a computer lab with every student facing a desktop. Yet it was believed to be a good lesson by the school authorities just because of the use of technology. On the one hand, I would never wish my students to go through the same learning experience as I did. On the other hand, I faced the huge responsibility of helping

them survive the Chinese education system. I tried to strike a balance and sometimes felt quite confused.

The point is that in such a system, teaching has become a torment: the repetition and the same teaching materials follow year after year. When the passion wears out, all you need is devotion. Teachers are like candles, which is a good metaphor for their self-sacrifice. But times have changed and the meaning of teaching has to be questioned and redefined. It is human nature to have curiosity and learning should be a process of discovery and illumination. The role of a teacher should be in the assistance of this happening. Ironically, this was to a greater extent destroyed in our education system. Creativity was replaced by mechanism. Moreover, I felt that being isolated in one place undoubtedly narrowed my vision. The monotony and bureaucracy of daily routines added to dissatisfaction. Also, in today China's state schools, there is the role of a Party secretary who not only keeps an eye on teachers' political beliefs and also assumes his or her authority over their personal lives, an extreme aspect of collectivist culture. This person is supposed to have the supreme power of the institution. I found myself reluctant to compromise with this ideological control. Nor did I want to conform to some propaganda that I did not truly believe. I was longing for change and a chance of recharging myself. Ultimately, I came to the decision of seeking further study overseas.

To summarize, my autobiographical reflection so far, if not just trivial pieces, makes me realize that I have been mostly engaged in changing my own fate. I have never felt confident or powerful enough to discuss openly the topic of changing the world as my

Western counterparts so often do. For me, success and hope mean leaving home and getting rid of my origins. I have made it through the route of education. Then the learning of English not only enables me to pursue a career later but also open up new horizons for me. Now at 30, an age that symbolizes maturity and independence as the Chinese proverb says '30 er li', my instinct tells me that it is time to move on and start all over again. Only it happens to be a longer journey this time.

1.6 New Journey, New Questions

Derived from my teaching experience in China, my initial research interests were the difficulties students had in their second language acquisition. It was commonly observed that students in China who had learned English at school for around ten years still found it difficult to achieve fluency and appropriateness. The so called 'Dumb English' painted a vivid picture of the situation. In my MA dissertation, I analyzed from a classroom teacher's point of view the factors that were likely to impede the development of Chinese students' communicative skills, including teaching methods, the testing system, class size and their cultural background. However, one significant aspect which was neglected or rather not recognized by me then was the lack of knowledge about the target culture if communication was to be viewed not merely from a pedagogical but from a cross-cultural perspective. It has been noted elsewhere that successful language learning could not possibly happen without relating to its culture. Otherwise, what language teachers taught, according to Robert Politzer (1965), will be nothing but meaningless symbols. I began to search for books covering issues on how to bridge the cultural gap in language

teaching and learning. I read, for instance, Michael Byram's *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective* (1998), Joyce Valdes's *Culture Bound* (1986) and Kramsch's *Language and Culture* (1998). As a non-native teacher of English, I believed I should take maximum advantage of my temporary stay in an English-speaking country, learning about the British culture, updating my English and professionally examining the intimate link between language and culture. Those were my hopes and expectations when I came to Goldsmiths College and met my supervisor Professor Eve Gregory in the autumn of 2003.

However, the sudden plunge into a strange country turned my attention to the anxiety and confusion I had in real life. Some anxieties were due to practical reasons such as finding suitable accommodation, looking for a part-time job and coping with everyday demands both linguistically and culturally. Others were feelings I could not possibly explain. Maybe I was suffering a newcomer's culture shock as I seemed to bear similar symptoms commonly identified for this condition: the distress, the fatigue and the helplessness. But there was more to it than that.

On one hand, there was the challenge of adapting to an unfamiliar environment and following the golden rule of 'when in Rome do as the Romans do' if I did not want to remain an outsider. I was frustrated by the loss of spontaneity and articulation and acutely aware that language was not only learnt to read and understand literally but to speak and communicate for the sheer sake of daily survival and social harmony. On the other hand, I was appalled by the way people in the West perceived my home culture. I felt strange

when hearing the word 'oriental' instead of 'Chinese' and was puzzled at the by no means intentional mention that I was from a communist country. Should I feel sorry for myself? Was there any negative connotation which I failed to recognize? Was I not aware of my representation? How to explain the sudden uneasiness with my Chinese identity as a result of coming to Cosmopolitan London? Maybe I had not yet acquired the signifiers to describe my situation?

The most frequent questions I got asked by the multi-racial population were 'where are you from' or just 'Vietnamese or Chinese'? Or more often 'are you from Hong Kong'? These casual talks helped me grasp that I was now a member of one ethnic minority in multicultural London, which seemed to possess neither a strong voice nor positive image in the social hierarchy. I was not comfortable with the way I was recognized. It was in fact rather irritating as that was not at all who I thought I was. But the question was 'to be is to be perceived'. How could I exist in the society without knowing how I was seen by others? Wasn't it the starting point for a newcomer who had to live along with dominant cultural groups?

Kearney (2003:136) describes the identity dilemma that ethnic minorities encounter in British society as such, 'We are often "fixed" by others – through our physical appearance, our accent, and our names.' I heard the exact stereotype 'all Chinese look alike' and other explicit or implicit remarks made by people with either ignorance or arrogance, including those who, as far as I know, have been fighting against racial discrimination and prejudice for ages due to the colonial legacy. I found out that Chinese

food and martial arts were the assumed national features and enduring topics, though I had virtually no expertise to impress. Never before did I realize Jacky Chen had such a world-wide fame and influence. I also understood why the international acclaimed filmmaker Zhang Yimou's festival films often criticized by his fellow countrymen were so suited to the taste of Western audiences, for was it what our images were supposed to be? As Liu Kang (1998:166) puts it: 'the exotic representations of China's antiquated, folkloric, and superstitious cultural past'. It is distant to us now but still recognizable by them.

Basically I am from a place where young people also go to McDonald's, shop at Carrefour and Wal-Mart, watch American blockbusters or listen to Rock music. But why is there the shadow of inferiority? Is it because of the political and socio-cultural system I happen to be born into? Mary Catherine Bateson's remarks that 'An encounter with other cultures can lead to openness only if you can suspend the assumption of superiority, not seeing new worlds to conquer, but new worlds to respect' (cited in McLaren,1998:1) give a Western intellectual's perception of the situation. Ironically, what would a person from the peripheries of the world say? Will superiority, conquer or respect still be used? It must be a different version of the story. In my case, I am afraid it is to be accepted rather than to accept. The truth is that cultural conflicts are created when geographical boundaries are crossed. Were this journey not made, I would never know about the host culture and most importantly acknowledge the culture of my own. To this point, I believe, it was the 'paradigmatic moment' for me as I realized that my understanding of language and culture could not be fully achieved without resolving the issue of identity, a

new concept I had to come to terms with.

It was through these experiences that I felt compelled to write something for myself as well as for many other newly arrived Chinese students who shared similar feelings with me. My primary concern was how the newcomers managed to cope with what Kim describes as 'the temporary but often bewildering transition into a new environment' (Kim, 2002: 262-263). Are things going right with them? What exactly was the situation like? What were the difficulties facing them? How did they negotiate between what they brought and what they encountered? With these questions in mind, I began my research project with a pilot study as the first step.

1.7 Overviews of Chapters

The thesis consists of 8 chapters. The first chapter, as can be seen above, aims to provide an autobiographical account of my personal and professional background, highlighting how and why this inquiry was initiated. Chapter 2 examines the recent trend of Chinese students coming to study in Britain with a case study of a particular newcomer's experience of London. The purpose is to set the scene and shape the specific questions for this study. To establish a theoretical framework, I carry out a systematic literature review in Chapter 3, regarding the relevant notions of culture, identity and the role of narrative in understanding the self. Chapter 4 deals with the methodology and methods used in this research project, in which I explain why ethnography is chosen as the research approach for my investigation and how the issue of validity is understood and tackled when

analyzing narrative data obtained from interviews. Also in this chapter, I introduce the four participants and describe how I conducted the interviews with them. In Chapter 5, I chart the trajectory of their one year in London and identify the common themes. Further narrative analysis takes place in Chapter 6, in which I examine key episodes of the participants' narrative accounts and explore ways in which, through the process of self-reflection, they make sense of their personal and cultural identities. A deep exploration of how they construct meanings out of their cross-cultural experience is made in Chapter 7 with two questions raised at the end of analysis. In the concluding chapter, I summarize theoretical and methodological implications and put forward suggestions in terms of how to meet the Chinese students' need for support. Finally I direct possible areas for future research.

Chapter Two: Strange Encounters: Setting the Scene

One day I recognized that what was more important for me than anything else was how I defined myself to the degree that I was a stranger... I then realized that, in his vulnerability, the stranger could only count on the hospitality that others could offer him.

Edmond Jabès (1991)

It may be tempting to think of identity in the age of globalisation as destined to end up in one place or another: either returning to its roots or disappearing through assimilation and homogenization. But this may be a false dilemma.

Stuart Hall (1992:310)

2.1 Introduction

To find answers to the big questions raised in Chapter 1, I set out to investigate the situation of Chinese students in Britain. My purpose was to gather sufficient evidence to prove the necessity and urgency of this inquiry. Meanwhile, I wanted to establish a good understanding about the context of this study. Importantly, in this chapter, I explain why newcomers were chosen to be the focus of my interest. Here, I present some details of my interviews with a newly-arrived Chinese postgraduate student. I also look briefly at existing studies on Chinese students' experience in the UK. Finally, I develop specific research questions that I wish to explore further in the main study.

2.2 The Recent Trend of Chinese Students Coming to Britain

In recent years there has been a dramatic rise in the number of Chinese students enrolled in British universities and colleges. Statistics from the British Council show that in 2003-2004 there were more than 300,000 international students (including EU) studying in the UK with the biggest proportion 13% from the People's Republic of China, followed by Greece and the United States (The British Council 2004). Overall, according to new figures from HESA, the number of Chinese students has increased by 17.5 times between 1995/96-2005/06. And China continues to provide over 50,000 students every year to the UK. Clearly, Chinese students have formed the largest overseas student group, accounting for more than 15% of non-UK domiciled students (www.prospects.ac.uk). Hence, what impact will this sudden influx of students have on UK higher education? More importantly, what do Chinese students think of their UK experience? Are their expectations matched with reality? Given the cultural distance between Britain and China, I believe these issues need to be addressed.

To gain a complete picture, I proceeded to find out why Britain had suddenly become a popular destination for Chinese students. Apparently many were drawn by its quality in education and the value of British degrees. But the British government's encouraging policy played a big part in the present boom apart from the commonly assumed reasons. In June, 1999, after visiting China, Prime Minister Tony Blair made a speech on attracting more international students, thus launching the start of a worldwide campaign to increase the number of overseas students in Britain (the Prime Minister's Initiative). A

package of 'open door' measures was introduced to smooth the path, which included providing easer access to application information, streamlining entry procedures, allowing students to work part-time etc... One most important aspect was that UK student visas were relatively easy to get in comparison to visas for the USA, particularly after the September 11th terrorists' attacks when the US tightened its visa policy.

A spokesperson from the Department for Education and Skills made it clear that: 'We have every intention of remaining one of the most popular destinations for overseas students. That is why we launched the Prime Minister's Initiative in 1999 to recruit an additional 50,000 international students by 2005' (BBC News, 20 April 2004). However, the US has since relaxed its visa controls. Recently, there have been worries and fears that the number of overseas students was decreasing and Britain was losing its share of the global market to other competitors such as Australia (Financial times, 14 September 2005). Diana Warwick, the CEO of Universities UK, in response to the perceived strength of the American experience said that international student recruitment still remained strong in Britain despite fierce competition (The Guardian, 30 October, 2007). A new survey shows that, though seen as expensive and lacking in employment prospects, Britain is becoming the most popular destination for overseas students (Independent.co.uk 31 January, 2008). So far, government funding and support have ensured active marketing and promotion of the UK education brand abroad. Apparently, this has yielded impressive results in China, as described by a BBC report (BBC News, 31 May 2002):

Education UK fairs promoted by the British Council are often crowded with enthusiastic visitors. IELTS English language exams are often booked out two months in advance, and the waiting hall for visa applications in the British Embassy in Beijing is often full of anxious young faces.

Economic development in China has created a large number of affluent middle class families who can afford to send children abroad for education. Even parents with modest incomes are willing to do whatever they can to provide the best opportunities for their children. Nothing can compare with Chinese parents' sacrifice and determination by investing their whole life's savings for the next generation's education. In today's China, parents believe that education is the best way, if not the only way, to ensure a good future. The one-child policy means that parents can focus all their financial support on the only child, be it boy or girl.

Traditionally, Confucian philosophy places a high value on the power of education in self-cultivation. This is reflected by Chinese parents' high hopes and expectations for their children to gain knowledge and become educated. Additionally, China's National College Entrance Examination remains a fierce battle due to a shortage of university places. Though during the past decade Chinese universities and colleges have been allowed to enlarge the acceptance of students, the majority of hopefuls are still turned away. Thus, seeking a higher education abroad becomes an alternative for those who come from better-off families. Also, more university graduates now wish to enhance their employability and pursue further study in Britain, lured by the fact that a UK Masters

degree only takes one year. When many applicants' dreams are shattered at the American Embassy, more and more Chinese students turn to Britain as their first choice of destination. Nowadays young Chinese students can be seen from the elite Oxford and Cambridge to colleges in the most remote towns, whereas during the early 1990s it was rare to find self-funded students from mainland China on a British campus. According to the survey by the British Council in 2003, the predicted number of potential Chinese students who wanted to attend UK universities was estimated to be from 200,000 to 225,000 (The British Council, 2003).

In financial terms, this flow of overseas students contributes significantly to university revenue and the UK economy, a much-desired target of UK government policy. In theory, British universities can charge what they like to non-EU students so long as the market can bear it. According to the government's May 1985 Green paper, it is 'for institutions and local authorities to determine the actual fees to be charged in the light of their own circumstances' (Overseas Students Trust, 1987:15). Fees of £7,000-£9,000 a year for overseas students are typical, whereas Science and Medical courses can be much higher than this. University recruiters are happy to see the growth of the market and overseas recruitment has grown by about 6% a year for the past five years. According to the latest financial returns for 2002-03, the income from outside the European Union is worth about £1bn and contributes about £8bn to the UK GNP, (HESA 2003). It definitely means big business. As Professor Ivor Crewe, president of Universities UK said 'The presence of international students and faculty is no longer an optional, mildly exotic, albeit welcome ingredient of campus life. It's quite simply what makes it possible for the

academic enterprise to continue' (The Guardian, 15 September 2004).

In the light of these facts and figures, there is no doubt about the benefits this trend brings. But the potential challenges may not catch the attention they deserve. As a matter of fact, emerging issues such as learning frustrations, cross-cultural differences as well as other personal and practical problems have given rise to a growing concern among those who have direct contact with Chinese students. Some universities have managed to provide support resources for them and others have not yet put the issues on the table. When all the institutions have their quality courses to prize and the current boom to enjoy, there is certainly no complacency about it.

Some have begun to ask questions, for instance 'Are we coping with them?', 'Are their needs and expectations being met?' or 'Are we providing a supportive environment for them?'. According to BBC news, Dr Geoffrey Copland, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Westminster emphasized in a conference that financial considerations should not become the primary drive for overseas recruitment but rather the wider purpose of how to achieve 'a more inclusive and tolerant society'. However, concerns were expressed that 'quality is being sacrificed for profit', as Mike Baker, the education correspondent, observed 'There are stories of overseas students, keen to get a taste of British education and culture, who find themselves in classes in Britain composed entirely of other foreign students' (BBC News, 3 April 2004). Recent articles in the Guardian (8 February 2005) revealed that some East Asian students expressed their worries about security, accommodation, and what they described as a culture of isolation,

though all these claims were denied by their host institution. The following are experiences of two undergraduates with whom I struck up a conversation when we celebrated the traditional Mid-Autumn Festival organized by the Chinese society in the Student Union right after the start of my first term.

I am becoming realistic now and not as ambitious as when I first arrived. There is no miracle here, though I no longer feel surprised at the poor facilities. What I want to tell those who are still desperate to come is if you can't do it well in China it is more difficult to do it in Britain. Just think about the language. One of my Chinese classmates who lives far away has been issued with an ultimate warning for skipping the seminars many times. I understand that. You sit there miserably, listening to discussions dominated by British students. They talk fast and it gets worse when there is an accent. Sometimes the topic is non-relevant. You don't feel part of it. After class you feel nothing has been gained. So why not save the travelling costs? (Pengjiu, A 22-year-old Media student from Shanghai)

Whereas learning in another language can be challenging and frustrating, there are also day-to-day isolation and loneliness to deal with.

I think we should look at things in both ways. I have a chance to see the world but I have to bear to live a lonely life, separated from family and friends. It is difficult to make friends here. As you can see I knew all of them (referring to the other four Chinese students sitting with her) since I came here. Now I can't stop asking

why we are still hanging out together. Those who fail to come shouldn't be too disappointed. There are also good chances in China. When my mother asked me over the phone how I am getting along. My answer is always 'very well'. What else could I say? I mean I have problems. But I have to cope as much as I can. I have to adjust. My parents won't really understand until they come here. Telling the truth can only make them worry about me. (Si, A 21-year-old Psychology student from Harbin)

If the UK government wants to see the continuing flow of overseas students, these voices are certainly not welcome. In fact, the two Chinese students spent more than five years in Britain doing consecutively foundation courses, undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Neither of them had a chance to gain any working experience. And both returned home as soon as they completed their Master courses. Again, Professor Ivor Crewe, President of Universities UK made a statement about the situation:

International students make a significant investment and place their trust in us when they decide to come to the UK for their higher education. We recognize the critical need to maintain and build on the reputation for quality higher education that is the key factor in the UK's success in educating citizens of other countries. Overseas students shouldn't be treated as mere providers of university revenue and their presence is simply tolerated. Genuine effort is hoped to be involved to address their needs and most importantly a willingness to respect and understand their culture." (BBC News, 16 July 2004)

Clearly, to maintain a good global share of the £60bn international student market is vital for revenue generation as well as the future of UK higher education (Independent.co.uk. 31 January, 2008). More and more British universities realize the importance of attracting students from China, the biggest and fastest growing source country on the horizon. If Britain does not want to lose out, Chinese students' UK experience needs to be identified and their welfare cared for. After all, a satisfied customer is the best advertiser. Especially, in striking contrast to the rose-tinted West is the gloomy reality that China remains somewhat a mystery to the West with racial stereotypes and biased perceptions worsened by the portrayal of Western media and cinema. Nowadays images of Mao's time are more likely to replace those anecdotes of Chinese men wearing plaits and women with 'three-inch golden lilies' (san cun jin lian, bound feet). Despite its dramatic socio-economic change, modern China still represents chaos, oppression and poverty in Westerners' imagination. Through personal testimonies, this work aims to articulate how this generation of Chinese students perceives the West and reflects upon themselves.

2.3 Why the Stranger

In an attempt to describe Chinese students' encounter with the West, I believe it is better to focus my attention on the newcomers because of what they unavoidably have to go through when entering an unfamiliar environment. This is unmistakably confirmed by my personal experience with my first day of arrival still vivid in my memory after 5 years in Britain. The underground system suddenly collapsed soon after I boarded the tube from

Terminal 4 at Heathrow Airport. I had planned to travel to somewhere closer to my host institution so that I could find temporary accommodation there. Before departure, I failed to book a room by phone with one of the recommended places in the information pack. The reason was simple as I, like many other Chinese, did not have the kind of credit card required in Britain. This unexpected incident added panic to my already dramatic enough journey including surviving the longest queue in my life waiting for immigration checks. Faced with heavy luggage, the incessant rain, and a totally strange place, I needed to solve an immediate task: finding an affordable place to stay before it was getting too dark (I only carried some limited cash with me and had to make sure it lasted until I could open a bank account). That day I underwent unimaginable exhaustion and exasperation in my life. It was only later through talking with other international students that I realized I was not the only one to experience such an inauspicious and disastrous arrival.

Sara Ahmed (2000:6) remarks that 'the term encounter suggests a meeting, but a meeting which involves surprise and conflict.' With little knowledge about the strange environment, new arrivals often find it overwhelming when having so much to observe and absorb. They are in a most vulnerable state to bear the insecurity and uncertainty. Like a fish out of water, the first surprise for me in London was the geographical images which were honestly beyond my expectation. Buildings looked old with different styles and dark colours. The sky was grey and streets were dirty. Even the little corner shops seemed weird and scary. Having no idea about the local community, I was shocked at seeing so many people of different ethnicities with their looks, dresses, hairstyles and languages. I quickly gained a sense of what postcolonial London was like. Coming from

a so-called Third world country, I understandably had some imagination of the privileged West. At the least, I felt it should look better than the city I had just left. Certainly, like a tourist, I marvelled at the magnificent views when walking across the Thames and was deeply impressed by the historical architecture in central London. But I also trod on murky streets in grim deserted towns, saw mysterious church buildings and huge tomb stones in the cemetery. I understand why Hong Ying, a Chinese writer, sojourning in London used 'ghost country' in her poem to describe Britain. My heart sank every time I walked by a beggar or homeless person, the sign of poverty. I could not figure out why native people in a prosperous Western country did not have a proper or decent way to survive. Then, what about those coming far way with nothing but innocent dreams? My puzzlement was solved years later as I learned better about the social problems in British society, especially the prevalence of drug use and street crime.

Apart from the impact of a strange milieu, there is the demand of living in it. As social theorist Alfred Schutz (1964:96) analyses,

> the stranger who hasn't acquired a knowledge of trustworthy recipes for interpreting the social world and for handling things and men is forced first to become an observer of the ways of life of the host community, and second to reconstruct, piece by piece, at least those sets of the rules without which everyday life would be impossible for him.

Precisely, I became the stranger 'who has to place in question nearly everything that

seems to be unquestionable to the members of the approached group' (Schutz, 1964:96). I had to cultivate the craftsmanship of an ethnographer as nothing could be taken for granted — even trivial things such as where to buy bus tickets, how to open a bank account, first and second class stamps or the meaning of various acronyms. It took hours to find a place which was in fact just a couple of blocks away, even with the help of a map and good-natured passers-by. Shopping in the supermarket could be nerve-racking given how different an English diet was from a Chinese one. I could not tell the difference between cheese and butter. Once I bought a bottle of spring water tasting too strange to drink. In a word, the newcomers cannot make judgments as usual. There is lots of trial-and-error learning and many problems tend to be magnified at this stage of settling-in. With masses of information to take in, newcomers feel inevitably bombarded and disoriented. If they also face situations like seeking suitable accommodation, dealing with unscrupulous landlords or juggling between part-time work and study, the newcomers are very much in a predicament of stress, frustration, and helplessness, even generating feelings of anger towards the hostile environment. It seems that the long damp dark British winter days are not the only reason for the newcomers' loneliness and depression.

Yet there is much more to the challenge of basic living. When newcomers enter an unfamiliar cultural environment, especially with a different mother tongue, the linguistic and cultural difficulties confronting them are enormous. The situation is worsened if there is a significant distance according to Babiker *et al* (1980: 121) between their original culture and adopted culture. For new arrivals, there exist in reality the barriers

and difficulties which seem not so easy to overcome or even to comprehend. Eva Hoffman in her biography *Lost in Translation* (1989:108) gives a vivid account of a newcomer's struggle with the English language,

> What has happened to me in this new world? I don't see what I have seen, don't comprehend what's in front of me. I am not filled with language any more, and I have only a memory of fullness to anguish me with the knowledge that, in this dark and empty state I don't really exist. (1989:108),

When imagining the challenge of living in another country, I thought my command of English would help me adjust to the life in Britain. On the contrary, I felt inadequate when using English for both everyday and academic purposes even though I scored 7 in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Like most Chinese students, I acquired linguistic knowledge from textbooks and classroom teachings. Clearly, there is more to language learning than memorizing words and grammatical rules. The teaching of culture has been missing from most China's English learners' experience. Also, once in London I discovered that not everyone spoke like a BBC news reader and, in reality, you had to deal with varieties of British accents. For me, reading and understanding complicated texts are much easier than small talk or academic debates. Constantly lost in contexts, I felt perplexed at the rhetorical style, wondering about the appropriate and acceptable ways to question or respond. I became a listener who needed to figure out the different repertoire native speakers used in different social situations.

Exposure to an unfamiliar culture is never easy especially with a great deal of internalization going on. Taft (1977) has identified a number of common reactions to cultural dislocation including 'cultural fatigue', a sense of loss arising from being uprooted from one's familiar surroundings, rejection by members of the new society and the impotence of being unable to deal with the new environment. In my view, the most acute sense for the newcomer is the loneliness and isolation, as can be manifested in the various terms created to identify a person from another country. These are 'stranger', 'alien', 'foreigner', 'outsider' or 'exile', 'expatriate' and the like. It is not difficult to visualize the bitterness of estrangement and exclusion. What does it mean to be a 'stranger'? What is it like being an alien in a strange land? Can one imagine a stranger's desperate desire to make acquaintances or friends, to be recognized or to feel welcomed by the host country? According to Kant, 'Hospitality means the right of a stranger not to be treated as an enemy when he arrives in the land of another' (cited in Madan Sarup, 1996). It strikes me that hospitality is a Chinese emotion, so often overdone, whereas the British are more aware of keeping distance and asserting boundaries.

A stranger according to George Simmel (1950), another turn-of-the-century social theorist, is a person simultaneously 'within' and 'without'. Sara Ahmed (2000:21) defines 'strangers' as not simply those who are not known in this dwelling, but those who are, in their very proximity, already recognized as not belonging, as being out of place. Madan Sarup who arrived in England from India at the age of 9 (1996:10-11) interprets 'strangers' as follows:

S/he is physically close while remaining culturally remote. Strangers often seem to be suspended in the empty space between a tradition which they have already left and the mode of life which stubbornly denies them the right of entry.

Zgmunt Bauman (1991:79), the Polish exile, gives a poignant interpretation of the permanent cultural exclusion of the stranger. He writes that:

Unlike an alien or a foreigner, the stranger is not simply a newcomer, a person temporarily out of place. He is an eternal wanderer, homeless always and everywhere, without hope of ever 'arriving'.

Bauman notes that acute uncertainty is the curse of the stranger. In an attempt to ease estrangement and embrace emancipation, the strangers would try to assimilate through 'self-refining'. Unfortunately, they discover that 'the harder they try, the faster the finishing-line seems to be receding' (1991:71).

These paint a disturbing picture of the isolated and culturally marginal stranger who wanders amid the impersonal crowd in late modernity. Likewise, Eva Hoffman (1989) describes her sense of displacement in a new country this way:

I have been dislocated from my own centre of the world, and that world has been shifted away from my centre. There is no longer a straight axis anchoring my imagination; it begins to oscillate, and I rotate around it unsteadily. (1989:132)

In terms of overseas students, Furnham (1986) uses the term 'sojourner' in his book *Culture shock* to describe a temporary stay in a new and unfamiliar environment, usually from six months to five or six years with the intention to leave at the completion of study. He gives an overview of psychological studies on the various psycho-social problems that confront the culture shocked sojourning students.

Obviously, there are distinctions between a 'sojourner' and a 'migrant'. A migrant according to Madan Sarup (1996:1) is:

> a person who has crossed the border. S/he seeks a place to make 'a new beginning', to start again, to make a better life. The newly arrived have to learn the new language and culture. They have to cope not only with the pain of separation but often with the resentment of a hostile population. (1996:1)

Though the situation of international students is in some aspects different from that of migrants, the cultural displacement they suffer is no less than the new settlers. McLaren (1998:7) summarizes the research conducted by Furnham (1988) and gives a list of the major problems that anxious new arrivals may have:

• Those demoralising stresses that many foreigners face – racial discrimination, language difficulties, accommodation trouble, unfamiliar diet, financial stress, misunderstandings and loneliness.

- Those that face any adolescents and young adults as they try to become emotionally and financially self-supporting.

- Academic stress, a common feature of university life involving very hard work, with complex material.

- The stress of being constantly forced into the role of being ambassadors or representatives of their countries.

Those who venture abroad, for whatever reason, inevitably suffer shock and anxiety when facing the unknown. All share the sorrow of leaving home and the challenge of adjusting to a world they may never possibly inhabit with comfort. In the case of international students, if problems are not properly taken care of, it is likely that their stay in the host country will be stressful, let alone returning home with the 'inner satisfaction and outward measure of successful academic achievement'(Elsey,1990:46).

2.4 Lang's London Confusion

In order to support my assumptions, I needed to find some recently arrived Chinese students for justification. I invited the two undergraduates mentioned above for further interviews respectively. Both of them talked candidly about their life and study in Britain. However, being in their early twenties, they did not have enough life experiences to give perceptive views. After this initial trial, I finally decided to focus on mature postgraduates in that they were more likely to provide deeper insights into their experiences. Thus, I started to put up notices on campus, saying 'if you are a newly

arrived Chinese postgraduate and if you would like to share your experience in a new country, what about meeting up for a chat with a fellow PhD student'. I got a couple of responses by email. But Lang was the only one left with a genuine interest. I guess, she as a newcomer like myself very much needed a friend to talk to. Our regular meetings on Friday evenings lasted most of my first academic year.

For individuals, as soon as they set foot in a different cultural terrain, an uncertain journey inwards begins (Chambers, 1994). Each encounter and confrontation sparks off self-reflections, calling upon political, cultural and historical connections of meaning. In this sense, what I went through bore a resemblance to Lang's experience. She was in her late twenties and sponsored by China's Central Television Station, where she worked as a news editor for 7 years. She received her first degree in Journalism in China. Arriving in London only two months after me, she, or rather both of us, felt the urge to talk. It turned out that we had a lot in common regarding first day of arrival, impression of the immediate surroundings, getting lost in London and all the strange little things. Our conversations were quite random and informal, as at first I was not sure what specific questions to ask except that I needed to know more about her experiences, feelings and thoughts. Thankfully, Lang did not need to be encouraged and too many times we forgot the time until college security guards came to lock the door of the research student office in my Department, the only place I could think of then to meet someone.

Apart from the 'blankness and anxiety of arrival', Lang encountered both expected and unexpected difficulties. The very first was getting acquainted with British higher

education system in which critical thinking and independent learning were highly emphasized. The lack of theoretical knowledge from her previous education made lectures hard to follow. Not knowing Foucault and postmodernism, it took her a while to catch up with contemporary Western theory. Constantly, there were worries about her English proficiency when meeting social and academic demands. Particularly, she described to me her difficulties in seminars. Here, her discomfort formed a sharp contrast with her relaxed laid-back British counterparts.

I felt rather tense at the beginning. My classmates responded quickly and usually gave a wide range of ideas. I could not think of anything to say. So I tried to prepare carefully before seminars, reading handouts and thinking about what to say. You know, I did not want to be an outsider and sit through the whole hour. And I had good ideas. But until the last minute, they still remained unsaid.

Her confidence was further weakened through competition with other Asian students. She observed:

When working with my Taiwan and Singapore course mates, I found they were more mature in thinking and had wider perspectives. I simply can't make the comparison as it hurts. During all my years of employment, I had only two chances of going abroad. Looking at my own personal history of development, I am far away from where I was from. It is a big advancement. But looking at others at my age here, I am still left behind. You don't realize your confines till

you meet the privileged.

Here, Lang realized that her narrow scope of knowledge and experiences resulting from socio-economic factors obscured her vision and left her behind other Asian counterparts.

Furthermore, like many other overseas students, Lang came with the idea that her study abroad could make her meet new friends. To her dismay, friendship was not easy to seek and she kept company mostly with either Chinese students or other international students from a similar cultural background. As she said, her 'contact zone' was very narrow.

I see my course mates every day but it is hard to go further with English students after saying hi or hello. I went to the bar in the Student Union, thinking it should be a good place to socialize. But I just can't relax. I am consciously aware of my being out of place. Drinking and smoking are not a natural part of my lifestyle. What's more, I don't have a clue of what they are talking about and they may not necessarily show interest in my topics. In the end, I only know my flatmates.

Furham and Bocher (1986:16) point out the fact that many overseas students, even after staying a longer period in the host country, may still not have the experience of getting involved in any real interaction with the natives. This lack of relationships limits their chances of learning the host language and culture, thus leading to a vicious circle. Lang continued that:

But I feel better when talking with flatmates. One of them who is also my course mate is a 24-year-old Korean student. He was educated in America for 7 years. I regard him as a link between European peers and me, for he can easily mingle with them. So I will get information from him which helps ease the feeling of isolation. He doesn't realize this, but I know how important it is to me.

According to a survey carried out by the joint effort of university bodies and the British Council, nearly two thirds of overseas students studying in the UK have few or no British friends (The Guardian, 29 November, 2004). It is not surprising to read news reports that remind us of UK universities' failure to integrate overseas students (5 October 2007, Times Higher Education). If friends are nowhere to be found, one saves the sorrow of saying goodbye to them and at least what many Chinese students can do as an alternative is to bring home the picture-perfect photos of the English countryside or numerous landmarks.

With not much financial pressure and comparably good accommodation, Lang soon felt settled and started to find her way around, exploring local areas and planning trips to central London. There was disappointment, though. For example, she had expected a more welcoming atmosphere, like a tour of London or some events organized by the international office. But it seemed that as soon as you registered and paid fees, you were left alone. There were no proper channels to know UK students or the local community.

Despite these complaints, her attitude was positive as she said 'you can't expect others to

give you everything. You need to discover by yourself'. She was determined to make the most of her time in Britain. Being a journalist she wanted to absorb as much professional knowledge as possible, taking advantage of the academic resources, which were mostly not available in China. To find a social life, she went to play badminton with other students in the Student Union gym. She also organized a successful birthday party for herself and entertained her flatmates with Chinese cooking. She even went to Trafalgar square with classmates to demonstrate when the American President George W. Bush visited London. She just wanted to be part of the dominant group and not feel like an outsider.

Yet deeply there were moments she felt lost and perplexed:

> I am constantly subject to feelings of inferiority, both culturally and ideologically. I was amazed when watching British politicians debating in Parliament on TV. Not many things can be talked about publicly in our political life. It reminds me of George Orwell's novel *1984*. Maybe we are unaware of our being brain washed. I am wondering what people here will think of our images, coming from what they believe a country ruled by a totalitarian government.

On the other hand, she expressed her rejection to Western media's negative judgments and assumptions. 'Why are they always keener to report disaster instead of development in China?' She could not help asking such questions. 'Is it obvious that the world has changed?' 'Why haven't they acknowledged this?' She explained to me:

That's why I appreciate the article in the Guardian about the Chinese cockle pickers (refers to the tragic deaths of 21 cockle pickers in Morecambe Bay in 2004). The reporter went to the village in Southern China and made a good investigation. He revealed the background stories that would be otherwise left untold. His report does not reflect a Westerner's viewpoint like it normally happens but an insider's because it tells about the real situation of those villagers.

Her feelings reflect what Wendt says 'I'm not arguing that outsiders should not write about us, but they must not pretend they can write from inside us' (cited in Friedman, 1994:143). Edward Hall (1976) in his book *Beyond Culture* comments that 'most cross-cultural exploration begins with the annoyance of being lost'. The confused newcomer undergoing culture shock is bound to ask 'what accounts for all the frustrations' and 'why is fitting in so difficult'. As Adler (1987), who views culture shock as a learning experience in self-understanding and change, states, the cross-cultural individual is inevitably forced into some form of introspection and self-examination as a result of contrast and comparison.

Born in Anhui Province, one of the poorest areas in China, Lang said she never saw a train before the age of 15. Now sitting in front of me, I could not detect any trace of her small town upbringing. Confident, eloquent and well-dressed, she spoke with a perfect Beijing accent. Within ten years she had transformed herself enormously. But, she stressed that all the change in her did not come easy and she knew how hard she had tried

and the fragmentation she had to bear

Stevens (1996) notes that our consciousness not only allows us to be aware of a world around us but also of our inner world, namely, our thoughts, feelings and reflections. This can be demonstrated from Lang's attempts to achieve a sense of continuity. For instance, she attributed her difficulty of fitting in with the new environment to her different cultural background, as she concluded, albeit in a simplistic way, 'There is no common ground'. Many times in our conversations she tried to explain to me the sheer differences she found when coping with life and study in London:

> Many values or habits I developed from my education and culture are different from what are happening here. For example, critical thinking is absent in our educational philosophy. Debating and arguing are not valued in our culture. We do so only to achieve agreement. We are taught that there is one right answer. I need to know it to get good marks in exams. Different ideas are not encouraged.

She also tried to analyze the reasons accounting for her uneasiness in social interaction. From her point of view, the social skills she had no chance to develop in earlier life were to blame:

> I was brought up to believe that a good child should stay at home and study hard. I was always a hard-working student. There was no time to play or have fun. Otherwise, you felt guilty about staying idle. Then one day you suddenly realize

there are a lot of things you have missed out on.

But what impressed me most was her determination and constant effort of seeking negotiations between home culture and host culture in which she had a strong desire to participate. She told me the following in an almost forceful way,

I hate being weak. I want to find a way out and take control. There is no use self blaming. You are what you've experienced. I am trying to look at things objectively. I am from a society where life seems not to have many options and outlets. I guess that is why Western lifestyles are so attractive to young people there. But being here makes me realize that even if I stay in Britain for ten years, I may not have the feeling of belonging. (Italics, my emphasis)

In China, there is real admiration for the material abundance and cultural resources in the West, the hallmarks of Western civilization. Westerners are believed to have more options in life. Individuals' choices are respected. We are from a society where you are expected to do certain things at certain stages. If you are not married at 29 you have the nagging of your mom and pressure from society. When you get married, you are expected to start a family next. When other people are making money, you feel losing out if you don't. Success seems to be measured by the same standard.

However, I see the problems of our society that I was not able to see at home. But

I can't afford to deny everything. It is still a country I belong to. I feel irritated when hearing unreasonable criticisms about China. It is not that I keep a blind eye to the problems there. As a matter of fact, I am very much aware of them.

These excerpts above show the dilemmas Lang had when confronted with new issues as a result of her journey. Attracted by Western lifestyles, she got away from a society where traditional values still prevailed, only to discover that the Western world was not even possible for her to feel she belonged. In contrast to the freedom of life choices in a Western society, she acknowledged the difficulty of opting for an individualistic way of life in Chinese culture. However, she disliked Western hegemonic attitudes towards China and tended to take a defensive position against it. These contradictory feelings and thoughts revealed the complexity when Lang made sense of her cultural identity in the West. Apparently, whilst orienting herself to the new environment, Lang came to realize the profound effects that family, education and traditional values had on her. In the meantime, she actively used her initiative to understand her situation. As Bateson (1972:211) illustrates:

> As a result of the culture shock process, the individual has gained a new perspective on himself, and has come to understand his own identity in terms significant to himself. The cross-cultural learning experience, additionally, takes place when the individual encounters a different culture and as a result examines the degree to which he is influenced by his own culture, and understands the culturally derived values, attitudes and outlooks of other people.

From my interviews with Lang I saw the efforts she made and the dilemmas she faced when trying to adapt to the new environment. Specifically, I was drawn by how she retrieved her past experiences in an attempt to explain the present situations. She recognized the shaping forces from her home culture and was also aware of the difficulty to fit into the host culture. It was a question of how much energy and coping resources she could employ to negotiate in-between. As Trinh T. Minh-ha (1994:23) interprets:

> The voyage out of the (known) self and back to the (unknown) self sometimes takes the wanderer far away to a motley place where everything safe and sound seems to waver while the essence of language is placed in doubt and profoundly destabilized. Traveling can thus turn out to be a process whereby the self loses its fixed boundaries— a disturbing yet potentially empowering practice of difference.

To sum up, traveling to another land can ignite a journey of self-discovery though in Lang's case, it is laden with ambiguity and unsettling emotions. Her reflections and my own experience make me ask why students from the East encounter isolation, frustrations or even feelings of inferiority when living and learning in Britain. Has anyone involved in UK higher education ever shown concern about their predicament?

2.5 The Chinese Students' Experience: Voices from the Margin

It has been documented that the presence of overseas students in UK higher education is

by no means a new phenomenon. Lewis (1984) provides a good understanding about the concept of being overseas students and the difficulties they may encounter when coming to the UK. In fact, Britain has a long tradition of receiving students from other countries and studies of overseas students can date back to the Lee-Warner Committee Report on Indian students in 1907 (Elsey & Kinnell,1990). Though since then, particularly after World War Two, different problems relating to the flow of overseas students have been identified or highlighted at various stages. Most of these have reflected a host's perception, namely treating overseas students largely as problem cases, ranging from poor study skills, over dependence, language inadequacy or excessive demands and puzzling behaviours. Little is taken into consideration that overseas students coming from different countries and cultures inevitably encounter difficulty when studying in Britain.

However, since the introduction of the full-cost fees in 1980 and especially in recent years, overseas students' experience have suddenly become the focus of attention for institutions and organizations that wish to recruit them. According to the Jarratt report (1985), overseas student recruitment is a valuable source of income for universities which are 'likely to continue to experience restricted funding for some time'. The research carried out by Margaret Kinnell, *et al* (1990) makes an investigation into the learning experiences of overseas students on such major themes as teaching and learning, the student-tutor relationship and their living needs. They point out that overseas students' problems should be addressed in positive and fundamental ways rather than merely from a marketing orientation. Their conclusions in a way reveal the overall fact that most past research projects and reports are marketing-related since recruiting overseas students is

regarded primarily as an income-generating enterprise.

Only recently, faced with a large number of overseas students and the competition of a global market, the stress, as Leonard and Morley (2003) point out, 'is now more on the contribution international students' fees make to the prestige and income of the individual universities, and the UK GNP and what we contractually provide for their money.' Compared to the significance of overseas students' fees to university revenues, however, little systematic research has been undertaken by mainstream academics to identify their needs and explore possible ways of supporting them. As Caroline Pelletier (2003) notes 'the education of overseas students has never been more than a marginal interest to most academics.' A search of educational resources shows that researching into overseas students' experience in UK higher education is left far behind by other provider countries such as America and Australia. What accounts for this mismatch certainly deserves consideration.

With the support of UKCOSA, Leonard and Morley (2003) provided a review of unpublished academic work on the experiences of international students. Interestingly, it is worth noting that many of these studies were carried out by international students themselves when working for masters and doctoral degrees. Currently, published resources are predominantly questionnaire-based large-scale surveys. For instance, *Broadening Our Horizons* (2004) and *New Horizons* (2006) were conducted by UKCOSA to monitor and promote international student experience in the UK.

In the case of Chinese students, the sudden increase in their numbers has fuelled recent academics' tendency to research into their experiences (Collins & Lim, 2006; Edwards & An, 2006; Turner, 2006). Drawing from the challenge of teaching and supporting this group of learners, these researchers examined difficulties Chinese students encountered in various dimensions. However, what remains absent in the scene is the personal stories told from the perspectives of individual Chinese students, namely, an honest account of the journey they have long dreamt of. Furthermore, few researchers have employed theoretical frameworks of culture and identity to explain the reality confronting Chinese students in the West and how it is related to wider social, political and historical contexts. And without this, I believe they cannot touch the essence of the problem. Crucially, existing studies or surveys have failed to recognize that the majority of Chinese students, especially mature ones are taking initiatives by making active adjustments and meanings out of their cross-cultural experience. They are neither 'problem' students nor helpless victims portrayed as overlooked or disadvantaged but agents with common sense and capability of reasoning and reaction. In a word, stories of their individual realities remain largely unknown to British academics and policy makers. In comparison with Western academic researchers, I believe my experience as a non-Westerner will allow me to contribute to the debate and give an insightful depiction of the situation facing Chinese students.

In my view, current issues at hand call for the necessity of fostering mutual understanding and reducing the degree of unfamiliarity between host educational institutions and Chinese students. Silverman and Casazza (2000:18) claim that teaching

can be more effective if native teachers have a good understanding of their students' diverse backgrounds, experiences and needs. It is worth mentioning that British academic and support staff may find Chinese students hard to relate to. For many, their knowledge about China is still limited to the chaotic time decades ago, or rather the period of the Cultural Revolution, which is history to this new generation as well. If Chinese students' cultural background is not acknowledged, genuine progress is not likely to happen in terms of understanding their needs and expectations, let alone providing quality education and support for them. To fill in the picture and make the experience of this underrepresented group in UK higher education visible, I need to know more Chinese students and find out their individual stories. Particularly, I want to identify the views of the post-Mao generation. Born and growing up in a time when China has undergone great social economic transformation, what are their expectations and discoveries when traveling to the West? Specifically, I decided to address the following research questions:

- What do newly-arrived Chinese students encounter?
- How do they cope and negotiate with the unfamiliar environment?
- How do they perceive and interpret their cross-cultural experience?
- How does the impact of their journey influence their construction of identity?

The old Chinese saying goes that 'not knowing the real nature of Mt. Lushan is due to one's fate of living only in its midst'. Thus, embarking on a journey may be the best way for the individual to leave familiar shelter, feel the poignancy of displacement, and develop a new sense of self. However, what matters as Stuart Hall (1996:4) states is how

to use the 'resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not "who we are" or "where we came from", so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves'. According to Hall, our identities are constituted within through the narrative of the self. It is more about how we come to terms with our 'routes'. In a sense, we never change but in another we are always changing. It is in this contradiction and mediation that we seek coherence in our lives. Importantly, we learn to compromise with reality in order to make the most of our circumstances. It is true in Lang's case and I believe she is not alone in the picture.

Furthermore, Kim (2002:228), despite giving a detailed description of the process and structure in which individuals adapt to new environments, fails to examine in detail how identity may be negotiated while it is undergoing transformation. Thus, my intent is not just to articulate the challenge facing Chinese students when they transfer to a new cultural and educational system but to examine this process of identity reconstruction in detail. By listening to their voices, I wish to reveal the cultural forces that continue to bind them and more importantly, how they seek to understand their identities in a time of change and fragmentation.

2.6 Summary

In this chapter, I first provide an overall picture of the recent trend of Chinese students coming to the UK with emphasis on the dramatic expansion and potential challenges it

brings. Then I move on to explain why I decide to focus on the newcomers by drawing on my personal experience and theories of culture shock and adaptation. The case study of a newly arrived Chinese student illustrates further the predicament newcomers face in an unfamiliar environment. Feelings of isolation, frustration and even inferiority are identified at different levels. Next, I briefly review what has been done so far in terms of researching into the experience of overseas students including those from China, making justification for the necessity of this inquiry. Finally, I am able to formulate the research questions that I will explore in the main study.

In Chapter 3, I will organize a literature review on the theoretical perspectives that are relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. To understand what people encounter when crossing borders and the underlying reasons, it is essential to trace the historical development of our existing knowledge on such concepts as culture, identity and how the self is understood. In so doing, a theoretical foundation can be built up for this study.

PART TWO   THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Chapter Three: Culture, Identity and Narrative: A Historical Review

'There are winners.' said the imprisoned rabbi, the imprisoned saint. 'Winners with their arrogance, their eloquence. And there are losers without words and without signs.'

<div align="right">Edmond Jabès (1976:50)</div>

Cultural difference is no longer a stable, exotic otherness; self-other relations are matters of power and rhetoric rather than of essence.

<div align="right">James Clifford (1988:14)</div>

As soon as I *desire* I am asking to be considered. I am not merely here-and-now, sealed into thingness. I am for somewhere else and for something else. I demand that notice be taken of my *negating activity* (my emphasis) insofar as I pursue something other than life; insofar as I do battle for the creation of a human world - that is a world of reciprocal recognitions.

<div align="right">Frantz Fanon (1986:218)</div>

3.1 Introduction

It is always daunting to live and learn in a language and culture very different from one's own. For individuals who come from the East, travelling to the West symbolizes a

pilgrimage, from the periphery to the centre, the backward to the advanced, or the 'barbaric' to the civilized. Nevertheless, what newcomers filled with expectation and imagination encounter seems to be a mirage rather than a miracle. Feelings of disillusion and insecurity emerge from their actual contact with the destination country. And suddenly many are wrestling with an overwhelming sense of doubt and uncertainty about their selves and cultural identities.

Charles Taylor (1992: 25) in his essay *The Politics of Recognition* remarks that:

> Identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves.

Nowadays, we have more chance than ever of bumping into a different other in human history. Edwards and Usher (2000:139) in their exploration of the significance of globalization for educational practices argue that space-time compression has led to a growing concern on the issues of spatial metaphors and created discourses of alienation, isolation and anomie. They suggest that:

> Globalization challenges traditional continuities and bounded senses of identity through an increased and intensified engagement with the other. As Morley and Robins (1995:108) argue, 'globalization, as it dissolves the barriers of distance,

makes the encounter of colonial centre and colonized periphery immediate and intense'. This is not comfortable nor comforting, raising as it does 'the deep, the profoundly perturbed and perturbing question of our relationship to others — other cultures, other states, other histories, other experiences, traditions, peoples and destinies' (Said,1989: 216).This calls for what Bhabha (1989) has referred to as a practice of cultural translation. Here, 'the responsibility of translation means learning to listen to others and learning to speak to rather than for or about others' (Morley and Robins, 1995: 115).

Similarly, McLaren (1998:40) reminds us that:

The trouble with ethnocentrism is not just that we like those like ourselves and tend to see our own culture as the best, but that we do not recognize the fact that we do, and that we allow it to cloud our understanding of other cultures. (1998:40)

Given the increasing global flow of students seeking international education in wealthier countries and undergoing the process of culture meeting and perhaps mixing, there is a demand for institutional and governmental engagement in the recognition and accommodation of their cultural difference.

To understand what Far Eastern students encounter in a Western metropolis where, to quote James Clifford (1988:13), 'six continents foreign populations have come to stay', it

is necessary to examine culture, identity and other interrelated concepts. In what follows, I will trace the historical development concerning such theories with culture as a central theme. By drawing perspectives from cultural anthropologists, postmodernists and social psychologists, I aim to establish a theoretical paradigm for the study.

3.2 Culture: the Anthropologists' View

To understand what is meant by culture, it is necessary to turn first to anthropologists for an answer since, as classic ethnographers, they have long been specialists in the study of culture. Traditionally, Western or rather American anthropologists committed themselves to the ongoing mission of defining, developing and interpreting culture primarily through observing and recording the life of natives undertaken on other exotic lands. Margaret Mead and Malinowski's fieldwork in the South Pacific areas are exemplary in the 1950s. Kroeber and Kluckhohn, two influential American anthropologists, give a chronological account of the anthropological idea of culture in 1952 and examine as many as 164 definitions to that date in their book *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*.

It is acknowledged that the very first anthropological definition of culture was made by E. B. Tylor in his *Primitive Culture* in 1871. He states that: 'Culture, or civilization taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'(Kuper,1999:56). Since then numerous successors have attempted to redefine

or refine the meaning of culture. According to Goodman (1967:32) the simplest anthropological view of culture is 'the entire set of customs practiced by the members of a society. It is the particular way of life learned, shared, and transmitted by members of the society bearing that culture'. This definition conveys the essence that culture is both a learning and interactive process consciously or unconsciously accomplished through the medium of a common communicative system. And the term 'culture' covers a wide range of aspects from values, world views, and religion to food, dress and leisure in everyday life.

According to Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), the sharing of values is the most distinctive and significant element of culture. For it provides the only basis for the fully intelligible comprehension of culture. To know the values people hold helps us understand their modes of thinking and patterns of behaviour. This likewise leads to the possibility of appreciating their culture, for 'every society through its culture seeks and in some measure finds values' (ibid: 171-173. cited in Kuper, 1999:58). Thereby, for people moving between cultures, tensions and conflicts are likely to occur when different values inevitably clash.

Clearly, anthropologists are well convinced of the shaping power that culture has on its members. Ruth Benedict (1935: 2) in her influential book *Patterns of Culture* points out the fateful connection between an individual and the culture he or she is raised in:

The life-history of the individual is first and foremost an accommodation to the

patterns and standards traditionally handed down in his community. From the moment of his birth the customs into which he is born shape his experience and behavior. By the time he can talk, he is the little creature of his culture, and by the time he is grown and able to take part in its activities, its habits are his habits, its beliefs his beliefs, its impossibilities his impossibilities.

This revealing description demonstrates that the maturation of an individual involves a process of integration to the customs passed down from one generation to another. And individuals inescapably bear the characteristics of their own culture.

Whilst impressed by Benedict's theory of cultural patterns, Sapir (1949) stresses the concept of individual personality when studying culture. He explains that when understanding human behaviours, especially under unfamiliar circumstances and with unfamiliar people, it is almost inevitable for us to resort to the 'net result of ethnographic field notes' for clues. Sapir thus argues (1949:201):

Cultures as ordinarily dealt with, are merely abstracted configurations of idea and action patterns, which have endlessly different meanings for the various individuals in the group and which, if they are to build up into any kind of significant psychic structure, whether for the individual or the small group or the larger group, must be set in relation to each other in a complex configuration of evaluations, inclusive and exclusive implications, priorities, and potentialities of realization which cannot be discovered from an inquiry into the described

patterns. (1949:201)

Sapir's eloquent analysis adds insights to our further understanding of human behaviours of a given culture, namely in the sense that the individual's personality must be recognized before making any generalization about what his/her cultural baggage means to them. Given the generalized assumptions people frequently make when judging others from unfamiliar cultures, we see the importance of Sapir's proposal in that it reminds us of the pitfall of stereotyping and biased perception.

The interpretive anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973: 50), employing his striking writing talent, goes on to assert in *The Interpretation of Cultures* that 'our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions, are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products and ...men, every last one of them, are cultural artifacts'. He illustrates that culture is a system of symbols and to understand it, a method of 'thick description', a phrase coined by the linguistic philosopher Gilbert Ryle, should be adopted in the search for meanings. Meanwhile, Edward Hall (1976:182) who has many intercultural experiences himself makes similar remarks that culture has always imposed a dominant influence on people, particularly in aspects of memory and thinking.

To say that culture is the essence of human life is beyond question. Without it, human beings are nothing but biological organisms, uncivilized and soulless, as is put by Adam Kuper (1999:98) 'to be human is to be cultured'. Yet, paradoxically, though it is evident that individuals are historically framed and culturally bound it is not easy in reality for

them to be aware of their own culture, like fish which do not see the water. As Edward Hall (1959:39) points out, 'culture hides much more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its only participants'. He believes that the encounter with another culture can stimulate one's dormant senses and reactivate a learning process about one's own culture.

Though Hall mainly speaks from the perspective of American foreign policy and Americans' attitude towards other cultures, the situation bears a resemblance to any individual plunging into a different culture. Knowledge acquired through socialization in one culture often does not work well in another culture or rather impede his/her participation of it. In other words, the cross-cultural individuals have lost their 'security blanket', to quote Korzenny (1991:56-61). Their common sense, which, according to Geertz (1983:91), represents the world as a familiar one, may no longer guide them as the accessible life wisdom. Inevitably, the newcomers are liable to a state of confusion and disorientation.

Likewise, culture also equips individuals with 'built-in blinders' (Hall, 1976: 220), which blurs their vision and thus is bound to influence the way they think of other cultures or peoples. Hall compares this blurring to 'a highly selective screen existing between individuals and their outside worlds, a filter which effectively designates what people attend to as well as what they choose to ignore'(cited in McLaren, 1998:16). Straightforwardly, William Graham Sumner (1906:13) calls this Ethnocentrism. He defines it as 'the technical name for the view of things in which one's own group is the

centre of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it'.

However, in the years that followed critical questions were raised about anthropologists' approach to culture in terms of whether a localized society or culture can be sufficiently understood by a scientific observer, and whether a privileged outsider has the authority to speak for the Other. Furthermore, times have changed and 'natives' no longer stay put these days. They begin to travel to the centre of power and capital. Those once regarded as exotic are now uncomfortably close causing xenophobia among rich neighbourhoods. In short, no one can turn back the tide now. The world is increasingly becoming a place full of people embarking on travelling and dwelling. Thus, who can be defined as 'the native' has become less distinct.

In a similar vein, ethnographic writings have been critiqued for being a narrative device rather than an objectively presented empirical truth, namely something made rather than found (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). The so-called 'description of peoples' carries the implication that it is always the Others who are described and commented on. Conventional ethnographic accounts are accused of having elements of what Jonathan Friedman has called 'our identification of them' (1994:88). Clifford Geertz, (1988:1) on the reading of classic ethnographic reports, notes that:

> The illusion that ethnography is a matter of sorting strange and irregular facts into familiar and orderly categories— this is magic, that is technology—has long since been exploded. What it is instead, however, is less clear.

Since the publication of *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said has made a profound difference to our knowledge of the relationship between Europe and the Orient or rather the West and the East. Borrowing Michel Foucault's theory on power and discourse, Said argues that Orientalism is fundamentally a discourse created and dominated by European culture which since the late eighteenth century has been constructing the Orient culturally and ideologically as images of other and exotic. According to Said, Orientalism connotes the Occident's power, domination and authority over the Orient, namely the European culture as superior and 'Us' in comparison with other non-European peoples and cultures as inferior and 'Them'. By quoting Karl Marx's words 'They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented' (cited in Orientalism), Said shows a disturbing fact that Orientalism has been so influenced by the construction of 'Otherness' that it is almost impossible for those who write and act on the Orient to free themselves from the limitations imposed by it.

With his book *The Predicament of Culture*, James Clifford (1988:275) takes us further in the understanding of culture. He criticizes the authority of Western anthropology by questioning 'What does it mean, at the end of twentieth century, to speak... of a "native land"? What processes rather than essences are involved in present experience of cultural identity?' Uncompromisingly, he challenges the authenticity of anthropologists' ethnographic texts of the twentieth century by arguing that the distinct history of marginal people quickly vanishes when entering the modern world 'Swept up in a destiny dominated by the capitalist West and by variously technologically advanced socialisms,

these suddenly "backward" people no longer invent local futures' (1988:5). Importantly, Clifford claims that 'the time is past when privileged authorities could routinely "give voice" to others without fear of contradiction'. Furthermore, there is the doubt about the existence of organic culture or authentic natives as he comments 'in an interconnected world; one is always, to varying degrees, "inauthentic": caught between cultures, implicated in others' (1988:11).

Rey Chow (1993:29), growing up in the diaspora of Hong Kong, is one of the few intellectuals in Western academia who possesses the knowledge and eloquence to defend and articulate the 'Third world' against the imperialist and hegemonic discourse. She confronts Western anthropologists in their obsessive search for the 'authentic and stereotypical native' by asking the ironic question 'Where have all the natives gone?' When criticizing the colonial view of the native as often a synonym for the oppressed, the marginalized, the wronged, she asks:

> Is there a way of "finding" the native without simply ignoring the image, or substituting a " correct" image of the ethnic specimen for an "incorrect" one, or giving the native a "true" voice "behind" her "false" image? (1993:29)

She thus requests 'Always contextualize! Never essentialize!', for the stereotyped natives are no longer the silent object, staying in their frame and to be gazed at. They have already begun to stare back. Clearly, European culture has its own history in the construction of 'Otherness'. As Atkinson (1992:40) notes:

In Renaissance discourse, the relevant moral and intellectual framework was religious. The non-European alien was coded in terms of the 'pagan', 'heathen', and the demonic. For the Enlightenment, the key feature of the Other was 'ignorance' and 'superstition'. In the nineteenth century, when modern anthropology was born, the 'primitive' was coded in terms of 'development' and evolutionary time. (1992: 40)

However, since the end of the twentieth century, there has been a growing debate on the way culture should be studied, as can be seen from the establishment of a new discipline called cultural studies. It goes without saying that anthropologists make fundamental contributions to our understandings about culture, especially the concept of 'cultures'. However, in a postcolonial age with intensive global interdependence and mobility, anthropologists find it increasingly difficult to participate in the debate. To capture the contemporary interpretation of culture, we must come to grips with the postmodernists' view.

3.3 The Postmodern Debate on Identity and Difference

Nowadays culture is no longer only the domain of anthropologists and more people begin to talk about it with ever more enthusiasm. Among them are postmodernists who, as creatures of our present age, seem to have more to say about culture, often in association with the concept of identity. One crucial point that postmodernists strive to make is that

culture and identity are, according to Stuart Hall, not 'fixed' but 'moveable' (1992). As Featherstone and Lash (1999:1) point out:

> Culture which was assumed to possess a coherence and order, to enable it to act as the grounds for the formation of stable identities, no longer seems to be able to perform this task adequately. The linkages between culture and identity have become more problematic as the sources of cultural production and dissemination increase, and the possibilities of inhabiting a shared cultural world in which cultural meanings function in a common sense taken-for-granted manner recedes.

This reasoning about culture cannot happen without taking into consideration the impact of globalisation. We are living in an age, as the recent explosion of literature defines, of globalisation. According to Robertson (1992:8), globalisation refers to 'the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole.' Communication and transportation technologies have, to a great extent, minimized the constraints of geography. Hardly does any corner in the world escape the effects of this 'time and space' compression. Theodore Levitt (1983:113) describes: 'Everywhere there is Chinese food, pitta bread, country and Western music, pizza and jazz'. Never before has history seen such a wide-ranging flow of people crossing borders and frontiers as tourists, immigrant workers, students or even refugees. One consequence of this movement and dislocation is one's question about identity and belonging.

Some cultural studies theorists argue that this globalizing process is leading to the

breakdown of all strong cultural identities. Stuart Hall (1992:302) puts it this way:

> Cultural flows and global consumerism between nations create the possibilities of 'shared identities' — as 'customers' for the same goods, 'clients' for the same services, 'audiences' for the same messages and images — between people who are far removed from one another in time and space. As national cultures becomes more exposed to outside influences it is difficult to preserve cultural identities intact, or to prevent them from becoming weakened through cultural bombardment and infiltration.

Hall continues to analyze the relationship between this global change and identity formation:

> The more social life becomes mediated by the global marketing of styles, places and images, by international travel, and by globally networked media images and communication systems, the more identities become detached – disembedded- from specific times, places, histories, and traditions, and appear free-floating. (1992:303)

Does the phenomenon of globalisation mean different parts of the world are becoming identical and that cultural identity has somewhat vanished? Then why do individuals from peripheries classified as the 'Third World' have so much to endure: the fear of being isolated, the sense of insecurity and the agony of being powerless. Thus, Madan

Sarup (1996:102) has raised a good question: 'when postmodernism is being discussed, whose condition is being talked about?' In terms of border crossing, cultural thinker Ang (2001:165) pointed out that 'It matters who you are in border encounters, as it does matter *which* borders, both physical and symbolic, are being crossed.'

When celebrating the new emergence of identity marked by fluidity and hybridity postmodernists may take a moment to ponder the uneven distribution of power, capital, information and media influences in the global market. Who plays a dominant role in the politics of the world order and what representation of the subordinate was and is being produced? Why does the encounter with the West lead to a sense of secondariness in one's cultural identity? As the historian Albert Hourani (1946) describes: 'It is no longer to have a standard of values of one's own, not to be able to create but only to imitate; and so not even to imitate correctly, since that also needs certain originality' (cited in Morley and Robins, 1995: 137).

Undoubtedly, Western attitudes toward other cultures still bear the legacy of what Edward Said has called Orientalism. Understanding Others is characterized by Western anthropologists' rhetoric, since, according to Foucault, knowledge is inseparable from power. With deep-embedded Ethnocentrism and imperialism still lurking around, we are living in the social reality where there is a hierarchy of place and it matters who you are and where you come from.

Thus in the debate, there are counter arguments stressing that 'the process of

globalisation does not result in, as have been predicated, the homogenization of culture or universalism but rather in the provision of new spaces for the clashing of cultures' (Robertson, 1992, 1995; Lash and Urry, 1994; Featherstone, 1995). Movement from the periphery to the centre involves hope as well as despair and may lead to constant delusion and identity crisis. As Morley and Robins (1995:121) illustrate:

> Globalisation is profoundly transforming our apprehension of the world: it is provoking a new experience of orientation and disorientation, new senses of placed and placeless identity. (1995:121)

Consequently, rather than creating a world of unification, the process of globalisation is provoking a proliferation of difference. It might be exaggerated to say 'in the global village all participants are likely to be strangers (Turner, 1994:111). But at some level, increasing encounters with strangeness indeed results in feelings of alienation and homelessness in people's search for a sense of belonging, particularly those who are culturally marginal and economically disadvantaged.

Sara Ahmed in her book *Strange Encounters* (2000:8) remarks that the word 'encounter' involves not only the surprise of being faced by an other who cannot be located in the present but also the conflict since the conditions of meeting are not equal and in harmony. As a matter of fact, the proximity of the strangers fuels recognition of the distance. Similarly, Chambers (2001:164) offers his acute analysis:

The question of the other is always the question of the stranger, the outsider, the one who comes from elsewhere and who inevitably bears the message of a movement that threatens to interrupt the stability of the domestic scene. What we desire to keep at a distance is rendered proximate, the external—for which in the past walls were built, and in the present laws are passed—today becomes internal, inescapable (2001:164).

The intensive encounters with different others inflict a sense of uncertainty on the individual. Thus the contemporary self has the psychological need to take responsibility for making sense of who they really are. As Stuart Hall (1991:42-43) writes:

The logic of language of identity is extremely important to our own self-conceptions. It contains the notion of the true self, some real self inside there, hiding inside of the husks of all the false selves that we present to the rest of the world. It is a kind of guarantee of authenticity. Not until we get really inside and hear what the true self has to say do we know what we are "really saying".(1991:42-43)

Jonathan Rutherford (1990:24) gives a profound analysis of how to seek a sense of belonging in this postmodern, wide-open world:

Our bodies are bereft of those spatial and temporal co-ordinates essential for historicity, for a consciousness of our own collective and personal past. 'Not

belonging', a sense of unreality, isolation and being fundamentally 'out of touch' with the world become endemic in such a culture. The rent in our relation to the exterior world is matched by a disruption in our relation to our selves. Our struggles for identity and a sense of personal coherence and intelligibility are centered on this threshold between interior and exterior, between self and other. (1990:24)

He concludes that 'only when we achieve a sense of personal integrity can we represent ourselves and be recognized—this is home, this is belonging.'

There is no doubt that we are living in an increasingly connected but certainly not homogeneous world. People are certainly not of an equal status and the flow of cultural power and global capital is by no means even. Given the similarity in urban centers and the fluid aspect of the human nature in the face of change, significant numbers of dislocated people are going through emotional pain in their attempts to be accepted by dominant cultural groups. Obviously, cultural barriers and boundaries do not simply vanish under the influence of globalisation and with the penetration of Western culture and capital. The cultural displacement those from the margins have to endure has demonstrated this cruel reality.

People born into different places certainly have different experiences of life. Those who are culturally, politically and economically marginalized have to cope with the fear of being bound and not flexible enough to conform. They need to have the capacity of

adapting to whatever comes. They have to face the confines of language, system and history. They have to mould themselves into a new being. In this sense, I find myself in agreement with Zygmunt Bauman's (1995) view on the postmodern 'problem of identity':

> The snag is no more how to discover, invent, construct, assemble (even buy) an identity, but how to prevent it from being too tight - and from sticking to the body. Well-constructed and durable identity turns from asset into liability. The hub of postmodern life strategy is not identity building, but avoidance of being fixed. (1995:89)

For Bauman, if the modern problem of identity is how to construct and keep a solid and stable identity, then the central issue of the postmodern problem of identity is the avoidance of fixation and how to keep the options open (1995:81).

To be caught in between is the dreadful dream of the intruding newcomer, the foreigner 'the one who does not belong to the group, who is not "one of them", the other' (Madan Sarup, 1996:7). Shall we hide our difference and try to adjust to the dominant norm for survival? Or shall we afford to ignore injustice, prejudice or inequality and just be ourselves? But why do we feel so lonely and desperate like a lost child? For people who do not belong, survival depends on how flexible they can become, or to what extent they can reinvent themselves. As Frantz Fanon (1986:109) describes: 'I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self'.

Rutherford (1990) suggests that:

We can use the word difference as a motif for that uprooting of certainty. It represents an experience of change, transformation and hybridity, in vogue because it acts as a focus for all those complementary fears, anxieties, confusions and arguments that accompany change. (1990:10)

How should we deal with the difference in the momentum of postmodernity? Madan Sarup (1996:12) gives his perspective:

at present the norm stresses similarity, but what would happen if the norm changed and stressed difference? What would happen if there was recognition of the diversity of subjective positions and cultural identities (1996:12).

Today millions of border-crossers are separated from their native cultures and dwelling in displacement and diaspora or rather in a state of homelessness. Some refuse to be the insignificant other and have begun to articulate and even assert their identity. As Cornel West (1995) remarks:

How you construct your identity is predicated on how you construct desire: desire for recognition; quest for visibility; the sense of being acknowledged; a deep desire for association...the longing to belong.... (1995:15)

One need not doubt the fact that our world is becoming smaller. Yet it takes a moment of hesitation to conclude people from different parts of the world can mingle and communicate better than before. Space and time can no longer divide the world but there seem still to be barriers and gaps blocking the way to shared understanding and humanity. What impedes people from 'hanging together' is a question to which there is no quick answer. By the same token, what makes different groups of people hate each other is a complex matter as well. However, in view of the ways postmodernists define our time and its features, it is my intent to stress that the strenuous effort made by those from the margins in their struggle into being, into narrative should not be ignored; their voices should be heard and their histories and cultural identities acknowledged in today's world stage.

3.4 The Reflexive Self through Narrative

How can we make sense of our life experiences in a time marked by rapid change and transition? How can travelling individuals cope with the fragmentation and dislocation of identities to attain inner peace when belonging becomes ambiguous in adopted lands? To what extent can we negotiate between fixation and flexibility, tradition and translation, coherence and inconsistency as a result of movement? And how do we maintain a coherent sense of self when crossing cultural boundaries? To answer these questions we need to come to terms with the concept of the self, particularly new theoretical interpretation of the self in the postmodern condition.

3.4.1 Conceptualization of the Self

It is noted that our understanding of the self changes at different times in history. In contrast to the traditional and modern notions of the self, postmodern commentators like Jean-Francois Lyotard and Michel Foucault believe that the late twentieth century is essentially featured with ambiguity, fragmentation and discontinuity. Gergen (1991) introduces the concept of 'the saturated self' in that people in contemporary society are subject to the great impact of mass media, new technology and global economy. Thus, they are more likely to face the effects of social change and mobility on their consciousness and sense of self. One of the consequences, as McLeod (1997:6) notes, is that the individual person 'is not known by any one other or group as a consistent whole, but experiences himself or herself as different selves in different settings.' Specifically, this experience of self and identity can be intensified when people change countries and languages. The uprootedness necessitates a process of reconstructing one's sense of self.

Apparently, the postmodern perspective on the self is different from the traditional one in social psychology, established by leading figures such as William James, Charles Horton Cooley and in particular, the philosopher George Herbert Mead. According to Mead, the self is socially formed and thus exists primarily through social experience. He points out that:

The individual experiences himself as (an object), not directly, but only indirectly,

from the particular standpoints of other members of the same social group...(The individual) becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him...it is impossible to conceive of a self arising outside of social experience. (1934:138-40)

Mead's ideas have since been amplified by social constructionists, who stress that individuals cannot be properly understood without considering the social contexts in which they are brought up. They argue that 'selves, persons, psychological traits and so forth, including the very idea of individual psychological traits, are social and historical constructions, not naturally occurring objects' (Sampson, 1989:2). Similarly, Taylor (1989:36) remarks that 'one cannot be a self on one's own'. The individual has to be recognized or identified in one way or another in social life. In short, the view of the self as a social object questions the perception of the individual as an independent self, which has dominated Western understanding of human beings for centuries. Geertz (1979:222) has summarized that:

The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures. (1979:222)

Clearly, in present days the free-willed, independent and isolated island of the self has become a myth. Rather, as Holstein and Gubrium (2000) argue, in a postmodern world so rapidly changing and producing fragmentation, insecurity and risk, the self is more than ever challenged and a dynamic adaptable self is thus in demand. This resonates with other modern cultural theorists' view on identity in that it is no longer fixed or stable but dislocated and fragmented. It is 'formed or transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us' (Hall, 1992:277). When diagnosing the postmodern condition of self, Holstein and Gubrium (2000:12) go on to explain that:

> As we conceptualize contemporary selves, then, we must regard them as a distinctive version of subjectivity. Currently, we are actively engaged in structuring our lives so they appear individually meaningful, organized, coherent, and responsible...While this subject is clearly social, its production is both artfully agentic and culturally circumscribed. Never the mere reflection of social responses, it is actively crafted in light of biographical particulars, using culturally endorsed formats. (2000:12)

What Holstein and Gubrium try to convey is that the self is not only a 'social structure', as Mead puts it, but also a valued social construction. And more importantly, the self is constructed through storytelling or rather an ongoing process of defining oneself through narrative. They conclude that the postmodern self is as much narratively constituted as actually lived. No doubt that this new trend of conceptualizing identity cannot be

separated from such contemporary themes as discontinuity, fragmentation and dislocation. Clearly, it is through language that we seek possible linkage between the past and present in order to understand different issues confronting us in life. Madan Sarup (1996:15) puts it simply: 'if you ask someone about their identity, a story soon appears. Our identity is not separate from what has happened... We construct our identity at the same time as we tell our life-story'. This echoes what Chambers claims, 'Language is not primarily a means of communication; it is, above all, a means of cultural construction in which our very selves and sense are constituted' (1994:22). Having discussed about the nature of the postmodern self above, I now proceed to elaborate the role of narrative in identity construction.

3.4.2 Identity and Narrative

The need for the fragmented self in the postmodern landscape to locate himself or herself results in an intimate relationship between identity and narrative. As a 'self-interpreting subject' (Taylor, 1989), the individual articulates experience and constructs meaning through language or in Bakhtinian view through conversation or imagined conversation. Our human consciousness means that we have the capacity for reflexive awareness. The sociologist Giddens (1991:2) in the analysis of globalizing influences on the individual's reflexive account of life biography writes:

the self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences: in forging their self-identities, no matter how local their specific contexts of action, individuals

contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications. (1991:2)

He argues that the self is 'a reflective project' embarking on an ongoing endeavour, 'which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives'(1991:5). For Giddens, late modernity is typified by a high sense of 'reflexivity'. Similarly, Madan Sarup (1996:16) remarks that the self is produced in the construction of a narrative by the act of making and telling of a story, 'to some extent we construct our story, and hence our identity.' Harold Garfinkel (1967) also reminds us that in the twentieth century, it is the self that takes responsibility for the shaping of identity and hereby to understand individuals requires detailed investigation of everyday life and practices. Nikolas Rose (1997:237) makes the following remarks from reading Kenneth Gergen.

> human beings do not just use language to recount their life to one another, they actually live out their lives as ' narratives'(Gergen, 1991). We use the stories of the self that our culture makes available to us, with their scenarios of emotions, their repertoires of motives, their cast-list of characters, to plan out our lives, to account for events and give them significance, to accord ourselves an identity as hero or victim, survivor or casualty within the plot of our own life, to shape our own conduct and understand that of others.

There is no question about the crucial role that narrative plays in the postmodern self's

attempts to attain meaning and resilience. This explains why there is an increasing academic interest in the recognition of personal narrative practices when researching lived experience and identity construction. It is documented that since the last decade, more scholars of various fields have opted for 'the narrative turn' in their research. As Riessman (1993:8) agues, 'Investigators do not have direct access to another's experience. Instead, we deal with ambiguous representations of it, that is, talk, text, interaction, and interpretation'. In short, narrative provides a valuable source for the researcher to gain in-depth understanding about 'not only the individual identity and its system of meaning but also the teller's culture and social world' (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998:9).

Relevant literature reveals that narrative has been used extensively in disciplines such as literature, anthropology, psychology and sociology. Clearly, as a natural form of discourse, narrative is powerful in the depiction of human experience and how it can be made meaningful by them. Human beings are storytellers by nature. Stories provide coherence and continuity to our experiences. We know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others by the stories we tell (Lieblich, Tuval, & Zilber, 1998). By emphasizing the role of memory in the process of identity making, many social psychologists argue that our lives only achieve meaning as stories, life histories, self narratives or autobiographies (Kearney, 2003). Clandinin and Connelly (1994:16) define narrative as 'the making of meaning through personal experience by way of a process of reflection in which storytelling is a key element and in which metaphors and folk knowledge take their place'. Henrietta Moore (1994: 119) goes further to say that

'narrative is a strategy for placing us within a historically constituted world, and thus our very concept of history is dependent on narrative. If narrative makes the world intelligible, it also makes ourselves intelligible'. In border-crossing situations, Edward Said (1990: 366) observes that 'For an exile, habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occurs against the memory of things in the other environment'. Importantly, to understand the dilemma of identity that confronts the traveling individual, Woodward (2002:168) suggests that:

> Identity travels, but it is about belonging. Roots are important, but an insistence on fixity and essential sources makes change difficult and stultifies development. Keeping in mind the journeys we have made and would like to make, and holding on to the moments that matter, make routes a more useful concept. We need to remember, in order to know where we have come from, so that we can create new stories of the self, while not losing sight of belonging.

These arguments demonstrate the level of complexity in understanding identities. For individuals embarking on travelling and dwelling, we may tolerate being misunderstood and misrepresented. But we cannot go on without understanding who we are. Speaking from memory, we are making a story - a story we tell to ourselves as the most important listeners. As Kerby (1991:125) comments, 'the self is constituted in and through language usage, and more particularly through self narration.' To sum up, it is in narrative that we construct our identities. By recalling and recounting our stories, we comprehend difficult issues in life and make our experiences of past and present meaningful. This is

particularly significant to those from the margins who are seeking life chances compared to the powerful and the privileged. Here, I agree with Stevens's view that we need to pay more attention to power relations in society in that different social groups may experience modern conditions differently (1996:349).

3.5 Summary

In this chapter, I begin my argument with an anthropologists' account of culture by placing emphasis on the binding power culture has over its members. I then move on to the critique of the traditional ethnographic approach made by leading figures like Said and Clifford. New questions are raised in terms of how to interpret culture in the contemporary world. I illustrate further that dominating the site of current debates are postmodernists who claim that in an age of globalization, culture and identity are no longer fixed and stable but appear 'free-floating'. As opposed to this, there are counterarguments that cultural flow and global mobility have created a proliferation of differences rather than a romanticized sense of universality, considering the uneven distribution of power, capital and global media between the centers and the margins. Thus I propose for individuals on the move, there exists a politics of place and a predicament of identity crisis. To negotiate between home culture and adopted culture, the postmodern individual, according to social psychologists, needs a strategy of reflection so as to seek consistency in the process of narrating self and identity.

To find out how individuals make sense of selves and identities as a result of leaving

familiar lands and confront the unknown world, it is necessary to listen to their talk and analyze their experiences. However, before embarking on this, I need to tackle the methodological problems arising from this study. Thus, in the next chapter, I will explain the approach and methods I choose for this inquiry and introduce the Chinese students who participate in my research.

Chapter Four: Trust and Trustworthiness: Analyzing Narratives

Coming to a country, any country... is an experience palpable enough to be felt on the skin, and penetrant enough to be felt beneath it. The difficulty lies in articulating that experience, making it available to the common view....

Clifford Geertz (1995:23)

The overriding criterion for judging the quality of a study is its capacity to emancipate, empower or otherwise make free a particular oppressed group of people.

Clive Seal (1999:9)

While realizing that writing about experience always is removed from actual "raw" experience (Denzin, 1991), the overriding concern of these writers is shrinking the distance between the experiencing subjects and their accounts of lived experience.

Ellis & Flaherty (1992:4)

Part I Methodology

4.1 Introduction

As already indicated in Chapter 1, this research arose from my own journey to the West. Travelling enables me to see others and also how others see us. Being a newcomer in an unfamiliar country, it has become a psychological need to start an autobiographical

narrative. My experience resulting from this transnational movement has prompted me to ask why individuals from the East encounter conflicting feelings and emotions once arriving in cosmopolitan London. In other words, how I should deal with the ambiguity I felt about my identity has suddenly become an issue.

Also, on a practical level as discussed earlier in Chapter 2, the last decade has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of Chinese students coming to Britain. I am concerned with how they cope with the new environment and interpret their cross-cultural experiences. Importantly, I want to introduce the socio-cultural and educational context in which this generation of Chinese students are historically situated. I believe familiarity with this group of students is the first step towards understanding the issues facing them and providing suitable education and support for them.

What methodological approaches can help me achieve such purposes? How can I examine the impact of travel on the individual's sense of self and cultural identities? My literature review in Chapter 3 shows that ethnography has long been regarded as the primary form of studying and writing culture by anthropologists. Can it also be employed in probing the increasingly important issues of culture and identity in a globalized and postmodern world? Hence, understanding ethnography becomes the first step in my quest for methodological solutions.

4.2 Why Ethnography

In retrospect, it is understandable that I had ambivalence about why and how ethnography could address my topics of concern at the beginning of my research. Apparently, as one of the principal methods of social research, ethnography has undergone its own historical development and generated ongoing debates in different academic disciplines. Originating in anthropology, classic ethnographic fieldwork in the early twentieth century often featured privileged Western travellers going to exotic places and studying the culture of native social groups. With its embedded sense of seeing the West as superior and the 'Other' as strange, it has been accused of being a child of both colonialism and imperialism (Trouillot, 2003).

My quandary was considerably eased when reading further on the ethnographic crisis of representation in the late twentieth century (Clifford, 1988; Rosaldo,1989; Clough, 1992). As Alasuutari (1995:24) notes:

> Anthropology was born to study foreign cultures and less complex societies in remote places, but time and place have lost much of their meaning in the present world: the 'other' have moved next door, and 'western' artifacts, television programs, and economic networks have invaded practically the entire globe.

Clearly, the critique of ethnographic authority contributes to our debates on how culture should be understood, and the changing nature of fieldwork in a post-colonial world. Indeed, culture has become mobile. Now everyone is a traveller and can have cosmopolitan experiences. The sites of contact happen more in urban or rather Western

centres, creating new meeting points and forms of cultural encounters.

Today ethnography is hardly associated with what Radcliffe-Brown (1952) called 'descriptive accounts of non-literate peoples'. Rather, 'natives' have become authors of ethnographic studies of their own cultural group. So does ethnography still have the advantage in examining the issues of culture and identity confronting border-crossing individuals? Denzin's reflections on ethnographic practices in the 21st century provide insights for my understanding. Importantly, he points out the shift in ethnography's role of writing culture in our contemporary world:

> As that culture has gone postmodern and multinational, so too has ethnography. The ethnographic project has changed because the world that ethnography confronts has changed. Disjuncture and difference define this global, postmodern cultural economy we all live in (Appadurai, 1990, 1993). National boundaries and identities blur. Everyone is a tourist, an immigrant, a refugee, an exile, or a guest worker, moving from one part of the world to another. (1997, introduction: xii)

Of course, the changing social reality requires new approaches to the writing of ethnography. According to Reed-Danahay (1997), this has generated debates about the politics and poetics of representation in cultural studies since the 1980s, resulting in a growing interest in using personal narrative, life history and autobiography to study individual lives among contemporary anthropologists. It is noted that more women, ethnic and marginal groups, and scholars from the peripheries are becoming

ethnographers of writing about their own representations, as can be seen from the many new terms this trend has produced. For instance, 'autoethnography' is created to refer to 'the ethnography of one's own group' or 'the form of writing wherein the ethnographer is the native' (Reed-Danahay, 1997:2 and 5). Also 'reflexive ethnography' refers to studies where the importance of the researcher's personal experience and knowledge is emphasized, or 'native ethnography' when the native researcher becomes the bicultural insider. As Ellis and Bochner (2000:740-741) summarize, those once 'exoticized or marginalized by others want to write about and interpret their own cultures for others.'

Precisely, fuelled by my resistance to Western hegemonic representation of 'the Other', I want to speak up for ourselves and tell about our perceptions of the changing world. Born in the 1970s, I belong to a generation that does not have much memory of Mao and the Cultural Revolution. Growing up in the process of China's fast modernization and social economic change, this is a generation caught in-between the transition of tradition and modernity. Through the voices of the travelling individuals, I wish to explore what are the push-and-pull forces that constrain or enable them in their journey to the West. What is the impact upon their identification process in the face of Western superiority? How may this implicate our conceptualization of the shifting nature of identity in postmodernity? Hence, this study is an autoethnography or the writing about stories told by boundary-crossers who have arrived and are casting their own gaze on the West.

To sum up, this theoretical justification is crucial for me to find my own political stance and philosophical perspectives. It helps me clarify the underlying purpose of this research

and decide possible routes for self representation as opposed to the othered and imposed stereotypical images. It has also made me realize the inseparable connection between autobiography and ethnography in this research.

4.3 What Counts as Ethnographic Research

How can I then proceed to conduct such an ethnographic research? What strategies allow me to be there and learn about the experience of those being studied? In *Ethnography: a way of seeing,* Wolcott illustrates that to claim a study to be ethnographic, there are two qualities: a field-oriented activity and cultural interpretation as its central purpose. This resonates with Spradley (1979:5) as he argues:

> The essential core of ethnography is this concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand...people make constant use of these complex meaning systems to organize their behaviour, to understand themselves and others, and to make sense out of the world in which they live. These systems of meaning constitute their culture; ethnography always implies a theory of culture. (1979:5)

Clearly, what an ethnographer seeks is the meaning people assign to their experience, which is undoubtedly the core of my exploration. Ethnography, according to O'Leary (2004:118) is a powerful research methodology in understanding such cultural phenomena as it offers:

- rich and in-depth exploration of the values, beliefs, and practices of cultural groups through thick description of real people in natural settings. This may be a culture that is intrinsically interesting, or one that is explored to shed light on more fundamental cultural norms.

- a way of exploring the working nature of culture, symbols, and norms. This can lead to a dialogue with existing theory, as well as insights that can lead to the development of new theory.

- Recognition of the importance of multiple worldviews. Ethnography offers an approach for building understandings from the perspective of the researched. (2004:118)

What matters is that there does not have to be a standard format or a model to follow in doing ethnography. The customary criteria for the identification of ethnography do not have to hold in every case. As Wolcott (1999:77) points out, it is like 'ripples on a pond', aiming to show there is no clear line to be drawn. A study that even matches a checklist of everything does not have to be more satisfyingly ethnographic. One needs to be circumspect and pragmatic with one's own study.

Meanwhile, Gregory *et al* (2005) provide a timely and step-by-step guidance on writing educational ethnographies. They emphasize that the aim of ethnography in education is to speak up for those whose voices would otherwise remain silent. Unlike questionnaire-based survey studies, ethnography as a research approach has its strength in identifying

the real circumstances of people, particularly those disadvantaged and marginalized. Moreover, as a new researcher, I find it helpful in that this book not only offers models of writing an ethnographic thesis but also charts the difficulties fellow researchers encountered in their PhD studies.

4.4 Critical Examination of the Researcher's Role

However, can I simplistically assume that I am in a better position to tell the truth of our own stories? Does my native status give me more authority to claim the authenticity of this self-representation? In view of my personal connection to this research, how do I make sure not to mix the researcher's voice with those of the researched? Hence, the researcher's role or, as Stanley and Wise describe, 'the place of the personal within research' (1993:150) has to be critically examined in ethnographic writing. David Lazar puts forward this issue in S*elected Issues in the Philosophy of Social Science* (1998:17):

> Social scientists, whatever their theoretical perspectives, are individuals with personal characteristics, are situated in a certain class, ethnic group, gender, religious group and live in a particular historical period. How, when each researcher is embedded in prejudices, values and specific cognitive frameworks, can we move, however tentatively, towards something which might be called objectivity?

Objectivity seems to be such a fearful topic for qualitative researchers. So should I deny

the level of subjectivity involved in this study? On the contrary, subjectivity is the focus or emphasis in that this research explores individuals' perceptions of a particular experience. Bill Ayers (cited in Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995:118) celebrates the value of subjectivity in understanding the human condition:

> Life history and narrative approaches are personal centered, unapologetically subjective. Far from a weakness, the voice of the person, the subject's own account represents a singular strength.

For Denzin (1989), one important feature of autoethnography is that the researcher is not the conventional objective outsider but infiltrates his/her own life experiences into the writing. For Deck (1990), the researcher's first hand knowledge of his/her culture injects authority to the textual construction. Indeed, the more I read other autoethnographic works, the more I am convinced that I can insert my own experiences and analytical insights into the text. However, as Davies (1998) reminds us considerations of reflexivity of methods and practice are important in ethnographic research. Hence let me review the research context first as it is crucial to the question of validation.

Clearly, this is not an ethnographic study in its traditional sense, as defined by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) and many others, nor am I 'the professional stranger' (Agar, 1980). Rather, I am a 'complete member' (Adler & Adler, 1987) and I based my project on the interviewing of four educated and articulate individuals, who like me had been acutely self-conscious and aware of whatever confronted them since their very first

day of arrival in London. When the much desired and imagined West was finally under their scrutiny, they took every chance to observe, participate and absorb, just like Schutz's stranger (1964). In this sense, the four individuals have done a lot of thinking and sense-making with regard to what they have seen, heard and experienced. My task as a researcher is to provide a platform for them to share their experiences with me. In so doing, issues arising from this journey could be appropriately identified and explored. Hence, instead of 'deep hanging out', I chose 'deep questioning' and 'active listening'. This practice reflects what Tedlock (1991) argues, the shift from 'participant observation' to the 'observation of participant'. Thus, albeit humble, interviewing is still a simple and effective way of generating experience from people in this ethnographic research. As Clive Seale (1998:202) notes:

> The interview is probably the most commonly used method in social research. It is more economical than observational methods since the interviewee can report on a wide range of situations that he or she has observed, so acting as the eyes and ears of the researcher. The researcher can also use an interview to find out about things that cannot be seen or heard, such as the interviewee's inner state - the reasoning behind their actions, and their feelings. (1998:202)

I met and interviewed Lang first as mentioned in Chapter 2 and then three others. Huan, Jiandong and Dawei joined in the main study the following academic year. A more detailed description of the participants and my interviews with them will be given in Part II of this chapter. Before interviewing them, I made sure each participant understood my

project by giving them a brief orientation. They agreed with me that talking about their experiences and views mattered and would make a difference to the current situation. The commonality of being Chinese and studying overseas drew us closer. Importantly, I did not have any controlling power over them. In fact, they were quite straightforward about their thoughts, frustrations, dilemmas as well as discontents. I would imagine a different repertoire if they were interviewed by a Western or indigenous researcher. Certain subjects they would feel reluctant to touch upon, let alone criticise, given the sensitivity of power in a hierarchical relationship.

Overall, I shared genuinely with my participants what I was doing and why I was doing it. Once the chosen individuals decided to participate in the project, it was out of their own interest and willingness. Often, as Dilthey (1985) understands, experience urges expression. They took the chance to talk and did not need to be encouraged. Put simply, my motive and empathy enabled me to earn their sincerity and trust. This collaborative nature formed the solid foundation for a deep and honest depiction of their stories. Also, successful models of small-sampled studies convince me that it is possible to achieve the level of depth and understanding about the particular phenomenon being investigated. Here, Rubin and Rubin (1995) give a clear view:

> What is important to interpretive social scientists is how people understand their worlds and how they create and share meanings about their lives. Social research is not about categorizing and classifying, but figuring out what events mean, how people adapt, and how they view what has happened to them and around them.

(1995:34)

4.5 Issues of Representing Experience

Clifford (1988:39) remarks that: 'Experiences become narratives'. However, when research data is largely composed of personal narrative accounts of experience, there are serious issues to be concerned with. Bruner (1986:7) reminds us of the distinction between reality, experience and expressions, as he remarks 'there are inevitable gaps between reality, experience, and expressions, and the tension among them constitutes a key problem in the anthropology of experience.' According to Riessman (1993: 9), the representation of experience necessitates 5 steps in the research process, as illustrated below:

Attending to experience   recollecting and reflecting on the chosen experience

Telling about experience   the performance of a personal experience

Transcribing experience   transcribing taped conversation into the form of text

Analyzing experience   reshaping the transcript into a written report

Reading experience   reader's interpretation of meaning

Clearly, there is no unmediated external reality but the subjective account of realities. How can the researcher assume that her respondents are 'telling it like it is'? Individuals' circumstances and attitudes affect their perspectives and perceptions of experience. Alasuutari (1995:85) concludes from his own interview experience that on some delicate

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issues 'People will not always be quite honest but try to portray themselves in as positive a light as possible'. There is hidden misery or weakness people are reluctant to reveal. A story told in an interview can be quite different from the version in a personal diary. People choose what to tell and how to tell about their experiences in the interviews. Indeed, whilst acknowledging my collaborators' trust and sincerity, the telling of experience is not unproblematic in an interview situation. For example, Jiandong tended to present himself as experienced and having everything under control. This may be attributed to the fact that embarrassment or loss of face is a major concern for the Chinese. Being senior and often respected for his status in his workplace, Jiandong might not want to disclose his weakness, particularly when talking to a younger female interviewer. It was likely for him to downplay the level of difficulties as a result of male authority. Similarly, although Dawei was very candid about his opinions on a range of issues in our interviews, he nevertheless declined my request for some extracts from his personal journal, albeit in a very polite way. Understandably, what were possibly his inner deepest thoughts or frustrations remained unknown to this researcher.

When touching on this thorny problem in narrative research, namely, the truth of what a teller says, Riessman (1993: 22) quotes the Personal Narratives Group's writing (1989a:261):

> When talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths. These truths don't reveal the past "as it actually was," aspiring to a standard of

objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences...Unlike the truth of the scientific ideal, the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident. We come to understand them only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and to the world views that inform them. Sometimes the truths we see in personal narratives jar us from our complacent security as interpreters "outside" the story and make us aware that our own place in the world plays a part in our interpretation and shapes the meanings we derive from them.

In addition, according to Denzin, 'language, which is our window into the subject's world (and our world) plays tricks' (1991: 68). For 'any window is always filtered through the gaze of language, signs and the process of significance' (Denzin, 1989:14). In this sense, the limitation of textual representation of experience as told must be properly recognized.

In fact, social scientists have different views on the validation of data generated from interviews. David Silverman (2001) summarizes the three positions as follows:

According to **positivism**, interview data give us access to 'facts' about the world. The primary issue is to generate data which are valid and reliable, independently of the research setting. The main ways to achieve this are the random selection of the interview sample and the administration of standardized questions with multiple-choice answers which can be readily tabulated.

According to **emotionalism**, interviewees are viewed as experiencing subjects who actively construct their social worlds. The primary issue is to generate data which give an authentic insight into people's experiences. The main ways to achieve this are unstructured, open-ended interviews usually based upon prior, in-depth participant observation.

According to **constructionism**, interviewers and interviewees are always actively engaged in constructing meaning. Rather than treat this as standing in the way of accurate depictions of 'facts' or 'experiences', how meaning is mutually constructed becomes the researcher's topic. (2001:87)

Here, the positivists' approaches of dealing with validity and reliability do not fit well in judging the value of studies focus on subjectivity. The disparity can be found from a quick look at the way how these two terms are defined (Hammersley,1990; Kirk and Miller, 1986). Instead, Mishler (1990:419) argued that conventional understanding of validity is inappropriate to act as a judgment criterion for social science. Instead, we should 'make claims for and evaluate the "trustworthiness" of reported observations, interpretations, and generalizations.' In a similar vein, Riessman (1983:65) argues that 'the historical truth of an individual's accounts is not the primary issues..." Trustworthiness" not "truth" is a key semantic difference.' She further suggests four ways of approaching validation in narrative studies:

Persuasiveness: Is the interpretation reasonable and convincing?

Correspondence: Can results be taken back to those studied?

Coherence: Does it meet the coherence criterion?

Pragmatic: To what extent does it become the basis for future work?

The overall assessment of a study's trustworthiness has considerably reassured me and provided profound insights for my data analysis. My intent is to understand how individuals interpret events rather than testing whether or not their perceptions correspond to or mirror the objective reality. The starting point of this research was to give voice to a rather marginal unfamiliar cultural group. Nevertheless, as the research process went further, it turned out to be more complicated than expected. Riessman cautiously claims (1993:8 and 15) that 'we cannot give voice, but we do hear voices that we record and interpreted.' According to her, all types of representation of experience are limitedly portrayed in that the investigators control the interpretation and creation of text all the time by using symbolic devices to stand for the original experience.

Ultimately, as Clifford notes, 'ethnography is, from beginning to end, enmeshed in writing' (Clifford, 1988:25). The contemporary crisis of representation in ethnographic writing has already been well articulated and led to explorations of new and creative writings (Bruner: 1986; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Clifford: 1988; Lather: 1993; Denzin, 1997). For instance, Denzin (1997:5) questions the nature of text and argues that 'There can never be a final, accurate representation of what was meant or said - only different textual representation of different experiences.'

How then can the researcher fulfill her goal of rendering visible unacknowledged experiences while bearing in mind the inevitable methodological problems the nature of ethnographic research brings about? How can the researcher make her 'interpretation of interpretations' without being accused of making it up? In view of the poststructuralist argument about text and life as experienced, is it possible to claim textual authority and convince readers when authenticity is such an elusive concept? It is to these issues that I now turn in the following section.

4.6 Analyzing Narratives: Methods and Problems

In contrast with the increasing interest in narrative inquiry in recent years, there have been few empirical and exemplary studies showing how to analyze the narrative data gathered. To be frank, faced with piles of interview transcripts, I had no clue where to start.

So what analytical methods can be used to investigate how individuals adapted to a new cultural environment? How does this process influence their way of recognizing and identifying themselves? What analytical tool can be used to detect the subtle transformative mechanisms from instances of story telling?

The level of complexity was obvious and I needed to find my own approach that best suited my way of justifying the experiences of my collaborators. Here, Atkinson and Coffey (1996:16) contribute to the task of data sorting:

The notion of "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) often is used to characterize the goal of qualitative, ethnographic research. That term itself is open to a variety of interpretations. One fruitful way of thinking about the production of "thick" analysis is to recognize the value of multiple analytic strategies.

For my information, I wanted to draw on four cross-cultural individuals' accounts of experience as a resource to explore how their journey to the West influenced the construction of their identities. In a broad sense, the data for use was narrative text obtained in interviews. The preliminary analysis of my interviews with Lang revealed that her constant attempts or struggles for meaning were an explicit feature of her telling. What was once assumed suddenly needed explaining and rethinking. Turner reminds us (1986:33) 'Meaning arises when we try to put what culture and language have crystallized from the past together with what we feel, wish, and think about our present point in life.' Precisely, this also happened to the other three participants in their attempts to make sense of their cultural encounters.

Furthermore, cross comparisons revealed a similar pattern arising from their cultural adaptation. For instance, each of the four participants had expressed the moments when they were transformed from being anxious and disoriented to a more active approach in their coping with the new environment. Hence, I believed that the starting-point of my analysis should rest upon making this dynamic process explicit. Polkinghorne (1995:12) calls this 'paradigmatic analysis', which is also what many other qualitative researchers

look for: the identification of key themes and patterns (Huberman and Miles: 1994, Dey. 1993, Wolcott, 1994). Only I wanted to incorporate the themes into the momentum of their one year stay in Britain. I call this initial level of analysis 'the trajectory of change', featured with three stages and their defining themes:

East meets West: focus on newcomers' difficulties and anxieties.

Coping Scenarios: focus on strategies developed and actions taken.

The impending return: focus on worries and anticipation of homecoming.

Specifically, in this process I highlighted the fact that they not only made evaluative comments on the host culture but at the same time, reached back to their home culture and reflected upon its influence on them. In this sense-making, they realized the invisible forces that constrained them in their adjustment. As Dawei commented:

> There are some things that are difficult to change without a purpose or urge to prompt you. It happens so often to me. Indeed, in this country, you find your views on life are different from people here. You come with your traditions and family background. These are things that are pulling you... restrict you ... affect you so much in decision making... and I find it difficult ...very difficult to overcome.

On the other hand, they felt empowered by absorbing new perspectives from the host culture such as respect for the individual. A rite of passage is about the change and

possible transformation happening to them. This is especially true for Huan. Coming out of a painful divorce, she was conscious of seeking new meanings for herself. As she said:

> You don't feel your human nature is repressed here. You not only can have ideas but also can do as you think. Your opinions are valued. I have had a whole new understanding of who I am and what my potential is. I find myself actually a woman who is very independent and open-minded. I have never ever realized this before. I hope in future my life won't all be the same and I need it to be fuller and more diverse. I think everyone should have the right to make choices about their way of life. I used to be very self-doubting and indecisive. Now if I have made a decision, I will try my best to realize it. I have the confidence.

Effectively, this paradigmatic analysis enabled me to organize data systematically in a structural order. Meanwhile, it also provides a holistic view of the transitional process for the reader.

The second level of analysis came from my thinking of what to do with the kinds of vivid stories and recounting of events in the transcripts? These narratives often take the form of an extended stretch of talk and have their own beginning, middles and ends. For example, Huan explained why she did not want to be submissive any more. Jiandong talked about his learning of neo-Marxism. Dawei reflected upon Chinese culture from his experience of the Chinese New Year parade in London. According to Benwell & Stokoe (2006:43),

Narrative researchers examine the kinds of stories narrators place themselves within, the identities that are performed and strategically claimed, why narratives are developed in particular ways and told in particular orders.

Indeed, the four individuals were not just narrators but active observers who always attempted to interpret what had happened to them. Obviously, these were important sites for me to work on in terms of how the construction of identities was affected as a result of their journey. My reading of recent works on narrative analysis provided illuminations and eventually helped me decide the tool for such analytical purpose, to which I will return in more detail in Chapter 6.

Crucially, my theoretical framework established from the literature review made me believe the key to unlock how movement affects identity construction might lie in reflexivity, or 'self-reflection, self-confrontation' (Beck,1994:6). This conviction was meanwhile reinforced by my empirical work. Indeed, whenever it is absorbing new perspectives or wrestling with dilemmas of social isolation, ideological crisis or clashes of different values, reflexivity is a distinct practice throughout the four individuals' journey of discovery. Travelling to another culture provided a medium for them to ask such ontological questions 'Why this happened?' 'How to cope?' and 'Who am I?' The challenge for me is how to map their self-analysis onto the broader social, cultural and political context, on both local and global terms, as is significant to our understanding of culture and identity in postmodernity. Hence, what permeates the final step of in depth analysis is the line of thinking of how this marginal group of individuals communicated

against hegemony and otherness in dominant Western discourse. Hall states that 'the global postmodern signifies an ambiguous opening to difference and to the margins and makes a certain kind of decentring of the Western narrative a likely possibility...' (cited in Kellner, 1997:22). Certainly, such voices of struggle and resistance to cultural hegemony once rarely heard and excluded from the narratives of Western culture, will become an increasing counter force as a result of globalization or border-crossings.

Having proved that a clarity and openness in methods is vital to the validation of interpretive research, I now move on to the potential problems that must be acknowledged in analysing narratives. For instance, I realize that my standpoints affect what to include or exclude and how data is arranged, presented and analyzed. Scientific detachment is impossible and my emotional, intellectual, political and aesthetic involvement shapes up the process of analysis. My purpose is to reveal stories of struggle and resistance, to reduce alienation and promote moral engagement with an unfamiliar cultural group. Whereas recognizing that social researcher use others' voices to speak our message (Fine,1990, cited in Hatch & Wisniewski: 42), I am aware that I need to be careful not to impose my voice on those of my collaborators in retelling their stories even though my stance inevitably informs the way I write up my understanding of what I have learned.

Moreover, to provide a truthful account, I often cite the participants' words to let them speak for themselves, on which I also base my analysis. However, would my readers, presumably, the privileged members of a powerful cultural group, really understand or

empathize with my collaborators' circumstances and dilemmas? As researchers, we are advised to employ artful persuasion that leads to heightened awareness rather than antagonism, particularly in a study which questions the legitimate and dominant cultural norms. Informed by poststructuralist theory, my solution is to contextualize, namely, providing as much detail as possible of the personal, political socio-cultural circumstances the group of individuals are embedded in and making them accessible to the unfamiliar reader. I take my full awareness of and knowledge about their situations as an advantage in my presentation. Whilst I have good faith in my collaborators, I leave the judgment of my conclusions to the critical reader.

Essentially, data analysis is the construction of meaning. More accurately, it is a textual construction of how my collaborators assigned meaning to an extraordinary experience in their life. Nevertheless, words and language as the primary means of creating and communicating meaning are not unproblematic. Frequently, as a novice researcher and writer with constraints and limitations, I found myself engaged in an experiment with the English language, from content, rhetorical styles, structure, to the choosing of a single word throughout my writing process. This nature can also be reflected by the blurring of genres in the thesis with emotive stories, abstract theory and academic arguments co-existing in the same piece of text.

4.7 Gender Difference

Gender difference is an unexpected issue. It is a coincidence rather than my planned

intention that two male and two female were chosen for this study. Yet my interviews with the two female participants show that what makes a woman decide to leave home and embark upon travelling deserves noticing. Apparently, deep personal reasons are the primary drive for the two mature women in this study. Lang had just ended a long-term unhappy relationship, being single and approaching the age of thirty. Similarly, Huan was a single parent in the aftermath of a painful divorce. Both of them had anxiety and discomfort about their personal situations. This is what Goffman explained, social 'stigma' (Goffman, 1963) as in today's changing China, traditional values and prejudice towards unmarried or divorced women still prevail. Even financially independent career women do not escape this fate. Marriage is socially acceptable. Older unmarried women or divorced women face inevitable pressure from both family and society. For Lang and Huan, escaping repressive elements and longing for the freedom of individual choices were the ultimate motive. The imagined West has become the ideal destination in their search for new outlooks and happiness.

These aspects explained the flush of emotions and epiphany moments in my conversation with the two women. New perspectives discovered from their journey triggered a self-reflexive examination of their own lives. The interview occasion has created an outlet for self-exploration and expression. What made them willingly disclose their personal lives and experiences to me then? I never intended for intimate details and nor did I expect they would have anything to do with my research interest at first. The reason, I believe, lies in my position of being a woman researcher with a similar age to them. Our shared life experiences made them believe that their problems and dilemmas would be well

understood and empathized with by me. Moreover, being away from their home environment released them from repressive social conventions. Topics once perceived as inappropriate and untellable in the home culture could be discussed openly when sojourning abroad.

In contrast to the women's emotionally-charged stories, the two men were more engaged in making sense of Western philosophy and political ideology. Indeed, this gender difference resonates with some feminist scholars' argument that 'experience is not gender-neutral' (Gray, 1997:92).

4.8 Ethical Concerns

The ethical issues this study involves cannot be ignored. Mason (1996:166-167) points out two important aspects:

- The rich and detailed character of much qualitative research can mean intimate engagement with the public and private lives of individuals.
- The changing directions of interest and access during a qualitative study mean that new and unexpected ethical dilemmas are likely to arise during the course of your research.

Whilst the researcher seeks information from her participants to achieve the research goals, certain responsibilities are required to avoid any harm that can be done to them.

Good intentions do not necessarily produce positive results. Sensitivity and moral concerns are important qualities for qualitative researchers especially when investigating people's experience. Would my participants, especially the two women, be happy to see their inner feelings and emotional pain exposed by the researcher they once confided in? In fact, my connection with them did not stop as soon as the research was completed. I kept contact with all four of them by e-mail, particularly during my writing up stage, making sure everything written was with their consent. More importantly, I did my best at all time to avoid the manipulating of data for selfish reasons.

Another ethical concern this research poses is how to protect those who might be offended. These include the particular educational establishment involved, the immediate departments, the academic community as well as the intended audience. Careful consideration has been made to protect their confidentiality. Thus any identification such as specific names was erased from the participants' narration.

4.9 Lost in Translation

By choosing Chinese as the interview language, participants were allowed the maximum freedom of telling in their mother tongue. It also ensured an effective communication between the interviewer and the interviewee. However, this posed a challenge when reporting my work to the audience, namely, the process of translation from Chinese into English. According to linguists, perfect translation is basically impossible. Walter Benjamin (1969:75) wrote 'All translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming

to terms with the foreignness of languages'. Hewson and Martin (1991:36) also make similar comments that translation is 'a losing operation'. As they explain:

> Since both LCs (Language Cultures) are bound to lose some of their characteristics, the loss has to be kept to a minimum and if possible compensated by the maximalization of the common core of profit achieved in transferred meaning. It is clear, consequently, that translation consists in constantly perfecting this fundamentally unattainable compromise.

This described the major obstacle or the unsatisfactory feeling whenever I could not find an equivalent English word or make a good translation. I knew that my English reader would never understand the participants' stories as I did with their images, personalities, distinctive voices and subtle accents in mind. However, to avoid loss of meaning in translation, I tried to stick to the principle that accuracy was the main priority. I did not just translate the language but communicate meaning. A good translation was not just about finding equivalent word for word translation but a maximum transference of meaning. However, on the other hand, I tried to avoid the loss of flavour by deliberately keeping their original Chinese expressions. For example, Huang used 'jidan li tiao gutou' as a metaphor to describe her husband's unreasonable and macho behaviour. A similar expression in English would be 'finding faults for no good reason'. Yet the vivid image was lost, so instead I translated the sentence as 'picking bones in an egg', which I believe could get the meaning cross and meanwhile preserve the flavour. There were many times when I found myself tormented between doing justice to the meaning and at the same

time not losing the characteristics of the Chinese language.

Another problem I constantly had was 'abstract words' and four-word set phrases or sayings which contained compact meaning and wisdom. For example, Huang used 'youren youyu' (having much room for manoeuvre) to describe the improving of her coping skills after initial difficulties. It would be hard for the English reader to get a sense of its meaning without knowing the story of how the phrase came into being. Similarly, Lang used the expression of 'kaotian chifan' when talking about feelings of being left alone and coping on her own. A literal translation would cause confusion, so I illustrated that she compared her situation to a farmer who had to depend solely on the blessing of nature to survive. I was once frustrated with how to translate 'yi hua' that Lang mentioned so many times in our conversations as the root cause for her inflexibility. It was different from 'brainwash' but had connotations closer to 'the consequence of ideological influence'. Eventually, I was convinced there was no exact word in English. Such situations often confronted me in the translating of Dawei's interview scripts as he used a great many abstract words to describe his coming to terms with Western theory and philosophy.

Above all, I keep in mind that the translator also works as a cultural operator. Lawrence Venuti (1995:18) notes that 'the aim of translation is to bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognizable, even the familiar...' I have a certain level of knowledge of the linguistic and cultural differences between the two languages and so am more aware of situations that can lead to cross-cultural misunderstanding. What seems logical for the

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Chinese can make no sense to the English. It was often the case that I simply followed the flow of their telling and translated accordingly. Yet when I went back and read the text critically, I discovered the potential awkwardness from the perspective of an English reader. In this case, amendments had to be made yet the original message needed to be respected.

Part II: Design of Study

4.10.1 Introduction

In Part I, I explained the theoretical and philosophical framework in the light of methodological issues in my research. I shall now turn to the empirical part by introducing the four participants and how I conducted the interviews with them. A suitable 'sample' is obviously of pivotal importance to this study. I shall therefore begin with how I met the four Chinese students and why I chose them to be my participants.

4.10.2 Finding Chinese Postgraduates

As mentioned in Chapter 2, I found my first participant Lang through the posting of a notice in November 2003 three months after I arrived in London. Being both disoriented newcomers, we connected and had a lot to share. My interview with Lang was quite informal, more like two friends meeting weekly for chat as I was then still in the preliminary stage of my research. My questions were tentative and we basically talked

about everything. I followed Lang and we met whenever she would like to talk with me till the end of the Summer Term. As the first participant, Lang plays an important experimental role for my later interviews.

I got the chance to know another Chinese student Huan when I moved from a private-rented accommodation to the halls of residence the second academic year. Living in the same flat gave me the opportunity to know her well. However, I did not want to interview her too soon as I learned after my experience with Lang that allowing time for participants was important if I wanted them to tell me what they thought about their experience. In addition, I was afraid that too much intimacy developed from day to day life may jeopardize my later interview relationship with Huan. She may find that we had already known each other well and there was nothing more to say. Geertz (1988:15) describes this dilemma in doing research as caught between 'a scientific worry about being insufficiently detached' and 'a humanistic worry about being insufficiently engaged'. However, by the time I asked her formally to be my participant, she was very supportive and indeed she felt she had been waiting too long to share her stories with me.

Jiandong was the next participant with whom I got in touch. A fellow PhD student after listening to my talk for the intercollegiate cross-cultural group recommended Jiandong, his flatmate and friend, to me. So I sent him an email, asking if he would like to be interviewed for my research project. His reply was prompt and supportive. More importantly, he introduced Dawei, another Chinese postgraduate to join in as well. After my upgrade in June 2005, I felt the time was ripe for me to interview them as I became

clearer about my research purpose. I refined my interview questions and finally 'plunged in'. Unexpectedly, the interview turned out to be the best part of my research process. I found myself often overwhelmed with excitement after each interview. Thus, by the end of September I had completed all the interview sessions with Huan, Jiandong and Dawei, meanwhile seeing them get ready for their return to China.

Of course there were other potential candidates on my secret list including another flatmate of mine who studied curating. Though it was the first time for her to come to Britain, she had been to other European countries before. I was initially interested in her experiences and views. But as she had to travel frequently back to China to take care of her own business, it was very difficult to get hold of her and she was finally ruled out. Dawei also suggested to me another Chinese student living in his flat. Unfortunately, this student did not meet my purposive selection criteria as he had been in the UK for a few years.

I should say there must be a large number of Chinese students around who also meet my requirements. But the chances are that you do not easily get to know them, let alone gain their time and trust. I did strike a conversation with two Chinese girls when standing in a queue, but found it was difficult to establish a secure cooperative relationship in this way. One Chinese PhD student promised to call back but never did so. Some, after a couple of exchanges of emails, simply stopped contact. I understand that everyone has different circumstances and concerns. Therefore, I feel very grateful that I was able to find four appropriate participants and had their genuine interest and support in my project whereas

expecting nothing from me to return. The farewell dinner party I organized to thank them before their departure went so well that I discovered more aspects of my participants' character when they let their hair down. It also made me realize that being away from our homeland and facing common issues sojourning abroad played an important bonding role between us. Many emotions and opinions can be expressed and shared free of the restrictive social conventions back home.

4.10.3 Profiles of Participants

In total, I interviewed four Chinese students in their late twenties and early thirties. They all came to Britain for the first time and enrolled in one-year taught Master's programmes in an educational institution in London. All were university graduates and had different years of working experiences in China. Being mature with a range of life experiences, they were likely to provide more socio-cultural and political insights into their cross-cultural experience. From my observation, they were eloquent and intelligent individuals, sensitive with both local and global situations. In short, they were educated informants in an ethnographic sense. In what follows, I shall introduce each of them in detail, highlighting their motivations for coming to study in Britain.

Lang

Before coming to London, Lang worked as a news editor in CCTV (China Central Television Station) after graduating from Renmin University with a BA in Journalism.

She had been longing for change in her life, especially after the final breakup with a long-term boyfriend. Professionally, she found that she could not go any further in her job other than feeling stuck in the daily routines. Long working hours and a heavy workload had stressed her out and pushed her to the limits. The censorship and bureaucracy occasionally left her with doubts about the meaning of being a journalist. She felt drained of creativity and desperately in need of some new perspectives. She initially intended a self-funded study in America and was accepted by the University of Missouri after passing G.R.E. (Graduate Record Examination: a requirement for entry into US universities) But when her visa application was refused by the American Embassy, she had to wait for a few more years till an opportunity turned up from her workplace and she took advantage of it. As she recalled, who should be selected as a visiting scholar to Britain depended not only on performance at work but also on connections with the authority. The competition with fellow colleagues was tense and tricky as well. Despite everything, luck was with her this time. After working for 7 years, she won the chance of being partly-sponsored by CCTV for one-year study in Britain. She chose Media studies and took the course of Transnational Communications and Global Media as her subject.

Huan

Huan graduated from Guangdong University of Foreign Languages with English as her major. After that, she worked at Guangdong TV Station first as an English newsreader and later supervisor for the Department of International News. At the age of 33, she felt the need to seek breakthroughs in her career as she said 'I have been doing the same job

for 10 years and is this all life should be?'. In her personal life, Huan had just survived a bitter divorce. She was yearning for a change of environment and new outlooks. In her words, everything was stable, leaving little chance of changing. Life would have been all the same for her if she simply carried on. Just when she felt caught desperately in a deadlock, news came that two candidates for a Chevening scholarship were allocated to her workplace. She jumped at the chance and eventually won it by passing the IELTS test and the face-to-face interview selection. To her great joy, she was awarded a full scholarship. Since most of her duties at work involved practical tasks, she thought it would be good for her to improve her knowledge in media theory so that she could look at things from a higher angle and to theorize what she was doing. She enrolled in Media and Communications studies.

Jiandong

Jiandong received his BA in English from Jinan University in Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong Province. He then worked as a financial journalist for South China Daily. In his opinion, anyone who studied English must to some extent wish to go abroad some day either to test or refine their English in a real English-speaking environment. In his case, he could have made the trip to America a decade ago with the financial support from his parents. But the plan was for some reason delayed. Now after working for more than ten years he finally got a chance to study abroad. It was the same competition for the Chevening scholarship as Huan had. Only he was awarded with a partial sponsorship. He guessed that it was probably due to some answers which he gave in the interview were

not satisfying. However, he still felt lucky enough even though he had to pay the other half of the costs by himself. For this, to quote his words, symbolized a dream fulfilled both for himself and his parents. He chose Media and Communications as well.

Dawei

Dawei was the only self-funded student and also the youngest in the group. He was born in Changsha, the capital of Southern China's Hunan Province. He attended a famous middle school which was founded by Yale-in-China, a university that dated back to the early 1900s and was the result of the then Yale University missionary movement (Porter, 1990). As a Christian school, it maintained a historical friendship with Yale University. So he was lucky to receive a good English education at an early age from native English-speaking teachers. He was offered a position to work as a teaching assistant by Beijing University of Broadcasting after receiving his BA in Television Scriptwriting and Production. He taught two subjects: Film Appreciation and Spoken English. In 2004, he gave up the chance of a sponsored postgraduate study by the University. Instead, he came to London and chose Cultural Studies as his subject. He explained to me that he enjoyed learning and since secondary school he wished he could have the chance of going abroad some day. After working as a teacher in university, he found teaching and researching was his interested areas and should become the goal of his career development. However, he was well aware of the underdevelopment in social science in China, particularly humanities and cultural studies. He decided he must go to the West. Through a thorough research via the internet, he learned that Britain was the origin of the cutting edge cultural

studies and London, as the center of culture and history, should be the best destination for him to fulfill his dream. Once arrived, he discovered that he was probably the only Chinese student for ten years enrolled in the Department of Cultural Studies.

Ultimately, for these four professionals, studying in Britain was a hard-won opportunity and long-awaited dream coming true. They came with hope for personal change and professional development. Despite the fact that China has become more open to the outside world during the past decades, still many constraints and obstacles are there to prevent people from making free choices. Traveling nowadays is much easier for some as a result of economic development and global transportation. However, going abroad is still perceived as a big life changing event in China. For ambitious individuals who finally make it, there are always touching stories to tell.

4.10.4 Conduct of the interviews

As indicated earlier, I met and interviewed Lang first for the pilot study. My interviews with the other participants: Huan, Jiandong and Dawei for the main study took place between July and September in 2005. With each of the three, there involved at least 5 sessions of intense formal interviews, each of which lasted approximately 2 hours. Though by nature the interviewing was semi-structured and open-ended, I kept my carefully-crafted interview guide with me, which constitutes a list of 12 broad directional topics and their related sub-topics. There were also spontaneous questions formed on the spur of the moment. Constantly, I was inviting my participants' attempts to go beyond the

mundane and come to a deep exploration of their immediate experience. Very often, I found them telling me stories of childhood memories and growing up experiences.

All interview sessions were conducted at the same venue, a quiet place where I felt comfortable to act as a host. The Chinese language or rather Mandarin was unquestionably adopted to avoid linguistic barriers of communication and ensure the best conveyance of meaning. Interview conversations were tape recorded along with a notebook as an emergency supplement should my tape recorder fail to function (It did happen!). To my great relief, I discovered that none of the participants seemed to be bothered by the presence of a tape recorder. Nor did I have to put them at ease before the interviews. I had to admit the interviewees seemed to be more confident than the interviewer. All my worries prior to the interview dissipated. Obviously, their media background made them familiar and experienced with the interview situation. I was impressed by the way they responded to the interview situation.

The whole interview process was fascinating and fruitful. I was able to obtain as much information as possible in terms of the participants' thoughts, feelings and experiences. However, like a film director, I also had some regrets about parts of my interview practice. For instance, I realized afterwards when listening to the tapes that I had made more interruptions than necessary. Particularly when there struck a cord, I would make such comments like 'I had the same experience' or 'Yes, that happened to me as well'. With hindsight, I should have allowed them to go in a flow by responding with some non-verbal expression of my attentiveness. According to Wengraf (2001), a passive

listening strategy will enhance the interviewee's narrative telling. In this sense, the interviewer's passivity is a virtue rather than liability. What I have learnt from my interview experience is that skillful questioning and listening with a minimum of interventions are essential to yield good results for narrative data collection.

4.10.5 Data analysis

Mishler (1986:47-50) points out, 'a careful prepared transcript' is crucial to yield 'valid analysis and interpretation of interview data'. Since my raw data was made up of tape-recorded interviews, I had to go through the inevitable process of repeated listening and transcribing, a physical and mental challenge in its real sense. The writing of Chinese characters took a longer time than I thought. To keep data accurate, I did not translate the Chinese version into English until later when I decided the exact part to be quoted in my thesis.

One problem resulting from generating data through unstructured interviewing is that after the initial excitement at the rich account of experience, the researcher is likely to find him/her at a loss as to what to do with the large amount of textual materials. Indeed, it was a frustrating time for me, not knowing how to approach the data and what analytic strategies could be employed to better answer the research questions I raised. In retrospect, I see that the reading of relevant literature, a simultaneous familiarity with data content and being clear about research purposes are indispensable elements for finally accomplishing the three levels of analysis in this study. Briefly, they each focus on

the general coding, examples of significant events and in-depth exploration. Detailed accounts of these analyses will be given in subsequent chapters. In moments of meeting an impasse, I kept in mind what Atkinson & Coffey (1996) have suggested: 'analysis is not about adhering to any one correct approach or set of right techniques; it is imaginative, artful, flexible, and reflexive. It should also be methodical, scholarly, and intellectually rigorous'.

4.11 Summary

This chapter comprises two sections: methodology and design of the study. It is meant to be the rationale of my methodological choices so that the reader is kept informed of my theoretical perspectives as well as empirical details in practice. Clearly, the conduct of any research has its complex and problematic side. After all, there rarely exists a standard perfect sample of research to follow. This makes an objective and critical scrutiny of one's standpoints and approaches essential to the validation of qualitative research. Thus, this chapter begins with why and how ethnography can be employed to answer the questions posed in this study. I then examine the researcher's role and issues of representation, as are important for an ethnographic study. How to analyze the narratives elicited from interviews is a major task. Here, I articulate how I develop my analytical strategies and deal with the problems emerging from the process of writing the presentation. In my view, what really matters is to be open about and ready to resolve whatever comes up in the research process. Overall, it is through the writing of this chapter that I reinforce my political, philosophical and methodological beliefs for the

research, which are crucial for me to proceed to the next stage of data analysis. In the following chapter, I will present the results from my first level of analysis.

Chapter Five: The Trajectory of Change: Drawing Thematic Threads

'Travel' denotes more or less voluntary practices of leaving familiar ground in search of difference, wisdom, power, adventure, an altered perspective".

Sojourning somewhere else, learning a language, putting oneself in odd situations and trying to figure them out can be a good way to learn something new, simultaneously about oneself and about the people and places one visits.

James Clifford (1997: 90-91)

5.1 Introduction

Clifford (1997:31) in his metaphor of using hotels as sites of cultural encounter and imagination attempts to give us a frame for a negative and positive vision of travel: travel, negatively viewed as transience, superficiality, tourism, exile, and rootlessness; travel positively conceived as exploration, research, escape, transforming encounter. However, in a truer sense of life, the majority of travelling individuals experience a mixed scenario.

It is well documented that globalization is the defining feature of late modernity and yet the global village is by no means egalitarian as a result of economic domination and cultural hegemony (King, 1997). To write about people's experience of crossing cultural boundaries, or to be exact, moving from the periphery to the centre, one needs not only to

have a considerable knowledge of the complex nature that characterizes our age but also the specific cultural context in which travelling individuals happen to be located. Without a comprehensive understanding of such factors as culture, power, and history that influence human interaction, or without a genuine concern about individuals' lived experience, it would not be possible to depict their journey of encounters in an insightful and sophisticated way.

Having acknowledged these underlying elements, I now come to the stage of presenting my participants' experience. Whilst admitting there is no escaping a researcher's presence in ethnographic text, I try to tell as truthfully and accurately as possible their stories to the reader. With their individual voices and distinctive emotions still vivid in my memory, I want to chart the trajectory of their journey by revealing what they discovered upon arrival, how they reacted to the emergent situations and made interpretation of them. Particularly, I want to illustrate the major aspects confronting the four individuals in their adjustment to the new environment. Overall, it appears that their one year time in London can be divided into three stages. The first is early settling-in period, featured with disorientation and anxiety. Then comes the stage of adaptation, with each individual employing coping strategies and resources to achieve their goals. The third stage refers to their worries about the impending return. Central to this first level of analysis are participants' observations of host culture and reflections upon home culture. Above all, I shall be cautious and avoid misusing my authority as a writer. Just keep in mind how easily the line between truth and fiction can be blurred concerning the nature of messiness in life and the deep recesses of a human mind. To guide the reader, I will

give an outline of common themes summarized in categorized units from the interview content. Then I will describe and explain each section in detail.

5.2 The Trajectory of Change

I) East Meets West

- Tales of Arrival

- Meeting Academic Demands

- Isolation versus Socialization

- Confusion and Frustration

II) Coping Scenarios: To Sink or Swim

III) Views on British People and Society

IV) Comments on British Higher Education

V) The Invisible Forces

- Cultural Background

- Previous Education

- Parental Influence

VI) A Rite of Passage

- Rethinking Chinese Culture

- Developing a New Sense of Self

- Gaining Refreshed Perspectives

VII) Worries about Impending Return

5.2.1 East Meets West

Living in a time when mass media and global capital significantly dominate our everyday life, people from different parts of the world are now more or less aware of the global talk taking place. However, it is understood that globalization as a process is never evenly experienced across time and space (McGrew, 1992). On the other hand, communication and technology allow people more mobility to travel, most flowing from peripheries to the centre of power with dream and imagination. As Clifford (1997:2) notes,

> The ethnographer is no longer a (worldly) traveller visiting (local) natives, departing from a metropolitan center to study in a rural periphery. Instead, his 'ancient and settled' fieldsite opens onto complex histories of dwelling and travelling, cosmopolitan experiences.

For the individuals in my study, this transnational movement was regarded as an once-in-a-lifetime event and what has become of their experience deserves attention. After bidding farewell to families and friends, undergoing a long-haul flight, and queuing endlessly for immigration checks, the newly-arrived Chinese students like many others emerged from Heathrow airport with heavy luggage, exhausted of course, amazed maybe but most likely full of curiosity about the world waiting for them.

It turned out that the four mature students were relatively not much bothered by the notorious British weather and food. They explored local markets, invented suitable

recipes or simply adjusted their taste buds. However, they faced more difficult tasks to tackle in reality. Here, I shall penetrate beneath the surface to examine what enabled or constrained them in their cross-cultural adjustments. Interview extracts will be cited to capture their experiences. I shall begin with the initial stage, a disorienting and bewildering moment when everything seemed to be squeezed together.

Tales of Arrival

Travelling to another country can be exhilarating as well as full of unpredictable surprises. All four participants told me stories about their day of arrival and subsequent confrontations with the strange environment. In short, the settling-in stage was marked with an overwhelming sense of disorientation and uncertainty.

All four mentioned that they had little idea of what Britain was like before arrival. In response to my question 'how much did you know about Britain before coming here', Huan answered half jokingly: 'Shakespeare and foggy London'. She then explained that even though she was familiar with international news at work, her actual impression of Britain was rather vague and superficial. As she said:

> Most of what I learned at university from English language study was about American culture and American literature. But like everybody, I know some basic things. For example, English people are reserved. It is through the reporting of the Iraq war on TV that I began to know the country better, partly because at that time

I did not like its policy of going to war. Once I was here I found everything was so different and I was full of curiosity.

In Lang's case, the destination place was a far cry from the romanticized notion of a Western metropolis. Her first impression of the immediate landscape did not match her imagination at all. She described the surroundings as strange and scary, especially the shape and colour of buildings and unfamiliar people on the street. On the first day after her arrival, she was startled when two local black youths wolf whistled at her while she was trying to find the location of her halls of residence. Her fear is understandable as coming from China she does not have much experience of living in a multi-racial society like Britain. She felt even worse when discovering later that the address she was directed to by staff from the Accommodation Office was only 5 minutes walk. Yet it actually took her nearly one hour, dragging a heavy suitcase around to find it. It is the exasperation and exhaustion that made her first day in London unforgettable.

Similarly, Jiandong told me how, despite careful travel planning, he and his companion still failed to find the hotel booked in advance. As a result, they had to pay a considerable price for an overnight stay in Canterbury. As to how the taxi driver took them to a totally opposite location, it still remained a mystery to him. As he said frankly, no one would like to spend the limited cash they brought with for such unworthy reasons. However, Jiandong did not show any more bitterness when telling me that he went to Trafalgar Square five times during the first months in London and each time he ended up at the wrong bus stop. He just felt how incredible it was. These experiences made him realize

when he lived in a foreign country such nuances as using public transport could become a major task even for a sensible adult.

The truth is that the four individuals' imagination of Britain based on classic English literature or images portrayed by media and cinema did not go well with what they actually saw. London looked dirty and gray rather than bright and glorious. Albeit unlikely to possess such a thought that 'the streets of London were paved with gold', they nevertheless discovered it in a more realistic way, seeing the glamorous side of a metropolis which was commonly known to outsiders but also some of its rough unpleasant areas.

In a way, these newcomers from the East were consciously or critically looking for reassuring signs that made up their dreamland. Like tourists, the newcomers were thrilled by the marvelous landmarks and historical architecture that made London famous. Numerous museums and galleries were free for them to visit. The theatre offered a variety of classic shows and performances all the time. There was no doubt about the genuine appreciation they had for the many cultural events going on in London.

As consumers, they acknowledged the material abundance in commodity — cuisine, fashion, music that make up Western lifestyles. In contrast to these, they also observed evidence of poverty and homelessness in multicultural London, which seemed to be difficult to accept. For me, it is 'The shock of seeing a local beggar'. For Lang, it is her realization that, 'I don't find any difference between an old lady walking on the street in

London and the one on the street of Beijing.' These images simply did not fit in to our imagination of a Western world. Not until later when some of them were able to travel elsewhere, did they get a fuller picture of Britain.

It seems that fantasies and realities do not correspond well to the newcomers' first impression of a Western metropolis. As a counterpart to 'the Western gaze' in traditional ethnography, these newcomers with fresh eyes provide some interesting perspectives when making their own observations in the West. First, 'culture shock' so often quoted to describe the newcomer's reaction to an alien environment does not seem to be a favorite expression for some participants in this study. For instance, Jiandong disagreed upon my mention of the term in our conversations, saying that 'I don't think culture shock is a suitable term for us. Times have changed. They (Westerners) should not assume that we come and simply react with shock and awe to everything here, especially when I found so many things here are not even as good as home'. In a sense, Jiandong's dislike about the application of culture shock to his situation was a reflection of his resistance to the stereotyped images imposed by Western superiority. Said (2003:204) questions this phenomenon in Orientalism, 'is it always the case that the eastern travelers in the West were there to learn and to gape at an advanced culture?'

Similarly, according to Dawei, the challenge for him was more about getting used to different ways of living, like such practical aspects as eating habits and social customs. He dismissed the umbrella term 'culture shock'. As he said, 'I did not expect to find so many Chinese people around. You can speak Chinese whenever you like. You are just

like, er, in Beijing'. I think what Dawei really meant is that in an age of globalization, urban centres increasingly resemble each other in surface appearance. In a word, with an awareness of Western imperialism, both Jiandong and Dawei refused to be identified stereotypically as the exotic other coming along with eyes wide open. Both of them stressed that the West could not simply expect people from the East to have a 'wow' response to Western advancement and prosperity.

Ironically, for them, the shock was more about the contradiction, namely, how reality was different from their expectation. After initial excitement, the newcomers found themselves feeling a slight sense of disillusion. On one hand, they were conscious of their high expectation of the Western world as a promised land. On the other hand, they did not want to be perceived as innocent but as astute observers with their own judgments. They wanted to assert that, in modern days, people from peripheries may have to be prepared for the shock of finding provincialism and 'backwardness' in the West. Self indulgence and imperial legacies blinded the eyes of Westerners, preventing them from seeing the new enlightenment in the East. As Ruth Benedict (1961: 4) has long reminded us, 'The white man knows little of any ways of life but his own.' It was time for the West to wake up and learn about the Rest.

Of course, I need to remind the reader that these newcomers' comments may represent merely a visitor's impression, fleeting and superficial. Soon their views and understanding will develop deeper as they stay longer and get to know more about the host environment. However, it is important to examine the complexities of how newly

arrived young Chinese intellectuals perceived early-21st-century London.

Meeting Academic Demands

As indicated earlier, the four highly motivated Chinese students came to Britain with hopes for change to happen in their lives. This explained their determination of seizing every opportunity to benefit from their course studies. For these ambitious professionals. their goal in Britain was first and foremost about academic achievement, not just getting a degree but really gaining new knowledge or skills to enhance their life chances. No wonder all four had a lot to say when I came to ask how they got along with their studies in the interviews. Specifically, their sudden plunge into a completely different learning environment had left them with great expectations but little preparation for the difficulties facing them. In the following, I am going to discuss four major aspects associated with their studies.

A. Lost in Context

One common obstacle for new entrants is a lack of basic knowledge about contemporary cultural theory since most of the theoretical frameworks are absent from their previous university education in China. Little is known to them about the current debate on postmodernism in the Western academic domain. 'Who is Michel Foucault' and 'why is everyone talking about him' are first questions in their heads. Sapochnik (1997) interprets well about the insecurity and fragmentation students experience resulting from a sudden

change of learning environment. Huan was still emotional when recalling the frustration she went through:

> I had absolutely no clue. I didn't know what books to read. I was stumbling blindly on without knowing where I was heading for. I could do nothing but search the books according to the reading list. There were an awful lot of books. I wasn't sure how many more books I should read before I could meet the requirement. Everything was very messy and confusing.

With hindsight, she said she would have found it a lot more helpful if at the start of her course there had been any kind of orientation about the structure such as a course outline or something similar explaining the different areas and subjects that media studies covered. It may be simple to British students but this knowledge was truly lacking from her background. It would have given her a sense of direction.

Instead, Huan remembered that she was struggling alone all the time with her difficulties and anxiety. She did go to see her tutor a couple of times but found it did not help much. She realized then that she had only herself to rely on. As an overseas student, she did not think her different educational background was appropriately taken account of.

Dawei had a similar yet much more painful experience. He told me that as a student he used to be quite good at dealing with complex theory and philosophy. Yet this self confidence was seriously shaken only a few days into his course. For the first time, he

was utterly lost. Never in his life had he doubted so much his capacity of learning. But this time there was real crisis.

I didn't understand what was postmodernism or poststructuralism. In China, when you talk about postmodernism it is normally associated with the literature genre. Here it is so complicated. I think Chinese scholars are more politically sensitive and their research is mostly close to real life. On the contrary, European scholars since the 18th century have developed a complete system of philosophical thinking. Most of the time, they are not talking about society but abstract human thoughts. It's like playing with words. My previous study was practically based, which has created lots of obstacles in my present study. I have learnt some philosophy and politics before, but it is a far cry from what I need now.

It is not surprising that Dawei felt overwhelmed by the various post-isms in contemporary Western theory. In China postmodernism is a term that only avant-garde writers use in literature circles. The Chinese higher education rarely provides students in social science with the chance of learning Western theory. Academic resources of this kind are limited as well. Put simply, there exists an ideological disconnection. In fact, Dawei regarded cultural theory as the hardest of the 6 modules he took. He said its goal, according to the course leader, was to learn as much theoretical knowledge as possible. However, there were so many unfamiliar terms to deal with. Moreover, he found the frequent references to religious stories in lectures difficult to relate to. He explained that:

I don't believe in Christianity and don't know much about it. I often get confused when lecturers mention terms such as forefather, Jesus Christ or Out of Egypt. I have no clue about the conflicts between forefathers and Jews as well.

Clearly, it should become a cause for concern that these Chinese students encountered difficulties resulting from their transition between different education systems. Their comments call for better academic provision that can guide them through this initial phase of study.

B. More Essays, Less Fuss

Studying in another language is never easy. A growing body of literature addresses the challenges Chinese students face in academic writing, a key practice in the British education system. Jin and Cortazzi (2006) point out the English writing skills they poorly develop in the Chinese education context. Edwards *et al* (2007) illustrate the conflicting perspectives that Chinese students and their British teachers have on English competence. According to my participants, essay writing proved to be a major source of stress. From constructing arguments, organizing structures to materializing ideas in words, all require strenuous efforts. Here, they told me how they grappled with the writing of an academic essay.

Dawei summarized the situation well:

The structure of a Master's course in Britain is quite different from one in China, where you attend classes. Well here, they teach you as well. But it's kind of different. Evaluation in the Chinese education system is mainly through exams. But here it is all about writing academic articles, that is, essays. I find my experience of writing essays different from my American or British counterparts.

Dawei then explained to me how he was deeply distressed when each of the six courses he chose assigned him a 5000-word essay with deadlines so close to each other. He finally made it. But he was astonished and speechless at seeing that there was not a single word of comment or any correction on the copies returned. He found it totally unacceptable.

I could almost sense his controlled anger when he tried to talk calmly:

> We do not expect merely a grade. We are not native students and do need some feedback to give us some evaluation. At least, there should be some recognition of the language problems.

Similarly, Jiandong had hurdles with his essay writing. At first, he was worried about his English ability. After all, he did not practise it much during his ten years of working as a journalist in China. Though he had tried his best not to forget the English he had learned in university, still he was not quite sure.

I remember it took me two weeks to write 2,000 words for my first essay not only because I was a bit rusty with my English but also I didn't know how to cite other people's work. There are certain formats, though. But to be frank, I found them complicated and felt dreadful about using quotations for fear of plagiarism. I had had a bad experience long ago as a student in China. That's why when my professor asked me to present in front of, er, about ten fellow students my case study, which we discussed earlier that day, I was simply scared. Later, I began to follow just one format closely and found it easier and more reassuring.

Concerns over referencing protocols or plagiarism are not uncommon among Chinese students, given the little training for academic writing they receive through tertiary education in China, even for students whose subject is English. However, the question that often puzzled Jiandong was why essay writing was still no smooth ride even after he had passed the academic English test for overseas students at the college's Language Studies Centre.

Clearly, it is not just English proficiency that impedes these students. Though in the end all participants believed they more or less learned some knack along the way, their experiences prove that Chinese students who meet the minimum English standards still need language support. Thus this study reinforces the idea as suggested by recent research that UK tutors need to take some responsibility in identifying the specific problems these postgraduate students encounter when writing academic essays and providing individual guidance for them.

C. To Speak or Not to Speak

If essay writing is alien to Chinese students, seminar is another challenge they meet in the British education system (Cheng, 2000; Jones, 2005 and Tan & Goh, 2006). Newcomers are amazed, yet most of the time at a loss as to how to make use of this new style of learning. Their confusion can be better understood by taking a glance at their Confucian-heritage culture which emphasizes peace and harmony. Reflected in thinking and intercultural communication are avoidance of confrontation and a cooperative tendency (Scollon & Scollon,1995). Indeed, to criticize or argue is a rarity in traditional Chinese education. My participants recalled that since childhood they were taught to respect elders and teachers. Challenging their authority is not as much encouraged as in the Western academic context but perceived as disrespectful and impolite. Knowledge is to be acquired from teaching. A good student means being quiet and attentive in class, listening to teachers instead of questioning them.

Jiandong summarized that:

> Our generation received a traditional education. Since primary school we learned that we should raise our hand when we knew the answer. Here, they (referring to British students) just speak straightaway if they just have some ideas. They do not seem to be bothered about whether their points of view are good or not. We Chinese students are generally obedient, hard-working and full of ideas as well.

Only our way of expressing them seems to be different from Western students.

Well aware of the difference, Jiandong was determined to gain benefit from this Western democratic way of learning. Despite his initial fear, he told me how he overcame it eventually:

> I was full of fear at first. Then I thought if I die I just die. After I spoke for the first time, I found it much easier to be part of a discussion. It is no big deal at all. The obstacle has been surmounted. I think my opinions are deep as I have working experience. Later on, I became quite annoyed if I did not get the chance of expressing myself, especially when a long tedious monologue was going on.

Compared with Jiandong, Huan felt neither comfortable nor confident to participate in seminars:

> I do not talk much in seminars. Or I have to think well till I feel safe to speak. I feel the constraints from traditional values in my upbringing. This is the way we think. For example, a good girl shouldn't try to attract attention and stand out. Or you need self-control and do not show off a lot.

Modesty is regarded as a virtue in Chinese culture. Females are especially expected to be obedient. Importantly, we also need to take into consideration the fact that Chinese education puts great emphasis on moral teaching such as respect for elders and loyalty to

the country (Porter, 1990). Critical thinking or individual ideas are not valued or promoted in their education. As Lang noted, 'We debate only to find a final answer.' This explains why Chinese students are often surprised when finding out at the end of a debate there is still no sign of a definite conclusion. They feel they are walking out of the seminar room empty-handed. Whilst British students can relax and grab the chance to speak freely, feelings of discontent set in for these overseas students. Some even condemn seminars as merely playing rhetorical games.

Very often, the English language was viewed as a barrier in such learning situations. Lang pointed out that she felt inadequate to express herself particularly when it came to abstract thoughts and critical analysis. She gave me an example:

In talking about such textual material as Roland Barthes's the Death of the Author, I have no confidence to speak in front of Western course mates for fear of making a mess and ending up being laughed at.

Even though sometimes she was aware of the shallowness in her course mates' talk, Lang did not want to risk loss of face or embarrassment in order to get her opinions across.

To sum up, no simplistic judgements can be made in terms of 'silence in seminars'. This study confirms other researchers' findings in that the reasons accounting for Chinese students' reluctance in group-based discussions are complex, involving cultural, psychological, linguistic and personal factors. In my view, many newcomers are simply

unclear about the role they should play in the process, not realizing that the ritual of taking turns to express ideas is to make a contribution according to British academic convention. Rather they are impeded by their own educational past with many losing enthusiasm and becoming the so-called 'silent sheep'. Whilst some may thrive and appreciate it, others simply detest and give up this academic practice.

D. Tutorials or Just Tuition

A Chinese saying articulates well the traditional relationship between students and their teachers: 'If someone teaches you for one day, you should respect him like your father for the rest of your life'. Indeed, teachers are viewed as knowledgeable authoritative superiors, worthy of great respect under the influence of Confucianism. However, this deep-embedded sense of hierarchy as also illustrated by Biggs (1994), Chan (1999) and Spencer-Oatey (1997) often causes misunderstanding between Chinese students and their Western tutors. The Chinese students' expectation of knowledge, guidance and support pedagogically clashes with the different role Western academics perceive themselves taking in teaching and supervision (Aspland, 1999; Wu, 2002). What was my participants' view of the British tutorial system? In response to my question 'Have you tried to talk about the problems with your tutor?' Dawei replied:

I have a tutor, and he is also the tutor of the whole class as well, about more than 10 students. I find it inappropriate to bother the tutor often with questions. To be honest, I tried to make a couple of appointments with him as I didn't quite

understand what he had said in the lecture. I know I can't generalize, but every time I went to meet my tutor, I had some specific problems to solve. However, somehow, he led you into sort of general discussion. For example, 'what's your idea' or 'How do you think of it'. He seemed to respect your thinking a lot and tried to resolve the problem through the exchange of questions. Tutors here like debating with you. The problem is at the end of the day my questions still remain unanswered. This dialogic way may not be suitable for Chinese students. We hope the tutor will give more instruction and guidance.

It seems that the Western tutor's way of holding an equal interactive tutorial was not working well with Dawei. He hoped that his tutor could solve his academic puzzlement, whereas his tutor seemed to wait for him to come up with ideas for discussion, which he could not until the questions confusing him were answered. After several trials, Dawei found the Catch 22 situation very paradoxical and finally gave up taking advantage of the one-to-one tutorials. Clearly, in Dawei's case, the mismatched expectations prevented the development of a good tutor-student relationship. According to all participants, tutors were understandably busy and certain boundaries were set from their experiences with them.

Earwaker (1992:55) describes the essence of a student-tutor relationship in the British education system this way:

A tutor and a student may belong to the same institution, but they belong there on

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different terms. For both it is their workplace, but whereas for one it is the place of employment, involving a commitment to deliver a service according to a contract, for the other it is the place where the particular services they seek are to be obtained.

Independence in learning still needs to be maintained and facilitated. However, UK academics have to bear in mind the challenges overseas students face. Sometimes it is simply not realistic to assume that they can find out things like home students. Surely, as adults, they were responsible for their studies and in fact proved to be capable of self-management and problem-solving. But I believe their stories of how to learn to become independent should not be told in a bitter negative way. Evidently, this study proves further the impact of different perceptions on student-tutor relationship. This poses a question for UK academics in terms of how to negotiate cultural and educational differences when supervising Chinese postgraduates.

Having discussed my participants' predicament in academic dimension, I want to stress that all of them desire academic achievement and work hard for it. However, after years of employment, going back to university can be daunting, let alone studying in a completely unfamiliar educational environment. Problems arise in their adjustment to the UK styles of teaching and learning, particularly at early stages. Unfortunately, they feel alone with their difficulties and do not receive appropriate help from the academic community.

Isolation versus Socialization

Going to university means not just to expand intellectual power but to meet new friends. Overseas students particularly feel the need of seeking friendship and emotional support. It is well documented that international students tend to suffer loneliness and isolation when studying in a foreign country (Furnham, 1993, 1997; Wiseman, 1997). Understandably, they want to be welcomed and integrated by the host environment. Yet, interviews with the participants revealed that fitting into the UK university life was like chasing the rainbow.

Both Lang and Huan expressed their disappointment when telling me that they did not know much about their British peers. Lang attributed this to her narrow 'contact zone', limited to only flatmates or course mates. Her circle of friends was made up of Chinese students including those from Hong Kong or Taiwan and other international students. She wished she could socialize more, but had difficulty joining British students in the student bar, as she observed, basically drinking and smoking. She would like to have conversations with them, in her view, a simple way of learning about British culture. But finding mutually interesting topics was a struggle for her. In addition, English communicative skills and different life experiences were perceived as barriers as well. Lang said back home she was known as popular and easy going. Here she did not have a clue about how to find a social life as most of her attempts failed. Social interaction with British counterparts remained at the superficial level of daily greetings. It was definitely a shame for her not to make any British friends during her stay in London.

Huan believed the institution played a part in her sense of isolation because she had hoped there would be some organized academic or social activities within its scope. Besides, the host institution gave her the impression of not being well-organized. She pointed out that:

> The college should do something, not just leave us alone. There is the Student Union but it is more for undergraduates. There aren't any activities from the department. You just come back (to halls of residence) when class is finished. I don't feel connected with a supervisor or lecturers. There are no feelings. I wish I could find a sense of familiarity with them. I feel I am suspended in the midair and can not find a community to attach to.

Alternatively, Huan sought solace from her friends back home. She liked to go online and chat with them, sending pictures and telling what had happened in London. She also knew some other Chevening scholars through the British Council. They met up and cooked together on certain occasions. In doing so, she established her own network of support. She assumed that if she found a part-time job, it might provide a chance of getting to know the British.

By contrast, Dawei had made some friends since he came to London, most of whom were Americans. He attributed this to his American English and knowledge about America. However, he stressed that he had made intentional efforts to maintain the friendship, as

he explained:

> You have to know something about them, some subjects catering to their interests. You need some diplomatic skills as well.

Despite everything, he still observed that it was very difficult to build up a deep friendship with Westerners. 'Our characters are so different'. He continued:

> We Chinese are very modest and caring and mindful, while my American friends are very arrogant and self-confident. As my departure is coming soon, one of my best American friends cried the other day, saying 'I am afraid I will forget you`. He said 'we can make friends quickly but unfortunately forget them quickly if there is no contact in two months. We'll simply forget and make new friends'.

Apart from this, Dawei described another event to show how he was confused by the British sense of distance. He recalled:

> I went to a party. You need to talk with people even if you don't know them. I happened to strike up a conversation with this British guy, who told me he was a PhD student from Birkbeck College. I asked him about his subject. He told me it was English literature, something like everyday reading experience in Victorian times. I wanted to keep the conversation going. But to my surprise, he stopped talking about it abruptly. I was not quite sure why and couldn't stop asking myself

'did I say something wrong'?

Dawei remarked that he often found it puzzling as to what topics were suitable for which occasions and where the line should be drawn when talking with Britons.

Apparently, somehow these mature overseas students never manage to become an integrated part of a modern British university. They feel like an outsider and do not have a sense of belonging to the host institution. This aspect has inevitably undermined the full enjoyment of their British education experience, a much regrettable part in their memory. Their voices from this inquiry emphasize again the emotional difficulty foreign students can experience. This raises the issue of how to improve cultural inclusion and develop a well-coordinated support system for this vulnerable group of students.

Confusion and Frustration

The newcomers, fresh, keen and determined to explore the unknown, soon discover with increasing dismay that they are confronted with a sense of ambivalence. This is characterized by feelings of confusion and frustration, a recurrent theme emerging from my interviews with the participants. The situations are often triggered by everyday nuances of language and behaviour through interaction with Western counterparts. Inevitably, these lead to such psychic states as annoyance, anger and irritation.

One negative aspect for Lang soon after the start of her life in London was the

stereotypical images imposed on her, discovered through media coverage or personal experiences. She felt frustrated and became very self-conscious of her own image. As she asked 'isn't this all about representation?' She explained,

> Westerners view us as people from a totalitarian government. The political image inevitably affects their attitude towards us. Sometimes I am afraid we are like those in George Orwell's 1984, brain washed and unable to think or in a state of yihua. Many people here still remember a China during the Cultural Revolution. There isn't any Chinese role model in the British media and most of them have no concept of what modern China is like. Probably that's why I can't agree on the same understanding about some subjects with my course mates.

As a matter of fact, the discrepancy between how she saw herself and how she was seen by the West has become the root cause of many of her dilemmas. For Dawei, everyday living in a foreign country could become a problem. He told me the discomfort he found when sharing a kitchen with British students.

> Sometimes we (together with other Chinese students) bought fish heads from the open market and used them to cook soup. My British flatmates think it's a horrible thing. If there is something smelly in the kitchen, they will just ask 'is it the fish head'. It has happened before when I remember they saw us cooking it and reacted overtly to it. Then I feel...of course, that's the difference. You should understand them. They don't eat this kind of food and think it is dirty or whatever.

However, he confirmed that from a scientific point of view, there was nothing wrong with eating fish heads. They were cheap, nutritious and normal in the Chinese diet. He understood that his British flatmates had different dietary habits but disliked their dubious and unkind attitude. He said this was just one example of everyday hassles though he usually ignored them. Indeed, you cannot force Chinese students to eat baked beans and cheese on toast just because they share a kitchen with fussy British students. For most of them, some comforting food at the end of the day may be the only thing they can count on in a foreign country.

Another downside for my participants was that all too often they found themselves forced to defend China over political issues. Questions relating to democracy and human rights were often on the lips of Westerners. If a few years ago it was more about the Cultural Revolution and the 1989 Tiananmen Demonstration, now the hot topics are Taiwan or Tibet. In a word, they just do not let go. Jiandong found it difficult when explaining to his Western peers about such sensitive and complex issues. In his opinion, this was mainly because their understandings about China were too biased and incomplete. Personally he rejected Western critical views on modern China. He talked back to them.

> *They always talk about human rights in terms of Tibet. It has become a cliché.* However, they don't know how much money the Chinese central government had invested there and how many communist Party members lost their lives to build that only road to Tibet. (Italics, my emphasis)

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Furthermore, from his interaction with Western students and even some academics, Jiandong said that he could feel the sense of arrogance and superiority in their attitudes, which he found unacceptable and sometimes intolerable. However, he added that:

I remember a slogan for a telecommunication advertising saying 'Communication starts from the heart'. I like it, for when you communicate with others, you need understanding and tolerance. I try not to overreact whenever they make unpleasant remarks. It takes time for them to understand. You can't just say 'no' angrily when they say 'Taiwan is a country'. Anyway they don't know much about China and can be very judgmental.

Jiangdong's heartfelt words show that he wishes to have genuine dialogues with Westerners to increase mutual understanding and learn from each other. However, as also discovered by other participants, they often feel baffled when dealing with the tough issue of identity and representation.

To sum up, in this section of East meets West, I have so far illustrated the major challenges facing the four newly arrived Chinese students. In the next section, I will come to examine how they developed coping strategies in order to gain maximum benefit from their hard-won, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

5.2.2 Coping Scenarios: To Sink or Swim

What the four mature students have in common is the great individual effort they made to understand and deal with their situations. I am truly impressed by their initiatives, energy and positive attitudes. They would do whatever they can to make the most of their one year in Britain. However, since the four individuals have different personalities and circumstances, each of them has demonstrated their own coping mechanisms when reacting to problems and difficulties.

Lang: I finally speak up

Lang was petite in stature and good-looking with her wide eyes and smooth dark hair. When talking to her, I found she was strong-minded and full of opinions, quite a contrast to her appearance. In Chapter 2, we learned about her conscious awareness of discomfort and disadvantage in social, cultural and academic dimensions. Here, I want to tell the story of how she got over her sense of helplessness and gained a sense of control.

In Lang's view, the worst thing for a person was to be perceived as narrow-minded, ill-informed and unpopular. Thus her goal was to grasp every opportunity to learn not just from books but also from people with different backgrounds. Though recognizing the linguistic and socio-cultural elements that constrained her, she did not passively allow these obstacles to stand in her way but took action to remove them as much as she could. Academically, she made best use of the resources for media studies in Britain, hoping to enhance her career development. As to socializing with British peers, she said she was

not afraid of it any more. Actually they, too, were shy like her.

Was she still troubled by feelings of being inferior and culturally stereotyped? She told me the story of how she finally stood up and gave her point of view in the end of term presentations:

> One of my course mates, a girl from Hong Kong talked about the Chinese central government's control over the media. She defined China as a one-party totalitarian country. I agree that China is still not as developed as other countries. But on this occasion, I found it unacceptable for some one who did not know much about China to criticize it in this way. As an insider, I feel obliged to defend it especially in front of a group of young Westerners who haven't got a clue about the truth.

She continued:

> This is what I did. After the student finished her presentation, I began to question her on the following points. First, dictatorship isn't a suitable term to use as every ordinary citizen in China knows that there are 9 parties in the government. Then the image she portrayed about the media in China is too simplistic, hollow and in need of factual support. I gave them right then and there a set of figures and facts to show them how fast and dramatic the media has developed in China within such a short period of time. They were simply shocked. Maybe, I am cruel. But,

for a long time, I have tried to be tolerant and was unable to find the right chance to speak up. The American class monitor later said to me humorously that I was a killer. He said at first he was convinced by the girl from Hong Kong. But after hearing what I said, he changed his mind. He murmured to me that, however, I should try to help her understand the situation.

It is not difficult to imagine her feelings of release and the joy of fighting back after such a long silence. As a matter of fact, since the beginning of the Spring Term, Lang had changed from the anxious and confused newcomer back to the active and confident person she always was. She was often seen in good spirits. She told me that she did not care about what others thought or being inferior or not. What mattered most was to know why she was here and how to realize her goal. In fact, her life so far has proved that this is always the best way to achieve personal change.

She explained to me why her favorite book was Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The story was all about people's fate and how they faced different isolation and loneliness. I had no doubt about her fighting spirit in life. The huge bouquet of bright yellow lilies on her desk which she bought for herself showed that even though she was alone in a foreign country, nothing could diminish her passion for life and a desire to make her life better. It did not matter where she was, even in a small room with no good view outside, she could still make the best of it and enjoy herself. Most important, Lang made me believe that whatever came along she had the strength and intelligence to deal with it.

Huan: Travelling as a way of seeing

Huan gave me the impression of a typical Southern Chinese woman, soft spoken and gentle in character. She was divorced with a 6-year-old daughter. Similar to Lang, she had a difficult time upon arrival and felt particularly frustrated with her study. As she remembered:

> You know there were a lot of things to consider at first, like where to do shopping, how to use the bank and the public transport .... But what worried me most was my study. It took a while before I could really calm down and do things.

For Huan, leaving her daughter behind was the hardest thing. She sometimes could become very emotional when talking about her. She told me with misty eyes how she missed her daughter terribly and had to call home every week. It was her favourite Chinese songs and her daughter's photographs that saw her through the first few lonely months in London. She recalled ruefully that:

> Every day seemed to be like a whole year dragging by (du ri ru nian). I didn't know how to deal with the long days. However, as the Spring Term came, I became more accustomed to everything and in fact had developed more flexibility as I had much room to manoeuvre myself out of unfavourable situations (you ren you yu). I found time actually was flying in a flash.

Once Huan felt settled, she wasted no time in starting to plan her travel. She believed that travelling broadened one's horizons, as the saying goes, 'it is better to cover thousands of miles rather than reading thousands of books'. With the support of a full scholarship, she was able to visit many parts of Britain and some European countries. She would search online and make use of cheap travel services. Within a year, she had been to Scotland, the Lake District as well as many historical cities such as Bath, Canterbury, Oxford and Cambridge. She walked through all the major parks in London. Until the last few days of her stay, she still mentioned that if possible she wanted to explore every corner of London streets again on foot and keep them in her mind.

Every time she came back from a trip, she would write down her experiences in the diary and organize hundreds of photographs on her laptop. She said these were treasure for her and would bring back sweet memories in the future. The following is an excerpt of her travel writing from my translation. She used poetic language to describe her sentiments and joy about the coming of the spring season:

> The taste of the wind has changed. Flowers have just begun to show their smiling faces. Spring has come on her riding horse! Such a wonderful season and I decide to put down my books for the moment and go out to smell the intoxicating wind and see the charming flowers, to enjoy the beauty of nature. Nearly half the year of my stay in Britain was spent on reading books. Every time I went out for a trip, I would feel guilty about it. But this time, I have decided to finish all the course

work assignments in winter so that I can take advantage of the Easter holiday and go sightseeing in Europe. Spring in Europe is a wonderful season. Just in one day, the taste of wind has changed totally. It gently touches my face and all my unhappiness seems to be blown away. All my fighting spirit has been softened. All I want is to bathe lazily in the warm sunshine, thinking nothing. Every corner in London has become more attractive because of spring. After half a year of studying in London, it seems that I begin to like this city. The sense of restlessness brought with me from fast-paced Guangzhou has been gradually eroded here. I learn to appreciate its sense of leisure and relaxation. Maybe also because I am an outsider and my life is far away from the cruel reality, I can discover more of its beauty. I feel so lucky to have a chance to see the world. Study abroad is not just a way of acquiring knowledge. It is more about the enriching of life experience. I hope all these will make me experience more about life so as to cherish it more. In 5 months' time, everything here will become memory. While I am missing home all the time, I also start to commemorate every feeling I had here. I hope I can manage my time better so that I can go out and walk around London more. I want to take pictures of every memorable corner so that my memory will have a space to attach itself to.

Indeed, Huan clearly realized how precious this journey to Britain meant to her. She did not want to waste any of her time here. Nothing could stop her from seeing, experiencing, and absorbing things around. I saw how she quickly recovered from a burglary shock right after her settling-in. Despite the fact that her attempts of seeking official help

remained unfruitful, Huan did not let this negative experience hold her back. Instead, she put more energy than ever into changing herself for better. Especially, Huan came to Britain with a bruised heart from the aftermath of her marriage breakdown. All the time she was consciously searching for new outlooks for her future. Did she find hope and strength to move on and find happiness in life? These are her words:

I was walking alone in the tube, you know, in a strange country and surrounded by strange travelers. I felt a strong sense of loneliness. I felt let down by life and people. Suddenly there was this music from somewhere, so touching, so melancholy. I felt...oh...It's something that gives strength to those emotionally homeless... the injured souls...

This emotional revelation happened accidentally when I just wanted to switch off the tape recorder and finish our interview. I believed that was why Huan felt relieved and was glad that she could talk to me like a friend. However, as a researcher, I realized this was the moment that I had been waiting for, the revealing of her true deep feelings. I tried to note down before asking her permission to switch on the recorder again. This deepened my conviction that somehow Huan found her inner peace, strength and hope from this journey. As she said convincingly to me, 'whatever happens, as long as you keep a pure heart, hope will always be with you.'

Jiandong: I will do everything to sharpen my thinking

Probably due to his many years of working as a financial journalist, Jiandong struck me as down-to-earth and worldly wise. He had his own idea about how to spend his one year in London. He criticized the tourist attitude and was more concerned with the cultivating of inner power, of an independent thinking individual. In short, he was not happy with just 'been there, done that' but desired some substantial change in himself. He talked about his opinion frankly:

> I don't see much point of taking hundreds of snapshots to bring home and show off the places you have been to. They will all be gone if there is a fire (jokingly). One year will pass in a blink. I don't want to go home still the same person. I mean I need to learn different ways of looking at things, which can be useful in my job. Of course, I can be assimilated again once I am back. But, at least, I know deep down I have changed and I am a different person.

According to Jiandong, the real change for a person was his/her way of thinking. He emphasized that this was the kind of change that he yearned for and wished to happen as a result of his study in Britain. The most important thing for him to do after arrival was to sort out the internet connection in his room. His only regret was that he did not manage to buy a TV as soon as he settled in.

In common with others, Jiandong also went through boredom and homesickness during the first couple of weeks. Then there was this party, as he recalled, for one flatmate's birthday to which about 100 people came and the whole flat was packed. He said after

that he no longer felt strange with everything though he was still not quite accustomed to Western parties, where people usually stood and talked to each other. But it would be fine for him by simply standing there. He decided it was time to put an end to his 'hiding' and start to make moves.

Academically, Jiandong found a sense of achievement from his participation in seminars. He gained confidence in his essay writing as well. He felt satisfied when seeing himself from initially spending two weeks writing 2000 words to later 5000 words within one week. As a matter of fact, when other participants often talked about pressure of deadlines and particularly how they felt stressed with their final dissertation, Jiandong was relaxed and easy as he said to me he had finished his work in advance due to a well-planned schedule and self-efficiency.

As a person of wide interests, Jiandong took advantage of the diverse cultural life in London. He went to the Shakespeare Globe, saying £5 was affordable to experience the glory of the theatre, albeit standing. He expressed his surprise that many young people in Britain were still interested in Shakespeare. He made visits to the local cinemas to improve his listening as films here had no English subtitles. He enjoyed musicals and went to see Mamma mia. As he did not like borrowing books from the library, he said most of his money was spent on books and he viewed it as a worthy investment. For this collection of academic works was invaluable to him, especially when some original versions for cultural studies were difficult to find in China. As an avid reader, he preferred to shop at Amazon for cheaper books. Novels like *The Davinci Code, Angels*

and Demons, and *The Shadow of the Wind* were enjoyable bed-time reading for him. Moreover, he mentioned that he was no longer afraid of going somewhere far and strange like before. As he said:

> I will just go as long as there is a map. It is much better if you walk around in the city of London. Yesterday, I went to the same place where I got lost at the beginning and found the area was actually rather small.

It can be seen that Jiandong managed different aspects of his UK life quite well. He attributed his being independent and organized to the fact that he had to look after himself for about 7 years when both of his parents worked abroad. It was normal for him to deal with difficulties himself. At least cooking was no problem. Compared to other participants, Jiandong was relatively content with his own efforts and the outcomes. Yet, from time to time, he expressed his quandary in terms of to what extent he had changed as a result of his one year in Britain. Maybe it was difficult for him to detect it himself but people back home would find he had indeed changed.

Dawei: Academic pursuit is the top priority

Dawei struck me as scholarly and conscientious. With an ambition to seek an academic career, Dawei's struggle mostly centered on his studies with cultural theory. Ever since his entry to the course, he discovered that he needed to learn a great deal of philosophy and theory. At the end of every lecture, there were more than ten books to read. And

worse, many of the philosophers' names were hardly heard of. He recalled:

I have heard of the French philosopher Deleuze. But there are many I do not know. There is a professor in my course, famous for his fast talking in the Department. He can jump from one subject to another very quickly. His lecture is really intense. There is terminology I don't quite understand. When coming to Walter Benjamin, the professor likes to quote him directly in German. Maybe he is showing off. My notes are very messy in the first term. I only get about 60%.

How did he catch up with the theoretical knowledge he was lacking in? His mood cheered up when he told me that:

Gradually the more books I read and the more I learn from other courses, the better I can relate different aspects of philosophical knowledge to each other. I begin to build up a clear framework. I find that there are even inner connections between Chinese and Western philosophy as well. The teachings of Laozi are very similar to Derrida. Sometimes you are surprised that Westerners know more about Chinese philosophy than you think. I am very happy that I have changed from being confused to interested, from feeling strange to familiar. I used to passively accept everything. Now I know what kind of new books I need to find next.

After about a two-month void, his hard work was paid off. Dawei started to regain

confidence in his theory study and could even make some connections between ancient Chinese philosophy and Western theory.

Particularly, Dawei appreciated the various lectures available not only in his host institution but also within the scope of the University of London. He believed he had benefited a lot from these opportunities. For instance, the commemoration held at SOAS for Edward Said left him deeply impressed. Other than going to lectures, he liked to visit museums and galleries often together with two other course mates. They would hold discussions when coming back. From his point of view, these were very important parts of his academic life in London.

Financial worries were not uncommon among Chinese students. As a self-funded student, how did Dawei cope with his living in expensive London? He responded that:

It's no problem for me in terms of daily living. I have lived on my own since I went to university (in China). I don't buy clothes here. I am not too picky with food. Of course with cheap stuff the quality is poorer. ..Meat doesn't taste as good as home ...but as long as I am not starving. Every week, we buy fruit and vegetables from the local open market together so we can share the costs (with other Chinese students). It saves money as I have to keep a tight budget here. I don't travel much and only left London three times. The traveling costs are expensive. But anyway I feel everything is ok. I feel I can manage.

For Dawei, the real sense of achievement came from his academic performance. He was the kind of student you often bumped into in the library. And his mind was always busy with ideas and thoughts. He even printed out college-circulated emails to study the wording and see how subtly British English was used in different contexts. In my view, Dawei was the most serious about his academic endeavours among my participants. It was not surprising that he finally became a successful candidate for a full-PhD scholarship offered by another university in London.

As illustrated above in this section, the four mature students do not withdraw from challenging situations. Instead, they develop their own coping strategies in order to navigate out of their predicaments and attain their goals. Importantly, in the end, each of them has more or less found their sense of fulfillment despite adversity.

5.2.3 Views on British People and Society

In addition to academic pursuit, another major aspect of studying abroad is the exploration of the host culture. All participants in the interviews gave their views on British people and society based on their personal experiences and observations. Huan witnessed that as a modern industrial country Britain has a more mature and stable social system compared with China, for example, the National Health Service and public transportation. She explained that:

If something is wrong with the tube, there is the alternative of bus service. We

used to assume British people are rigid and not flexible. On the contrary, I find the problem back home is that we are too flexible, which sometimes leads to chaos.

Huan was also impressed by the rights as a customer in Western society from one of her shopping experiences. She told me that 'You can return things that you are not happy about in shops here. Back in China, the shop assistant may give you a hard time.' However, she did not find it easy at first. She recalled what had happened to her in a bank:

I was annoyed that other people accused me of jumping the queue, as I didn't need any service except an enquiry. Back home, it's very simple. I didn't understand why I had to queue just for a question. I was very impatient and irritated. Of course, I get used to the customs now and actually think they are good and may be better if they can be flexible a bit. I become more patient as well. I think different social environments create different social behaviours. I find it heart warming whenever the long distance bus driver helped me with my luggage on my travels and said 'have a nice day' to me. People here are very patient to answer your enquiry probably because Britain has a much smaller population.

Jiandong told me a vignette to show his understanding about the British culture:

When I was taking my IELTS class in China, I got to know an English teacher and we later became friends. Once I invited him to dinner, he said to me if I came to Britain he would take me to the restaurant. But it never happened and I know he knows I am here. Now many foreigners (Westerners) like to teach in China. We call them 'foreign experts'. The Chinese hospitality is sometimes too much. They come to teach English and we treat them like professors. The host institution usually provides them with the best accommodation and service. Our society depends a lot on the reciprocal personal relationships between people. We call it ren qing (human feeling, or kindness or favour). That is why guanxi (interpersonal or social relationships) can be used directly as a term in English newspaper articles without translation.

Here, Jiandong pointed out two important terms that defined the feature of social interaction in Chinese society. Based on Confucian cultural heritage, guanxi and ren qing refer to informal relational contracts among people in order to maintain reciprocal social favours. It is about coming and going, a cultivated friendship leading to mutual benefits and emotions. The pervasive popularity of gift giving and eating together among the Chinese reflects this salient characteristic of the culture. Obviously, he was let down by his British friend as he did not keep his word. But being in Britain made him understand better how the Chinese way was different from the British way in terms of interpersonal relations.

In addition, Jiandong observed that the atmosphere in European countries was more

relaxing than that in some Asian countries where the pace was fast and the sense of competition tense. He was particularly fond of the British pub culture. In his view, it created a space for communication.

Unlike the Britons, we go straightaway home at the end of a busy working day. Most of us will go to the supermarket to shop and then cook dinner at home. There is no chance of chilling out. I was once astonished at those packed pubs along the banks in Canary Wharf. Lots of people drank beer while watching football. I have been to the pub to have a drink with friends. The feeling is quite good. Better than parties as you have to stand and find topics and people to talk with. Back home, socializing happens more among friends you already know, normally dining together with good food and fine wine as a must.

As a football fan who also liked beer and socializing, Jiandong's appreciation for British pub culture was understandable. Unlike Jiandong, Dawei gave some different opinions about the British:

It's a practical country. You can see it from Jane Austin's novels such as *Sense and Sensibility* or *Pride and Prejudice*. British People talk too much about their jobs in the conversation. They are always saying that it is difficult to find a job, blah, blah.

However, his comments on social customs and etiquettes in British society were

complimentary. According to him, being in Britain raised his awareness of cultural norms and social morality such as not talking too loud in public places or keeping a certain distance between people. He had made an effort to develop cross-cultural sensitivity and change his patterns of behaviour. In his view, it was necessary to learn about another culture and behave in a socially acceptable way, especially in a polite society like Britain.

In summary, the four individuals perceive life in Britain as generally less stressful particularly because interpersonal relationship seems to be simpler. The British social system is considered to be better organized and has more credibility. British people are polite but they admit that not much is known about them. Obviously, these can be some superficial impressions and judgements. After all, their stay in Britain may not be long enough for them to get used to drinking the English tea. And, as foreign students, they have a limited chance of getting deeply involved in British social life. But their personal experience is real and how they feel about it is honest.

5.2.4 Comments on British Higher Education

It is noted that all four participants had little knowledge about British higher education before they came to Britain. As they learnt more about the goal of British education and how the system was delivered, they were able to make some evaluative comments about it especially in comparison with their previous Chinese education. Their individual opinions may not be representative but surely give insights into the present situation.

In response to my question 'what do you think of Chinese students in British higher education', Jiandong had no hesitation but to say that:

The academic atmosphere in Britain is of course world famous. Intellectuals are free to express their views. But nowadays, there are many young Chinese students coming here from newly rich middle class families. They drive expensive cars and flaunt their parents' money without a thought. Of course there are good ones among them. What I mean is you have to come (to Britain) with a purpose. 300,000 RMB a year isn't a small sum and study is a task that demands hard work as well.

His disapproving attitude towards some younger Chinese students' behaviours was obvious. Dawei, from his own experience, gave a critical review on MA education in Britain. In his opinion, the British MA course was not quite taken seriously in the education system. His point was clearly demonstrated in the following citation:

One year MA study here is like touring (you xue)... academic tourism. When thinking about my tutors' help, I feel they are remote, indeed quite remote from you. In the Thatcher era, students from China were a rarity on the British campus. They were mostly sponsored by the Government. It was quite a great event to study in Britain then, there were very few Chinese students, even in MA study. Education was for the elite. But now it is like keeping sheep.

However, the machine is still the same old one. There isn't enough oil but it is continuously kept running that fast. It won't work. They can't meet the demand. This college is a living proof. One friend who studies Art told me that in 1999 there were 20 students enrolled on the subject. Now...er... it's the year 2005. There are more than 110. They have 2 tutors. You cannot possibly make an appointment with the tutor. Even in 1999, it was already difficult to meet them, let alone now. I am wondering what they were doing during this 5 or 6 years.

...In America, a PhD is very difficult and takes about 8 years. You have to have a MA degree. And you need to attend classes for three years as well. Here, in my understanding, they hope people coming to study should themselves be elite rather than in need of their help and cultivation. I find it very strange. I don't quite understand why still there are so many (refers to the current influx of Chinese students) probably because our country has just opened to the West. Students have come to Britain for only a few years. Sooner or later, if they know better, the situation can become very bad.

In Dawei's view, British higher education needed to do something about this inadequacy and live up to its perceived good quality of education. He made it clear that the expanding student body had posed a great challenge to UK university system. Specifically, he showed his concern in terms of how Chinese students could cope with such an overcrowded system when sufficient guidance and support were not available. No doubt that Dawei felt his Masters courses did not meet his expectations in terms of

academic rigour or support. However he did not forget to add that:

But the curriculum (in Britain) is better designed ... divided into different and very detailed categories, such as by youth, gender, or race. And lecturers have a very diverse background. In China, if you learn Chinese literature you end up teaching it naturally. Here, students can benefit from lecturers' interdisciplinary backgrounds.

Both Jiandong and Dawei's candid comments on British higher education are undoubtedly thought-provoking. They acknowledge its established reputation but more importantly express their concerns and worries in terms of the recent change in UK universities. I believe how they understand the tricky situation in current UK higher education offers valuable feedback for future improvement.

5.2.5 The Invisible Forces

The interviews show that when reflecting upon what they encountered in the UK, all participants made frequent references to their home culture, previous education and parental influence. This echoes what Sara Ahmed (2000:91) states as 'the question of being-at-home or leaving home is always a question of memory, of the discontinuity between past and present'. Indeed, the journey to the West made them reflect their tradition and culture. All four tended to retrieve their past experiences to explain the difficult elements in their adjustment to the new cultural environment.

Cultural Background

It has been said that we are ruled by culture rather than nature. The work of Vygotsky has made us realize the important links between culture and human consciousness—'the subjective awareness of one's own sensations, perceptions, and other mental events' (Shiraev & Levy, 2004:114). In this case, the four mature Chinese students were born, grew up and educated in China and have a very distinctive Chinese cultural background. Lonner and Malpass (1994: 89) point out that:

> Culture...is analogous to knowing the 'rules of game'. When one becomes socialized (through rule-governed learning and child-rearing practices) and acculturated (through subtle informal learning) in a specific society, he or she has learned a complex set of explicit, as well as implicit, rules concerning how he or she should behave among his or her fellows who share the same culture by virtue of being raised under the same rules.

However, when one moves into another culture, he or she not only faces the challenge of learning new 'rules of the game' but also unlearning the old ones to meet the requirement of the new environment. It is in this process that the four individuals came to realize the constraining forces that held them back.

Lang discovered that her disadvantage in socializing with peers had much to do with her

upbringing in a different culture, as she explained:

People usually like to talk to someone similar to them or better than them. In my daily communication with other students, I discover the lack of common ground or …say overlaps I can identify with them. It is a shame especially when you think you've found a common topic, yet sadly the other doesn't seem interested.

Lang also analyzed that the uneasiness she felt in social interaction was due to the fact that studying dominated her childhood and adolescent years, leaving her with little experience. But as a journalist, Lang knew that it was vital for her to have good communication and people skills, to use her words, a must for her profession. Thus she consciously tried to improve her weak points by taking the initiative to know other people and different thinking. But her unsuccessful attempts to fit in with the dominant group filled her frequently with self doubt and frustration. She once suffered a crisis of confidence, as she said, 'Maybe it's because we are from a Third world country. Not many people are interested in our culture. They know little about us and do not see why they should bother to know more about it.'

As indicated earlier, the desire for change was what motivated my participants to embark on a journey to Britain. Looking back, Dawei talked about how his home culture affected him in making things happen:

There are some things that are difficult to change without a purpose or urge to

prompt you. It happens so often to me. Indeed, in this country, you find your views on life are different from people here, especially Britons or Americans. You come with your tradition and family background. These are things that are pulling you... restrict you ... affect you so much in decision making... and I find it difficult ...very difficult to overcome.

Giddens (1991:194) points out that 'tradition was itself a prime source of authority, not located within any particular institution, but pervading many aspects of social life'. Importantly, tradition is bound up with memory particularly collective memory. Dawei felt deeply the powerful force of tradition on him when making changes to adapt to the new environment. He pointed out:

We have different beliefs and patterns of behaviour from Westerners. For instance, I am conscious of the sense of seriousness found in our Chinese character and the inescapable effects of our mother tongue when communicating with Westerners. These cultural and linguistic barriers are not easy to get rid of. One year is too short to learn about their society. So what you can do is be yourself first and then try to find ways of getting along with them.

Dawei's strategy may reflect the experience of many people who temporarily stay in another country. What has formed in character, social behaviour or modes of thinking in one's own culture is not easy to give up or alter simply because physically dwelling in a different socio-cultural environment. To get by, the individual has to reconcile and

negotiate many differences for survival, peace or superficial harmony. Both Lang and Dawei recognized the shaping power of their own culture which impeded them from achieving personal change.

Previous Education

Constantly, my participants' first hand experience of the British education made them review critically the Chinese education system in which they had survived and succeeded. They realized that they had to bear the consequences resulting from this discontinuity when adapting to the British academic system. Specifically, it triggered their memories of early schooling, leading to frequent comparisons between the two countries' pedagogical systems.

It is noted that the Chinese concept of educational achievement is marked by the accumulation of knowledge mainly through rote learning and memorization of factual materials. Students' progress is assessed by their examination results. A good student is perceived as studious and attentive to teachers. Also, it is a morally grounded education featured with discipline and loyalty teaching. Personal happiness should be sacrificed for the collective good. Above all, derived from Confucianism, Chinese education aims to create an environment that promotes peace and harmony (Porter, 1990). By contrast, the British system emphasizes individual ideas and achievements. Students are encouraged to debate and criticize in their learning. Obviously, it would be too simplistic here to make quick judgments about either of the education systems. Rather, I would like to present my

participants' views on the different styles of teaching and learning they discovered in the UK.

Dawei observed that:

In retrospect, since primary school, our education has revolved around learning what the teacher says by heart and getting good marks in the exam. We are not taught how to do research. Students of Science may be better. At least there are some experiments to do in the lab. But for students of Humanities or social science there is little systematic training, such as skills of academic writing. Once here, the academic convention leaves a deep impression on me. First, you need to do literature research, and then work out methodology issues... There are these procedures to follow.

He explained further:

Once I gave my essay on the reform of the Chinese football system to a British friend to read. It examined the relationship between politics and sports in China. He suggested to me that the theme of my subject was too broad. He would need 20,000 words to make it clear rather than 5,000 words. I reconsidered it and found there was a point in what he said. Probably this has something to do with our education and the cognitive habit formed since we were very young. We Chinese students tend to sloganeer a lot on empty enormous subjects and often fail to

capture the essence. Finally, I decided to focus on Chinese women's volleyball rather than using it just as a supporting example.

Another recurrent theme mentioned by the participants was their English learning experiences. Overall, they believed the English education in China did not prepare students well and put them at a disadvantage for both social and academic purposes once they were abroad. Dawei gave his view on how English should be taught in schools:

English teachers stress too much the accuracy of pronunciation. I have a good American accent and scored 8 in speaking in IELTS. But when an American friend asked how come I didn't have any accent, it made me think. In my case, it is because I had been taught by American teachers since I was very young. But for many Chinese children, in their English class, teachers set a high standard for them by requiring them to pronounce English in a correct way. This makes many Chinese English learners reluctant to speak as they are afraid of making mistakes. The point is you can talk if you just know only a word. They will understand anyway as long as you like to talk with them.

In common with Dawei, the three others expressed similar views on the difficulties encountered in their studies resulting from the effects of previous education. To achieve in the British education system they have to overcome this inconsistency. Their understandings of different educational values and practices will certainly help us grasp the problems that Chinese students possibly face when studying in Britain.

Parental Influence

All four participants talked about the profound influence their parents exerted on their growing up and later life choices. Certainly, parents play an important role in the development of a child's attitude and behaviour. Particularly, Confucianism promotes filial piety in the parent-child relations, namely the care and respect for one's parents. This deep rooted value in Chinese society explains the long lasting bond between Chinese parents and their children. However, the changing values today's young people experience are increasingly causing conflicts with older generation. Here, my participants talked about the problematic relationship they had with their parents.

As we know, the four did well at school, received university education and settled into good employment. In a word, they were role models for others and pride of their parents. However, as adults facing their own life decisions, they found themselves reacting rebelliously against their parents' traditional ways. Dawei recounted that as a child he was obedient and listened to his parents but often had some small ideas of his own. He was not the best in class, but always above average. His parents did not have to bother too much with his study. They gave attention to what he thought as well. However, he told me that:

> My relationship with my parents is no longer like before. I began to have more
>
> rifts with them, particularly after the age of 18, you know, after I went to

university and later worked in the capital. After all these 6 years I have changed a lot including my views. I have made my own circle of friends. I find my values and beliefs are very different from my parents. There were many times when I found myself in big arguments with my mother mostly over my choice of a girlfriend.

When I asked if he liked to discuss his personal life with his parents, he continued:

Of course not. But they often ask, especially about what kind of girl I should find. I once got annoyed and said to them I didn't have to report everything to them. I tried to explain to my parents that the girl was from another family and had nothing to do with them. But my mother thought I must get her approval as to what kind of girl I should marry. What kind of looks and physique and what kind of family she was from ...

Finally, he had a head on clash with them, which he did on purpose. He explained that he found the generation gap was huge and it would be very difficult to get along with his parents in future if he did not get his ideas across. Yet he added that he would still act as a good son according to the Chinese tradition, but his parents had to know that he had changed and they had to respect his choices.

Similarly, Huan had an ongoing troubled relationship with her mother largely due to her criticism over many aspects of her life. She felt that despite her success, she still was not

good enough for her mother's expectation of her. When her mother made some sharp comments about her going out at night with male friends after her divorce, Huan decided to talk back and be assertive. For in her mother's view, a virtuous woman should not behave like her. But Huan insisted that it was her right to look for happiness. Thus, it was her mother who should discard the traditional ideas rather than that she should change her behaviour.

Clearly, these examples reflect the generational differences in transitional Chinese society when dramatic social change fuels clashes between young people's personal choices and their parents' expectations. It takes courage and strength for them to break away from the fixities of traditional norms and values when making decisions for their own lives.

5.2.6 A Rite of Passage

A rite of passage comes from significant stages occurring in a person's life course. It is commonly viewed that radical change normally brings about transformative experiences. Arguably, it alters the individual in his/her emotional, physical and psychological process of adaptation. In the interviews, participants agreed unanimously that their one year study in Britain was a chance of a life time and had in many ways changed them. They described to me what a difference their one year in London had made to them.

Rethinking Chinese Culture

Madan Sarup (1996:47) reminds us 'identity is only conceivable in and through difference'. Indeed, the four participants made continual efforts to compare and negotiate cultural differences in their adaptation. More importantly, they recognized various aspects in their own culture, which would remain invisible to them if this journey was not made.

Independence, perceived as one of the most important values by the British, provoked Dawei to think about why it was not emphasized in the Chinese society.

> Independence is a relatively new concept for many Chinese. We have been in an agricultural society for too long. We emphasize collectivism...People in our society have similar ideas about standards of success or the way of life.

It is true that Chinese people often say 'you rely on your parents when at home, and you rely on your friends when leaving home'. This in a way reflects a tradition of heavily dependent and interconnected human relations in social life. Dawei mentioned another event which prompted his thinking about the Chinese character.

> We used to discuss after lectures. Once my American friend complained that he didn't like the lecturer and had no idea what he had talked about. I said to him 'but I've learnt a lot and taken a whole book of notes'. They were surprised when I said I was going to start writing my essay soon. What I mean here is we Chinese

people are too clever sometimes to a degree that we always rely on ourselves to solve all problems. Or we try to make compromises when facing with unpleasant situations. However, I can see the repression and restraint (ya yi) in our character now. These make us tend to be tolerating and enduring when problems come up. We don't talk about our difficulties openly. Western students are different. They don't tolerate and are always ready to complain.

In contrast to Dawei, Lang was fascinated by the individual's freedom for life choices. She compared what she experienced in Chinese society:

People have more alternatives and life choices in Western culture. Back at home, your life is not just yours. You have to wear a mask to protect yourself. Individuals are respected here but we stress the benefits of the collective. In my work place, I don't like to talk about my private life and don't want to get involved in others as well. But people will think you are too individual and you will end up with bad human relations. The boss won't promote you when seeing you are not popular in the group.

Lang observed that different social reality created different life choices. As a single woman, she felt the pressure from both parents and society. Even financial independence and a good profession could not compensate for her failure in personal life. Naturally, when her friends married well and lived an easy life, she felt jealous even though deep down she did not want that kind of parasitic life. But the mentality still prevailed that a

woman's life was more about marriage and family. Lang told me that all these years she was on her own in the capital city, coping with a demanding job. Even though she was excellent, it did not change the sad fact that she was still single approaching 30. For even in big cities, this could be a major source of anxiety and fear for women of her age. Moreover, according to her, in today's China, being successful meant having the trademarks of such material possessions as a big house, expensive cars and money for luxurious lifestyles. This created an atmosphere of restlessness and vanity in social relations. Lang commented on the consequence of this same measurement of success:

> The social evaluation system is single standard. In the village where the cockle pickers come from, a tall family house is the symbol of success. They opt for doing dirty work invisibly in the rich world and only got noticed when they died. I mean the pressure is the same for people from different walks of life in the society. When I make money, I may compare it with my colleagues and old schoolmates to see if they are richer than me. There are not many other ways of living a life.

Here, Lang gave a glimpse of the tension and anxiety among people under the influence of huge social and economic change in recent China. For her, the process of achieving advancement in her life had been coupled with a strong sense of fragmentation during the past ten years. Above all, she expressed her frustration over the difficulty of seeking an individualized way of life in Chinese culture.

Developing a New Sense of Self

One impact of moving into a new culture and seeing a different other is that the individual learns to ask such necessary questions as 'why has this happened' or 'who am I'. The study reveals that all participants have to some extent gained a better understanding about themselves through critical self-examination. This heightened awareness of selfhood is especially pronounced for the two women students, whereas men's sense-making has more to do with political, ideological and philosophical issues.

Huan was acutely aware of how she had changed during her one year in Britain. As a woman who had gone through a divorce, Huan was still in a state of healing before she came to London. Here, she talked about her new discovery about herself:

> You don't feel your human nature is repressed here. You not only can have ideas but also can do as you think. Your opinions are valued. Here, every one can have different ideas and your ideas are respected. I have had a whole new understanding of who I am and what my potential is. I find myself actually a woman who is very independent and open-minded. I have never ever realized this before. I hope in future my life won't be all the same and I need it to be fuller and more diverse. I think everyone should have the right to make choices about their way of life. I used to be very self-doubtful and indecisive. Now if I have made a decision, I will try my best to realize it. I have the confidence.

Indeed, confidence was vital for Huan after her emotional trauma. It provided the drive for her to move forward. She continued that:

> I once lost myself in my marriage. I forgot who I was and my name was... (She spoke with vehemence.) Life is too short. I won't care too much about how other people will think of me like before. I want to pay more attention to my own feelings and respect my own needs...

As a caring mother and supportive wife for years, she always put others first and suffered a low sense of self-esteem after the collapse of her marriage. Huan made it clear that what she experienced in Britain was liberating. Her way of thinking and life attitude had changed. Being critical of the traditional female roles that were expected of her, Huan had restored her confidence and begun to imagine new visions of what she wanted to be in future. However, Huan stressed that her longing for change did not mean that she accepted the Western concept of individualism totally and unconditionally. In her view, on one hand, it was wise to absorb the good side of it like respect for personal choice and freedom of true self-revelation. On the other hand, it was still necessary for people to keep conscious of collective interests under some circumstances.

From his daily interaction with others, Dawei also learnt many aspects about himself that were different from his Western counterparts.

> We Chinese people always put collective interests first instead of the self.

Westerners and we Chinese are so different in terms of the concept of who you are or the 'selfhood'. No wonder you will find it disappointing to get along with your Western friends. I can understand now why so many mixed marriages fail to work, our worldviews are so different.

Dawei contrasted the reactions among flatmates when the heating broke down in his flat:

When the heating in our flat broke down, they went straightaway to complain about it. On the contrary, we Chinese students just think this place is so expensive yet so poorly facilitated. But it never crosses my mind that we can make a complaint to the Accommodation office and get the problems solved. My Western friends think they have to make us happy and satisfied, while we Chinese students tend to swallow our anger and suffer in silence (ren qi tun sheng).

He interpreted that maybe it was because they were products of a consumer society for hundreds of years and more aware of a contract relationship. If one paid money, the other had to provide the service. As to being polite or not, it was a different matter.

Gaining Refreshed Perspectives

All four participants agreed to some extent that their UK experience was an eye opener. All tried to take their hard-earned chance to learn and better themselves as much as possible. To a certain extent, they developed new perspectives in understanding their

social and personal realities.

In Huan's case, after experiencing a painful divorce, she was desperately in search of new meanings in life. She made the following remarks:

> One year of life abroad has in many ways changed my views towards life. I can be more open to express myself. I used to be content with everything. Now I tend to pay more attention to my own needs and choices. Once I have some plans I will look for chances to make them happen.

In her words, she had become more open-minded and expressive. She talked about her changed views in terms of how to educate her daughter in future. Rather than following other pushy parents who burdened their children with extra-curricular music, English or dance lessons, she would respect her daughter's own interests and let her do whatever she wanted. Huan said as long as her daughter was happy—the most important thing in the world, she would never force her to do anything against her will.

Through his cross-cultural comparisons, Dawei made comments on young people of his generation. He noted that their life paths or experiences were quite similar and predictable. They would mostly do as they were expected by society — go to university, find a job, and then get married normally at the expected age. He further explained that,

> When young people in China look for a job, they want a stable one. But

Westerners such as Americans, of course, everybody wants stability, are not afraid of change. Normally, like those twenty-something, within the next ten years they may change 5 or 6 jobs. It is no problem for them. In China, if you are not from a rich family or have no connections, you need to find a secure job.

His biggest gain during this one year abroad was that he was able to absorb new ideas every time he got to know a new person. He realized how different people's attitudes could be even toward the same thing.

Before, my circle of friends was all made up of classmates from my undergraduate study. We had similar values and worldviews. We agreed on what was good and bad. Here I discover that what I believe to be good may not be good at all. In China, there are too many ideological and psychological misconceptions (wu qu) in terms of education and the respect for the individual. Here, no matter what kind of person you are, it seems there are many different ways of self realization, though this is a class conscious society.

Obviously, living and learning in another culture broadened Dawei's horizon and made him reflect upon what he had once taken for granted. Certainly, these discoveries and new perspectives had an impact on him in terms of making changes in his life.

5.2.7 Worries about Impending Return

What overseas students will experience upon their return home has been studied by some researchers. Citron (1996) identifies the physical, interpersonal, cultural and personal dimensions in relation to the re-entry phenomenon. All four participants expressed concerns about how to readjust to the once familiar home environment when their one-year sojourn in London came to an end. It seems that what worried them most was going back to the same working atmosphere and daily routines.

Jiandong remarked that where he worked there was fierce competition and rapid change. No doubt many new colleagues had joined in during his absence, forming new networks. This meant that he had to adapt to new situations once back, which may require a different kit of survival strategies and techniques from him.

Huan noted that after getting accustomed to a more relaxed student life, she might find the situation back home stressful, as she visualized the juggling between looking after her daughter as a single parent and coping with a demanding job. She was also afraid that she would not be able to express herself as freely as she did in Britain. But nevertheless she held a positive attitude, saying that she hoped the change in her could play a part in fostering new working relationships with both her superiors and subordinates.

Compared with Jiandong and Huan, Dawei also had a practical concern. He told me with a grin on his face that he had already started thinking about where to live when going back to Beijing. He would stay there for one year before coming back to London to continue his PhD study. For Lang, apart from the dread of a highly pressurized working

environment, going back was more about bracing herself again to face curious friends and nagging parents about the subject of her single status.

Despite everything, study abroad provides a temporary relief from work and family commitments. However, participants' worries before departure confirm the issue of re-entry facing overseas students as illustrated in previous literature. This study shows to some extent the four Chinese students have anticipated the various challenges or 'reverse culture shock' once back home and have more or less made some psychological preparations for that.

5.3 A Brief Review of Emerging Common Patterns

Having examined the different stages my participants went through during their one year stay in London, I would like to summarize the common patterns of their cross-cultural encounters arising from their journey to the West. They are as follows:

- Expectations did not go well with reality for the newcomers. Settling-in was a prime concern before starting their new life. Loneliness and social isolation were perceived particularly at early stages.

- Participants encountered difficulties in transferring into the British education system. A range of challenges particularly the lack of theoretical context and unfamiliarity with UK academic conventions was identified. Anxiety and frustration were

expressed when dealing with academic demands.

- Coping mechanisms were developed with individual characteristics in order to make the most of their opportunity. Efforts were made to gain maximum participation in both academic and social activities.

- A certain level of understanding about British culture and society was gained through personal experiences and observations. Attempts were made to learn and negotiate cultural differences. However, confusion and dilemma were generated in their struggle to fit in with the host community. Cultural stereotypes and Western superiority evoked feelings of resistance and ambiguity.

- The four participants' experiences demonstrate that one year in London has been a journey of discovery and personal growth. It prompts the exploration of their own cultural and educational backgrounds. Change has happened or is hoped to happen with expectations of bringing positive effects on their lives in future. eg. Huan's new sense of self, Jiandong's belief in thinking as the real power, and Dawei's final decision about his academic career.

5.4 Summary

The central task of this chapter has been to identify the common themes from the interview data. To chart the trajectory of their journey, I begin with the varied difficulties

they encountered as newcomers. Next, I illustrate the coping strategies that each participant employs to make the most of their opportunity. Then, their perceptions of British culture and UK higher education are examined. I move on to analyze the invisible forces that constrain them in their adaptation to the new environment. In contrast to this, I also explain how new perspectives are developed from their cross-cultural experience which entails reflections upon their own culture and schooling. Finally, I point out the worries they have when speculating their return to China. In the next chapter, instead of segmenting the participants' stories, I shall look closely at their narratives of some key events and analyze further how this journey influences the construction of their personal and cultural identities.

Chapter Six: Narrating Identity: Journey of Discovery

A journey makes sense as a 'coming to consciousness'; its story hardens around an identity.

James Clifford (1988: 167)

Travelling has become an increasingly popular way of 'discovering one's identity'.

Madan Sarup (1996:127)

6.1 Introduction

It is clear that travelling into a different world has provided new resources for the four well-educated well-spoken individuals to tell stories about themselves. The function of human consciousness prompts them to embark simultaneously on an inward journey of self-exploration and interpretation. Specifically, they wanted to ask what this journey meant for them. In the last chapter, I painted an overall picture of their one year trajectory of change in Britain and outlined salient features of the major stages they went through. To explore further how their cross-cultural encounters have generated the process of critical reflection on self and cultural identity, I want now to focus on the narratives or rather stories told in interviews. As my early literature review indicated, these are important sites for the researcher to examine interpretive practices and analyze identity work.

This chapter is also written as a response to the critique of 'culture of fragmentation' (Atkinson, 1992). Here, I will present a number of coherent complete textual pieces of participants' first-personal narrative accounts. I will look in detail at the inner workings that happen when individuals try to make sense of a particular experience. But first of all, I need to explain the theoretical arguments and analytic methods that are going to guide me through this level of analysis.

6.2 Narrative Analysis as Method

Most of the narratives I selected at this second level of analysis take the form of what Denzin (1989) describes as a story telling, a sequence of events that has significance for the narrator and the listener. He suggests that a narrative as a story has a beginning-middle-and-end plot with a logic that makes sense to the teller. Nevertheless, Riessman (1993:18) points out that not all narratives elicited from interviews are stories in a conventional sense. Indeed, the examples given below do not just include description of happenings and events in a narrow sense, but also communication of participants' feelings and understandings. Most importantly, by locating and examining these key episodes of their narrative telling obtained in interviews, I create an arena for the individuals to speak for themselves, thus inviting the reader to their world.

Obviously, as Riessman (1993: 19) notes, 'Narrativization tells not only about past actions but how individuals understand those actions, that is, meaning.' It is true that people seldom tell stories without making their point. Atkinson and Coffey (1996) make

a similar argument that: 'Narratives are a common genre from which to retell or come to terms with particular sensitive or traumatic times and events'. Understandably, extraordinary experiences produce fascinating stories. As we can see, narratives elicited from interviews are widely used to study the phenomena of change and transition in people's lives.

The important relations between stories and identity construction explain the new interest in narrative inquiry, as demonstrated by the recent burgeoning literature across the scope of social science. Different versions of empirical analysis have been adopted. For instance, Lieblich (1993) explores the impact of cultural change on individuals by presenting a new immigrant's life story. Cortazzi (1993) examines systematically different models of narrative analysis in disciplines other than education and shows explicitly how each of them can be applied to the study of teachers' narratives. Riessman (1993) has used narrative analysis as a formal methodological approach in the study of traumatic life course events like divorce and violence. Mishler (1995) classifies the study of narratives according to central research issues. Moreover, Ochs and Capps (1996) provide an extensively cited review of related works on narrative and the self. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) also give a detail account of how the discursive construction of identity is achieved through narrative analysis.

Exemplary works show that narrative analysis, as an interpretative tool, is more about how to draw upon theoretical frameworks, construct appropriate approaches and adapt them to one's own study since no research is alike in terms of goals and the narratives

gathered. In this particular study, I want to unravel the impact of a journey to the West on the individuals' sense of self. My central concern at this stage is about participants' interpretations and perceptions of their experience. Thus, I want to analyze both the content and structure of their narratives. By looking not only at what they tell but how they tell it, I intend to show the reader exactly how this hard-won journey has prompted my participants to understand and reflect upon their experiences.

6.3 An Introduction to the Evaluation Model

To identify the structural characteristics of each narrative, I decided to opt for Labov's Evaluation model as an analytical aid. According to Labov's sociolinguistic views of narrative, interviewees rarely give an account of events without evaluating them. He argues that the function of evaluation is a crucial element of narrative. In what follows, I will give a brief introduction of this specific model of narrative analysis.

Labov (1972), in his classic studies of American oral narratives, examines structural units and based his formal analysis on recurrent patterns. He points out two social functions of narrative, that is, 'referential' and 'evaluative'. Cortazzi (1993:44) summarizes the two definitions as follows,

> The referential function of a narrative is to give the audience information through the narrator's recapitulation of experience, in the same order as the occurrence of the original events. This would be a straightforward report of what occurred.

The evaluative function is to communicate to the audience the meaning of the narrative by establishing some point of personal involvement. This is what makes the narrated events reportable and 'without the concept of repeatability we cannot begin to understand the things that people do in telling narratives' (Labov *et al*, 1968: 30).

Derived, to some extent, from Propp's argument (1968) that stories unfold linearly in terms of a number of functions, Labov (1972:363) suggests that there are six elementary structural units in a 'fully formed' narrative structure of personal experience, as illustrated below in Table 1:

Structure	Question
Abstract	What was this about?
Orientation	Who? What? When? Where?
Complication	Then what happened?
Evaluation	So what?
Result	What finally happened?
Coda	Finish narrative

Table 1: The Structure of Narrative in the Evaluation Model

Labov (1972, 369) explains that a narrative 'begins with an orientation, proceeds to the complicating action, is suspended at the focus of evaluation before the resolution, concludes with the resolution, and returns the listener to the present time with coda'. Labov notes that what makes an event reportable for the teller lies in the evaluation, which he defines as 'the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative' (Labov, 1972:366).

Obviously, Labov's analytic framework provides insights into the examination of my interview data. First, it helps me to see how a narrative as a whole is structured and how it is constructed by the narrator. In so doing, significant parts of telling can be distinguished. Secondly, Labov's model helps reveal the internal structure of personal experience and identify the narrator's cultural perspectives. Thirdly, Labov's mode of reading narratives allows me most possibilities to detect intricate areas in the narrator's account. In short, Labov's method is effective in finding out how individuals in the study assign meaning and significance to their experience through cross-cultural comparison and self-reflection.

Of course Labov's identification of structural units does not have to be fully in accordance with all collected narratives. By the same token, the narrative elements do not necessarily occur in an orderly sequence. What matters is that Labov's theory draws attention to the narrator's perspectives on meaningful events.

6.4 Sorting out Evaluations

In his Evaluation model, Labov has argued strongly for the role of human agency in understanding both the inner self and outer world. According to Cortazzi (1993), evaluation refers to the significance and meaning of the action or attitude of the narrator. So it is important to pay special attention to participants' evaluations in the narratives as they are expressions of their attitudes, viewpoints, and perceptions. Hence, the evaluation in narratives is a crucial part in revealing how the narrators make sense of experiences. Precisely, these are where the four individuals made self-explanatory and cross-cultural analysis of their UK experience.

Since the interview conversations were guided by my question prompts, they normally centred around different topics and themes. On the whole, each individual's narratives from interviews did not adhere to a chronological order as in a life story. Yet, many isolated events and happenings occurred in the participant's narrative accounts, often taking the form of long stretches of talk. In my view, these self contained narrations of key events were crucial parts of the participants' sense-making. As my emphasis was on their interpretation rather than descriptions of experiences, the evaluation theory acted effectively to identify the components of narrators' thoughts, viewpoints and reflections. The identification of structural units helped me clarify the internal structure of each narrative. For instance, it reveals an explicit feature that narrators adopted a 'Them' or 'the Westerners', and 'Us' or 'we Chinese' in their rhetorical style. It is through this contrast and comparison that the participants recognized and understood themselves.

Nevertheless, I realized that any interpretation of text was inevitably personal and subjective. To avoid being partial and speculative, I was consciously aware of separating my voice from those of participants and approach their narratives in an objective way. Lieblich, Zilber & Tuval-Machiah (1998:10) summarize Bakhtin (1981) and point out that:

> working with narrative materials requires dialogical listening to three voices: the voice of the narrator, as represented by tape or the text; the theoretical framework, which provides the concepts and tools for interpretation; and a reflexive monitoring of the act of reading and interpretation, that is, self awareness of the decision process of drawing conclusions from the materials.

These are the illuminations I sought from time to time when tackling the issues in relation to textual representation of experience.

6.5 Identity Construction through Storytelling

This section illustrates how Labov's Evaluation model is employed to examine the way individuals understand and interpret experience. Examples of Huan, Dawei and Jiandong's narratives of meaningful events are selected for this analytical purpose. Each narrative is followed by my analysis of its content, using my cultural knowledge to make connections with the wider historical social and political contexts. Denzin's definition of epiphanies gives me insights in that individual revelations are often compounded with

significant or problematic experiences (Denzin, 1989). Meanwhile, informed by the narrative method of Bell (1988) and Riessman (1990), I also want to keep participants' telling of storied events intact and coherent. Background voices, mostly my interruptions, are edited out to leave their narratives whole. Given below are 17 extracts from the narrative interview data in prosaic form. Each of their structures has been analysed using Labov's categories of Abstract, Orientation, Complication, Evaluation, Result and Coda.

Additionally, individuals' distinctive styles of telling are worthy of note in that they constitute an important part of the narrative. There are non-verbal elements such as accent, facial expressions, gestures and rhythm of voice as well as pitch and intonation. These performance features will be missing for the reader if the writer does not provide some clues for them. No doubt these aspects contribute to the understanding of participants and their experiences. Without mentioning these, much information would be lost in the process of transforming talk into text.

6.5.1 Huan's Stories

Huan was a passionate story teller and had no reluctance to reveal her true feelings and emotions. My interviews with Huan went extremely well. Her talk was in a flow, often laden with strong emotions and highlighted by her use of exclamations. She spoke in a pleasant rhythmical way. I found her talk easy to translate. In the first piece of narrative, Huan recalled the frustrating moments when dealing with her studies at the start of her course.

Narrative 1 That's how I learned to study independently.

Abstract

Maybe we were used to spoon feeding in our previous education. Teachers gave very specific instructions in class and would explain in utmost detail if you didn't understand.

Orientation

So once here, I found it very difficult to adjust. Probably because I haven't done an MA in China and didn't know what it was like. When I came here, at the start of every class, I would become very anxious and worried because much of the mentioned theory was absent from my knowledge.

Complication

After class I came to the lecturers, they usually answered your questions generally. They wouldn't come to the details. You felt you still didn't know where to get into it. I felt frustrated and anxious because there was too much to deal with. I remember the core course I took during the first term um it's general introductions about media and communication. There were about ten sessions. Every session centred on a subject. For example, the first session was about media and history, the second was relationship between media and audience, and the third media and cultural imperialism and so on. All were very big topics. You can

imagine how condensed each lecture was. What's worse, you came here knowing nothing about media and cultural studies. It may be due to the fact that my job in China was more practically based. I had never looked at media from the angle of cultural studies and barely read any articles relating to media studies before. No. Of course I didn't know how to get into it. Lectures were good but very generalized. I didn't know how to read and understand everything. Then, the lecturers would be gone as soon as they finished class. They didn't appear to be happy if you occupied slightly more of their time with your questions. One hour was just one hour.

Evaluation

But back home, things are different. If you don't understand you can ask teachers about all kinds of questions. Oh, we had seminars here but questions were not allowed in class. You could raise questions in seminars. But you didn't know what you were going to talk about. Mostly teachers guided you to read something. But the biggest problem was I felt confused and didn't know where to get into it.

Result

Later, I had to count on myself. That was how I learned to study independently.

In the extract above, Huan's anxiety at the initial stages of her course study is well conveyed. I notice that she repeated three times 'I don't know how to get into it', which shows her frustration when feeling lost and overwhelmed about her study. She tried to

give her own explanations of what might account for the difficult situation by making some comparison with her previous education system. For her, returning to study after about ten years of employment was daunting enough, let alone facing a totally unfamiliar academic context. Naturally, she turned to teachers for help and found they were not as she expected from China. In a word, she could not get the kind of help and attention she was used to from teachers in Chinese education system. As a result, she could do nothing but cope on her own. Obviously, the road to independence was not achieved by choice. That's why later on, though she made some positive comments about the UK style of teaching and learning, saying that it was challenging and could encourage self-exploratory learning, she did stress lecturers should at least have guidelines for course structure or an orientation to the basic theories, which would be very useful for students like her with little pre-course knowledge.

Narrative 2 I can be more open here.

Abstract

Now I feel I am becoming somewhat … like to argue.

Orientation

Indeed, through seminars and social interaction with international students (I find) everybody likes to argue. As long as they have different ideas they would like to talk about, to question or explain why they wouldn't act like that. Then, I feel, en, probably my character has changed a little. That is, I am unconsciously influenced

by all these.

Evaluation

But I am afraid if I go back home, what consequence this change of character will bring to me. It is very, er, difficult. I can't stand out or say what I want to there. Many things need to be taken into consideration. Even though I feel, by nature, I am the kind of person who likes to speak my mind. But I won't, especially at work, talk much about what I think. Probably due to something in our culture, people like you when you are obedient, being a goody-goody and listening to the elders. Otherwise, they will oppress your morale and destroy your willpower. If you stand from the crowd and try to be self assertive, you become a target. I know inside I am more outspoken and free spirited. But I won't show it.

Complication

It's very simple. When I talk to flatmates, most of them international students, I can talk about any topic. But with my Chinese friends, colleagues or other fellow Chevening students, I am a bit reserved. If I have different ideas, I wouldn't like to talk with them, erm, about topics like family and sexual relationships. I can discuss these with flatmates and be very open. But I will never talk about such topics with Chinese friends.

Evaluation

It may have something to do with the Chinese character, very restrained and

rarely showing emotions, or for fear that what other people will think of you.

Complication

When my Chinese male friends talk about such topics, I won't interrupt. I just laugh. But with flatmates, I just blurt out whatever I think and won't worry too much about what I have said. Even many thoughts are immature, contradictory or just on a whim. I don't care. I do not have to worry about how what I think at the moment is different from what I thought before. I know when the talk finishes, it means finish. But with Chinese friends, I still have some concerns.

Evaluation

It's the Chinese character, I think. Many subjects are difficult to talk about openly. And we Chinese don't show much of our emotions as well. I don't think it's good because when you have opinions it feels much better if you can communicate with others in a frank way.

Result

But we are not good at this, me included.

In this narrative, Huan recounted how she became more outspoken without worrying about other people's opinions of her. Yet, she had some doubts about this change in her character and its possible negative effects on her once going back to China. Her dilemma was apparent. She knew from her experiences that as a woman, she needed to suppress

herself to be socially and morally acceptable or simply avoid confrontations at workplace. By contrast, being in Britain and far from cultural and traditional restrictions enabled her to discover new aspects about herself. She felt more liberated and less repressed. She could talk about her true feelings and discuss sensitive topics such as sex, which was taboo in her home culture. There was no threat of losing face or respect. Nobody would judge her just because of what she had said. She was aware of the factors that repressed her and how a change of cultural environment eliminated those restricting forces on her. Being able to talk about what she wanted to was an exhilarating experience taking place in Britain. This explains why she repeatedly emphasized the importance of true self in our conversations.

In the next episode, she has just been asked a question about what she thinks of the host university in a general way.

Narrative 3 It's a big regret that I don't feel part of the college.

Abstract

> I don't know much about the college. It is a huge shame. But tutors are very good. They gave me instructions when I emailed them questions, telling me what kind of books I needed to read.

Orientation

As to the college as an institution, I have completely no idea about it. I am not involved with it. I do not feel that I am related to this college, have a sense of being part of it, or I am concerned with its development. No.

Complication

I remember when I was an undergraduate in China, we were happy to participate in many organized activities. I felt connected. Probably it's because we had a specified tutor then to be in charge of us. The whole atmosphere made you a member of the university community. I cared about it. But here, it doesn't have anything to attract my attention. My biggest concern is the library. But it lets me down so much. (Laugh)

Complication

The staff are nice and polite, you have to say. But you see, this week the whole internet collapsed. They just posted a notice saying 'we have no time to fix it', only because it's summer time. No information about when it will be fixed. I mean their excuse is ridiculous. They have to find time to fix it. As postgraduates and overseas students, we need the service very much. Again, now the library only has two members of staff. All service time is shortened. And Sunday is cancelled. Besides, the photocopying machine has been broken for a whole month.

Evaluation

They should consider there are many MA students here writing dissertations at this time of year. Especially we pay a high tuition fee, and yet we don't get the same value of service. I feel the running of the whole college is not well planned. It does not make me feel warm and connected as expected. I thought I could get some help from it at the beginning. However, now if any problem comes up, my first reaction will be to deal with it on my own.

Complication

The service provided by the Accommodation office is rather cold as well. The shower broke down for one month and they repaired it only after we protested. Then they gave each of us a letter of apology. Last week, I signed a contract with them to extend for one week. I delivered one signed copy to them in person. Then they sent me a letter which arrived on the 17th saying I haven't signed a contract and needed to have it done by 18th. Normally I just let it go and don't bother to argue. But this time I didn't want to act like this. I showed them the other signed copy I kept. Later they apologized to me, saying they couldn't find it anywhere. It is about responsibility and mutual respect. What if I had been away during these days?

Complication

Also, the only way to get in touch with our department is through the secretaries, for example, any enquiry about grades or dates to hand in assignments. When our departmental secretary was away on holiday, all work relating to her stopped. If

you needed to solve some urgent problems you couldn't find anybody. No backup measures at all. They just posted a notice, 'Service hours are reduced due to shortage of staff'.

Evaluation

I find it unreasonable. Back home someone else is supposed to replace the absent person. It is quite natural. This reveals certain problems of the system, I mean, the college system.

Result

It is not very satisfying and needs improving.

In this narrative section, Huan expressed her disappointment at not feeling part of the host university. Her personal experiences with the library, the Accommodation office and the Department she was in reveal certain problems with management and organization. These unpleasant incidents affected her overall impression of the service that the host university was expected to provide, especially by full-fee-paying overseas students. She came with the memory of previous university days still in her mind only to find that the atmosphere of a British university was totally different. She did not feel she belonged to the university community and believed improvements had to be made to foster positive change.

Next, Huan told a story that happened during one of her visits to other parts of Britain.

Narrative 4 Why didn't we think about this?

Orientation

I remember last time when we travelled, on the train a superintendent came up to check the tickets. One of us forgot to bring his Young Persons rail card. In fact, he couldn't find his wallet at all. We used a rail card to buy discount train tickets. So we tried to explain everything about this to the superintendent. But he said 'no way'.

Complication

The problem is that the railway superintendent didn't talk appropriately when I explained that five of us were travelling together, four of us had rail cards and it's not possible for just one member not to have one. Then he made a comparison, saying that 'what if you don't have your passport'. He meant that not having a rail card was the same as not having a passport. We almost gave up and decided to pay the fine.

Complication

Just at that moment, a young Englishman stood up and pointed out that he shouldn't say things like that. Passport and rail card were not the same. A passport was a very important document while rail card was like tickets to the cinema. He thought there was racism in his remarks. Later, when we came to our senses, we

went back to complain about this. We realized we needed to speak up in terms of the disrespect. We said to him you shouldn't use the passport as a comparison, implying that we were illegal immigrants. It's racial discrimination. We said we just forgot a rail card. He said he only used the metaphor to make us understand. We said no. You were not making us understand but discriminating. And you owe us an apology. He did apologize to us in the end.

Evaluation

But back home you wouldn't react like this. You think 'oh, forget it and I can't bother to argue. So let it be. You just do whatever you want to me'. But here I learn to stand up if we need to defend our own right. If an inappropriate word is used or I feel I am discriminated against. I needed to stand up for that, to make my complaint. They have to say sorry. But at that moment, we didn't think about that until that Englishman who spoke for us. It gave us such a big bang, because that boy was very young, 20 something. The rest of us were in our thirties. No one thought of defending him. It has something to do with what is rooted in our education as well as tradition.

Result

But now I think in future I should gradually develop such awareness. Maybe it is not exactly like what has happened in Britain: I have to argue and you have to apologize. But I will choose more indirect ways to protest. So I feel it is the good part of the system here. It emphasizes the individual's rights, human rights.

People are respected.

Coda

That is, you are valued as a person.

In this vignette, Huan described how from this incident she learned to become assertive and more aware of her rights. She reflected upon the influence of educational and traditional values on her lack of assertiveness in both thinking and behaviour. Being agreeable and less confrontational in challenging situations was regarded as a good acceptable characteristic in her culture. But what the British young man said enabled her to attain a fresh view of how people should be treated as individuals. It was like a wake-up call for her to reexamine how to exist with others and be respected as an individual in British society.

Narrative 5 I don't want to be submissive any more.

Abstract

Here I feel I show a lot of my true personal character… probably it has something to do with my own life experience (in particular, her conflicting relationship with her mother) and marriage as well.

Orientation

In my marriage, I sacrificed a lot, or rather lost my sense of self. In my

relationship with my ex-husband, how to say, (pause), out of love, I put myself, my emotion, and energy all on him. How was he getting along with his work? I needed to know. I even asked about every piece of news he edited during the day. I gave him advice in terms of work. In everyday life, I needed to look after him. Of course, I did well in my job. Other than this, he was the centre. I even tolerated it when he wasn't happy about my visits to my parents' home.

Evaluation

There are traditional expectations of women from men, like you have to support your husband and educate your children. You have to be a good housewife knowing to do everything. But my ex-husband went to extremes. It was similar to my mum's expectation of me.

Complication

At first, I was under huge pressure. Later I was able to be flexible to do what he wanted. But he still wasn't satisfied. I felt he was picking bones in the egg. For example, we had a cup with a lid at home. I often forgot the lid or left the cup in the bedroom and forgot to put it back. For a while I felt there must be some problems with him. I felt such a small thing like this, but he would accuse me of not being good enough to be his wife. As we were all very busy, we hired a housemaid. So I didn't do much of the cooking. Then he said 'How could you be someone's wife without knowing how to cook'.

Evaluation

Later, I found it very unreasonable. But why could he treat me like this? I felt it had something to do with my character. I am very gentle and submissive. Since we could afford a maid to relieve us from housework, why couldn't we spend the free time doing something to nurture the marriage like going to the cinema? You know, everyday family life can sometimes be very nerve racking. Even as a married couple you still need to communicate with each other and improve together. Put simply, I lost myself. The result was divorce. It was a disaster. The lessons I've learned is first, I need to be independent, I mean, emotionally. Second, I need equality. I don't have to be completely equal. But you have to consciously keep something for yourself. So the other can respect you. There is a balance between the two. I can sacrifice but not without principles. I had no expectations of my ex-husband and was always obedient, probably because I liked him. I respected his personal development. But he didn't respect mine.

Result

Later, when talking with friends I found I was in fact very good. The point is I lost my sense of self in the marriage. I did a lot of thinking after the divorce. I realized that I was actually strong inside. I found I was confident, erm, positive and I was sincere to people. Then, here after staying in Britain for one year, I even began to discover my potential, which I had never ever realized before. The atmosphere here helps release this. I am very open-minded and I can be very open-minded here. The cultural environment plays a key role. It encourages

individuality and self-liberation.

Coda

But of course, I know self-liberation doesn't mean going to extremes. After all, you need to get along with other people. You need to respect each other.

Emerging from a failed marriage, Huan certainly took much time to recover and reflect. She tried to analyze why she became so submissive in her personality. In common with other Chinese women, she was brought up with the ingrained notion that submission was a virtue. To be a virtuous woman, she was supposed to fulfill the traditional female roles of a devoted wife and mother. Huan sacrificed herself to meet her mother's expectation and ensure her husband's needs. When her world fell apart as a result of a painful divorce, she felt lost since the main part of her life revolved around husband and family. The collapse of the marriage inevitably had a negative effect on her self-esteem. She felt the urge to find her own life again. Thus, the new values she had learned from her British experience made her believe there were other possible ways of being. She felt liberated and gained more confidence in herself. She was able to look at the future in a hopeful way. As she explained, the liberal atmosphere enabled her to find her true self and discover more about her potential as an individual. This self discovery was significant in helping her put the emotional baggage from the breakup behind and move on. A great deal of feelings and emotions were going on in her narrative. The self-revelation shows that she has gone through a transformative process in her psychological world.

In narrative 6 Huan gave an emotional account of her deep feelings for London.

Narrative 6   It is hard to say goodbye to London.

Abstract

London is a very good city.

Orientation

The reason why I say it's good is not because of the many cultural events I can enjoy here such as opera or museums, yes, very good museums, free of charge, and I have seen many world famous paintings. It is a good city to know Western culture. But this is not the reason for those feelings deep in my heart towards London.

Complication

It's very strange. Every time I use the tube and hear music played somewhere, I am overwhelmed by a feeling of serenity. People around me come and go, passing by to change tubes. But these street singers' songs always stop my footsteps. I don't know why. It's inexplicable, something like nostalgia or melancholy. It gives me peace and makes me discover that deep in my heart there is a space I still keep intact. I don't know how to express it.

Evaluation

That is, the world may be hard. But there is still a beautiful wish in my heart. It is mine, pure and full of good wishes. It is the underground music that makes me realize that I have got such a place in my heart. Nobody can disturb it. Even though I have to face many difficulties here, these feelings free me from my worries. I become happier and more hopeful.

Complication

After the terrorists' attacks in the undergrounds, I felt very sad. I found that London to me was not just a city where I could enjoy Western culture, but I had feelings for it, feelings that came from my everyday life in it. I felt it was connected with me. This is where you live, even though I don't have much contact with this society. There is no denying the personal feelings about the city. I can't be indifferent and there is sort of familial bond. It's hard to leave London.

Evaluation

I have seen many scenes of terrorist attacks when making and broadcasting international news, but what happened here made me very sad. It happened so close to you. I had then an impulse that I needed to go to every disaster location to have a look. I feel I have this attachment to London. So I sent an email to friends, saying I began to like London and fall in love with it. I didn't know where this feeling was from, probably from the simplest banal everyday experiences. I sent them a recorded sample of underground music as well. I said to them I felt life

sometimes was hard. We were vulnerable and couldn't control it. However, we need to have hope. If it is within our control, we can make the most of it and that is really wonderful. Life is short. Live it. You must have hope and fight for your chances. When the British Council sent us questionnaires asking what touched our heart most, my answer was the underground music. Cultural life is impressive but what touches me most is still the music on the underground.

Result

But I know London doesn't belong to me. I was born and grew up in China. Wherever you travel and however wonderful the outside world is, finally home is where you should go, like all leaves falling back to their roots. I cherish my one year experience here including all the difficulties. Sometimes I felt so helpless, so lonely, but I still feel all was very, very worthwhile. In terms of my character, study or life... every aspect I have tested myself. At the end I still have my confidence, hope and many beautiful wishes. There is no defeat. I know I can overcome difficulties. Music on the London Underground has stimulated the dormant feelings in me and given me inspiration. No one can disturb me in any way.

Coda

That's it. (laugh)

In this long stretch of emotionally charged revelation, Huan's narrative of her journey of

self discovery reached a climax. It is her moment of epiphany. She explored the real reason for her sense of a bond with London. Interestingly, Huan attributed her love for London not to the various cultural events it offered but the simple everyday living in it. Despite everything, Huan emphasized that all she had been through was worthwhile and would have a significant impact on her future life. The emotional recount of how music on London underground inspired her captures the defining moment of her change in understanding herself and life. Life for her is like a lonely traveller in a strange land. The future remains unknown. Yet, you can always find strength and aspirations along the way to keep you going, like the purifying and soul-touching music. It gave her hope for the pursuit of happiness in her life.

Throughout our interviews, I noticed there were a number of aspects that Huan repeatedly stressed in terms of how much one year life in Britain had changed her. Particularly, she talked about how she became more assertive, independent and open-minded in her personal character. It is apparent that Huan attained some new understandings about herself, especially her emotional issues. There is no doubt that she has gained inner power for planning her life in future.

6.5.2. Jiandong's Stories

Jiandong struck me as a detached observer. When talking about his personal experiences, he portrayed himself as mature and resourceful when coping with difficulties. This may be due to his years of working as a veteran journalist. Apart from answering my

questions, he tended to take the lead in our conversations. The style of his talk was informal and loosely structured. I consider this had something to do with his relaxed and easy-going personality. He did not like to be restricted by my questions but talk in a relatively free way. There were lots of repetition and jumps. To present his narratives, some reconstruction of sentences had to be made. Given below are 5 extracts from my conversations with him.

Narrative 1 About Mao: The Unknown Story

Orientation

Don't you know about it? There is a recently published bestseller, *Mao: the Unknown Story*. The author is Jung Chang, you know, the one who also wrote *Wild Swans*.

Complication

I can't accept it. (Pause) I just want to ask her one question 'If Mao Zedong is a person like what she says in the book, are then Zhou Enlai and many others idiots? Those were the elites then in China. Would they follow Mao's leadership with such loyalty if he had no visions but just, according to her, was a monster as evil as Hitler? Even Deng Xiaoping who himself was prosecuted in the Cultural Revolution still held positive views about Mao's life.

Evaluation

I think it's a kind of crowd pleasing. There is a suspicion of more commercial than academic value. Quite conversely, nowadays in China, the admiration for Mao has increased. Many people commemorate him. How much do people here know about China? This autobiography is No. 5 on the list of Amazon. Is the writer a Chinese? I think she is not very responsible. Only lets one voice speak. This can lead to cultural misunderstanding or clashes. Their knowledge about China still remains the image of Mao's era. That's why I need to express these views in my essays because their descriptions about the media in China are still about the 1989 Tiananmen Demonstration. The truth is during the past ten years China's media has gained more space for freedom and is not just the mouthpiece of the government. At least, a law has been passed and is in effect.

Complication

As I know many real life cases from work, there are often conflicting views (with fellow students) when arguing such issues as human rights or the current situation of China's media. It is a challenge both linguistically and academically if I want to find ways to persuade them. And it will be a real success if my argument is acknowledged, for I can't use the Chinese way of thinking to criticize...I need to use Western academic theory. I have to admit that there are practical difficulties such as language, the correct citations and so on. Some Chinese words may take you much trouble to explain in English.

Result

I think many Chinese students here write more or less about Chinese culture in their essays. This is in itself a kind of cultural confrontation.

The criticism Jiandong made on Chang's book is straightforward and it is not surprising that many young Chinese of his generation may also share his views. Growing up and educated in modern China, this generation increasingly find it unacceptable for the West to continue perceiving China in an obsolete way. Westerners' obsession with images of revolutionary China in history while at the same time ignoring the change in new China often generate discomfort, anger and resistance among younger Chinese, particularly when they are here in the West. In Jiandong's case, he realized the pressing need to inform a Western audience of the media development in China. However, he was well aware of the inescapable constraints when using the English language and Western theoretical knowledge to construct arguments in essay writings or form debates in seminars.

Narrative 2 Learning New Marxism

Orientation

After two weeks attending lectures, I found Neo-Marxism was very influential here. I know there are three popular figures in Western philosophy: Marx, Foucault and Darwin. Their way is to treat Marxism as normal academic issues for debate or critique, while we use it as an ideological means for political control.

Complication

But at first, I was very surprised. 'What! I need to learn Marxism! Is there something wrong?' I've learnt too much in my life and can recite many parts of it. When the lecturer asked what capitalists want to make? No one answered. I think it should be profits. So I ventured 'surplus values'. 'Exactly' he said. I found I could discuss a lot with them about this topic.

Evaluation

They didn't know that I had to attend regular classes for Party members in China to learn Marxism. When friends asked what I was learning here, I said that I was learning Marxism. They would think I was joking. But in fact, Marxism is penetrating everywhere in politics and economics. Most books in China about Marxism are translated from Russian.

Result

Here reading the original version gives you some new understanding of the theory.

The learning of Western theory is a major challenge for participants in their study in Britain. Most of them are surprised as well as overwhelmed by the proportion of theoretical study that constitutes their course content. In this episode, Jiandong talked about the new understanding he gained about Marxism. Born and educated in Communist China, he perceived Marxism in a quite different way. However, his course enabled him to rethink what Marxism as a theory really was from a more objective and scientific point

of view. This new perspective will certainly pose an influence on his way of thinking and political beliefs.

Narrative 3 The predicament of being Chinese students

Abstract

I find many Chinese students here.

Orientation

I think teachers may like them as they are obedient, studious and also have ideas. Probably their way of expressing themselves is different from their Western peers. I knew some fellow Chinese students who didn't speak in seminars, but when I discussed with them after class, I found they actually had good opinions. In recent years, many Chinese students have come to do media studies. Teachers here must have learned something about China. Some of them, I know, have their books translated and published in China as well.

Complication

But I remember in a seminar, a Chinese student talked about the regional differences between Northern and Southern China, saying that the north was comparably backward. Then the teacher asked if there was any internet bar in the north. I felt very much ashamed of how little he knew about China. I know things are getting better. People have begun to show interest. At least, some know there are the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.

Evaluation

Indeed, sometimes I don't know how to explain to them, for example, when they

talk about Taiwan, Tibet or the cliché topic of human rights.... Anyway, I don't

know about the feelings of previous generations of Chinese overseas students in

Britain. Personally, I don't feel as a Chinese I am inferior in any sense. But since

coming here I find people, including some academic staff, still possess some kind

of a deep embedded sense of superiority.

Complication

I remember once a Japanese student asked a question in class. His spoken English

wasn't good. The teacher's response was a bit exaggerated. As a result, that

student felt ridiculed and was very embarrassed.

Result

I am afraid Chinese students may experience similar feelings in situations like this

as well.

In this example, Jiandong told from his own experience and observation about the

dilemmas Chinese students may face when studying in the West. He was critical and felt

ashamed of the Western academic's lack of knowledge about China. He began to realize

that that was something Chinese students had to tolerate, i.e. the existence of Western

superiority or ignorance. The seminar experience is just one example of the many

unpleasant daily encounters. The academic was not sensitive enough to know that in Asian countries like China and Japan, it is very humiliating to lose face in front of other peers. People in these societies develop a high consciousness of respecting each other's feelings in social interaction. That's why Jiandong had strong empathy towards that Japanese student. And he naturally related this incident of public humiliation to similar situations that Chinese students may be subject to when studying in the West. This example shows that it is easy to get into a negative and tricky situation simply by being students from China. Mostly, it is not just a matter of English levels but all the cultural, historical and political baggage imposed on the individual.

Narrative 4 The changing image of China

Abstract

In recent years there have been more news reports about China by Western media.

Orientation

The second month after I came, the Guardian made a week long special report about China. This obviously has something to do with China's increasing economic power and greater involvement in world affairs. Though there is still a sense of exotic or ethnocentrism in their way of looking at China, little by little, I don't know how to put it, there is the sign of subtle change.

Complication

Western mainstream media has begun to pay more attention to China. For example, next week American Time magazine is going to do an additional report about China and BBC last month's Question Time was made in Shanghai.

Evaluation

I think all of these will, little by little, play a positive role in improving overseas Chinese's living circumstances. It helps alter China's previous image of being exotic.

Complication

There are cultural products as well, like Chinese films 'Hero' 'The House of Flying Daggers' and Wong Kar-wai's '2046'. These all provide the chance for Westerners to know about the Chinese culture. The other day, a Greek student told me that he liked 2046 very much and had watched it many times. I was also surprised to find out he knew Wong's other film 'In the Mood for Love' so well that he could recite most of the dialogues. He told me he was amazed at the beauty and elegance of the traditional Chinese qi pao worn by the actress in the film.

Evaluation

These films are all about the theme of human nature. That's why Westerners can understand them. Zhang Yimou's films, including some martial arts ones are part of the Chinese culture as well, no matter what kind of criticism they received

from indigenous Chinese critics.

Result

Most importantly, when you see that Chinese culture is becoming popular and appreciated you definitely feel proud of it.

Being a journalist, Jiandong was consciously studying the trend and development of Western media, particularly in their changing attitudes towards modern China. In this instance, he acknowledged the difference of how today's China was perceived by the West as a result of its economic boom and attraction of global capital. He welcomed this changing image of China, perceived now as an increasingly powerful country in the Far East. For this, he supposed, would have positive effects on the circumstances of Chinese people overseas. Just like his feelings of pride when he discovered how popular Chinese films had become among Westerners in recent years. Indeed, being abroad, Jiandong felt strongly how the changing image of China had personally related to him.

Narrative 5 How the study in Britain will benefit me?

Abstract

I believe more and more Chinese students will have the chance to study media in Britain every year and each different person may have different thoughts. Gradually, this will produce a group of graduates from British universities. I think this is also what the British government intends. And I hope this will be helpful to

media development in China.

Orientation

Naturally, people from my workplace expect me to do something once I go back. After all, I am the first to come to Britain as a Chevening scholar. But I don't know how much part I can play in the reform of our company. I am not too optimistic. You know, it is a different environment. You can't simply put what you've learned here into use in China.

Complication

Several years ago, a group of MBA graduates came back from America. They created a wave of dotcom boom in the late 90s. Their adventure did not last longer than a few months. Only those who managed to combine Western theory well with the Chinese market survived. So it is hard to say what contributions I can make back home. By the way, they thought I was learning media management or practice here. Actually I was learning Marxism! (Laugh)

Evaluation

However, I feel I have personally benefited a lot this year, I mean, in terms of my way of thinking. I live a much simpler life here as I don't have to be bothered about social relations. Back home it was a more stressful atmosphere. You needed to think about how to deal with interpersonal relations or face the strains of competition or workload. Here, it is two points and one line. In other words, I am

living between the college and my flat. Life is peaceful and my heart is as pure as a piece of paper. Maybe I don't feel the change in myself now. But people at home may find I have changed a lot (when I go back). Who knows? I hope I won't be assimilated too soon once back. It's hard to say...

Result

But whatever happens, it's (one year abroad) a once-in-a-lifetime experience, definitely. It surely will have some effects on both my future career and personal life.

In the above excerpt, Jiandong had some quandary of what benefit his one year British experience could bring to his workplace. He was realistic about the fact that Western theory may not survive on Chinese soil. However, he expressed the pressure he felt from what people expected of him back home. He was not sure what an immediate difference he could make to his work as a result of his course study as it had much to do with theory rather than media management or practical skills. But he was sure that change had happened to him. It may not be a phoenix-like as the story he told me about the reinvention of a returned colleague from abroad and how everyone was fascinated by her change. But definitely his experience in Britain had sharpened his thinking. At the end, he still viewed it as a chance of a lifetime, no matter how good or bad things had been. It was all experience for him.

During our conversations, Jiandong mentioned that the biggest contrast for him to live in

London was the loss of status and a busy social life that he was used to back home. The isolation at the beginning was unbearable to him. Yet, he quickly added that, on the other hand, he soon learnt to cherish this simple quiet life of being a student, which would in many ways benefit him. As it turned out, he did not wait for help but took action to make things happen. Jiandong's view of studying abroad was practical and rational. As a result of his positive attitude and self-management, in the end, he was mostly satisfied with his time in London as well as the host institution.

6.5.3 Dawei's Stories

In contrast to Jiandong' outgoing character, Dawei was thoughtful and discreet. He treated our interviews as formal and serious. The answers he gave to my questions were carefully considered and well organized. His narratives were logical and concise. Due to his cultural studies background, there was a great deal of abstract thinking about culture and philosophy, which I found difficult in the process of translation. Though his narrative style was different from Jiandong, the two shared similar views in their understanding of Western cultural theory and some political topics. Given below are 6 significant events Dawei recounted in our interviews.

Narrative 1 First impression of London

Abstract

This is the first time I've come to Britain. I know little about the country, only

from some literature like Jane Austen's books or *a Tale of Two Cities.*

Orientation

Even before I came I still wasn't sure if London was foggy or not. I assumed I would see well-dressed gentlemen or respectable old ladies on the street. After I came here, well to New Cross, 'wow' I said to myself 'did I arrive in Jamaica?'

Complication

All you could see was black people everywhere and all you could hear was Black vernacular English. Some of the buildings were really old and that gave me a feeling of old Imperial Empire. But Trafalgar Square was very beautiful. London is an international and multicultural city. You see all kinds of different people. Here is an area for black people. This is different from the Britain in my mind, the image of gentlemen, countryside and cream cakes. There are chimneys and the Thames. But no countryside and gentlemen, only blacks. You also found Chinese people everywhere. Then you feel this is almost the same as Beijing.

Evaluation

Well, I am only joking. What I mean is London is very diverse. But there is no shock. I have been to some other countries before. I think culture shock isn't a suitable term.

Result

Now it is globalization. Our generation won't feel shocked. My parents, their generation may have, but I won't.

Here, Dawei described his first visual impression of London. He expressed the contrast between the London seen through his eyes and the one in his imagination, namely images derived from classic English literature. Like other participants, his knowledge of Britain did not go beyond Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. Once here, the multicultural and multiracial features of London certainly had an impact on Dawei, given the nature of China as a monocultural and homogeneous society. Yet, however different he discovered it to be, Dawei emphasized that it was not culture shock for him. As he explained, his generation was brought up in an age of globalization. The term culture shock was too simplistic to describe his feelings and reactions in front of the real London.

Narrative 2 An embarrassing incident in the high street

Abstract

We assume that Westerners are self-centered and indifferent...well...it is individualism anyway. They normally don't care much about others. But one thing changed my view.

Orientation

That day, I went to the University of London and bought some books and after that I wanted to buy a sandwich in a nearby Sainsbury's. It was about 6 o'clock.

Many people doing shopping after work were coming in and out through the front door. I got my sandwich and was moving out with the flow.

Complication

Everything was so normal and then suddenly all the people around me stood aside and allowed space at the entrance. I was surprised and didn't understand why. I still walked ahead when I found a blind man with a walking stick. And a shop assistant came along to ask if he needed help.

Evaluation

At that moment, I was highly embarrassed. I blamed myself why I was the only one who didn't see him. Was it because I was lowering my head and thinking which bus to catch? But it was no good excuse. I was simply amazed that in such a crowded place and peak hour, everybody else seemed to be conscious of their behaviours such as paying attention to others especially people with disabilities.

Result

I guess it must be a habit learned long from the socializing process. This is something we are considerably lacking in our society.

One is seldom aware of social norms until they are violated. This is especially true when one enters into a new environment. Like any newcomer, Dawei was conscious of observing and following the social customs of his host country. It was part of the

adaptation. The story he told above was typical of how he learned a lesson from his own social experience. Feelings of shame and self-blame were elicited for failing to behave as everybody else. There is no doubt that this event increased Dawei's awareness of social etiquette. As he observed, this sensitivity was missing from the social convention of his home culture. In the next story, Dawei told me about the extreme stress he suffered in his very first examination in British education system.

Narrative 3 The most stressful exam in my life

Orientation

I have never before sat through a 3-hour written exam in English. The pressure I felt was enormous, indeed. You need to give correct answers. You have to finish all the writing within the time limit, about 10,000 words within 3 hours. Oh, it's very, very hard.

Complication

I remember it took me two weeks to prepare. I chose three out of about ten questions given. Then I spent one week to memorize them again and again, for I was afraid that my mind would go blank as a result of nervousness.

Evaluation

I found the whole process of memorization horrible. There were about 5 days when my mind was preoccupied by nothing but the content of the three essays.

Even when I went out for a walk in the evenings, I found myself murmuring. Sometimes, halfway through my walk, I couldn't remember the next sentence. So I would run home, check and then come back to continue my walk. As the essays were complicated and involved with many quotations, it wasn't easy to learn them all by heart. The pressure was huge.

Result

As soon as the exam finished, I almost fainted because of the exhaustion. I didn't know what the result would be. But anyway I finished all the questions.

Inevitably, students go through strain when meeting academic demands, be it a written task, presentation or exam. Here, Dawei gave an explicit account of the agonizing time he had when preparing for his first formal examination in British higher education system. He wanted good results and feared poor performance or even failure. In addition, the three-hour non-stop writing was also a physical challenge for him. Especially, he was not sure about his English language. He could not stop thinking these questions: 'What if he forgot the word and got stuck', 'What if he could not finish the essay' and 'What if he panicked'. So to make sure he could pass the exam in a language that was not his own, he decided to memorize the answers he had prepared. It is not difficult to visualize the huge pressure he was under when trying to recite all the essays.

Narrative 4 How should I get along with the British?

Abstract

I don't know why I have a negative feeling towards the English, probably because they are really conservative, not only conservative but also sharp-tongued.

Orientation

I remember one of our tutors who taught us academic writing once said that 'we British are reserved and distance is very important for us. There are lines which cannot be crossed'. Maybe their sharpness comes from the old Empire status and their democratic system makes them keen to argue. They tend to find faults a lot. The debate in parliament is a typical example. You watch them on TV. They all look like gentlemen. However, they can fight for political debates to the point of using dirty words.

Evaluation

I felt my only British flatmate sort of spying on me if I met him in the kitchen. He made me feel uncomfortable. It seems that everything he did was right. I find that British people are very difficult to get along with. In contrast, American students or students from Latin backgrounds such as Spanish are easy going, including the French. But on the whole, British people are hard to make friends with. They seem nice but very difficult to communicate with. I don't know how to explain it. if you want to play a joke with them, there is nothing to joke about. When they tell a joke you don't understand. Then you just feel...(He gave a helpless facial expression.)

Result

Anyway they strike me as really conservative. Later on I went to some parties and met more British people. I felt better about them. But after the party they didn't seem to know you any more.

Here, Dawei talked about his general impression of British people. He tried to resolve his confusion in terms of why it was difficult to get along with them. Obviously, as a foreign student, he very much wanted to get acquainted with the British and their culture. However, to his disappointment, he seemed to be at a loss from his social interaction with them. Dawei was not quite sure what exactly the problems were. Language barriers and communication skills could be part of the reasons. But he also attributed the difficulty of making British friends to their conservativeness in comparison with other international peers and the strangeness of the British party culture. Understandably, foreign students wish to feel welcomed and accepted by home students and host environment. However, Dawei's story reveals a discouraging prospect. In the next example, Dawei told about his first time of experiencing the Chinese New Year celebration in London.

Narrative 5 An unforgettable event: the Chinese New Year Parade

Abstract

What impressed me most was the big parade near Oxford Street celebrating the Chinese New year. There was a big show in Trafalgar Square.

Orientation

I didn't know the Chinese New Year was so popular here. It seemed that every year there were lion dances, acrobatics, lanterns and the like. I went there with some American and Indian friends. We left at 11 a.m. and planned to find a restaurant in China Town for lunch. But when we arrived at Trafalgar Square we couldn't move any further. There were too many people. You could only see the performance from the big Screen. I was greatly taken back. That day happened to be the first day that Britain was open to Chinese tourists. Maybe many people came to spend their holiday there. I wasn't particularly interested in the performances. After all I have seen plenty back home. I just wanted to feel the atmosphere and see people's response.

Complication

There were many performances including one from the Beijing Ballet Troup. One of my American friends who was very impressed said 'I can't believe it. In a country ruled by communism for so many years, its culture is still kept to such a good standard.' I found what he said interesting. I guess he was imagining Stalin's regime and didn't know things were different in China. But I said to him that China had many cities famous for traditional culture. But this traditional culture was gradually disappearing and losing its original taste with the pouring in of foreign capital.

Evaluation

They were all very surprised. I found this interesting and it surprised me as well. I mean Chinese traditional culture is indeed attractive due to its special features. People here are beginning to accept it. But, like Chinese food, frankly speaking, when they talk about it, I don't know what they are referring to. We know there are 8 categories of cuisine divided by region. The same is true with Chinese culture. I don't know what they mean exactly by Chinese culture. I asked my friends. They told me face painting. But I feel our culture is so different from what they understand.

Coda

Anyway, that day left me deeply impressed.

This instance is a vivid example of how Dawei consciously observed Westerners' response to Chinese culture. It is intriguing to note that both Dawei and his friends felt surprised at this cultural event, yet completely for different reasons. His Western counterparts were amazed by how wonderful traditional Chinese culture was, whereas he was impressed by how Chinese culture was received by people in London. However, Dawei expressed his ambivalence about what Chinese culture truly was when seeing Westerners' perceptions of it were so different from his. His tactical answer to the Western student's comments showed his tolerance and yet subtle assertion over Westerners' failure of grasping global and local change. Dawei's feelings manifest an increasing situation that the young Chinese generation encounters in the West: the

frequent confrontation of an outdated view of China and now more a growing curiosity with the exotic oriental culture, fuelled by media reports of the increasing economic power that China holds in today's world.

Narrative 6 London is a good choice

Abstract

I chose to study in London because at that time I thought Britain wasn't a big country, especially for a one year Masters. Now I am convinced that if you come to Britain just for one year, London is a good choice or other big cities, not some small, distant towns.

Orientation

The actual time devoted to classroom teaching is limited, about 6 months. The rest of the time you are on your own. I find that London is very diverse; it has many different kinds of people. You don't feel much like a foreigner here. There are many Asian people. Then the transport is convenient. Most importantly, London provides a rich variety of resources for cultural exploration and study. There are many museums and lots of them are free. There are art exhibitions and fashion shows.

Complication

I had a course in the first term called Modern Society and Culture. You know,

there is a controversial British artist Tracey Emin. After our lecturer talked about her in class we went to see her latest works in Tate Modern the next day. When it came to Monet, you could find his original paintings in the National Gallery. This makes you feel really good. Also, the libraries of the University of London like SOAS, LSE and Senate House are open to all its students. You can borrow books from them.

Evaluation

This is really good, and made a deep impression on me, especially in comparison with the academic situation in China.

Reflecting upon his one year study in London, Dawei concluded that coming to London was the right choice despite its high living costs. He acknowledged the wider access to resources as well as the cultural diversity. He gave his reasons why overseas students could benefit more by coming to a city like London, especially for a short-term study. Compared with other participants, Dawei's self-financed status gave him a strong urge to achieve. Not only did he have very specific pre-arrival goals but also he made double efforts in terms of gaining maximum benefit from his time in Britain. Judging from his own experience, his comments certainly sounded convincing.

6.6 Reflexivity at Work

Analysis of examples illustrated above demonstrates that the participants not only told

stories but actively sought meanings in their telling. Indeed, their reflexive awareness permeated throughout their talk. This reflects what Giddens (1991:215) says,

> Self-identity today is a reflexive achievement. The narrative of self-identity has to be shaped, altered and reflexively sustained in relation to rapidly changing circumstances of social life, on a local and global scale. The individual must integrate information deriving from a diversity of mediated experiences with local involvements in such a way as to connect future projects with past experiences in a reasonably coherent fashion.

Clearly, the only possible frames of reference that individuals can resort to when making sense of present situations are their past experiences. As we can see, the participants constantly reflected the past to understand the present. Also, Tannen (1993:15) observes that:

> The only way we can make sense of the world is to see the connections between things, and between present things and things we have experienced before or heard about. These vital connections are learned as we grow up and live in a given culture. As soon as we measure a new perception against what we know of the world from prior experience, we are dealing with expectations.

In a way, it is the wide gaps between expectations and realities that prompt the individuals to tell stories and reflect upon who they are. As a result of using Labov's

framework, my participants' active construction of change, evaluation of selves and others and their cross-cultural comparisons has been foregrounded. As Benwell and Stokoe (2006:137) remark:

> If selves and identities are constituted in discourse, they are necessary constructed in stories. Through storytelling, narrators can produce 'edited' descriptions and evaluations of themselves and others, making identity aspects more salient at certain points in the story than others (Georgakopoulou, 2002).

Finally, I want to summarize the significant effects of this journey on participants derived from this level of analysis:

- Epiphanies arise from problematic and significant occasions, in particular when clashes of educational and cultural values occur.
- Self reflexivity and analysis of cross-cultural encounters are made via reaching back and comparing with previous experiences of schooling. Influences of tradition and characteristics of home culture are also employed as frames of reference.
- There is a wish for absorbance of positive elements from host cultural values, such as the respect for individuals, however, often compounded with a cautious and realistic attitude. The transformative power of an overseas experience is expected and certain aspects of change are perceived.
- However, there is conscious awareness of how change in thinking or behaviour

learned from the host culture would affect them once back to their home culture.

- Efforts are made to cope and find temporary harmony with the new environment. Ambivalence and discomfort are expressed in terms of social interaction with the British.

- An acknowledgement of historical and cultural constraints on themselves. They expressed resistance to Western obsolete views of China and meanwhile realized the difficulty in changing the situation. However, the growing interest in Chinese culture and the influence of modern China in the world system was regarded as a boost for confidence.

6.7 Summary

If Chapter 5 is about macro-analysis, this chapter focuses on the micro-level of analysis. To explore further how the participants' cross-cultural experience makes an impact on their construction of selves and identities, I examine the stories told in interviews by applying Labov's framework and detecting the structural features of their narratives. Effectively, it fulfills my purpose of letting participants speak for themselves, thus rendering a detailed honest account of how they learn, think and reflect on their journeys of discovery into the reader's view. In so doing, how they explain and interpret change and how personal and cultural identities are constructed through narrative can be identified and analyzed.

Clearly, narrative is a central part to this inquiry on experience. Elements of narrative

range from my autobiographical introduction at the beginning to my participants' personal accounts of their UK experience. After all, my intent is to tell stories, stories about what has happened to a particular group of individuals in the course of travel and discovery. Laurel Richardson (1995: 218) reminds us that:

> If we wish to understand the deepest and most universal of human experiences, if we wish our work to be faithful to the lived experiences of people, if we wish for a union between poetics and science, or if we wish to use our privileges and skills to empower the people we study, then we should value the narrative.

In the next chapter, I will highlight the dilemmas and ambiguities the four individuals encounter on their journey drawing on my data analysis. Particularly, I want to find out how they attempt to seek a coherent sense of self. Finally, I will discuss the questions this study has raised and how it will impinge on educational policy and cultural theory.

Chapter Seven: Deep Exploration: Dilemmas and Questions

Time would pass, old empires would fall and new ones take their place. The relations of classes had to change before I discovered that it's not quality of goods and utility that matter, but movement, not where you are or what you have, but where you come from, where you are going and rate at which you are getting there.

C.L.R.James (cited in Clifford, 1997: 17)

Our previous sense of knowledge, language and identity, our peculiar inheritance, cannot be simply rubbed out of the story, cancelled. What we have inherited — as culture, as history, as language, as tradition, as a sense of identity — is not destroyed but taken apart, opened up to questioning, rewriting, and re-routing.

Iain Chambers (1994:24)

7.1 Introduction

This thesis is not just to report the missing voices of a culturally marginalized group of students' encounters in the West. Rather, the challenge lies in how to penetrate the surface and detect the meaning they made out of their journey of discovery. As a researcher and writer, I am well aware of the perils when making the inevitable generalizations at the end of an investigation. Thus, in my attempt to weave interrelated elements and make my point, I believe it is crucial to remain faithful to the participants' original account of experience.

7.2 Constructing Meanings from Cross-Cultural Experience

Manen (1990: 79) remarks that 'To be human is to be concerned with meaning, to desire meaning.' We not only cope with a situation but ask why it occurs and what we can learn from it, as demonstrated by the four individuals' active engagements in attributing meaning to their experience. According to Stevens (1996:183), 'Our power of reflexiveness also makes it possible for us to question the meaningfulness of our life experience, to review the values which we ourselves hold, and to search for new and more satisfactory forms'. As a result of my data analysis in previous chapters, I was able to reveal the overall features of their journey as well as specific eventful stories. Indeed, as Susan Chase (2005:656) notes, 'Narrative is retrospective meaning making'. Our conscious awareness allows us to stand back and reflect upon our experiences. Furthermore, Earwaker (1992:39) points out that 'the student experience is not simply one that is undergone or lived through: it is, in some ways, constructed by those living through it.' Hence, narrative plays a pivotal role to make our experiences intelligible to each other.

Precisely, this study has shown that the four individuals looked back impulsively to seek explanations for their present ambivalence. As Blumer states (1962: 686), 'We can, and I think must, look upon human life as chiefly a vast interpretative process in which people singly and collectively, guide themselves by defining objectives, events and situations which they encounter.' Indeed, their cross-cultural experience made them confront their

own social, cultural and educational backgrounds. Through this process, they deconstructed or reconstructed meanings and identities. Here, I would like to make an in-depth exploration of three important aspects arising from data analysis. Then I will move on to discuss what implications this work can have for both theory and policy.

7.2.1 Observing the Trend of Studying in Britain

Students from China have a long history of pursuing educational opportunities overseas, dating back to the 1850s when the first Chinese student graduated from Yale University (Edwards & Ran, 2006). Since the late 1970s, students have more possibilities of travelling abroad thanks to China's opening-up policy and economic reform. It was estimated that a total of 1.067 million Chinese students went abroad to study between 1978 and 2006. The recent surge in the number of Chinese students going to Britain is a phenomenon resulting from a combination of different factors as already indicated in Chapter 2.

Clearly, going abroad has become more attainable today for Chinese students, and yet it is still regarded as a glamorous event, associated with enhancement of career prospects, financial benefits or social advancement. As this study shows, studying in Britain was a hard-won opportunity, a long-awaited dream coming true for the four individuals. However, their first-hand experience enabled them to demystify it and make critical observations on the issues they faced. This was particularly true in Dawei's case. He was very observant of his academic, social and cultural experiences in London. Like many

others, Dawei came to Britain with imagination, great expectations as well as specific goals in mind. Looking back on his one year postgraduate study in London, he gave some chilling observations. Here, he examined the common attitudes towards studying abroad among Chinese students.

Our attitude towards going abroad for Masters or PhD degrees seems to be different from, say, American counterparts. We view it as an act which is all positive, a realization of our dream and ambition, and will automatically bring us advantages in life simply because we have finally come to the West. Still now, many people call it dujin (literally gilded). Even though the gold has become not that valuable, yet the whole mentality is still there.

That was why he was surprised when, in a farewell party, someone asked the departing American student 'What are you going to do when you get back?'. And he was even more surprised when she answered 'I don't know. I have no idea. I want to get a job first, but maybe not a real job.' This overheard conversation made him think how differently the same situation could be perceived. Obviously, not everyone assumed studying abroad would bring shortcuts or any form of gain. He further explained to me that studying in Britain for many Americans or others was not like what we Chinese thought as an all happy positive move. As a matter of fact, it could be a decision you made at a cost or with sacrifice. For you might have given up your previous job or only managed to find a job later that did not need a master's degree at all. There were pros and cons that you needed to weigh up carefully. In his view, a rational society would not treat studying

abroad as all positive and beneficial. Dawei believed that this line of thinking was a big problem currently in China, as he continued,

It is a collective unconsciousness, following suit in a blind way. For 100 years back since the Qing Dynasty, we've had great admiration for the West. After more than 10 years of isolation as a consequence of the Cultural Revolution, many people now view going abroad as a dream. To be frank, I know for many Chinese students it is just a matter of being here. What they have learnt may not have any practical effect on them. Many friends of mine here usually go out to have fun, travelling or doing whatever they like as soon as their essays are kind of sorted out. They admit themselves that they may not find what they've learnt here useful in 10 or 20 years time if they go back to China.

Here, Dawei pointed out the contrast between expectations of the general public in China and Chinese students actually studying in Britain. By simply following trend and being unclear about their goals, these Chinese students lacked the motivation to achieve, especially when little relevance was perceived from their courses. Some could become trapped in a lost and purposeless state. Others with better financial backgrounds had turned the British experience into a tourist one. In Dawei's view, studying abroad was no longer a dream. In reality, it was challenging and deserved serious thinking before making the decision.

Similarly, Huan, who lived through a frustrating period of time after arrival in London,

also gave her understanding of the misconception:

Studying abroad isn't easy at all. Actually, it is very hard, especially if you are alone and with no friends. Because you come from another world and do not know about the system here, you can meet all sorts of difficulties and have to deal with them on your own. But people at home wouldn't think this way. They are convinced that it must be enjoyable and definitely a thing to envy. I don't like to tell them the truth, as they won't understand or believe what I've been through. Before I left China, many people said to me things like 'Oh, how lucky, there will be such a wonderful world waiting for you!' Surprisingly, at that moment, everybody felt the same way.

Here, Huan pointed out explicitly that the West was so romanticized by ordinary people that returning Chinese from overseas would be unlikely to talk about the hardships they endured. Political dilemmas, racial discrimination, social isolation, demoralizing stereotypes, and even vicious attacks, to name just a few, are the untold truth for insiders. Compared to Dawei and Huan, Jiandong had some other concerns. In his view, older students could normally cope well and act upon situations, but younger Chinese students were more vulnerable and susceptible to setbacks. According to his observations, a large number of them came from rich families. Some squandered their parents' earnings without second thoughts. They were not competitive in their studies but in chasing fashionable Western lifestyles, as he commented,

I think people like us born in the 70s are better than those born in the 80s. We still have some memories about the difficult past. I was born in the early 70s and don't have much impression about the Cultural Revolution. But I still remember vividly the living conditions when I was young: very small apartment, a 9-inch black and white TV set. When we go abroad, we tend to be more mature and responsible than younger Chinese students, as we have more sentiments about the past and know that today's better life does not come easy. Yet, those born in the 80s may not know the difference. They can easily fit into the modern Western lifestyles. Most of them I met here are spending their parents' money. But if there is any setback, they may become very vulnerable.

Jiandong's worries are by no means groundless. Nostalgia makes his generation cherish change and have a sense of attachment to the past. By contrast, younger students are more flexible to embrace Western lifestyles and yet easily get lost in a material and consumer society, especially when parental control or guidance is not available. In view of the fantasy towards studying abroad, Jiandong observed that, 'we should learn from our Korean or Japanese counterparts. For them, after generations of studying abroad, overseas experiences or degrees have become an essential yet by no means a special part of their personal history of education.'

Overall, Dawei concluded that it was only a question of time for Chinese parents and students to become rational and wise. For him, study in Britain was the ultimate result of careful planning and thinking. With a motive to seek an academic career path in future,

he was focused and determined to achieve what he wanted. He learned that there was no plain sailing but hard work. As he stressed, Chinese students needed to clarify their aims for studying abroad. This was very important, especially at a time when overseas experiences no longer brought as many surprises as expected. He explained further the paradoxical situation:

The quality of educational provision (in Britain) is not as satisfying as expected. Also standards are changing these days. 5 or 10 years ago, studying abroad would make a big difference back home. But recently, UK universities have lowered their requirements for the entrance of full-fee-paying overseas students. Basically, they will offer you a place as long as you've got enough money. As a consequence, many Chinese graduates who return to China with a British degree do not have the good employment prospects as they wish. On the other hand, people at home tend to have unrealistic ideas towards those who have been abroad. I think their expectations are too high. So a rational attitude needs to be developed and studying abroad is no mystery at all. We shouldn't take it for granted that significant advancement or benefit will simply follow. It all depends on how much effort each individual has made.

Dawei's dilemma is well articulated in this excerpt. On one hand, the quality of British education is not as high as commonly assumed as the threshold is becoming lower and academic standards are dropping as a result of university expansion. A British degree has already begun to lose its value and advantage in the eyes of home employers. On the

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other hand, returning students from overseas face great pressure resulting from people's unrealistic expectations of the transformative power of studying abroad. However, he was positive that more and more Chinese people were beginning to realize this.

Despite the fact that Dawei was getting on well with his course in cultural studies, he strongly believed many areas needed to be improved. As he suggested,

> One year is not that short, especially for students from China, Americans included. European students may be better. Things can be done to make them feel less like an outsider such as some organized social academic activities. Just please don't let them pay the fees, study on their own, and then go home.

He explained further about this opinion:

> If you are a person who is not sociable, good at communication or active in events, there isn't much to get involved in. There are not many hours for lectures, only about 6 months in general. For the rest of the time you are on your own. It can be pretty much a lonely learning experience. Also, the chance to know the surrounding community is limited as you have to busy yourself with study. Or you don't have a part-time job or just don't have much money to travel around. Then after the whole year, you feel you have been through a lot, yet still remain very much an outsider.

Dawei contrasted his feeling of isolation to his previous university days in China. 'You studied with a group of fellow classmates and had regular lessons in the mornings and afternoons. You were part of a group. Once coming to the British system, you discover that their way is to let you find out things by yourself. The whole feeling is loose. Indeed, there isn't a sense of belonging.'

Whilst spoonfeeding may be one extreme that my participants did not deny, they expressed their ambivalence about the British education system. With few lectures and limited contact hours with tutors, self-enlightenment did not come easy or straightforward. The disillusionment was exacerbated when they realized that even their English skills did not improve as much as they had expected. The common perception was that learning and living in an English-speaking environment would undoubtedly enhance their English level. In reality, they constantly felt handicapped and overstretched when meeting speaking or writing tasks. This in a way intensified their sense of inadequacy and disappointment. It also, to certain extent, damaged their self-confidence in academic endeavours.

There is no doubt that the four mature students refused to be perceived as naïve. They had clear serious personal and professional goals to fulfill from their time of studying in Britain. This can be demonstrated by Jiangdong's critical view of a British Council officer's speech in a feedback meeting held for its Chevening scholars. 'I found it unacceptable when he said he did not care about how we were getting along with our studies or whether we would get the degree or not, the most important thing was to enjoy

our time here.' Jiandong regarded his talk as patronizing, as if overseas students could simply go out and have a look around then they would learn what British culture really was. He argued that students from the East needed proper channels of communication. As he said, 'Culture is the sort of thing, to know it, you have to communicate or through personal participation, to feel it. Put simply, if you don't speak in a seminar, you never know what it is like.'

Alongside critical comments, the four mature students wanted to present a balanced view of British education as well by acknowledging its positive elements. Specifically, they appreciated the intellectual inspirations, academic resources and core values promoted by the British education. However, their straight talk makes the point clear that studying abroad is no miracle or has the magical power of transformation as expected. Rather than following suit blindly, Chinese students should make pragmatic and rational considerations before heading for the UK.

7.2.2 Negotiating Dilemmas and Difficulties

One salient feature this study reveals is the four participants' great self-awareness of emerged situations and self-created mechanisms of negotiating with them. Reflexivity acts throughout as a means of dealing with ambivalent feelings and circumstances. Thereby, in this section, I will highlight three major dilemmas from their journey of discovery. Clearly, it is through mediating between what they brought and what they encountered that they made sense of themselves and the issues confronting them.

Philosophical Crisis

Participants, especially the two male students, often found themselves wrestling with ideological dilemmas resulting from confrontations with Western rhetoric on China's political system. Both Dawei and Jiandong realized the inescapable fate of being forced into the role of representing a country, like it or not. As Dawei commented, 'We come from China, but we do not represent the Chinese government or its policies. I think we are too many times questioned about Tibet and Taiwan.' He believed it was unfair and even annoying that he was asked about his opinions over some controversial political issues by those who did not seem to know much about China. Like most other foreign students, their reaction to cultural stereotypes and racial prejudice was either to defend or ignore. However, they stressed that it was hard to make Westerners understand modern China, due to their deep-rooted preconception and Eurocentrism. That was why they would avoid conflicting arguments with their Western counterparts as much as they could.

In the same vein, Jiandong and Dawei's quest for meaning and relevance in their theory study reflects the philosophical ambiguity Chinese students may face in the West. The influence of their inherited Confucian culture and tradition means that they had little knowledge of Western theory and philosophy. Thus, it is not surprising for them to feel overwhelmed by its range, complexity and accessibility. Moreover, they found Western cultural theories difficult to relate to. Pages of text reading ended up with no logical

sense, as Dawei said, 'I felt at first it was just rhetoric'. The worst moment came when they began to question the taken-for-granted beliefs that they had learned in their own culture. The acquisition of Western philosophy had positioned them at a crossroad with uncertainty. The situation only improved when both Dawei and Jiandong believed they could make some logical connections between contemporary Western theory and Confucian based traditional Chinese philosophy. When their discovery was somewhat confirmed by their tutors, they felt reassured and gained considerable confidence in their study of theory. Their struggle demonstrates the importance of a clear understanding of one's own cultural or philosophical foundation when confronting Western theory.

Despite the situation he faced in the West, Dawei observed that Westernization was inevitable and that in fact China needed to open up more to the West. But he expressed his uneasiness about the way Westerners saw China as a threatening future superpower. As he explained, 'In China we still talk about the fact that we are a developing country and there are many problems waiting for us to resolve. But you find things are different and paradoxical when you are abroad.' He agreed that everyone had a right to express their opinions. However he pointed out that the unjustified hegemonic attitudes that Westerners held towards China were difficult to accept. Listen to the following voices:

They (Westerners) can express what they think about our food, lifestyles or politics, but I feel now it's 21st century. 20 years' economic reform has brought great change in China. More Chinese people than ever are travelling. *Though we are still categorized as a Communist state, it is not right for them to use an*

orthodox way to look at modern China. I remember the text books I read when in primary school, saying that capitalism was decadent (laugh). But today, our knowledge of science and technology, popular culture or our sense of openness toward the outside world as well as *our readiness and willingness for change* are developing much faster than theirs. The difference in terms of ideology these days is becoming less and less. (Italics, my emphasis)

Here, as a witness, Dawei criticized Westerners' clinging to their obsolete imperialist mentality in terms of what should be accepted as norms. By contrast, China's attitude towards the West has greatly changed during the past two decades. The cold war hostility is long gone and nowadays replaced more by admiration of the West. Ordinary Chinese people hold naive and romantic notions towards the West. The Western way means the better way and something they desire to learn from. Little do they know about Westerners' perception of China and what overseas Chinese face in the West is beyond their imagination. In Jiandong's case, he adopted a more flexible approach towards these dilemmas. He would consciously remind himself of not touching upon sensitive topics and always keeping himself well informed so that he could have a wider range of topics to talk about in a conversation. The purpose was to avoid unpleasant or hostile confrontations. Put briefly, their philosophical dilemma is a manifestation of the problematic relationship between the Chinese cultural condition and the Eurocentric narrative of history, modernization, and capital (Lu, 2001).

Conflicting Values

One dominant theme in the four individuals' narratives is the struggle with conflicting values. Many were attributed by them to the clash of cultural differences. The adjustment was, in essence, a process for the newcomers to learn and negotiate unfamiliar values. Very often, they expressed the stark contrasts between the British way and the Chinese way. The most distinctive value contrast is between collectivism and individualism. Dilemmas resulting from these two value systems permeate their academic and social life.

Apparently, the participants discovered a set of trademark Western values such as human rights, freedom of expression, democracy and individualism. Particularly, individuality as a concept impressed and inspired them most. According to their observations, the individual's rights were more valued in British society than in China. Being an individual, it was important to have opinions and express them. Even in everyday life, there were expressions of individuality. For instance, Huan was amazed at how young people dressed in London. As she said, 'They wear whatever they like and are quite relaxed about their figure or size. Not like us— always worrying about what others will think and say.' Here, the choice of fashion styles was viewed as a manifestation of their freedom of being an individual.

By contrast, Dawei noted that young people in China tended to go through similar stages in their life pathways whereas their Western counterparts seemed to be more adaptive to change in life rather than following conventions or doing what their parents wished them

to. Young people in the West did not have to take the same route as their Chinese counterparts. There was not much social pressure on them to pursue an individualized lifestyle or go against the tide since individual right is socially respected and lawfully guarded. But he also emphasized that the advocacy of individualism also led to selfishness and less consideration of others, judging from his everyday observation. Whilst people in Chinese society tend to seek security in a collective identity, like being a member of a group or an institution, and usually have a close relationship with the place where they work or study, participants in this study soon learnt that they needed to adapt to the newly adopted sense of individualism and learn to begin a sentence with 'I' instead of 'we'.

Participants also encountered conflicting values in academic dimensions. One salient example is that individuals' opinions are respected in lectures and seminars. British students do not need to be encouraged to express what they think. However, the Chinese students in this study were struggling to understand what made it difficult for them to participate in debating. It is commonly viewed that Western academics regard Asian students' reticence in seminars as a sign of passive learning and a lack of creative thinking. In Lang's case, she did resort to self-blame at first for her failure in seminars. In fact, as this study has shown, the root reason rested upon a clash of educational cultures, which included unfamiliarity with discussion-based activities, the emphasis of individual contribution, as well as linguistic and psychological barriers. Obviously, it is too simplistic to assume that silence means passivity and lack of creativity for these students.

Furthermore, if we make a comparison of the values that British and Chinese education systems each promote, we can understand better the frustrations that the four Chinese students had when coping with academic demands. It is suggested in most literature that the Chinese education system is authoritarian, characterized by conformity, discipline and obedience. Conversely, the British one emphasizes independence and critical thinking. In terms of learning styles, Chinese students are described as passive, receptive and hard working, who do not question accepted norms but learn within defined boundaries. In contrast to them, their British counterparts are active, critical and like to challenge the accepted standard (Turner, 2006). Though I must say these generalizations are not suited to every Chinese student and should be treated with caution, they demonstrate the plight that Chinese learners may go through when transferring to the UK system.

Conflicting values can also be seen from the participants' social contacts with British students. The English language is not the only obstacle that impedes the establishment of mutual understanding or friendship. What makes international students an 'absent group' from many activities in British culture is a question that has no quick answer. As this study shows, Dawei's confusion over 'distance' in social interaction and Lang's uneasiness towards the drinking and smoking culture explained how different values and forms of behaviour affected their integration into the dominant group.

Emotional Difficulties

Emotional difficulty is another major challenge for the participants. It is well recognized

that foreign students suffer homesickness and loneliness when living and studying in another country. However, mature students are often assumed to be more independent and less problematic. This study shows that, depending on individual circumstances, different degrees of isolation, confusion and frustration were experienced by the four participants. Here, I would like to examine how they identified and coped with the emotional issues arising from their entry into a strange environment.

First, a sense of alienation was commonly perceived in both learning and socializing experiences. Mann (2001:11) has compared the alienation that students feel in their transition to higher education to those crossing the borders to a new country, as he notes,

> they have to deal with the bureaucracy of check-points, or matriculation. They may have limited knowledge of the local language and customs, and are alone. Furthermore, the student's position is akin to the colonized or the migrant from the colonized land, where the experience of alienation arises from being in a place where those in power have the potential to impose their particular ways of perceiving and understanding the world.

It is not difficult to imagine the acute sense of alienation, considering my participants went through the dual situations simultaneously. According to Mann (2001: 8), alienation is 'the state or experience of being isolated from a group or an activity to which one should belong or in which one should be involved.' It should be noted that alienation is different from loneliness as it emphasizes the helplessness of not being accepted, not

even if you have tried. The two female students expressed strongly their disappointment at failing to develop a sense of belonging and become part of the host community. As Huang observed, British people were polite and yet did not like to know you or were not easy to get close to. In Jiandong's case, realizing other people's behaviour and prejudice were beyond his control, he simply chose to ignore them. As he told me, 'You can not change them. So why not shrug things off and just be civilized yourself'.

In addition to alienation, participants had their own personal emotions to deal with. For Huan, it was the longing for new perspectives in life after her divorce. As for Lang, free from a long-term unhappy relationship, she wanted to focus her energy on academic achievement and enhance her career development. Both of them took initiatives and were eager to fit into the new environment. Yet, faced with anxiety and uncertainty, they somehow delved into a sense of disillusion. Lang expressed her feelings by saying there was just no escape. For her, life seemed to be always unfair and fragmented. Ten years ago, it was leaving her rural hometown to go to university and pursue a better life in the capital city. Now she arrived in a Western metropolis searching for her freedom of making life choices. However, she was more than ever aware of all the factors that confined her. Once in a moment of pessimism, she remarked that in the life game of survival, she was already left behind even before the competition started. Obviously, these two modern educated women desired change and fought for their chance of happiness. Yet being in the West made them see the harsh reality. that is, the West may be a wonderful land and yet they did not really belong to it.

In the case of Dawei, most of his anxiety and stress came from the pressure to achieve his academic goals. However, he admitted to me, though with hesitation, the most difficult moment was actually the day when he received a split-up email from his girlfriend in China, whom he planned to marry after finishing his study. It had such an emotional impact on him that he thought he could not live through it. In retrospect, he said he might have coped with it better if he had not been alone in a strange country and with no one to talk to. For people living abroad, those loved ones at home were life strings. The cutting off of this emotional connection left Dawei vulnerable and frustrated. His life in London reached its lowest point as he remembered,

It was awful. I didn't know if I could get over it. If I told my parents the study was so hard and all the difficulties here, they would simply worry. One night I couldn't sleep and took a walk on the college green fields, trying to work out everything.

When coming to terms with it, he said it was both a physical and psychological challenge for a man of his age to study abroad. As he remarked,

You need to bear the solitude and the loneliness. Our cultural heritage and traditional values do not make it easy for us to accept Western values and lifestyles. Our culture promotes a moral sense of being and we have a traditional attitude towards love and marriage. Drinking and having casual sex like 'one night stand' are not acceptable but shameful behaviours.

However, he had learned some Western views on sexuality during his one year in London, which made him reflect upon the sense of sexual morality in his own culture. In fact, he added that his attitude towards love and marriage had since changed. He found out he was actually not ready for marriage even if his girlfriend had not broken up with him. The point is that private matters are not often discussed between males and females in Chinese culture. Telling me about his distress shows how unbearable the situation once was to him.

So far, I have elaborated three significant aspects derived from the four individuals' interpretation of their UK experience. Obviously, they have undergone different levels of dilemma and fragmentation, resulting from the inconsistency between prior life experiences and newly emerged situations. Their adaptation is made through a process of negotiating ideological dilemmas, different cultural values as well as emotional difficulties. It is worth highlighting that the factors that underlie their predicament of cultural adjustment are intertwined with their own political, socio-cultural and personal circumstances. These elements reveal the particular problems and personal difficulties this group of overseas students face and thus raise the issue of what kind of support can be provided for them. Specifically, the complex nature of their problems needs to be recognized and how individuals in transition search for a coherent sense of self deserves noticing. In the following, I will go on to illustrate this point.

7.2.3 Seeking Self Understanding

Denzin (1989:14) argues that people live their lives with meaning and his theory of interpretive biography provides a method which looks at 'how subjects give subjective meaning to their life experiences'. This line of thinking can be reflected from how the four individuals interpreted their changing realities. They constantly sought explanations from their childhood memories, family background, and educational experiences. Giddens (1991:53) defines this process as 'the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography'. I noted from this study that the social and cultural context in which a person is born and grows up significantly shapes his/her sense of identity. When this sense of stability is shaken due to the confrontation of a different other, the individual is bound to have ambivalent feelings about who he/she is, fusing a (de)reconstruction of identity.

As we can see, the process of adjustment is about learning other ways of thinking and behaving. On the other hand, this means one has to unlearn one's own cultural values and formed cognition. In this way, the individual's flexibility is tested and his/her sense of selfhood is fragmented. Indeed, the participants in this study have learned more about themselves, only their self discoveries are often tainted with emotional pain and political dilemmas. As Sau-ling Wong remarks (cited in Grice, 2002: 133), 'under the powerful controlling gaze of white society the ethnic subject is prone to a crisis of self and self-representation'. The existential question of self-image and cultural representation prompted them to give coherence to their life. Here, Dawei's stories interested me most. He explained why he believed life writing or autobiography was an effective tool to

understand the changes in his life. 'Sometimes I write what happened in my days here. It is a therapy. Being alone abroad, especially during the first two or three months, it is very difficult.' He gave his views about keeping a journal for himself.

It is a self therapy for people in modern times. Not the traditional sense of diary. The purpose is neither to remember nor to forget. It is just a process of healing. Yet it is not a simple way of recording what has happened but a consolation for the soul. It comes from external forces as well as one's internal needs.

Yet he added with self-mockery that his writing later became more for him to put down thoughts when reading books than the recording of daily events. He said it was really a multifunctional diary for him as it provided a gateway to carry on a dialogue with himself. It eased the sense of loneliness and frustration. (I did ask Dawei if I could have an excerpt of his journal for this study. But he declined my request politely. I think it was understandable since a personal journal was not meant for other people to read and it contained most private thoughts and true feelings.) Dawei gave me more insights as he looked deeper at the impact of cultural change on the individual.

Somehow I like to think about the feeling of exile. Since childhood, I have admired a writer called Shen Congwen. He was Hunanese as well (Hunan is a province in Southern China). He joined the army when he was young and received no formal university education. Later he came to live in such big cities as Beijing and Shanghai. However, there is always a sense of nostalgia in his

writing. For all his life, he wrote about the original world where he was from. But in fact, he only lived in that place for a very short time. And today when you go to that village, you will find it actually not quite the same as he described. The point is when you think at different places you always remember the question 'who you really are'. Like another exile, Edward Said, he believed only if you keep making sense of the outside world around, can you really know your own world. I think, there is something deep in your soul that does not change, which is not restricted by external forces. There is always the need to find your real belonging and identity.

The reading of this interview extract made me pause for thought. It strikes a chord in that we both realize how important it is to have an inner core stability that gives a sense of who you really are when leaving familiar land and embarking on travelling and dwelling. It is important to find or imagine a spiritual home that we can always return to even if it may be just some memories. It is the sense of exclusive belonging, safe and stable, that matters, especially when we do not feel at home in new places. Dawei emphasized that this was particularly important for Chinese people, given their strong sense of home (jia, jiayuan) and the mentality of falling leaves returning to their roots (luoye guigen). Here, Dawei used subconsciously this metaphor to understand his ambivalent feelings. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 232-233) observe:

[People]...seek out personal metaphors to highlight and make coherent our own pasts, our present activities, and our dreams, hopes, and goals as well. A large part

of self-understanding is the search for appropriate personal metaphors that make sense of our lives.

Whilst the change of place elicits new meanings and associations, we need to recognize the sense of fixation, which, on the one hand, constrains people in their adaptation, but, on the other hand, provides a secure and clear sense of identity for the travelling individual. It does not matter if he or she is displaced by force or travels willingly and with purpose. As Edward Relph (1976:43) remarks, 'There is for virtually everyone a deep association with and consciousness of the places where we were born and grew up, where we live now, or where we have had particularly moving experiences. This association seems to constitute a vital source of both individual and cultural identity and security'. Obviously, this secure sense of place is crucial for the psyche when people make geographical movements and encounter different worlds.

This chimes with Harold Rosen (1998:17) who remarks that:

> We, or others, may find our selves to be problematic or, indeed, a turmoil. We may find it difficult to answer, 'Who was I? What am I? How many Is am I?' Yet again and again we confront those questions knowing that all is not chaos. It is memory which repeatedly rescues us and makes it possible to speak with a comprehensible voice. (1998:17)

That is why, in postmodern psychoanalysis, there is increasing tendency for the self to go

back to the origins and find out what accounts for the fragmentation in modern life. To cope with ambiguous experiences, modern individuals constantly need to start an autobiographical narrative.

Dawei mentioned another Chinese writer he admired, Lu Xun, who famously said the Chinese people should sift the essence and discard the rubbish when learning from the West. This attitude was reflected in Dawei's learning experience in that he saw the positive as well as negative aspects of British culture and system. To adapt, he had to figure out a middle way. As a matter of fact, none of the four individuals exhibited a total acceptance of Western values and lifestyles. Rather, they were rational and realistic about their own socio-cultural contexts. Their reactions show that Western values were rarely taken in without going through a critical filtering process. It is up to them to decide what established values and views to keep and what to revise.

Dawei was also consciously looking for illuminations from inspiring figures in history to form his life strategies. He further commented on his generation,

I think people like me born in the late 70s don't have much experience, not like previous generations. We grew up under the influence of Western media, TV, American films and popular culture. Spiritually we feel somewhat empty inside. Previous generations, for example those born in the 50s like my parents, suffered a lot due to the Cultural Revolution but strangely they never feel empty in spirit. Their generation went through the turbulent times together and didn't end up with

pessimism or emptiness. Probably our generation has more desires, more opportunities, or a stronger willingness to change. I mean, in my case, I received a better education than most other peers, yet still can not avoid feeling lost. Maybe it is due to my character, typically Chinese, having more sentiments and awareness of morality and tradition, not like Westerners, the conquering type, regardless of consequences.

This shows Dawei's quandary in his quest for spiritual power on his journey of self discovery. He understood that the collective nature of Chinese culture could be a source of constraint or as he said, 'the pull of tradition is always there'. By contrast, his Western counterparts seemed to be able to go anywhere and do anything. As he was awakening to his individuality, he felt the difficulty of breaking out of his cultural tradition.

Again, if we reconsider what motivated the four individuals to make their journey to the West, it comes ultimately from their yearning for change. This acts as the driving force of their reflexivity in this process. As this study reveals, to gain a coherent sense of self, the four individuals seek explanations by looking back and relating new occurrences to past experiences. Through rethinking where they are from and who they are, they achieve some understandings of their dilemmas and difficulties. This self-reflective process makes them become more aware of their own identities and cultural background. It should be noted that the mature Chinese students in this study represent a generation growing up in modern, transitional China. All are well educated and have experiences of working in media and academic areas. Thus, what they perceive of their encounters in the

West is important to our understanding about current educational as well as cultural scenes. In the next section, I will take this point further to discuss what questions can be asked based on the four individuals' interpretations of their journey to the UK.

7.3 Who Should be There Listening?

By exploring the four fellow Chinese students' expectations, discoveries, frustrations and dilemmas, I have deepened my understanding of their situation and seen more clearly what once puzzled me and caused so much discomfort and even anger at the beginning. The point is how as a researcher I can articulate these resistant voices against dominant Western discourse. A journey has to end and yet stories of lonely struggles and inner conflicts can be read and hopefully enact change. Nevertheless, who will then be interested in these young Chinese men and women's talking back to the West? Who will appreciate the significance of these stories? As Spivak points out, 'Who will listen?' is more crucial than 'Who should speak?' (Spivak,1993:194). In my view, this particular case study has raised important questions with regard to present educational policy and cultural theory. I shall explain why I claim so in the following sections.

7.3.1 Question for Educational Policy

As indicated above and also in Chapter 5, the four Chinese postgraduate students made critical evaluations of the British education system. So far, their reflections and observations have enabled me to obtain a fuller view of their learning experience in

London. First of all, as newcomers, they were confronted with a range of difficulties and felt disadvantaged in adjusting to the new academic environment. How they subsequently employed different coping strategies demonstrated their strong determination to make the most of their opportunity. Their constant negotiation with different educational values has shown that the British university system is not well prepared for this influx of students from mainland China. The four participants' mixed views on studying in Britain made it clear that things needed to be done to improve academic support for this group of overseas students, which is particularly important when the strategy of overseas recruitment for revenue generation still dominates the current scene in UK higher education.

Having survived and excelled in a harsher Chinese educational selection system, the four mature students found it daunting to re-enter higher education after certain lengths of employment, especially in a country they virtually know little about. The foremost obstacle to be overcome was the blankness about British education system. So much anxiety and uncertainty would have been avoided if they had been better informed at earlier stages.

Meanwhile their hope for support from the academic system did not receive an effective response. In due time, they learned that the culture was to be self-management and independent learning. All four had since taken initiatives and learned the 'cultural tricks of the trade'. However, it must be recognized that while new knowledge and skills had yet to be acquired, there was every reason for them to anticipate suitable guidance.

Unfortunately, it turned out that the inconsistency as a result of their transition clouded their academic endeavours with self-doubt and frustration. As mature students, they would cope and eventually 'learnt the ropes'. But things could have been done to make this process less distressing.

Evidently, a smooth entry into their course studies will make a difference to the newcomers. Unpleasant incidents and lonely struggles increased their sense of not being welcomed or helped by the academic community. They questioned teaching standards as well as the level of support they could get from academic staff. Clearly, a well planned and delivered system of learning support is needed at the initial transitional period. Instead, these students were left alone and struggling on their own. It should be noted that mature students of course know the meaning of independence. What they expect may be nothing more than just some chance of human contact and warmth. When peer group support is difficult to find and tutors seem to be unapproachable and distant, learning can be a very isolating experience for the newcomers.

The participants' reflections show that some important parts are missing in British higher education. Though universities have enjoyed the financial benefits of an increasing number of Chinese students since the late 1990s, not enough effort and resources have been put into improving provision of services for them. Most academic staff are oblivious about the characteristics of this group of learners and the challenges they face when transferring to the British education system. There is a lack of understanding of their predicaments though a few studies have been conducted by empathetic academics, in

terms of meeting Chinese students' needs and expectations in British universities (Turner, 2003, 2006; Collins & Lim, 2004; Edwards & An, 2006).

In contrast with other researchers' writing about Chinese students' experience, I extend this area of knowledge by providing their own interpretations of learning in the British education system. Their straightforward comments, complaints and observations were honest words as a result of first-hand experiences. Importantly, they not only made a critical examination of British higher education but also of their own misconceptions of studying abroad.

Furthermore, this study has pointed out the importance of sensitivity and respect in cross-cultural context. Cultural difference should be mutually recognized and accommodated rather than tolerated or ignored. Instead of letting students from non-English backgrounds feel disadvantaged and isolated, UK universities should foster a more inclusive culture of teaching and learning. Rather than the impression of a faceless institution, the host university is duty bound to provide good pastoral care and educational experience for overseas students. The truth is that studying abroad is an enormous investment of time and money for most of them.

Importantly, UK educational institutions can no longer afford to live on their perceived reputation. This study has proven that policy and practice do not correspond with the changing situation in UK higher education. The student profile has become different and so have their needs and expectations. UK educationalists and administrators need to

rethink the impact of internationalization and respond to its challenge, in particular, how to make British education more relevant to international students' personal goals and career development.

At this point, I put forward the question: what can UK higher education do for Chinese students? The study calls for attention to different levels of difficulties newly-arrived Chinese students will possibly encounter. One year postgraduate study is short and their stay in Britain is temporary. But for them, this journey is a once-in-a-lifetime event and may have lasting effects in the future, especially when most of them come with high expectations and romanticized notions of the West. What they might live through in reality, such as frustrations and dilemmas as well as academic difficulties should become an issue for concern for those who wish to recruit them.

The purpose of this study is not to emphasize that Chinese students are in need of special help but that they are more prone to certain difficulties, which are not acknowledged by host institutions. From my point of view, Chinese students should not be solely responsible for their adjustments. The situation demands reciprocal recognition of cultural difference. The four mature students' attempts to make the most of their time in Britain indicate that it is time for UK higher education to change the traditional attitude and adapt to the challenge of university expansion and student diversity. There is no complacency for the British brand, given a system that is well known for its elitism and deeply embedded ethnocentrism. Meanwhile academics should reflect upon their way of teaching culturally different students. I suggest they should discard the mentality that

'they come for the British experience, don't they?'. As Ryan and Carroll (2005) also point out, the deficit view of international students cannot be repeated mindlessly. The four individuals have demonstrated their initiatives, abilities and efforts to adjust. Now the question is how UK higher education can improve teaching and learning practices for them.

In summary, I am critical of the present situation in that it reflects a marketing orientation which undermines the real purpose of education. I argue that a genuine effort in identifying this group of learners' difficulties and responding to their needs is essential in an increasingly competitive global market. UK universities need to modify their current education and support system to ensure a fulfilling learning experience for students such as those in my study.

7.3.2 Question for Cultural Theory

This investigation also raises questions in terms of the interconnection between culture, place and people on the move, perceived under the influence of 'globalization'. My ideas on the debate are that cultural studies theorists often use the umbrella term 'globalization' without recognizing adequately that the actual flow of meaning and meaningful forms is not at all even and balanced. For certain groups of people from other or less dominating cultures, their experiences of modernity are typified by the fear of not being cosmopolitan enough in a time of 'all that is solid melts into air' (Berman, 1982). Hannerz notes (1996:89) that globalization of this kind, diffused with social life, is opaque. Deep

personal experiences and their distribution in the world can be in large part a private matter, given the ideological, political and cultural forces imposed on the individuals.

Once arriving in the romanticized West, the four individuals were confronted with ambiguity, which propelled them into an exploration of their identities. The paradox between fantasy and reality in their journey of discovery prompts me to ask why the crossing of cultural boundaries has such an impact on them. How do they attain a coherent sense of self in their adaptive or even transformative process? The study reveals that the imagined West which represented the better and the advanced was not so in accordance with what they saw with their eyes. Instead, they encountered more or less issues of conflicting values, emotional isolation as well as cultural stereotypes and racial prejudice. In coping with the new social cultural system, they felt the pull of tradition, namely, the shaping power of the home culture, and meanwhile, made some realistic observations of the host culture.

Giddens (1991: 215) remarks that:

> self-identity today is a reflexive achievement. The narrative of self-identity has to be shaped, altered and reflexively sustained in relation to rapidly changing circumstances of social life, on a local and global scale. The individual must integrate information deriving from a diversity of mediated experiences with local involvements in such a way as to connect future projects with past experiences in a reasonably coherent fashion.

Indeed, encounters with others or their Western counterparts have put the four individuals in a state of reflexivity. However, this self-reflexive or 'continuously revised' process did not happen in a straightforward way. Rather, the road to inner strength and peace was overshadowed by anxiety and uncertainty. Hence, I would like to argue that other than celebrating the fluidity of identity in a simplistic way, different experiences of identity need attending to. In this study, the movement was made from a periphery country to a postcolonial Western cosmopolitan. Or rather, China as a remaining communist state has always been regarded as the political enemy by the West. Derogatory media portrayals, criticism of its totalitarian government and obsolete cultural images are not an uncommon reality for overseas Chinese and so often evoked feelings of resistance and antagonism.

The situation is especially true for this generation of younger Chinese. Born in the 1970s, for them, leaving China is not out of political or economic reasons but more related to social or personal factors. Growing up in post-Mao China, this generation does not have much memory of the Cultural Revolution or the bitterness of previous generation. It is not surprising that Chinese students are often shocked at Western hostility, feeling that times have changed and yet the West still dwells upon the same rhetoric and attitude towards China. Indeed, the participants in this study found it offensive that Westerners obsessively question the same old issues of democracy and human rights. In their words, this was not turning a blind eye to their own problems but a manifesto of their resistance to Western ignorance and hegemony. Whilst recognizing nationalism was another extreme like Jiandong, they asserted that it was time for Westerners to alter their attitude

towards China. In their views, Western hegemonic and ethnocentric perspectives cannot be fundamentally changed without a genuine interest in learning about the real China.

Nowadays, China's position in the world systems is becoming important thanks to recent economic development and attraction of capital. Still China is regarded as a competitor of power or threat by the West, which has to be kept a watchful eye on. That explains how occasional positive media reports of China work on lifting national confidence for the Chinese overseas. One step further is made to free China from its commonly perceived and historically formed representations. Recent Chinese overseas students' protest against BBC report on Tibet is strong evidence to show their rejection to the Westerners who do not know much about China and yet want to have their say over its issues.

If the four individuals faced tricky situations abroad, what were the vulnerabilities they brought with them from home? In today's transitional China, the process of modernization and Western influences are challenging the values and structures of a society where tradition still prevails. Generational differences, social moralities, interpersonal relations, life attitudes and judging standards for success, as all mentioned by the four individuals, have created a sense of restlessness and enormous pressure among young people. Moreover, its Confucianist philosophical roots bear a distinctive difference from Western thinking and ideology. Emphasis on collective interests and hierarchy are opposite to Western value systems as well. These were explicitly explained by the two women's talk. Coming from a society where, to quote Canclini, 'traditions have not yet disappeared and modernity has not completely arrived' (Canclini, 1995:1),

the repressive effects of traditional values and expectation of female roles fuelled their yearning and envying for Western individualized lifestyles and free life choices.

Inevitably, the complexity of their position in both a local and global sense exacerbates the four self- and media-conscious individuals' experiences in a Western metropolis. As Sara Ahmed (2000:7) notes, 'to talk about the importance of encounters to identity is to remind ourselves of the processes that are already at stake...' With so many conflicting and interwoven elements to face and negotiate, the level of fragmentation and inconsistence is unquestionable. Kobena Mercer (1990:43) observes that 'identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty.' Precisely, to make sense of their dilemmas and ambiguities they needed to reconstruct their understanding of self and other. In time, they recognized the constraining forces from their own culture. Madan Sarup (1994:95) makes the point clear: 'identities are not free-floating; they are limited by borders and boundaries.' As this study shows, modes of thinking, patterns of behaviour and the influence of tradition and mother tongue all made the adaptation a strenuous effort.

Meanwhile, though admiring Western democratic values, the four individuals never expressed a total acceptance of individualization or freedom of speech without reservation. Even newly-acquired Western theory could only be useful when being adjusted to the Chinese condition. According to Dawei, absorbing was about selecting what could possibly bring benefit. As to Lang, she left a society which made her feel

repressed, only to find new forms of constraints in a Western liberal society. Just a few months into her life in London, she concluded that it would be unlikely for her to feel socially integrated into the mainstream even if she stayed in Britain for ten years. Frankly, Jiandong pointed out that Western ignorance and blind arrogance prevented them from learning about the rest of the world and seeing the rising power from the margins. In their views, it was not always true that the West represents the modern and the advanced. It seemed that the West still dwelled on the past and failed to develop new knowledge and a sense of openness in a fast changing world.

So what does this particular case of boundary-crossing tell us about identity formation? I think we need first to critique the Western hegemonic and orthodox view of other cultures, or according to Sheldon, Lu (2001, 49) a Eurocentric Orientalist discourse in defining the West as the norm and the Rest having to follow. The four individuals' struggle for meaning in this process proved Bauman's argument that the postmodern problem of identity is primarily about the avoidance of fixation (Beilharz, 1999). However, no matter how much they compromised with the new environment and longed for change, they found a need to resort to an original sense of self in the face of uncertainty. Travelling away from home made them realize the importance of a rootedness based on their distinct Chinese identity.

Second, this boils down to how to deal with difference in an increasingly shrinking world. I want to argue that with the historical legacy of cultural hegemony and ethnocentrism, people from non-Western cultures are still struggling to assert their own

identities. The truth is that some have more weight of baggage to bear than others in today's globalizing world. As Sara Ahmed (2000) observes, encounters are not simply happening in the present. Depending on where you are from, different levels of cultural flexibility are required to cope with the new mobility. Those from peripheries have an emotional price to pay for acceptance and recognition. Westerners' static view of other histories and cultures as inferior and alien has to be challenged. In actuality, the involvement of toleration is reciprocal for both parties and in many ways the insecure and vulnerable ones have to bear the double consciousness of this inequality. When difference exists, respect is the solution. The truth is that respect is not equally experienced by people from different cultural groups, as in postcolonial and multi-racial London. I believe the spirit of cosmopolitanism rests not on the obsessively labelling of people in such categories as race, ethnicity and nationality but to build up an ethos that difference is celebrated rather than the weakest having to conform to the strongest for survival (Amin: 1997).

Ultimately, in a time of change, cultural theorists should keep in mind the historical, socio-cultural and political conditions in which individuals are embedded. Big cities are becoming similar in terms of familiar brands, commodities and services, and yet this does not shorten the distance between cultures and groups of people. Rather, globalization has complicated the individual's sense of identity. Those from non Euro-American background have to endure a legacy imposed by world history, Western hegemony and political system. Today it is no longer what Kipling has described 'East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet'. However, what is happening everywhere in the

world proves that globalization does not lead to open-mindedness and social cohesion of different cultural groups. Moreover, physical proximity evokes frequent outbreak of misunderstandings and conflicts. In my view, the dark side brought about by this process deserves attention, or according to Gundara (2002), the alienation, inequalities and disadvantages felt by various groups, communities and nationalities. Revealingly, the voices from this group of young Chinese demonstrated their resistance to dominant Western discourse. They not only defended their own identities but also demanded for mutual recognition and respect from the West.

7.4 Summary

This chapter is a further analysis of the four individuals' interpretations of their cross-cultural experience in metropolitan London. Drawn from their narratives, it explores in depth the meaning they make from their UK experience. Three significant aspects are highlighted, including their observation on the trend of studying abroad, negotiation of dilemmas and ambiguities as well as the search for self understanding. The conclusion is that newcomers' ambivalence about their self and cultural identities can only be eased by a recognition and articulation of the cultural practices that framed them. It is evident that each of them has undergone a psychological and emotional process in order to gain a sense of coherence in the face of change and transition.

However, what is at issue is how their stories of travel and discovery have an impact on educational policy and our knowledge about cultural theory. The findings of the enquiry

raise two questions. On a practical level, it is about how UK universities should rethink their policy and respond to the challenge of recent change in UK higher education. The priority is to address what kind of educational provision should be provided for high-fee-paying overseas students. On a theoretical level, I would like to draw attention to the ambiguity and dilemma individuals encounter when travelling to a Western metropolis. Whilst admitting there is a possible process of becoming, I want to stress there is no dichotomy between being and becoming. Movements bring about self discovery and transformation. But the fragmentation individuals have to go through also deserves attention.

It has been demonstrated from this enquiry that Chinese students are not receiving the support and help they expected upon and after arrival. This forms a sharp contrast with the time and energy invested in recruiting them. So far, not enough knowledge has been built up for the predicament that Chinese students have when transferring between different cultural and learning systems. Reports resulting from market research incentives are criticized by Walker (1999) as a poor substitute for a scholarly investigation into international student experience in Britain. In my view, individual experiences have remained largely unnoticed and can not be detected from survey statistics. Thus, it is important to give voice to the marginal and powerless by presenting their narratives. In the final chapter, I will summarize the theoretical and methodological insights derived from this study and their implication for education in terms of what British universities can do as a next step to enhance the Chinese students' experience.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion: A Time for Change

We live in a world where identity matters. It matters both as a concept, theoretically, and as a contested fact of contemporary political life.

Paul Gilroy (1997:301, also cited in Woodward, 2000)

While Chinese students are flooding to foreign countries like the UK to learn the better, in some ways, they should be prepared for the worse. On the other hand, foreign countries should learn more about modern China. Today, you can't expect a Chinese to scream in excitement when he or she sees a skyscraper.

Jiandong (Extract from his diary, August 2005)

With the new policy of promoting Mandarin in British and American schools and with China's economy booming, why assume we have all the answers? I arrive in China, thinking my job was easy: to sell the wonders of a British boarding education, its broad curriculum, the music, the drama, all the sport it offers. I left thinking it might be more beneficial instead to bring some of our teenagers to China for a few months, in language and cultural exchanges. Rather than educating the Chinese, this teacher had learned a few lessons himself.

Dr Andrew Cunningham (Financial Times, March 18 2006)

8.1 Introduction

This study stems from a personal and political need of articulating my own experience and speaking for those who are invisible and voiceless to the West. It aims to find out why individuals from the East, such as China, encounter conflicting feelings of dilemmas and ambiguity when travelling to the West. To answer this key question, I drew upon theoretical perspectives through a literature review of culture and identity, particularly their new conceptualization in relation to globalization. The notion of self and narrative's role in identity construction were also examined. Meanwhile, a pilot study set the scene for this research project and defined the specific questions I intended to address. Ethnography was chosen to identify the participants' perceptions and interpretations of their cross-cultural experience. In total, four Chinese postgraduate students were interviewed. Their narrative accounts were subsequently analyzed at different depths and for different purposes.

Bearing in mind that the researcher should be cautious and never make claims without data support, I would like to summarize the theoretical, methodological and practical implications this study contributes to our existing knowledge. Then I will discuss briefly its limitations and suggest possible areas for further research.

8.2 Theorizing Identity: A Non-Western Perspective

As Giddens notes, 'No longer the unexamined basis of Western hegemony over other cultures, the percepts and social forms of modernity stand open to scrutiny' (1994:57). Based upon the observations and reflections of four educated individuals from the

periphery, this study gives an insightful depiction of how their encounters with the West influence identity construction. It confirms the level of complexity when understanding identity in a time marked with 'rapid, extensive and continuous change' (Hall, 1992:278). I begin with my doubts about Western cultural theorists' view of the postmodern subject as 'having no fixed, essential or permanent identity' and the argument that identity has become fluid and 'a moveable feast' (Hall, 1992, 277). Though acknowledging that fixed and stable identities are challenged in an increasingly globalized world, I propose that in discussing such matters, it is always important to ask who we are talking about and what local and global situations they are positioned in. As demonstrated by this particular study, what the four individuals witnessed and experienced in the West cannot be properly understood without looking at the historical, cultural and political contexts they are embedded in.

Obviously, their brief encounter with the much desired West brings about as many surprises as discoveries. In the end, Jiandong observed that the foreign moon was actually not always brighter. In some ways, Western countries like Britain should learn more about modern China. Dawei recognized his deep sense of attachment to his homeland and the inescapable fate of Chinese identity in his character. Both Lang and Huan eventually realized that they would never really feel like they belonged to the world about which they had so many fantasies. Moreover, the self-examination of their own values, beliefs and the socio-economic political system they came from confirms the postmodernist view of the self as a reflexive and dynamic agent who is in a continuous effort to make meanings out of change and transition. This study demonstrates the importance of a

coherent sense of self in the face of fragmentation and ambivalence, even just for situational and temporal sake. This can be seen from the four individuals' resistance to Western cultural hegemony and their struggle for acceptance and recognition.

Hence, I want to emphasize the role of cultural power and global capital in people's experiencing of late modernity. Whilst in agreement with the postmodern notion that identity is not fixed and always in process, I argue that we cannot ignore the uncertainty, frustration and insecurity those from the margins may face when travelling to the centres. How they attempt to reconstruct their identities as opposed to Western superiority and discourse needs to be acknowledged. And the emotional pain involved in this process should not be neglected. Conversely, the four individuals' straight talk suggests that it is time for the West to develop a sense of openness towards the Rest. Thus, I propose whilst celebrating the fluidity of identity, Western cultural theorists need take into account the constraining forces imposed on certain individuals. Depending on where you are from, stories of identity resulting from geographic movement can be very different.

At this point, I want to critique the degree of assumptions Western cultural theorists make regarding identity formation by arguing that this process cannot be universal, but depends rather on who and where you are. In my view, Western cultural theorists should be cautionary when framing the postmodern debate and not allow it to become the rhetoric of the privileged West again. Before making any hasty statement on the condition of our contemporary world, they need to recognize the differences of other cultural forms, experiences, subjectivities and circumstances. Otherwise, the issue of identity cannot be

addressed appropriately. By highlighting the dilemmas and ambiguities the four individuals encountered on their journey to the West, I want to stress that depending where you are from, individuals come different ways and have different emotional issues when trying to unify their past and present for a secure sense of self. In this process, history, power, culture and language all play an intertwined role. Hence, Western cultural theorists need to draw attention to other cultures and other experiences to attain a balanced view when theorizing the shifting nature of identity. Ultimately, this thesis is my scholarly endeavour to challenge some of the current understandings on culture and identify from a de-Westernized perspective.

8.3 Methodological Alternatives for Self-Representation

The methodological challenge for this study is that I needed to work out my own way of fulfilling the purpose for self-representation. Drawing from the historical development of ethnography in writing culture, this thesis is an experiment on how to present a marginal group of individuals' brief encounter with the West in a postcolonial and globalized world. In this special case, the ethnographic subject is the one who has cosmopolitan experience, stares back critically and actively contests the Western way of perceiving the Other. The central issue is how my participants negotiate the new environment and make sense of who they are as a result of their journey. However, there is no one agreed approach for investigating and analyzing identity work through narratives obtained in interviews. Thus, the principle I hold on to is to be true to my participants and tell their stories honestly. Mishler (1999:19) states that 'We speak our identities'. This describes

the fact that in the making and telling of stories we claim our identities and selfhood. Precisely, by focusing on the four individuals' narrative account of experience, I was able to uncover how their journey to the West influenced the construction of their personal and cultural identities, whether articulated or struggled over.

Based on a corpus of transcribed texts, different levels of data analysis were designed and carried out to represent this particular experience. I started with structuring a holistic view of the participants' one year time in Britain, identifying common themes and patterns. Next, I selected key episodes of personal recounting of events and used Labov's Evaluation model as an analytical method to make the structural components of a story salient. The truth is that through storytelling individuals often come to their own point of views and conclusions. Throughout, narrative analysis enabled me to examine how the participants understood themselves and others in a time of change and transition. These two stages of analysis were essential for me to further explore the meanings they made out of their journey of discovery and finally pose my questions. In a word, this study is to inform, orient and persuade the reader by means of credible description and interpretation. Clearly, a self-conscious and critical scrutiny of my textual practices is vital to attain such goals. Overall, (auto)ethnography in combination with narrative analysis provides an alternate way of completing this study about voice and representation.

8.4 Enhancing the British Experience: Policy and Practice

On a practical level, this study contributes to a deep understanding in terms of the recent trend of Chinese students coming to Britain. Based on four mature students' experiences and observations, it has explored the difficulties and dilemmas that confronted this group of Chinese students when adjusting to the UK education system. Compared to other similar studies, this research provides insights into the cultural differences that have given rise to the situation this group of Chinese students found themselves in. Evidently, effective teaching and learning cannot happen without acknowledging these learners' educational and cultural backgrounds. It has been my intent to fill this gap by informing UK academics of the potential challenges facing Chinese students in their transition to the British higher education. This study will thereby benefit universities either already having a large number of Chinese students or wishing to attract more. Findings from this research indicate that a top-down initiative is essential to foster a strategic shift from a marketing incentive to a focus on cultural inclusion and appropriate educational provision. I would argue that policymakers and university heads shoulder the responsibility of creating an ethos that prioritizes the student experience. I shall elaborate my point in the following.

8.4.1 Changing Universities

Student mobility and global competition have fundamentally changed the British educational landscape. Internationalization is inevitably going to become an important feature of the UK higher education as a result of university expansion and a funding shortage, a spectacular phenomenon that happened in the second half of 20th century.

More students now have access to higher education and UK universities are moving, as McNay (1994) states from an elite to a mass system of participation. However, this change has posed great challenges for both the new and old universities in that not all of them are well prepared for the influx of an increasingly diverse student body. Whilst the British government and institutions are keen to recruit large numbers of full-fee-paying students from abroad to generate income, I argue that things have to be done to enhance the quality of their British experience.

It is time to change the rhetoric that overseas students are demanding and have a nature of producing problems. Paying at least three times the fees of UK students and so much desired for the financial benefit they bring should account for why their needs and expectations require attention. Furthermore, it is understandable that they are prone to difficulties, given their different cultural and educational backgrounds. UK higher education has to respond to the changes, as Robertson (2000:79) criticizes, 'life for academics and students in a British university continues much as it has done for years'. I point out that the perception of a British education is simply good enough for these overseas students from less developed countries is outdated and dangerous for a sustainable future. Bruch & Barty (1998:24) depict the situation of overseas students with a good understanding:

Students coming to the UK to study have made an active decision to move out of their familiar environment and to expose themselves to an international experience. In doing so, they expose themselves to various aspects of the UK: the

academic dimension, the social dimension and the official dimension. The messages they receive from these encounters may vary and apparently contradict one another. While from recruiters and promotional material they may receive the message that the UK welcomes international students into its HE communities, their actual experience before arrival, on arrival or during their stay may undermine these initial encouraging impressions. Students do not necessarily distinguish between the different agencies involved but rather see obstacles anywhere in the system as evidence of a less than welcoming attitude. (1998:24)

8.4.2 Meeting Chinese Students' Need for Support

With Chinese students currently being the largest group of international students and China as a big potential market, more UK universities are waking up to the importance of recruiting them and picking up the lucrative foreign market share. This trend can be demonstrated from the many China projects that have been quickly established in recent years. However, in the meantime, UK universities need to pause for thought in terms of whether these students are getting value for their money and are satisfied with their British education. As this study shows, the sets of difficulties and issues confronting the four mature Chinese students after their arrival were not properly recognized by the host institution. They made their point clear that Chinese students do not come naively or can be simply impressed by a British education. In reality, things need to be done to make their learning experience more fulfilling. What these students want is not just a British degree but demand real personal development and substantial professional enhancement.

Throughout the course of my research, I have been paying attention to developments in academic research, media reports, university strategies and government policy in relation to overseas students, particularly those from China. I have seen some positive signs of change over years. More academics and university chancellors are getting involved in public debates of international student education. It is good news to see the themes in the higher education summit in February, 2007 were about international education and cultural diversity. Yet new issues and problems also emerge. The report by John Crace (May 2007, the Guardian) warned that universities in the UK should be careful not to take their international students for granted in that many Chinese students have wised up to the fact that some institutions are not doing enough to meet their expectations but treating them as a source of revenue. Victoria Adam (anonymous name chosen by the author) gave an insider's analysis of the situation and pointed out explicitly that 'In the current system, the British universities that keep their China links to a minimum will almost certainly be the ones that prioritize quality over cash cows' (December 2007, the Guardian). The most recent debate was fuelled by a whistleblower from a renowned British university, again whose identity had to be hidden, claiming that degrees were awarded to unqualified overseas students for the lucrative foreign students market (BBC News June 23, 2008). I should say these reports and media attention from time to time convince me of the value of my research, especially when I have become more and more aware of the risk of investigating such a topic as my work progresses. Either it may cause uneasy reaction and get me nowhere closer to the dominant academic community, or worse, I may be accused of being too critical.

However, this particular case study has provided an opportunity to let overseas students' voices be heard. It has shown that this group of students not only wanted to survive but succeed in the British education system. As mature postgraduate students, they particularly wished to have their career prospects enhanced from their study in Britain. Personally, I believe these expectations are understandable as every student from mainland China, who finally makes the journey to the UK, has to go through complicated and lengthy application procedures, immigration check, bureaucratic headaches and personal sacrifices. Hence, let them not face a situation that Mike Baker described as, 'the glossy brochures and the expensive advertising campaigns that are offered by many universities often exceed the reality that greets students when they arrive.' Indeed, it is an outstanding investment of both time and money in the hope of a better future. UK universities thereby have an inescapable responsibility for these overseas students' welfare. They should not only 'catch them while you can' but also give attention to the 'Chinese whispers' and their 'anxiety in the UK'. There should be better responses than 'Walls of silence' in relation to their problems. Bill Rammell, the higher education minister, warned at a conference of international students in London that Britain must develop a reputation as an appealing country for international students if it is to remain competitive and the government needed to ensure students enjoyed studying in the UK. He said,

Reputation depends hugely on word of mouth, a grim experience of poor student accommodation, bad food and cold weather can do a lot of damage. We can't do

anything about the weather but there are many things we can do to ensure that foreign students feel welcome in our communities.

Thursday, March 23, 2006 the Guardian

Crucially, no one would benefit if Britain is viewed as 'physically and emotionally cold, expensive and racist' (Wheeler and Birtle,1993). To make a good start for change, British universities need first to recognize the predicaments that this group of newcomers may encounter in UK higher education. Second, a genuine engagement is needed to understand and remove the possible difficulties that emerge from their UK experience.

The dramatic increase in the number of Chinese students means that British universities can no longer turn a blind eye to the issues they bring as well as encounter in many dimensions. For their positive feedback matters a lot to the well-being and future of UK higher education. Having examined what the four mature Chinese students experienced in London, I would argue that there is a lack of knowledge and expertise in providing living, cultural and learning support for newcomers. Whilst it is inevitable to face challenges when studying abroad, let us be aware that things can easily go wrong in a foreign country and just not make them learn the hard way. That is why I welcome the second strategy of the Prime Minister Initiative launched in 2006, a decade after the first PMI. For it is time for policymakers to prioritize the quality of international student experience after ten years expansion. However, we have to wait and see how in practice British universities are going to respond and benchmark their provision of services for

international students. In my view, standards should not be sacrificed simply to take in overseas students for financial reasons. Meanwhile practical measures need to be taken to improve the quality of educational experience for students who desire for academic achievement. Rather than the potential peril of a vicious circle, British higher education may need to 'exhibit a cultural willingness to change', to quote Boris Johnson, when he was the Shadow Higher Education Minister (BBC News, 23 June, 2006). In short, as this work demonstrates, British universities need to live up to its reputation of academic excellence and morally deliver a good following-up support system for Chinese students.

8.5 Limitations and Areas for Future Research

The purpose of this study is not to measure the rate of satisfaction as often seen in large-scale, predominantly questionnaire based surveys. Instead, this is a small-sampled but in-depth investigation into a particular experience that happened to one group of students from one British institution. It stems from my belief that stories in this case can say much more than statistics. So far Chinese students' view of the UK education system has not been adequately documented and their individual experiences remained largely unnoticed. However, I must remind the reader that the four participants in this study do not necessarily represent a full picture of the large proportion of Chinese students in UK higher education. Obviously, the individual circumstances of Chinese students in British universities vary and their motivations for studying in Britain differ. Nevertheless, I hope unresonant voices revealed from this study will stimulate further debates on how to teach and support Chinese students. Also I want to mention that, though the focus of this study

is on students from mainland China, it surely throws light on issues concerning other international students who come with little knowledge of British education system. More academic research on international student experience in UK higher education needs to be conducted, as it is vital to the success and sustainability of a British education. In my view, the following aspects are worth exploring.

First, British universities need to explore how to modify the existing and rather conventional support structure to accommodate the needs and expectations of Chinese students. A modern university in today's UK is often seen to have the physical presence of student support services. However, the crucial point is how effectively they function in targeting the needs of foreign students? Second, academics such as tutors and lecturers need to reflect self-critically upon how teaching and learning might look to Chinese students as well as how to assist them to adjust to the UK education system. Specifically, efforts need to be made to identify the student perspective and accordingly suitable academic help can be provided for them. Third, there is a pressing need to work on the administration and cooperation within the dynamics of a university to guarantee a consistent and well run system for Chinese students. Also, British universities need to think what effective training programmes can be provided for academic and support staff to increase their knowledge and skills in cross-cultural situations. Allocation of resources may be necessary as well as the appointment of staff with specialist knowledge. For some UK universities where recruiting more Chinese students has suddenly become an objective, the issue of after-sale customer care needs to be addressed with urgency. As is clearly stated in PMI2, "for those students paying full fees, education is a 'luxury

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purchase' and, as such, they have demanding expectations. We must ensure that we understand and are able to respond to these expectations." (British Council website)

Epilogue

Not long before I left home and arrived in London, the question 'Who am I?' started to bother me. My daily encounters made me ask 'Are you who you think you are or are you what you are represented?' With this puzzlement, I embarked upon my research and at the same time stumbled into my life in an entirely foreign land. Five years on, compared to that disoriented and confused newcomer, I have gained a deep understanding about my identity in a multi-racial and multi-ethnic society. Though believing there are better ways of recognizing people in a cosmopolitan city, I have learnt to ignore or shrug off whatever irritates me. And I realize more than ever the importance, despite various forms of constraints, of becoming an independent and free thinking individual with a clear sense of identity.

Doing a PhD is never easy, especially not if it often takes place in unpleasant accommodation and gnawing isolation. Yet, the worst enemy is the inner struggle: the self-doubt, fear and moments of despair. What makes me carry on is that I still have the strong urge to tell our version of truth and the belief that it is of significance to voice the fragmentation and disillusion that people suffer when traveling from East to West. Increasingly, more 'small stories' need to be told as a counterpart to the `grand narratives' in postmodern discourse. Inspired by previous Chinese women writing autobiographies in diaspora, I hope this piece of work gives a good articulation about my generation and contemporary China. More importantly, this study is a demonstration of our resistance to Western obsolete and stereotypical views on other cultures and people.

The process of reading, thinking and writing has introduced me to the world of intellectuals, especially those from 'peripheral countries' (Bauman, 1995). How they attempt to get their perspectives acknowledged in dominant Western culture and language is a vital source of strength for me. I see clearer now my stance and approach of how to question and critique established norms and speak for those whose voices would otherwise rarely be heard in my chosen field of interest. I hope that the practice of PhD study will not be a dead end but become my new beginning for pursuing further related educational and cultural issues.

Indeed, it is a journey of self-discovery, made through the retelling of four modern educated individuals' stories of struggle. By theorizing their experiences, I make sense of my own past and present for therapeutic sake. I expect some transformation in myself of becoming better and stronger when looking forwards to the future. But I also sometimes lament the original 'me' free of all the complex issues and life vicissitudes that have emerged along my way of adventure. Maybe this is the pain of growing up, leaving your comfort zone and exposing yourself to a challenging or even risky reality. What matters is that I don't feel regret about everything and I would make the same decision if next time the opportunity repeats itself.

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Appendix 1 The growth of Chinese students in the UK

1. Number of overseas students from China (1995/96-2005/06)

Figure 1. Number of overseas students from China (1995/96 - 2005/06)

source: HESA
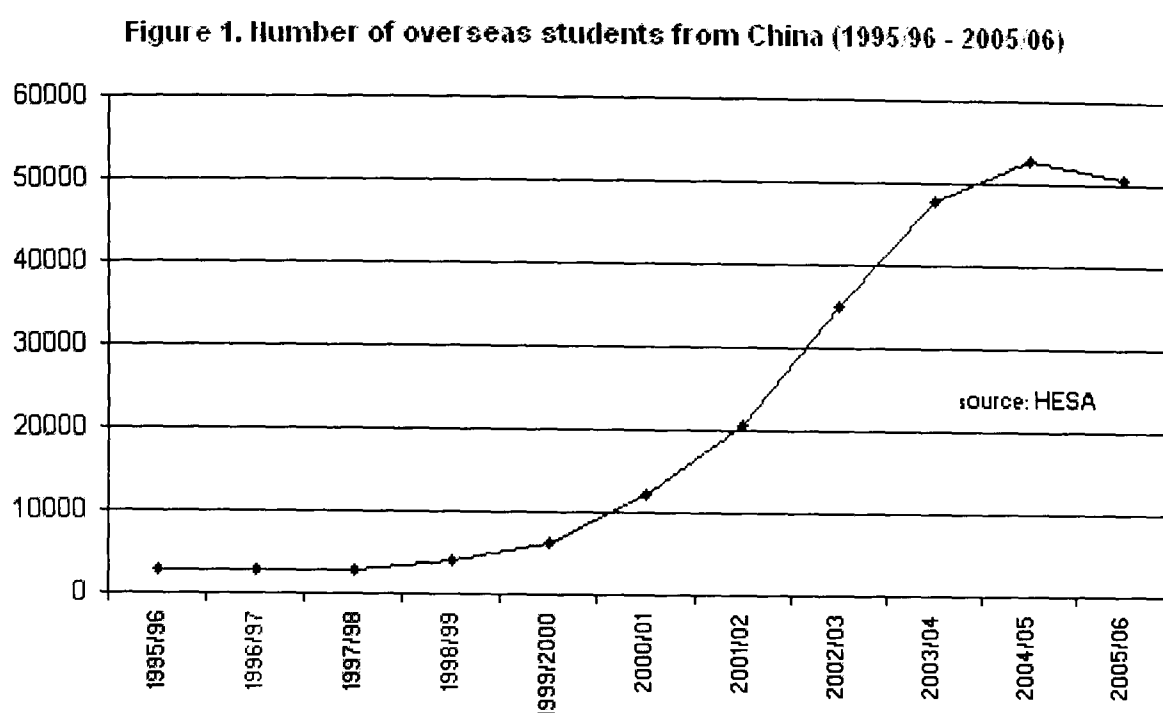
2. Top ten non-EU countries of domicile in 2006/07 for HE students in UK HEIs

Country of domicile	2005/06	2006/07	% change
China (People's Republic of)*	50755	49595	-2%
India	19205	23835	24%
United States	14755	15955	8%
Malaysia	11450	11810	3%
Nigeria	9605	11135	16%
Hong Kong	9445	9640	2%
Pakistan	7940	9305	17%
Taiwan	6180	6795	10%
Japan	6200	5705	-8%
Canada	4640	5010	8%
Total Non-EU	**223855**	**239210**	*7%*

Source: HESA Students in Higher Education Institutions 2005/06. 2006/07

* Figures for China do not include students whose domicile was recorded as Hong Kong. Macao or Taiwan.

The statistics above provide a clear picture of the demographic change of Chinese students in Britain during the past decade. From the chart, we can see the gradual steady increase in the number of Chinese students studying in UK universities since 1996, right after the launch of the first Prime Minister Initiative. And it reaches the highest between 2003 and 2005, partly due to the tightening policy of America after the September 11 terrorist attacks. The number has a tendency to drop slightly in 2005 and 2006. UK's unfriendly visa policy and the exchange rate between pound and RMB have a part to play.

Overall, according to HESA, the number of Chinese students has increased by 17.5 times. China continues to provide over 50,000 students to the UK - the highest amongst all overseas countries and accounting for more than 15% of non-UK domiciled students. Chinese students have contributed significant financial benefits to Britain and British educational institutes. However, in contrast to this, not enough knowledge is gained about this group of overseas students. Effort needs to be made to improve the quality of their educational and cultural experience in the UK.

Appendix 2 Excerpts of Jiandong's diary

Lost in London

Never had I expected my first day in London to be such a disaster. But the truth was that I, along with Huan (another fellow Chinese Chevening scholar) got lost in London! Misguided to Canterbury, we wasted two hours in the coach. We had been wandering in New Cross for more than three hours only to find that the hotel we had booked online in China was such a trivial place that no one in London seemed to know about it, even taxi drivers. So desperate, had it been possible, we would have taken a flight back to China immediately. Finally, we made a painful decision. We took a black cab to Central and stayed a night in a hotel. The cost? 100 quids each (hotel plus return taxi)! That amounts to more than 10% of our monthly scholarship stipend, and what it would cost to stay in a suite of a Chinese five-star hotel.

Obviously, the guy from the British Council who picked us up at the airport should be responsible for our disaster. Huan showed him the address of the hotel. He called the hotel and seemed to be pretty sure about its where-about. But he guided us to board a coach towards Canterbury which is miles away from London.

Basically, Londoners are friendly when asked ways. But the problem in my experience was that they liked to pinpoint east and west, south and north, which is horrendous to a person like me with poor sense of directions. Huan did have a compass with her, but I

didn't think it worked that well.

Up to now, almost one year through in London, I have been unable to locate the hotel we were looking for in the first day. I don't remember its name, but know it is somewhere in Kentwood Road. It remains a mystery in my memory of London. Every time I think about it, I smile, with no pain any more.

The 'Foreign Moon'

'The foreign moon is always brighter and rounder than the Chinese one'. While most Chinese speak of this saying ironically, at the bottoms of their hearts they still more or less believe that in many ways, the foreign is better than the native. In some of my early journalistic writings, I often used the phrases like 'according to the experience of the developed foreign countries' in support of my critical account of some Chinese businesses. But my one-year experience in London tells me that this is not always the case, in particular for those Chinese from such cities as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

The first thing I did after having settled down in my host university was to open a bank account. It took me one month, two weeks longer than the bank's promised date. This in China can be done in less than thirty minutes. It could be right for a bank to exercise prudence in opening an account to a foreigner with no history of credits. But one month was too long, anyway.

I found it funny when a professor asked in class a Chinese student: 'is there any internet café in China?' Today, internet connection is almost a must in most Chinese universities' accommodations for students. But here in my halls of residence, I still had to pay BT for my landline and broadband.

When I reported the loss of my friend's mobile to Vodafone at 9:00pm, I took it for granted that this kind of service was 24 hours effective like that in China. But the answer was: 'our staff is off duty now. Please do it tomorrow'.

My reference of these cases doesn't mean that 'the foreign moon' saying should be written the other way round. My point is, while Chinese students are flooding to foreign countries like the UK to learn the better, in some ways they should be prepared for the worse. On the other hand, foreign countries should learn more about modern China. Today, you can't expect a Chinese to scream in excitement when he/she sees a skyscraper.

Appendix 3 Excerpts of Huan's travel writing

刚到伦敦不久，走在市中心的大街上，总会看到现代建筑和传统建筑彼此相邻，而且距离彼此十分紧密。走在大街上，可以看到冷峻高贵的乔治王朝建筑，维多利亚时期柔美的建筑，还有挑战传统美学的后现代主义作品。自己心里总不明白为什么这座城市如此奇怪，各种建筑可以并列存在，好像很不和谐。1月16号第二次去看Tatemodern这个由旧船厂改变成的展览馆，馆内收藏着欧洲顶尖后现代主义作品。我的感觉已经和第一次很不一样。第一次进馆，怀着的是好奇，出来的是拒绝的心理。而这一次虽然我还不能去认同很多作品之所以成为作品的价值，但我却学会并愿意去了解它。下午的阳光难得灿烂，于是决定沿着泰晤士河边走，再次去看看塔桥。

走出Tatemodern，前面就是伦敦著名的后现代建筑作品千禧桥，而千禧桥的对面，是高高耸立的圣保罗大教堂，现代与传统在鲜明对比着，沿着泰晤士河边到塔桥，随时都可以看到这些对比鲜明的景观。但这一次我感觉到它们是和谐的，也明白了伦敦的魅力就自在于它的包容性。伦敦学会包容各种建筑，艺术和人文景观，而这些多元文化则让伦敦与众不同，成了欧洲之都。我把寒假期间和16号拍下的一些伦敦印象，集中在一起，希望你们从中可以看看伦敦不同角落的特色。

春游欧洲

风儿的味道变了，花儿也微露笑脸，春天骑着马儿就要来啦。迷人的季节将至，我也暂且把书放下，去闻闻醉人的风，看看迷人的花，欣赏美丽的大自然。半年的留英生涯基本都是在书本上度过，每每出去溜达，心里总是愧疚不已。这次终于下定决心,趁着冬日时节，把所有的作业都做好，利用复活节假期好好去欣赏异国的风光。

欧洲的春天是个迷人的季节，一日之隔，风儿的味道就已经截然不同。春风拂面，

所有的不快似乎都可以忘却，所有的斗志似乎都可以被消磨，只想懒洋洋地去享受阳光的沐浴。伦敦的大街小巷，每个角落，因为春天的来临更显得格外迷人。半年的留学生涯，好像已经有点喜欢上这个城市。快节奏的广州让自己颇显浮躁的心态在这里慢慢地被磨平，学会去欣赏它的悠闲自若。而也因是异乡人，远离它的实际所以也更能去发掘它的美。真幸运自己有机会出来看看这个世界。留学的生涯不仅是知识的收获，而且更是生活体验的扩充，希望这些收获能让自己更加去体味和珍惜人生。还有5个月，这里的一切都将成为记忆，想家的同时也开始怀念起在这里的每一种感受。希望以后可以更合理安排时间，走多点路，拍下每一个值得想念的角落，让回忆有承托的空间。

哈罗德百货公司是伦敦最顶尖的百货公司，汇聚世界名牌，还没有走进这座百年老店，外面的橱窗摆设已经极尽侈糜，极力渲染着它的美艳。这些照片是在26号拍的，可惜由于圣诞哈罗德闭门3天，所以没法进入看看。这才明白圣诞假期在外国人眼里绝对是家庭团聚的日子，和我们过节大街热热闹闹完全不同。圣诞晚上和25号伦敦全城的公共交通停开，26号开始恢复正常，大街上人迹稀疏，正是好好拍照的好机会，但是由于自己只穿了一件薄风衣，在大街冷得直打颤，只好中途放弃乖乖回去了。改天再好好逛吧。

苏格兰有着英国最独特的地貌，特别是地势崎岖陡峭，山峦起伏的高地地区。走在苏格兰的每个地方，似乎都可以感受高地民族独特的精神风貌，也好像可以明白这片独特的土地为什么会孕育着条傲不逊的高地民族。苏格兰的山峦风貌，时时刻刻地让我回忆起了新疆天山一带的山貌，它们都有着大片的草原，只是苏格兰的山峦更加起伏一些，针叶树木面积不是那么浓密，有些地方更加显得荒凉一些。92年游天山的时候，我还不满20岁，一路上和同学们为天山美丽的风景不断地大声惊叫，放肆地宣泄着自己的快乐。10几年后在苏格兰，自己却愿意静静地把感受放在心里，尽量多地把美景收入自己的眼睛里，享受快乐的方式已经悄悄地发生了变化，**真**不知道自己是成熟了还是老了。

Appendix 4 Huan's email to friends

Dear,

When I filled in the questionnaire sent by Daniel to ask us which part of aspects that we would be glad to leave behind in the UK yesterday, I thought of the music in the London underground. It always touches my heart and makes me feel at peace every time when I travel in the underground. I think I am going to miss it the most when I go back home. However, tragedies happened in the underground where innocent people died. Death sometimes can be so close to us. And this time it happened to the place in which we spend nearly one year and experience some of the most unforgettable moments in our life. As an international news editor, I have seen lots of bloodshed pictures of all kinds of disasters. But this time, it happened so close to me that it really shocked me and made me understand once more deeply that how vulnerable life sometimes is. We may not be able to change our destiny sometimes, but I do think we can try to live our life as meaningfully as possible. Life is short, live it.

Attached please find the music that I hear and love the most in the London underground. Enjoy your days in the UK.

Appendix 5 Glossary

CHINESE STUDENTS   In this thesis, Chinese students refer to those from the People's Republic of China excluding Taiwan and Hong Kong.

ORSAS   Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme funded by the UK government

GRE   Graduate Record Examination: a requirement for entry into US universities

IELTS   the International English Language Testing System

UKCISA   the UK Council for International Student Affairs

HESA   Higher Education Statistics Agency

UKCOSA

the council for International Education (formerly the united Kingdom Council overseas Students' affairs) is a UK-based agency which supports the work of voluntary sector organizations, study abroad administrators, recruiters, student union Sabbatical officers and staff, housing administrators and registry staff.

UNIVERSITIES UK

the umbrella organization for the heads of 131 institutions of higher learning

PMI 1

The Prime Minister's Initiative was originally launched by the Government in 1999as a 5-year strategy to increase the number of international students in the UK.

PMI 2

A second phase of the PMI was launched in 2006. This five-year strategy has four interconnected strands with a focus on the quality of international student experience.

BRITISH CHEVENING SCHOLARSHIPS

Funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and administered by the British Council, they enable overseas students to study in the United Kingdom.

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Appendix 6 Chinese Names and Terms

Chapter 1

fumu zai bu yuanyou (Confucius) 父母在不远游

hu kou 户口

hui dang ling jue ding, yi lan zhong sha xiao 会当凌绝顶一览众山小

Du Fu 杜甫

xiao ren shu 小人书

liyu tiao longmen 鲤鱼跳龙门

tie fan wan 铁饭碗

30 er li 三十而立

Chapter 2

san cun jin lian, 三寸金莲

Hong Ying 虹影

Chapter 4

jidan li tao gutou 鸡蛋里挑骨头

youren youyu 游刃有余

kaotian chifan 靠天吃饭

yihua 憶化

Chapter 5

du ri ru nian 度日如年

ren qing 人情

guanxi 关系

you xue 游学

ya yi 压抑

ren qi tun sheng 忍气吞声

wu qu 误区

Chapter 6

Mao Zedong 毛泽东

Zhou Enlai 周恩来

Deng Xiaoping 邓小平

qi pao 旗袍

Zhang Yimou 张艺谋

Chapter 7

du jin 镀金

Shen Congwen 沈从文

Lu Xun 鲁迅

jia, jia yuan 家 家园

luoye guigen 落叶归根