You can easily feel like a nobody:
an interpretative phenomenological analysis of the lived experiences of 12 Chinese post-graduate students in higher education in the United Kingdom

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November 2018

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education

Declaration of originality and length

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

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It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Table of contents

Chapter 1

Contextualising (1): opening doors

Chapter 2

Contextualising (2): Prior research and current perspectives

Chapter 3

Clarifying: philosophical commitments and methodological underpinnings

Chapter 4

Constructing and connecting: findings and discussion

Chapter 5

Sharing and shaping: recommendations for practice and future research

Chapter 6

Closing some doors; leaving others ajar

List of references   *233*

Appendices   *247*

List of tables and figures

FIGURE   **PAGE**

List of appendices

Acknowledgements

I extend my thanks to the many people who assisted in creating the work presented in this thesis. First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr Richard Byers and Dr Carol Holiday, who have been consistently compassionate, reassuring and infinitely wise throughout my project. They shaped this work deftly, almost always without my realising it. Similarly, my colleagues on the Doctor of Education programme at the Faculty of Education have been supportive, rational and inspirational.

Thank you to Ruth Hamilton, Xana de Nagy and Paula de Nagy, who, 25 years ago, taught me how to teach. I would not be an educator were it not for them. David Block planted a doctoral seed in my mind a decade ago. Tracey Costley, Damian Fitzpatrick and Jayne Pearson provided thought-provoking discussions.

Thank you to my parents, Tony and Judy, for their constant love and support.

Thank you especially to Craig Leaper, who understood the time and effort involved in writing a thesis, and for commenting on this one as it came together.

Finally, thank you to all my students, who have taught me about the world, and about myself. In particular, thank you to the twelve participants in this project who gave so freely and generously of their time and who were willing to share their lives with a stranger.

Abstract

Higher education in the UK has been transformed in diverse and far-reaching ways in recent decades, most notably through the internationalisation of the sector. Internationalisation has brought about many opportunities for states, institutions and individuals, but also raised concurrent challenges for all. Differences in approaches to knowledge and scholarship – cultures of learning – have led international students, and post-graduate students from mainland China in particular, to be commonly conceptualised as deficient when they rub up against different practices in the UK.

This thesis explores the experiences of 12 mainland Chinese post-graduate students across three higher education institutions in the UK. Data was generated through in-depth, focussed interviews, with the analysis drawing on the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to generate a thematic, idiographic account of the participants' lifeworlds. The interviews indicated that any satisfying outcomes of the participants' sojourns were tempered by significant challenges, namely: establishing meaningful relationships with tutors and other students; feeling isolated, lonely and marginalised; struggling with emotional wellbeing; adjusting to new pedagogical practices and struggling with curricular content. In addition, transitioning to post-graduate study, and tense relationships between students from mainland China and those from Hong Kong and Taiwan, emerged as unexpected aspects of their lifeworlds.

Given the range of challenges experienced by this cohort, this thesis draws on the emancipatory stances of neo-Marxism and critical transformative pedagogy to trouble current discourses. It militates for a reframing of the ways in which Chinese post-graduate students are conceptualised in higher education in the UK, which necessitates greater recognition and appreciation of the pluralithic approaches to knowledge and scholarship which are present in university classrooms. As this is a professional doctorate, suggestions for adjusting classroom practices, curricular content and institutional approaches are made, and I call for a deeper understanding of cultures of learning in university settings, for the benefit of all.

Chapter 1

Contextualising (1): opening doors

1.1 Overview of this chapter and a rationale for the title

What follows is an interpretive phenomenological analysis of the lived experiences of 12 Chinese post-graduate students in higher education in the United Kingdom. This enquiry is important and significant because Chinese students are conceptualised and shaped by abstracted and inequitable discourses which have led to only a "partial understanding" (Straker, 2016:300) of the cohort and which therefore perpetuate stereotypical and hackneyed perceptions of deficiency. They are consistently, and reductively, portrayed as a homogenous community, and characterised by being different, and distanced, from other students on campus; as a result, many misperceptions have arisen about and around them (see 2.5.1). This has led to discriminatory behaviours and practices – both unwitting and overt – towards them (Cheng et al., 2018). Prior research (see Chapter 2) and the findings of this project (see 4.4 and 4.5) indicate that these behaviours and practices have resulted in Chinese post-graduate students encountering significant persistent challenges when studying in the UK. However, despite the high numbers of Chinese students in higher education in the UK – 95,090 in 2016/17 (HESA, 2018) – they are in many ways a "hidden population" (Lee, 1993). There is, therefore, a real and pressing need to determine how Chinese post-graduate students themselves perceive and articulate their experience of being a student in the UK, both academically and socially, and to identify ways in which this experience can be enhanced.

My research unfolded the lifeworlds of my participants in order to identify what challenges they encounter, and the factors that confound and alleviate those challenges. My findings lead me to argue that institutions should do more to facilitate the acculturation of Chinese post-graduate students in the UK, and that the assumption that these students automatically "decode" (Carroll & Appleton, 2007:74) their new academic setting effectively should be confronted. I contest current conceptualisations of these students, and intend, ultimately, to shift mindsets and practices, by arguing that institutions need to adapt to the new internationalised profile of their cohorts, not vice versa, and that a middle way is needed.

Central to this is the need to raise awareness among both staff and students of the different approaches to teaching, learning and knowledge – cultures of learning (see 2.5) – which are present on campus. By arguing that institutional practices and perceptions need to change in order to better attend to the new internationalised landscape of higher education, this project is driven by a "pedagogical good" (van Manen, 2001). The fact that this is a professional doctorate (EdD) has helped me attend to this, because I have been able to draw on the understanding I have garnered about the experiences of Chinese post-graduate students in the UK in order to speak directly to diverse constituencies who should heed what my participants say about their lifeworlds in this country. This enquiry is therefore of interest to classroom practitioners (see 5.3), curriculum planners (see 5.4) and institutions (see 5.5), as well as those who have an interest in higher education teaching and learning, and student welfare, more widely. I also speak to other researchers in similar settings (see 5.6). By speaking to these varied constituencies, I aim to show how the lived experiences of Chinese post-graduate students in the UK are troublesome, and can be better than they currently are.

This opening chapter provides a rationale for my choice of enquiry. It also gives some preliminary insights into me and my professional setting, in order to contextualise what follows. The metaphor of opening doors fits well with what this thesis aims to do: it conveys a sense of entering into existing spaces which may not have been seen by others. As it is an introductory chapter, I paint with broad brushstrokes, but return to pick out issues, tensions and concepts in more detail in subsequent chapters. The chapters of this thesis do the following:

- Chapter 1 lays out my motivation in carrying out this research, and considers how I, as a researcher and a person, have subjectivities, positions and biases which need to be made explicit [🗩 1.1] if my account is to be trustworthy. It draws on my professional experience to present four vignettes which bring to life the challenges faced by Chinese post-graduate students. These vignettes exemplify the four strands of substantive knowledge which cradle this enquiry and which are explored in more depth in…

> [🗩 1.1] The text boxes throughout this account serve to make my perceptions and reflections explicit and audible. See 1.3 for a rationale and account of this.

- …Chapter 2, which scopes out prior research and current perspectives relating to the four themes which buttress this research, namely: (1) higher education in the UK: policy and praxis; (2) acculturation; (3) cultures of learning; and (4) the transition to post-graduate study.

- Chapter 3 gives an account of the philosophies and methodological choices which underpin this project.

- Chapter 4 forms the basis for new substantive knowledge and my contribution to scholarship. It provides a thematic analysis of the data collected, and considers the extent to which the experiences of my participants are in dialogue with the wider conceptual and empirical literatures.

- In Chapter 5, I consider what changes to practice should be enacted in order to challenge the status quo. I also consider what research could supplement and complement my own in future.

- Chapter 6 reflects on the tensions inherent in the practitioner-researcher role, and how my doctoral journey has transformed me as a person.

Having laid out what each chapter of this thesis purports to do, I now move to make a claim and take a position in relation to my project.

1.2 A claim, and a position

In Chapter 2, I explore the substantive context of this enquiry. At the heart of this is the direction of UK higher education policy over recent decades, which has accelerated the marketisation and internationalisation of the sector. I will argue that this policy has had a significant bearing on institutions and individuals, and, by extension, on my participants.

This leads me to make this claim: higher education in the United Kingdom, customarily held to be a setting for progressive social democracy, does not always do what it intends to. Instead, the "neo-liberal colonisation of higher education" (Boden & Epstein, 2006:223) has brought about a number of questionable outcomes (see 2.3), and Chinese post-graduate students in particular have been impacted by this. I acknowledge that this claim is bold and contentious; some may even call it belligerent. It has significant and far-reaching implications, one of which is that current higher education policy in relation to international

students (and Chinese post-graduate students in particular) is at best disingenuous, and at worst fraudulent. However, any educational enquiry should problematise the status quo in order to bring about improvements, and I believe my uncomfortable claim does need to be made, as it has substantial implications for the day-to-day lives of institutions, tutors [🗨[1.2]] and students.

> [🗨[1.2]] Throughout this account I use the term "tutor" for consistency and brevity, although I recognise that this does not reflect the range of roles of faculty within institutions.

I argue that the political and social location of UK higher education today has led to a situation in which Chinese students are significantly disadvantaged. Since their sojourns in the UK are typically characterised by loneliness, marginalisation and episodes of depression, this thesis has an element of "social and cultural criticism" (Kinchloe et al., 2013:342) embedded in it, as I argue that universities recruit high fee-paying students from overseas, particularly from China, principally for political and financial reasons, but have not provided them with the social or academic environments they need in return. These environments have been moulded by policies enacted in the 1980s and 1990s (Humfrey, 2011), and have also been shaped by more recent discourses of discrimination (Ramos et al., 2016) and reaction (Lefringhausen & Marshall, 2016). The inclusion of overseas students in immigration figures is currently hotly debated in the UK, although it is "powerful voices" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998:9) who shape this debate, and international students themselves rarely have the opportunity to contribute to it. I have invited these students to make their "tentative, marginalised voices" (Etherington, 2004:21) more clearly heard in order to challenge and subvert those domineering discourses, since they shape and define the international student's overseas experience (Prieto-Welch, 2016). As a result, I wish "not just to explain but to change" (Newby, 2014) the status quo. I return to this in 1.2 and 3.6, and also in Chapter 5.

As a result of the claim made here, and the pedagogical good referred to in the previous section, there is an emancipatory strand running through this thesis. Given this claim and this emancipatory strand, it is important to state at the outset that I have viewed my participants' lifeworlds through the twin lenses of neo-Marxism (see e.g. Greaves et al., 2007) – more specifically, a Gramscian neo-Marxist perspective on the social world – and critical transformative pedagogy (see e.g. Morrow & Torres, 2002; Kim & Slapac, 2015). The former argues that inequalities in society are a result of imbalances in socio-cultural power (and de-emphasises the economic aspect of classical Marxism), whilst the latter encourages

all those involved in education to question and critique those engrained socio-cultural power structures. In adopting such an explicit political position, I recognise that I risk presenting an ideologically-biased account. However, a political (small "p") orientation makes social research more committed, not less (Griffiths, 1998), and research in educational arenas cannot be anything other than partisan (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007), since it aims to transform policy and practice [💬1.3]. In addition, in order to ensure that what follows is trustworthy, and to give the reader a context in which to situate this enquiry, I clarify my social, political and professional location in 1.7.1, and also give an account of my interest in, and interpretation of, neo-Marxism and critical transformative pedagogy in 3.6.1 and 3.6.2 respectively.

> [💬1.3] I believe that learning and knowledge are drivers of social progress. Increasingly, though, education is manipulated for political ends. This is why an emancipatory perspective resonates with me: I feel that the governance of higher education over recent decades has led to the exploitation of international students, and that the system (particularly dual fees) has led to inequality.

Although my professional and experiential knowledge, coupled with the insights gained from my enquiry, have led me to take an overt social and political position in this thesis, I acknowledge that what I say forms part of a discursive debate: there are others who disagree with what I say. I will endeavour, as Taylor & Hicks (2009) implore, to be courteous to those who take different standpoints from me, and critically explore contentions and divergences.

Given the scope of the enquiry, this thesis does not militate for an identification of causation of the kind that may be associated with large-scale quantitative studies (Andrews, 2003), and nor do I provide an account which speaks to (or of, or for) identical settings. Rather, the account is grounded in the subjective experience of 12 Chinese post-graduate participants and their interpretations of their own lifeworlds. I recognise that I am dealing with situated knowledge (Kvale, 2007), and that this report is just one of many possible constructions of my participants' experiences: another researcher, or other research questions, would make sense of the participants' lifeworlds in other ways and generate different accounts. I also recognise that what follows reflects what I found interesting and worthwhile to explore and write about. I recognise that what my participants told me about their lifeworlds in the UK was defined by my interests, which have shaped what I say here [💬1.4]. Nonetheless, there is some element of transferability in

> [💬1.4] If I had been concerned with the participants' use of grammar, or of discourse, for instance, I would have constructed a radically different project.

what follows, given that, whilst my participants' experiences are unique to them, they are predicated on what is "shared and common" (Smith, et al., 2009) with others in comparable contexts (See 4.4 and 4.5), and so what I say may resonate with other practitioners in similar settings.

1.3 Personal Critical Commentaries

This thesis is the tip of a metaphorical iceberg: beneath the waterline, invisible to the reader, lies the process I went through in putting together this account. Since responsible researchers provide a justification and explanation for the choices they made about their projects, rather than simply enumerating findings (Dowling & Brown, 2009), I have also chosen to include in this account a reflection on some of the key incidents on my five-year doctoral journey [🗩[1.5]]. These incidents, which McCormack (2006:183) refers to as the "critical moments of candidature", gave me pause for thought or raised questions, or on occasion even changed my direction of travel. Whilst it would be possible to explore these incidents in a stand-alone section, I feel that presenting these reflections in tandem with the main text provides a more grounded and powerful commentary. These reflections, which I have termed "Personal Critical Commentaries" appear in the blue text boxes. These boxes have allowed me to show my "workings-out" (Taylor & Hicks, 2009), and to indicate to the reader how I responded to critical incidents. I flag up, explicitly, what my thinking and decision-making processes were at key points on my journey, and also reflect on how I, as a person, am ineluctably "in" this thesis. Writing about such things has allowed me to highlight and deliberate on my own "imperatives and epistemological presuppositions", as well as my "subjective, intersubjective and normative reference claims" (Kinchloe et al., 2013:348). Since this account incorporates a reflexive strand (see 1.7), this commentary is therefore also a form of empirical evidence (Forbes, 2008), and contributes to making the account trustworthy (see 1.6).

> [🗩[1.5]] By "five years", I mean the formalised five years as an EdD student, since my relationship with Chinese post-graduate students and my awareness of the fact that all is not well in their worlds has been going on for longer than this.

1.4 Why *this* enquiry? My motivation in exploring the experiences of Chinese post-graduate students

My account focuses explicitly and solely on Chinese [🕪[1.6]] post-graduate students studying in the UK. There are four reasons for this. Firstly, Chinese students are the largest group of international students worldwide (Yu & Zhang, 2016), and China is by far the largest provider of international students to the UK (Wang et al., 2015), sending five times as many students as Malaysia, the

> [🕪[1.6]] My participants were from the People's Republic of China, rather than Hong Kong, Macau or Taiwan. For expediency, I refer to "Chinese" students, rather than "mainland Chinese" in this text, and use "Hong Kong" and "Taiwan" when referencing those two locations specifically. See, though, 4.5.6.

second-largest (HESA, 2018); Chinese students have consistently been the largest nationality group on programmes on which I have taught. Secondly, although more university places have become available, demand still outstrips supply in China, particularly for post-graduate programmes (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). This, coupled with the switch from a command economy to a mixed command/market-based economy in the 1990s has meant that many self-funded Chinese students have opted to study overseas, predominantly in the US, the UK, Canada, France, Germany and New Zealand (Heng, 2018), in contrast with the government-sponsored sojourns prior to that date (Wu, 2014). Prestige is still attached to an overseas education, as it is deemed to increase employability (Cheng et al., 2018), provide an international outlook on the world, and improve English language skills (Wang et al., 2015), and indeed, it has been reported that it is parental pressure which leads many Chinese to study at university (Boshier, 2017), and parents often select the programme their child will study (Clark & Gieve, 2006) – like one of the participants, Tina, in 3.2. Thirdly, Chinese students in the UK have been identified recurrently in the conceptual and empirical literatures as facing challenges in social and academic acculturation, yet there is scant guidance in official policy documents (e.g. QAA, 2012; QAA, 2015) for attending to the welfare of these students, nor how to manage the intercultural classroom (Stier, 2006), and it is as if the fees of international students are more important than their wellbeing (Jiang, 2011). Fourthly, from a pragmatic perspective, the high number of Chinese post-graduate students in the UK means they can be accessed more easily than other cohorts (Zhou et al., 2011).

A succession of critical incidents a number of years ago alerted me to the fact that all was not well with some of my Chinese post-graduate students, and that there was something problematic with their experiences in the UK. Next, I present four vignettes which exemplify

this. They chronicle not just lived experience but the "emotionality of the lived experience" (McCormack, 2006) and, as such, they expose not simply some slices of the lives of these students, but rather, some slices of lives *in trouble*. Highlighting these troubling experiences is at the heart of the emancipatory strand which runs through this thesis (see 1.2).

Vignettes are a "focused description of… events taken to be representative or typical" of a phenomenon (Miles & Huberman,1984:81, in Trafford & Leshem, 2009), and the four which follow are indicative personalised and ethnographic illustrations of some of the difficulties Chinese post-graduate students encounter in the UK. They exemplify the four substantive themes which frame this enquiry (see 1.8 and Chapter 2), and each made me incrementally more aware of the existence of a problem hiding in plain sight.

Vignette 1. Louise: misled by her agent

Louise was a bright and creative student, but was failing to engage with her programme. She was consistently late for class, and had a high absence rate. I probed the reasons for this with her. She dissolved into tears, but was eventually able to tell me that she had taken a job in China and saved hard in order to study in the UK, believing this would enhance her future career prospects. She had also, like many international students, engaged an agent to help her through the application and visa processes. The agent had charged high fees, but had given her inaccurate information about her application which had cost her a significant amount of money to rectify. Not only was this a loss of her hard-earned savings, but also jeopardised her immigration status: as a "high-risk" nation, the Home Office requires Chinese students to show they have sufficient money to pay their tuition fees for the duration of their stay in the UK, plus £1,265 per month (Home Office, 2017) to cover living in London. I asked whether she would be interested in accessing the institution's student hardship fund, but, as she pointed out, she was not actually in hardship, but, rather, had been misled by an unscrupulous agent.

Vignette 2. Ruby: struggling with emotional wellbeing

Ruby had a good undergraduate GPA from a prestigious Chinese university and a proficiency in English which allowed her to communicate with ease. However, like Louise, her progress was not matching her potential, and her attendance and motivation were both poor. I tried to dig down and explore why this might be the case. Ruby became progressively more subdued, and eventually lost eye-contact. She told me she spent her weekends alone in her room, was sleeping poorly, losing weight and suffering from headaches and stomach pains [💬1.7]. She had been an "A" student in China but in the UK had never got more than a pass on any assessment, which she found demoralising. She had no-one to talk to and could not discuss her problems with her parents in China for fear of worrying them, and felt she was letting them down.

> [💬1.7] I can recognise the symptoms of depression, and surmised that was the case with Ruby. As so often happens with new experiences, once I had become aware of this phenomenon, it began to manifest itself everywhere: emails from students explaining absences, or poor academic engagement, included remarks such as "Recently, I always feel tired"; "I feel so depressed to learn"; "I saw the doctor because of […] blue mood in London". This was a critical incident in my professional career, as prior to this point I had no inkling that so many of my students were suffering from potentially debilitating mental health problems. In retrospect, it was probably Ruby who led me to carry out this research.

Vignette 3. Yuanqi, Chenxu and Bobby: academic misconduct

An assessed essay submitted by three students revealed high percentages of non-ascribed writing when passed through an originality programme. The percentage was so high on each script that it triggered the institution's misconduct procedure, and the students were requested to appear before the university's Academic Misconduct Board. As the programme coordinator, I also attended [💬1.8]. It emerged that one of the students had accessed a paid essay-writing service, and had passed the essay on to his two colleagues, who had copied from it. When questioned why, one of the students became emotional. He admitted to having used the essay his friend had bought because he was unsure of how to write his essay and was scared of failing the programme, since this would put at risk his future studies in the UK. When pressed on why he did not seek more help prior to submitting his assignment, he stated that he was ashamed to admit to his tutors that he was

> [💬1.8] These boards are grisly: although the panel was considerate, the courtroom-like atmosphere and the high stakes involved made for an uncomfortable experience for the students.

struggling: he felt he should be able write the essay himself. He knew of the need to "be critical", "to engage with theory" and "take a stance"– but did not know how to do those things. The shift to a new context with new requirements had led to a conflict with his deep-seated perceptions about teaching, learning and knowledge.

Vignette 4. Pauline and Jayne: "Post-graduate students should know better"

This vignette does not draw directly on the experiences *of* students, but more on the expectations *on* them. It occurred in a department I worked in, where I overheard a conversation between two colleagues. They were discussing their students – post-graduates – and complaining about their inability to work autonomously on a researched assignment. Their conversation revolved around the fact that the students needed a lot of guidance and hand-holding, and that, given that they had already been undergraduates, they should be able to do this kind of work easily and independently. Post-graduate students are often viewed as "expert students" (Tobbell et al., 2010) who are, essentially, doing "more of the same" – but this is not the case: being a Master's student requires a high level of skills and knowledge and the cognitive and academic demands placed on post-graduate students are greater than on undergraduates. However, no real acknowledgement is ever made of the challenges of transitioning to post-graduate study, as Pauline and Jayne demonstrated.

Andrews (2003) points out that many research projects emerge from a professional problem, and, for me, the four vignettes above are an indication of what piqued my interest in this field. I made some initial sorties into the literature on the experiences of international students in the UK, which gave me some understanding of what those difficulties are. I came across reports in the literature (Parker et al., 2005; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Jung et al., 2007; Yan & Berliner, 2011) which revealed that Chinese students in UK HEIs face significant challenges (see 2.5) which are not attended to, or even fully appreciated by institutions. I came to realise that underlying each event was "something to which I [had a] fleeting awareness but whose nature was largely unknown" (Moustakas, 1990). At the time, I was studying for a Post-Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) and my dissertation explored how international students are supported in higher education. However, the dissertation was short and I found it actually raised more questions than it answered. This led me to this doctoral research.

1.5 My research questions

Having established my impetus in exploring the experience of Chinese post-graduate students in the UK, it is important to flag up what I wished to learn, and add to the body of established knowledge, about this phenomenon. In order to show that a research project is important and relevant, it is crucial to state early on in a thesis what the research aimed to establish (Maxwell, 2012), and so I have elected to lay out my research questions briefly here, although I return to them in depth in 3.4. There is little point, I feel, in clarifying the concepts, methodologies and theoretical considerations I applied to my project without first indicating the purpose of the research.

My project was shaped – eventually – by two research questions. These underwent much refinement and (re)articulation (see 3.4), but, at the point of submitting this final draft [🗨︎1.9], they are:

1. How do Chinese post-graduate students describe their academic and social acculturation in higher education in the UK?
2. What do Chinese post-graduate students perceive to be the factors which confound and facilitate their academic and social acculturation to higher education in the UK?

> [🗨︎1.9] It may seem incongruous to refer to this document, which has been five years in the crafting and which has been edited and reviewed constantly over that period, as a "draft". I would argue, though, that what I present here is only valid at this point in time: in another month's time my interpretation and perspective would be different from what is written here. I recognise that I do need to present something "fixed", but I do not feel that submission marks an endpoint.

In order to offer responses to these questions, I conducted research across three higher education institutions in the UK. I opted for a qualitative paradigm, as my interest was with "how people think and act in their everyday lives" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998:8). It was guided (but not fettered) by the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2009), or IPA (see 3.8) and was reflexive in nature (see 1.7), both aspects being woven together in a way that has allowed me to focus on both substantive findings as well as my own "political, ideological, metathoeretical and linguistic context" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000:265).

1.6 A commitment to trustworthiness

There are expectations of a doctoral thesis. It must be both cohesive and coherent, show how the research design was rigorous and robust, and consider the ways in which that research has impact in the field. These notions can be gathered together under the heading "doctorateness" (Trafford & Leshem, 2009). In qualitative social research such as this, doctorateness can be tricky to operationalise because, unlike in quantitative research, there is no "arsenal of validity tests" (Hedges, 2010) to establish reliability. This has led to claims, often by quantitative researchers (Shenton, 2004), that qualitative research is little more than a "collection of anecdotes" (Williams & Morrow, 2009:576); indeed, two decades ago, Denzin wrote about the "legitimation crisis" that was already disquieting qualitative research (Denzin, 1996), and urged interpretive researchers to consider what criteria they employ in order to validate their work. Since then, there has been a discernible move towards the promotion of evidence-based research as the gold standard of social research (Cannella & Lincoln, 2004), and although this may placate the public bodies which fund large-scale research, it risks reducing research with and about people to endless rounds of observations, checklists and predictions (Taylor & White, 2000), rather than allowing an understanding of social phenomena to emerge from the voices of those who actually experience them. Qualitative social researchers, therefore, have to try "valiantly and honourably" (Williams & Hill, 2012:182) to show how their projects demonstrate trustworthiness.

In order to demonstrate how my own project is trustworthy, I initially identified a common core of principles from the various conceptualisations of trustworthiness present in the literature. However, perhaps predictably, different voices in the literature argue for different conceptualisations. Guba (1981), for example, was an early voice in the discussion, calling on qualitative researchers to consider the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of their research. Dowling & Brown (2009) appealed to researchers to show how their work attends to validity, reliability and sampling procedures, whilst Williams & Morrow (2009) asked for a deliberation on the integrity, the balance of subjectivity and reflexivity and the communication of their research. More recently, Coleman (2014) has argued that qualitative researchers need to evidence the originality, significance and rigour of their studies. Through a synthesis of these different concretisations, I drew up an initial

framework which encapsulated five pillars of trustworthiness which I felt underpinned my project. These pillars are laid out in Table 1, below,

Pillar:	Requires a commentary which considers:
Originality	What is the gap in knowledge which my research attempts to fill?
Significance	To which constituencies does my account speak, in political, pedagogical and practical terms?
Rigour	Are the methods I have selected sufficiently precise to allow conclusions to be drawn, and are those conclusions justified by the data generated?
Impact	What bearing will my findings have on both those in the field and those outside my setting who may have a vested interest in it?
Communication	How will what this thesis has to say be communicated to those in the field and those outside my setting?

Table 1: Five pillars of trustworthiness

Later, however, I happened upon Tracy's (2010) concept of "Big Tent" criteria for qualitative research. This eight-point conceptualisation, is "expansive, yet flexible" (ibid., p837) and resonated so powerfully with what I wished to say about the trustworthiness of my own project that I elected to replace my five pillars and adopt Tracy's *in toto* [🗩[1.10]]. This eight-point conceptualisation is summarised in Table 2:

[🗩[1.10]] Adapting a framework "off-the-shelf" in this manner initially felt naughty, in some ways, as if I was being lazy, or duplicitous. However, it also seemed churlish to reject something simply because it was already fully formed. Yes, a doctoral thesis needs to be original and creative, but there seems to be no point in wasting time and effort in recreating established knowledge if it is suitable and justifiable.

Criterion:	Requires a commentary which considers whether:
Worthy topic	The topic of the research is **relevant, timely, significant** and **interesting**.
Rich rigor	The study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex **theoretical constructs, data, time in the field, sample(s), context(s)** and **data collection and analysis processes**.
Sincerity	The study is characterized by **self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, the inclinations of the researcher(s)** and **transparency about the methods used and challenges encountered**.
Credibility	The research is marked by **thick description, concrete detail, explication of tacit (non-textual) knowledge, showing rather than telling, triangulation or crystallization, multivocality** and **member reflections**.
Resonance	The research influences, affects, or moves particular readers or a variety of audiences through **aesthetic, evocative representation, naturalistic generalizations** with **transferable findings**.
Significant contribution	The research provides a significant contribution **conceptually, theoretically, practically, morally, methodologically** and **heuristically.**
Ethical	The research considers **procedural ethics (with human subjects), situational and culturally specific ethics, relational ethics** and **exiting ethics**.
Meaningful coherence	The study **achieves what it purports to be about, uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals,** and **meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions/foci, findings,** and **interpretations with each other**.

Table 2: Eight "Big Tent" Criteria for Qualitative Trustworthiness (after Tracy, 2010)

In practice, however, it is insufficient simply to say "I have been trustworthy"; it is, instead, necessary to demonstrate *how* trustworthiness has been established. With this in mind I return to Tracy's criteria at the end of each of the following chapters, in order to show that what I decided and did at each stage of this project can be considered to be truthful and dependable [💬1.11].

[💬1.11] I present the key concepts of trustworthiness established in Table 2 **in bold** in each of these end-of-chapter sections, to highlight how these concepts have been attended to.

1.7 Reflexivity: characteristics, development and purpose [🗨1.12]

If it is to be trustworthy, any account of the social world needs to make the researcher's subjective perspectives and allegiances explicit. In this spirit, this section sets out who I am, what I do professionally, and my biases and allegiances in relation to my field of research. In doing so, I am following a tradition of qualitative social enquiry in which, as Coffey (2002:314, in Taylor & Hicks, 2009:62) puts it, researchers are "simultaneously involved in auto/biographical work of their own". I consider why it is important for those who carry out research in a social context, and who draw on interpretive traditions, to consider their own personal and professional assumptions as part of the research process [🗨1.13].

Even before I began this project, I knew too much about the experiences of Chinese post-graduate students in the UK to be an impartial commentator on their lifeworlds. I had an understanding of their experiences in the UK (see 1.4), I had seen how institutions view and conceptualise them, and I had a good idea what problems they typically encounter. This understanding was shaped by the years I have spent teaching Chinese post-graduate students (see 1.7.1), and it was my professional practice which led me to recognise that many of my students were facing significant long-term challenges in the UK. This recognition led to this project, and I acknowledge that my views of this setting are grounded in my personal experience. Therefore, airing my biases, allegiances and assumptions in relation to both my professional milieu and the wider world in this chapter will help me "represent difference better" (Pillow, 2003:176) when I come to draw out the essential aspects of my participants' experience (in Chapter 4) and make suggestions for practice (in Chapter 5).

Qualitative research in the social world concerns itself with human subjects. Their relationships and perspectives are mediated through language: in turn, the way we respond

[🗨1.12] This was a challenging section to write. Having to put on paper what makes me *me*, and articulate my allegiances and assumptions, was a hard process. Perhaps it was the idea of taking the private and making it public – what Thomson & Kamler (2010:152) describe as "running up the flag to say, 'I am here'" which was awkward. In some ways it felt self-indulgent. Why would anyone want to hear what *I* think? But I have come to recognise the central role this section has in my account.

[🗨1.13] The importance of overtly stating how and why I became interested in my field is not something I had expected to do. I had imagined that doctoral writing would/should be more "scientific" in nature – with "scientific" signifying dispassionate and stringently objective. It was a revelation to find that my research should include me "in" the work and that my reflections on the field, my enquiry, and my place in both need to be made explicit if my project is to be trustworthy.

to language and decode the meaning of an utterance is informed by our own experiences and subjectivities. Rather than bracketing off these subjectivities, in an attempt to provide a fully objective account, the turn toward dialogic accounts over recent years has led to researchers in the human sphere becoming ever-more explicit about their subjective position(s) in relation to the topic under scrutiny (Etherington, 2004). This post-modern perspective (see 2.7), which is characterised by "curiosity, doubt and irreverence" (Hedges, 2010:10) towards and about the nature of truth and reality (see 3.5), has led to a more confessional way of working in qualitative social research. Given the ever-present, intimate interplay between the researcher and the researched, we cannot be "neutral observers" (ibid., p2) of human experience. Instead, researchers acknowledge that they are people first and foremost and write themselves into their accounts. This process of "conscientisation", through which we "develop our capacity for epistemological curiosity" (Freire, 2001:55), is fundamental to reflexivity, which can be considered a tool to:

> *"demonstrate one's awareness of the problematics of doing research – issues of power, voice, researcher and researcher subjectivity [which can] validate and legitimise research precisely by raising questions about the research process."*
> (Pillow, 2010, in Thomson & Walker, 2010)

Of course, there is a risk that reflexivity can lead us to slip into what Denzin (1996:xv) calls "endless self-reflection and self-referential criticism" which is "more artful than factual" (Etherington, 2004:66), or even a slide into "self-fascinated observation" (May,1999, in Taylor & Hicks, 2009:64), thus obscuring the purpose of the research and doing nothing to draw out the experiences of the participants. The challenge for the reflexive researcher is therefore in "negotiating the swamp" (Finlay, 2002) between objective reporting and subjective reflexion, because a reflexive doctoral project still needs to be trustworthy (see 1.6). Such negotiation is delicate – Taylor & Bogdan (1998:19) call it the "phenomenological puzzle" – because reflexive qualitative researchers should not be overly self-obsessive. Rather, they need to be aware of the uncertainties that social research brings and how they inform the process, and find a "pragmatic response" (Alvesson, 2002:117) to questions of reflexivity which allows for a balance of objective report and subjective reflexion which does not stifle the voices of the participants.

Striking this balance requires a significant level of self-awareness and self-disclosure on the part of the researcher. They must be explicit about their stance in relation to the enquiry (Moustakas, 1994; Finlay, 2002; O'Leary, 2005; Clough & Nutbrown, 2007; Gilgun, 2008), and must acknowledge their own subjectivities (Etherington, 2004; Taylor & Hicks, 2009; Hedges, 2010) which may well be "deeply internalised in their mind" (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006:78). Richardson & Adams St Pierre (2008) refer to this as "honouring the location of the self" in the research process – in other words, researchers need to acknowledge that parts of their lives rub up against their research and need to be clear about what personal connections have drawn them to the field [🗨1.14]. With this in mind, I now turn to consider and clarify who I am as a person, and in particular who I am in relation to my project. My "moral intents" (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007) and political engagement will be unpacked, and I will indicate how both have shaped this enquiry.

> [🗨1.14] That said, there may be personal reasons for researchers' *not* wishing to be overt about their connection to their enquiry. For instance, a researcher exploring kleptomania may not wish to admit to a history of shoplifting. I identify with Seidman (2013), who cautions that sharing *too much* of oneself can distort the relationship between researcher and what is researched.

1.7.1 The ever-present "me" in this enquiry: my assumptions and allegiances

The exploration of any social setting is grounded in specific times, places, people, and phenomena, but is ultimately an interpretation on the part of the researcher who crafts the account. I am aware that my interpretation of the lifeworlds of my participants has been informed by my autobiographical and affective history. Ravitch & Riggan (2016) argue that these interpretations are informed by the researcher's (1) social location, (2) professional position and (3) life experience, and I will lay out these three areas to show how I play a part in this account. Clarifying my social location will allow me to indicate who I am and how my social and political allegiances have come together to inform my view of the world, and, accordingly, the political position I take in relation to my project; outlining my professional position will make my setting clear; and exploring my life experience will evidence why I sympathise – and empathise – with my post-graduate participants' lifeworlds in the UK.

My social location

I was born in 1971, in Liverpool. This was the period of the post-war consensus, an uneasy reconciliation of labour and capital, when the role of the state was understood to be to work for the good of the nation, before the shift in the 1980s to "partisanship in favour of particular interests" (Hammersley, 1999). It was a troubled time, socially: I remember power cuts, Rhodesia and the Vietnamese Boat People, and being petrified by advice on how to build a fallout shelter out of mattresses. By the 1980s, Liverpool had become marginalised politically by the ideological stance of the Trotskyist city council. It was close to collapse, with the highest level of unemployment in the UK (Owens et al., 1983, in Salt, 1985), and the "managed decline" of the city was proposed. I was fortunate to grow up in an affluent area, but even so, my formative years were spent in a city which challenged and resisted powerful institutions. Taylor & Hicks (2009) argue that "the best doctoral projects usually spring from the personal and political concerns of the researcher", and it may be that that this is one of the reasons why a Gramscian neo-Marxist perspective, which ties together social and political problems, appeals to me. To exemplify, in 2.3, I argue that neo-liberalism narratives have transformed universities into marketable – and marketised – corporations, in which education is a commodity to be bought and students are increasingly viewed and treated as consumers: I recognise that a large part of my distrust of neo-liberalism [🗨1.15] stems from my social location.

> [🗨1.15] Whilst I am not setting out to censure neo-liberalism *per se*, I do wish to set off alarm bells about the impact of the marketisation and managerialism of higher education, and how this leads universities unwittingly, to marginalise some individuals – in this case, Chinese post-graduate students.

My professional position

Education has been central to my life: I have never been anything other than either a student or a teacher. I was lucky enough to attend a good secondary school, and took a BA in French and Portuguese in Manchester. Later I studied for a Master's degree in Teaching English as a Second or Other Language (TESOL) at the Institute of Education, University of London. I also hold a Post-graduate Diploma in English Language Teaching, and a Post-graduate Certificate in Academic Practice [💬1.16]. As my participants were all post-graduate students, I could empathise well with them, as I know what it is like to be a post-graduate student.

[💬1.16] I am mindful that being in educational contexts all my life has given me insights into institutions and how educational policy impacts on the experience of individuals, but that it has restricted my knowledge of fields outside education. For instance, I have little professional knowledge of the worlds of industry, business and finance, and I recognise that my inexperience in those arenas may colour my view of the world.

I have taught in a number of different locations and sectors. I worked in a secondary school in Lisbon for a number of years, as well as in a language school there. I have worked as a trainer for initial and in-service language teachers, and continue to work as an examiner for Cambridge Assessment's Post-graduate Diploma in English Language Teaching. Since 2009, I have worked in a number of universities in the UK. My wide, varied and international teaching experience has given me a good feel for the needs of international students, especially those whose first language is not English.

I currently teach English for Academic Purposes (EAP). EAP falls within the broader field of English Language Teaching (ELT), and is informed by a range of disciplines (pure and applied linguistics, second language acquisition, education studies, cultural studies, psychology, and neuro- and sociolinguistics, among others), which were in their infancy in the middle of the twentieth century, but which have now matured into serious and robust fields, as has EAP itself (Hedge, 2000). What EAP is, and what its purpose is, means different things to different people. However, a useful working definition is provided by de Chazal (2014:78):

> *"EAP is concerned with the development of [...] "academic literacy" or "academic literacies". The [...] term is intended to convey the diverse set of skills and*

competences in academic contexts. [EAP] goes considerably beyond language alone, and emphasises academic practice in the disciplines."

In practice, then, EAP purports to provide university students with an understanding of the practices and conventions typical of undergraduate and/or post-graduate study. This immediately throws up four critically-orientated questions, however. Firstly, what marks a practice out as "typical"? There may be expectations about what university students should be able to do, but these vary from discipline to discipline: what Philosophy students need to do effectively is very different from what is required of Engineering students. Secondly, and crucially, given the nature of my own enquiry, practices which are considered characteristic of the academy in the UK are categorically not so in other parts of the world, and vice versa. This can be even more troublesome for post-graduate students who bring with them *a priori* beliefs about what university education should be, which may be at odds with those of the new setting: this tension forms a thick strand in this account. Thirdly, political, social and philosophical questions can be asked regarding power and knowledge, such as, "What do we mean when we say 'English'? What is 'good' English"? Why do linguistic models [🗨1.17] of English replicate native speaker norms, when most of the English used today is by non-native speakers communicating with other non-native speakers?" Fourthly, the terms "international" and "non-native speaker" are slippery. As Killick (2015) points out, "international" in UK higher education is not synonymous with "from another country": the fees regime is set up so that European Union students (currently) pay the same amount as domestic students, whilst international students pay significantly higher amounts. For universities, "international" is a financial and economic term, not demographic. From a neo-Marxist perspective, the fact that different fees are charged for the same service is deplorable. Secondly, there is a tendency to conflate the term "international" with "non-native speaker". However, using the definition given previously there are many "international" students for whom English is a mother tongue (Canadians, Singaporeans, Nigerians and so on), and plenty of home students for whom it is not. There is, therefore, a clear and present need to problematise the internationalisation of higher education since institutions are failing to acknowledge sufficiently the range and variety of academic practices that exist in different locations. In this thesis I refer to EAP in the UK, although EAP is not limited to the UK, and appears in many guises world-wide. There are, as is to be expected, similarities between EAP in the UK and EAP in other native

[🗨1.17] Although this research is not linguistic in nature, all the participants were all non-native speakers of English, and therefore socio-linguistic issues of this ilk must be considered.

speaker settings (Canada, the US, Ireland), but EAP can also be taught in countries where English is not a native language, either because the language of instruction in higher education may be English (the Netherlands), or because English is a lingua franca (Nigeria, India), or because the students are studying EAP on a preparatory period in their home country (China, Portugal, Saudi Arabia) before moving to an English-speaking context to study at university.

My own EAP experience is predominantly on programmes for post-graduate students. Such programmes support students in developing their language for Master's level study in the UK, and usually take place in the year before students embark on their programmes. Intakes tend to be smaller than those for pre-undergraduate students, and therefore tend to be more personal and welcoming. Applicants usually have good undergraduate degrees and are competent users of English, although do not have a sufficiently high language proficiency to allow them direct entry onto a post-graduate programme and so they enrol on these programmes to raise that level. Students on my programmes have come from a range of countries, although China is by far the largest nationality group represented, followed by other nations in South East Asia (Japan, South Korea), with large clusters of Russian and Saudi Arabian students, and smaller numbers of EU students (from France and Italy in particular). Since they are all graduates, the students tend to have an understanding of the nature of the academy and what it means to be a university student, although the specific expectations of post-graduate study can be challenging (see 2.6). Many also struggle with the expectation to take up the mantle of their academic community and contribute to the body of knowledge. These challenges are unpacked in 2.4 – 2.6.

In the summer of 2016, I was made redundant. Such an occurrence was so far from my mind that it did not even feature as a risk to my project when I submitted my Registration Report in Year 2. It was a shock and an affront, and it made me question my own professional abilities. Only after the dust had settled did I come to realise that redundancy was less about my performance as a professional and much more about the institution's approach to educational management, which replaced programme leaders with teaching experience with people with business acumen. I recognise that this event informed the way I write about higher education in 2.3, and that it has given wings to my neo-Marxist and critical transformative pedagogy stances.

My life experience

My life experience has had a significant bearing on the way I approached this project and responded to what it has thrown up. I spent a year of my life in Brazil and then a decade living and working in Portugal. I am therefore alert to the difficulties which being an outsider (see 4.4.2) brings with it. When my students talk of the challenges of living overseas, I can both sympathise and empathise with them. I know all about the ways people respond to you when you are not local. I know of the struggle it can be to acculturate, the frustrations (and, of course, joys) involved in learning a new language and striking up new intercultural friendships. In Brazil, I spent a year at the Universidade Federal da Paraíba, and therefore have an understanding of the challenges involved in being an international student. Being an outsider gives us insights in to our own home culture and society, thereby increasing self-awareness and self-understanding (Stier, 2006), and living abroad for 11 years equipped me with personal and professional sensitivities which I can draw on as a form of "ethical hermeneutics" (Cole, 2008): like my participants, I have been that outsider, and that experience taught me about myself, and the wider world.

1.7.2 Being a non-indigenous researcher

Carrying out research with people from a different cultural background is challenging. Social mores play out differently in different locations, and even the purposes and processes of research may be viewed differently across cultures. There are some who argue that research with those from other cultures should only be carried out by those who have a deep understanding of the culture of the researched group, to eliminate the risk of cultural "blind spots" (Inman et al., 2012), or that interviews in a second language risk may "miss nuanced meaning" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003:26), or that a shared cultural background allows for better and more trusting relationships to be built between the researcher and the participants (Wu et al., 2015). Much of the research with Chinese students is carried out in the student's native tongue, as this allows them to "communicate thoughts or ideas deeply embedded within their culture that are hard to translate" (Heng, 2018:25). Being a non-indigenous researcher was therefore a concern for me, since I speak no Chinese and have spent no significant time there. I was aware that I risked carrying out interviews which were not as successful as they could

have been if they were not run in English, although my decision to interview in English was an "obvious" one (Cortazzi et al., 2011:506), given my lack of knowledge of Chinese.

Smith et al. (2009:195) argue that researchers do not need to be "cultural 'insiders'", but that they do need to have some understanding of the participants' frames of reference. Therefore, although no expert on China, I can draw on twenty-five years' experience of teaching students from different and diverse cultural backgrounds, much of which has involved working closely with students from China. So, although I am not Chinese, and am not familiar with the language, I feel I know sufficient about my participants and their lives in the UK to be able to attenuate any cultural blind spots. It has, in addition, been argued that not sharing language or nationality with interview participants means that they may feel less constrained about discussing troubling or sensitive issues than they may do when speaking to a co-national (Durkin, 2004, in Cortazzi, et al., 2011). Qualitative social research such as this project "requires that we realize we are not the centre of the world, and demands that our

actions as interviewers indicate that others' stories are important" (Seidman, 2013), so it could be argued that not having a deep personal connection with China meant I was less likely, when interviewing, to take things for granted, or be blinkered by prior socio-cultural assumptions [💬1.18].

> [💬1.18] I fact, I found that being a non-indigenous researcher created an authentic knowledge gap which participants were eager to fill – they were eager to talk about China, and their experiences in the UK, to an concerned listener.

1.8 Substantive themes

In addition to the eight criteria for trustworthiness discussed in 1.6, this thesis is also laced together by four substantive themes. At the beginning of this project, I had some inkling of what life as a Chinese post-graduate student in the UK might be like. These perceptions were grounded in my professional experience (see 1.4), supplemented by initial reading about the welfare of Chinese students. However, the reading I did (see 2.2 for an account of how I marshalled the literature) and time spent in the field throughout my project have allowed me to winnow my initial fuzzy perceptions down to four key themes which cradle Chinese post-graduate students' lifeworlds in the UK. They are:

(1) Higher education in the UK: policy and praxis;

(2) Acculturation;

(3) Cultures of learning; and

(4) The transition to post-graduate study.

These themes were refined and developed as my enquiry progressed, with new insights in the field leading me back to the literature, which, in turn, informed the direction my interviews took. These are explored in depth in the following chapter.

1.9 A conceptual framework for this enquiry, and some of the company I have kept

My commitment to trustworthiness and the fours substantive themes above are strands in my conceptual framework. Ravitch & Riggan (2016) maintain that a good conceptual framework allows the researcher to interlace (1) their personal interest in the topic; (2) their research into relevant fields of enquiry; and (3) their theoretical framework. Together, these three concepts shore up effective (and trustworthy) projects. Figure 1, below, shows my conceptual framework:
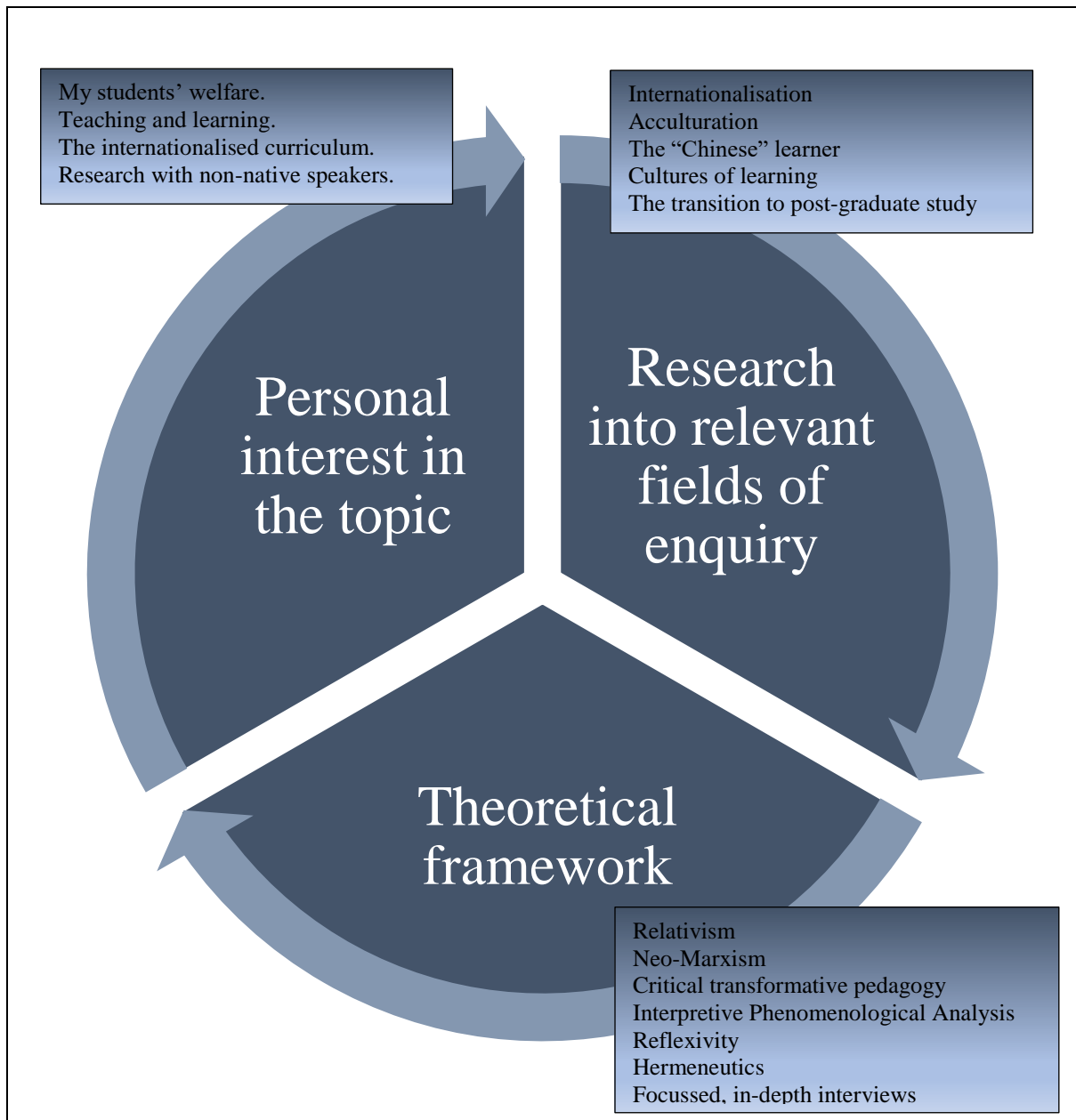
Figure 1: A conceptual framework for this enquiry

Personal interest in the topic

In this enquiry, my personal interest in the topic encompasses my own "curiosities, biases and ideological commitments" in relation to my enquiry (Ravitch & Riggan, op. cit., p10). This is an important consideration in qualitative social research, since I am an instrument of the research, and the influence of my own subjectivities (see 1.7.1) has a significant impact in the way in which the project is designed and how I interpret the lives of my participants.

Research into relevant fields of enquiry

My research into relevant fields of enquiry led to the four substantive themes indicated in the previous section. It was characterised by a survey of the established knowledge in those four areas (see 2.2), and, as such, it is in many ways contiguous with the concept of the literature review. Stephen Ball (2010; 2012) and Jill Knight (2011; 2013) gave me a lot to mull over in relation to, respectively, the commodification of higher education and the internationalisation of the sector. Lixian Jin and Martin Cortazzi's (1998; 2006; 2011; 2017) exploration of cultures of learning was a key influence on this report, as was Qing Gu's (2009; 2011) research on Chinese students in the UK. I explore and use this knowledge predominantly in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, although, of course, the substantive literature is mobilised throughout this report,

Theoretical framework

Ravitch and Riggan (op. cit) argue that a distinction should be made between the terms conceptual framework and theoretical framework. They argue that the two are frequently used synonymously but that it is beneficial to distinguish between the conceptualisation of the study as a whole (the conceptual framework) and the framework of specific formal methodological and philosophical underpinning (the theoretical framework) which supports the study. Methodologically, I drew heavily on Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis when analysing my participants' lifeworlds, and so Jonathan Smith, Paul Flowers and Michael Larkin (2009) are central to this inquiry. Mats Alvesson and Kaj Skoldberg 2000) helped me take a more reflexive perspective, as have the phenomenological and hermeneutic concepts of Martin Heidegger (Davis, 2010). Steven Taylor and Robert Bogdan (1998) provided excellent practical advice about in-depth interviewing. My theoretical framework is erected in Chapter 3.

1.10 Voice and language

In written discourse, "voice" refers to the way(s) in which writers mark themselves off as unique. In the same way that our own spoken voice is unique and immediately recognizable by those who know us, so our writing makes us identifiable to our reader(s), and shows that what we have to say is different from what others have said. It also shows why we should be

taken seriously. In writing, voice is characterised not only by our lexical and syntactic choices, but also by what we choose to write about and how we salient aspects of the world, and establishing my own voice has been a key step in ensuring the trustworthiness of my writing. However, honing my voice as an academic writer has been challenging. For example, at the outset I was under the impression that doctoral writing should be distant and impersonal, with no place for me in the account – using pronouns like *I* and *my* would be subjective and frivolous, I assumed. It took me some time to realise that, in order to make this qualitative and reflexive account trustworthy, establishing my own voice was, in fact, vital. This involved three realisations. Firstly, it is sensible and necessary to make use of *I* and *my*, since I carried out this research. Secondly, for qualitative social enquiry to be truthful, it needs to take into account the biases and assumptions of the researcher; doing this would be impossible without saying *I*. Thirdly, a number of chapters in this thesis chronicle

the decisions I made about the design and implementation of my project. Again, attempting to rationalise those decisions would be impossible with the use of *I*. Developing a discernible and distinct voice, which has allowed me to say what I wish to say (Murray & Hughes, 2008), has been a rewarding outcome of this project [🗨1.19].

> [🗨1.19] In retrospect, a challenge I faced was one of confidence. I initially felt I had nothing of interest to say, and lacked authority to say anything. It felt disrespectful to challenge established voices. However, as I reach the end of this project, I feel that I *do* have something worthwhile to say, and I can justify what I say. This has given me confidence in my voice.

Of course, this account is not just mine: many other voices are audible in it. My participants are central, because this account would not have been possible without their voices (and their voices echo the voices of other students like them). There are also voices from the substantive literature, as well as from the philosophical, methodological and pragmatic

literatures. Some of those voices speak more loudly, whilst others are softer. For example, in some chapters, my own voice is dominant [🗨1.20], such as in 1.7, where I contextualise my enquiry with specific and explicit reference to me and my practice. In Chapter 2 my voice is less audible, but, in contrast, voices from the

> [🗨1.20] My own voice is noticeably present throughout this account. This is because I am aiming to provide a reflexive and hermeneutic interpretation (see 1.7 and 3.7.2 respectively) of my participants' lifeworlds, which expressly necessitates my "being here" in this account.

substantive literature(s) can be heard loudly. The same is true of Chapter 3, where voices from the methodological literature can be heard most strongly. Chapter 4 is characterised by the voices of the participants, although these are also heard in chorus with others voices from the substantive literature. This is summarised in Table 3, below:

Chapter	My voice	Participants' voices	Voices from the substantive literature(s)	Voices from the philosophical and methodological literature(s)
1	◆	◆	◆	◆
2	◆	◆	◆	◆
3	◆	◆	◆	◆
4	◆	◆	◆	◆
5	◆	◆	◆	◆
6	◆	◆	◆	◆

◆ Louder voice   ◆ Softer voice

Table 3: Voices heard in each chapter

From a linguistic perspective [🗩1.21], voice governs language choices about grammar and lexis – therefore, chapters with more about me as practitioner tend to evidence more use of the pronouns *I, me, my* and *mine*

[🗩1.21] My background is in applied linguistics and language teaching, so these concepts are familiar and comfortable to me. Talking about language and linguistic structures and forms does not scare me.

and language structures such as the past simple (because in those chapters I talk about what I did in my projects); more theoretical chapters display more use of structures such as the present simple (since I discuss generalisations, or established knowledge) and use of the passive voice.

1.11 Revisiting my commitment to trustworthiness

This chapter has been buttressed by a number of the pillars of trustworthiness which I established in 1.6. Firstly, I have argued that this is a **worthy topic** by providing a rationale for the research which draws on both professional and personal concerns. I have shown why the research is **relevant**, and that it is **significant** because Chinese post-graduate students are conceptualised in ways which affect not only them but also institutions and the sector as a whole. In addition, I have given an indication of some of the **theoretical and philosophical concepts** and **multivocality** which underpin this enquiry, and given information about the context in which the study rests. Freire (2001:49) argues that all those involved in education should be "critical and enquiring", and in this chapter I have shown, through reflecting on my

professional experience, what led me to look more deeply into my students' lifeworlds. The vignettes in this chapter have shown the **relevance, timeliness and significance of** this topic, since the status quo is causing problems for many individuals. By divulging my biases and subjectivities in this chapter, I have shown how I, as a person, relate to and conceptualise other humans involved in this project. This is crucial because my socialisation has constructed my view of what is – for me – "right" or "normal" in the world, and this, in turn, has informed how I relate to and conceptualise people and phenomena. I have given an indication of my social and professional location and perspectives, and how they may impact on my **interpretation** of my participants' experiences. In doing so, I have acknowledged how "[my] own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing), have informed the processes and outcomes of [my] enquiry" (Etherington, 2004). I have also considered the challenge of being a non-indigenous researcher, and how this may have a bearing on the interpretations I make later. In addition, I have also recognised the "inseparability of research and researcher" (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007:80) by engaging in a process of **self-reflexivity** about my own **subjective values, biases** and **inclinations**, and how these may inform the way I draw up this account. I have been **transparent** in this respect, and in doing so have removed some of what Freire (2001) refers to as the "gloves and masks" which can fog over the research process if it assumes a position of neutral observation.

Chapter 2

Contextualising (2): Prior research and current perspectives

2.1 Overview of this chapter and a rationale for the title [🗨²·¹]

This enquiry offers responses to the two research questions laid out in 1.5, *viz.*:

[🗨²·¹] I have not given this chapter the more conventional title of "Literature Review", although it does serve this purpose to some extent. This is because I feel that a literature review can lead to a sequence of summaries of papers and studies. It is my intent to be more evaluative and critical than this, and, in doing so, bring to life the emancipatory strand running through this report.

1. How do Chinese post-graduate students describe their academic and social acculturation to higher education in the UK?

2. What do Chinese post-graduate students perceive to be the factors which confound and facilitate their academic and social acculturation to higher education in the UK?

The purpose of this chapter is to locate these research questions within their substantive context. My aim in doing so is two-fold: firstly, my reading and research indicated that there are four key themes (see 1.8) which need to be unpacked and problematised, because they underpin my participants' experiences: (1) higher education in the UK: policy and praxis; (2) acculturation; (3) cultures of learning; and (4) the transition to post-graduate study. There is therefore a need to unpack those themes. Secondly, researchers need to indicate to other scholars what is significant about the field they have explored (Wagner, 2010), and so this chapter shows how my own enquiry is in dialogue with established knowledge.

Although this chapter precedes the discussion of my philosophical and theoretical underpinning (in Chapter 3) and the exploration of my participants' experiences (in Chapter 4), this is not indicative of the chronological development of this enquiry. It was not the case that my engagement with the literature was complete before the design of the

project was finalised, or before my data generation began. In fact, a significant proportion of what follows emerged during, and, in some cases, after, the data generation phase. Indeed, this chapter was one of the last to be finalised, since I was constantly refreshing my understanding of the field, through engaging with a range of literatures (see 2.2), even in the later phases of interviewing and writing. As a result, my identification of the themes which helped me respond to my research questions was only fully completed near the end of the project.

2.2 A framework for surveying the literature

At the start of my project, I opened my survey of the literature via the British Educational Index (BEI), which I accessed via the Faculty of Education Library's virtual learning environment. My point of departure was the literature relating to the internationalisation of higher education: some of the search terms I employed were *higher education, university, internationalisation, international students* [🗨2.2]. I looked predominantly for sources from the UK, although where relevant I drew on sources from Australia, Canada, the United States and Ireland, since their higher education policies have, particularly in relation to internationalisation, largely paralleled those of the UK.

[🗨2.2] At that point, I knew that internationalisation would be central to my enquiry, as it had emerged in the reading I did in response to the issues thrown up by the vignettes in 1.7. It was only later that I began to engage with other themes, when it became apparent (through reading, and through interviewing), that my participants' experiences in the UK were framed by additional aspects.

Initially, my forays into the literature were relatively unfocused. I was reading broadly, but had not yet pinpointed precisely what I was looking for. Taylor & Bogdan's (1998) assertion that the literature is not easy to navigate until some research has been carried out and the researcher has a clearer sense of what is being explored resonates strongly: in retrospect, it was time in the field which led to a more focussed survey of the literature. To exemplify, emotional wellbeing (see 4.4.3) and the challenge of transitioning to post-graduate study (see 4.5.5) emerged in the some of the earlier interviews I carried out, and so I began to read more about those fields. The relationship between theory and context in this thesis is therefore dialogic: earlier interviews were informed by my nascent knowledge of the field, but as my understanding of my participants' lifeworlds grew, so my survey of the literature gained specificity.

By the end of the project, I had crystallised my reading into four key substantive themes. These, and their sub-sections, are summarised in Figure 2, below, and I go on, in 2.3 – 2.6, to explore and respond to these four themes.

2.3: Higher education in the UK: policy and praxis

- 2.3.1 The commodification of higher education
- 2.3.2 Internationalisation

2.4: Acculturation

- 2.4.1 Principles
- 2.4.2 Socio-cultural acculturation
- 2.4.3 Academic acculturation
- 2.4.4 Linguistic acculturation
- 2.4.5 Acculturative stress

2.5: Cultures of learning

2.5.1 "The Chinese Learner"

2.6: The transition to post-graduate study

*Figure 2: The four substantive themes which cradle this enquiry*

However, the four substantive themes presented in Figure 2 do not – and should not be considered to – exist as isolated and discrete aspects of the experiences of my participants. Both the interviews and my engagement with a range of literatures – substantive (see 2-3 – 2.6), philosophical (see 3.5 and 3.6), methodological (see 3.7 and 3.8) and the literature

on trustworthy and reflexive social research (see 1.6 and 1.7 respectively) made it apparent that the participants' lifeworlds, and, by extension, this project, are constructed and interrelated in diverse and multi-dimensional ways.

Figure 3, below, represents these diverse, multi-dimensional constructions and interrelationships. The concentric rings in the centre of the figure denote the operationalisation of my project, and indicate the layers therein. At the heart of the project is the topic I set out to explore, namely, the lived experiences of 12 Chinese post-graduate students in higher education in the United Kingdom. This led out into the two research questions (see 1.5 and 3.4) I offer responses to in this thesis ("How do Chinese post-graduate students describe their academic and social acculturation in higher education in the UK?" and "What do Chinese post-graduate students perceive to be the factors which confound and facilitate their academic and social acculturation to higher education in the UK?"), which formed a second layer of the project. These research questions were explored through in-depth focussed interviews (shown in the third circle), and these interviews, and the analysis of the data they generated, coupled with time in the field and surveying the literature led me to identify the four key themes which underpin the experiences of my participants: higher education in the UK: policy and praxis; acculturation; cultures of learning and the transition to post-graduate study, offered in the fourth circle. The first of these themes I have viewed through a Gramscian neo-Marxist lens, since higher education in the UK is characterised by political, and politicised, discourses, whilst I have viewed acculturation, cultures of learning and the transition to post-graduate study through a critical transformative pedagogy lens, since these themes speak primarily to practice and practitioners. These lenses formed a fifth layer of the operationalisation of my project,

My research, however, was also framed by four wider considerations, which are ranged around the edge of the figure. All of these considerations informed and influenced my project on multiple levels (for example, I attended to ethical concerns at all levels of the project|), although it is graphically awkward to show all these complex interrelationships: for clarity, therefore, only main connections are shown in Figure 3.

Firstly, my ontological and epistemological stances have had a significant bearing on the way I conceptualised and designed the project. I have taken a realist-subjectivist

ontological stance (see 3.5) since I feel the lived experiences of my participants are subjective, and, in many ways, only "true" in the here-and-now: other times, other participants, other researchers and other settings would generate different data (and, therefore, different themes and findings); this goes to the very core of this project, and, in Figure 3, is shown to inform the focus of the project, the central circle, *in toto* (although, of course, this stance informed all layers of the project). I have also adopted an interpretivist epistemological stance, given that I played a significant part in constructing the account presented here (see 3.7.2), and given that I sought to understand the essence of *these* participants' experiences, rather than establishing generalisations and abstractions. This interpretivist stance also informed the reflexive strand which runs through this thesis (see 1.7).

Secondly, given the philosophical stances I have adopted, my methodological considerations were two-fold, incorporating both phenomenological and hermeneutic elements (see 3.7.1 and 3.7.2 respectively). These considerations came to bear predominantly on the data generation, interpretation and construction of the "structures of experience" (van Manen, 2001:79) which cradle these participants' lifeworlds in the UK (see Chapter 4), and so are interrelated most closely with the third circle in Figure 3.

A third consideration in my project was the need for the research to be trustworthy (see 1.6). There are a number of elements which characterise trustworthy social research, and these are shown at the bottom of the figure. A fundamental aspect for my project, given that it is grounded in practice, was the need to ensure it resonated with others and that I addressed a number of important constituencies, specifically: classroom practitioners (see 5.3), curriculum planners (see 5.4), institutions (see 5.5) and other researchers in similar settings (see 5.6). These constituencies are the fourth consideration in the figure, on the right-hand side.
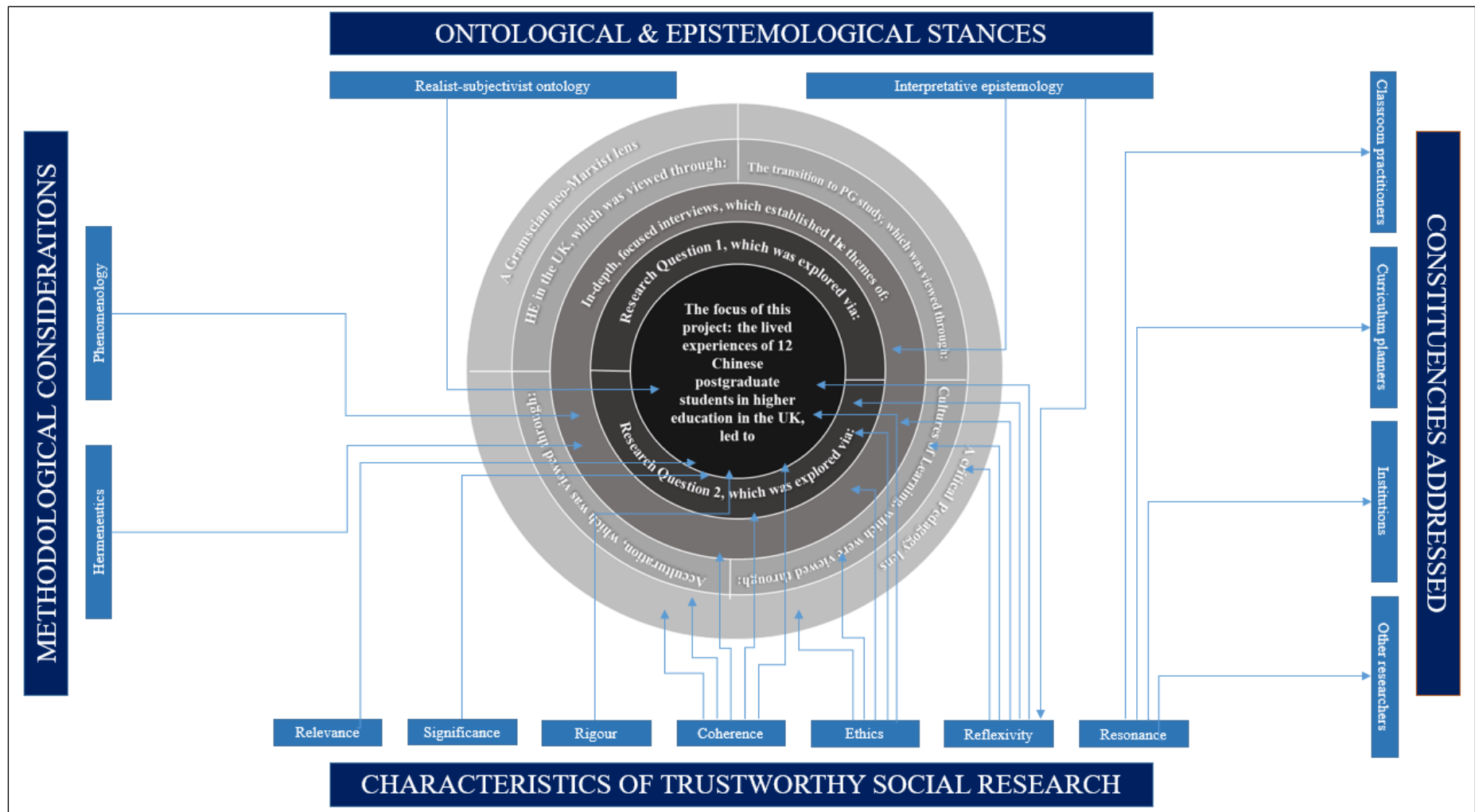
Figure 3: The diverse, multi-dimensional constructions and interrelationships which underpin this project

Throughout my project, I read widely. Journal articles, monographs and chapters from edited books were staples, but I also consulted policy documents, reports, conference papers and websites. For each source, I produced a Record Card which summarised the biographical and publication details of each source. These Records Cards allowed me to summarise the content of the source, as well as my own critical response to that content. I also copied noteworthy quotations. An extract is presented in Figure 4, below (see Appendix 1 for a full example):

Source	
Authors	Paloma CASTRO, Jane WOODIN, Ulla LUNDGREN & Michael BYRAM
Title	Student mobility and internationalisation in higher education: perspectives from practitioners
Date	2016
Journal/book	LANGUAGE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION, 2016 VOL. 16, NO. 3, pp418–436
Main Idea	
Type of article	Research
Key words	Student mobility; internationalisation; higher education; intercultural dialogue
Main idea	Internationalisation is one thing at institutional level and another thing on the ground.
Lit Review	
Ideas synthesised	**INTRODUCTION** • Internationalisation has two idealisations – the neo-liberal, instrumental, economic, and the educational, developmental, socially progressive: "respect, tolerance, equality, dignity and common purpose" (p420). • But of course not either/or – weighted depending on time, location, and even place in the institution. • Unis, like it or not, are a market-driven context. Need to be high on rankings, so attract lots of international students (therefore scoring high on the international criterion). Thus they get more students, and more money, can employ (buy?) renowned internal scholars. Thus "a circle which might be called virtuous or vicious depending on the point of view" (p419)

Figure 4: Extract from a literature review Record Card

In order to ensure that my summaries remained coherent, I copied all headings from the original source into my own Record Card before reading the text for detail, and then read closely in order to summarise and paraphrase key points. I found that maintaining the same divisions as the original text to be a beneficial strategy, as it ensured I did not miss key sections. It also allowed for a more manageable distillation of the information by breaking it down into chunks. Making notes also meant that, when I came to write about a theme, I was able to do by using the Record Cards alone, rather than the original text; this made it easier to identify commonalities and divergences in the literature than would have been the case if I had used the unabridged text. More practically, it also ensured I avoided the temptation to write too closely from the original, therefore reducing the risk of inadvertent plagiarism [🔍2.3]. Of course, there were occasions when I did revert back to the original (as my note-taking sometimes revealed itself to be incomplete), but this approach allowed me to marshal and make sense of a significant amount of text in an orderly, methodical – and, crucially, controllable – manner.

> [🔍2.3] This approach to notemaking works well for me, although I know that study habits are personal and that others may have different habits. Since embarking on this project, I have made highlighting the benefits of record cards for students one of my first lessons: my research has already informed and advanced my practice in new and unexpected ways.

As my ventures into the literature progressed, my review of the literature become more genealogical. In other words, I recognised that a number of names appeared frequently in my reading, which indicated that these were key writers in their respective fields [🔍2.4], so I followed up these authors. In addition, I used the list of references at the

> [🔍2.4] An indication of who these names included can be seen in 1.9, where I show whose company I have kept.

end of published sources to identify texts which were aligned to my own reading. However, a limitation of this strategy is that the list of references can, by its very nature, only be retrospective. I therefore used the "cited by" function of the BEI to identify writers which had made use of the text in question; this led to more recent sources. In this way, my literature review became more organic and less database-driven as my project advanced, although I did keep returning to databases to ensure my reading was updated. Dowling & Brown (2009) argue that the literature review must be re-visited after initial drafts, and as this EdD has been a five-year undertaking, there were key sources which had been published and developments that had occurred in the intervening period which I needed to capture and convey in this report. Therefore, towards the end of the project, I re-immersed myself in the literature in order to refresh my sources.

A challenge with such a far-reaching and long-term project as reading for a doctorate is that it is difficult to know when to stop reading. It would easily have been possible to find ever-more sources, and many of the side-roads the literature took me down were fascinating in themselves. For example, I spent some time reading about how the quality of university accommodation can affect students' wellbeing, and whilst this was an interesting diversion, I decided that it was tangential to my enquiry and did not pursue it. Therefore, although there was a risk of overlooking some concepts, I decided that when the sources I was reading did not throw up any new themes or insights (by which I mean, the research itself might take a new angle on a theme, but the theme itself was familiar), then it was time to start decelerating the reading on that particular theme (whilst bearing in mind that it may be necessary to reactivate it later).

To sum up, my reading became more refined and more focussed as I moved the project on, and this ultimately led to the identification of the four key substantive themes in Figure 2 which cradle this enquiry. The following four sections unpack those themes in more depth.

2.3 Higher Education in the UK: Policy and Praxis

I have chosen to open my survey with a discussion of the purpose and current landscape of higher education in the UK. This may seem questionable, given that this theme this was not explicitly voiced by the participants as an aspect of their experience. I recognise that electing to explore a theme which does not directly emerge from the comments made by my participants means that there is a potential disconnect between this conceptual chapter and the findings and discussion which takes place in Chapter 4. However, Alvesson & Skoldberg (2000) are adamant that social enquiry can be neither critical (see 3.6.2) nor transformative if it does not problematise the context and ask questions about what lies behind the interpretations that the researcher produces. Similarly, Van Manen (2001) argues that the social researcher should evaluate the broader historical and social movements which shape research participants' perspectives, even if these are not thrown up directly by the empirical data. More locally, Heng (2018:23) cautions that "attention to challenges without adequately examining their causes [in] context may lead to unfair perceptions of Chinese students". This chapter, therefore, opens by problematising higher

education policy and praxis in the UK, since this allows me to interpret my participants' experiences "with an eye on the totality" (Bronner, 2011:2) of their context.

2.3.1 The commodification of higher education

Given what Alvesson & Skoldberg, Van Manen and Heng, above, argue, any exploration of the experiences of international students in UK universities should take in a critical survey of the nature and effect of higher education policy in the UK [💬2.5]. The sector has seen significant shifts in both its scope and its purpose over the last three decades (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Gu et al., 2010; Lynch, 2015), which has had far-reaching effects: Tinklin et al. (2005:510), for instance, contend that "the nature of higher education has exacerbated and even created" many of the difficulties which

[💬2.5] I believe that the marketisation of higher education has had a detrimental effect on the sector, and that education does not fit into a for-profit model of governance. I believe that recent higher education policies have welded capital, state and education together in a way which leads to inequality. This welding, however, is seen to be common sensical ("How else are universities supposed to operate?"), thus silencing dissenting voices. I explore the Gramscian concepts of *common sense* and *hegemony* in more depth in 3.6.1.

international students face, and critiques of these shifts have become more prevalent in the literature over the last decade or so (Yemini, 2014). The commodification of higher education is not limited to the UK, either: multi-lateral international agreements and "'advice' from the World Bank or OECD" (Lynch, 2015:191), have marketised higher education globally, and the World Trade Organisation's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) specifically counts education as a form of international trade. This "progressive liberalisation" (World Trade Organisation, n.d.:265) has percolated down into regional higher education policies, such as the 1999 Bologna Declaration (Stier, 2006) and neo-liberal discourses are discernible in the speech of vice-principals and education minsters in many locations (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008). The social role of the internationalised

university has therefore been eroded by the repositioning of the university as a marketable commodity (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2013), shifting the sector "from co-operative to competitive" (de Wit, 2005:2 in de Wit, 2010:6). All this has led to what Ciancanelli (2006, in Boden & Epstein, 2006) terms "EduBiz", which serves to create the "social, political, ideological and economic conditions for capitalism" (Greaves et al., 2007:38), in

[💬2.6] This, too, can be viewed in Gramscian terms: students are conditioned by the education system to become part of the "superstructure" – the intellectual, social and political cadres, who create and promulgate the frameworks needed for capitalism to flourish (Greaves et al., 2007). As a result, universities exist "to service the economy through the production of human capital" (Block et al., 2012:210).

turn creating what Slaughter & Rhoades (2004:2) call "academic capitalism". These conditions are becoming both normalised and normative [💬2.6].

This recasting of the sector can be traced back to the 1980s, since when, particularly in more developed, post-industrial nations, the traditional means of production have been in decline. These nations have filled the gap left by the reduction in manufacturing by developing ever-more sophisticated niche service and skills industries, thus allowing them to continue to maintain a competitive edge in the global marketplace (Boden & Epstein, 2006; Lynch, 2015). Universities in post-industrial nations such as the UK have therefore become central in preparing personnel to service the global economy (Boshier, 2017) and in maintaining a lead over emerging economies, whose tertiary education sectors tend to be less well-developed (Greaves et al., 2007). This shift in the status and purpose of universities has been enabled and enacted by successive policy decisions which are predicated on economic priorities (Boden & Epstein, 2006; Ball, 2012; Lynch, 2015). The (re)positioning of higher education as a lever of the national economy has occurred in tandem with the dismantling of the post-war social consensus. This has been characterised by a weakening of socially-focussed governance and a reduction in the role of the state in public life, ushering in the concept of "small government". In order for small government to function, the ownership of production and services is shifted from the state to private hands, ostensibly lessening the tax burden as a result. Sectors which are suitable for privatisation – utilities and transport – are sold off, and those which are not are accused of being wasteful (Lynch, 2015). Sectors such as higher education, which are not "profitisable" as easily as utilities and transport, come to be regarded as a drain on the public purse [💬2.7].

> [💬2.7] The concept of "common sense" economics is a key element of Gramscian critique which I explore in 3.6.1.

In the UK, this paradox (being wasteful but not profitisable) has given rise to the argument that, if universities cannot be privatised in their entirety, then the state should at least limit their financial support. Cuts in income, it is maintained, can be made up through increasing tuition fees, or generating income via partnerships with business and industry, or through merging programmes, or, *in extremis*, by closing departments (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016). In addition, funding for research has altered, with institutions receiving most income for projects which are deemed to have quantifiable benefits for business and industry. Much current research, particularly in the STEM disciplines, is carried out under the auspices of private industry, meaning institutions are "virtually incapable of

facilitating critical research" (Boden & Epstein, 2006:234): universities are told what to find out, and enterprise reaps the rewards, and in so doing create "an increasingly privatised [research] sphere for reproducing the interest of the corporations" (Fovet & Giles, 2015:7). This has particularly impacted on research funding in the social sciences, which are viewed as troublesome by those with anti-liberal and/or anti-intellectual stances (Giroux, 2006) who often hold the research purse strings. Consequently, "hybridisation" (Ball, 2010) is now identifiable in higher education, since the sector has fuzzy boundaries regarding who pays what, for what, and for whom, and, as a result, institutions are neither fully public nor fully private.

As actors in the market economy, universities have increasingly adopted models of institutional governance predicated on the practices of the private sector. Where universities were once supported by the state, they now serve to support it (Humfrey, 2011), and, for this to happen, approaches to university administration have also had to shift, moving from "government to governance" (Ball, op. cit., p124). This is particular true in relation to regulation, management and performance (Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration, n.d.:102). University administrative strategies now commonly focus on promoting, reinforcing and operationalising neo-liberal practices through the covert (and frequently overt) implementation of top-down policy-making, the use of key performance indicators to quantify teaching for audit and accountability purposes (Thomson & Walker, 2010), and surveillant managerialism (Lynch, 2015). These strategies are claimed to simplify university management, but in practice are used to "monitor, steer and reform" (Ball, op. cit., p125) institutions onto a marketised pathway. To take a recent example, the *White Paper on the Future of Higher Education* from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2016) heralded the expansion of "High quality new providers" (ibid., p9) which will allow for the creation of for-profit institutions, with the aim of creating a more "competitive market" (ibid., p8).

Whilst the premise of a competitive market is to drive up standards (and reduce ostensibly wasteful bureaucracy), in effect this frequently leads to more regulation, not less (in the form of Key Performance Indicators, for instance) and an erosion of the status of staff [🗨2.8].

[🗨2.8] In the same week as this White Paper was published a position for a full-time EAP tutor in London was advertised, with a salary of just £20,000, with applicants expected to be in possession of a teaching qualification and a Master's degree.

The repositioning of higher education has also led to a concomitant shift in the way students are viewed, from being people with a right to an education to people who pay for a service (Lynch, 2015). As a result, the term "learning experience", which has gained significant currency in recent years, has been critiqued as shorthand for "consumption of the education commodity" (de Vita & Case, 2003:387), with demands made by students about what the curriculum should teach. Daymon & Durkin (2013), for instance, carried out research with post-graduate students in the UK and Australia and discovered that students are now acquisitive, not inquisitive, being less interested in developing analytical and critical thinking skills, and more concerned about gaining vocational skills to improve their employability; likewise, Boshier (2017:222) found that his interviewees were "unashamedly pragmatic" in viewing university as a place to gather workplace skills. This should be a cause for concern, given that higher education is a place where participants should develop robust critical views of the world (Fovet & Giles, 2015). Of course, it is right that students should have some say in their education, having moved from a position of impotence in the 1960s to importance in the current system (Humfrey, 2011), but there is a sense that universities are being recast as training centres, rather than a locus which aims "to improve the quality of democratic societies" (Levin & Greenwood, 2013:66).

The picture painted here seems gloomy. There are, though, voices in the literature which highlight the positives of the neo-liberalised campus: Fovet & Giles (2015), for instance, argue that neo-liberal approaches have led to initiatives such a "holistic service delivery format" (ibid., p6) on campus, which has allowed students' to make their voices heard, and which has led to the creation of student services which are well-utilised, and a far cry from the services which existed formerly. Notwithstanding, the changes in UK higher education in recent years have been radical, and international students, as I argue in the next section, have borne the brunt of these changes.

2.3.2 Internationalisation

For a substantial number of international students, it is human interests which lead them to study abroad. Many are drawn to do so in the expectation that this will lead to personal growth (Jackson & Chen, 2017), enhance their options in the employment market (Boden & Epstein, 2006), and, in turn, increase their social standing (Mazarol & Soutar, 2002, in

Ramachandran, 2011), or because provision for higher education in their own country is limited (Mok & Wu, 2016): China, for example, has more university students than any other nation, although this does not equate with the highest number of places in proportion to applicants (Boshier, 2017). In addition, the era of globalisation (cheaper travel, the expansion of the internet and the growth in social media) has made it far easier than it was to pursue a university education overseas: by 2024, it is estimated that there will be approximately 3.85 million tertiary-level students studying overseas (British Council, 2013). However, the manner in which international students are treated when they arrive *in situ* is problematic in many ways, and institutions frequently fail to manage the diverse needs of international students (Choudaha, 2017). The fact that they suffer significant challenges with acculturation (see 2.3) is rarely acknowledged and even more rarely understood. UK universities are prestigious and benefit from enhanced reputations, and are therefore extremely attractive to overseas students. Yet the UK has done less than other countries (Australia, most notably) in attending to the needs of international students and integrating them effectively on campus (Jones & Killick, 2007; Liu & Winder, 2014). There are scant national policies which attend to the wellbeing of international students: strategic documents (e.g. UKCISA, n.d.; QAA, 2012; 2015) offer advice for teaching international students but do not comment on the affective support these students may require. For these reasons, it is important to trouble both the rationale for, and the implementation of, internationalisation strategies in UK higher education.

Internationalisation is not a new feature of higher education: the university of today traces its roots back to the ancient medieval universities which relied on peripatetic scholars teaching throughout Europe (Humfrey, 2011). Until the 1970s, internationalisation mainly took the form of education-as-aid (Rizvi, 2008), in which post-colonial nations sent their brightest (or richest) students to the metropole for an education which would prepare them for roles in national administration. From the 1980s onwards, education-as-trade (Sawir, 2013) began to have the edge over this model, however, and UK universities, which had previously attracted Commonwealth students, were faced with competition from their former colonies who were in the process of developing their own domestic university systems (Ramachandran, 2011). Changes in east-west and north-south flows of international students, coupled with the economic imperatives summarised in the previous section, led the UK to move to attract more international students, and the Prime Minister's Initiatives (PMIs) for International Education in 1999 and 2006 viewed

international students as "an economic silver bullet […] for both the education sector and the broader economy" (Migration Observatory, 2011:2 in Tannock, 2013) by increasing the number of overseas students on campus. These students' high fees were perceived to be a golden goose for higher education, particularly following budgetary cuts in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis (Choudaha, 2017), and were "the major driver" (Wang et al., 2012: 317) for the explosive growth in the rate of internationalisation (Tang et al., 2012). Attracting high-fee-paying students became a central precept of the transformation of universities into key actors in the knowledge-based economy, and since the turn of the millennium, the UK has been extremely successful in attracting international students to its institutions: 18% of the student population in London is international (Chien, 2015), and international students will be worth a predicted £14.9bn per annum to the UK economy by 2025 (Lomer et al., 2016).

Despite rapid developments over recent decades, the internationalisation of the higher education sector is by no means a finished product. It is dynamic and complex, and even contradictory at times (Knight, 2011). However, this definition is sufficiently broad to encapsulate the nature of internationalisation as a

> *"process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions (primarily teaching/learning, research, service) or delivery of higher education"* (Knight, 2013:85).

This "global dimension" has become a key shaper of higher education because it sits at the crossroads of a number of the tenets of globalisation. It is, for example, a locus of knowledge, trade, culture and economics (Lynch, 2015). However, whilst internationalisation may be a manifestation of globalisation, the two terms are not synonymous: the latter is politically and economically orientated, and not shaped by government policies, whereas internationalisation, in contrast, is exclusively derived from, and driven by, national political decisions (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Yang (2002) similarly argues that internationalisation is concerned with human interests, and globalisation with economic interests.

Since it has, ostensibly, human interests at heart, internationalisation should produce myriad academic, cultural and economic benefits for institutions, and the internationalised university should be uniquely placed to provide meaningful and diverse socio-cultural and academic interaction (Colvin & Volet, 2014). Much has been written about the benefits of the culturally-diverse campus (see e.g. Pandit, 2007; Leask & Carroll, 2011), and how interacting with others from different settings and cultures leads to greater understanding and tolerance of others (see e.g. Sawir, 2013; Chien, 2015), and for some domestic students, the internationalised university campus may be the first sustained interaction they have had with other peoples and cultures. This can dispel taboos and stereotypes among domestic students who may not have experienced overseas customs and habits (Humfrey, 2011) – a process which Knight (2013:85) refers to as "internationalisation at home". The socio-culturally diverse campus also prepares students for a global workplace (Cheng et al., 2018), forges friendships with people from around the world and allows new perspectives and practices to be explored (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008). Former sojourners [🕭²·⁹] often become ambassadors for both the institution and the country (Pandit, 2007; Prieto-Welch, 2016; Heng, 2018), thereby fostering tolerance

> [🕭²·⁹] The term "sojourner" is characteristically used to refer to an individual who spends a time-limited period in another country with a clearly-defined outcome, such as education, and who plans to return to their country of origin afterwards (Wu et al., 2015).

and respect (Stier, 2006). It has even been claimed that this can contribute to world peace (Larkins, 2008, in Leask & Carroll, 2011). However, the purpose of internationalisation, and the manner in which it is implemented, are frequently problematised. Much of the literature on internationalisation problematises the tensions and dilemmas inherent in internationalisation, rather than the "aspirations and hypothetical possibilities" (Leask & Carroll, 2011:648) it purports to offer. Since the internationalisation of the campus is the most extensive transformation of the sector in the 21st century (Gu et al., 2010), it is important to consider why universities have chosen to internationalise.

Two rationales for internationalisation have been identified, both of which find expression in institutional literature. On one hand, transformative (or academic) internationalisation aims to forge and strengthen links with universities and scholars in other countries in order to further knowledge and encourage intercultural and intellectual exchange (Pandit, 2007; Ramachandran, 2011; Castro, et al., 2016). This position recognises that international students are "a learning resource rather than a teaching burden, [an] enrichment rather than a problem" (Sawir, 2013:369), whose presence on campus can

inform both the formal and informal curricula. Symbolic internationalisation, on the other hand, purports to be transformative in nature, yet in reality speaks only to economic motives, and there is a significant tranche of the literature (Koutsantoni, 2006; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Rizvi, 2008, Gu, 2009; Knight, 2013; Killick, 2015) which argues that universities use internationalisation to address economic interests more than educational purposes. An example of symbolic internationalisation is the infatuation which (some) institutions have with international league table rankings (Knight, 2011b; Lynch, 2015), since the percentage of international students on an institution's campus is a criterion in drawing up – and climbing up – these tables. Some institutions have been reported to pursue higher rankings as the *sine qua non* of their existence, and have even lowered admissions requirements in order to recruit more international students (de Wit, 2010; Knight, 2013). So, despite ostensibly being a push towards cooperation, collaboration and integration, internationalisation can, instead, become a marketing strategy aimed at recruiting students, increasing income and pursuing league table rankings. It is perhaps, then, unsurprising that Boden & Epstein (2006:230) go so far as to claim that internationalisation is "more subtle, and perhaps more wicked" than it appears on the face of it, since some universities may outwardly espouse transformative internationalisation, but in practice care only about revenue generation. It is the implementation of internationalisation, therefore, which can be considered to be problematic, rather than its rationalisation. There is evidence, though, that some members of faculty sense the "disjuncture between the espoused values and the reality" of internationalisation (Warwick & Moogan, 2013:103). They reject the ethnocentric, Western cultural imperialist attitudes which argue that "they need to learn to be like us" (Stier, 2006), and are working towards transformative internationalisation by implementing small-scale local interventions and adjustments to pedagogy and curricula [🗨2.10] so as to make their teaching and learning more relevant and accessible to both home and international students, and consequently more representative of the cohort.

> [🗨2.10] I return to the importance of re-thinking pedagogy and course content in order to better accommodate all students in 5.3 and 5.4 respectively, in the spirit of the emancipatory strand which is knitted into this account.

To sum up, despite the potential benefits of internationalisation, the process brings with it significant and often unacknowledged challenges for institutions, tutors and students, and, by extension for Chinese post-graduate students. I explore the challenges of adapting to new academic and socio-cultural practices in the following section.

2.4 Acculturation

Acculturation is the second theme which shapes my participants' experiences in the UK. Interest in this area has grown in tandem with the growth in internationalisation (Gu & Maley, 2008), so there is a need to explore what acculturation means, both theoretically and practically, and to consider what challenges and opportunities it brings for international students.

2.4.1 Principles of acculturation

Acculturation can be defined as "the process through which an actor changes to fit in with the host culture" (Gu & Maley, 2008:225). Individuals have expectations about how cultures operate, based on their previous life experience, so a change in setting brings both "opportunities on one hand and dilemmas on the other" (Gabb, 2006:358), for both individuals and communities (Jung et al., 2007). These changes often lead to some level of "disorientation, disequilibrium, disjuncture [and] dissonance" (Killick, 2015:111) if familiar and frequently deeply-held behaviours, beliefs and perspectives are at odds with those of the new context, or if an individual has difficulties bridging the gap between the society of origin and the society of settlement (Berry, 1997). This means that acculturation impinges on aspects of identity, as individuals may feel they need constantly to reappraise – and sometimes to relinquish – deep-seated ways of being and doing in order to adopt new ones. Acculturative stress (see 2.4.5) may ensue if an individual finds this reappraisal to be troubling.

Every day of an international sojourn brings new intercultural and cross-cultural experiences. Of the two, intercultural experiences are more integrative in nature and are characterised by greater interaction with, and acceptance of, the host culture. Students undergoing cross-cultural experiences, on the other hand, are more likely to maintain some level of distance between their home culture and the host culture (Gu, 2009). Sojourners need to adjust to what Fontaine (1996:268) refers to as "new ecologies" in terms of unfamiliar people, diverse places, different ways of communicating and structuring their lives, as well as new ways of accessing support and interpreting contextual power relationships. All of these aspects create "ecological challenges" (ibid., p268), in which individuals are required to "negotiate the multiplicity of discontinuities that mark the new community out as different from their

former community" (Tobbell et al., 2010:265). Cushner & Landis (1996) differentiate between types of discontinuities, drawing a distinction between objective elements of culture (food, clothing, artefacts) and subjective elements of culture (values, attitudes and behaviours). The latter are potentially more problematic because, initially at least, they may be located under the cultural waterline, and so sojourners are unable to make judgments regarding local values, attitudes and beliefs because they remain invisible. Acculturation is therefore highly subjective, context-dependent and characterised by "fragmentation" (Gu et al., 2010:11).

The literature on acculturation has moved from descriptions of group-level psychotic neuroses to more individual, psychological explorations (Ward, 1996). Earlier writing on acculturation tended to refer to the process as "culture shock" and took a recuperative view of the phenomenon, in which individuals "succumbed" to the shock but "recovered" over time (Wang et al., 2012). Berry (1997; 2007), however, has been instrumental in challenging this perspective, arguing that acculturation is not a passive process. It does not simply happen *to* individuals, but rather, outcomes are informed by (conscious or subconscious) choices made *by* individuals about how to reconcile their old and new lives. For Berry, there are four possible outcomes to the acculturative process, as follows: firstly, if individuals decide to engage with the new society and simultaneously leave behind previous identities, the outcome will be one of assimilation into the new setting. Secondly, engaging with the new society whilst still maintaining aspects of one's previous culture leads to integration. Not engaging with the new cultural setting whilst maintaining contact with the original culture leads to a third possible outcome, that of separation (or segregation, if the option to engage with the new culture is not offered by members of the dominant culture); finally, the fourth outcome, marginalisation, occurs when an individual does not make or maintain contact with either the new or the original culture. These outcomes, which Berry drew together in his Model of Acculturation, are summarised in Figure 5, below:

		Is it considered to be of value to establish relationships with the new society?	
		YES	NO
Is it considered to be of value to maintain one's identity and characteristics?	YES	integration	separation and/or segregation
	NO	assimilation	marginalisation

Figure 5: Berry's (1997) Model of Acculturation

Although Berry's model is more sophisticated and helpful that the culture shock model, it too has come under criticism due to its limited, fixed outcomes. Ward (1996), for example, questioned the focus on the replacement (or not) of one set of values, beliefs and behaviours with another, when, in fact, acculturation is much more likely to see these things existing in tandem, or with one outcome being prevalent in certain contexts and at certain times, with other outcomes occurring in other contexts and at other times. Murphy-Leujeune (2003:113 in Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006) views this hybridity as an "opening out", or personal expansion, rather than a transition from one orientation to another. In a similar vein, Bagnoli (2007) critiques Berry for assuming (or at least implying) that acculturation outcomes are fixed, arguing instead that "people may easily be part of both the in-group and the out-group at the same time" (p26). More recently, Gu (2011) has taken a view in which acculturation is less of a linear process and more a case of constant negotiation in which individuals choose, consciously or subconsciously, how they wish to identify and portray themselves, often providing a different portrayal at different times, and/or in different arenas.

A further critique of earlier conceptualisations of acculturation is that it is unlikely, if not impossible, for the process merely to affect sojourners. It is clear that acculturation must also have an effect, at multiple levels, on the local population. However, the dearth of research into what has been termed an "entirely new field" (Haugen & Kunst, 2017) into the outcomes of acculturation on the host population may well be a reason why it is often held to apply only to the former (Dinh & Bond, 2008), and, in fact, much research into the phenomenon

explores majority populations' views of how minority populations should adapt to their new setting – and, in so doing, serves to perpetuate the view that it is the sojourner's attitudes, behaviours and identities which need to shift and be re-shaped to fit in with the host culture.

Whilst sojourners often maintain their original traditions and customs in the private sphere (e.g. by speaking a mother tongue at home, following dietary habits or maintaining strict gender roles) and acculturate more in the public sphere (for example, at school or at work), members of the domestic community often do the opposite: they maintain their original behaviours, attitudes and beliefs at school or work, but are affected by acculturation much more in the private spaces of their lives, such as consuming food from local outlets owned by sojourners, or by spending time playing sport with sojourner team-mates. For the host population, then, the impact of acculturation would seem to be more in terms of behaviour, rather than shifts in values. There is also little evidence that this is leading towards one homogenised, monolithic globalised culture: domestic communities have been shown to adopt aspects of diverse new, incoming cultures whilst simultaneously maintaining their own "national" culture (Lefringhausen & Marshall, 2016). Nonetheless, there is some evidence that the local population can undergo a form of acculturative stress (see 2.4.5) if they perceive that the impact of sojourners on the local population is negative (Haugen & Kunst, 2017), which may account for some of the divisions which my participants reported between themselves and UK students (see 4.4.1 and 4.4.2).

The younger the member of the host community, the more likely they are to be able to move away from the values and behaviours of their community (Haugen & Kunst, op. cit). This has particular relevance for educational institutions, such as universities, where members of the host community are more likely to be significantly impacted by cultural contact with sojourners than in other settings – although, ironically, universities are a location where sojourners are expected to conform to the local culture of learning (see 2.5). Of course, as (Inguglia & Musso, 2015:93) caution, acculturation is a "complex process that, despite some general features, needs to be analysed in relation to the context in which takes place", and not all settings or populations may reflect these constructs.

It is not the case that all individuals eventually acculturate fully: for some people, cultural beliefs and values may be "beyond modification […] and will never be completely abandoned for another" (Gu & Maley, 2008:225). It may also be the case, as Gu et al. (2010) posit, that some individuals profess to becoming acculturated yet still maintain a distinct sense of otherness. Clark & Gieve (2006) argue that most sojourners end up in a third place, where their identify and behaviours reflect neither "home" nor "abroad", but instead meet in a hybrid middle ground, and it may be that this middle way is the most common sojourning experience [🗨2.11].

[🗨2.11] In 1.7.1. I recounted how I lived in Lisbon for a decade. My lifeworld at the time evidenced exactly this kind of middle way. I shared common and deep-rooted cultural links with people from the UK, but, having lived away for ten years, I had no contemporary cultural references here; conversely, I had a fully up-to-date knowledge of contemporary culture in Portugal but few of the deep-seated "folk" references gained by growing up in a location. I felt that I had feet in two camps, but not fully in either.

Acculturation has significant implications for university students, since they face challenges in transitioning to a new life. They need to get used to living independently, possibly for the first time, with less structure and guidance in their lives then they may be accustomed to. They may also be building and managing unfamiliar emotional and sexual relationships (Tang et al., 2012). International students face added challenges (Ye, 2006; Gu & Maley, 2008), particularly with regards to language and cultural awareness (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006), and post-graduate students often face unforeseen challenges (see 2.6) which can lead to significant acculturative stress.

Notwithstanding, acculturation is a rewarding and positive experience for many individuals. It is often "a transformative learning process which leads to a journey of personal growth" (Gu, 2009:40), and in a university setting, the lives and experiences of both the domestic group and the acculturating group can be positively affected by that process (Berry, 1997). This is particularly the case when individuals are able to reflect on what is happening to, and around, them, generating "abstract theories or generalizations" (Lucas, 2003:302, in Killick, 2015:112) about other cultures and communities which are then tested, thus reconfiguring their world view. In other words, experimentation with, and evaluation of, culturally-different approaches and their outcomes allows individuals to reconstruct a mental map of what is deemed contextually suitable, based on the "cultural other's" perspective (Cushner & Landis, 1996). A successful outcome leads to an increase in subjective agency and self-efficacy (Jung et al., 2007) which, in turn, feeds forwards into the next encounter. For international students, these acculturative encounters occur predominantly in three domains:

the socio-cultural, the academic and the linguistic, which are explored in turn in the following three sections.

2.4.2 Socio-cultural acculturation

Being a successful international student involves more than simply adapting to new approaches to teaching and learning or gaining new subject knowledge. Rather, it is characterised by a "psychological and physical struggle to live with an entirely different life pattern" (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006:82). Socio-cultural acculturation is consequently an area to which international students attach significant importance (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006).

Socio-cultural acculturation can be defined as the need to adapt to the new "interpersonal-societal demands [of a sojourn], such as making friends, being part of social activities, or being able to work in groups" (Rienties et al., 2011:687). It is a central characteristic of an overseas sojourn, since familiarity with, and openness towards, local communities and culture(s) helps diminish possible "identity discontinuities" (Jung et al., 2007:606) which may occur when one's own identity seems under threat by other, more dominant local constructions. There is evidence that successful socio-cultural acculturation facilitates academic acculturation (see 2.4.3), and, *mutatis mutandis*, successful academic acculturation facilitates socio-cultural acculturation (Rienties et al., op. cit.).

Many social events and behaviours which are taken for granted by the local population may cause distress for the sojourner, for instance, understanding humour, dealing with physical closeness/touching, and getting used to new leisure activities: pubs and bars are particularly awkward for many Chinese students (see 4.4.4), as is shared accommodation if flatmates have noisy parties, or leave communal areas untidy (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). Making friends is an especially important aspect of socio-cultural acculturation, since it is associated with a lower incidences of acculturative stress. Conversely, "discriminatory attitudes", which lead international students to feel isolated or even marginalised (see 4.4.2) can result in a sense of failure (Killick, 2015) and even serious psychological distress (Jung et al., 2007:619). International students typically arrive in the UK expecting to forge multiple meaningful relationships with local students, but this remains almost unheard of (Sovic, 2008). As a result, international students instead tend to create new hybrid friendship groups (see 4.4.2 and 4.5.7), thereby creating an "international student culture" (Wu & Hammond,

2011:435). These groups often comprise nationalities who may not have identified together before coming to the UK, but who are drawn together through shared rejection.

2.4.3 Academic acculturation

Whilst university study can be stressful for all students, irrespective of background (Sovic, 2008; Quinn et al., 2009; Garrett, 2015), it is particularly challenging for international students (Sümer et al, 2008; Wang et al., 2015), since studying abroad involves acquiring an understanding of, and an ability to engage with, a new academic environment (Chien, 2015). This engagement can be termed "academic acculturation", a process which frequently leads to bewilderment and trauma for international students (Rienties et al., 2011), as this Chinese post-graduate student recounts:

> *"When I first started studying here, I was not used to the study or the life here. I did not know where to start. In class, I did not understand the purposes of the teaching and sometimes I did not quite understand the teacher. It was not simply the teaching. It was actually the whole system including how things work and how teachers and students communicate with each other that I felt I was not used to."* (Gu & Maley, 2008:229) [🗨[2.12]]

[🗨[2.12]] This student echoes the experience of Yuanqi, Chenxu and Bobby in Vignette 3 in 1.4.

One of the reasons why academic acculturation is such a significant challenge is because it is unexpected. Whilst international students know that they will have to adapt to new socio-cultural practices (for instance, new ways of being and doing in the UK), and with linguistic acculturation (such as speaking English on a daily basis), they rarely give any consideration to the fact that classroom practices may differ from their previous experience (Carroll & Appleton, 2007). Academic acculturation is therefore characterised by "an uphill struggle" (Gu, 2011:222) to take part fully in the university classroom, especially at the start of the sojourn.

Academic acculturation is also thorny because international students are assumed to adapt automatically, and therefore many tutors (subconsciously) try to assimilate students (Jiang, 2011) into the established practices of their classrooms and the norms of their academic community – "bringing the foreigners up to speed", as Jones & Killick

(2007:112) put it – rather than adapting their practices to meet the needs of the students in the classroom [🗨2.13].

[🗨2.13] This is the message I wish to convey most strongly as a result of what my participants told me about their lifeworlds in the UK, and in 2.5.1 I explore the concept of cultures of learning in depth.

As with all individuals, teachers have also been socialised into a particular educational tradition. They may believe that their own practices and perceptions are "self-evidently normal" (Gu & Maley, 2008:226), and that any students who do not display the same practices and perceptions are in some way in deficit. This is perhaps even more the case within the academy, where each community has its own complex and intricate discourse(s) through which truth and knowledge are created, conveyed and conserved (Straker, 2016). Consequently, academic acculturation is a real and present challenge for both tutors and students in the higher education arena – especially for those students who may be new to the field (see 2.6 and 4.5.5) – although practice-based guidance for those who teach international university students is limited, and often one-dimensional. For instance, the UK Quality Code for Higher Education's *Supporting and Enhancing the Experience of International Students in the UK* (QAA, 2015:9) stresses the need to support international students adequately, but the advice lacks explicit suggestions for classroom practice.

Notwithstanding, whilst academic acculturation is a challenge, international students do become more attuned to local practices over the course of their programmes. Pilcher et al. (2011) found that students' awareness and understanding of the requirements of their new setting increased as they progressed on their programmes, with students' developing what they term "cue-consciousness" – in other words, an ability to identify clues in the task at hand which indicate to them what approach(es) they should employ. Zhao & Bourne (2011:np) found that the acculturation of Chinese students to the "'legitimated' pedagogical culture" in the UK involves students *and* tutors going through a three-part process of adaptation. The first stage is one of unfamiliarity with procedures and frustration with the expected roles of teachers and learners. The second stage involves further frustration, but some gradual adaptation. The third stage is characterised by more adaptation and relaxation – but is definitely not a period of euphoria. Students also become increasingly more willing to embrace previously-unfamiliar practices: Gu et al. (2010) found that 77% of their respondents reported gaining better study skills, 72% believed they had become more autonomous learners and 71% felt more comfortable taking part in open-class discussions by the end of their programmes of study in the UK.

Academically, therefore, international students seem to go through a process of "gradually shifting their own psychological distance closer to the expectations of the new classroom" (Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011:182), and the more successfully they can do this, they more able they are to move "beyond frustration" (Gu, 2011:223). Nevertheless, there is still insufficient regard given to the prior learning experiences of international students in the UK, or to what they bring to the classroom [💬2.14].

> [💬2.14] This raises questions for the internationalised university about who, precisely, needs to adapt. It seems that it is the international student who is expected to change, although there is a strong argument for a meeting in the middle, with tutors also modifying their own practices and beliefs in order to better accommodate the nature of the student body (Killick, 2013; 2015). I return to this more practically in 5.3 – 5.5.

2.4.4 Linguistic acculturation

The ability to communicate effectively in the host country is the third aspect of acculturation which informs the experiences of Chinese post-graduate students in the UK, and there is an extensive body of research which consistently reports that linguistic acculturation is one of the most fundamental challenges that international students encounter (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Wei et al., 2007; O'Reilly at el., 2010; Pilcher et al., 2011). For the international student to become an active member of the host community (be that within the university itself or outside), it is necessary to attain a level of language proficiency which permits effective communication across a range of both familiar and unpredictable contexts.

In in the psycho-social literature, better language proficiency has been shown to result in a more positive psychological, social and cultural transition for international students: better linguistic acculturation means that international students are less likely to be marked out as "foreign" which in turn facilitates better socio-cultural acculturation (Bagnoli, 2007), whilst lower linguistic acculturation is a predictor of anxiety and even depression (Prieto-Welch, 2016). This is because a lower level of language proficiency curtails interaction with others, resulting in fewer opportunities to improve language proficiency (Sümer et al., 2008): the archetypal vicious circle. However, since linguistic acculturation is a slow process, international students may view a lack of palpable progress as a personal flaw, thereby raising the risk of both acculturative stress and psychological distress.

Since international students operate predominantly in academic settings, they have different linguistic needs from other sojourners such as workers or asylum seekers. These needs can be crystallised into five considerations.

Firstly, international students need to be able to use setting-specific English, follow lectures, interact appropriately and in meaningful ways with colleagues and tutors in class or outside, and produce suitably-academic written work (Wu & Hammond, 2011). Secondly, it is often the case that international students, particularly post-graduates, have an excellent understanding of their academic subject, but lack sufficient English to be able to communicate this effectively (Gu & Maley, 2008) – and even if a student can communicate accurately and successfully in English, this does not necessarily lead to success in an academic context since students may be unaware of the subject terminology, genres and practices of the discipline (Ramachandran, 2011; Higher Education Academy, 2014). Thirdly, there are features of academic discourse which international students are unlikely to have encountered in English classes in their home country (Wu et al., 2015), and gatekeeping English language exams such as IELTS do not prepare students adequately for the high-pressure, often abstracted, contexts of use in which they will need English to study (Sovic, 2008; Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011). Fourthly, international exams tend to test accepted forms of the language, and, whilst varieties of English other than standard British English are now common in most international language exams, they do still promote "correct" forms of the language which do not necessarily reflect the kind of English international students will hear on campus (Cheng et al., 2018). Finally, students with lower linguistic competence tend to resort to using survival strategies such as memorising facts and content, particularly in "public" events such as presentations and seminars (Saravanamuthu, 2008), thus perpetuating the stereotype that (e.g. Chinese) students can only employ surface learning strategies such as rote-learning (see 2.5.1).

As a result of some or all of these considerations, tutors may take poor language as indicative of a lack of subject knowledge (Bamford, 2008), which would not be the case with native-speaker students [🗨2.15]. However, since international students are set a language entry requirement as part of their offer of admission, and since language ability is scalar, it may be true that a student has only just met the language entry requirement, and thus still has areas of weakness, but they have met the

> [🗨2.15] This clearly exemplifies, I feel, how Chinese students are conceptualised and treated differently from other students.

requirement. It is crucial to ensure that the level which the institution deems to be "good enough" for study means what it says.

Of course, as with socio-cultural and academic acculturation, international students do advance their language level over time (Cheng et al., 2018), and this development is frequently cited as one of the most rewarding aspects of an international student's sojourn, giving them increased linguistic – and hence socio-cultural and academic – confidence (Gu & Maley, 2008; Gu et al., 2010). Nonetheless, proficiency in English emerged as a central aspect of my participants' lives in the UK which I explore and discuss in 4.5.3.

2.4.5 Acculturative stress

The three preceding sections explored and problematised academic, socio-cultural and linguistic acculturation. A failure to acculturate successfully in any one of these areas may lead to acculturative stress, which can be defined as "psychological and physical distress while adapting to the local way of life" (Rienties et al., 2011:687). The impact of acculturative stress can be much higher than anticipated (Zhou et al., 2011): the psychological literature shows a high association between acculturative stress and clinical depression (Ye, 2006; Wei et al., 2007; Yan & Berliner, 2011), and there is also an association between acculturative stress and poor academic attainment (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). It is important, though, to bear in mind that it is not the fact of being a sojourner itself which leads to acculturative stress, but rather how the new setting is responded to (Gu et al., 2010).

Although "acculturation processes" (Jung et al., 2007:609) may lead to any sojourner in a new setting to register some sort of distress, university students have been found to have higher rates of stress than the comparable age-adjusted population (Tang et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2014), and there are additional burdens for international students. However, only a small proportion of students who are suffering from acculturative stress seek help (Macaskill, 2013; Prieto-Welch, 2016), often due to a fear of stigmatisation (O'Leary, 2005; Suh et al., 2017) or a concern that the condition will be noted down on medical and college records and impact on assessment or references (O'Leary, 2005; Wilson et al., 2007). Chinese students access support less frequently than other international students (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Raunic & Xenos, 2008), often only when all other avenues of support have been trodden (Yoon &

Jepsen, 2008), and typically somaticise symptoms of distress by unconsciously taking emotional issues and displacing them into physical symptoms (Parker et al., 2005; Tang et al., 2012; Prieto-Welch, 2016) [💬2.16].

[💬2.16] This was the case with Ruby in 1.4, who was sleeping poorly and was suffering from headaches and stomach pains.

Three factors have been shown to increase the likelihood of acculturative stress for international students. Firstly, the greater the cultural distance (in other words, the ways in which behaviours, values, traditions, customs and beliefs vary from location to location) between the two societies, the greater the risk of acculturative stress (Yan & Berliner, 2011). Students from more collectivist cultures such as China are more likely to suffer from acculturative stress in the UK than students from more individualistic contexts (Wei et al., 2007; Sümer et al., 2008; Suh et al., 2017) because these students, who typically value collaboration and connections with others, may find their values jar with the more competitive environment in the UK, which is orientated more towards individuation (Prieto-Welch, 2016). Of course, this does not mean that *all* Chinese students will suffer from acculturative stress, nor that students from contexts whose cultural distance is closer to the UK are immune: Hunley (2010), for instance, found that EU students in the UK suffered from similar levels of acculturative stress as non-EU international students. However, it does indicate that cultural distance may be a predictor of acculturative stress.

Secondly, the role of the "pre-arrival personality" and coping mechanisms appear to have an influence on successful acculturation (Jung et al., 2007), with students who possess higher self-esteem, and/or having positive problem-solving approaches being more likely to adapt successfully (Wang et al., 2012;424) than students who display maladaptive perfectionism or who feel that they are not progressing as expected (Wei et al., 2007). This is revisited in 4.5.4.

Thirdly, subjective factors may regulate how successful the acculturative process is. These are summarised in Table 4, below:

Subjective factor:	Regulatory effect on the acculturative process:
Age	The younger the individual is, the more likely they are to acculturate successfully.
Gender	Women tend to face more acculturative challenges than men, often due to gender roles in the society of origin. (In other words, if the society of origin tends to place women in subservient positions, they may find acculturation to a more egalitarian setting to be a challenge).
Education	Better-educated individuals tend to face fewer acculturative problems, possibly because they have already been exposed to other ways of being and doing.
Economic	For many, transition to a new location results in a loss of, or reduction in, economic status. This may be because language barriers preclude employment, or because credentials are not recognised.
Motivation	Sojourners who are more motivated are more likely to find acculturation easier. However, being too proactive can mean expectations are not met.
Personality	Individuals who display more extrovert tendencies are more likely to acculturate successfully.
Prejudice	Facing discrimination is more likely to hamper acculturation. Discrimination may also come from local members of the society of origin if earlier sojourners discriminate against those who come later.

Table 4: Subjective factors which regulate acculturation (after Berry, 1997)

In 4.4.3, I explore how some of my participants had experienced acculturative stress and what the outcomes were for them.

2.5 Cultures of Learning

International students bring with them deeply-seated, tacit, and often unrecognised, beliefs about what teaching, learning and knowledge "mean". These beliefs are typically fostered in the home environment (Jackson & Chen, 2017). Much has been written on the ways in which knowledge is acquired, conserved and conveyed in different socio-educational settings, and how effective teaching, learning and assessment is conceptualised (Watkins & Biggs, 1996; Salili, 1996; Jin & Cortazzi, 1998, 2006, 2011; Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011). These differences can be termed *cultures of learning* [🗪 2.17], which are:

> *"Socially transmitted expectations, beliefs and values about what good learning is, what constitutes a good teacher and a good student and what their roles and relationships should be; about learning and teaching styles, approaches and methods; about classroom interaction and activities; about the use of textbooks; about what constitutes good work."* (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998:38-39)

[🗪 2.17] Here, and throughout, I refer to this concept as "culture(s) of learning" as opposed to "learning culture(s)" since the latter could be taken to refer to the process of learning about another culture in order to assimilate. Given what I said in 2.4, above, and in Chapters 4-6 later, I am not advocating that Chinese students need to "learn" UK culture in order to be successful. Rather, I argue that an awareness of cultures of learning would allow all those in the international university to identify and adopt approaches to teaching, learning and knowledge which acknowledge difference.

Cultures of learning inform the ways in which knowledge is acquired, conserved and conveyed. Consequently, a student's culture of learning may affect how comfortable s/he feels in challenging views and stances, participating in discussions and working with others. Because recent decades have seen an acceleration in the size of international student population in higher education (see 2.3), the concept of cultures of learning should be of the utmost importance to institutions. However, whilst the concept is a powerful conceptual tool for practitioners to frame what happens in an internationalised classroom, it needs to be viewed in the light of two important caveats.

Firstly, despite its usefulness, there is limited awareness of the concept of cultures of learning among teachers and learners. The "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 2002) means that what individuals believe constitutes effective teaching and learning is informed by what they were exposed to in their educational career. However, those

practices "remain invisible to those who stay within familiar academic systems" (Carroll & Appleton, 2007:72). Cultures of learning, therefore, go unnoticed by teachers and learners because everyone around demonstrates the same behaviours: they become "submerged" (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006) and seem innate and right. It is therefore rare for teachers or students to give thought to the fact that other locations may approach teaching, learning and knowledge differently [🗩²·¹⁸], or to reflect on whether the education traditions in which they were socialised may differ from those in other settings (Jin & Cortazzi, 2017). As a result, other settings appear to be "idiosyncratic, psychologically uncomfortable, and counter-intuitive" (Gu & Maley, 2008:226) or even

[🗩²·¹⁸] In fact, I was unaware of differences in learning cultures until I became a practitioner in higher education, and it became apparent (both in the classroom and in the staffroom) that different locations (and, indeed, disciplines) have different epistemological perspectives about what teaching, learning and knowledge are and how they should (or could) be approached.

"ineffective" (Gu & Schweisfurth, op. cit., p75). This commonly leads to tensions when different cultures of learning collide, and, from the perspective of Chinese post-graduate students in the UK, this is a pervasive cause of difficulty, and even distress, in the classroom (see 2.4.3, 4.5.1 and 4.5.2).

The second caveat is that drawing on a concept such as cultures of learning risks promulgating the over-generalisation and "othering" (Bamford, 2008) that frequently occurs when students from different educational contexts rub up against each other. For example, claiming that all Chinese students conceptualise teaching and learning in the same manner is to adopt an essentialist view which fails to take into account the natural variations which exist between individuals [🗩²·¹⁹]. Indeed, variations may even exist within individuals, changing according to place, time and context. Essentialist views are troublesome because they privilege particular cultural beliefs and practices, leading

[🗩²·¹⁹] This caveat epitomises one of the difficulties I have had in writing about Chinese learners. Whilst I recognise that what I say about Chinese learners in 2.5.1 can be considered in some ways to be reductive, it is also necessary to give an indication of why this cohort faces challenges in ways which other groups do not. I have tried to manage this tension by hedging what I say.

to "all-encompassing systems of rules […] that substantially determine personal behaviour" (Clark & Gieve, 2006:55). Such perspectives may even result in establishing and sustaining deficit models of certain groups of learners: what Shi-xu (1997:216, in Clark & Gieve, op. cit., p58) claims leads to "eternalising the cultural Other's history", and these deficit models play a central role in why Chinese students continue to be viewed as problematic to teach: it is not because of who they are, but rather because of where they

are from. Such views also embrace ethnocentric views of beliefs and behaviour: "we are right, they are wrong", and consequently, "our way" becomes "the way" (Fontaine, 1996). In 4.5.1, I explore how cultures of learning informed my participants' lifeworlds as students in the UK. In the following section, however, I tease out the ways – many of them detrimental – in which Chinese students are typically conceptualised, both in the literature and in practice.

2.5.1. "The Chinese learner"

Given that this enquiry problematises the experiences of Chinese post-graduate students in the UK, it is imperative to consider what "the Chinese learner" means, from both theoretical and practical standpoints. It is a problematic term, since, as discussed above, broad and unqualified descriptions of whole groups of people may result in reductive accounts which can lead to othering and a perception that difference equals dysfunction. Many scholars have challenged this term (e.g. Feng, n.d.; Clark & Gieve, 2006; Gu, 2009; 2011), arguing that it creates the "cultural silos" (Leask & Carroll, 2011) in which Chinese students studying overseas often reside, and into which they are often unwittingly placed before they even start on their programme of study (Ramachandran, 2011). These challenges can be distilled into three core arguments.

Firstly, in terms of designation, what is meant by "Chinese"? The term is characteristically used to refer to students from the People's Republic of China (PRC), Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore (Saravanamuthu, 2008), yet these settings differ vastly in terms of society, politics and culture; it is problematic to reconcile four different locations under one heading [🗨2.20]. Secondly, in the literature, Chinese learners are routinely viewed as sharing key traits and commonalities, yet these "large culture" views of swathes

[🗨2.20] This tension, in fact, emerged in the interviews, as a number of participants from mainland China talked of the tensions that exist between them and students from Hong Kong and Taiwan. This tension is explored in Section 4.5.6.

of individuals fail to reflect reality. China is the world's most populous country, and the world's largest ethnic group, with attendant regional differences (Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011): China, possibly more than any other location, encompasses "one country but many cultures" (Gaskin, 2002:9). Any attempt, therefore, to provide an immutable description of "the Chinese learner" fails to consider the role played by factors such as the individual's background, educational goals and motivations, location, and relationships between tutors

and students (Parker et al., 2005), and of course, even within a shared setting, individuals have subjective behaviours and outlooks (Sovic, 2008; Zhao & Bourne, 2011; Jackson & Chen, 2017). Thirdly, painting Chinese learners as "different" means they have to be different in relation *to* something or someone else – what Pilcher et al. (2011) refer to as an "either-or model" – in this case, different from the traditions and beliefs of "Western" learners. Consequently, Chinese students are consistently considered to be problematic in UK higher education institutions. For instance, the student from Beijing who says little during a seminar is labelled "Chinese", yet the student from Bristol who is similarly quiet is

labelled "shy". Such labelling intensifies the prejudice which Leask & Carroll (2011) argue is tacitly present in international classrooms, where a "Chinese learner is always and only a Chinese learner" (Clark & Gieve, 2006:57) [🗩2.21]. It is crucial, therefore, to distinguish between etic and emic approaches (Watkins, 1996) to socio-cultural research, and the effect this may have on

[🗩2.21] An institution in which I worked required all Chinese students to attend language support classes, whether they needed this provision or not. Consequently, there were a lot of disgruntled fluent and accurate language users – as well as many dissatisfied non-Chinese students who needed language support but were unable to access it.

the reliability of conclusions drawn about Chinese learners. The former employs the norms of one culture as an empirical framework for those of another, whilst the latter uses local constructs in order to explore phenomena. Much of the research into Chinese learners has, to date, employed etic approaches, and we should therefore be wary of the validity of measuring Chinese students using Western metrics – as Gu (2011:217) has it, "Chineseness has been defined in terms of deviation from Western norms".

An early contribution to the writing on East Asian students was Ballard & Clanchy (1991, in Straker, 2016:304), who described them as, among other things, "passive", "silent", "rote learners" and "uncritical". Whilst such reductive accounts have long since been discredited, many perceptions about students from this context have been perpetuated and which evidence

an "expectations clash" (Murray & McConachy, 2018:255), between tutors and students, to which I return in 5.5. In the literature, Chinese students have, for example, been described [🗩2.22] as:

[🗩2.22] To note that these authors do not argue that *they* feel these characteristics to be true; rather, they have encountered these conceptualisations of Chinese students.

- *Deferential in relation to authority* (Gu & Maley, 2008; Zhao & Bourne, 2011; Turner, 2003, in Macdonald & Firth, 2014; Heng, 2018).

- *Docile and passive* (McGuire, 1997, in Clark & Gieve, 2006; Wright, 2015).

- *Lacking critical-analytical skills* (Clark & Gieve, 2006; Jiang, 2011) particularly *in relation to assessment* (Brown & Joughin, 2007).

- *Lacking humour* (Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011).

- *Preferring a "text-based and teacher-centric learning environment"* (Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011:176; Wright, 2015), in which *teaching is more expository than exploratory* (Macdonald & Firth, 2014).

- *Requiring special treatment due to poor English* (Clark & Gieve, 2006; Brown & Joughin, 2007).

- *Silent in class* (Bamford, 2008; Leask, 2009, in Killick, 2015) – like *"tape recorders"* (Biggs, 1996:47) or *"stuffed ducks"* (Gu, 2009:43).

- *Unwilling to ask for clarification in the classroom, but requiring attention individually outside the classroom* (Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011; Zhao & Bourne, 2011).

- *Unwilling to mix with other nationalities* (Gu & Maley, 2008:231; Leask, 2009, in Killick, 2015).

- *Valuing behaviourist learning strategies (rote learning and memorisation, for instance), over more cognitive approaches to learning* (Wu & Hammond, 2011; Caruana, 2014; Heng, 2018).

It seems clear, then, that Chinese students are often conceptualised in ways which are detrimental and even derogatory, and over which they have little say [🔍2.23]. Of course, this is not to say that these students do not face challenges when they come to the UK: much research has uncovered a multiplicity of challenges which Chinese students encounter in a new educational setting, and it is important to summarise four aspects of this which have been given prominence in the literature.

[🔍2.23] Challenging these perspectives, and allowing my participants to make their voices heard in relation to these reductive accounts is a key aspect of the emancipatory stance this project espouses, as it encourages institutions to better accommodate students better, rather than continue with a system which does not suit the shape of the student body, and where "the onus is one the students to adapt […], rather than the institution" (Bowl, 2001:57).

Firstly, Chinese students have been reported to be unfamiliar with the expectations and approaches to teaching, learning and knowledge which typify the culture of learning in higher education in the UK (Gu & Maley, 2008; Gu, 2009; Gu et al., 2010). Even when students are

able to recognise that there are differences in practices between China and the UK, they are less able to articulate what those differences are (Cross & Hitchcock, 2007, in Wright, 2015) [💬2.24].

> [💬2.24] I argue that tutors can only assist these students in making the transition to other ways of thinking and doing if they themselves have an understanding of the concept of cultures of learning.

Secondly, it has been argued that Chinese views of education value formal learning because it is believed to enhance an individual's position in the world and serves to develop both the individual and society as a whole. These views reflect Confucian philosophy, which celebrates a "spirit of enquiry" (Wing On, 1996:35) in which education is held to provide a "moral transformation" (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006:12). How this is enacted has been the subject of much research, dating back to the 1960s, with a number of studies reporting that Chinese students have a tendency to employ surface approaches to learning (Marton & Säljö, 1976) such as memorisation and rote-learning, with less use made of deep approaches to learning (e.g. problem-solving skills and a critical orientation towards knowledge), or rote learning for exams (Macdonald & Firth, 2014:np). Chinese teachers have been reported to prioritise knowledge acquisition through memorisation, modelling and imitation of factual knowledge, which are considered crucial "skills for learning" (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998:39), and of rewarding students who behave in this way (Heng, 2018); Jin & Cortazzi (2011) also found that British teachers believe students should ask for help when they have a problem, whilst Chinese students are of the opinion that asking for help is burdensome, and that their teachers should be sufficiently sensitive to their difficulties to be on hand to proffer help. In addition, British students believe that to delay asking for clarification may be detrimental to later learning (Jin & Cortazzi, 2017), whereas Chinese students do not. This can inform the way in which the learning process is mediated by students: UK students seem to use questions during learning as a way of understanding, whereas Chinese students used questions after learning "in order to avoid foolish or superficial questions" (Jin & Cortazzi, 1997:50). In instances such as these, there is a socio-cultural gap present, since "the need for help is unexpressed by the Chinese and unnoticed by the British" (Jin & Cortazzi, 2011:54) and, as a result, Chinese students in a UK academic setting may not get the support they need (see 4.5.1 and 4.5.2). Of course, such conceptualisations are not monolithic, and, in fact, Saravanamuthu (2008) argues that traditional Confucianism has had a limited impact on approaches to education in China in recent years, with schools becoming more "Western" in their approach to teaching and learning, possibly as an effect of the Cultural Revolution and the purge of "traditional" values. Jin & Cortazzi (2006) also maintain that Chinese conceptualisations of teaching,

learning and knowledge are changing, leading to what has been termed "vernacular Confucianism". For instance, continuous assessment is now used in conjunction with exams; previously unseen written exams were seen as the gold standard of assessment, and the role of critical engagement is also developing, with students increasingly viewed as having something worthwhile to say.

Thirdly, in the Chinese tradition, effort, application, perseverance and diligence are typically viewed as more important than ability (Brown & Joughin, 2007; Wright, 2015) and the concept of *li zhi* – will power – is of supreme importance (Wing On, 1996). Conversely, "Western" education tends to value academic ability over effort. Terms such as "gifted", "naturally able", and "talented" are common-place, and "a good effort" implies that energy was spent, but a lack of aptitude precluded success. This can result in "learned failure" (Biggs, 1996), whereby students who fail believe (or are told) that this is because they lack ability, which, of course, they can do little about. It is therefore typical for Chinese students to be self-effacing about their own academic ability and achievement (Salili, 1996) even when those achievements are notable. They are also more likely to take control of their own learning, whilst Western students often relinquish that control to others (Biggs, 1996). However, since academic failure is attributed to a lack of effort, students who are hard-working yet still fail may be more distressed that those who did not make an effort in the first place, thus generating a feeling of incompetence (Fwu et al., 2017). Students may therefore be caught between "'feeling bad' for making too much effort and 'being bad' for making too little effort" (ibid., p508), leading to frustration and dissatisfaction. This can, in turn, lead to acculturative stress (see 2.4.5 and 4.4.3).

Finally, since parents bestow the gift of life, Chinese students have been reported to believe that their own lives should bring them pride and satisfaction (Hui et al., 2011; Heng, 2018), resulting in a strong sense of "affiliative achievement" (Salili, 1996), which can result in a sense of pressure (Wu et al., 2015; Prieto-Welch, 2016) since academic failure brings family shame (Wei et al., 2007). This carries through into conceptualisations of teaching and learning, with teachers warranting the same level of obedience and respect afforded to parents (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). This can create challenges for Chinese students studying in the UK where relationships between students and teachers may be more equitable (see 4.4.1), or where there may be rewards for "confronting authority and established scholarship to put forward their own opinions and theories." (Gabb, 2006:361).

As 2.3 argued, higher education in the UK has changed vastly over recent decades. The transformation in the composition of the university student population means we need to find ways to bridge the gap between old, traditional practices and the diversity of cultures of learning which are now manifest in the classroom (Saravanamuthu, 2008). This involves acknowledging that the practices and beliefs which these new students bring to the classroom may not be what we may be accustomed to, but that are equally valid. In 5.3 – 5.5, I argue for a "third way" of approaching the internationalised university classroom, which recognises that Chinese students should be viewed as "different but equal", rather than simply "different".

2.6. The Transition to Post-Graduate Study [💬[2.25]]

[💬[2.25]] This was not an area I expected to emerge as a challenge for my participants. When I began interviewing, however, it emerged that this was, indeed, a significant part of their experience and one which I explored in the literature to in order to better understand it in context.

The transition from undergraduate to post-graduate study is far from easy – and much less straightforward than tutors assume, or recall from their own experience. Although post-graduates have a broad understanding of what university study involves, and usually take a more mature approach to aspects such as attendance (Gu & Maley, 2008), they encounter significant challenges which their undergraduate counterparts do not (Gu, 2009). Indeed, it could be argued that this transition is itself a variety of acculturation (see 2.4). However, unlike other academic transitions, such as 6th Form to university (Wilson et al., 2007), the move from being an undergraduate to being a post-graduate has generally been overlooked in the literature (O'Donnell et al., 2009) – although the fact that there is limited research in this field would indicate that it warrants examination (Tobbell et al., 2010).

Full-time post-graduate study (in the UK) typically comprises programmes lasting only one academic year, and rarely amount to more than twenty weeks' actual teaching. Unlike undergraduate programmes, there is consequently little room to make mistakes and rectify them later. The shortness of post-graduate programmes may well be a contributory factor in the challenges students face, since it can take up to two years to acquire the skills needed for effective post-graduate study (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006), and international post-graduate students may underperform (see 4.5) because they are struggling to acculturate to the new setting (Caruana, 2014). Whereas undergraduate students may spend up to 18 months before submitting summatively-assessed work, post-graduate students need to be "switched on"

right from the start, becoming proficient, or *faute de mieux*, adequately critical readers and writers in a short space of time (Bamford, 2008). Since the time available to refine and redefine perspectives is so short, post-graduate students are more likely to encounter acculturative stress than longer stayers: Sümer et al. (2008), for example, found that sojourns of up to 12 months result in distress more frequently than those of more than one year, and Hyun et al. (2006) found that 50% of their post-graduate respondents had suffered from some kind of emotional or stress-related problem over their year's study.

In addition to the need to be immediately effective, post-graduates are often hampered by being conceptualised as "expert" students (Tobbell et al., 2010) who are simply doing "more of the same" (O'Donnell et al., 2009a). There is an expectation that they will adjust to the high level of autonomy required by Master's-level study. However, this is not necessarily the case, and the lack of the structured, scaffolded learning which characterises undergraduate teaching can be problematic. For example, post-graduate students are typically expected to carry out independent research projects for which their undergraduate studies may not have adequately prepared them. The decline in traditional manufacturing industries (see 2.3.1) has also led to larger numbers of students who are re-training in new fields but who may lack fundamental practical, theoretical or/and epistemological knowledge about their subject area (Bowl, 2001). This is compounded by what van de Werfhorst & Andersen (2005:321) refer to as "credential inflation" – in other words, as the proportion of the population with undergraduate degrees grows, so employers look for employees with ever-higher qualifications, thus creating a need for a Master's degree to gain employment in jobs which would previously have been accessible with a lower qualification.

The relationship with academic supervisors is, likewise, a fundamental facet of the post-graduate experience. This relationship can affect the quality of a student's lifeworld, as a poor relationship can be a catalyst for significant distress (McCormack, 2006). This is compounded for international students who may be unaware of precisely what their role, and that of their supervisor, should be: McClure (2007) found that 50% of Chinese post-graduates had suffered from anxiety and/or depression because they felt they had insufficient guidance and personal contact with their supervisors. These relationships emerged as problematic in my own participants' accounts (see 4.4.1).

Furthermore, the cost of post-graduate study is high, and, despite what we may think, not all international students are from prosperous backgrounds (O'Reilly et al., 2010). Financial pressures can be a source of anxiety for all students (Prieto-Welch, 2016), and this anxiety can be greater for post-graduate students (Bowl, 2001) since they may have additional financial commitments such as mortgages and families. International students are additionally affected by the whims of currency exchange rates and economic crises in their own countries. For a post-graduate student unlucky enough to fall into financial distress, the hardship funds which are available are often limited and frequently inegalitarian, with better-off institutions being able to draw on greater resources to allocate to students in need. Funds are also often awarded at faculty or even departmental level, meaning that aid is not only unequal between institutions but also within them. In addition, access to funding is typically means tested, requiring the completion of complex application forms which have a whiff of the legal about them, meaning that they may be impenetrable to non-native speaking students. On top of this is the ignominy of having to admit to being in need of support, and the requirement to disclose information of a highly personal nature (Tinklin et al., 2005) – which may be particularly troubling for Chinese students, coupled as it is with a possible loss of face (Prieto-Welch, 2016) [🗨2.26]. Due to the cost associated with their studies, many post-graduate students work part-time, or even work full-time and study part-time (Clegg et al., 2003; Thomas, 2005; Garrett, 2015), which means their academic progress may be disadvantaged.

> [🗨2.26] This potential loss of face was likely in Louise's mind in Vignette 1 in 1.4, when we discussed applying to the institution's hardship fund when she lost money due to her agent.

Post-graduate students are usually older than undergraduates, and higher age is a contributing factor in acculturative stress among international students (Sümer et al., 2008). Older post-graduates may also be less willing to adopt the drinking-and-clubbing routine which typifies the student lifestyle (Liu & Winder, 2014), and may thus be less successful in forming meaningful and supportive campus-based relationships (see 4.4.2). They are more likely than undergraduates to be in long-term relationships, and, for international students, anxieties about an accompanying partner's isolation in an unfamiliar country is a common cause of concern (Higher Education Academy, 2014), particularly if the partner is not employed, or lacks a support network to draw on. Children's schooling may also be a worry, and the need to pay for dependents' healthcare can be a financial drain (Ramachandran, 2011). It is also common for international post-graduate students to have left spouses and children at home, and the lack of familial contact can weigh heavily (Wu et al., 2015). There are therefore

difficulties associated with transitioning to post-graduate study which may not receive sufficient consideration from tutors or institutions.

2.7 A scepticism towards meta-narratives

The four themes explored in 2.3 – 2.6 reflects a postmodern perspective on the social world. This is because each refutes any claim to what is true in "universalistic terms" (Hammersley, 1999:28). Whilst this thesis is no way an exploration of postmodernism (or even of postmodernities more broadly), the four themes discussed in this chapter can be seen to reflect a scepticism towards meta narratives. Meta-narratives can be thought of as the "stories" that underpin orthodox modes of thought, such as religion, political ideologies, the legal and judicial systems, education and morality, which are orientated towards rationalising Enlightenment philosophies like the progress of history and the primacy of science. Because these stories and philosophies offer a way of understanding the world, they also end up structuring it: as result, their "totalising truths lead to totalising practices" (Cole, 2008), in which the "tentativeness, fragmentation and indeterminacy" (Alvesson, 2002:10) of human experience goes unrecognised and uncelebrated.

This chapter has challenged these hegemonies, showing that there is no one single truth in the lives of these participants, but rather, multiple truths. To exemplify, 2.3 argued that universities are now home to diverse and varied cohorts of students: the uniformity and consistency of earlier decades is no longer present. 2.4 contended that the shift from culture shock to acculturation as an explanation of sojourners' distress recognises that the process is not a predictable one which can be explained scientifically. In 2.5, I conjectured that universal views of what "good" teaching, learning and knowledge are not universal and do not accurately account for what happens in the contemporary university. Finally, 2.6 claimed that post-graduate students have vulnerabilities and face challenges which have previously gone unacknowledged. This chapter, therefore, places an emphasis on diversity and heterogeneity, and helps contextualise my participants' experiences in Chapter 4 within assorted open-ended narratives.

In 1.2, I showed how there is an emancipatory and socially-critical thread running through this account. Whilst there is some tendency in the philosophical literature to conflate postmodernism and emancipatory stances at the subjective end of the continuum of truth

(Williams & Morrow, 2009), I believe there is a distinction to be made between the two. Whilst postmodern perspectives are useful in describing the splintering of the lifeworld – as exemplified by the four themes in this chapter – they are not particularly progressive in nature. They represent an "endless and relatively ahistorical process of deconstruction" (Cole, 2008), but offer no suggestions for how to better shape the world after that deconstruction. This is one reason why I hold a neo-Marxist lens up to my students' experiences, because its prism allows me to not only comment on their lives, but also to advocate and militate for systemic structural change in Chapter 5 [🗨2.27].

> [🗨2.27] I fully recognise that in arguing that this account rejects earlier meta narratives because they are totalising, I risk replacing them with a meta narrative of my own making. This is perhaps the biggest irony of postmodernism, although I would contend that one thing postmodern views do allow us to say is that, whilst there are no "right" answers, there are certainly good arguments.

2.8 Revisiting my commitment to trustworthiness

The topic of my research is at the intersection of the four themes explored in this chapter (higher education in the UK, acculturation, cultures of learning and the transition to post-graduate study). In this sense, this enquiry is **significant** because there are few studies which share this particular convergence, and **relevant** because it embodies a plurality of voices, many of which are from the margins. There is a thick description of **prior and current knowledge** in relation to these four themes, both **conceptually** and **theoretically**.

There is an element of **multivocality** in this chapter, both in the range of voices heard, but also in the range of sources represented (for instance, peer-reviewed journals, government policy documents, reports and guidance). My understanding of the field, therefore, is predicated on **a meaningful interconnection of literatures**, and I have been transparent in this chapter about the processes and procedures I followed in surveying the literature. Finally, I have continued to show, through my personal critical commentaries, how I relate and respond to established knowledge, thereby adding a **reflexive** dimension to the account.

Chapter 3

Clarifying: philosophical commitments and methodological underpinnings

3.1 Overview of this chapter and a rationale for the title

This chapter unfolds and rationalises the philosophical commitments and methodological underpinnings [💬3.1] which cradle this enquiry. It chronicles how my preliminary research (an exploratory reconnaissance study, followed by a more extensive pilot study) informed the design of the main phase of the project and how lessons learnt in the field made the project iterative in nature. It also explores the philosophical positions and methodological approaches which have moulded my interpretation of my participants' [💬3.2] lifeworlds. I also clarify how I attended to ethical concerns, and consider the central role which writing played in my research and in drawing together this account.

> [💬3.1] I do not intend to evidence "correct" decision making here; instead, I account for and rationalise the decisions I made about how best to go about responding to my research questions, in my setting, with my participants.

> [💬3.2] In writing this report, I became increasingly more aware that the lexicon of qualitative research – what Taylor & White (2000:59) term the "empirical repertoire" – is littered with leftovers from the positivist tradition ("bracketing", "collecting data", "subjects" and so on). For qualitative researchers these terms are unhelpful (and inaccurate), and so in the remainder of this report I have replaced a number of terms, for example: *subject* ➜ *participant; data collection* ➜ *data generation; reliability* ➜ *trustworthiness*.

It can be difficult, particularly for a novice researcher working alone, to know precisely what options are most apposite for a research project. My own decisions were informed in three ways: (1) by recommendations I came across in the methodological literature; (2) by reading about similar research; and (3) by decisions I took for the purposes of "the study at hand" (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016:11-12). A number of my design decisions were successful from the outset, whilst others were more troublesome and required modification, and others still required discarding. I will show how I arrived at, and moved on from, these junctures, and be open and explicit about the decisions taken about what I wanted to find out, and the ways I went about this, because these decisions provide insights into my own stance in relation to my enquiry and the wider world.

3.2 Three illustrative sketches

Before giving an account of the decisions I took when designing my project, first I introduce three of my participants. By exemplifying who I spoke to, I hope to give a sense of their lifeworlds, and these three illustrative sketches frame the philosophical commitments and methodological underpinnings which follow. In addition, research which draws on the precepts of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (see 5.8), such as my own project, aims to identify "distinctive voices" (Smith et al., 2009:38), and these three sketches show why Tina, Sheena and Shaun all had distinctive voices.

Tina: young and depressed

Tina was the first of the participants I interviewed, and is consequently special to me because, as a novice researcher, I was astonished at how open and frank unknown people can be, and because she was so generous with her time and in talking to me about her experience in the UK. She had been in the UK for two months at the time of our first meeting. She arrived for the first interview late, and flustered. It was a chilly day and she took some time to take off a fluffy white bobble hat, unwind a long scarf and take off a woollen navy coat. She apologised profusely for being late, concerned that she had ruined the interview.

Tina had taken an undergraduate degree in Engineering, and had moved to an MA in Cultural and Creative Industries. She was close to her parents, and when she spoke of them it was with affection and respect. Indeed, she commented that she needed to be a good student in order to repay them for the sacrifices they had made for her (see 2.5.1): Engineering was not a subject she enjoyed, but she had studied for a BSc at her parents' behest, and this was part of her filial repayment. She had amicable relationships with the four girls she shared a university flat with, but these were not particularly emotionally supportive relationships: when she needed help, it was provided by her friends in China, and, most importantly, by her parents, to whom she spoke regularly on FaceTime.

Tina, though, was finding adjusting to life in the UK to be more problematic than she had

anticipated, and this was, she felt, primarily due to her level of proficiency in English. Despite achieving 7.0 overall on her IELTS language entry exam [🗨3.3], she believed her English to be poor, and not up to the challenge of studying at Master's level – a point she raised on numerous occasions.

[🗨3.3] This is a respectable score. The maximum mark, 9.0, is considered to be that of an educated native-speaker. The IELTS organisation itself describes a score of 7.0 to be "acceptable" for most academic study (IELTS, n.d.).

Tina was troubled by the new and unfamiliar practices which she had encountered as a student. For example, seminar discussions mortified her, as she was scared of making herself look foolish. This was tied in, she believed, to her heritage: European students were all far more insightful and able to think and speak critically because of a cultural background which she (and her Chinese friends) did not share. Indeed, Tina was noticeably self-critical, stating on a number of occasions that all other students were better than she was, and that any success she had as a student was due to luck. She also spoke on a number of occasions about her relationship with her Personal Tutor. He was sympathetic to her plight, but was not fully aware of how best to mitigate her challenges, nor what advice to give: for example, he responded to Tina's concern about her level of English by suggesting she get an English boyfriend.

Tina was insightful about her own personality – she knew, for instance that she had a tendency towards procrastination and indolence. She admitted, for example, that she allowed deadlines to loom large before beginning to study, and that she would be prepared to pay to have someone manage her application for the internship she needed to complete as prerequisite of her programme. She was also open about the mental and emotional struggles which she had faced in the first few months in the UK, talking frankly about the depression which had led her to shut herself away in her room for days at a time, watching endless episodes of *Friends* on her laptop. She recognised that this was part of a personal history of distress, and was seeing a counsellor on a weekly basis.

Tina also recounted the most troubling incident to emerge in the interviews. She wanted to make friends with local people, which led to her to begin talking to a young man who seemed to have lost his phone. They swapped contact details, but he bombarded her with messages imploring her to meet, and even began to seek her out. When she invented a

fictitious boyfriend in China to try and deter him from contacting her, he instead told her that they need not become boyfriend and girlfriend, but could, instead, just be "sex buddies" (Tina, 2:46). This upset her, and made her wary of striking up friendships with other people in the UK.

Despite her challenges, though, Tina had not found being in the UK to be a dreadful experience. For instance, she relished the opportunity to meet people from other backgrounds, and was proud to point out that she had learned how to cook – a skill which she had not mastered when she lived in China. In this way, she was typical of international students who have a challenging but ultimately fulfilling sojourn.

Sheena: aware and determined

Sheena was a Digital Culture and Society MA student, although her first degree, in China, was a BA in Journalism and Communication. She stood out for me because of her perceptive observations about the differences in classroom practices and pedagogy between China and the UK and of the disparate approaches to knowledge in these places. She had observed that knowledge in the UK is created through analysis and critique, rather than conserved (see 2.5.1) and recognised that the latter approach typified her previous culture of learning. She was also able to point out, from a student's perspective, what practices and procedures made for better learning opportunities (see 4.5.1 and 5.3), such as encouraging students to work with other nationalities. Sheena was highly critical of tutors who appeared to have little perception of, or sympathy towards, students whose culture of learning differs from that of the UK: she recounted a painful anecdote of a tutor who told a quiet Chinese student in a seminar not to bother coming to class again if she had nothing to contribute.

Sheena – like Tina – was open about the mental health challenges she had encountered in the UK [🗨3.4]. She told me she had recently spent two days locked away in

> [🗨3.4] This resonates with many of the participants' accounts (see 4.4.3).

her room, crying. One of the causes for her distress was the belief – again, like Tina – that her level of English proficiency was poor. This had affected both her confidence in herself as a student and her willingness to seek out and strike up friendships with other people.

Sheena had taken a pre-sessional programme prior to embarking on her MA, and was convinced that this had given her a solid grounding in what she would be required to do as a Master's student (see 4.5.8). The programme had developed skills that she had been able to draw on when she began her MA, and unlike her colleagues who spent their first term attuning to a new and unfamiliar setting, she was focussed and effective from the first day of her programme.

Sheena was also notable because she was prepared to challenge herself to adapt to the expectations of the academy in the UK, and had been successful in doing so. She had, for instance, forced herself to contribute to seminar discussions, despite knowing that this would be uncomfortable. The response from her colleagues and tutor was positive, however, which she found motivating (see 4.4.1), and which had led her to contribute more regularly in subsequent discussions.

Shaun: reflective and solitary

Shaun was the only male participant in the project, and stands out for this reason. He was the cousin of a student I taught, and had heard of my project and asked to participate. He was the only participant I spoke to three times. He was a natty dresser: he arrived for our first interview in a tangerine puffer jacket and sunglasses, despite the cloudy day. In that first interview, two months into his Master's programme, Shaun was shy, but as we became more familiar with each other, he became increasingly open and forthcoming. He had an impressive grasp of vernacular English, and I wondered whether he was aware of the impression that some of his more colourful language had on his interlocutors.

As a Philosophy student, Shaun had a thoughtful and sensitive connection with the world and with people around him, giving careful and considered responses to questions. He was, for instance, clear about why he chose not to spend much time with his classmates: unlike some of the other participants in this project, who did not take part in social events because they did not feel they were part of the social group (see 4.4.2), Shaun chose not to participate because he would rather be alone. He was not interested in bars and clubs – as he said, he did not "care that much about [the] material life" (Shaun, 3:161-162). He was a solitary character, but for him, unlike others, this was not a negative aspect of his sojourn in the UK. He was clear that this was who he was, and he was happy with that.

Shaun was also a keen observer of the actions and thoughts of others, and was sensitive to other ways of being and doing: he pointed out that the Saudi Arabian girl in his seminar group exemplified all her comments through reference to religion, and that his Italian and French counterparts produced philosophically-complex responses which, although impressive-sounding, actually had little real substance. Like Sheena, he was immensely proud when he made an observation during a seminar discussion which was praised by the tutor, which had given him confidence.

3.3 A theoretical framework for the enquiry

In 1.9, I outlined the conceptual framework which holds this enquiry together. One element of that is my theoretical framework, in other words, the specific, and formal, philosophical commitments and methodological underpinning on which this enquiry hangs. Constantly re-designing and refining my theoretical framework helped me create a robust and workable project.

By its very definition, a theoretical framework is an abstraction, and, as such, does not always provide sufficient details about the practical application of a research project. Dowling & Brown (2009) therefore urge researchers to cast a critical eye over the operationalisation of their research; in other words, they need to clarify what decisions were taken in order to safeguard the effectiveness, and by extension, the trustworthiness, of their enquiry. In operationalising my own project, I drew on Taylor & Bogdan (1998), who ask eight questions which need to be answered explicitly in order to make a research project robust. Those questions are:

1. What methodological decisions were taken?
2. What theoretical perspectives were embraced?
3. When, and for how long, did the study run?
4. What was the nature and number of participants [💬3.5] and settings?
5. How were settings and participants identified?
   Were participants known prior to the research? Why/not?

> [💬3.5] Taylor and Bogdan (op. cit.) use the term "informants"; I prefer "participants", as I feel this term carries with it a sense of shared knowledge creation, and a more open approach to the field which does not aim to corroborate preconceived theories. See [💬3.2].

6. What was my original purpose? How did this change over time? What assumptions and allegiances did I bring to the project?

7. How did I and the participants view each other?

8. How was the analysis carried out? How were interpretations checked? Did participants review drafts?

Table 5, below, shows the architecture of this chapter, by indicating how the content of 3.4 – 3.14 offers responses to Taylor and Bogdan's questions:

SECTION		Methodological decisions	Theoretical perspective	Time & length of study	Participants and settings	Research design	Purposes, assumption and allegiances	Relationships	Analysis
3.4	Refining my research questions	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	
3.3	Taking a Relativist-subjectivist stance		◆						
3.6	Positioning myself philosophically		◆				◆	◆	
3.7	Positioning myself methodologically		◆			◆		◆	
3.8	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis	◆	◆		◆	◆			◆
3.9	Preliminary research	◆		◆	◆	◆			◆
3.10	Identifying participants and settings				◆				
3.11	In-depth, focussed interviews	◆				◆			
3.12	Ethical considerations	◆							◆
3.13	The process of writing	◆			◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
3.14	Revisiting my commitment to trustworthiness	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆

TAYLOR & BOGDAN'S QUESTIONS

Table 5: An architecture for my theoretical framework (after Taylor & Bogdan, 1998)

3.4 Refining my research questions

In 1.5, I presented the research questions to which this thesis offers responses. In this section, I show how I arrived at those questions. I have elected to make this the first substantive section of this chapter since my research questions are at the heart of this enquiry, and they informed all the philosophical and methodological decisions I took.

Research questions pin down what the researcher wants to say, and ensure that the enquiry is manageable. They are the "big questions that both generate and are generated by all the smaller questions" (Pryor, 2010:162), and are of interest not only to the researcher but also to others who have a vested interest in the field, such as colleagues, supervisors, practitioners, policy makers – and of course, other researchers. It is crucial to articulate research questions accurately, since their phrasing informs the approach to the research itself, although they should "guide not dictate" the research (Brown, 2010:175): in my case, having different research questions would have led me to a different theoretical framework. Andrews (2003) argues that effective research questions need to be answerable, so ensuring they are clear and precise is crucial in assisting the researcher in making methodological decisions which will generate relevant and appropriate data. The research questions I eventually settled on shaped – and were shaped by – the responses I gleaned from participants, and therefore provide a prism through which I have viewed their lifeworlds (Newby, 2014:67).

Settling on suitable research questions is an iterative process (O'Leary, 2005), and much fine-tuning occurred as my project developed. The research questions which I respond to in this thesis are significantly different from those I articulated at the start of my doctoral journey. In my research proposal, I was interested in exploring the psychological effect that studying in the UK might have on Chinese post-graduate students. The questions which I drew up at that point were, in retrospect, unfocussed and unmanageably vast. I had seven (!) questions, *viz.*:

1. What issues affect international students? How are these the same as, or different from, those which affect the student body as a whole?
2. To whom do international students turn to when in need of support?
3. To what extent is support provided on a peer or national community level? For instance, do Chinese students seek out support from co-nationals when in crisis?

4. Do different nationalities / communities attend to problems in the same way, and, by extension, is the problem particularly prevalent amongst one community, such as Confucian-heritage students?

5. Do international native speakers of English (students for the US, Ireland, Australasia, for instance) encounter similar issues?

6. How do home students deal with problems?

7. In what ways can current HE welfare provision be adapted to ensure that international students are adequately catered for?

Silverman (2015:35) points out that it is "common for novice researchers to take on what turns out to be an impossibly large research problem", which requires modification before it can be addressed by a single-handed researcher, and by the time I got to my reconnaissance study at the end of my first year of study (see 3.9.1), I had already refined these research questions. This was in the light of reading more about the field and similar studies: it became apparent that each of the original seven questions could feasibly be a thesis in its own right, and that, for instance, Questions 4, 5 and 6 would call for number-driven methods, and access to large numbers of respondents. In addition to insights from my reading, discussion with my colleagues and supervisors helped me pare down the scope of the questions [🗩3.6], and my reconnaissance study had the following research questions:

> [🗩3.6] Initially, modifying the focus of my enquiry felt fraudulent, somehow, as if I was not delivering what I had promised. However, discussions with colleagues and supervisors, as well as my engagement with the literature (e.g. Thomson & Walker, 2010), clarified that this kind of recalibration is a common feature of doctoral research: it is unlikely (and imprudent?) to have the same focus at the end of the enquiry as was proposed at the outset. Indeed, Taylor & Bogdan (1998:8) state that "… we begin our studies with only vaguely formulated research questions". I would argue, therefore, that my re-focussing was an indication of burgeoning knowledge which allowed me to make my enquiry more directed and powerful.

1. What issues affect international students? How are these the same as, or different from, those which affect the student body as a whole?

2. To whom do international students turn to when in need of support?

3. To what extent is support provided on a peer or national community level? For instance, do Chinese students seek out support from co-nationals when in crisis?

4. In what ways can current HE welfare provision be adapted to ensure that international students are adequately catered for?

However, the reconnaissance study revealed that this iteration of my research questions was still problematic. Questions 1 and 2 focused too broadly on all international students, and Question 4 was more akin to a conclusion than a question. Andrews (2003) reassures the researcher that it can take a long time to fine-tune their research questions to a point where they make for a manageable project, as part of a process of "gradual transformation" (ibid., p60), and after my reconnaissance study I reflected in depth on precisely what I was interested in finding out. I thought about the lessons I had learned in the field, discussed at length with others and engaged further with the methodological literature. This resulted in the development of these research questions which I used in my pilot study:

1. How do Chinese post-graduate students make sense of their social and academic acculturation to UK HEIs?
2. What are the perceptions of Chinese post-graduate students of factors which confound and facilitate their social and academic acculturation in UK HE?

In due course, when I embarked on the main phase of the project, I recognised that the questions needed yet another modification if they were to reflect the themes which were emerging from my interviews. As a result, the questions were recast one final time, resulting in the two questions which I set out in 1.5, and to which I respond in Chapter 4, *viz.*:

1. How do Chinese post-graduate students describe their academic and social acculturation in higher education in the UK?
2. What do Chinese post-graduate students perceive to be the factors which confound and facilitate their academic and social acculturation to higher education in the UK?

These two research questions are related, but are also epistemologically and methodologically distinct. Question 1 has a research-driven goal, and focuses on my participants' experience and understanding of their academic and social acculturation in higher education in the UK, as well as their "personal meaning and sense-making […] in their world" (Smith et al., 2009:46). Research-driven goals such as this can feasibly be explored with little or no *a priori* knowledge of the field of enquiry. However, they do not necessarily carry any practical implications, and since this thesis is a professional doctorate, it is incumbent upon me to speak to practice. Therefore, Question 2 has a

theory-driven goal, and, since it develops "an *explanatory level* account of factors, impacts and influences" (ibid., p45, emphasis in original), and the findings which emerged from this question led to the suggestions for practice that I tender in Chapter 5.

I am aware that my research questions, in a number of ways, introduced positions of power into the relationships I had with my participants. This is because the questions reflected my interests in their experience of being a Chinese post-graduate student in the UK. It may be that what they wanted to talk about did not marry up with the thrust of my enquiry: what if some of the participants wanted to use the interviews as a forum to criticise provision, for instance? That said, Gillham (2001), Kvale (2007) and Smith et al. (2009) – among others – all argue that, whilst qualitative interviewers should respect the direction the participants wish to take during an interview, there is also a pragmatic need for the researcher to be able to maintain some level of control over the subject matter. Indeed, Rapley (2004: 26, in Silverman, 2015:168) argues that "interviewing is never just 'a conversation': the interview 'may be conversation*al*, but you as the interviewer […] decide which bit of talk to follow-up, [and] when to open and close various topics'." As a result, I endeavoured to provide a space in which the participants could talk about what was important to them (see 3.11), as well as focussing on the aspects of their experience which I wished to explore.

3.5 Positioning myself philosophically [🗩 3.7]

Many researchers in social contexts question the legitimacy of attempting to find universal answers to questions relating to the human world. They likewise reject the identification of single, absolute causes or descriptions of phenomena in the social world (see 2.7). This is because different perspectives may lead to a different interpretation of a phenomenon (Newby, 2014), and what might be real and true in one context may not

[🗩 3.7] The sections of this chapter which attend to the more philosophical and metaphysical aspects of social research have been some of the most thought-provoking sections to construct. For that reason alone, I am rueful that they get less coverage here than I would like. There is so much more I would like to explore than I can, given the limits of this thesis. This is the lot of the doctoral student: you want to know everything, but cannot; equally, you want to say everything, but cannot.

necessarily the case elsewhere. Truth is relative – relative to places, people and times – and is therefore subjective (Sausman, 2011): as a result, our understanding of, and ability to describe, the world is socially constructed. Given that the research questions to which I offer responses are grounded in the perceptions and experiences of a highly contextualised group of participants, it made sense for me to take a relativist stance in this project. This is

especially the case given the intercultural and cross-cultural aspect of my setting, as relativism only really makes sense when viewed through social and cultural lenses (Mathison, 2005).

Barrow (2010) argues that a distinction can be made between truth which is relative to societies ("relativism") and truth which is relevant to individuals ("subjectivism); for me, in this enquiry, I believe that truth emerges both within the experiences of the individual participants I spoke to, and also from a more remote, superimposed location, given the structures and policies which inform their lifeworlds in the UK (see 2.3). For this reason, I blend the two positions into a dual relativist-subjectivist ontology, which also enmeshes the phenomenological and hermeneutic perspectives I adopt in 3.9.

3.6 Positioning myself politically

Critical social research [🗨3.8] should concern itself with challenging the political status quo (Hammersley, 1999). It serves to "rethink, even re-imagine, possibilities for different futures*"* (Boden & Epstein, 2006:224). These different futures can be brought about by using research findings to inform objectives, strategies and policies: consequently, research in the human world is eminently political (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007). Crotty (1998) and Steinberg & Kinchloe (2012) argue that any socially-critical enquiry needs to go beyond suggesting that "a bit of social engineering" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2003:159) is sufficient to bring about change. Rather, they argue that enquiry in this tradition should take a more emancipatory objective, and ask questions of society as a whole, keeping a constant eye on differential relationships within social structures. I believe, therefore, that there are political questions to be asked about how Chinese post-graduate students are conceptualised and approached in the university classroom. Whilst my participants reported that their time in the UK had been transformational and life enhancing in many ways (see 4.5.9), there were aspects of their experience which make for uncomfortable reading, and which stem, I contend, from policies which have fomented detrimental conditions in the university classroom (see 2.3). These conditions lead to Chinese post-graduate students being less visible, and often

[🗨3.8] Critical social research is generally associated with a left-wing political perspective. That is not necessarily the case, however: as critical theories exist to change the world for the better, it is feasible that someone with a more reactionary stance may also take a socially-critical position. For example, those who believe that welfare support leads individuals to shun employment may argue, from a critical perspective, that cutting support will rectify this.

perceived as less able, than other students, and it is because of this that I have viewed my participants' experiences through the twin lenses of neo-Marxism and critical transformative pedagogy, which are intertwined in the emancipatory strand I established in 1.2; the two sections which follow explore these philosophical positions.

3.6.1 A Gramscian neo-Marxist lens

I am holding up a neo-Marxist (rather than a classical Marxist) lens to the human world because, even though the economic arguments of Marxism may have been discredited, its stance on issues of power in society still carries weight, and can still be used to explain the ways in which the world we live in is structured and functions. This shift in focus – from economic to social critique – is what differentiates classical Marxism and neo-Marxism, with the latter engaging less in "struggle and action" (Cole, 2008) and Leninist calls for a revolutionary vanguard, and more in a "just, equal, mutual and respectful" pursuit of fairness (Jiang, 2011).

My enquiry falls into what can be considered to be a "third wave" of neo-Marxist critiques of education. The first wave occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, and concerned itself with educational inequalities engendered by class, race and gender. The second wave critiqued and extended the first wave, arguing that, by not considering aspects such as age, sexuality or disability, it was limited in scope (Greaves et al., 2007). The current third wave differs from the first two in that it rejects "actually existing socialism" (Cole et al., 1997:188) in the light of the abhorrent excesses of Soviet-style state socialism, thus advocating a kind of humanist Marxism. It has also refined the first two waves, in an attempt to evaluate and trouble social structures and institutions rather than critiquing the social order *per se*. A key feature of this is the emphasis on challenging the "ability of the ruling class to keep control" (Hammersley, 1999:43) through a hegemonic model of society and culture to which the population a adheres *en masse*. Given what I say about the neo-liberalism of higher education in 2.3, troubling and subverting the socio-cultural construction of the internationalised classroom has been a key driver of this thesis.

The concept of "hegemony" stems from the writings of Antonio Gramsci, who speaks particularly loudly to this project. Gramsci died aged 46, a result of his imprisonment by the Italian fascist government for founding the *Partito Comunista d'Italia*. Because of his

writing on the hierarchical and conditioning relationship between "political society" (the government, army, police, the courts and prison system and so on) and "civil society" (the church, family, communication, culture, trade unions, and the education system), Gramsci is a key figure in the development of neo-Marxist thought, and a "radical hero" (Coben, 1998) in the field of adult education. He argued that the ruling classes (and, by extension, Capitalism itself) have developed a hegemonic system which promulgates their ideals and principles. These ideals and principles become accepted as the "common sense" values of society as a whole, and all members of society work to maintain the *status quo* precisely because they seem to be common sensical. This is legitimised by gaining the approval and consent of the majority, typically through the press (ibid.), as well as through societal structures such as education, which replicate and reinforce the ideals and principles of the ruling classes, because education can be used to coerce the people more easily and effectively than physical force (Cole, 2008). This hegemonic system has had a significant impact on, and is pervasive in, the shape and scope of higher education in the UK (see 2.3), and thus, by extension, impinges upon the experiences of Chinese post-graduate students [💬3.9].

[💬3.9] I recognise that there are tensions in embracing a post-modern perspective earlier and espousing a neo-Marxist perspective here, since the two are self-contradictory: postmodern thinking is individualistic and anti-rationalist, whilst Marxism provides a collective, progressive narrative of the human condition (Hammersley, 1999). However, I argue that the inequality created by the fragmented (and therefore postmodern) nature of higher education has become an example of Gramscian common sense.

3.6.2 A critical transformative pedagogy lens

Critical transformative pedagogy challenges those processes and systems which create dogmatic, and ultimately detrimental, educational practices. It engages with more progressive and emancipatory forms of teaching and learning (Greaves et al., 2007), and problematises the way hegemonies emerge and are perpetuated in education systems. It therefore contributes to my troubling of the status quo in the internationalised university classroom, and my considerations of what ideological structures lie behind those hegemonies (see 2.3). This is because the rapid increase in the numbers of international students in UK higher education has not been accompanied by adequate structural, pedagogical or conceptual shifts, and the lack of adequate integration and accommodation of these students has led to poor outcomes for some (Gu, 2009, 2011; Hunley, 2010; Colvin & Volet, 2014). The majority of curricular and pedagogical choices in the university reflect typically Western content and approaches (Killick, 2015), and may

therefore not be appropriate in institutions with significant numbers of non-Western students (see 4.4.2).

There is, consequently, a pressing need to reconsider what curricula and pedagogies should be embraced in order to better attend to the needs of students in the internationalised university, and this is why my own project includes an *"action agenda for reform"* (Creswell, 2003:9-10, in Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006:np). I bring this agenda to bear on classroom practices (see 5.3), curriculum planning (see 5.4) and institutions (see 5.5).

3.7 Positioning myself methodologically

3.6.1 and 3.6.2 provided an account of the philosophical lenses through which I have viewed my participants' experiences. It is, though, equally important to clarify the practical decisions I made about how to go about exploring my participants' experiences, and I clarify those decisions in the following six sections.

3.7.1 A phenomenological perspective

My enquiry explored what it is like to be a Chinese post-graduate student at a UK university. A phenomenological perspective helped me drill down into the heart of this experience, because phenomenology aims to find out, from the individuals involved, what it feels like to be in a particular place or position (Smith, 1996; O'Leary, 2005), thereby exploring "social phenomena from the actors' own perspectives" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015:30) [💬3.10]. The objective of phenomenological enquiry, therefore, is "a rigorous description of human life as it is lived […] in all of its first-person concreteness, urgency, and ambiguity" (Pollio et al., 1997). In addition, phenomenological perspectives allow the researcher to establish "a theory of the unique" (van Manen, 2001:7), as they focus on interrogating the lived experience of a particular group of people in a defined setting, thus allowing us to see human beings as individuals, rather than as numerical data: in all phenomenological enquiry, the researcher is less interested in rules and patterns and more in understanding

> [💬3.10] This sounds complex, but in fact I would argue that we are all phenomenologists on a daily basis. When we listen to and respond to a friend's description of an event or situation in their life ("It sounds like you've had a tough few days"), we are being phenomenological because we are interpreting what it is like to be in a particular place or position.

the "deep meanings of a person's experiences and how she articulates these experiences" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003:97). Phenomenology does not attempt to classify or theorise – rather, it seeks "plausible insights" (van Manen, 2001:9) into how people perceive and "live out" an experience. For these reasons, it has become a distinctive approach in qualitative enquiry (Norlyk & Harder, 2010), and was suited to help me respond to my two research questions in my own unique setting.

Phenomenology can trace its roots back to Edmund Husserl, whose philosophy centres on the concept of "intentionality" – in other words, the internal experience of "being aware" of something. Husserl famously urged those who explored experience to "go back to the things themselves" (Smith et al., 2009:12), by which he meant that the exploration of lived experience should be predicated on, and described in terms of, the informant's description of the experience alone, rather than endeavouring to fit aspects of the life-world into predetermined categories.

However, as with all schools of thought, different conceptualisations of the nature and scope of phenomenology can be identified [🗨3.11]. It is a complex concept in that it can be both a way of examining the world from an abstracted ("philosophical") perspective and also an approach to applied ("empirical") research (Norlyk & Harder, 2010), despite that fact that none of the historical voices in the phenomenological tradition gave much thought to application. In attempting to make sense of these various conceptualisations, I found it useful to place them on a continuum. At one end of the continuum is Husserl's own transcendental phenomenology, in which the phenomenologist is expected to "bracket off" her/his

> [🗨3.11] When I embarked on this EdD project, one of the aspects of the process which caused me not insignificant angst was the need (or expectation) to grapple with wider ontological and epistemological considerations regarding my enquiry. The opening chapters of many methodology books, which typically provide a theoretical underpinning for what follows, seemed opaque, dealing with concepts which were impenetrable to me (although the more practical later chapters were much more readable). It was only half way through the journey that I began to see some light. (In fact, one pleasing aspect of my doctoral journey has been returning to those texts I engaged with in the first two years and realise they do, finally, mean something.)

own assumptions about the world, in order to provide a fully unbiased, objective – yet still rigorous – description of the central nature of the phenomenon under scrutiny. The objective is to identify what the essence of an experience or concept may be, and which goes beyond the purely subjective (in other words, it transcends the subjective). This involves the reduction of the phenomenon to its essence, as described by the participants alone: there is no

room for the researcher's own response to the data. I decided to reject a fully Husserlian approach because I feel that bracketing off my own assumptions, biases and experiences (see 1.7.1) is impossible, given the nature and focus of my enquiry: I know too much about this context (see 1.3 and 1.4), and have strong beliefs about the challenges brought about by the current state of higher education (see 2.3), to be able to put my own perspectives to one side.

At the opposite end of the continuum, Ricouer and Gadamer viewed phenomenological enquiry as dialogic in nature, with both the researcher and the researched fully and equally involved in a reciprocal, two-way process of interpretation and meaning making, in which bracketing is eschewed since it hinders the researcher from "getting at the real world" (Pellauer, 2007). I judged that this form of dialogic phenomenology was unlikely to be effective for my project, given the setting and the profile of my participants: from professional experience, I knew that it was likely that the participants would expect me to manage the shape and thrust of the enquiry. This has been discussed elsewhere in the literature: university research in China is customarily top-down, with university leaders sometimes consulted, but students rarely so (Boshier, 2017). Asking participants to work with me in constructing meaning may therefore have been put them in unfamiliar and potentially uncomfortable situation [🔊3.12] which they felt unable to refuse (as this would be discourteous), thereby obliging them to do something against their will.

[🔊3.12] This presented me with a dilemma: I was concerned that I was making *a priori* judgements about my participants, and taking an essentialist view of Chinese students, to the point of perpetuating stereotypes. I was also concerned about failing to give them a full opportunity to make their voices heard. On reflection, though, I stand by the decision made to not adopt a fully dialogic Ricoeurian position – as it was the least likely to cause awkwardness, and, pragmatically, was most likely to allow me to explore their experiences effectively.

A mid-point on this phenomenological continuum is a Heideggerian position. Heidegger acknowledged Husserl's intellectual influence on his thinking, but rejected the transcendental element of his former teacher's work. For Heidegger, making sense of phenomena involves an awareness of the way we, as individual actors, are involved with the world. This he termed *Dasein* – the unique quality of "being human". He took a more reflexive view of phenomenological research, which recognised the fundamental and ineluctable role a researcher plays in any study, and argued that the researcher should reflect on their involvement in, and influence on, the interpretation of their participants' lifeworlds, acknowledging the way(s) in which their location in the world affects and informs the research process. This acknowledgement leads to more hermeneutic ways of working (see 3.7.2).

For me, and for my setting, this was the most convincing phenomenological stance to take, since it recognises that the lifeworld is far too complex and intricate to be either fully understood (van Manen, 2001) or to be written about impartially. Since my enquiry takes a socially and politically critical position, I know that I can never be "un-neutral" (Newby, 2014) in relation to my participants and their experiences, and so this Heideggerian position is fitting.

As illustrated above, there are many interpretations of phenomenology-as-praxis – in fact, Dowling (2007) argues that there are as many phenomenological approaches to research as there are phenomenologists. That said, there are three principal steps in the analysis of data (ibid.) in phenomenological research:

1. The accounts are divided into smaller units for analysis.
2. These units are transformed by the researcher into a number of different phenomenological concepts.
3. These concepts are drawn together to provide an interpretation of the experience.

In 4.2 and 6.3, I give an account of how I followed these steps in my analysis of my participants' experience.

3.7.2 A hermeneutic perspective

In addition to the phenomenological perspective explored above, there was also a significant hermeneutic element in my enquiry. I take this to mean that my understanding of the nature of my participants' experience(s) has come about through an interpretation of their words – which are, in turn, an interpretation of their own perception(s) of their experience(s). There is therefore a substantial and weighty responsibility on the part of researchers engaged in hermeneutic enquiry to capture that nature of their participants' lifeworlds accurately. In order to be successful in this respect, the researcher needs to "make meaning" for the reader (Richardson & Adams St Pierre, 2008) who may not be familiar with the experience being explored. This requires a contemplation of the link between part and whole – the hermeneutic circle – which brings together different relationships (Smith et al., 2009). In my project, this meant recognising that the words my participants used ("parts") created

utterances ("the whole"). These utterances, however, were only a part of the whole interview, and one interview was only a part of the participant's whole lifeworld – and any incidents or experiences they chose to recount were only a part of their whole lives. The hermeneutic circle also came to the fore when I moved from the lifeworld of one participant out into shared experience (which forms the basis of what I say in Chapter 4) and also when I went from shared experience back into subjective lifeworlds (for example, when I asked a participant whether what other people had said resonated with them). In order to get an overarching phenomenological perspective on these participants' lives, I found it vital to move around this hermeneutic circle continuously, exploring both parts and wholes, in an iterative manner, rather than viewing the research project as a series of sequential steps. (I return to this in 3.13.)

In a research context, hermeneutic interpretation occurs on a number of levels. Firstly, participants choose what to reveal and how to portray themselves to the interviewer – already, we can see a deliberation on the part of the participants about what they choose to disclose about themselves and their lifeworlds. It may be, as Birch & Miller (2000) posit, that participants re-invent, and even redact, critical incidents from their past, and re-cast both those incidents and themselves in an edited (and possibly more positive) light; this re-invention may be conscious or subconscious. Secondly, the researcher must then select what to highlight from the participants' accounts. This selection process is complex and subjective, and, given the intimate and profound relationship between the researcher and the participants, between the researcher and the data, and between the researcher and the

interpretation itself, anyone working hermeneutically needs to be cautious and explicit about what and how they choose to interpret and present (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) [🗨3.13]. As a result, my analysis and discussion of my participants' experiences (in Chapter 4) can only ever be a subjective interpretation of what my participants told me. Since it is impossible to discount

> [🗨3.13] Deciding what to write about was a thorny problem, which caused me long periods of reflection. I did not wish to miss anything which seemed important, but was also aware of the need to be succinct – even a doctoral thesis has a word limit. In 6.3, I discuss in more depth how I decided what to prioritise in my account.

the personal in any kind of qualitative enquiry (Kvale, 2007), I acknowledge that I cannot represent (or even "re-present") my participants' experiences fully accurately. This has been termed the "double hermeneutic" (Giddens, 1976; 2013; Smith et al., 2009), which problematises how researchers construct these "interpretations of interpretations".

However, hermeneutics can be viewed as being more than just a two-layered construct. Alvesson & Skoldberg (2000), in fact, argue that it takes place on four levels, as follows:

1. The participant interprets her own experience(s) for the interviewer-researcher.
2. The interviewer-researcher decides what to write about, and how.
3. The critical interviewer-researcher reflects on any social and political implications which the interpretation throws up.
4. The interviewer-researcher engages in a period of subjective reflexion, clarifying why they chose to include some aspects of the participant's lifeworld and not others, in the light of personal biases and subjectivities.

Alvesson & Skoldberg recommend that the researcher view these four aspects as layers, and that the research should "glide" (ibid., p271) between them; in 4.2, I show how I applied this to my own project.

The way language is used is a central consideration in hermeneutic interpretation. Language is considered to be the object of experience, and the linguistic turn has opened up new and varied vistas for enquiry (Alvesson, 2002; Dunne et al., 2005; Schmidt, 2006). To illustrate, hermeneutic researchers may elect to explore a participant's use of discoursal aspects of language (Pellauer, 2007) – in other words, what language do participants choose to use to produce a unified, meaningful and purposeful text? Alternatively, they may wish to explore the organisational moves which characterise spoken narratives to identify what aspects of the experience are foregrounded by participants (Alvesson, 2002). They may explore phonological features of speech which affect meaning, such as intonation and sentence stress, or how metaphor is used in constructing meaning (Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Schmitt, 2005; Smith et al., 2009; Newby, 2014). However, in my research, this linguistic turn raised complications. My participants were all non-native speakers, and whilst non-native speakers at post-graduate level are fluent and eloquent, there are some limits to their language competence, and there is therefore a "trade-off" (Cortazzi et al., 2011:509) between articulating complex ideas and expression [🗨3.14]. Metaphor and other linguistic tropes are less frequent in – and often absent from – non-native speech

[🗨3.14] This is particularly the case when discussing unfamiliar or abstract topics, since the brain's meaning-making capacity focuses on the cognitively-complex message, rather than on controlling the accuracy of the language, and there are few situations which are more unfamiliar or abstract than being asked to examine one's own subjective experience in a research interview situation.

(Prodromou, 2003; Medgyes, 2017) as they are semantically and cognitively complex, and a narrower lexical range may mean that nuance of meaning is not fully attended to. Non-native speaker participants may have a more restricted phonological range (Jenkins, 2000), which can affect attitudinal meaning, and cultural mores relating to the structure of narratives may be at odds with those of the researcher. I write more about the implications of the linguistic turn in qualitative research and how this shapes research with participants who may not use language in predictable – and anticipated – ways in 4.2.

3.8 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Designing a qualitative research project, rather than one predicated on quantitative procedures, made sense for my enquiry. My purpose was not to draw up descriptions which are true of all Chinese post-graduate students in the UK, but instead to shine a light on the subjective experience(s) of these participants. Nonetheless, there are myriad methodological options available to the qualitative researcher, which can be bewildering for the novice researcher, and initially, I was unsure [💬[3.15]] which methods would suit my enquiry, given the options available.

[💬[3.15]] It may be more truthful to say "unclear".

However, it is not the case that there is a free choice in relation to the methodology of a research project: the type of knowledge which is sought narrows down the methodological options open to the researcher (Maxwell, 2012). For instance, Grounded Theory is a widespread methodology in current educational research and "meets a need" (Thomas & James, 2006:768) for the qualitative researcher who seeks a place between the "hard" methods of the natural sciences and "soft" ethnomethodology. Initially, I flirted with Grounded Theory as an approach to my enquiry, since it "does" a lot of what I wanted to do. For example, it creates knowledge from the bottom up, using the words and experiences of participants to develop an understanding of their lifeworlds, rather than using the research process to confirm (or refute) pre-determined hypotheses. Grounded Theory also requires the research to take place in context and can be applied to the exploration of phenomena which do not lend themselves to quantification. It is therefore suited to exploring the convergences and divergences which exist within the subjective human experience, and which would otherwise remain obfuscated (Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2013).

In time, however, I rejected a deep-end Grounded Theory orientation for four reasons. Firstly, a number of its proponents (e.g. Glaser, 1998) recommend that the literature should not be engaged with prior to gathering data, as this may distort the views of the researcher and preclude a clear, unbiased interpretation of the phenomenon. Yet having engaged with the literature before embarking on this project (see 1.4), I already had an understanding of established knowledge in my field and so could be neither neutral nor dispassionate in relation to the setting. Secondly, my own familiarity with the setting could not be bracketed off: the "inseparability of knower and known" (Pels, 2001:1, in Taylor & Hicks, 2009:63) is always an issue for researchers exploring a field with which they have already had considerable dealings, and I could not disregard my instinctive feelings about my participants' lives in the UK. Thirdly, I felt that Grounded Theory, even in its more constructivist form (e.g. Charmaz, 2006) places too much emphasis on procedure, at the expense of interpretation: Thomas & James (2006:775) refer to it as "functionalism incarnate", and Birks & Mills (2010) are even less generous, calling it a "smash and grab" approach. Finally, a key feature of a Grounded Theory study requires that the phenomenon is explored in such depth as to reach saturation (Charmaz, 2006; Birks & Mills, 2010) – the point at which no new themes emerge from the data gathered [💬[3.16]]. For me, though, this was not practical, given the limitations of time, resources and scope of the enquiry. In addition, saturation, in and of itself, does not necessarily lead to insightful interpretation, and I preferred to aim for understanding rather than inundation.

> [💬[3.16]] In principle, saturation sounds compelling: imagine finding out so much when out in the field that there is nothing left to uncover! In practice, however, it is tricky to achieve with a single-handed researcher on a time-limited project.

After rejecting Grounded Theory, I explored Consensual Qualitative Research as a possible approach for my enquiry. Like Grounded Theory, this is an inductive approach to research: research questions in Consensual Qualitative Research are open ended and not framed as hypotheses, and the approach also allows for unexpected data to be incorporated into the findings (Hill, 2012). However, Consensual Qualitative Research is characterised by collaborative analysis (hence "consensual"), with a number of researchers ("judges") working in tandem to analyse and interpret the data, and having a team of researchers was not a feasible design choice for my own project. In addition, Consensual Qualitative Research tends towards a more interpretivist relationship with data, in which researchers aim to distance themselves from it, so as to curb "researcher

subjectivity" (Williams & Morrow, 2009:579). This for me was unappealing: I was reluctant to bracket off my own feelings about my participants' experiences. Therefore, after a period of contemplation, I chose to take an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach in my project. Although Patton (2002) argues that all interpretive approaches are essentially variations on forms of Grounded Theory, since all build up accounts from the data (rather than using data to confirm pre-formed hypotheses), I feel that IPA is more suited to this reflexive account than Grounded Theory (Brocki & Wearden, 2006), since, as discussed above, the latter requires the researcher to adopt a more remote orientation towards the data. In addition, as Smith et al. (2009) point out, IPA draws on tandem phenomenological and hermeneutic positionings (see 3.7), and brings them together in ways which other methodological approaches do not. This was an important consideration for me, since one of my commitments in this account is to acknowledge to what extent my own biases and subjectivities have informed the research.

Six key elements of IPA were particularly appropriate to my project, in my setting. Firstly, it was more suited to my small-scale enquiry than the more generalised (or generalisable) accounts which typically occur with Grounded Theory (Smith, 1996). Secondly, given the local, contextual nature of my enquiry, IPA allowed me to provide idiographic accounts of my participants' subjective experiences, by presenting "actual slices of human life" (Smith et al., 2009:202) from an "insider's perspective of the phenomenon under study" (Smith, 1996:264). This allowed me to shine a focussed spotlight on the experiences of my participants, exploring how the "everyday flow of lived experience takes on a significance" (Smith et al., 2009:1). This appealed to me, since these participants were living through a period of particular import in their lives. Thirdly, in IPA, research questions are held to (1) be open, not closed; (2) be exploratory not explanatory; and (3) focus on subjective interpretations of phenomena, rather than attempting to determine causation or correlation. These considerations were important because I wished to view my participants in the round, as individuals, rather than reducing them to numbers and variables. Fourthly, saturation is not required – IPA researchers, instead, comment on the representational nature of the sample and the data: it is when we believe that we have told "a suitably persuasive story that the analysis may be considered sufficiently complete" (Brocki & Wearden, 2006:96). Fifthly, IPA accounts tend to use easily-comprehensible language and straightforward guidelines, rather than using language to obscure meaning, which Brocki & Wearden (2006) claim some Grounded

Theory studies do. As I was working with participants whose first language was not English, clarity and concision were important considerations for me. In sixth place, a significant tranche of the literature regarding international students and their acculturation is psychological in nature, and IPA is common in the psychological literature. Although my own enquiry is roundly not psychological, there are elements of emotional wellbeing present in my enquiry, and it made sense for me to employ an analytical tool which has been used by others in related fields. Consequently, drawing on an already-established paradigm allowed me to engage with an "accepted and well-developed approach to research" (Maxwell, 2012:43).

By the time I entered the field to carry out some preliminary research, I felt confident that my methodological underpinning was fit for purpose. The following section sets out what that preliminary research involved, and what I learned when I entered the field.

3.9 Preliminary research: the reconnaissance and pilot studies

This project ran for five years, although the first two were predominantly exploratory in nature. Those two years were crucial in determining suitable design choices for the main phase of the project and involved two small-scale preliminary research projects: (1) an exploratory reconnaissance study and (2) a more extensive pilot study. Preliminary sorties in the field like these are a crucial step in any research project (Gillham, 2001; Clough & Nutbrown, 2007; Kvale, 2007; Dowling & Brown, 2009; Seidman, 2013), since they allow the researcher to audit current knowledge and identify how research in the field has been carried out to date. They also allow the researcher to weigh up the efficacy of their proposed methods and procedures, and to reflect on their role and impact on the design of the enquiry, so that adjustments can be made to ensure that the main phase of the project is as effective as it can possibly be.

My sorties into the field in the reconnaissance and pilot study were crucial in shaping my main research project. Figure 6, below, shows, visually, how the project as a whole developed and became increasingly more complex:
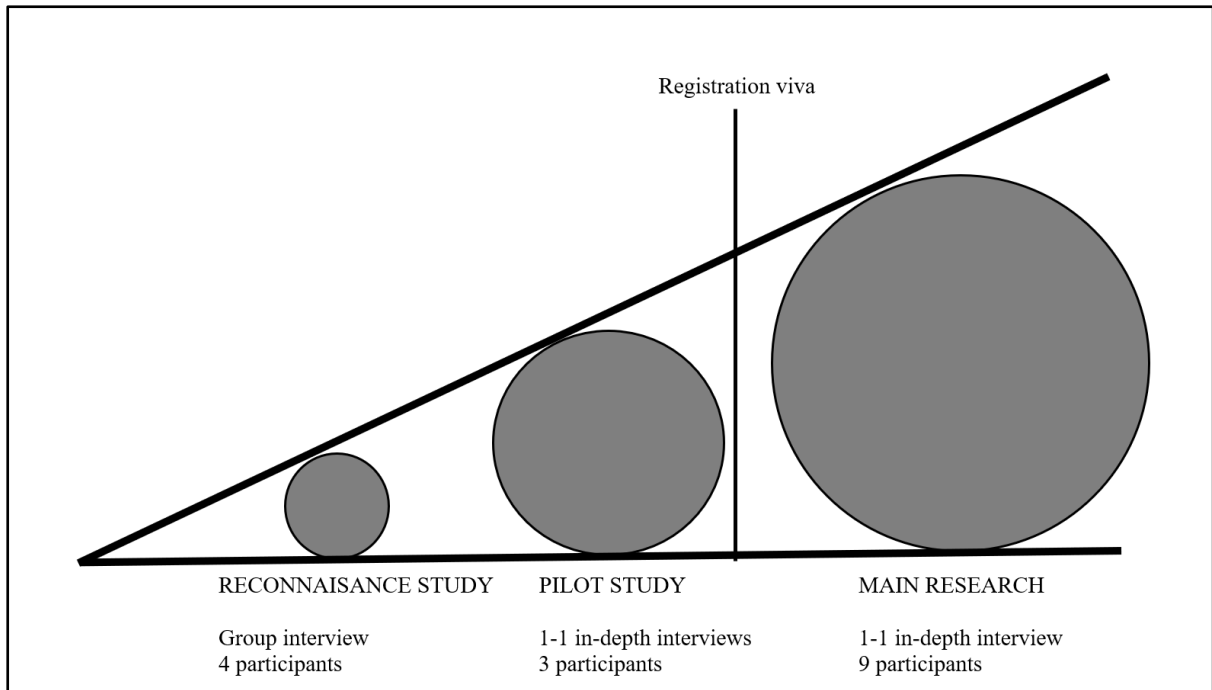
Figure 6: Development of the project (after Andrews, 2003)

3.9.1 The reconnaissance study: rationale, design and lessons learned

By the middle of the first year of my project, my knowledge of the theoretical context in which my enquiry sits was growing. I had immersed myself in the literature and had a broad overview of my subject, but I felt that the reading I had done to date was abstracted, and I wished to (1) unpack some of the issues, concepts and constructs encountered in the literature; (2) experiment with data generation and analysis; and (3) identify (in)congruencies between theory and practice. This led me to devise a small-scale exploratory reconnaissance study, which took place in May 2014. This took the form of a semi-structured group interview with four students from the programme I was co-ordinating at the time. At this stage I was working with the second iteration of my research questions (see 3.4), and I drew on my reading of the literature to identify a number of key themes which seemed to characterise the experiences of Chinese post-graduate students in the UK. I then asked about those themes in the group interview. Subsequently, I transcribed the discussion, colour-coding any examples of those themes, as exemplified in Figure 7, below (a fuller extract appears in Appendix 5):

Alison	The first one is as they said, the time management, because every time I just… I just delay to the last moment, several times, you know, I did not hand in on time. It's… it's not a very big thing… it's big thing… but it makes me not only think about the essay itself but it makes me doubt, you know, my personality
Interviewer	[Right]
Alison	Maybe I will do something, I will cause some more… some bigger result because of this and also the second one, sometimes I miss my family so badly
Interviewer	[Uh huh]
Alison	And er… but friends make me feel better

Figure 7: Sample of transcript from the exploratory reconnaissance study

On reflection, I realised, however, that the design of this reconnaissance study was underpinned by a deductive approach to knowledge, as I was looking for confirmation of what I thought was important in my participants' lives. My reconnaissance study therefore (unwittingly) reflected positivist approaches to inquiry, in which my role was to corroborate the existence of phenomena already accounted for in the literature – essentially, I was testing hypotheses. This exemplifies the metaphors of researcher-as-miner and researcher-as-traveller (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), with the former conceptualising the data gathering process as looking for issues already in existence. The researcher-as-traveller, however, is more interested in hearing individuals' accounts of their experiences and considering how their insights throw a new light on lived experience. The reconnaissance study showed me that the latter would be more suited to my enquiry since it would allow me to look at a familiar context with a fresh perspective, much like a traveller in a new country sees commonplace phenomena with new eyes [🗨3.17], and thereby "making the familiar strange" as Clough & Nutbrown (2007) have it.

[🗨3.17] Initially, changing tack felt wrong, somehow, as if I had taken a wrong turn earlier. However, as a novice researcher, I found solace in these words of Taylor & Hicks (2009), who counsel that "[I]deas about method/ology change over the course of a project, and some aspects may not become clear towards the end".

This realisation was a critical juncture on my EdD journey because I recognised that although I had set out to gain substantive knowledge from the reconnaissance study, instead I had gained a better idea of what kind of research design would work best for my project. The reconnaissance study made it apparent that a number of design decisions I

had taken did not really allow me to drill down into the kind of knowledge I was attempting to generate. I came, therefore, to four conclusions.

Firstly, a group interview was not a productive design decision. The participants were reluctant to discuss sensitive issues or to disclose personal feelings to peers or to myself in a public forum. In group interviews, issues of power often (re)emerge (Griffiths, 1998; Kvale, 2007), so tensions may arise because of what each party knows about the other (Dowling & Brown, 2009), affecting how honest they feel they can be (O'Leary, 2005); reticence may also arise when the researcher and participant already know each other, since the latter may fear exposure or sanction (Lee, 1993; Shenton, 2004). I realised, therefore, that future participants would feel more comfortable if interviews were carried out individually. Individual interviews are particularly suited to phenomenological enquiry because participants tend to feel more at ease with the dynamic therein (Lee, 1993), and I wanted to drill down into personal experiences, in a idiographic manner (Smith et al., 2009). Individual interviews also make participants feel more valued and responded to than group interviews do: this sense of "consultancy and collaboration" (Etherington, 2004:32) enhances the depth and scope of the data generated. I therefore modified the design of the main phase of my project accordingly.

Secondly, inviting students from my own programme to be research participants was not a sensible design decision, as much of the discussion turned to either how much the students appreciated the programme (perhaps as an attempt to please me, as the programme co-ordinator), or, conversely, as Wellington (2010) also found, the students viewed the group interview as an opportunity to discuss and/or criticise provision on the programme. This brought home to me the challenge inherent in being an insider in a research setting (in this instance, carrying out research in my department, with my own students). Comprehensive coverage in the literature is given to the challenges which emerge from this complex dual role: for instance, being an insider researcher may give rise to what Lee (1993:3) refers to as an "intrusive threat" to participants, since previous relations between the parties may have been altered by the research process. Research interviews can be veridical in nature – in which the participants are taken "at their word" and viewed as telling the truth to the interviewer – or symptomatic, in which the interview becomes "a depository for expressions of frustration and discontent" (Block, 2000:762), and it was clear that some of the data I gathered was symptomatic in nature. Whilst this was useful feedback for me as

a programme co-ordinator, it was less useful as a researcher. This experience made me aware of "the perils of easy access" (Seidman, 2013:44), and also raised ethical questions (see 3.12) about the nature of the relationship I had with my participants. Whilst, of course, it is right that participants should also guide the interview process, Block (op. cit.) warns that they may feel that the extent to which they can be honest in an interview setting can be constrained by what they feel they are allowed – or supposed – to say. This led me to decide that my project would be more illuminative if the participants were not from my own programme, and if I did not know them.

Thirdly, I decided that I wanted to take an idiographic view of my participants' lifeworlds, and look at their subjective experiences in depth. As Smith et al. (2009) point out, the multiple voices which emerge in a group interview make it difficult to adopt a phenomenological perspective in a research project. As a result, I recognised that individual interviews would align better with my purpose in using interviews to generate this type of data.

Finally, and perhaps most strikingly, some themes emerged in the reconnaissance study interview which did not fit in to the themes which I was "looking for", based on the reading I had done. I did not know what to do with this data. When I came to code the transcript, these themes were left uncoded, as they did not fit in with my pre-selected themes. However, a number of the points made were revelatory (for example, participants talk to their parents about their lives in general, but prefer to talk to friends when they encounter problems), and this led me to realise that looking for confirmation of experiences was not useful for my project. I therefore moved from a deductive approach to generating knowledge in the reconnaissance study to a more *inductive* approach in the pilot [💬3.18].

[💬3.18] In fact, by the time I embarked on the main phase of my project in Year 3, it was predominantly abductive in nature, exploring both *a priori* themes which I expected to encounter, but remaining open to the emergence of new, unexpected themes (see 4.3.1).

3.9.2 The pilot study: rationale, design and lessons learned

The reconnaissance study led me to reconsider the most effective way to seek responses to my research questions. It also allowed me to refine those research questions (see 3.4). Reflection and discussion with peers and supervisors, as well as further engagement with a range of literatures (theoretical, political, pragmatic and methodological) assisted me in

designing a subsequent pilot study which was more attuned to my context and my purpose. The aim of the pilot study, which took place between November 2014 and April 2015, was twofold: (1) from a substantive perspective, to identify how Chinese post-graduate students in the UK conceptualise their experience of life in the UK, what makes this experience challenging, and what facilitates it, and (2) from a design perspective, to further refine methodological decisions. In this pilot study, I carried out in-depth individual interviews with three Chinese post-graduate students within my institution. For the reasons I highlighted in 3.9.1, the participants were unknown to me before the interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the transcripts unpacked to identify themes. However, as with the reconnaissance study, the pilot study was less revelatory in terms of substantive knowledge generated and more so in settling on an appropriate and manageable research design for the main phase of my project, particularly in relation to in-depth interviewing. Four insights emerged.

Firstly, I had planned structured interviews, with pre-set questions (see Appendix 4 for the interview schedule), believing this would facilitate both the management of the interview and the unpacking of issues I wished to explore. However, on reviewing the video recordings and transcripts, it became apparent that this led to issues being forced out into the open, and sometimes precipitously so ("How are your tutors sympathetic to the fact that Chinese students have a different approach to learning?"). In addition, I employed some polar questions ("Were [those] things disappointing for you?"), which had a tendency to close down the interaction. Although reassured to read that new interviewers "tend to be over-controlling – not attending to the interviewee, working relentlessly from a list of questions in their head" (Gillham, 2001:3), this indicated that I needed to articulate questions more effectively in the main phase of the research, and to move away from a structured interview format. The literature provides useful practical recommendations for formats which elicit information more effectively, and I moved to incorporate better strategies such as four-phase interviews (ibid.) and funnel-shaped interviews (Kvale, 2007) which begin broadly and then hone in on areas of interest by asking participants first to talk about their life history, then moving to build up an account of their experiences and encouraging them to reflect on the nature of their experiences (Seidman, 2013). These strategies led me to adopt a more interpretivist (Dowling & Brown, 2009), and less positivist, stance (see 3.9.1) in the main phase of the project.

A second realisation was that, although a form of spoken communication, interviews are so much more than simply talking. They are not an "everyday conversation between two partners" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015:35); rather, they constitute a "conversation with a purpose" (Smith et al., 2009:57) [💬3.19]. This is because the usual turn-taking and co-construction of meaning typical of interactional discourse are replaced by transactional discourse (Richards, 1990), with a pre-planned outcome (for the interviewer, at least). The sequential order (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008) typical of "normal" speech, characterised by initiation – response – follow-up moves (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1974) is compromised during a research interview. It is therefore typically the case that the interviewer to some extent "manages" the discourse in an interview, allowing it to become "a conversation with a purpose" (Gillham, 2001), and the pilot study made me more prepared for this somewhat unnatural interaction when I embarked on the main phase of the project.

[💬3.19] My first few steps as in interviewer were humbling. There is an "illusory simplicity" (Kvale, 2007:8; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015:8) to qualitative data generation, and, as Dunne et al. (2005) point out, this really is so much more than asking questions. The experience was exciting, yes, but also imbued with a sense of responsibility in asking questions of a personal nature to strangers. I was aware throughout of power issues: although these were not students from my home department, I wondered whether some of the participants responded to me as a tutor rather than as a researcher. As with many questions in social research, it is impossible to arrive at definite answers. As Griffiths (1998) points out, we can defend our decisions, but we can never be sure they are right.

Thirdly, I came to realise that the participants appreciated being given the opportunity to talk at length, and to be listened to. They revealed much more than I imagined they would, and I was surprised [💬3.20] at the richness of the content they shared with me. This may be because they viewed the interviews as a "special occasion" (Gilham, 2001:7), in which they knew

[💬3.20] I was moved by the depth of what was shared and the length with which the participants talked to me. The content which was shared with me made me realise that I was in possession of personal, intimate feelings.

they would be listened and responded to at length and in depth, and felt "honoured" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998:95) to be asked to participate. In line with the literature (Lee, 1993; Block, 2000; Birch & Miller, 2000) the interviews may have played a therapeutic role for some of the participants, who appreciated the opportunity to discuss their experiences with a sympathetic "other".

Finally, I recognised that I had given insufficient consideration to how to close an interview: it became apparent that this takes considerable skill. Gillham (2001) recommends that a focus on cognitive closure (by summarising the content of the

interview) should be coupled with social closing (by withdrawing in a natural manner from the conversation). When I progressed to the main phase of the project, I drew on this reading and ensured that the interviews ended (rather than stopped) by summarising main themes that had emerged, giving the participants time to reflect on, and modify or clarify, what had been said, as well as to ask questions. I also told participants what would happen next.

The knowledge gained from the reconnaissance and the pilot studies into research allowed me to re-enter the field for the main phase of the project in the confidence that my research design was robust, although fine-tuning was also necessary in the field. The main phase of the project was divided into two distinct periods: October 2015-June 2016, and October 2016-March 2018. The lull between the two stages afforded me the chance to sit back and grapple with the themes I had identified to date, and to recalibrate my nascent findings (see 4.2), which were then explored and refined in the second stage of fieldwork.

3.10 Identifying participants and settings

Since I was more interested in the experiences of Chinese post-graduate students than in looking to confirm a scientific fact, and since my research was located in a phenomenon, not a population, my participants were not recruited through a statistically-representative sample, nor were they recruited through a probability sampling method. I took a purposive approach (O'Leary, 2005) to recruiting participants for the study, given that I was aiming to "isolate the views of [a] well-defined group" (Newby, 2014:260), and because this is a precept of IPA projects (Smith et al., 2009).

My research was extra-mural, so I was unable to access the all-student email lists in the institutions in which I carried out my project. In order to recruit participants, I made contact with a number of institutional departments and asked them to forward an email outlining the

project to students. For the sake of brevity, and in order to ensure that the message was clear.

I kept this short and succinct. Any interested students were encouraged to reply to me [🗨3.21]. At that point I sent fuller details about the project, and suggested possible days and times for interviews, asking potential participants to indicate which would be suitable for them (see 5.6.1).

I am aware that my purposive approach to participant recruitment did not give me a representative picture from the institution as a whole, and so a coverage error (O'Leary, 2005) may have arisen, since potential participants may not have known that the research was taking place. However, sampling can never be perfect (Wellington, 2010), and from a pragmatic perspective,

> [🗨3.21] I came to realise that one of the problems with recruiting students was that an open invitation to "please write to me at this email address led to limited responses. I realised that there were possible cultural and linguistic reasons for this reticence. Firstly, it may be the case that being interviewed seemed daunting for the participants. Secondly, constructing an email which requires a high level of cautious language (e.g. "I would be willing") may also have been daunting. I therefore modified the initial email, advising participants that it was not necessary to write a long email, and included the line "Just write and say, 'Hi Jonathan, I'm interested in your research. Can you give me some more details?'" This meant that participants could paste that into a reply.

this was the most straightforward route to participants, especially since it has been established that individuals are often more likely to participate in a research project if they are invited (Hill & Williams, 2012).

I recruited and interviewed 16 participants across the three phases of my project, although the four from the Reconnaissance Study were not included in this thesis (see 3.9.1). Table 6, below, indicates the number of participants in each phase:

Year	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Phase	Preliminary phase of the project		Main phase of the project		
	Reconnaissance Study	Pilot Study			
Number of participants	4	3	2	4	3

Table 6: Participant numbers at each phase of the project

Whilst there are no fixed guidelines on sample size, (Gillham, 2001) and Kvale (2007) argue that qualitative research benefits from having a limited sample, with the number of participants tending to be about ten to fifteen, given that experience is uniquely located and subjective. Smaller sample sizes are a characteristic of IPA studies (Smith et al., 2009), and are also more common in research which uses interview data, since interviewing, and subsequent analysis, is much more time consuming than other methods (Dowling & Brown, 2009), so limiting the number of participants to 12 allowed me to "do less, more thoroughly" (Wolcott, 2001:128, in Taylor & Hicks, 2009:69). I decided early on to also include relevant data from the pilot study interviews, because what these participants said was also often very revealing [💬3.22]. Table 7, below, summarises the 12 participants, their Master's programmes and when interviews took place:

[💬3.22] I felt that not allowing the pilot study participants' experiences to form part of this study would imply that their experiences were not worth reporting, simply because they came at the "wrong" time. This would be unjustifiable.

Phase	Participant	M/F	Programme	Institution	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
Pilot study	Tina	F	MA Cultural & Creative Industries	1	November, 2014	January, 2015	
	Yvonne	F	MA Digital Culture and Society		January, 2015	April, 2015	
	Sheena	F	MA Digital Culture and Society		January, 2015	April, 2015	
Main phase of the project	Heidi	F	MA Digital Assets and Media Management		November, 2015		
	Shaun	M	MA Philosophy		November, 2015	March, 2016	June 2016
	Jenny	F	MSc Education and International Development	2	February, 2017	May, 2017	
	Sophie	F	MEd Education		February, 2017	May, 2017	
	Yu-Min	F	MPhil Second Language Education		February, 2017	May, 2017	
	Daisy	F	MA Children's Literature		February, 2017	May, 2017	
	Huiling	F	MA Media and Communication	3	November 2017	February 2018	
	Poppy	F	MA Arts Administration and Cultural Policy		December 2017	March 2018	
	Xiuying	F	MA Culture and Creative Entrepreneurship		December 2017	March 2018	

Table 7: Participants' details and dates of interviews

When we met for the first interview, I spent the opening ten minutes clarifying the nature and purpose of the research, and what would happen in the interviews. I told the participants that I was interested in their experience of being a post-graduate student in the UK, and that there were no right or wrong answers [💬3.23] to my questions. I also answered any questions they had. In addition, I stressed the anonymous nature of the research, and that they would be assigned pseudonyms [💬3.24]. If the participant had no further questions, I asked them re-read the participant information sheet and then complete and sign an informed consent form (see Appendix 3) and the interview commenced.

> [💬3.23] This reflects the epistemological perspective of phenomenological and hermeneutic enquiry, in which the understanding gleaned from an interview is "not held to be 'the truth' – but [rather] to be 'meaning-full'" (Smith et al., 2009:66).

> [💬3.24] Initially, I gave all the participants English pseudonyms as Chinese students often take an English name. However, it was pointed out to me that not all Chinese students do this, and that some may wish to take on a Chinese pseudonym. Consequently, from the middle of the main phase of the research I asked whether the students would prefer an English or Chinese pseudonym.

3.11 In-depth, focussed interviews

For the purposes of my enquiry, interviews were more suitable than other forms of data collection (such as group interviews or questionnaires) because my experience in the reconnaissance study (see 3.9.1) had shown me that group interviews would not be fruitful in my setting, and questionnaires typically involve looking for answers to pre-set questions, which can lead to overlooking aspects of experiences which do not fit into predetermined categories. I was looking for "insight and understanding" (Gillham, 2001) rather than facts [💬3.25], so I decided that interviews would yield data that was more suited to my purposes, since they allow for thicker, more illuminative explorations of the participants' lifeworlds. Thirdly, whilst there is some scepticism regarding the value and trustworthiness of interviews as a source of research data

> [💬3.25] When I embarked on my doctoral journey, I believed that research should be objective and seek to locate evidence to confirm a hypothesis. My reading of Seidman (2013:9), who asserts that the aim of in-depth interviewing "is not to test hypotheses, and not to "evaluate" as the term is normally used", made me aware of the need to look *at* a phenomenon, rather than look *for* one. This was a key juncture in my transition to the research position I occupied later.

(Alvesson, 2002), interviews are held to be the best way to find out about people's lifeworlds and their experiences, because the open questions which typify interviewing elicit more extended and personalised responses than other methods (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This allows the researcher to get as close as possible to the phenomenon (Seidman, 2013). Finally, the conversational elements inherent in an interview setting lead to "interplay between two

people that … is negotiated and contextual" (Birks & Mills, 2010;56), thus creating a "construction site for knowledge" (Brinkmann & Kvale, op. cit., p7).

Once I had settled on using individual interviews, it was necessary to decide what type of individual interview to carry out, as there are a number of options available. I opted to employ "focused, in-depth interviews" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998:88). These are less rigid than structured and semi-structured interviews, but, because they are focused, they are less likely to lose sight of the topic than fully unstructured interviews. In-depth, focused interviews allow "the participants' thoughts, feelings and experiences to drive the interview" (O'Donnell et al,, 2009) in a way that helps make sense of their lives (Birch & Miller, 2000), but also allow the interviewer to maintain a level of control over the direction the interview takes. Nonetheless, when I was less experienced as an interviewer, I found that some of the questions I asked did not marry up fully with the thrust of the enquiry, and some of the participants did not always wish to engage with the same phenomena that I wished to explore. In later interviews, armed with more experience (and more confidence), I was able to build on the themes drawn from earlier interviews, and could align the questions more closely with the enquiry. In this sense, I was aiming for "expert openness" (Gillham, 2001:3), or "qualified naïveté" (Kvale, 2007:14), in which I had an *a priori* awareness of the nature of the phenomenon, but no rigid script.

I ensured the questions I asked were concise and direct (see Appendix 7). This goes against some voices in the literature (e.g. Lee, 1993) who argue that interview questions should be long, since more words stimulate more recall, and the time taken asking a long question allows the participants to formulate a response. My experience as an English-language teacher, however, has shown me that rambling questions, or two-part questions, can be complex to decode. I therefore ensured my questions were pithy, and consciously left thinking time (Cortazzi et al, 2011) after each question to allow participants to formulate their responses [🗨3.26]. This meant I avoided recasting questions in the belief that the participants had not understood at the first time of asking.

[🗨3.26] Being an English-language teacher, and having extensive experience working with Chinese post-graduate students, has equipped me with useful practical knowledge about communicating as easily as possible with my participants. However, initially, and conversely, this also raised some challenges with regard to my interviewer persona. I found it peculiar, at first, to shed some of the typical "interactional habits" (Smith et al., 2009:67) that I have acquired through experience, such as sharing my knowledge with participants when necessary, or wanting to step in and scaffold their understanding.

Gilgun (2008) and Seidman (2013) both advocate interviewing participants multiple times. Doing so, they argue, allows the researcher to build up a picture of the participants' lifeworlds prior to the phenomenon, since "[w]ithout context, there is little possibility to explore the meaning of an experience" (Seidman, 2013:20). I therefore initially planned a three-interview series, in order to generate contextual knowledge around my participants' experiences in the UK. I planned each of the three interviews to take a different focus, moving from more narrative and descriptive accounts to more analytic and evaluative orientations, as Smith et al. (2009) suggest, as this allows the researcher to draw out distinct types of information and forms of knowledge in successive interviews. This process, and the focuses therein, is summarised in Table 8, below:

Interview	Focus	Knowledge and information to elicit
1	Explores life history	Aims to explore the participants' lives up to the present time, with a slant towards the area of enquiry (which means that I explored my participants' experience of studying prior to coming to the UK).
2	Explores current lived experience.	Aims to explore the participants' experience of transitioning to post-graduate study in the UK.
3	Weaves together themes from interviews 1 and 2	Asks questions such as "Given what you said about *a* and *b* previously, how would you characterise/identify/explain *c*?"

Table 8: The planned three-interview series

However, in the field, it became apparent that a three-interview series was unsustainable, and in fact, only one participant, Shaun, met this schedule. Since post-graduate students are only on their courses for one year, and with universities generally only teaching in the first two terms of the year (see 2.6), it was too time-constricted to carry out three interviews in the time available, for three reasons. Firstly, it was impossible to begin interviewing at the start of the academic year (in September/October) because there was too much start-of-programme activity taking place. I realised it was more productive to wait until November to carry out the first interview, when the start-of-year turmoil had alleviated and students were in a (relative) place of tranquillity. Secondly, students at the beginning of the year would be unlikely to be able to articulate (or even identify) the challenges they were facing, and I felt it was more conducive to wait until the middle of

the first term to interview students, as they were then more able to identify practices which they found challenging. Thirdly, the final interviews would have taken place in the summer term, when participants were sitting final exams, or writing up dissertations. I therefore reduced the schedule to a two-interview series, which still avoids what Chamberlain (2012) refers to as "drive-by" one-off interviews, but allowed me to explore my participants' experiences within their wider lifeworlds. This permitted me to build up a holistic picture of their experiences in a way that a solitary interview could not because we had the opportunity to revisit themes in the second interview.

The interviews had a four-phase shape (Gillham, 2001), with each phase having a different focus and intensity, as clarified in Table 9, below:

Phase	Focus:	Characterised by:
1	The introductory phase	In this phase of the first interview, the participant and I discussed the nature and purpose of the research and also how what they said would fit into the project. I gave the participant the Participant Information and Informed Consent Form (see Appendix 3), and discussed pseudonyms. In the second interview, this introductory phase was used to look back over the transcript of the first interview and allowed the participants to comment on anything they wished to clarify in more depth, or that they wished to redact.
2	The opening phase	This unstructured phase allowed the participants to talk freely and get used to speaking in an interview setting in English. I asked general questions to put the participant more at ease and which tended to be biographical/descriptive in nature. I drew on my knowledge of working with non-native speakers in this respect: it is often useful to allow such participants to "warm up" by talking about familiar, often-rehearsed/discussed topics (such as their studies and their daily lives) before moving on to more evaluative and cognitively challenging topics (Dunne et al., 2005; Dowling & Brown, 2009). This phase also allowed for rapport to be (re)established between the participant and myself.
3	The central core	In this phase, I asked questions relating to my research questions. The participants were encouraged to highlight experiences which they felt to be of importance, and could avoid disclosing potentially distressing subjects, should they so wish. Later in the project it became useful to spend time in the interviews asking participants how their subjective experience tallied up with that of earlier participants ("Other people have said x. How does this reflect your experience?"). This quasi-delphi technique (Pilcher et al., 2011) led to some rich seams of information, and allowed me to do two things: (1) compare experiences across the participants' lifeworlds, and (2) identify divergences. This was where the hermeneutic circle (see 3.7.2) was commonly operationalised.
4	The closing phase	Here, I summarised what had been said, asked if there were any initial corrections that the participant wished to make, and thanked the participant for taking part in the interview. I also summarised what would happen next, and when (i.e. that I would send the transcript, and, if this was the first interview, we discussed possible dates to meet again).

Table 9: The four-phase shape of the interviews

This four-phase shape was useful to me as a novice researcher, as it gave the interviews clarity and direction (Andrews, 2003; Charmaz, 2006). However, there is also a need to be sensitive to the way the interview is unfolding and to change tack as necessary in response to what emerges, so this structure was not rigid and the length and depth of the phases varied with each interview, and in reaction to what was said. Smith et al. (2009:58) are clear these "unexpected turns" are valuable and revelatory in an interview setting since they can often unearth aspects of the lifeworld that the researcher had failed to attach importance to, but which may be vitally important to the participant [💬3.27]. Each successive interview helped me identify and whittle down themes to explore in later interviews; and allowed me to create what Holstein & Gubrium (1995, in Taylor & Bogdan, 1998:98) refer to as "knowledge-in-the-making".

[💬3.27] This was, indeed, the case: for instance, it had not occurred to me prior to interviewing that transitioning to post-graduate study (see 2.6 and 4.5.5) would be a significant aspect of these participants' experiences, and this went on to become one of the four key themes which underpin this project (see Chapter 2).

After each interview, participants audited the recordings and transcripts, so member reflections (Gillham, 2001) on the data ensured that what was discussed was mutually agreed. This also allowed participants to "censor" (Etherington, 2004) aspects of the interviews, if they wished to do so. This mitigated some of the power imbalances which can occur in interpretive research (Pillow, 2003) [💬3.28], allowing for a more "collaborative relationship" (Williams & Morrow, 2009:579) between myself and my participants.

[💬3.28] Of course, I have also to question whether they wanted to audit the recordings! Was I forcing this on them? Did they feel like they could say no? Is this a case of marking inequity under a "veneer of equitability"? (Pillow, 2003). I can account for what I did, but in some ways I can never be sure that it was right.

Despite the fact that some voices in the literature (e.g. Glaser, 1992, in Charmaz, 2006) advocate not recording interviews, I knew that I would be unable to recall, verbatim, critical aspects of the interview without some form of record. All interviews were, therefore, video recorded and subsequently transcribed before I moved to analyse them: in 4.2, I clarify and rationalise my analytical framework.

3.12 Ethical considerations [🗨³·²⁹]

It is crucial to bear issues of an ethical nature in mind when embarking on a research project, and the exhortation to "do no harm" is the *sine qua non* of any human enquiry. There are fewer fixed "rules" in social science research since it is bound by fewer legal considerations than, say, medical research (Edwards & Mauthner, 2012), where ethical clearance is necessary before the research begins, but once the project is underway, there is less need to consider this. Conversely,

> [🗨³·²⁹] Although this is the penultimate section of this chapter, it is not that case that I afforded ethical concerns less consideration than the project design discussed above. In practice, I took ethical considerations into account at all stages of my project since these were central to the research process from moral, legal and collegiate angles (Dowling & Brown, 2009). This is especially the case if the research aims towards some form of social or political critique (Griffiths, 1998), as is the case here.

though, in social research, ethical concerns abound throughout the project: before interviewing, while interviewing, and vitally, when interpreting and reporting on participants' lifeworlds. It is therefore incumbent upon the social researcher to consider what will be done to mitigate these concerns, and to ensure that the project remains ethically principled throughout.

Educational enquiry throws up a number of ethical conundrums, and the researcher can draw on three broad positions to attend to them. As with most aspects of my enquiry, my own ethical position did not involve adopting just one of these three philosophical positions in its entirety. I found that taking the most relevant and powerful elements from each approach, given my context and the purpose of the enquiry, allowed me to make more apposite choices in relation to ethical principles.

The first of these ethical positions is a Kantian approach, which Edwards & Mauthner (op. cit.) define as "duty ethics" and Rossman & Rallis (2003) as the "ethics of rights and responsibilities" – in other words, respecting universal principles and procedures which are ethical in nature. There were elements of this in my own project, because, before entering the field, I sought ethical approval to proceed from my department, by completing a Research Ethics Review Checklist (see Appendix 2). This draws on the British Educational Research Association *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (BERA, 2011; 2018) and by the departmental ethical framework (Faculty of Education, n.d.), both of which emphasise the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence. In addition, although my research did not aim to be "therapeutic" or clinical, I also familiarised myself with the British Association for

Counselling & Psychotherapy *Ethical Framework for Good Practice* (BACP, 2012), as I was aware that some participants may have been having an unhappy experience in the UK; I wanted to ensure that my questioning would not create any further anguish, and to know how best to respond to my participants if they were in distress. In addition, I attended an Introduction to Counselling course to acquire basic skills in case there was a call to respond to sensitive or distressing topics.

Secondly, a Utilitarian ethical approach exists, which, reflecting its Benthamite roots, promotes ends over means (Rossman & Rallis, 2003)*,* and encourages the researcher to make ethical decisions which result in the best outcomes for the greatest number of people. The nature of this project aims to bring about more positive consequences for all those who work in higher education, irrespective of whether they work predominantly with Chinese post-graduate students, and so the potentially-beneficial outcomes of this research hopefully moderate any disquiet participants might have felt in discussing their subjective experiences.

Finally, an Aristotelian approach requires a practitioner to make on-the-spot decisions about how to respond to events in an ethical manner: this is the "ethics of skills" (Edwards & Mauthner, 2012)*,* or the "ethics of virtue" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). For instance, when interviewing participants, I drew on my experience as a language professional and a teacher of international students to ensure that the interview environment was as positive as possible at all times.

In order to ensure that the design choices I made were ethical, I drew on the following questions (after Edwards & Mauthner, op. cit.), and the answers I offer give an indication of the operationalisation of these principles in my project:

What are the locations of the people involved in the research?

I was connected to the three institutions in which the project was set, but decided not to interview participants who were known to me (see 3.9.1). This meant that participants did not respond to me as a tutor and were less likely to raise issues relating to provision during the interview, which can be an issue when the researcher and participants have a teacher-student relationship (Block, 2000). I was aware that simply being part of the institution's

staff meant that some participants may have viewed the interviews as an opportunity to discuss provision, and was ready to steer respondents towards more suitable fora to raise concerns should this have been necessary. I do know, however, that my position as a member of staff may still have influenced the naturalness of responses given by respondents but felt that this was mitigated by having participants who did not know me in a professional capacity.

What are the needs of the participants?

As discussed in 1.4, I was aware from the outset that some of my participants faced challenges during their sojourns in the UK, and so potentially-distressing aspects of their experience may have arisen which necessitated careful handling. Seidman (2013:99) draws attention to the need for the researcher to maintain a "delicate balance between respecting what the participant is saying and taking advantage of opportunities to ask difficult questions", so, in order to be able to drill down into sensitive issues without making participants unnecessarily uncomfortable, I prepared a number of "loading" questions (Lee, 1993). These encourage participants to consider a phenomenon as it is manifested in other people, and in a manner which assumes that the phenomenon has already taken place, allowing them to discuss a potentially-distressing situation from a less personal – and therefore less threatening – perspective. Two examples are given in Figure 8, below (and further examples appear in Appendix 4):

Your friend tells you she is worried about her academic progress. What would you say to her?	*Your friend tells you she is not eating well and cannot sleep. Her body feels tired. What would you say to her?*
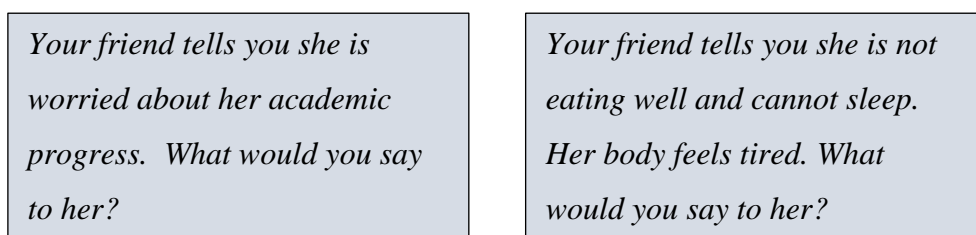
Figure 8: Sample loading questions

I followed these loading questions up by asking (e.g.) *Students often feel like this at some point. When did you feel like that?* – rather than *Have you ever felt like that?* Stressing the frequency and innocuous nature of a phenomenon in this way can encourage more honesty and depth of response from participants (O'Leary, 2005), and this technique was useful in

allowing participants to talk about troubling experiences but without having necessarily to talk about themselves.

Although remedy was not my objective, I drew on the skills I acquired on my Introduction to Counselling course when sensitive issues arose. The qualitative interviewer often (unwittingly) draws on techniques from the counselling professions (Dowling & Brown, 2009), and so I was able to employ strategies such as probing sympathetically, use of body language (in particular, posture and eye-contact) and avoiding closing off the discussion with ill-judged questions or answers. I also became much better at being an active listener by appreciating the "role of silence" (Gillham, 2001:35) in the interview process, and this allowed me to treat participants with respect and respond sympathetically in a non-threatening manner.

What is the balance of personal and social power between those involved?

It is almost impossible to achieve absolute parity and equality within a research interview setting (Griffiths, 1998). As it is the interviewer who draws up the interview schedule and decides what line the conversation will take, interviews can easily become "a manipulative dialogue" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), which may result in participants' deciding to censor what they say, or even to withdraw from the research. I was alert to the power asymmetry (Birks & Mills, 2010) inherent in the relationship between researcher and researched and sought to create an environment where this was minimised as far as possible.

Some participants may feel they need to give answers which they feel the researcher is looking, or may consider it respectful to "please" a figure who they see as being in a position of authority. Birch & Miller (2000) point out that a good interview for participants may be one which allows them to cast themselves in a particular light or reframe previous experiences in a way which is more pleasing or beneficial to them, so I was mindful that what I considered to be a good interview was not necessarily what constituted a good interview for participants. For example, it would not be a good interview if the participants were responded to primarily as sources of data, and as people only as a secondary concern. In order to attend to this I ensured that my interviews did not take the form of a cross-examination, and I drew on my experience in working with international students to create a linguistically-appropriate environment (see 3.11).

There is a strand in the literature (e.g. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) which calls on the researcher to reveal aspects of her/his own life to participants, in order to build trust and interact sympathetically – and empathetically – with respondents. However, I felt that over-disclosure on my part would be unhelpful, so I trod a middle path, whereby I related to my participants as real people (and not as "data"), but was sensitive to areas they did not wish to expand on. Interviewing respondents from outside my own department also went some way to reducing the power differential between myself and the participants, and carrying out more than one interview allowed me to return to participants' accounts of their experiences and drill down into these more deeply.

How will those involved understand our actions?

A key concern for me throughout the project was how my participants perceived my role as a researcher. I was aware that some of the participants may view the interviews as therapeutic in nature, and many warn of the potential perils inherent in this (e.g. Birch & Miller, 2000; Block, 2000; Etherington 2004; Dunne et al. 2005; Dowling & Brown; 2009). Interviews can instigate a "process of reflection" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015:34) in participants, which can lead to change. This represents a significant responsibility on the part of the researcher, so although some of my participants brought up "painful memories" (Taylor & Hicks, 2009), they also had the time and space to talk about difficult experiences in an empathetic environment: such "self-disclosure" can be revelatory and emancipatory for participants (Birch & Miller, 2000). Since Confucian-heritage students have been shown not to seek specialised help if they are in distress, preferring instead to talk with sympathetic and kindly listeners (Raunic & Xenos, 2008), there was a possibility that they would wish to open up to me if they felt that their concerns were being heard. As mentioned above, in order to be better prepared for this, I ensured I was familiar with the BACP Ethical Framework for Good Practice, and took at Introduction to Counselling course. In case there was a need to pass a distressed participant on to professional support, I also had contacts for institutional counselling services to hand.

How will being a participant affect the people involved?

The end of the research period can be delicate, and involves much soul-searching (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Participants may have come to view the relationship as special: I know that for some of my participants, I was one of the few native-speakers with whom they had in-depth contact. In this respect, their involvement in my project may itself have become part of their experience of being a Chinese post-graduate student in the UK. A researcher also builds up a "conversational relationship" (van Manen, 2001:50) with the research participants, and so, in leaving the field, I was mindful that I was also leaving an intimate relationship.

3.13 The process of writing [💬3.30]

Unlike other research traditions, where research in the field is completed before "writing up" begins, in qualitative phenomenological research, writing takes place throughout the enquiry. Thomson & Kamler (2010:152) maintain that "writing *is* research", and in retrospect I see that I have done an extensive amount of writing, in a variety of formats and genres. This was an integral part of my enquiry, although I did not fully realise the central place of writing in my project until after my Registration Viva.

> [💬3.30] "Writing a doctoral thesis" sounds like an orderly, measured and scholarly process, but most of my writing was far from this. Simply thinking and reflecting, and toying with ideas, was a significant part of my writing process, and I found that the "incidental" moments of writing and reflection (such as jotting down an idea on a post-it) have been central in producing the more formalised text presented here. Some of my best "writing" occurred when I least expected it.

My writing has been characterised by a number of different phases. Initially, I took copious notes from my reading of the substantive and methodological literatures (see 2.2). Simultaneously, I was writing reflexive field notes in my researcher's journal (see Appendix 9) about how I felt in relation to the research process. I was also writing for public audiences (for instance, my supervisors, my colleagues, assessors and colleagues). There was therefore much writing happening, in different places, and in the third year of my project I realised that this needed marshalling into a semblance of order [💬3.31]. I drew up a matrix of possible chapters for this thesis, and made notes about content in each (see Appendix 10). Over time, this matrix became progressively fuller, and, as Dunne et al. (2005) recommend, I was constantly reviewing and adding to it, until I came to recognise

> [💬3.31] It was a messy process! By this point I had reading, data and writing in multiple locations. In retrospect, a benefit of organising these incipient chapters early was that it allowed me a lot of time to shape this thesis.

that it was, in essence, a draft thesis. Although the architecture and content of each chapter has changed significantly since then (sections were created, conflated, deleted, moved, and divided), "getting things down" allowed me to see the horizon. Drafting the thesis in this way also indicated to me where there were gaps in my reading too, so I returned to my Record Cards (see 2.2) to see whether concepts I had already read about could be slotted in, or whether a return to the literature was in order.

As well as engaging with, and writing about, substantive and methodological knowledge, I wrote about my data generation and interpretation throughout the project. On a number of occasions, new data made me reconsider the validity of an earlier conceptualisation, and this required an overhaul of both my understanding of my participants' experiences and what I was writing. In 4.2, I show how new, unexpected themes emerged which were written into this account – what Kvale (2007:43) refers to as "spiralling backwards". My writing was, therefore, "a dynamic, creative process" (Richardson & Adams St Pierre, 2008:474), and it allowed me to interpret and "make sense of the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008:406) of my participants.

3.14 Revisiting my commitment to trustworthiness

This chapter has clarified the philosophical and theoretical **constructs** which underpin this enquiry. I have been **transparent** about the **methods** I employed, and the **challenges** I encountered, given the **phenomenon** and **setting**. I have made the context of the interviews clear, and have given an account of how my participants were recruited. I have shown how the interviews were designed and staged, and I have given a "clear description" (Williams & Morrow, 2009:576) of the data generating procedures I employed. I have shown how I set up and responded to developments in the field in order to make the research principled and viable. I have continued to include Personal Critical Commentaries to provide a **reflexive account** of the ways in which I, as a researcher, affected the design of this enquiry. By chronicling the changing nature of my project, and the reason for these changes, I have provided **transparency** in the description of what I did, and why. Finally, it was important for me, as a social researcher, to ensure that the decisions I made about my research and the procedures I followed were **ethical and moral** in nature, and this chapter has indicated how the methods and procedures I selected were appropriate in this respect.

Chapter 4

Constructing and connecting: findings and discussion

4.1 Overview of this chapter and a rationale for the title

In this chapter, I construct and connect the experiences of my 12 Chinese post-graduate participants. I explore the meanings which they assigned to their lifeworlds in the UK, and, in doing to, offer responses to the two research questions which brace this thesis. What follows is an interpretation, on many levels (see 4.2), and I am conscious that this is very much my interpretation of these participants' experiences; other participants, and other research orientations, would throw up radically different interpretations, and therefore different accounts. Consequently, the responses that I offer to my research questions are grounded decisively in the experience of these particular participants, in this specific context, at this given time [🗩4.1].

[🗩4.1] In 1.2 and 3.6, I militated for a critical and emancipatory position which situates my participants' experiences at the centre of the imbalance between more powerful and less powerful voices in higher education in the UK. However, I realise that what follows is also a case of the powerful (me) interpreting what has been said by the less powerful (the participants in my study). By dint of my experience, nationality, status within the university and role as a researcher, I am "powerful" – but who am I to claim to be able to make any sense of the experience of others? It is important to ask myself this question, and recognise that in interpretivist research such questions should always be asked.

I have drawn on this interpretation to construct the essential nature of these participants' lifeworlds as Chinese post-graduate students in the UK. This process of constructing – the first element in this chapter's title – was a long and recursive process, characterised by "sobriety and patience" (Kvale, 2007:34). It required many passes before arriving at the themes presented here, and, as Smith et al. (2009) predicted, earlier passes were predominantly descriptive: it was only through further revision that the account became more interpretative. This chapter, then, describes and rationalises the choices I made and the processes I followed in analysing and making sense of the data generated by the interviews. It also indicates the extent to which the experience(s) of these participants are in dialogue with

those of other participants in similar settings, by mobilising the literature to show how and where their experiences chime with prior research in the field. These convergences (and divergences) are the "connecting" element of the title. Given that the themes I lay out here raise questions about the lives of Chinese post-graduate students in the UK, this chapter also acts as groundwork for the implications for practice I propose in Chapter 5.

I begin by clarifying how I went about marshalling and analysing the data that the interviews generated, and how I settled on the key themes which are unpacked in 4.4 and 4.5.

4.2 My analytical framework [🗨4.2]

There is no *via regia* of qualitative data analysis. Indeed, the literature can be confusing, if not contradictory, in this respect, although Smith et al. (2009) view the multiplicity of analytic options as a form of "healthy flexibility" which permits the researcher to select tools and procedures that work for the setting and the participants (Kvale, 2007:34).

[🗨4.2] Smith et al. (2009:80) say, "analysis is inevitably a complex process. It may be […] difficult, creative, intense and conceptually-demanding", and writing about my own data has been the most challenging part of this thesis. It was only towards the end of the third year that I began to be able to write something which seemed meaningful, and only now, at the point of submission, that this process has reached an acceptable point.

Unlike other modes of enquiry, where a rigorous engagement with the literature is crucial before entering the field, and where the data needs to be generated before analysis can take place and results written up, qualitative is more effective when the analysis informs reading, and vice versa (Dowling & Brown, 2009), with no linear progression (Smith et al., 2009) from one stage to another. As a result, I took an iterative approach to generating and exploring the data: my project was characterised by reading [🗨4.3], interviewing, analysis and writing, all of which occurred concurrently and recursively. To exemplify, by the summer of 2016, I had a good feel for the field and a large amount of data collected, so I put my interviewing on hold and embarked on analysing the data amassed to date (see 4.3.1). This allowed me to engage in some initial theorising about the nature of my participants'

[🗨4.3] As I neared the end of the project I looked back at the kind of literature I had engaged with at different stages. This revealed that I had begun my journey reading about the topic and methodology in almost equal parts. In the second year, I continued to read about the topic, but read more of the methodological literature. The main phase of the project was characterised mainly by reading sources of a more political nature. Then, when I came to editing and reviewing, I found I returned to explore all types of literature. This illustrates how my reading needs altered at different stages of the project.

experiences. Subsequently, having identified a number of tentative themes, I went back into the field to explore these in more depth with later participants. The hiatus also meant I was able to identify gaps in the themes I had so far identified, which allowed me to better focus my reading, because as I interviewed and generated data, so I gained insights into new tentative themes to reconnoitre in the literature.

Since each foray into the field and each pass over the literature brought the responses to my research questions into sharper focus, so my analytical framework was constantly revised and modified. At the start of the main phase of the project, my awareness of themes was grounded in the lessons learnt during my preliminary research (see 3.9.1), but this awareness was recalibrated through further time in the field, deeper engagement with the literature and thought-provoking discussions with colleagues and supervisors.

4.2.1 From words to text

The first step in moving from the words spoken in the interviews to written text was to transcribe each video-recorded interview. It immediately became apparent that there are tensions in transcribing the spoken word: oral language use is spontaneous and ungrammatical, and is characterised by false starts, recasts and redundancy (McCarthy, 1991), which is at odds with the highly structured and syntactically-accurate features of written forms of the language. Any transcription, therefore, can be regarded as a translation of the original oral text, and deciding how faithful that translation should be to the original gives rise to questions about the value of the transcript, and the danger of putting words into people's mouths: *traduire traittore*. Yet, of course, I wanted (and needed) a form of written representation to include in this account. Kvale (2007:98) argues that there is no right answer to this conundrum, and that the researcher must ask, "What is a useful transcription for *my* research purposes?"

There are a number of positions on what a transcription should do. Atkinson & Delamont (2008) argue that qualitative researchers should think about employing either conversation analysis or discourse analysis, and, by dint of my career in language teaching, I considered these possibilities, because they were concepts I was already familiar with. However, specialised linguistic transcriptions are often too much for phenomenological enquiry (Smith et al., 2009; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), and so I decided against the

phonologically-precise and coded linguistic transcription typical of conversation analysis, which transcribes "all of the sounds uttered by participants" (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008:72). Such an analysis, whilst valid for studies with a phonological or linguistic purpose, divorces the semantic utterance from its pragmatic meaning – what Alvesson & Skoldberg (2000:268) refer to as "linguistic reductionism" – and would not serve to throw light on the experiences and lifeworlds of these participants. Nor was I interested in how my participants construct their lifeworlds through speech, so I elected not to use discourse analysis as an approach to transcription [💬4.4]. I settled on pragmatic analysis (Hutchby & Wooffitt, op. cit.), in which the transcription "tidies up" the original utterances to allow for a more accessible reading of the text but maintains (as far as possible) the original words of the respondents (Kvale, 2007). I chose to transcribe verbatim any language errors made by the participants which did not impede communication, yet reformulated sections where meaning was compromised, whilst remaining as close to the original sense as possible. A sample can be found in Appendix 8.

> [💬4.4] I am not, of course, implying that linguistic analysis with non-native speakers is invalid: such studies abound, are fascinating, and commonly inform my day-to-day teaching. However, a linguistic analysis was not the most beneficial approach for the nature, setting and purpose of this particular enquiry.

Once the transcription was complete, and had been audited by the participant (see 3.1.1), I moved to analyse the content, and to identify emergent themes in the lives of my participants.

4.2.2 Identifying emergent themes

Qualitative projects generate large quantities of data, which necessitates a significant amount of reflection and decision making on the part of the researcher about the importance and weight of emergent themes and what to report. Even this small-scale ideographic project raised many questions about what was noteworthy in the data.

Below, and in more depth in 6.3, I lay out how I arrived at my "repertoire of interpretation" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000:273) – in other words, the themes which were sufficiently significant [🗨4.5] to include in my construction of the lifeworlds of my participants. Arriving at a repertoire of interpretation is a delicate process: it needs to be sufficiently close to the phenomenon not to diverge from the central thrust of the project, but, if it is too restricted, it can result in a narrow and unrepresentative description of the nature of the phenomenon. In addition, whilst drawing up my own repertoire of interpretation I needed to be aware of

[🗨4.5] Weighty questions arise in relation to "significance". For instance, is a theme to be considered significant if it is raised by 75% of respondents? 50%？ Are statistical criteria even worthwhile in qualitative research? It may be the case that a participant wishes to use an interview to present a particular picture of her/himself (Birch & Miller, 2000), and therefore elects to flag up the same theme on a number of occasions; conversely, a single participant may make only passing reference to a theme which is of crucial importance in understanding a phenomenon fully. I was very heedful of this, and rationalise my thinking in 4.3.1.

my own "cognitive bias" (ibid., p273), driven by my own emotional relationship with the setting and the participants (see 1.7), since such a bias may take over the interpretation if it goes unchecked. For example, if I am concerned with the emotional well-being of my participants, then I will be more sensitive to mentions of this in the data.

In order to attend to this problem, I took an abductive approach to identifying key themes. In practice, this meant that I had an idea of what might emerge in the interviews, but maintained an open mind. It may seem that working deductively and inductively concurrently is contradictory, from an epistemological perspective: was I looking for or looking at evidence? However, Alvesson & Skoldberg (2000:274) argue that there is "no conflict between these two strategies, the widely read and the 'blank' one" […] as long as there is a balance of emphasis", and a blended abductive approach worked well for me in identifying key themes in my data.

In one respect, I worked through my interview data deductively with the expectation of encountering familiar themes from the literature. Although there are voices in the literature who warn that such an approach risks "forcing the data" (Birks & Mills, 2010), thus creating "interviewer bias" (Dowling & Brown, 2009:79), my prior engagement with the literature and familiarity with the context meant my knowledge of these students' likely experiences was not a *tabula rasa*. Indeed, Smith et al. (2009) and Sim et al. (2012) argue that researchers should draw on their own professional and experiential knowledge to help identify possible themes within a phenomenological project, and Thomas & James

(2006) believe that *a priori* assumptions are what make qualitative research possible

[🗨4.6], since researchers would have few ideas of what to explore without an awareness of a problem. I could not ignore my subjective knowledge of the nature of my participants' experiences, informed by both my own prior professional experience (see 1.4), and by my reading of the substantive literature (see 2.2). Perhaps,

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[🗨4.6] This may well be even more the case with an EdD project: whatever we, as researching practitioners, try to do to eliminate assumptions, there will always be some level of verification going on, given that we are inextricably close to both our professional and our research settings.

</div>

then, it might be more accurate to say that, rather than looking for themes, I was "prepared to be unsurprised by" the appearance of certain themes. These themes, which I have called *a priori themes*, are listed in Table 10, below:

A priori **themes:**
• Feeling lonely
• Being an outsider
• Gaining new socio-cultural perspectives
• Adjusting to new cultures of learning
• Struggling with curricular content
• Worrying about proficiency in English
• Having unrealistic expectations
• Accessing support networks

Table 10: A priori *themes*

In another respect, however, I was not just looking for these *a priori* themes: the reconnaissance study (see 3.9.1) had shown me that adopting this kind of positivist approach was not fully effective in uncovering personal accounts of the lives of my participants. Therefore, I also worked inductively with the data: as well as being sensitive to the possible existence of the *a priori* themes in my participants' experiences, I was also open to encountering new, unexpected themes. In being open to the "surprise potential" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000:277) of the data, I hoped to avoid simply making my analysis a confirmation of "perpetuating and normative" (Hedges, 2010) hypotheses about Chinese post-graduate students, in which I found only what I expected to find. Like Colley (2010), I was pleased to find surprises in what participants said, as this made me feel that I was being open to the data. The themes that were new and unexpected, which Rossman & Rallis (2003:283) refer to as "indigenous themes", are summarised in Table 11, below:

Indigenous themes:
• Establishing relationships with tutors
• Taking a pre-sessional programme
• Appreciating life in the UK
• Struggling with face and emotional wellbeing
• Transitioning to post-graduate study
• Encountering tension with students from Hong Kong and Taiwan

Table 11: Indigenous themes

Next, I clarify how these themes were categorised (in 4.2.3) and later prioritised (in 4.3.1).

4.2.3 Categorising emergent themes

Many experts advocate a line-by-line analysis of a transcript (e.g. Charmaz, 2006). However, I feel that a "line" is an arbitrary and unnatural division of discourse, which does not always correspond with a meaningful sense group, and so instead I chose to explore the data on an incident-by-incident basis – what van Manen (2001:94) refers to as a "sententious approach" (in the sense of critical, not censorious) – in which the researcher highlights a participant's reference to a complete action, emotion or feeling. When any of these actions, emotions or feelings emerged in a transcript, I highlighted the section and made initial exploratory notes on the transcript. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that the transcript is divided into three columns, placing the original text in the centre of the page, with a right-hand column where these initial exploratory notes can be made, as exemplified in Figure 9, below:

	Transcribed verbatim data	Initial exploratory notes
	Because in College, the professors, they won't … won't just… they just gave me lectures, but they're not interested in what you're interested in, or they give you reading materials that's all up to you and back in China it's a common thing in Chinese universities. It's okay if you don't go to classes, yeah. Unless the teacher would keep a record or something, but people go to class like me, like all of… most of my classmates they go to class, they sit there, but they won't listen. They just read books, like play with the mobile phones, check their social media, like…	This is what happens in China – is this shared?

Figure 9: Extract of transcript with initial exploratory notes

Once I had transcribed and made initial exploratory notes, I shifted away from the raw verbatim data and began focussing on the exploratory notes. The concepts identified in these notes were crystallised into emergent themes (Smith et al., 2009), which I noted in the left hand column of the transcript. These included both *a priori* and indigenous themes. An example is given in Figure 10, below, which shows how the initial exploratory notes ("How tutors deal with students' emotional lives") is incorporated into a broader emergent theme ("Relationships with tutors):

Emergent themes	Transcribed verbatim data	Initial exploratory notes
	Okay. That's… wow. You said before that you said your English is improving from when you arrived until, so do you think that in future you will continue to improve?	
RELATIONSHIPS WITH TUTORS	Yeah, I think so, but I think that if I continue to be in a bad mood and not want to talk to anybody, that will not help my English. My… my friends told name, you have to … yeah, my Personal Tutor gave me some interesting advice, he told me he once studied abroad and he know a girl in that country, and his language in that country improved a lot because you have to talk to her every day, so I asked whether he suggest to me to date and English guy and he said, it's just a suggestion [laughs]	Personal Tutor suggests getting a boyfriend. It sounds like he has no real ability to deal with students' emotional issues.

Figure 10: Extract of transcript with initial exploratory notes and emergent themes

These emergent themes were then entered on an analytical matrix. Initially, this took the form of an Excel document, which I used to record themes and examples, as exemplified in Figure 11, below:

	Evidence of depression	Proficiency in English	Personal Tutor	Educational practices	Food and cooking
Tina	when it comes to study you have to try to understand what the teacher talking about and try to do the long reading list and sometimes it just make me feel depressed And I just don't want to talk to anybody even if … I have foreign roommates, and they are kind but at that time I just even don't want to say hello to them and ask how is you day, yeah, so that was a hard week I have been through	everything is different in in my country and some things really change especially the language I think the most [complicated] point is language I have the IELTS test for 7.0 and I... I am beyond the requirement but I still think my English is not that great I think maybe because she stayed in England for a long time so she may get used to studying, staying here, so the language is not as difficult as I my English is not that good, so I can't to talk about... talk about some deep things	I told this once to my Personal Tutor, and I said that his support means a lot to me, and he said that my confidence should come from myself, from inside. At the time, no. The whole week, no. After I got through that week, I told to my Personal Tutor and my parents. And what did your Personal Tutor say? - He just said… Yeah, he just asked me if I got through it, and I said yes, and he said that's fine [laughs]	in the seminar I can't I can't erm talk well when I am in a group with native speaker or something and sometimes they just talk a joke which I cannot understand what they are talking and that really, really depressed me But when it comes to you have to study and get improvement it's complicated.	you can practise your cooking skills because I... I really think the most improvement in for these two months is the cooking skills. I never cooked before, so I can now… now I can try a lot of new dishes I invite a lot of friends to come here and I cook dishes for them, yeah […] it really make me happy to find out I can do it, yeah, I can do it better and better I think it's easier for me to cook than study, and that makes me feel happy and confident, so that's why I like to do it

Figure 11. Sample from initial analytical matrix

However, the amount of data gathered quickly made an Excel document unwieldy. I therefore explored other options for managing large quantities of qualitative interview data, and, as O'Leary (2005) suggests, explored using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS), which allows the researcher to manage large quantities of data by reducing the "multiplicity of meanings" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000:274) to more manageable quantities: a form of "data distillation" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003:97). I accessed NVivo, which proved to be an excellent "code and retrieve" (Silverman, 2015) database. NVivo allowed me to organise my emergent themes into "nodes" (= categories). A sample of my NVivo coding is given in Figure 12, below:

Figure 12: Sample of NVivo coding

Using NVivo allowed me to explore and experiment with the emergent themes and organise and reorganise them until I felt that they provided credible tentative responses to my research questions. This happened in two ways: firstly, through a process of abstraction (Smith et al., 2009:96), in which I put similar themes together and created a new super-ordinate node, or through subsumption (ibid., p97), in which an existing theme became a node in its own right, with related themes subsumed into it.

4.3 Findings

The analysis and coding discussed in the previous section led to a significant number of themes. These themes in their totality were my findings, which I needed to winnow, since it was not possible to give consideration to all the themes which emerged in the interviews. In this section, I show how I prioritised certain common and notable themes.

4.3.1 Prioritising themes: the common and the notable

Following the three-step procedure (transcribe – highlight – categorise) discussed above allowed me to identify emergent themes in my participants' experiences. However, whilst this process was time-consuming, a greater challenge was deciding which of these themes were of significance. This meant identifying the common and the notable in my participants' experiences.

After the first period of the main phase of my project (October 2015-June 2016), I used the emergent themes I had established draw up initial "structures of experience" (van Manen, 2001:79) which offered tentative answers [💬4.7] to my research questions. These structures are presented in Figures 13 and 14, below:

[💬4.7] I have elected to articulate the themes as gerunds (in other words, noun forms ending in –*ing*) because I believe that my research questions attend to dynamic phenomena, and syntactically, gerunds convey a sense of progression, development and a "strong sense of action sequence" (Glaser, 1978, in Charmaz, 2006:49).
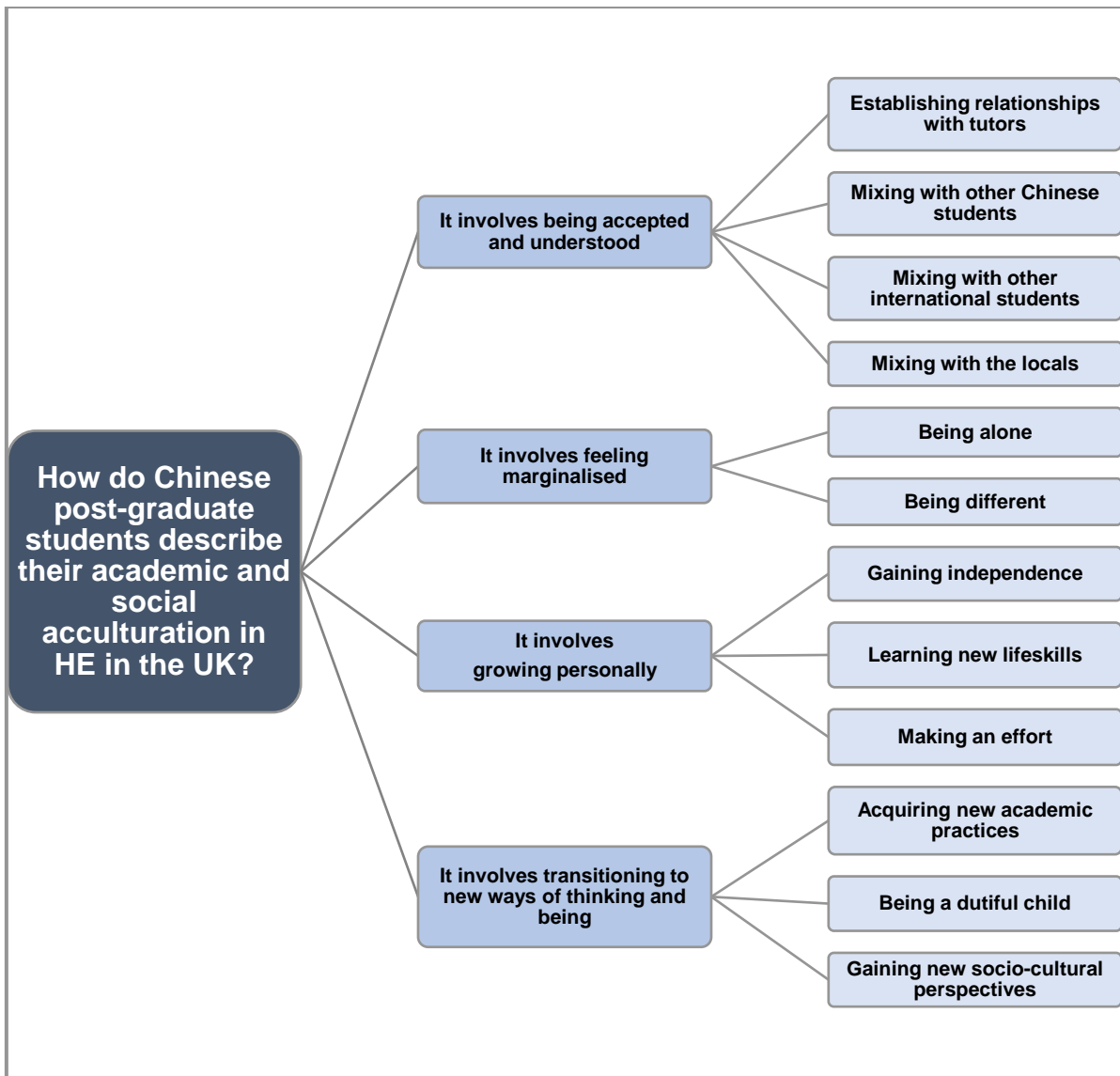
Figure 13: Initial thematic analysis of participants' perceptions of their social and academic acculturation to UK HEIs
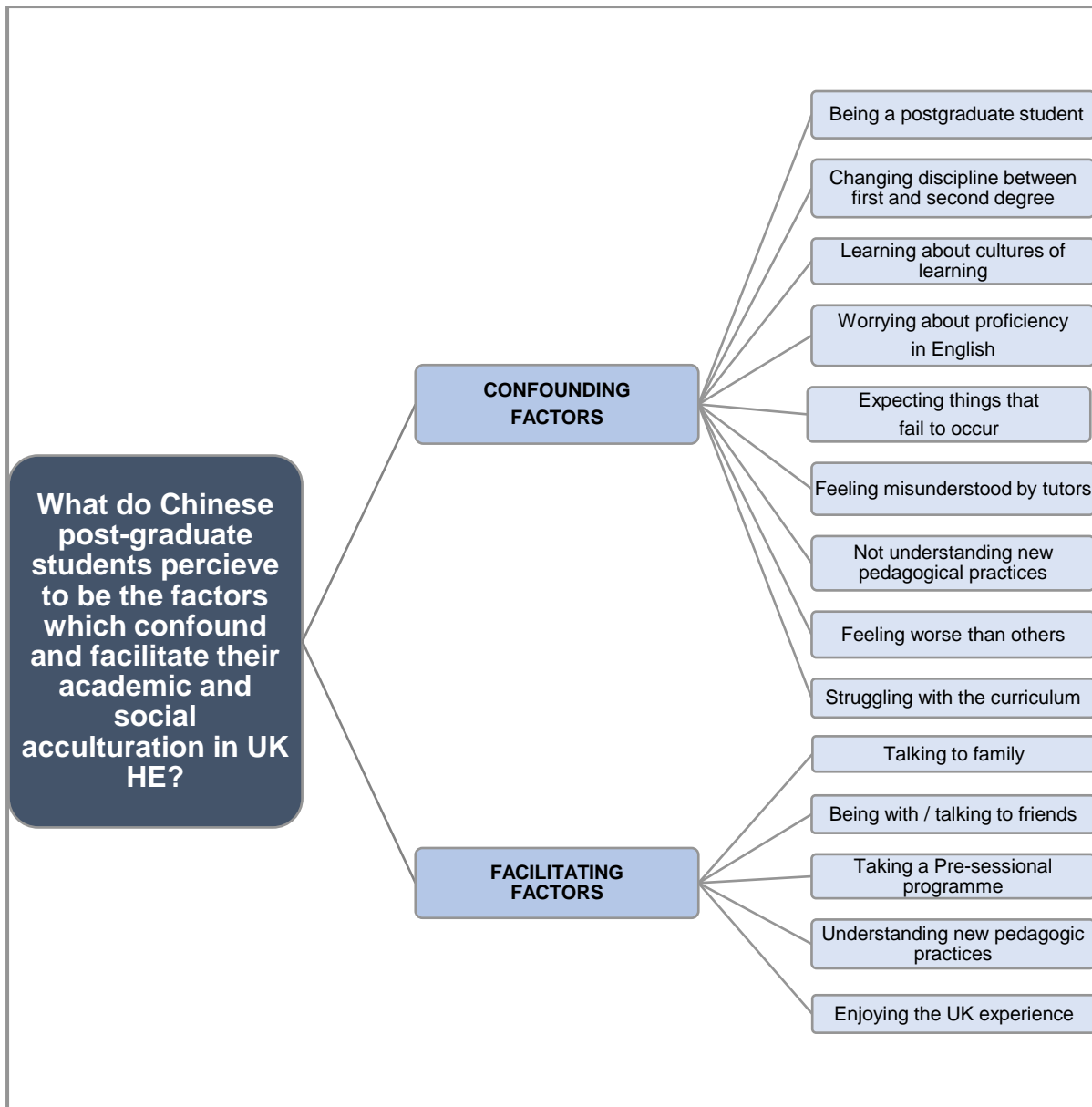
Figure 14: Initial thematic analysis of participants' perceptions of factors which confound and facilitate their social and academic acculturation to UK HEIs

Together, however, these two initial thematic analyses totalled 26 themes, which was too unwieldly to say anything meaningful in a (relatively!) brief and focused report like this. I realised that I needed to cut back and prioritise, and did so by returning to NVivo to pare down the number of themes. I did this initially by identifying which themes were most frequently cited, although I was very mindful of the fact that frequency does not necessarily indicate significance. Smith et al. (2009) recommend that a phenomenon can only really be "representative" if it is raised by 50% of participants, particularly in IPA studies with larger

samples, since "the more the same concept occurs in a text, the more likely it is a theme" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003:89). These "recurring regularities" (Guba, 1978:53, ibid., p88) in my own analysis indicated concepts which were likely to be representative of a key theme in the participants' structure of experience. This gave me a good initial indication of what was salient in my participants' lifeworlds: Table 12, below, shows the themes which emerged at this stage, with those raised by six or more participants highlighted.

PARTICIPANT: / THEME:	Tina	Yvonne	Sheena	Heidi	Shaun	Jenny	Sophie	Yu-Min	Daisy	Huiling	Poppy	Xiuying	x/12
Establishing relationships with tutors		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	9
Feeling misunderstood by tutors	✓		✓								✓	✓	4
Mixing with other Chinese students	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		9
Mixing with other international students		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10
Mixing with the locals	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		10
Feeling lonely	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		6
Feeling different	✓										✓	✓	3
Gaining independence	✓			✓	✓								3
Learning new life skills	✓				✓		✓						3
Making an effort						✓	✓				✓		3
Acquiring new academic practices	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	9
Learning about cultures of learning	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓		7
Not understanding new pedagogical practices	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓			6
Understanding new pedagogical practices		✓	✓	✓			✓			✓			5
Struggling with the curriculum	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	8
Being a dutiful child	✓		✓				✓						3

Theme													Total
Gaining new socio-cultural perspectives	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			9
Transitioning to post-graduate study			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		8
Changing discipline between 1st and 2nd degree	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓		5
Worrying about proficiency in English	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	12
Having unrealistic expectations		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10
Feeling worse than others	✓		✓				✓		✓	✓			5
Talking to family	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					7
Being / talking with friends	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓					5
Taking a pre-sessional programme		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓		6
Enjoying the UK experience		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10
Feeling depressed	✓		✓			✓	✓						4
Face					✓	✓	✓		✓				4
Tension with Hong Kong and Taiwan students										✓	✓	✓	3

Table 12: Themes raised by individual participants

However, drawing on quantitative data alone may not establish what Rossman & Rallis (2003:97) term "the quintessential meaning of the experience". It may be the case that a theme mentioned by a small number of the participants – even just one – is central in understanding the phenomenon. For instance, only four of the participants mentioned that they had suffered from periods of depression, and only three mentioned tension between students from mainland China and students from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Whilst the former was raised by only a third of the participants, and the latter by just a quarter, both were clearly themes of importance in the sojourns of these participants and were therefore important to include. My decisions about what to articulate in this thesis, then, involved negotiating a path between "convergence and divergence, commonality and individuality" (Smith et al., 2009:107). Consequently, I went back to my initial conceptualisation and identified themes which could be conflated, re-framed, or, in some cases, deleted in their entirety. In Table 13, below, I make this explicit by summarising the reframing that occurred, with a rationale for the decisions I made:

Initial themes	Revised themes	Rationale for change
Being valued and acknowledged by tutors	Establishing relationships with tutors	
Feeling misunderstood by tutors		
Mixing with other Chinese students	Feeling isolated, lonely and marginalised	
Mixing with other international students		
Mixing with the locals		
Being alone		
Being different		
Gaining independence	Developing life skills	This was an interesting finding, but the need to prioritise meant that there were more significant areas to report.
Learning new life skills		
Making an effort	██████████████████	This theme did not really go to the essence of the phenomenon, as it could apply to *all* students.
Acquiring new academic practices	Adjusting to new cultures of learning and curricula	
Learning about cultures of learning		
Not understanding new pedagogical practices		
Understanding new pedagogical practices		
Struggling with the curriculum	Struggling with curricular content	
Being a dutiful child	██████████████████	
Gaining new socio-cultural perspectives	Gaining new socio-cultural perspectives	██████████████████
Transitioning to post-graduate study	Transitioning to post-graduate study	
Changing discipline between 1st and 2nd degree		
Worrying about proficiency in English	Worrying about proficiency in English	██████████████████
Expecting things that fail to occur	Having unrealistic expectations	It became clear that this was more than #things which did not occur: some things occurred which were unanticipated.
Feeling worse than others	██████████████████	
Talking to family	Accessing support networks	Dowling & Brown (2009) argue that the categories which are explored in the empirical section of a thesis must reflect the themes as the engagement with the literature, thereby squaring the theoretical-empirical circle.
Being / talking with friends		
Taking a pre-sessional programme	Taking a pre-sessional programme	██████████████████
Enjoying the UK experience	Enjoying the UK experience	██████████████████
Feeling depressed	Struggling with emotional wellbeing	A number of participants mentioned issues of face, but this was in relation to their affective wellbeing.
Face		

Table 13: Conflating, reframing and deleting themes

This reframing produced two new, final conceptualisations which (a) were more manageable; (b) were a better representation of the experience of these students; and (c) allowed me to draw up more precise responses to my research questions, as shown in Figure 15 and Figure 16, below:
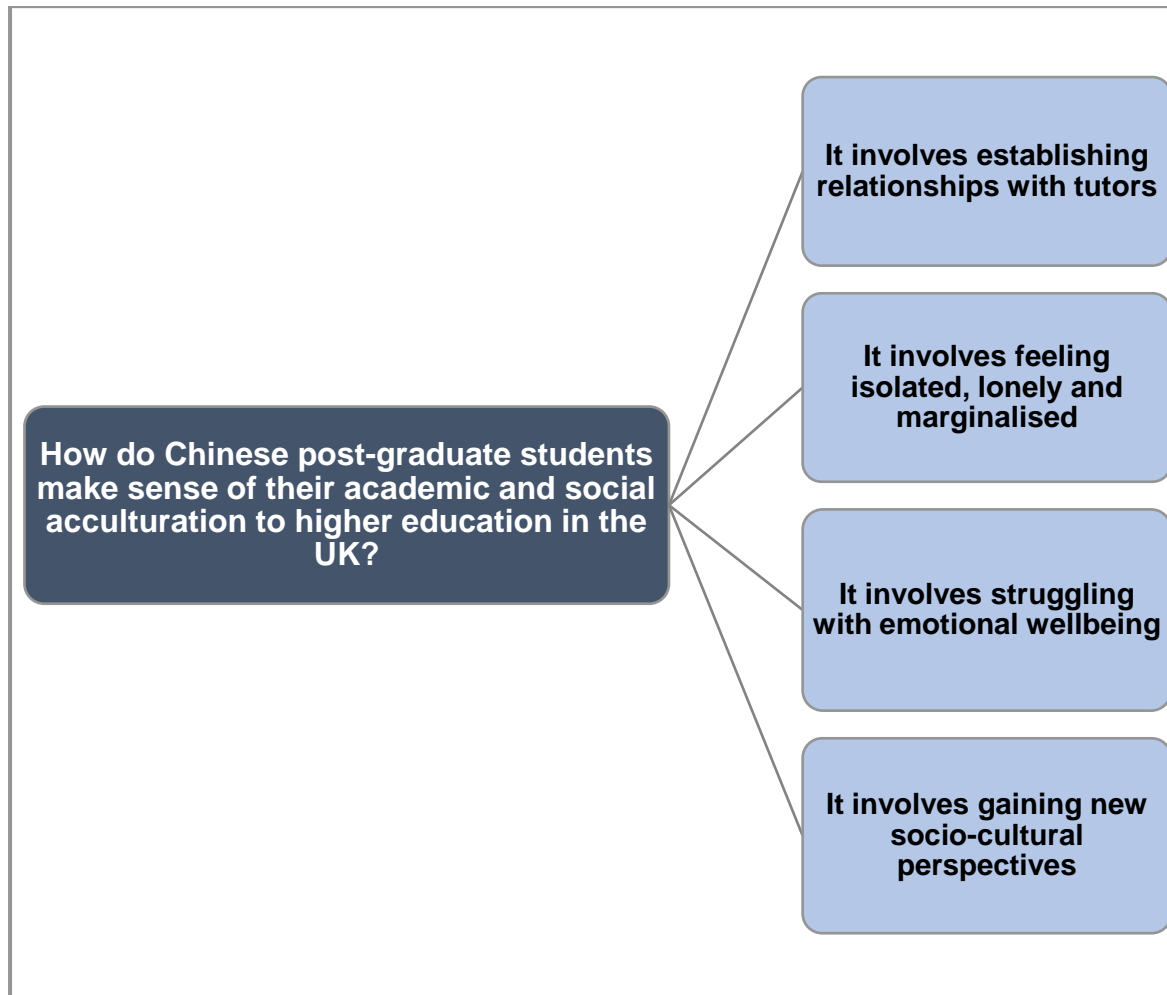
Figure 15: Final thematic analysis of participants' perceptions of their social and academic acculturation to UK HEIs
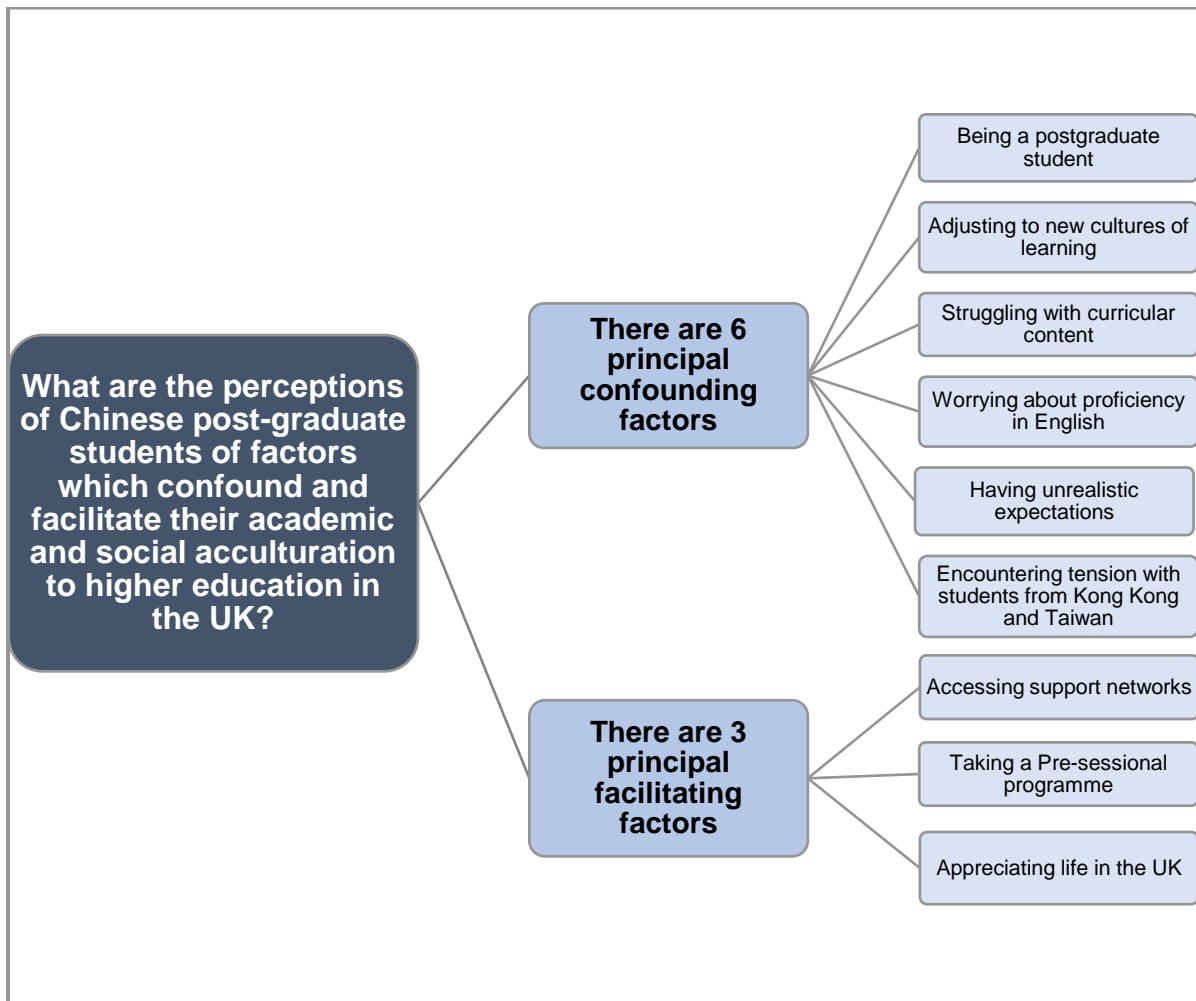
Figure 16: Final thematic analysis of participants' perceptions of factors which confound and facilitate their social and academic acculturation to UK HEIs

After establishing these two structures of meaning, I moved to generating responses to my research questions. This process is chronicled in the following section.

4.3.2 From prioritising themes to interpreting my participants' experiences

In 3.7.2, I made reference to the hermeneutic circle, and how my interpretive phenomenological analysis explored both the parts and the whole of the lived experiences of these participants. This section clarifies how I drew the individual voices of my participants together into a cohesive whole.

There is much written about interpreting qualitative data. A core principle, however, is that interpretation should take place on a number of levels. Kvale (2007:102), for instance, encourages researches to engage in what he terms "third order hermeneutics", in which the data is generated and then interpreted in a three-stage process: the first order occurs when participants describe their lives to the researcher. The second order is the researcher's interpretation of those descriptions, and the third order involves condensing and interpreting meanings.

Whilst this "third order" approach allows for the participants' voices to be heard, I wished to create a more multi-vocal text (Pillow, 2003) in this project, encompassing my participants' voices, of course, but also the voices of others in the field, and my own reflexive voice. I therefore drew on Alvesson & Skoldberg's (2000) more intricate concept of "quadri-hermeneutics", in which data is generated and then analysed at four different levels of interpretation. I employed what Ricouer terms the "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Pellauer, 2007), in which no theme, be it *a priori* or indigenous, is taken at face value. Each level reflects on the data in more depth, and the writing itself becomes increasingly less objective and more reflexive at each pass. Practically, then, this meant I needed to (1) transcribe the raw data; (2) identify key themes therein (see 4.2 and 4.3); (3) interpret what was said; (4) consider how my participants' experiences chimed with established knowledge; then (5) also consider the whole process reflexively, recognising and making explicit my subjective allegiances and assumptions (see 1.7) which may have impinged on the interpretative procedure I followed. This reflexive commentary is crucial in any account of lived experience since, as Sim et al. (2012:59-61) put it:

> *"[R]esearchers' biases and expectations are inevitable parts of the data analysis process and undoubtedly affect the coding process and results. […] [B]ecause researchers cannot avoid having biases, and thus cannot be completely objective, dealing with these biases is a matter of knowing how to acknowledge and address their effects."*

Each level of interpretation can be viewed as independent and cohesive, and consequently there are a number of texts present in what follows. Alvesson & Skoldberg (op. cit.) suggest that these texts may be explored and written about concurrently, but taking a consecutive approach, with the deeper levels occurring later in the writing process, may be easier. This allows the data to "incubate" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003:281) in the researcher's mind, permitting insights to emerge later which did not appear at the time of the first or second pass over the data. In the accounts which follow, I have represented each of the texts differently in-text, in order to mark off different voices (Pillow, 2003), and to ensure that my voice did not detract from, or become merged with, that of the participants (Alvesson, 2002) [💬4.8]. The representation is on four level, *viz*.:

> [💬4.8] And, of course, vice versa. The bulk of the critical interpretation in this section occurred in the later stages of drawing up this account, when I had had the opportunity to reflect on the significance of what the participants had shared with me.

Level 1: Interaction with empirical material

This text emerges from the accounts provided by participants during interviews, and characterises their own perspectives on their lifeworlds. In the accounts which follow, these are the italicised and indented verbatim quotations [💬4.9]. These extracts are cross-referenced to the participant, the interview number and the lines in the transcript, as follows: "Daisy, 1:81-87" means that the extract came from lines 81-87 in Daisy's first interview.

> [💬4.9] There are conflicting positions on how much of a discussion section should comprise verbatim extracts from the spoken data: quantitative social research tends to make more of the statistical frequency of themes and includes only brief illustrative examples. More constructivist paradigms, however, focus more on "individual participants perspectives within […] the emergent theoretical model" (Williams & Morrow, 2009:579), and since my own project is concerned with experiences and lifeworlds, I have followed the latter course. There are therefore some extracts in 4.4 and 4.5 which may seem lengthy, but which are, I argue, crucial in allowing the voices of my participants to shine through: they are a conduit for understanding.

Level 2: Interpretation

This text connects the participants' experiences to established knowledge in the field, by considering and commenting on how what participants said converges with (and diverges from) what others have found. This level of interpretation allowed me to reformulate current theorising about the field. This text is written in "normal" text, and is entwined with the Level 3 text [🗨4.10], since these two levels of interpretation bleed into and inform each other.

> [🗨4.10] Initially I attempted to separate this text from Level 3 text, by presenting each text in different colours. However, I found that in practice this forced an unnatural partition into the discussion so elected to interweave these texts together. This was a good example, I feel, of taking a methodological suggestion and adapting it so it worked for my project.

Level 3: Critical interpretation

This text views the data through my twin lenses of neo-Marxism and critical pedagogy in order to comment on issues of ideology, power, and social reproduction which emerged in the data.

Level 4: Reflections on the process of producing the text and being "researcherful"

This text deliberates on my own subjectivities in relation to the other texts. This is where I engage in "explicit self-aware meta-analysis" (Finlay, 2002:209), and this meta-analysis appears in the Personal Critical Commentary text boxes in blue.

4.3.3 Offering responses to my research questions

4.4 and 4.5 are the crux of this enquiry. They chronicle what my participants told me, and thus encapsulate their experience of being a Chinese post-graduate student in the UK. Drawing up the structures of experience (see Figures 15 and 16) of my participants allowed me to offer the responses to my research questions which follow.

In 3.4, I argued that my first research question ("How do Chinese post-graduate students describe their academic and social acculturation in higher education in the UK?") has a research-driven goal, in that it explores my participants understanding of their academic and social acculturation: this is responded to in 4.4 Question 2 ("What do Chinese post-

graduate students perceive to be the factors which confound and facilitate their academic and social acculturation to higher education in the UK?") has a theory-driven goal, which is more explanatory – and thus more practical – in scope, and the six confounding and three facilitating factors are presented in 4.5.

I now lay out those constructions, and confounding and facilitating factors, commenting on each at the four levels of interpretation which were spelled out above.

4.4 Responding to the question, "How do Chinese post-graduate students describe their academic and social acculturation in higher education in the UK?"

Acculturating to life at university is a demanding undertaking for all (Quinn et al., 2009), and for international students, those demands are compounded. The following four sections construct and discuss how my 12 participants described their academic and social acculturation in higher education in the UK.

4.4.1 It involves establishing purposeful relationships with tutors

The interviews revealed that a pivotal aspect of the participants' lifeworlds was establishing purposeful relationships with tutors. The impact which tutors had on their experience of being a sojourner in the UK cannot be underestimated. Nine of the 12 participants mentioned [🗨4.11] how meaningful interpersonal relationships helped them to make sense of their new settings. This happened in four main ways.

> [🗨4.11] In 4.3.1, I chronicled the process I followed in identifying common and notable themes, and how relying solely on high-frequency themes might provide a skewed interpretation of the lives of these participants. By giving a number here (and later), I indicate the prevalence of this theme in the interviews, rather than provide a quantitative validation for its inclusion.

Firstly, students reported feeling valued and acknowledged when they were listened (and responded) to in a positive manner, which helped them come to terms with the requirements – and challenges – of their programmes. For example, Huiling had a tutor who said to her, "'*I know that English is not your first language and you just need to say what you want to say in your words'*", which she found *"really amazing"* (Huiling, 1:41-43). Similarly, Daisy's supervisor was *"inspiring"* her by being reassuring about her ability to engage with complex academic texts (Daisy, 1:86); Jenny talked about how her supervisor had helped her *"fill in*

the gaps" in her criticality (Jenny, 1:102); and Shaun talked about how getting positive feedback by his tutor had *"definitely"* been a powerful step in increasing his own sense of value and worth (Shaun, 3:39-45). Yvonne was particularly insightful in this respect, and talked about how having tutors who were encouraging had instilled a sense of personal agency in her:

> *International students […] need encouragement and someone to say positive things to them; it's really important, from my own experience. When I get encouragement from foreign teachers, that means a lot to me […] Actually, recently, I got my feedback of my essay of last term. The teacher says encouragement to me, [which] inspires me to study more, I even want to study a PhD degree now. So, I think, encouragement means a lot* (Yvonne, 1:206-213)

This kind of institutional validation has been shown to be crucial not only in engendering a positive attitude towards sojourning in the UK but also in facilitating socio-cultural and academic acculturation. This is because students who have purposeful relationships with tutors are much more likely to integrate socially and develop academically more effectively than those who do not (Rienties et al., 2011). Rather than simply transmitting knowledge, therefore, effective tutors create frameworks which students can use to develop their own thinking and understanding (Heng, 2018).

It was also evident that the participants could differentiate between tutors who were able to establish purposeful relationships and those who did so less successfully. For example, Yu-Min had worked with two supervisors, and noticed that the more effective tutor was the one who was able to show her how to do things better, not simply tell her what she had done poorly:

I think [one of my supervisors] wasn't really aware that […] in China, we do not really focus on criticality or critical thinking when we're writing an essay and we do not have such training at undergrad. So I kind of struggled in his supervision because I couldn't really get his point, and those supervisions didn't work out very well. [My new supervisor] provides me support, like I am learning to swim [🗨4.12]. He tells me how to breathe. He gives very detailed instructions, like I need to put my head up and hold my breath when I'm in the water and

> [🗨4.12] In 3.7.2, I rationalised my decision not to focus on metaphor use, as this was not a significant feature of the interviews. Yu-min's use of the metaphor of swimming was one of the few instances in which metaphor was used by a participant.

breathe out when I'm not in the water. And sometimes he even gives me a clear demonstration on how to breathe. However, the previous supervisor, his support is more like: okay, you need to learn to breathe when you swim. But there's much less detailed instructions or demonstrations. […] The comments were more general. Like, "You must improve your critical thinking". But it was never made clear and I was like "How?" (Yu-Min, 1:137-159)

The fact that such encouragement and guidance has a powerful effect is important. This is, of course, true for all students – but not all students are conceptualised in the way that Chinese post-graduate students are. Positive validation characteristically leads to an increased sense of self-efficacy (Killick, 2015), since an individual's confidence in their ability to carry out a new action successfully is increased when an equivalent past action was effective. There is therefore a case for making tutors and supervisors aware of the power and motivation for students that is brought about by valuing and acknowledging them. This seems to be particularly true in seminar discussions (see 5.3), which are commonly troublesome for Chinese students (e.g. Yu & Wright, 2017) because they are believed to adopt passive roles in class, or are less willing to participate in seminar discussions than other students (see 2.5.1), and so it is unsurprising that this emerged as a particularly challenging and troubling aspect of these students' academic experience. Half of the participants reported anxiety, and even fear, about the expectation to contribute in seminars: Huiling said, *"I didn't know what to say and that made me a bit crazy"* (Huiling, 1:32). However, these feelings were lessened if they were positively responded to by tutors, and as a result, they felt empowered to participate more.

Positive feedback typically came from tutors, but it also came from fellow students. To exemplify, Sheena reported how encouragement in the form of a supportive smile from a classmate had increased her own confidence and desire to *"speak more next time"* (Sheena, 2:138). It would appear that this empowerment had been helpful in relocating the participants away from merely being subjects to becoming individuals who were able to make more sense of their own individual lifeworlds [💬⁴·¹³].

> [💬⁴·¹³] This kind of individuality and subjectivity reflects the postmodern perspective I explored in 2.7.

Secondly, as well as encouragement in formal learning situations, the pastoral element of tutor-student relationships was also important for these participants. They reported that their most positive relationships with tutors were those which were predicated on affective and very human interaction. The roles of a Chinese teacher are said to often include that of parent, bringing *ren* (warm-heartedness and understanding) to their relationships with students (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998): Boshier (2017) found that Chinese students described their ideal tutor as: "kind", "warm-hearted", "humorous", "knowledgeable", "friendly" and "patient", echoing Wright's (2015) description of "friendliness", "patience" and "positivity". Chinese students may therefore expect their tutor to be an academic father/mother (Higher Education Academy, 2014), and these interviews indicated that this did occur in the relationships that some of the participants had with some of their tutors. Jenny, for example, said that "*you should have respect for [a teacher] for life, as if he's your father*" (Jenny, 1:63-64). Sophie also painted a picture of a caring and compassionate supervisor who seemed to take on a parental role for her:

> *[My supervisor] is super cool and super nice. He's a really laid-back personality, like in a grandma way [laughs] because whatever I suggest or propose, even my most naïve or childish idea, he would listen and is very patient […] and he's always encouraging. He talks like a human being.* (Sophie, 1:106-109)

It would seem, then, that Chinese students value the "affective tone" (Wright, 2015:219) of their relationship with their tutors, and that, for some, this is equally as important as their subject knowledge or teaching expertise.

However, a tension sometimes existed between what participants expected from their tutors and what tutors believed their roles to be. Heidi, for instance, knew that her tutors recognised that Chinese students were different from other students, and that they tend to be "*quite quiet and passive*" (Heidi, 1:320), but were not necessarily aware of why this might be the case [🗨4.14]. This is important, given the preconceptions which abound about Chinese students (see 2.5.1) and can lead to unspoken conflict when both parties are unclear about

[🗨4.14] This evident lack of awareness, and the damage it causes, is the reason why I militate for explicit consideration of the importance of recognising cultures of learning in the university classroom throughout this thesis.

what "typical" classroom behaviour is, ultimately raising questions about what "participation" actually means. This is taken by Western tutors to mean active vocal contributions, yet participation can take other forms: for Chinese students, not speaking does not mean inattention or lack of application, since attentive listening is also considered to be a form of participation (Straker, 2016). This creates a vicious circle: students are expected to be active oral participants, which makes them anxious, yet anxious students rarely volunteer to speak in class (Jackson & Chen, 2017).

A third issue raised by a number of participants was how to behave towards, and address, their tutors. The fact that tutor-student relationships are managed differently in other locations was clear to these participants, but, even with this awareness, caused anxiety. For example, Huiling reported how, in China, she felt should could not *"ask stupid questions to the teacher because it would leave a bad impression"* (Huiling, 2:167) and Heidi was concerned that her emails to her UK tutors sounded *"very rude"* (Heidi, 1:363). Shaun was even more concerned by his colleagues' habit of addressing tutors by their first name:

> *You treat people differently in China when you meet them. Lots of respect, with your teacher, your friends, your brothers, your sisters. When I'm in a lecture, I find colleagues just call out the name of the lecturer, for example, "Bill, hey Bill, I've got a question, I'm not convinced, you're not right!" but, I think "Oh my God! You should show some respect!", so I use Doctor, Professor.* (Shaun, 1:309-321)

Here, it seems that Huiling, Heidi and Shaun were experiencing different cultures of learning coming together in unanticipated ways. It is considered impolite by Chinese students to interrupt a tutor (Wu et al., 2015), and some even refer to their tutors as their "boss" (Yu & Wright, 2017), so using first names is inappropriate due to a more hierarchical system

(Jackson & Chen, 2017). This means they may struggle to adapt to the more collegial relationships which occur between students and staff in settings with reduced power distances between tutors and students such as the UK (de Vita & Case, 2003; Ramachandran, 2011), and which are particularly evident in tutors' relationships with post-graduate students.

Fourthly, it emerged that some tutors seemed to be unable or ill-equipped (or simply unwilling?) to support Chinese post-graduate students in ways which are suitable or culturally appropriate. Tina, for instance, had a conversation with her Personal Tutor regarding her concerns about her level of English. Since linguistic acculturation is a key aspect of the international student's sojourn (see 2.4.4), Tina's worries were well-founded. However, instead of referring Tina to the language support available in the institution, her tutor suggested that getting a boyfriend would help her improve her English proficiency, and whilst undoubtedly well-meaning, it would be difficult to conceive a tutor having this discussion with a home student:

> *My Personal Tutor gave me some advice, he told me he once studied abroad and he know a girl in that country, and his language in that country improved a lot because you have to talk to her every day, so I asked whether he suggests to me to date an English guy and he said, it's just a suggestion.* (Tina, 1:401-403)

Other tutors came across as unsympathetic to the challenges faced by the participants, and seemed unwilling to help them in this respect. Sheena recounted a tutor who had failed Asian students who had written an essay on a cultural aspect which was familiar to them but not to him (Sheena, 2:181-184), which echoes Wu et al.'s (ibid.) finding that tutors regularly question the ability of international students to meet coursework requirements much more than that of home students, and Jackson & Chen (2017) and Cheng et al. (2018), both of whom found that Chinese students felt they were treated differently by tutors because they were Chinese – even to the extent of ignoring their contributions. Some tutors have reported to feel they cannot offer meaningful support to Chinese students because of perceived insurmountable differences in cultural and educational expectations (O'Reilly et al., 2010), or because they believe Chinese students need more attention than others (McClure, 2007). In 2.5.1, I contended that there may be covert racialising discourses present in some university classrooms ("quiet Chinese students are quiet because they are Chinese; quiet British students are quiet because they are quiet"), and Tina and Sheena's experiences could be considered to

be manifestations of this: as Wu et al (2015:3) argue, "racism and stereotypes still exist for international students". This may lead international students to feel that tutors are unsupportive, or even unjust, and, because of this, they perform poorly, thereby creating a causal nexus of failure. This perceived lack of respect is a key cause for students' retreating into co-national silos (Ramachandran, 2011), so if tutors (and institutions, more widely) want international students to engage more in the classroom, these prejudices much be challenged, because, although incidences may be unwitting, they are as insidious as more explicit forms of discrimination.

To sum up, it would seem that the change in the makeup of the student body over recent years warrants a re-examination of the ways in which tutors and students view and shape their expectations about their relationships, and how their perception of what those relationships should be like is predicated on their cultures of learning. I consider this further in 5.3.

4.4.2 It involves feeling isolated, lonely and marginalised [💬4.15]

> [💬4.15] It was hard to listen to accounts of homesickness, loneliness, and depression in the participants' accounts. It has been tricky not to let these experiences lead me to rail at a system that allows this to happen. I tried, as Hedges (2010) advises, to make my emotions less of a limitation and more of a potential source of insight.

Isolation, loneliness and even marginalisation emerged as a significant and omnipresent feature of these participants' lives in the UK. This was a troubling finding, although not unexpected: Chinese students are often peripheral to life on campus (Cheng et al., 2018). Although more, and more frequent, contact between international students and home students would be welcomed (Wu & Hammond, 2011), especially since the more contact international students have with home students, the less likely they are to suffer from acculturative stress (O'Reilly et al., 2010), Chinese students have reported that home students sometimes act as if they "don't want to know at all" (Liu & Winder, 2014:56), are superficial (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006) or even "rude, strange and a bit arrogant" (Durkin, 2011:283). As a consequence, the participants felt like outsiders looking in on a world to which they did not fully belong. Sophie encapsulated what many of the participants felt when she said, candidly, "you can easily feel like a nobody" [💬4.16]. For these participants, feelings of isolation, loneliness and marginalisation were new and raw, given that they

> [💬4.16] Sophie's words were so powerful that I took them for the title of this thesis.

belonged to established social groups and communities in China. 50% of the participants

reported feeling lonely at some point in their sojourn, and four explicitly referred to having had depressive episodes (three of them requiring professional intervention) because they felt alone and unsupported (see 4.4.3). Some of Yvonne's friends suffered from such dreadful homesickness in the UK that they took every opportunity to return *"really quick"* to China (Yvonne, 1:228).

A significant contributory factor to these feelings was the lack of contact with other students, above all home students. Although all the participants had come to the UK expecting to make a host of UK and international friends, this was rarely the case: rather, they found students from the UK to be aloof, even unapproachable. Tina indicated how her relationships with home students were shallow and unfulfilling, because *"they may smile at you, but they do not want to be your friend. It's very hard to get close to them"* (Tina, 2:139-141), and Sophie concluded that such behaviour is part of a national psyche:

> *British people are not personally targeted to […] international students: they are not very easy to be friends with […] and I think you have to put extra effort in to make friends with British people.* (Sophie, 1:31-32)

The "universality hypothesis" (DiTommaso et al., 2005:57) posits that loneliness can occur in all contexts and settings. However, feelings of isolation, loneliness and marginalisation are more common among international sojourners (Ramachandran, 2011), and do not improve in the same way that other types of acculturation, such as linguistic acculturation, do (Lu, 2001, in Hunley, 2010). These feelings occur when the sojourner is removed from familiar and established support networks (see 4.5.7) and is not (yet) attuned to the local context (Hunley, 2010). That international students have few, if any, local friendships is not necessarily because they are a "poor people person" or "lacking sociability" – they are simply, as Hedges (2010) points out, in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Feelings of isolation, loneliness and marginalisation can be triggered by the way others interact with us (Berry, 1997), and Huiling had experience of the outcome of this: *"I think it's much easier for us to stay with Asian people, because […] European students are not willing to work with [us]"* (Huiling, 2: 119-121). Such attitudes can lead to unwitting and unwilled segregation if the marginalisation is "imposed" by members of the dominant culture, leading segregated individuals to form bonds with others who have similarly been alienated by

negative treatment or prejudice. This is not at all uncommon: Pandit (2007), for instance, recounts her own experience as an international student, in which she had no interaction with home students for the whole of her first year; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong (2006), in their study of Chinese students in a post-1992 institution in the UK, found that only 7% had UK friends; and Leask & Carroll (2011) found that some international students finish their course of study without making a single local friend. This is problematic, since friendships between home and international students has been shown to lead to much more successful acculturation than spending time only with co-nationals (Yan & Berliner, 2011).

One reason why some of these participants had not forged relationships with home students appears to be because doing so would have required them to adopt new and uncomfortable behaviours. Chief among these was the expectation to frequent pubs and bars in order to make and maintain friendships. This is where much student socialising takes place [🗩4.17], so individuals who do not feel comfortable in such places are immediately restricted in their options for forging new friendships (see 5.5). Huiling reported that her *"foreign friends are more likely to go to a bar"* whereas Chinese students preferred to go *"to the park, or go on a trip, or go for dinner"* (Huiling, 2: 134-135), and Poppy said she had *"never been to a bar or a pub here"* (Poppy, 1:152). Daisy recounted how going to the pub was *"embarrassing"* for her because she did not know how to behave (Daisy, 1:46), whilst Sophie found it to be an isolating experience: others were having fun, but she stood alone, clutching a glass:

> [🗩4.17] Note how many student activities involve a pub crawl.

> *[In China] we don't spend a long time talking to people at the pub. You know, holding a drink, standing there talking to people. I'm the only one standing there lonely. So I don't go to those kind of parties, you know the Bop, the College Bop.* (Sophie, 1:236-238)

When groups do not gel, it is typically the international students who are considered to be the cause, due to their "foreign studentness" (Killick, 2015:161). For example, Harrison & Peacock (2007:5) found that international students who were prepared to "come out and get drunk" were accepted by home students, whilst students who did not drink alcohol were viewed as awkward, and consequently excluded from their circles. However, these participants' revealed that, in fact, it is the behaviours of home students which limit

intercultural interaction. It may be that navigating the internationalised campus is more of a challenge to home students than international students – contrary to what we might imagine – since the latter are aware before they arrive that they will be outsiders in some respects, and can prime themselves psychologically and socio-culturally for what this might entail (Jones & Killick, 2007). Conversely, university may be the first prolonged exposure that some home students have to other people and cultures, and some may find this a threat to their identify and established world view. It could be that forging cross-cultural friendships is therefore more onerous for home students than international students because some are "unwilling to explore perspectives other than their own" (Bowl, 2001:157). In addition, home students may feel resentful towards international students as they perceive them to receive more attention and to access extra provision (Gabb, 2006). Finally, it may also be the case, as Leask & Carroll (2011) point out, that interacting with speakers whose first language is not English requires discourse management skills such as grading of language and checking understanding, which home students may not be able, or willing, to employ: cross-cultural working is "psychologically intense" (ibid., p648), and is therefore perhaps demanding for some home students (see 5.4). This is frustrating for international students, who feel that one purpose of their sojourn is to gain new cross-cultural experiences. It is also a wasted opportunity, since international students contribute to the development of home students' intercultural learning and "tolerance of diversity" (Jin & Cortazzi, 2017:246), and can, in this way, be a valuable resource. That said, a lack of contact with home students was seen by some participants to offer opportunities to broaden their understanding of, and friendships with, people from other parts of the globe. Yvonne, for example, had expected to make friends with students from the UK, but instead made friends from other locations. She said *"I don't feel disappointed because I also met many students from other countries; not just from China or Asian region. Yes, so I think, it's good for me"* (Yvonne, 2:49-50).

It seems, then, these participants' experiences bear out other studies which also found that international students appreciate the multi-cultural experience of university life, but tend not to integrate fully into the life of the institution (McClure, 2007; Gu, 2009; Gu et al., 2010). That a lack of meaningful relationships led these Chinese post-graduate students to feel isolated, lonely and marginalised is a cause for concern [🗨4.18], and whilst institutions have laudable policies in place

> [🗨4.18] So, although internationalisation claims to enhance the campus and the curriculum, it also leads to silos of home and international students. This speaks to my neo-Marxist critique of the neoliberalised tertiary sector.

promoting tolerance and diversity, it appears that these policies do not necessarily play out in practice.

4.4.3 It involves struggling with emotional wellbeing

Adjusting to a new lifeworld at university can be emotionally demanding for all students, both domestic and international. Because of the anxiety which stems from unfamiliar situations and new, unexpected experiences (Prieto-Welch, 2016), international students face challenges which are similar to those of home students. However, their challenges are compounded by obstacles such as unfamiliar food and living conditions (Jackson & Chen, 2017), learning styles, language and culture (Wu et al., 2015), as well as homesickness, and this sense of estrangement can result in acculturative stress (see 2.4.5), and, in extremes, to psychological illness (Gu, 2009), especially if an individual has low self-esteem and life satisfaction (Fwu et al., 2017). Up to one in every five international students may be in distress (Suh et al., 2017), although only 9% of those actually seek out support (Lu et al., 2014), and, in fact, a higher proportion (four out of 12) of my participants made explicit reference to distress [💬^4.19], so, although it was not a ubiquitous experience, there is a need to give this aspect of their lifeworlds consideration, since the four are probably indictive of a far-reaching problem.

[💬^4.19] One of the participants was happy for this to be mentioned but requested that she not be named or quoted.

Withdrawal into one's own personal space and avoiding others often takes place when students are struggling to acculturate and are worrying about their studies and their level of English proficiency (DiTommaso et al., 2005). Tina was blunt about how a depressive event led her to close herself off from the world:

> *Two weeks ago I feel very, very depressed with no reason, I just lost confidence and I can't do anything well and I just wanted to stay in my small room and watch the video TV series like Friends […] And I just don't want to talk to anybody, so that was a hard week I went through […] I just sleep for ten days.* (Tina, 2:30-34)

Tina had not been making the progress she had expected to make before she arrived in the UK (see 4.5.4), and this itself can be a cause of indifference, lethargy and distress (Fwu et al., op. cit.), which may account for why she was unable to motivate herself to do anything of

value. She was trapped: she was not making progress, so shut herself away, yet withdrawal from human contact had, in turn, led to fewer opportunities for developing her self-efficacy, which hampers the acquisition of language and knowledge (Jackson & Chen, 2017).

Sophie, too, had endured a period of distress and depression. In contrast with other accounts, in which Asian students are less likely than other students to recognise emotional distress – often preferring to use traditional Chinese medicine as a remedy (Han & Chen, 2015), Sophie had actually sought help. Since the more that international students have acculturated into the local setting, the more likely they are to view psychological support positively (Barry & Grilo, 2003; Clough et al., 2018), and since Sophie had adjusted to many aspects of life in the UK, she was able to acknowledge that she was suffering from depression and had looked for professional support:

> *You just want to lie in bed and do nothing. I tried to ignore it but there was a point last year when I was writing my MPhil thesis and I cried a lot and I really felt very depressed and I felt at one point that I needed to go and see a doctor.* (Sophie, 1:70-73)

Jenny, too, had suffered from anxiety and depression, and also felt that being in the UK had actually been an opportunity for her in this regard:

> *I think it's ok to be anxious here, you can go and get help, but in China we don't get that many resources or we do have resources but people feel that they shouldn't go and use them […] It's not normal for people to look for help from doctors and nurses. Going to the doctor means you are different from the norm.* (Jenny, 1:281-286)

Whilst the experiences of these participants should be seen against the wider backdrop of the wellbeing of all students, it is clear that some of these participants had encountered periods of significant distress. Importantly, they had not shared this distress with peers or tutors, so there is a need for institutions (see 5.5) to be aware of the frequency and severity of distress among this cohort, and be able to direct students to support networks if necessary.

4.4.4 It involves gaining new socio-cultural perspectives

Studying abroad does not simply result in new academic knowledge. Overseas sojourns confer new socio-cultural perspectives on participants, and the presence of international students on campus also opens up new vistas for domestic students (Wu et al., 2015). Unsurprisingly, then, gaining new socio-cultural perspectives emerged as a key aspect of the experience of three quarters of the participants. They recognised that being in the UK involved a different existence from their lives at home, and had come to recognise that part of this existence was the gaining of these new socio-cultural perspectives. They had arrived expecting to deepen their understanding of their subjects, and had, indeed, done so, but had also expanded their cross-cultural awareness. Yet even though they had developed new perspectives, they recognised that they were not fully acculturated into life in the UK.

4.4.2 reported that friendships with students of other nationalities were established less frequently than participants would have liked, but some inter-cultural contact did occur, and the socio-cultural diversity of the student body was appreciated by participants. Yvonne, for instance, was struck by the nationality mix on her programme, and this had raised her awareness of other people, places and cultures:

> *On the first day, the lecturer asked how many nationalities in the whole classroom, and [...] I found it very diverse. It includes almost every nationality. And that's really interesting because you can communicate with people from different backgrounds and we can recognise, you know, their culture. It is really different from my own culture, so that's a valuable experience for me. Not just Western culture or Asian culture, there are other minority cultures. That's really interesting.* (Yvonne, 1:42-45)

For a number of these participants, new socio-cultural perspectives had arisen from meeting people whose lifestyles diverged from what they had previously encountered, or perhaps differed from what may be considered "normal" or "acceptable" in their home setting. Interacting with BAME or LGBT students, or meeting people with different religious beliefs or attitudes to sex and drugs can challenge some students' "ontological security" (Brooks & Everett, 2008:335), but, for Sophie at least, meeting people whose lifestyles differed from hers had been an enlightening experience, and instilled in her a sense of tolerance and respect:

> *It makes me be more open minded. For example, here I know lots of homosexual people and learnt a lot about LGBT people and that people are very different and we need to respect that.* (Sophie, 1:288-289)

Huiling, too, mentioned how *"the gays and lesbians, they can hold hands, and they don't need to care that people will judge them"* (Huiling, 2:58), and so both participants seem to have been exposed to what Caruana and Ploner (2010:100, in Killick, 2015:127) term "culture below the waterline". This "hidden curriculum" (ibid.) is an arena in which international students encounter behaviours, opinions and norms which are not taught explicitly, as part of their programme's content, but which form a key aspect of their overseas experience (Cheng et al., 2018).

For some of the participants, gaining new socio-cultural perspectives was about engaging others with Chinese culture. Yvonne, for example, had joined a group called the Asian Research Group, an informal group set up by students as a forum for interrogating and celebrating the range of cultures represented in the department. For her, this was as opportunity to show Western students more about her culture:

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> *We had several events and although we are Asian group, we have members from other nationalities, for example, US or English students who are interested in Asian culture. So we can communicate, with our culture differences, which is really interesting. We exchange our opinions and we have appointments to [meet] together, it is really interesting to communicate different experiences.* (Yvonne, 1:59-63)

The wider literature shows that this type of "celebratory event" (Caruana and Ploner, 2010:100, in Killick, 2015:127) encourages and promotes new socio-cultural perspectives. They are often embraced and attended to in positive and meaningful ways, and typically serve to provide a locus for the informal curriculum, which, unlike the hidden curriculum mentioned above, forms part of the institution's provision but is not organised and delivered as part of the formal syllabus. This informal curriculum seems to have been more successful in informing Yvonne's cultural awareness than some aspects of the taught syllabus.

The fact that these international students have a presence on campus brings unexpected socio-cultural perspectives to others, because they can draw on their own experience to unmask hidden aspects of the world for others. Daisy, for example, was able to draw on her knowledge of being a learner of English to point out something in a text which to her was incongruous, but which her classmates had not considered:

> *We were looking at a book which is about a boy going to Japan and he meets a Japanese old man [who] was learning English and at the beginning he could just say one or two English words but at the end he could say sentences, very short sentences, but with grammatical errors, and I said, "As an English learner, it's strange, because his sentences are not grammatically correct but his word choice is very precise, but that's not realistic". And my classmate said "Well, I've never thought about that!" and I had that knowledge because I have been in that situation.* (Daisy, 1:245-249)

It appears, then, that internationalisation, for these participants, was not simply a case of "them" becoming like "us": new socio-cultural perspectives emerged for home students equally.

4.5 Responding to the question, "What do Chinese post-graduate students perceive to be the factors which confound and facilitate their academic and social acculturation to higher education in the UK?"

The participants revealed that there are a number of factors which made their experiences in the UK more troublesome, namely: adjusting to new cultures of learning, struggling with curricular content, worrying about proficiency in English, having unrealistic expectations, transitioning to post-graduate study, and encountering tension with students from Hong Kong and Taiwan. However, the interviews also uncovered aspects which made the participants' sojourns easier to manage. There were three significant themes: accessing support networks, taking a pre-sessional programme, and appreciating life in the UK. These six confounding and three mitigating factors are unpacked and discussed in the following sections.

4.5.1 A confounding factor is adjusting to new cultures of learning [🗨4.20]

The fact that these participants found it problematic to adjust to new cultures of learning was a fundamental finding of this enquiry. Every one of the participants commented that this aspect of their experience made studying in the UK challenging. This is an important finding because international students often disengage from their programmes when they feel that their prior understanding and experiences are disregarded in a new context (Cheng et al., 2018), and also because problems in adjusting to new academic practices have been identified as a potential trigger for distress in international students (Gu & Maley, 2008, Wu & Hammond, 2011).

> [🗨4.20] There is an irony in this section of which I am very mindful. I argue that the current situation is problematic and needs to be reconsidered – but paradoxically, if all my suggestions were to be implemented (indulge me…) then that would replace one top-down approach with another. I claimed, in 2.7, that this account embraces a post-modern interpretation of the participants' lifeworlds, which rejects grand, totalising narratives – but that what I say here risks replacing one universal truth with another truth of my own making.

Whilst the participants were clear that some procedures and practices (and some tutors) were more effective than others for them as international students, new approaches to teaching, learning and knowledge were often at odds with their previous experience. These can be divided into three areas: expectations, participation and assessment.

Firstly, some participants had no expectation that they would encounter different approaches to teaching, learning and knowledge in the UK, and this in itself was a significant contributor to the confounding nature of this factor. An example which many of the participants made reference to was seminars. With their focus on creating and critiquing knowledge, seminars are a hallmark of university teaching, especially on post-graduate programmes. The expectation in the UK is that participation in a debate contributes to learning: participation is therefore a "cultural act" (Murray & McConachy, 2018), and Chinese students who are less participative are commonly viewed to be deficient in some way. However, the reality is more nuanced. Many participants commented on how seminars had not formed part of their previous university learning experience. Tina, for example, explained how the practices and expectations of these kinds of discussions were new to her, and were difficult to adapt to. She found she was rarely able to clarify, or further her understanding of, the topics being deliberated, because the discussion moved at speed:

In China we don't have seminars, we just have a teacher who told the key points of the subject and sometimes they may review and keep talking about one specific important thing again and again, so you can get it even if you missed it in the first time, but now everything is too fast for me, because I don't think I got used to the study style yet. (Tina, 1:25-28)

Tina appears to lack the "academic cultural capital" (Caruana, 2014:3) which students draw on to help them make sense of their academic context. The lack of such capital was not ubiquitous among all the participants, however: a number of the participants could, and did, identify different approaches to teaching, learning and knowledge, and had worked out that what is considered good in China is not necessarily good in the UK. For instance, Heidi commented on how she had not previously needed to attend to criticality, as her former university learning experience was characterised by teachers telling her what she needed to know. However, she had identified that approaches on her Master's programme in the UK differed in this respect:

Because we, like all Chinese students, we're not really required to think critically […] Our experience of education is, teacher told you what is right and what is wrong. […] I think that professors here are more open to discuss problems rather than just "I told you it is" and I think they're even happy to be questioned. I think that's amazing. Back in China if you question, that would be like a burden or something, "Why don't you stop questioning me?" (Heidi, 1:226-227; 309-311)

Heidi had been able to adapt to new approaches to teaching, learning and knowledge, and was therefore one of the 91% of Chinese students who reported acquiring new ways of thinking in the UK (Gu & Maley, 2008) [💬4.21]. In a similar vein, Yvonne painted a powerful picture of how transitioning to post-graduate study in the UK had allowed her to feel part of a critical academic community, which she had not previously experienced:

> [💬4.21] In this study, 58% of students felt these were positive changes. It is perhaps more interesting to speculate on why 33% of the students felt that these were negative changes. It may well be the case that they did not disprove of these new approaches *per se*, but rather that they had a preference for other, more familiar approaches.

In China, most teachers like talking all the time, talking. There is no interruption [by] students. You find students are always quiet because that's a kind of habit and there

is no critical thinking and, I think, what I learned the most from here is critical
independent thinking; you can question everything you learn from the teacher or a
book. And actually, the teacher would encourage you to do that. But Chinese teachers
don't like challenge, actually. They don't like [it if] you write things on your exam
paper that contradict what they said. (Yvonne, 1:170-174)

Yvonne had evidently been inspired and enthused by this new opportunity to question and be sceptical. This confounds the stereotype that Chinese students struggle with participation [💬4.22], which is the second aspect of this confounding factor. It is important to bear in mind that Chinese students may be less frequent participants in group discussions not because they are unthinking, or uncritical, or unable, but because these may not have been a common feature of their earlier culture of learning. There is evidence that Chinese students are disinclined to ask questions in class because this may imply that the tutor was unclear, or had failed to prepare adequately for the class, since an effective tutor would have recognised the need for a particular slice of knowledge, so if something is not mentioned, it cannot be important and does not need to be asked about (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998; Zhou et al., 2011). There is also a risk that the teacher will be unable to provide an impromptu answer to the question, thereby compounding a possible loss of face. Chinese students may also be disinclined to ask questions publicly because they recognise that contact time is limited and that taking up time by asking questions might be seen to be taking teacher time away from other participants in the class (Jin & Cortazzi, 2017). The interviews revealed five reasons why these particular participants found it intimidating to take part in whole-class discussions, namely, fear, peer-pressure, quality of comments, paying lip-service to practices and constructive classroom procedures. Firstly, some participated less because they were fearful of sounding uninformed, or of making mistakes. Tina was worried that her contributions would be *"silly"* (Tina, 1:220) and Yvonne posited that Chinese students refrain from making contributions in public due to concerns that errors of language may lead to mockery:

> [💬4.22] As established through this thesis, this is a common conceptualisation, and the literature is replete with reports of tutors who feel frustrated by the reluctance of Chinese students to participate actively in discussions (see 2.5.1). However, such reports are typically top-down: tutors complain about the students, but the students' voices are rarely heard in this respect. These interviews were important in shining a light on this conceptualisation from the participants' perspectives, and in developing my emancipatory strand.

English may be a problem. [Chinese students] feel they will be laughed at or despised by others according to their accent or English problem or something. So they are reluctant to talk. (Yvonne, 2:49-50)

Both Tina and Yvonne appear to reflect the finding that students do not want to draw attention to themselves by speaking out in class in case their questions are judged to be simple or self-evident (Jackson & Chen, 2017).

Secondly, peer-pressure had led some of the participants to be as unobtrusive as possible in class. One [💬4.23] reported being challenged after class by a Chinese friend who disapproved of her speaking out

[💬4.23] The participant was happy for this incident to be included but wished to remain anonymous on this occasion.

during discussions because she felt this was sycophantic. Sophie, too, had not been directly censured by other Chinese students, but was aware of how she might appear in their eyes if she were to be seen to be too participative in class, as this would make her look ingratiating:

I think if there were no Chinese students around I'd be a more extrovert than when there is a Chinese student there because I don't want her to think that I am an apple polisher of the British! So I just keep quiet. (Sophie, 1:254-255)

Sophie's concerns chime with other research: Jin & Cortazzi (1998) and Gu & Maley (2008) found that Chinese students are reluctant to participate in class because they fear that they will be censured for showing off, or for being disrespectful; Durkin (2011) and Leask & Carroll (2011) found that criticism from co-nationals arises when students are felt to be adopting behaviours which are not typical of their culture of learning. This may be because standing out from the crowd is considered to be individualistic, which is "generally frowned upon by in the comparatively more collectivistic Chinese society" (Heng, 2018:26). Criticism from co-nationals can be particularly distressing since unfamiliar or unwanted behaviours is often expected from locals, but not from friendly faces from the same country (Fontaine, 1996).

Thirdly, several participants were keenly aware that the quantity of participation by students during a seminar does not always equate with the quality of the comments made. There was a feeling that some students ought to "think more and talk less" (Durkin, 2011:283): Xiuying

felt that *"all Asian people – Chinese people, Korean people, Japanese people – are quiet because Americans and British people are very active"* (Xiuying, 1:87-88). More participative students from Western contexts appear to know the "rules of the game", but Yvonne felt that knowledge of those rules did not necessarily equate with knowledge about the subject: louder students drowned out quieter students, who often had valid points to raise, yet the louder students' contributions added little of value to the debate beyond the personal or anecdotal:

> *I would say the students who dominate at a seminar are not the students who are more academic or more eager to study. They may just have an open mind and their English is fluent and they have more examples or thoughts about it and they will talk about it. But I find it is sometimes superficial because it cannot reach the point of the academic theory. They just talk about their experience and, Ooh, it's really funny" and everyone laughs at that. It's not very helpful.* (Yvonne, 1:153-156)

This sense of learning how to "play the game" was the fourth key aspect in adapting to new cultures of learning, and some participants made it clear that they felt they were learning how to conform to the expectations placed on them, rather than actually doing so for favourable personal, pedagogic or academic reasons. For example, Sheena was aware of the practices of UK higher education and was trying to adjust to them, even though she felt that she was only paying lip service to those practices. This had led to mixed results:

> *Sometimes when I talk I just think it's nonsense, it's meaningless but […] a tutor told us we just need to try to participate, try to talk about something, so I just followed that, just to talk about anything, [in order] to participate.* (Sheena, 1:52-53)

Paying lip service to the academy has been reported elsewhere (Gorard, 2007), so it may be that some students attend more to learning how to manage the system than to learning about their subject.

Fifthly, although some classes, such as seminars, can be troublesome, all participants talked about how certain classroom procedures made them feel more comfortable, which led, in turn, to more participation. For example, a physical division between students from different cultural backgrounds is frequent in the classroom, because students typically arrive and sit

with friends from similar locations. Not all lecturers attended to this, even though the participants agreed that they felt that the most successful classes were those where students were required to mix together and share experiences (see 5.3). Sheena had found that grouping students in such a way as to avoid nationality clusters was a particularly useful practice, as this allowed all students to engage, cognitively and affectively, with other cultures, particularly when non-Western examples and practices were explored:

> *If you are at a lecture and you're working in the seminar room, you will find [students] sit in different places. There's a line of Asian students and the European students just sit a bit up in front of you. I remember [name of lecturer], I really admire her because she noted this and she said, "I really want a different cultural background of students that can communicate with each other", so she deliberately mixed students and we communicated with each other, but I think most of the lecturers they think, "Oh, you just sit wherever you want."* (Sheena, 1:85-88)

The participants had found that including phases in classes in which all students were encouraged by the tutor to participate led to valuable diverse and multi-cultural encounters. These encounters provided students with the opportunity to draw on the cross-cultural experiences of others. In turn, this fosters transformative learning (Jones & Killick, 2007), which transcends academic content and allows participants to reframe their world view, and their own lifeworlds, in progressive and powerful ways. The interviews indicated that encouraging equitable participation through small-group discussions was beneficial in this respect, since it (1) allowed more taciturn, or shyer, students to speak; (2) permitted more students to speak; and (3) reduced the risk of more vocal students dominating. There was even a sense that students should be actively nominated to participate, as they may not get the chance to speak otherwise. Yvonne felt that nominating students to contribute might be awkward initially for quieter students, but that *"quiet students need such a push"* (Yvonne, 1:127) and that this often helped overcome initial fears relating to participation.

Assessment and grading was the third aspect relating to cultures of learning which the participants had found disconcerting. To exemplify: in the UK, a mark of 70% corresponds to an excellent piece of work, and marks in the 80-100% band are almost unheard of. For Yvonne, this was troublesome, as she believed that the marks in the 60-69% band she had received for assessed work indicated poor scholarship:

The academic requirements vary from countries; you know, we have a different assessment system in China but we have to learn to get used to new academic assessments here. That is really tough for some international students because, you know, UK colleges always give low grades, compared to other countries. So they may find it hard to accept their grades or they are worried. (Yvonne, 1:307-309)

The fact that something so central to the teaching and learning process as assessment and grading is problematic would suggest that there are more challenges hidden within the international student's experience than may be imagined.

4.5.2 A confounding factor is struggling with curricular content

An important finding in the interviews was that curricular content was equally as challenging for the participants as adapting to new cultures of learning. A number of the participants were vocal in their critique of the curriculum, which, they felt, focussed on Western, Euro-centric, Anglo-Saxon or even purely UK concepts and models at the expense of a wider-angled focus, and so it would appear that the internationalisation of the curriculum is lagging behind the internationalisation of the student body. Whilst institutions claim to be diverse and attend to cultural differences in their attempt to internationalise their campuses, less seems actually to have been done to internationalise the curriculum itself (Ryan, 2000:568, in de Vita & Case, 2003:389; Clegg et al., 2003). Many Asian students have limited experience of Western cultures and contexts (Zhou et al., 2011), and Western lecturers often lack meaningful knowledge of Asian examples (Murray & McConachy, 2018), so the examples and case studies which are drawn on in the classroom do not always fit with the profile of the students. Xiuying recognised this, having realised that there was a gulf between the knowledge that different parties bring to the classroom, arguing that "*we can't talk about British things and the teacher can't talk about Chinese things. We are separated*" (Xiuying, 1:91-92). Sometimes other contexts were given consideration – Huiling had a tutor who was *"willing to listen to ideas from other countries"* which gave her *"confidence to say things"* (Huiling, 1:36-39), but coverage was generally either superficial or unsuitable: Poppy, for example, attended a lecture which generated interest in the cultural policies of Asia, but which attempted to cover extensive regional policies in just one hour:

The students were really interested in Asian cultural policy, but it was just too short to cover anything about Asian policy, it needed to be longer – in just one lecture of one hour you can't cover all of the policies in Asia […] We had two slides for China and three slides for Japan and two slides for Korea and two slides for Singapore, so it's really short. (Poppy, 1:83-121)

What is striking is that is unlikely that a one-hour lecture would attempt to cover the vastly-different cultural polices of the UK, US, Germany and France in any meaningful way but it was considered possible to do so about Asia. This indicates that the curriculum does not fully reflect (or represent) the character of the cohort, leading to the "productive power" (Cheng et al., 2018:757) of the curriculum residing in the hands of tutors, which cannot easily be challenged. Internationalising the curriculum in a way that allows other voices to be heard would go some way towards mitigating the "white, western … ways of knowing" (Thomas, 2005:102) which have traditionally dominated university teaching, and would also be much more attuned to the expectations of the internationalised student body. Yvonne, for instance, recounted how her MA in Digital Culture and Society used examples which drew on Western perspectives. Given that the class was of mixed backgrounds and nationalities, she felt that other perspectives, and other voices, needed to be heard, and that she would find this a motivator to participate more in the class:

In the film industry, a blockbuster tells a story from a Western perspective […] but if there are some people from other background [in the class], they will propose different ideas, not only Western, but also Asian or other countries. Maybe they could propose a Chinese example or propose Japanese examples or something like that. [Those examples] feel really familiar and I'm willing to talk about it […] It will give me more thoughts to share with other students because maybe other students are not familiar with it. (Yvonne, 2:71-103)

One some occasions, some tutors had attempted to speak about, and to, non-European contexts, but this was often poorly managed. For example, Poppy's lecture on Asian cultural policies talked about China, but the information was so dated as to be incorrect:

The content in the slides […] it's about 5 or 10 years old, the cultural policy parts. It's not up-to-date, because China has developed so fast in terms of policy and society.

So before the lecture I found the most up-to-date news and policies on the internet and I sent them to the lecturer, but he didn't see my email. I think it's better if you want to talk about China that you have an updated picture. (Poppy, 1:123-127)

Bamford (2008) found that international students felt that tutors assumed too much local knowledge in their teaching, and therefore institutions may risk possible "counter-productive responses" (Killick, 2015:127) to the process of internationalisation if the curriculum does not reflect the composition of the class. Some participants had witnessed lecture content which was so wrong as to be offensive, and which led to precisely those counter-productive responses among the Chinese students:

Disappointingly, [lecturers] often see China as an outdated, feudalist, dark country. You know, one thing impressed me recently: in our Theory of Capital lecture, on the slides, the lecturer said, "Chinese people sell blood to buy houses". It's terrible! It was on his slides! All the Chinese people were silent because they were stunned and astonished by this. How could this happen? We said to the lecturer that this is not true in China, and the lecturer just said, "OK. I'll change it, but it's not such a big thing". (Xiuying, 1:94-96)

Nevertheless, some of these participants' tutors were reported to be aware of this, and bring in examples which speak to other contexts and settings. This can be empowering, as Heidi highlighted:

I'm studying Digital Assets, and you know, back in China we don't have access – generally we don't have access – to Facebook. So when the professors are making an example, they think about what the situation is in China and they allow us to explore more about this, back in China, even though they're not really know a lot about it, but they allow us, to, you know, study and do research based on what happens in China. (Heidi, 1:145-148)

Heidi's comment about the accessibility of Facebook highlights another important feature of the participants' lifeworlds in the UK. As mainland China restricts access to certain sources of knowledge, being in the UK had allowed some participants to challenge narratives about their own backgrounds and identities, leading in some cases to a sense of liberation. Daisy,

for example, reported that the information she found online was stimulating, as she could read about things which had previously been inaccessible:

> *In China I couldn't use Facebook and academically when I was looking for something I couldn't really get results in China, but here the whole world is open and I can access everything.* (Daisy, 1:259-260)

Gaining access to unrestricted news about the world has been found to be an important aspect of Chinese students' sojourns (McClure, 2007), because it leads them to respond more critically to what they see and hear (Heng, 2018). This point was reflected in the comments made by a number of participants. Shaun, for example, was excited by the fact that, in the UK, he was part of an international academic community, which encouraged him to position himself within debates on issues which he would not be able to access were he in China. For him, the availability of new and different political perspectives was especially stimulating:

> *We get different kinds of information from the student societies, the philosophical society, and we got different opinions from the Arabic religion and Buddhists and of course there are always seminars, informal seminars, with students talking about racism and politics and [...] you have the chance to say your opinion, and meanwhile you have access to what others think and say. [In China], if you are doing something aimed at the government, something related to the establishment, the system, or a particular issue like Taiwan or maybe Tibet [...] you get your opinion banned [...], it just disappears.* (Shaun, 3:125-141)

This is an important consideration given that teaching in some Chinese universities is commonly characterised by "slideshow snoozefests" (Boshier, 2017:214) in which tutors "just read out the slides" (Yu & Wright, 2017) and so students have little opportunity to challenge established thinking.

In summary, what emerges most from these participants' comments about adjusting to the curriculum is that changes need to be made so that the content reflects better the cohort. I return to this in Chapter 5.

4.5.3 A confounding factor is worrying about proficiency in English

2.4.4 indicated that linguistic proficiency is consistently held to be the most challenging aspect of an international student's acculturation (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Pilcher et al., 2011; Chien, 2015; Heng, 2018) and also their greatest concern (O'Reilly et al., 2010) affecting all aspects of teaching and learning (Sovic, 2008). As English-medium instruction is neither fully entrenched into the curriculum in China (Thorpe et al., 2017), albeit growing (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006), nor one in which students typically perform well (Wang et al., 2015), it was unsurprising that every one of these participants stated that this was one of their biggest challenges in the UK.

All the participants could converse with a high level of competence in English. However, they encountered struggles when they needed to match that linguistic competence to the cognitive challenges of their programmes. The contexts in which they had learnt English previously, and the kind of English they had learnt, had not equipped them sufficiently well for academic study in the UK. Tina, for instance, talked about her own painful experience in this respect, declaring that concerns about her English proficiency gave rise to anxiety and reticence, contributing significantly to the marginalisation she had sensed (see 4.4.2). She wanted to participate, yet found this difficult, not because she did not understand the topic, but because she could not express herself successfully:

> *For me firstly it's the language and secondly it's the content, so it's much harder for me to speak a word in class, and I always felt awkward because maybe the others can't understand me, and… yeah, I don't think they have the patience to listen to me. I don't have the words so I have to think for a moment, and I don't think they have the patience, so I sometimes just go in the corner.* (Tina, 2:129-135)

It is important to note that Tina, in common with many other international students, was by no means a non-participant in class, nor was she "actively resisting participation" (Leask & Carroll, 2011:649); rather, she was a "frustrated participant" (Bowl, 2001:152), who struggled to make her voice heard. Having to communicate in English appears to be so nerve-racking that some individuals elect not to interact rather than be embarrassed. This establishes a vicious circle: poor English leads to a lack of self-confidence in using English, which leads to fewer opportunities to interact with (and therefore learn from) other users of

English, resulting in poor English. Tina's words exemplify how, for many international university students, language ability is as much, if not more, of a challenge as subject knowledge.

However, it is important to recognise that linguistic ability is more than just speaking fluently and correctly, and the accuracy of a student's spoken English is not always representative of her/his overall language level. Since much of the contact between students, and between students and tutors, is in a classroom setting, where communication is predominantly oral, judgments about an individual's language proficiency may be oversimplified, because they are made solely on the quality of the speech. It may be the case, however, that students with weaker spoken English have stronger writing skills. This is particularly true for those students whose schooling in English focussed more on paper-based learning (reading, writing and grammar) than those whose prior experience of learning English prioritised oral communication. In addition, students may possess subject-specific lexis but weaker communicative competence (Ramachandran, 2011), which can lead to the impression that the student is not in control of the subject matter itself. Yvonne exemplified this, saying how she felt that students who struggled to make a point clearly faced difficulties in getting themselves noticed, since tutors and other students *"will ignore you because of your language"* (Yvonne, 2:188).

A number of the participants perceived a gap between the language ability of Chinese students and that of other students, and that this frequently led to a separation of the two groups. It was common to hear participants state that native speakers of English were good at what they did because they had more facility in English. A more nuanced form of this perception also emerged: a number of the participants conflated European students with native speakers, giving rise to a belief that all Chinese students have poor English and all other students have good English. Tina felt that the Chinese students simply looked on whilst conversations took place, unable to follow the gist of the interaction, even when their classmates purposely tried to engage them:

> *I have another class and I am with native speakers, and it's a disaster [laughs], because they keep talking and talking and making jokes, and when they turn to me and ask me my idea about things, I just can't speak, because I can't keep up with them and I don't have an idea about that, so it's hard.* (Tina, 2:147-150)

In being lost when jokes are made, Tina was typical of international sojourners who struggle to understand humour, which is notoriously awkward to follow in a second language, since context-based jokes typically rely on shared in-culture references or language play (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). The non-native speaker then risks faces exclusion – ironically, by light-hearted interactions which are intended to make people feel part of a group. In turn, this leads to shallow and superficial interactions, characterised by trivialities and description, rather than a more affective, or interactive, discourse. Some students even resort to pretending to understand (Terui, 2011, in Wu et al., 2015), perhaps in an attempt to avoid being excluded from social groups.

The perception that all non-Chinese students are experts was an interesting finding, and is typical of some Chinese students, who think that European students adapt better than they do to life in the UK (Liu & Winder, 2014). The way in which European students were equated with native speakers in the minds of many of the participants was striking, since many of the other international students (and home students, for that matter) likely face similar challenges to these participants. This binary division between "Chinese" and "non-Chinese" students may also have emerged because, as Spencer-Oatey & Xiong (2006) found, Chinese students tend not to differentiate between different nationalities – all are "foreigners". This led to some participants believing they were "playing catch up" with the other students in the class. Heidi, for example, spoke of the hours she put in at the library in an attempt to keep up with her colleagues, which was ultimately less successful than she had wished:

> *We've got a lot of readings, of course, but local students and the European students, they finish the readings quickly and effectively, efficiently, but I'm really suffering from it, I keep reading from day to night and I stay in the library until midnight, 1am, but I still can't finish it and I failed the formative essay, and I'm really frustrated and I'm like, "Why can't I finish this, I'm not a bad student?"* (Heidi, 1:381-383)

Such perceptions may unintentionally stem from the racialising discourses considered in 4.4.2: home students are good students because they are home students; Chinese students are poor students because they are Chinese, which plays into the disruptive and contentious conceptualisations of Chinese students which I explored in 2.5.1.

As well as being able to access and produce texts relating to their studies, international students also need to be able to operate in English outside the classroom. Nevertheless, it is often the case that the English they develop in the UK is primarily academic, as this is their primary context of language use, which is inappropriate in social or informal situations (Heng, 2018). These participants had found that it was not just in academic milieux that their language ability was insufficient for the task at hand: Sophie, for instance, achieved a mark of 8.0 in her IELTS exam, but found that, despite this excellent grade, her English was not good enough to allow her to operate in social settings. This she found to be dispiriting:

> *I took IELTS and I got 8, which I thought was a great score, but when I got here I realised that it just wasn't good at all. We have been learning English for, well, forever, we started learning English in primary school, but now I'm here and it's not functioning! It's not functioning at all. You know, I went to KFC and I said, "I want this and this and this" and they didn't understand and I just had to say, "I want number 2". It's sad.* (Sophie, 1:300-303)

Jenny, too, was a communicative and accurate speaker, but was also flummoxed by having to use English in new and unfamiliar contexts. Speaking in class was one thing, but attending to life outside the classroom, such as making phone calls to service providers, required a familiarity with contexts of language use that she did not have:

> *I worry more about my English in the supermarket or the restaurant because […] I don't have a clue about what is the proper way to speak or the way to say things, so that's when I get anxious about my own level of English. […] I don't worry when I'm in an academic setting because it's an academic setting, I've been in this setting for years, I'm confident. But if I'm out in social places, or I have to make a service call, I find that difficult.* (Jenny, 1:269-275)

Nevertheless, a number of the participants were aware that, although their language proficiency was not perfect, this was not a cause for undue concern. Or, put differently, they were aware that their level of English would never be that of a native speaker and had reconciled this. Whilst Heidi said that many of her Chinese colleagues were reluctant to speak English because *"they feel really embarrassed"* (Heidi, 1:351-353), she was comfortable with making language slips. Shaun, too, was pragmatic about his linguistic

development, recognising the fact that language proficiency is on a continuum and that it would always be possible for him to find fault with his English:

> *As a philosophy student, English is extremely important. It's all about writing. Being terse, precise. It's hard when you're doing it in Chinese so [doing it in] English is even harder. But I'm sure I'm doing better and better. [...] But you'll never find the point at which you get satisfied with your English. That's what learning is about, right? There's no endpoint, you can see always see a better point and then another better point. You can't find a final line, there is never an end point.* (Shaun, 2:166-176)

In summary, then, language proficiency emerged as a pervasive confounding factor in these participants' lifeworlds in the UK. It affected all aspects of their lives, both in the classroom and outside. Despite some of the participants being aware of the unlikelihood of speaking English with native-speaker fluency and control, their language ability was frequently on their minds. In 5.5, I return to the question of language and consider what tutors and institutions can do to mitigate this pervasive challenge.

4.5.4 A confounding factor is having unrealistic expectations

Many international students embark upon their overseas study with expectations which are often unrealistic (Leask & Carroll, 2011; Sawir, 2013). Students planning to study in the UK often have a rosy view of their destination before they arrive, but this is not borne out in reality: to exemplify, Jackson & Chen (2017) found that, prior to departure, only 38% of Chinese students anticipated that taking part in discussions would be a challenge, but this this number rose to 64% when asked in retrospect what had been their greatest challenge. Unrealistic expectations are problematic because, when unmet, they can lead to acculturative stress and even distress (Clough et al., 2018). Furthermore, students with higher pre-arrival expectations are more likely to suffer from acculturative stress than those with lower expectations, since higher expectations are rarely fully met (Yan & Berliner, 2011), whilst students who have more realistic perceptions of the nature and practices of the destination culture are less likely to struggle (Sovic, 2008).

Liu & Winder (2014) identified three aspects of international students' sojourn which lead to unfulfilled expectations: meeting locals (see 4.4.2), improving language ability (see 4.5.3), and having educational needs met – and, for example, 4.5.1 showed how some classroom procedures and practices, particularly seminars [🗨4.24], are frequently troublesome for international students. One of the reasons for this may be that the students are not aware, before they arrive, of what they involve. Shaun talked about how he had not anticipated that seminar participation would be so problematic:

[🗨4.24] One aspect of this account which I found troublesome was untangling themes when a participant's experience touched on more than one theme. I elected, eventually, to ensure that comments which I considered significant (see 4.2.3 and 4.3.1) appeared in the section to which it spoke most loudly. So, for instance, Shaun's comment here could well have been included earlier, but I felt it shone more light on this themes, and so it appears here, rather than in 4.5.1.

One thing I didn't expect was that… I didn't know… I can't imagine that the seminar was so hard for me to follow. At first I thought it wouldn't be that hard, but actually you know, the listening part is hard. (Shaun, 1:171-178)

The interviews revealed that these participants also had misconceptions (or, for some, even no conceptions) about how their lifeworlds might be different in the UK compared to China, and how this might give rise to challenges. A number felt that they were destined to have an illustrious academic career in the UK. Tina, for instance, had expected to be successful in her studies but had not improved to the extent she had imagined, and her dreams of getting a distinction had been dashed. This had left her *"disappointed"* and she felt she should have come the UK with *"lower expectations"* (Tina, 2:115-122), because working hard but failing to achieve a desired outcome can lead Chinese students to feel unfulfilled and dejected (Fwu et al., 2017) – initially, they feel bad because they have made an effort but have not had the success which hard work is held to bring – which may do some way to account for the distress Tina had suffered in the UK (see 4.4.3).

Liu & Winder (2014:44) found that international students are often surprised when the UK does not conform to "preconceived ideals of a British society consisting of Dickens and Austen characters". Both Huiling and Sophie had pre-arrival images of the UK and of the type of people they expected to meet here. For Huiling, this consisted of *"British gentleman, and the people are very gentle and they love art"* (Huiling, 2:42-43) whilst Sophie's

perceptions had been informed by the stereotypical ways in which the UK is portrayed in films and TV series. Of course, the reality for both Huiling and Sophie was different: when she arrived in the UK, Sophie was not struck by the ways in which the people she met here are different from people in China, but rather by the ways in which they are similar:

> *I had this really positive stereotype! Like everyone is a gentleman like Downton Abbey and everyone dresses really nicely and they have a long black umbrella and they speak with a really posh accent like "Mr Parker parked his car in the car park" or "Would you like a cup of tea?" We just think that everything is better in the UK much better than China! But when I went to [the UK] I thought things like, "Oh, look, they also run across the road when the light is red." I realise that actually people are much more similar than I thought.* (Sophie, 1:182-187)

This interesting observation seemed to have been a salient moment in her experience, since it shifted her intercultural awareness and, more broadly, her world view.

Since realistic expectations of what is likely to occur in the country of destination enhance successful acculturation (Ward, 1996), the participants' experience in this respect should be attended to before students arrive in the UK. Institutions could do more to orientate international students more to life in the UK, both academically and socially, before they arrive, and I return to this from a practical perspective in 5.5.

4.5.5 A confounding factor is transitioning to post-graduate study

Post-graduate students face challenges which their undergraduate counterparts do not, and these challenges are often overlooked (see 2.6). Since full-time Master's programmes in the UK last only one year, and typically less, if contact time is calculated (Bamber, 2014, in Cheng et al., 2018), some of the participants admitted that they felt it was not worth investing fully in the life of the institution, or adjusting to new practices and ways of thinking, given the psychological, social and educational adjustment this would entail for only a short period of time. Heidi, for instance, talked about how the relatively short length of her programme impinged on the depth and quality of acculturation that she felt was achievable in the time available:

You can't change a pattern that's been there for ten years or more. You can't change everything in a month or a year, it's difficult. I think you can make some progress but not change really dramatically. (Heidi, 1:322-329)

In saying this, Heidi reflects the experience of other international post-graduate students who also maintain a distance between their home behaviours, beliefs, values and actions and those of the host culture. For example, Durkin (2011) found that Chinese students rejected approaches to some of the new ways of teaching and learning which they encountered in the UK, preferring to preserve their existing ways of doing things. For students who do achieve a level of academic acculturation, the transition may only be temporary: Gu et al. (2010) found that students reported having one set of values in the UK, but quickly reverted to previously-held values on returning home. Like Heidi, Daisy made reference to this, saying "*Just one year isn't enough and most people are going home […] so you don't have enough time*" (Daisy, 1:271-272). She pointed out how students are aware that they will be returning to China at the end of their programmes, and that making far-reaching changes to their approaches to teaching, learning and knowledge does not seem worthwhile. This may be one of the reasons why much research (e.g. Rienties et al., 2011; Wu & Hammond, 2011) has found that international students seek out social and academic support from co-nationals (see 4.4.2), since other co-nationals are aware that theirs are only temporary sojourns, unlike home students.

Coupled with an awareness of the provisional nature of their sojourns in the UK was an understanding on the part of the participants of the role which relevant prior work experience plays in Master's level study [💬4.25]. A number of the participants had returned to study after having worked for a number of years, and viewed their post-graduate study (and the

> [💬4.25] This was an unexpected finding, and one which I went back to the literature to read about in more depth as part of the iterative and recursive reading and writing process I clarified in 2.2 and 3.13.

resultant qualification) as a stage in their career development. For a number of the participants, though, this meant that their Master's programme was in a subject which differed from that which they studied at undergraduate level. A change of field between undergraduate and post-graduate study often raises significant problems for students because, whilst they may have practical experience of their new subject area, their theoretical and conceptual knowledge in relation to the new field is often lacking (O'Donnell et al., 2009; Rienties et al., 2011). Sheena, for instance, had found that moving from a BA in General

Communications to an MA in Digital Culture and Society had been problematic for her because the approach to scholarship in her new field did not align with that of her first degree. This had led to misunderstandings about the nature of knowledge and truth in her new field, and, consequently, tutors' expectations, and, in her words, it took *"a long time to get used to"* (Sheena, 1:21). Poppy, similarly, felt like she was a *"new-born baby"* (Poppy, 1:36) because, although she had worked for seven years, her experience was not related to her MA in Arts Administration.

The fact that many students change disciplines between their first and second degrees, and that this transition is troublesome for many post-graduate students, raises questions for academic departments. Pauline and Jayne, in the vignette in 1.4, as well as the discussion about the challenges which post-graduate student face (see 2.6), indicate that post-graduates are perceived as experts, particularly amongst tutors. As a consequence, there is often little explicit orientation into the practices of the discipline for new students, meaning they have to work ontological and epistemological stances out for themselves, because tutors do not recognise that their students are struggling with new orientations to the world which may jar with their previous understanding. It seems that when moving from a first to a second degree, "transformations [occur] despite the pedagogical support" (Tobbell et al., 2010:276), not because of it.

Those participants who progressed directly from a first degree to a Master's without gaining any intercalated work experience also found the requirements of their programmes challenging, albeit for other reasons. They reported that colleagues with work experience were able to draw on their practical knowledge, achieved an understanding of the nature of the field and talked more confidently [🗨4.26], possibly because they could apply theory to the real world. Since many post-graduate programmes have been found to draw heavily on prior work experience in the field (Zhou et al.,

> [🗨4.26] This may be one of the reasons why some students are quieter than others in class: they have less experience, not less ability. It would be useful for all who work with diverse cohorts to be wary of simple, reductive explanations for classroom behaviours.

2011), students who do not have this experience may be compromised in their ability to follow lectures and participate critically in seminar discussions. Shaun, for example, took his first degree in Philosophy in China and came to the UK to take up a place on a Master's immediately after. His challenges were not so much about grappling with concepts and substantive knowledge, because he had an excellent familiarity with the subject, but rather

about becoming proficient in the specific and specialised skills needed to be able to tackle his Master's programme successfully. It could be said that Shaun had been challenged more by the process of being a post-graduate than the product (O'Donnell et al., 2009). One of these processes is developing autonomy, because post-graduate study is less about being told the answers, and more about exploring debates and critiquing established knowledge. For students who are not aware of this, this can be overwhelming, as Shaun indicated:

> *The most different part is that you have to do nearly most of the work, the research, on your own [...] At the beginning, you would be stuck in a really awkward position. You have to learn how to how to develop the way of thinking from the very bottom to the very top.* (Shaun, 2:119-125)

Shaun was in the process of revising his view of what is means to know something. For him, this involved noticing, and implementing, new orientations to knowledge and perhaps establishing a more evaluative outlook than he was accustomed to. Durkin (2011) argues that one of the roles of higher education is to challenge and weigh evidence up carefully, and taking a sceptical approach to truth. However, this is not a universal, and there are settings in which group harmony is a more valued outcome than debate (Heng, 2018). It may be the case that those who voice a concern that Chinese students cannot think critically are in fact observing differences in approaches to knowledge. Jenny was articulate in this respect, revealing how her undergraduate degree involved conserving knowledge, whereas her Master's degree required her to be more independent and critical, thereby creating knowledge:

> *I was taught a lot of stuff as an undergrad, and [...] I would read textbooks and they told me things like, scientists or scholars have found things out, for example, men are like this, women are like that, or English has this feature and Chinese has that feature, and I thought it was just established fact, and I never knew that, actually, as a postgrad you ask questions, you learn what people already know about that and you try to find a way to answer your own question. That was a new experience for me.* (Jenny, 1:175-179)

Heidi, Sheena, Shaun and Jenny's experiences reveal that they had undergone a period of transition from undergraduate to post-graduate study. This transition had made them

vulnerable (both academically and emotionally) and, so such students may become "peripheral participants" (Tobbell et al., 2010:266) in the classroom until they work out what is required of them by their subjects, tutors and institutions. It seems, then, that institutions need to be better attuned to the challenges this transition brings, and may need to offer more, or better, or different, support to students than that which has been offered to date. I return to what shape this support could take in 5.3 – 5.5.

4.5.6 A confounding factor is encountering tension with students from Hong Kong and Taiwan [🗨️4.27]

[🗨️4.27] This theme emerged later in the project. It was not widespread, but significant enough to warrant inclusion. This was an example of not simply relying on frequency alone when selecting themes.

It might be surmised that, despite the size of the Chinese population and its vast range of ethnic groups (whose relationships can be acrimonious), differences between individuals are set aside in the UK because adversity leads them to bond together (see 2.4.2). The *self + other model* (Bagnoli, 2007) is helpful in understanding this group formation, since individuals typically define their experiences in relation to others. Students from more collectivist and socio-centric societies may feel that Western relationships, predicated as they are on more individualistic lines (DiTommaso et al., 2005; Straker, 2016; Heng, 2018), do not provide the depth of support they need. However, the interviews revealed that this was not the case, and that, in fact, a significant amount of tension exists between students from mainland China and those from Hong Kong and Taiwan. In the case of Hong Kong, its culture is a hybrid of Chinese and British elements, and this is a key aspect which distinguishes it from mainland China, where Western influences are fewer (Yu & Zhang, 2016). The return to China in 1997 brought more mainland Chinese inhabitants to the territory, which has led to social conflict between the two. In Hong Kong, locals typically refer to the mainland as "China", which mainland citizens resent. As far as some of these participants were concerned, this was an issue: Xiuying was aware of this tension, saying *"People think that Taiwan is part of mainland China but […] Taiwan wants to be independent and China has never allowed this"* (Xiuying, 2:90-91;93). Conversely, Poppy, a mainland China citizen, was unable to understand why Hong Kong and Taiwanese students did not share her perspective on their respective nationalities:

> *I felt really shocked because the Hong Kong students – I can't say all of them, but the ones I met – they're trying to isolate themselves by saying they're not from China, and*

> *the Taiwanese students say, "We're not from China, we don't like China".* (Poppy, 1:106-107)

For some of the participants in this enquiry, the status of these communities had led to overt and often angry disagreement in class. Huiling, for example, reported that *"The people from Taiwan will not speak Chinese to students from China. They prefer to speak English"* (Huiling, 1:58-59). Sheena reported how a discussion on sovereignty had raised problems between students:

> *This is quite a sensitive topic for us, like, is Taiwan part of China or not? [...] I have lots of Taiwanese friends but we don't talk about it too much because it is so sensitive. [...] Because in China, I'm living on the mainland, so I don't have Taiwanese friends but here, the lecturers think that Taiwan is not part of China – but all the Chinese students think it is.* (Sheena, 2:71-78)

This had caused a number of emotional confrontations, which ought to be a concern for all those who deal with these students, as socio-cultural divergence within a multi-cultural educational setting can lead to a fragmentation of the student body (Cheng et al., 2018).

4.5.7 A facilitating factor is accessing support networks

The previous six sections highlighted some of the confounding factors which participants felt made their experience in the UK more tricky. However, a number of mitigating factors also emerged in the interviews, with three of the most salient discussed below.

All participants made reference to the support they received from family and friends, with the former being particularly critical in providing help, guidance and advice. This type of affective attention is important, since support from sympathetic family members has an influence on the motivation, and even the completion rates, of international students (Rienties et al., 2011). Whilst supportive relationships *in situ* from co-nationals also help to lessen the negative aspects of the sojourn (Ward, 1996; Jung et al., 2007) and lead to lower levels of loneliness, greater well-being and better adjustment to a new context (Raunic & Xenos, 2008; Sümer et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2012), such relationships are not established overnight and so

it was unsurprising that all participants talked at length about the contact they had with their families.

Contact with parents above all was common and frequent for all participants. There were four aspects to this contact. Firstly, many of the participants admitted that they did not always give their parents fully accurate or truthful accounts of their sojourns or how they were feeling, for fear worrying them. Jenny, for example, confessed that she only really told her parents about the positive aspects of her time in the UK, because even if she did need help, her parents would not be able to provide it to the level they would wish:

> *I generally talk to them about good things in life because I know that if I run into difficulties they won't be able to help me, either academically or financially. They would just worry about me, so I try to be really happy when I call them and when I video chat with them, because they can't do anything and I would just make them worry otherwise. [...] I mean I haven't even told them [my boyfriend and I] moved in together because it would make them outraged.* (Jenny, 1:231-233; 247-248)

This extract is striking because Jenny revealed she has not told her parents that she is now living with her boyfriend, as they would not approve. Although being a long way from family can be problematic when in need of support, and the loss of familiar support networks can result in anxiety and other emotional challenges (Prieto-Welch, 2016), it may also be the case that some individuals, like Jenny, find a personal liberty when they are away from the watchful gaze of their parents. However, Quinn et al. (2009) found that family members can often be unsympathetic when students are in need of emotional support, and this would seem to be the justification behind Jenny's decisions not to be open with her parents in this respect.

Secondly, many participants revealed a sense of guilt about leaving their parents. They were aware of how much their parents miss them, and that whilst they were having new and exciting experiences, their parents had to go about their daily lives without them. (The sense of loss that the participants' parents feel may have been exacerbated by the fact that many of these participants were an only child.) Tina revealed that this was true for her and her Chinese friends:

When I talk to my friends from China and I ask them, "What makes you feel the most sad?" it's our parents. Because we have friends and we have a new environment to get adjusted, so every day for us is new. And so I think it's a happy situation, but for our parents, they miss us, and they have to stay in the same place, and they don't have something new to attract their attentions, so they only thing they have is missing us. (Tina, 1:264-267)

In order to help alleviate this, participants maintained contact with their parents on a regular basis, via social media such as Facetime, Skype and WeChat. So, whilst the quantity of the contact between parents and children had been impacted, quality may have been less affected.

The "tangible losses" (Wang et al., 2012) which the participants felt in the absence of their "usual and known support systems" (Higher Education Academy, 2014) had led them to seek support from new people in the UK, which was a third aspect of the support they drew on. Belonging to a supportive community is an atavistic need (Schmitt et al., 2003), and these participants had replicated face-to-face support from friends and family "back home" by forging new friendships with other, typically Chinese, students. Tina, for example, said that her friendships with other Chinese students provided a forum for sharing tribulations and supporting each other, since all faced the same challenging process of acculturation:

My friends say everything will be fine, and just study and try your best, because they also study abroad, and they are also going through a difficult mood […] That's when I say "Me too!" [laughs]. Yeah, actually, I just mentioned that at lunch today to one of my friends and we shared our emotions and we had a conclusion, it's that every Chinese here has worries, so I'm not alone. It may be a problem but it's not as big as I thought it was. My friend, she totally understands this situation, because she also meets this problem. (Tina, 1:143-144; 191-193)

Forging friendships with people from the same country permits individuals to draw on shared knowledge, socialisation, schemata and experiences, in order to make sense of the new context (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Gu & Maley, 2008; Hunley, 2010; Zhou et al., 2011), and, as Tina exemplifies, being part of an extended support network can validate a sojourner's sense of self (Yeh & Inose, 2003:24). In addition, sharing problems creates a sense of greater control over the situation, in turn reducing anxiety and distress (Ye, 2006; Lu

et al., 2014). As Tina had admitted to suffering from poor mental wellbeing (see 4.4.3), her comments indicate that sharing her concerns with her Chinese friends had allowed her to unburden herself, and thereby possibly reduce some of the anxiety she was suffering from. Daisy, too, spoke of how the realisation that others faced the same challenges meant that her own fears and apprehensions were diminished:

> *It really helps me when I talk to someone from China because I think we have the same problems to talk in the class, or reading […] It's good to talk to them because of that. They're like, "Yes, I'm exactly the same" and that just reassures you.* (Daisy, 1:123-124; 131)

Given the sense of isolation, loneliness and marginalisation that these students had experienced (see 4.4.2), it would seem only natural for them to seek solace in familiarity. Saklofske et al. (2012) found that rejection, be it real or perceived, typically results in the creation of a group identity among minorities from the same background – even if the members of this out-group had not experienced rejection in their home countries, and even if they have little in common with co-members of the group apart from their shared experience. In this respect, Yvonne was clear that, even if the classroom is peopled with students from around the world, outside the classroom the students group themselves along co-national lines anyway:

> *The same nationality always clusters together and they talk about their countries and their own topics. Even though there are communications between [nationality] groups, that's superficial. We're just classmates. We won't hang out together.* (Yvonne, 1:68-70; 75)

This echoes Liu & Winder (2014:49), who found that "the idea of working together in a classroom was considered plausible, [although] the idea of social contact was not". Nationalities group together because members can draw on shared experiences, thereby making better sense of the new context (Gu & Maley, 2008), and also providing a safe haven from sensitive discussions and unfamiliar practices which students may find awkward or threatening. Whilst some tutors believe that co-national friendships should be discouraged, since this can, they feel, lead to students "living in China psychologically, socially and culturally" (Gu & Maley, 2008:233), Gu (2011) argues strongly that the beneficial elements

of co-national friendship groups far outweigh any drawbacks, and should therefore be encouraged, irrespective of what others may maintain, since any attempt to proscribe these groupings only adds to the students' anxieties.

Fourthly, although the participants drew heavily on the Chinese community of their institutions for support, this was not the only avenue of support they accessed, and some had established relationships with other international students. Contact between international students and other international students has been shown to be a common feature of the international sojourner's experience: after grouping with co-nationals, the second most frequent friendship group for international students is with other international students, irrespective of nationality, thus creating "international micro-cultures" (Fontaine, 1996:269) in the institution. Yu-Min had a close Chinese friend in the institution who she knew before coming to the UK, but had also forged supportive relationships with her Romanian and Irish flatmates, and with an American classmate:

> *For some emotional support, I sometimes speak to my Chinese friends, or I turn to my*
> *flatmates, two girls – one from Romania, one from Ireland – and I feel quite close to*
> *them for emotional support [and] I would talk to people in the class who I am close*
> *to, like there's an America girl.* (Yu-Min, 1:166-170)

To sum up, it seems that these participants fell in with other international students because they face common challenges, irrespective of their origins. This has important implications for practice, to which I return in 5.5.

4.5.8 A facilitating factor is taking a pre-sessional programme

Many international students take part in a pre-sessional programme prior to embarking on their programme of study. Pre-sessional programmes vary in length (typically between six weeks' and six months' duration) and successful completion serves as an entry requirement for students who are below the stipulated language level for their course upon application. Pre-sessional programmes focus students on areas such as academic language, literacy in reading, writing, listening and speaking, and also skills for successful independent study, as well as an orientation to student life. They are held to be beneficial because they (1) give international students a period to adjust to the socio-cultural profile of the destination

country; (2) allow them to become accustomed to daily life, such as travel, shopping and accommodation; (3) help them develop their language ability; and (4) familiarise them with the organisation and administration of the institution (Fox et al., 2013). These aspects of campus life can take time to develop, so students who have attended a pre-sessional programme have freed up time and space to focus on their studies when the academic year begins, whilst students who have not taken a pre-sessional need to attend, simultaneously, to both their studies and the campus skills listed above (Carroll & Appleton, 2007). Since many international students (including these participants) have unrealistic expectations about their studies in the UK (see 4.5.4), particularly if their undergraduate studies were in a different field (see 4.5.5), a pre-sessional programme can provide effective and targeted orientation to local practices.

For many of these participants, taking a pre-sessional had been useful in elucidating the administrative procedures and academic requirements of their institutions and fields. Huiling had found that her pre-sessional programme had made some of the unspoken conventions about writing in her discipline more explicit, so she felt she could now make her ideas *"very clear"* (Huiling, 2: 184). Correspondingly, Heidi talked about how her pre-sessional had given her a good sense of what she needed to do as a post-graduate student, and this allowed her to "hit the ground running". She recounted how a Chinese friend, studying at a different institution, had not taken a pre-sessional programme, and this had caused problems when her first assessment was due:

> *I was in the five-week pre-sessional about how write academically, and I think that's a skill you can't find out from someone's social media [laughs]. My friend, she was quite a good English user and speaker, but when she was writing her formative essay, she felt so depressed because she can't manage it right. She knew nothing about the style in Britain. Back in China it's really a totally different style for writing essays, and she's really frustrated [...] but [she didn't get] the pre-sessional skills so she's really... really not used to it.* (Heidi, 1:244-248)

Since institutions who integrate international students well, and who provide them with informative and timely pre-arrival information report lower levels of acculturative stress and disillusionment among their international students (O'Reilly et al., 2010; Wu & Hammond, 2011; Liu & Winder, 2014), there is an argument for providing international students with the

kind of information which is covered on a pre-sessional programme, even if they do not physically attend. I consider this more in 5.5.

4.5.9 A facilitating factor is appreciating life in the UK

The interviews indicated that a key motivator for these participants in electing to study in the UK was the opportunity to experience life in another country. All participants were clear that, although there were challenges in being in the UK, they appreciated many aspects of their lifeworlds here. To illustrate, Poppy said she chose to come the UK rather than the US *"because London is the heart of arts and culture in the world"* (Poppy, 1:14-15); Xiuying said how *"the cultural atmosphere here… really broadens my horizons"* (Xiuying, 1:110). Daisy was impressed by the opportunity she had in the UK to meet people from other locations, which she felt she would not have had in China:

> *The UK is a very multicultural country compared to China, so people are more understanding and people are accepting. I think that's another reason why I like to be in the UK, because you get to know people from all different places and people are very kind to people from other countries.* (Daisy, 1:198-200)

Yu-Min was equally enthusiastic about cultural opportunities on offer in the UK. Like Daisy, she was enjoying the multiculturalism of the UK, and was regularly accessing a range of public lectures and events that were on offer in her city. The fact that these events exposed her to new cultures and voices was of high importance to her:

> *I like the culture in the UK. And the history and arts and music and the literature. […] I try to go to as many events as I can afford here, for example, I went to a talk today. When I lived in Tianjin, one of the largest cities in China, I went to events every weekend, but I got a bit of bored of going to the theatre or concert after a while. It was very difficult for me to find Tango class or an African music concert. But in here, although there's dominant western culture, we still have many other choices, many other voices, different events with good availability and good quality.* (Yu-Min, 1:20-28; 41-43)

For Huiling, life in the UK meant the opportunity to experience cultures which she had not encountered previously, such as a trip to Brixton in which she found *"so much culture from different places"* (Huiling: 1:20-21) which was *"strange but exciting"* (Huiling, 2:17). These appreciative reports of life in the UK would seem to indicate that gaining a more in-depth knowledge of another culture is among the greatest factors which leads Chinese students to choose to study in the UK (Chien, 2015).

Some participants made cheerful comments about the weather, food and traffic in the UK, which are (stereo)typically viewed negatively. For them, these aspects were either inconsequential: Shaun said they were "*obviously not that important… I don't care about the food, I don't care about the traffic*" (Shaun, 2:72), and Yu-min reported that she did not *"really care about the weather and the food"* (Yu-min, 2:40), or even an enhancement to their lives: Daisy said *"I know it's quite ridiculous to say but the weather here is best"* (Daisy, 1:13). It is perhaps, therefore, important to remember that what we imagine is important in the lives of these sojourners may not reflect their own perceptions.

Some participants talked about how the reputation of their respective institutions was also a draw to the UK. Huiling reported how she felt that, in China, *"people value English education"* (Huiling, 2:13) and for both Yvonne and Shaun, the prestigious name of their UK institutions, and the fact that their programme ranked highly on league tables, was a significant draw to study in the UK, reflecting similar findings in the literature (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Chien, 2015). Shaun felt that his programme focussed on aspects of his field which he felt to be less developed in China:

> *The Department of Philosophy is really great! […] We check the ranking. In England the first two are Cambridge and Oxford, then after them comes along [this institution]. As you know I'm doing the programme in philosophy here which is not as well developed in China as here in the UK. Also there are fewer scholars who are engaging in such subjects for teaching or research. Basically, you can find more people and more resources [in the UK] – a lot more – compared with China.* (Shaun, 1:144-147; 2:48-50)

The fact that the choice of which institution to apply for was informed by league table positions for some of the participants was an interesting finding. Perhaps unbeknown to

students, the ranking of the institution has bearings beyond simply reputation: Rienties et al. (2011) found that the more highly ranked an institution is perceived to be, the less likely international students are to experience acculturative stress. Shaun had had a positive experience in the UK and was not one of the four participants who had experienced periods of distress during his sojourn, and this may have been linked to his decisions to select a high-ranking institution.

4.6 In summary

The participants in this study shone a spotlight on the lifeworlds of Chinese post-graduate students in UK higher education. For the most part, they were appreciative of, and were benefitting from, their experience, and were therefore following similar trajectories to most other international students (Prieto-Welch, 2016), although they were clear about the significant challenges that arose within their own subjective experiences. Whilst some aspects of their experiences did not marry up with their expectations, on balance, they were happy with their studies, and undergoing personally transformative experiences. Progress was being made and it was recognised that life as a Chinese post-graduate student in the UK can be good – very good, in fact. Perhaps, however, the biggest aspect of these participants' experience was the effect it had on their identities as both individuals and citizens. Sophie captured this deftly:

> *I found my identity as a Chinese person here. Because back in China I would say like "The government isn't not good, and they of these nasty things" and I was very cynical, but here I'm trying to be proud and more understanding of my family and of my country.* (Sophie, 1:209-211)

It was encouraging to hear that, on balance, these participants were having a generally positive experience in the UK. Yet it is important to bear in mind that their sojourns were neither fully enjoyable not fully satisfying, and there is therefore scope to make their stays more productive and agreeable. I return to this in Chapter 5.

4.7 Reflecting on the practicalities of qualitative interviewing

I entered the field intending to explore what it is like to be a Chinese post-graduate student in the UK. However, unexpectedly, I gained more than just theoretical knowledge. For example, I learnt a lot about the practicalities of interviewing. I came to realise that, as well as asking my participants to talk about their lifeworlds, it was crucial to ask for illustrative examples too, and often those examples were so revealing, and brought the participants' lives into such sharp focus, that they became the verbatim excerpts in the discussion above.

In addition, on reviewing the recordings made of the earlier interviews, I noticed that I repeatedly said, "That's interesting!" unnecessarily. I also asked a significant number of polar questions [🗨4.28] (see 3.9.2). Such questions, I noticed, did not lead to rich data, and so I moved, in later interviews, to ask more open questions.

> [🗨4.28] Ironically, my twenty five years' experience in adjusting my language to communicate effectively with speakers whose first language is not English was the root of this, on reflection. In order to communicate effectively, I usually avoid idiomatic language, work around complex grammatical structures and use intonation and speed of delivery in ways which are easy to follow yet still natural. One aspect of this is asking clear yes/no questions, which was actually more detrimental than helpful in these interviews.

I also learned not to feel that my research was an imposition on the participants. It seemed that some at least appreciated the time they had to talk about themselves, and a number of them appreciated the opportunity to talk in English at length, without feeling that their language ability was being judged. There was also a sense that they felt they would be helping other students who came after them. However, I also came to realise that interviewing participants whose first language is not English raises a number of questions for the qualitative researcher, and I consider this in more depth in 5.6.1.

4.8 Revisiting my commitment to trustworthiness

Rapley (2011) censures researchers who "tag" theoretical orientations in order to show off their knowledge, but who fail to clarify adequately why their framework is suitable in context. It was therefore crucial that this chapter presented an "easy-to-read map" (Silverman, 2015:110) of what I did and found out.

Since a "miracle" sometimes seems to occur between "the mass of data that must have been gathered, and the printed page" (Bathmaker, 2010, in Thomson & Walker, 2010:200), I have shown the **steps and methods I used to generate and analyse** the data, thus ensuring that common and notable themes were identified. This was facilitated by listening to recordings multiple times, to avoid falling into the trap of producing a "quick and dirty" (Smith et al., 2009:82) analysis, and by spiralling backwards to the literature when necessary. I was also prepared "to be unsurprised" but also prepared "to be surprised" by what emerged.

This chapter has a "**multiplicity of voices**" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000:290). It has contextualised the participants' perceptions of their lives in the UK within the wider substantive literatures. In doing so, I have shown the commonalties that exist within and across these students' experiences, and thus what the **essential features** of the lifeworlds of these Chinese post-graduate students in the UK are. I have used levels of phenomenological **interpretation**, which allowed me to strike a balance between **objectivity** (the verbatim excerpts) and **subjectivity** (my own interpretations and personal responses). This allowed me to move away from simply saying what "is" and towards considering what "is and may be" (Smith et al., 2009), and this move from description to evaluation of the phenomenon (Dowling, 2007) helped me pull together a more reflexive account (van Manen, 2001).

Chapter 5

Sharing and shaping: recommendations for practice and future research

5.1 Overview of this chapter and a rationale for the title

In 2.3.2, I problematised the process and outcomes of internationalisation policies, and in 4.4 and 4.5 I laid out what the effects of internationalisation were on my participants *in situ*. Accordingly, this chapter argues that it is not enough to increase the number of international students on campus and yet continue "as if nothing has changed" (Jackson & Chen, 2017:15). The structures of experience teased out in the previous chapter give rise to a number of pedagogical, curricular and institutional imperatives, and so, in this chapter, I challenge current approaches and practices in relation to Chinese post-graduate students, and make suggestions not only for those who interact with this cohort, but for the research directions in which this area could move in the near future [💬5.1]. Since social research which does not improve the world we live in is worthless (Moustakas, 1994; Gilgun, 2008), and given that this is a professional doctorate, I argue for the need to engage with an array of constituencies in order to raise awareness of the diverse approaches to teaching, learning and knowledge which manifest themselves in universities today (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; 2017).

> [💬5.1] I am acutely aware of the risk of being what Hedges (2010) refers to as a missionary researcher here – in other words, trying to make things right for others because I am from the "right" background. However, I hope that what follows is constructive, thus counteracting the "cultural pessimism" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000:147) which so often pervades socially critical writing.

Although generalisability is not possible from a small-scale project, applicability most certainly is (O'Leary, 2005), and the illustrative findings of this enquiry indicate that there is a need for a systematic and systemic re-shaping of the way that Chinese post-graduate students are conceptualised and responded to in the internationalised university. In fact, the suggestions which follow should serve to improve provision for the student body as a whole,

because "good practice for international students is clearly good practice for all" (Brown & Joughin, 2007:64).

5.2 Prioritising constituencies

Yemini (2014) found that the research on internationalisation to date has had an impact at three distinct levels: at a micro level of classroom practice; at a medio level, informing curricular and institutional choices; and thirdly at a macro level, where national policy is deliberated. This chapter has many messages of importance and consequence that I wish to communicate widely, but this requires a level of prioritisation. As much as I would like to make suggestions on all three levels, the limitations of a relatively short (!) thesis means I have prioritised three constituencies, addressing micro-level classroom practice (see 5.3), and medio-level curricular choices (see 5.4) and institutional procedures (see 5.5). As well as addressing these three constituencies, I also speak to researchers in similar settings (see 5.6), as my project also led me to problematise the challenges of interviewing participants whose first language is not English. I summarise the constituencies to whom this chapter speaks in Figure 17, below:
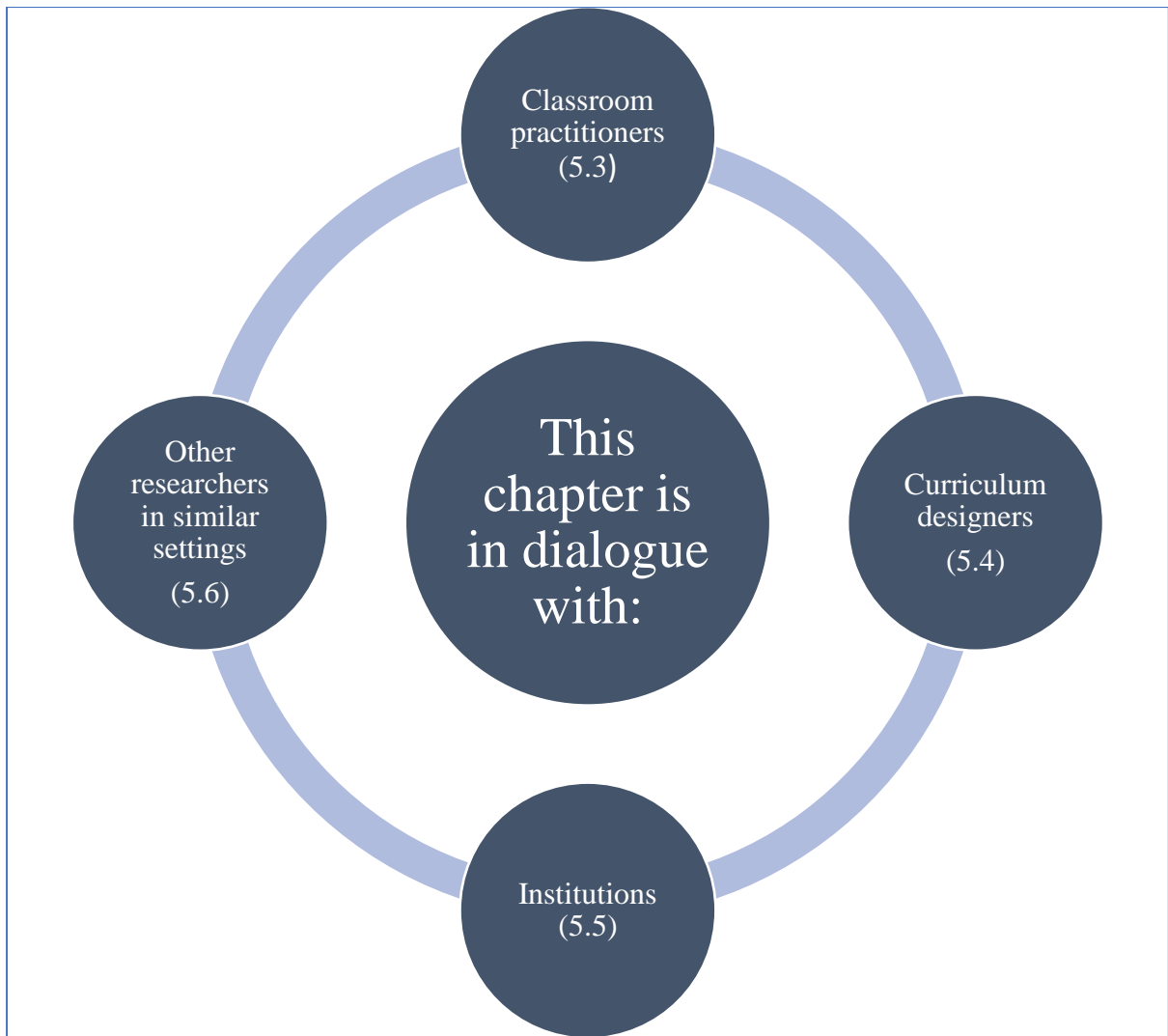
Figure 17: Constituencies to whom this chapter speaks

I have selected these constituencies for three reasons. Firstly, most research to date has identified a need for change at either the medio level or the macro level (Yemeni, op. cit.), with less consideration given to micro level recommendations, and so, by conversing dialogically with those who deal with Chinese post-graduate students in the classroom, I hope to foster a sense of collegiality, rather than impose diktats [🗨5.2]. Secondly, change can be more easily enacted at micro and medio levels by the lone researcher. Thirdly, although I have viewed my participants' lifeworlds through a neo-Marxist lens, and a tenet of neo-Marxism is the role the state should play in bringing about beneficial outcomes for those in less powerful positions (Jiang, 2011), I have chosen not to speak to policymakers given that I am more interested in tangible and implementable classroom outcomes.

> [🗨5.2] As I mentioned in 2.5, I carried out a project on the integration of international students in an institution in which I worked. I was invited to deliver my findings to the institution's International Committee. A committee member argued that changes to practice risked becoming performance indicators. This was not my intention, but the experience made me aware that suggestions for practice must have a basis in sharing, not imposing. (He also argued, worryingly, that these students should, in essence, put up or shut up, and that the institution did not need to pay heed to their needs because it was a selecting, not a recruiting, university.)

Of course, some institutions, departments and individuals already carry out useful interventions in order to better incorporate diverse approaches to teaching, leaning and knowledge. These usually take one of three directions (Knight, 2013). Firstly, top-down initiatives exist, in which the institution makes a collective, conscious decision to adapt pedagogies and practices to suit the composition of the student body better. Secondly, middle-out developments also occur, in which interventions are planned at departmental or programme level and then, if successful, are applied more widely around the institution. Finally, bottom-up changes take place, in which *ad hoc* projects are implemented locally by individuals acting alone. These are the most common attempts to shift pedagogy and practice to more inclusive ways of working, and are generally carried out by those who have an interest in the wellbeing of their students (Warwick & Moogan, 2013).

Communicating effectively with such a range of audiences is challenging, given that each has its own concerns and vested interests in the topic. I have therefore drawn on the concept of "T-shaped research" (see e.g. Hansen, 2010, n.p.) which provides a way for me to speak to an array of perspectives and praxes, and from which my contributions to knowledge emanate. T-shaped research digs deeply into the topic (represented by the vertical leg of the T) but with sufficient breadth (the horizontal stroke) to reach out and

communicate with other communities of practice. This thesis, therefore, bridges and brokers both academic and professional knowledge, and I indicate how I hope to raise awareness in relation to the constituencies I have identified (see 5.7). Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that change is not immediate and any modification of practices takes time (Gabb, 2006). There may therefore be an interval before the suggestions below are acted upon. There is, however, a need to enact changes sooner rather than later, since poor treatment, even if it is only perceived, can have a significant impact on students. Jiang (2011), for instance, reported a significant drop in the number of Chinese students studying in New Zealand because internationalisation policies did not encourage a recognition of different cultures on campus.

The participants made it clear that in many ways it is that manner in which they are responded to that is more problematic than who they are. In other words, it is the system which is the problem, not the students. Claims to diversity and inclusivity are specious if success is only considered to be achieved when people from other countries have "learned the words to our song" (Clegg et al.. 2003): we need to be wary of trying to make "them" like "us". Of course, I am not advocating the abandonment of all current approaches: that would be akin to "culture shedding" (Berry, 1997). However, I contend that it is possible to promote mutual accommodation through a "different-but-equal" approach (Clark & Grieve, 2006:56), in which varied cultures of learning are recognised and acknowledged as alternatives, lessening the implication that some are more (or less) valid than others: as Heng (2018) argues, "different is not deficient". With this in mind, I have drawn up a number of practical implications which tutors may consider incorporating into their practice.

5.3 Dialogue with classroom practitioners

Classroom practice was, and is, the prime motivator of this enquiry, since it was through my professional experience (see 1.4) that I became aware of the need for new ways of thinking about Chinese post-graduate students. This can be enhanced in the following ways.

Attending to new cultures of learning

The most important message for me, given my reading and the findings of this enquiry, is the need to raise awareness of cultures of learning. The participants talked about how aspects of their educational experience were problematic for them (see 4.5.1), so it is important for tutors to approach teaching and learning in ways which are not disadvantageous to Chinese post-graduate students (Cheng et al., 2018), especially since the recurrent construction of a "deficit model" of Chinese learners is often more due to the teaching than the learners themselves (Gu & Maley, 2008:226; Yu & Wright, 2017). It is important, therefore, that dissimilarities in approaches to teaching and learning in the university classroom are acknowledged. It has been argued elsewhere that tutors would benefit from specific training in teaching international students (Leask & Carroll, 2011; Ramachandran, 2011; QAA, 2015), since a better awareness of the background and learning needs of students leads to more successful teaching and learning (Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011). Since not all tutors may be aware of different socio-cultural perspectives *vis-à-vis* what it means to "know" (Killick, 2013:730), they may be managing teaching, learning and knowledge with insufficient awareness of the pedagogic background or needs of their students. Having a greater understanding of the concept of cultures of learning would allow tutors to create more sensitive and adjusted classrooms (Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011), and allay some of the "frustration" they have been reported to feel when dealing with international students (Murray & McConachy, 2018:255). Awareness raising for tutors in which variations in approaches to teaching, learning and knowledge are made overt would immediately improve classroom practice and also make institutions more equitable in understanding different milieux. This could take the form of explicit workshops about different cultures of learning (Jin & Cortazzi, 2017) – in other words, making people aware of variations across and within cultures of learning. These workshops could also make knowledge about cultural distances more explicit (Prieto-Welch, 2016), as well as explore more culturally-appropriate pedagogies (Heng, 2018), in order to understand the challenges international students have, and thereby accommodate them better.

Gu & Maley (2008) argue that a more reflexive approach is needed in the university classroom, in which our own customs, prejudices and traditions are suspended, thereby turning our practice away from an "us-and-them" approach and towards mutually-constructed "third places" (Kramsch, 1993) in which different cultures of learning can meet. Practically,

then, tutors could be made more aware of a "pragmatic third alternative" (Durkin, 2011:286), in which familiar Western classroom traditions, such as questioning established knowledge, are maintained, but are enacted in a way that recognises that not all students may be familiar with this approach, and may initially find it uncomfortable. A consensual and collegiate middle way can be established in three ways, as follows.

Firstly, spending some time early in a programme exploring practices, behaviours and expectations in different educational settings would make what is currently hidden become explicit to all. This could involve students' writing about, or discussing, their previous learning experience (Caruana, 2014), and their beliefs regarding what constitutes good teaching and learning. Making overt reference to cultures of learning – for all students, not just international – and raising every student's awareness of her/his own culture of learning would show how different settings typically conceptualise teaching, learning and knowledge (Macdonald & Firth, 2014; Jin & Cortazzi, 2017) and how different cultures of learning manifest themselves in the classroom. This kind of "creative, synergistic approach" (Chien, 2015:753) would allow for a more conciliatory classroom approach, and may remove some of the tension and strain which my participants reported. Wang et al. (2015) found that varying approaches from class to class actually improved results, so this too could be considered.

Secondly, Jin & Cortazzi (2011:49) found that Chinese students place significantly higher emphasis on preparing in advance for classes than their British counterparts do, so it would be beneficial to make tasks and readings available, as a matter of course, to students prior to seminars, with accompanying questions to assist in guiding the readings, since pre-reading is often unfocussed (Gabb, 2006). It may also be helpful to give options for homework tasks, so that students are not bewildered by one insurmountable task which saps their confidence.

Finally, given what my participants said about the stress of being required to speak in front of colleagues, and the benefits of working in smaller intercultural groups (see 4.5.1), modest changes, such as managing seminars so that students are given preparation time before being required to speak *in plenum*, and promoting small-group discussion before opening out to full-class debate, would be helpful, as would grouping students so that nationalities do not cluster together. It is also worthwhile responding encouragingly to pertinent comments made by more reticent students (see 4.4.1).

4.5.1 showed how some of these participants were reticent in class because of hostile responses from other class members. Therefore, an awareness of the strain that direct questions, requiring impromptu responses, can place on some students needs to be recognised. For example, questions such as, "What do people in China think about this?" appear to be an inclusive and engaging, yet they are problematic on three levels. Firstly, they require students to speak on behalf of all Chinese citizens – no mean feat – and, secondly, they take away the opportunities for personalised responses. Thirdly, it would be unlikely for a tutor to ask a British student, "What do people in the UK think about this?" So, rather than asking, "What do people in China think about this?" it is preferable to ask students for their own subjective opinion, thereby focussing on "difference within difference" (Luke, 2010, in Killick, 2015:133) – and, of course and bearing in mind that not all students, irrespective of background, are comfortable with speaking publicly.

Attending to post-graduate students

Transitioning to post-graduate study emerged as an unexpected theme as the project unfolded (see 4.5.5). It is important for tutors to bear in mind that their students may not be in possession of the in-depth knowledge they may imagine them to have, and to spend some time making their students aware of the covert epistemologies and ways of knowing which characterise learning at this level.

Attending to tension with students from Hong Kong and Taiwan

Given the tension that exists between students from mainland China and students from Hong Kong and Taiwan (see 5.9.5) consideration needs to be given to the composition of the class, bearing in mind that not all "Chinese" students are from mainland China. Tutors need to be aware that these differences may need to be recognised and handled with sensitivity.

5.4 Dialogue with curriculum planners

The curriculum is more than simply what is taught. It also shapes how knowledge is framed, and how institutions support students through the teaching, learning and assessment process. The curriculum, therefore, needs to be inclusive, acknowledging the divergent backgrounds

of students and recognising their multiple and varied prior learning experiences (Caruana, 2014), and promote an intercultural outlook (Jin & Cortazzi, 2017).

The experiences of my participants exposed the fact that, whilst internationalisation has been successfully implemented in terms of recruitment, it has been less consistently realised at curricular level (see 4.5.2), and a number reported that their programmes were heavily Anglo- or Euro-centric. Even more worryingly, when there was an attempt to talk of other contexts, the information provided was sometimes outdated or even offensive. Many programmes containing "international" have been found to be so only because they include some international examples in course materials (de Vita & Case, 2003), or due to the composition of the students in the classroom (Gabb, 2006), rather than because what is taught is truly international in scope. The risk inherent in this shallow approach to other contexts and cultures means students merely look at, rather than into, other settings.

Some departments do seem to be aware of the internationalised nature of their programmes, and reflect this in their syllabuses, and so good work in relation to the curriculum is in evidence, although this is often piecemeal due to a lack of cohesion across institutions (Cheng et al., 2018). There is a pressing need, therefore, to reconsider and redefine the curriculum in order to better attend to the nature of the internationalised university. This can be promoted as follows:

Attending to curricular content

Bamford (2008) found that tutors in international classrooms assumed too much historical, political, social and cultural knowledge of the home setting on the part of international students. This risks dividing students into what Gabb (2006) refers to as the *ethnoi* (those on the "inside") and the *ellenoi* (those on the "outside"). Since a number of participants indicated that being in the UK had given them a new perspective on the world (see 4.5.8), it is important not to assume that international students all have a comprehensive understanding of the local context.

Some participants pointed out that the content of their programmes did not always match either their past experience or their future needs, so course content needs to be reassessed so that the syllabus reflects the multi-cultural nature of the student body. This needs to be more

than simply lip-service, and requires tutors to develop an awareness of how their "subject matter [is] taught within another educational tradition" (Gabb, 2006:365). Case studies should be selected which match the background of the students in the classroom, thereby reducing the number of "Western" or British examples, as students may be bewildered by too many local references with which they are unfamiliar (Heng, 2018): what is familiar and common-sensical to the lecturer may not be for the students. Using materials from outside the UK, and making reference to other places, seems vital, therefore.

In addition, re-framing learning outcomes so that they make reference to other contexts is crucial, so that "the capabilities/attributes of the global student […] become embedded throughout a programme of study" (Killick, 2015:155). Practically, this can be done by including phrases such as "…in different communities" or "… in a multi-cultural society" or "… by contrasting with another national context" (ibid). Doing so will encourage tutors and students to consider the truly international aspects of the discipline (de Wit & Jones, 2014).

Finally, more consideration of where students will apply the knowledge they gain on their programmes is needed. For example, if students only learn about Business Management in the UK, this is unlikely to be of use when they return home, and so it would be advantageous for institutions to consider what international students' needs and expectations are in relation to their own future(s), and then blend this in with UK perspectives (Cheng et al., 2018). In addition, allowing students to discuss and explain how principles and concepts are enacted in their countries can be beneficial in the international classroom, and can be simple to implement through an "add-on approach" (Killick, 2015), in which changes are retrofitted to existing course content.

Of course, the internationalisation of the curriculum is not just about accommodating international students. "Transformative curriculum internationalisation" (Sawir, 2013:372), aims to prepare all students in the classroom to be global citizens (Cheng et al., 2018), and contexts and tasks which challenge assumptions and explore alternatives can lead to a more critical awareness of culturally-diverse attitudes towards class, gender, nationality, and ethnicity, leading to greater intercultural openness and tolerance (Knight, 2004; Carroll & Appleton, 2007). This can be promoted through cooperative and/or collaborative work comprising small groups of students from different socio-cultural backgrounds (Chang, 2006,

in Sawir, 2013; Prieto-Welch, 2016), thereby encouraging and celebrating diversity in group work (Macdonald & Firth, 2014), which international students value (Murray & McConachy, 2018). This in turn stimulates a greater understanding of different sociocultural ways of being and doing.

As well as internationalising the curriculum, institutions could consider internationalising other aspects of teaching and learning, such as assessment. This is an important consideration, since not all forms of assessment (such as viva voces and summative presentations) work for all students. It may therefore be worthwhile modifying or replacing assessment procedures to accommodate other cultures of learning (de Vita & Case, 2003), for instance, by offering students a choice of two assessment procedures – either an essay or a presentation – and allowing them to choose which to attempt.

5.5 Dialogue with institutions

Many of the challenges reported by these participants, such as their relationships with tutors, and having unrealistic expectations (see 4.4.1 and 4.5.4, respectively), could well be improved with the implementation of better practices at institutional level. This section, therefore, encourages institutions to review their current policies and approaches with regard to international students, with the aim of making internationalisation more equitable. The positives of internationalisation do not happen just because there are international students on campus (Sawir, 2013; Jin & Cortazzi, 2017), and in fact, some of these participants' experiences appeared to go against the stated objectives of internationalisation.

The interviews revealed that the participants faced challenges which went beyond the formal curriculum, indicating that institutions could do more for international students outside the classroom. There are five reasons for this. Firstly, institutions have a duty of care towards their students, particularly those who may be vulnerable, as is the case with international students (Gaskin, 2002), and as borne out by those participants who had struggled with their emotional wellbeing (see 4.4.3). Secondly, Carroll & Appleton (2007) found that when international students represent over 20% of the total student body, significant problems can arise for institutions unless adequate support is in place. These problems often revolve around demands by staff for different admission requirements for international students, implying that it is the makeup of the classes which is problematic, rather than the way

institutions respond to large international cohorts. Thirdly, universities often claim to be good for – and with – international students, but rarely clarify how this is the case in practice (see 2.3.2). Fourthly, members of staff "have needs too" (ibid., p74) and would thus welcome any support which makes their classrooms more productive settings for the creation of knowledge. Finally, enhancements to classroom practice (see 5.3) or in curriculum planning (see 5.4) tend to be individually-instigated, bottom-up initiatives, but are rarely implemented across the institution because of a lack of understanding higher up in the institution (Warwick & Moogan, 2013:113).

As discussed in 2.3.2, there are a number of perspectives on how internationalisation "works" in a university, and it seems that currently many institutions adopt an internationalisation-through-import approach (de Vita & Case, 2003) – in other words, bringing in international students means internationalisation will inevitably occur, whereas a transformative approach, which shakes up the institution and mind-sets therein, may be more effective in this respect. It is not the case that more needs to be done, but rather, as Carroll & Appleton (2007:79) put it, "the challenge is to do things differently". One way of doing this is by de-emphasising the economic imperatives for internationalisation (Jiang, 2011) and focussing on people instead. Consequently, institutions may wish to consider some, or all, of the following seven suggestions:

Attending to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and marginalisation

A number of participants reported that their challenges are not simply academic and/or linguistic, but also interpersonal (see 4.4.1 – 4.4.3) and socio-cultural (see 4.4.4). Institutions habitually aim to ensure that students are provided with a balance of academic and social activities (Bamford, 2008; Killick, 2015:156), and "international mixer" events are commonly offered by institutions. Whilst such events are believed to be a way to integrate students, both these participants and the literature (e.g. Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; McClure, 2007; Liu and Winder, 2014), indicate that such well-intentioned events do not, in practice, lead to stronger bonds between home and international students. Home students rarely attend, as they either do not feel they are the designated audience, or are not interested in international cultures (Cheng et al., 2018), so such get-togethers can often unwittingly contribute to ghettoization (Sawir, 2013). Social and cultural events therefore need to be promoted in ways which are attractive to all students. Many of the participants found the

settings in which social interaction occurred to be off-putting, because students in the UK commonly have social lives which revolve around alcohol, yet the participants felt uncomfortable in pubs and bars. Institutions, then, must consider offering alternative social events which go beyond pub crawls or the Student Union Bop.

Attending to students' emotional wellbeing

Four of the participants indicated that they had suffered from distress and even depression during their sojourn (see 4.4.3). Provision for students in distress does exist in institutions, but support is patchy (Wilson et al., 2007), and the procedures required to access support can be complex, even unclear, so simplifying these and providing personalised, timely responses to calls for help would be of benefit.

International students are seen as a homogenous group, but in fact different groups have different needs, and are often in need of additional emotional support (Liu & Winder, 2014). However, due to cultural and/or linguistic reasons, academic staff may be unable – or unwilling – to provide this (Quinn et al., 2009). Online support has been shown to be as effective as face-to-face support (Ye, 2006) and it may be that some students who feel inhibited by personal interaction with a welfare professional would be more willing to access support through a less intimate online mode. This may appeal particularly to Chinese students, given the loss of face which may arise in a one-to-one context (Yakunina & Weigold, 2011). Institutions could also promote co-national support networks, possibly online, or promote contacts with local communities through social or volunteering opportunities, which have been shown to be beneficial in this arena (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). Since a number of the participants were unaware initially that they were actually in distress, some form of awareness raising, during Welcome Week, about the nature of distress, how it manifests itself, and an indication of what support is available would be valuable (Yan & Berliner, 2011; Wang et al., 2012). It would also be helpful for staff to be aware of warning signs (Gaskin, 2002), particularly for students who may somaticise mental health symptoms. For instance, asking students if they are sleeping well, or how they are eating, can often be used to gauge distress.

Attending to proficiency in English

Language was an issue for every participant in this project (see 4.5.3), and even those students whose level of language was impressively high were concerned about their English proficiency. It seems sensible, therefore, that institutions offer language development for those students who need and/or want it: as Killick (2015) points out, we cannot simply abandon students whose first language is not English as soon as they have met the institution's language entry requirement. Most institutions run academic language and skills development programmes, which are useful in developing confidence (Heng, 2018), but it may be worthwhile considering the form this training takes, since students access support in different ways. Chinese students, for instance, have been found to tend to draw on the support of other Chinese students, rather than seek more structured support (Tang et al., 2012). It would be helpful, therefore, if provision was offered both face-to-face and online, with students free to select the format they feel more comfortable with.

"Intellectual self-censorship" (Caruana, 2014:9), occurs when second-language students do not discuss key concepts because they lack confidence in their ability to write about them effectively. Support relating to the core concepts and terms from the discipline, often referred to as "threshold concepts" (ibid. p2), which cause difficulty, would therefore also be of help (Gabb, 2006), perhaps in the form of a glossary. This would be especially valuable for those students who are new to the discipline, since the participants revealed that changing subject between first degree and second degree was a particular challenge for them (see 4.5.5) [🗨5.3].

> [🗨5.3] In writing this, I know that there are those who would argue that students do need to do some work themselves, and that post-graduate students should be able to read independently. However, the amount of information and new ideas can be so vast as to be overwhelming, and students new to the discipline may not know what or who to read. Since a Master's programme is only one academic year, there is a risk that students spend so long understanding central ideas and thinkers that the demands of their course overtakes them.

Questions are sometimes raised about why students have been permitted entry to an institution if their language level hinders their ability to study effectively, which leads to questions about language entry requirements (Thorpe et al., 2017). All students on post-graduate programmes who speak a first language other than English need to satisfy a language proficiency condition as part of their entry offer. Once students meet that condition, and are accepted into the institution, they have been acknowledged to have reached a level of English that permits them to engage sufficiently well with their programme of study. To then

have their language proficiency questioned contradicts the purpose of the entry requirement. It may therefore be worth reminding tutors that students who have gained a place on a programme have been deemed to be linguistically capable. Too much focus on language errors when providing feedback can, too, be problematic: it is not possible to implement assessment criteria which have higher expectations than the institution's entry requirements – and if language is not an explicit assessment criterion, it cannot be a cause for failure (Killick, 2015). Given the power of positive feedback (see 4.4.1), tutor feedback needs to explain, clarify and develop, rather than castigate.

I would also argue that some form of language training is as necessary for tutors and home students as it is for international students. Killick (2015) claims this would help to create a more global environment on campus and would bring benefits both within the institution and also outside, as these skills are transferable into other contexts where clear communication is required. My participants talked about the problems they had understanding home students (see 4.5.3), and in many instances it is possible that it was the speaker, not the listener, who caused the breakdown in communication. Idiom and metaphor are particularly problematic to understand in a foreign language, but feature frequently in native speaker speech [🗩 5.4]. Tutors and students whose first language is English may not have spent much time in contact with non-native speakers, so being able to communicate clearly and in a non-idiomatic way would lighten the international students' cognitive load (Carroll & Appleton, 2007, Zhou et al., 2011) thereby allowing them to focus on the content of the message, not the language used to convey it. The fact that significant numbers of faculty members are non-native speakers also raises challenges (Bamford, 2008) as they may speak varieties of English to which the student has had no prior exposure, or may use English with an unfamiliar accent. Of course, international students should be able to handle high-level idiomatic language use, and generally do so, but many tutors (and home students) take the position that it is the international student who needs to understand them, whereas, in fact, they may well be the root of the problem.

> [🗩 5.4] I overheard an exchange at the Student Services desk between an officer and a newly-arrived Chinese student in which the officer asked the student, "Can you stick around for a mo, or do you need to shoot off?"

Attending to unrealistic expectations

4.5.4 revealed that these participants often had unrealistic expectations about their sojourns. This indicates that institutions need to ensure they provide incoming students with timely pre-departure information, as well as appropriate and accurate post-arrival orientation. This can mitigate many of the problems which international students face (Zhou et al., 2011), especially those who are on their first study trip abroad, since novice sojourners are more likely to have greater expectations than more experienced sojourners, but are less likely to have those expectations met (Yan & Berliner, 2011).

Most institutions have strategies in place for new students once they arrive, with on-site, post-arrival orientations arranged before the start of term – often termed "Welcome Week", or a variation thereof. Welcome Weeks typically impart information in two ways: firstly, sessions aimed at all students, covering aspects such as timetables, assessment procedures and "who's and where's", and, secondly, sessions tailored specifically towards international students, which provide information on aspects such as visa compliance, banking and life in the UK. The quality and depth of this provision is inconsistent, however, varying from institution to institution, faculty to faculty, department to department, and even programme to programme, with the quality often hinging on the ability – or willingness – of individuals to provide effective orientation (Gu et al., 2010:16). Since these participants talked about how some of their experiences within their respective institutions were troublesome, there is a pressing need to modify Welcome Week provision so that international students are better prepared for their careers as post-graduates. As well as orientation to life in the UK, for example, it would be sensible to include awareness-raising sessions on how to manage personal relationships and interaction with peers and tutors (see 4.4.1), and what to expect from those relationships, focussing particularly on the more equitable relationships which are built between tutors and students at this level (Rienties et al., 2011). A clarification of the educational processes students are likely to encounter, and expectations on them, would also be valuable (Prieto-Welch, 2016), as would a discussion of how to access support should students find themselves in distress (Wu et al., 2015).

Of course, pre-arrival information also needs to make prospective students aware of their own responsibilities too, encompassing issues such as alcohol consumption, sex and sexually-appropriate behaviour and drug use, particularly if the home culture takes different views on

such matters (Gaskin, 2002). Because new students have been found to seek advice about what to expect once they arrive at their institution by contacting local co-national alumni more often than accessing information sent out by the institution (Yan & Berliner, 2011), creating formalised co-national alumni networks to provide pre-arrival guidance to new students would be beneficial. Systems where more experienced students" buddy up" with newer students can also be effective in this respect (McClure, 2007; Prieto-Welch, 2016) particularly if those students are from a familiar socio-cultural background, and can act as a "cultural and communication bridge" (Heng, 2018:31). This can be a particularly helpful first port of call for students who are in distress (Lu et al, 2014), as the support may be felt to be less intimidating than a counselling service (which can be accessed later, if required).

5.6 Dialogue with other researchers in similar settings

The concept of "research affect" (Taylor & Hicks, 2009) encourages researchers to reflect on how their enquiry can inform other projects. As well as an understanding of the experience of being a Chinese post-graduate student, my project also gave me insights into research in this type of setting, and those insights may serve to enhance the methodological practice(s) of colleagues working on similar projects.

Much has been written about interviewing in specific social settings, such as with children (Eder & Fingerson, 2003), older participants (Wenger, 2003), LGBT participants (Kong et al, 2003) and reluctant participants (Adler & Adler, 2003). There is also attention paid to interviewing across cultures (Ryen, 2003), although this characteristically explores different perspectives on the purpose of research in different cultures, or critiques the power discourses inherent within social research (Cannella & Lincoln, 2004). These discussions are sometimes no more than lists of cultural do's and don'ts – for instance, Kvale (2007) has a chapter on interviewing across cultures, but only considers questions such as managing informed consent in environments where this may be unexpected.

In the literature on applied linguistics, there has been important work done on research with non-native speakers with regard to, variously, their communicative competence (Hymes, 1974; Alptekin, 2002; Richards & Schmidt, 2014) and cross-cultural pragmatics (Thomas, 1983; Wierzbicka, 1991; Ishihara, 2010) but this tends to consider how meaning-making varies across languages. There is therefore a lack of practical and methodological guidance for the researcher who works with participants whose first language is not English [🗨5.5]. This is an important consideration, because, as Brocki & Wearden (2006) argue, the whole process of interpretation hinges

> [🗨5.5] Ironically, these participants would never be considered to have difficulties expressing themselves in their first language but may do so when interviewed in a second

on a participant's ability to articulate thoughts in a way that allows them to go to the nub of their experiences. In this section, then, I reflect on the practicalities of carrying out research with participants whose first language is not English (see 5.6.1) and also consider the limitations of this enquiry and how these limitations open doors for future research (see 5.6.2).

5.6.1 Research with non-native speaker participants [🗨5.6]

> [🗨5.6] I recognise that this term is troublesome, and imposes a level of stratification. However, it is a common term in the field, and, whilst not as precise as other terms, such as "Bilingual speaker of English plus another language", I have used it here for simplicity. I also recognise the irony that, although I term these participants "non-native speakers", from their perspective, it was me who was speaking a second language.

In qualitative research, language is the primary system through which meaning is made and through which lifeworlds are conveyed (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Indeed, Inman et al. (2012:195) go further, claiming that language is "a critical conduit for expressing cultural beliefs, emotions and deeper meanings". The linguistic turn has significant methodological and epistemological implications for those who carry out research with participants whose first language is not English. In such projects, there are more considerations in the process of interpretation than may be the case when the researcher and the participant share a common tongue. In 3.7.2, above, I discussed the double hermeneutic which is ubiquitous in interpretative phenomenological enquiry, and in 4.3.2, I laid out how I drew on Alvesson & Skoldberg's (2000) four-stage, quadri-hermeneutic approach to interpreting my participants' experiences. However, questions of language mean that there was a further, superposed, layer of interpretation present in this account. The language choices these participants made may have coloured the way they described their lifeworlds, and consequently affected the way I interpreted and portrayed them. This was not an issue I

had envisaged when I embarked on my project, although it became apparent to me that it made the already-complex process of interpretation even more intricate. Building on the concept of quadri-hermeneutics, I argue that working with non-native speakers leads to what could be termed "poly-hermeneutic interpretation".

"Thinking of the right words to say" can be an issue for any interview participant, but the challenges are multiplied when the linguistic repertoire is less extensive. Participants who are being interviewed in a second language cannot always draw on "a wide range of alternative words and combinations of words from which to choose" (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998:203, in Taylor & White, 2000:56). This had ramifications for my analysis, because many writers on interviewing advise attending to the linguistic forms used by participants as a way of making sense of the data (see 4.2.1): Charmaz (2006), for instance, encourages interviewers to look out for phatic expressions such as "you know?" which may be used by a participant to elicit affirmation, or to attend to long pauses, as these can be indicative of a need for support. The exploration of metaphor is also common in qualitative research (Moustakas, 1990; Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Schmitt, 2005; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011; Inman et al., 2012; Newby, 2014), since participants use it to clarify aspects of their experience when direct description may not work, or to talk about troublesome or emotional phenomena (Hedges, 2010). However, metaphor is not employed by non-native speakers to the same extent as it is by native speakers – indeed, metaphorical language is almost completely absent from the accounts of non-native speaker participants, since, linguistically, it is a challenge to produce as it is inextricably bound up with culture (Alger, 2009, in Thomas & Beauchamp, op. cit.). Whilst I am in no way suggesting that non-native speakers cannot and do not use these linguistic tropes, the researcher working with non-native speakers, and who is interested more in their lifeworlds than their language use, should be aware that there is a possibility that their participants do not, pragmatically, communicate in the way a native speaker does (long pauses may indicate a search for lexis, for example, rather than reflection) and should therefore be wary of analyses which are overly predicated on linguistic foundations.

As well as realising that an analysis predicated on linguistic foundations would be unhelpful for my research purposes, I also came to four further recognitions, which may be useful to others working with similar participants. Firstly, my recruitment process for interview participants originally required them to send me an email indicating their interest in my

project. However, writing to an unknown person (who may well be perceived to be in a position of power or superiority), can be daunting, especially in a second language, and my initial contact yielded few responses. I found that adding a sentence in my contact email which interested participants could copy and paste into their reply (see 3.10) led to significantly more responses.

Secondly, a number of potential participants "disappeared" when it came to making a commitment to being interviewed. It is to be expected that there is some attrition in the recruitment of participants, but I came to realise that, in an effort to hand over aspects of the research process to participants, I appeared vague: I had been replying to emails with "Please let me know when a good time for you would be". Although it is typically good practice to ask the participant to suggest a time and location for the interview (Smith et al., 2009), I changed tack so that I proposed possible days and times to meet, and later in the project all the participants who made initial enquires went on to be interviewed. This indicates a possible need for researchers to be more directive during the recruitment stage.

Thirdly, during an interview, all participants, irrespective of language, have to decode the questions they are asked, interpret how they wish to answer, and then formulate a response. Non-native speakers face the additional challenge of having to formulate a response using viable syntactic, grammatical and lexical choices, all of which would be instinctive to a native speaker. In other words, they need to think of both the message and the vehicle. This means that non-native speakers may need extra time to respond to questions. With non-native speaker participants, silence does not indicate incomprehension, or that they have nothing to say. Rather, silence is likely to mean that the participant is decoding the question and thinking about how to respond in terms of both content and language. I realised that recasting the question set the interview back, so researchers in such settings may need to be more comfortable with silence after asking a question than may otherwise be the case.

Finally, I took a pragmatic approach (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008) to transcription of the data generated by the interviews (see 4.2.1), given that the participants did not produce consistently-standard English. It may be useful, therefore, for researchers in similar settings to consider such an approach to transcription, focussing on content rather than error, and "tidying up" the script in a way that allows the essential nature of the non-native speaker's lifeworld to be conveyed.

5.6.2 Possible future avenues of research

Although a principal aim of this thesis was to turn my participants' "lived experience into a textual representation of its essence" (van Manen, 2001:36), I am acutely aware that this is not the final, definitive account of the experiences of Chinese post-graduate students in the UK and that this thesis is therefore by no means an end-point for this field. It is necessary to consider the limitations of this enquiry, and, in the light of this, make suggestions for possible future directions for the field.

Firstly, whilst I have made suggestions for practice at the micro and medio levels (see 5.3 – 5.5), I have not made macro-level suggestions for policy change. There is a need, therefore, for future research to attend to this, and consider ways in which the sector as a whole could, and should, consider how it conceptualises and manages Chinese post-graduate students more effectively.

Secondly, this enquiry has focussed predominantly on the academic acculturation of Chinese post-graduate students. Within that, some aspects of the participants' socio-cultural acculturation to the milieu emerged, but this was not the main thrust of the enquiry. It may be worth exploring more explicitly how socio-cultural acculturation occurs with international students. It would be worth considering tutors' perspectives, also.

Thirdly, I recognise that in spite of what I said in 2.5 about the dangers of taking reductionist views of whole swathes of people, to some extent this is what I have done. It may therefore be worth considering running studies which disaggregate Chinese students, and explore the community along the lines of gender, or age, or socio-economic status.

Fourthly, whilst it is difficult to run a longitudinal study with participants who are only in the UK for one year, a study which asks international sojourns to reflect on their overseas study period after they have returned to their home country may provide insights which an *in situ* study like this cannot.

Finally, given that IPA studies are frequently orientated to explore lifeworlds and experience through the use of in-depth case studies (Smith et al., 2009), any or all of the suggestions above could also draw on fine-grained, comprehensive single-participant studies.

5.7 Making an impact: getting the message out

In 5.1, I referred to Moustakas (1994) and Gilgun (2008), who contend that social research should have an impact in the world if it is to be meaningful. Dunleavy (2003:237), similarly, warns of the danger of "shelf-bending" research which sits in the library but makes no contribution to the real world. With this counsel in mind, this section indicates the ways in which I have, and intend to, get my message out so that the experience of future Chinse post-graduate students in the UK can be enhanced. Researching practitioners are in a "dialogue with the field" (Taylor & Hicks, 2009), through which they can tell other practitioners what they did and what they learnt from the experience so that others can benefit from the knowledge created (see 5.6.1 and 5.7), and, in this way, I can shift mindsets and practices: a key undertaking in 1.1.

I have mentioned already that I ran a project in a department in an institution in which I worked, which led to a report on the integration of international students within their programmes. This led to a presentation to the institution's International Committee (see 5.2). I believe that a good initial starting point for helping to change the way these students are viewed by individuals and institutions is to work within the university itself, thereby bringing about the bottom-up initiatives which Warwick & Moogan (2013) champion. This could even be as an add-on approach (Killick, 2015), which are easy to implement. My current institution has a Learning and Teaching Forum which holds annual conferences and runs workshops for tutors, and I intend to put together a presentation which attends to a number of the implications discussed in 5.3 – 5.5. In particular, I am keen to make tutors more aware of the concept of cultures of learning, and how this sheds light on the orientations which different students adopt towards teaching, learning and knowledge in the university classroom. This could also make suggestions for practice regarding curriculum content, managing interaction between students more effectively, and re-considering assessment tools and procedures.

More widely, submitting an article for publication would allow my message to reach a more varied audience. Necessarily, this involves selecting journals whose epistemological and methodological stances marry with my own, and there are a number of journals which I have surveyed extensively as part of this enquiry which publish mainly qualitative and interpretative research. These include *The Journal of Studies in International Education; Language, Culture and Curriculum; Language and International Communication* and *Globalisation, Societies and Education*) and any of those would be sensible places to submit papers to – and of course, I am mindful that this involves a lengthy wait, and undoubtedly the need for revisions before acceptance [🗨5.7].

> [🗨5.7] Indeed, in my third year, I submitted a paper to one of these journals. It was returned with a number of corrections to make, and so I have postponed this until I feel more confident in being able to produce something that fits better.

There are a number of professional organisations within my discipline. Two in particular, the *British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes* (BALEAP) and the *International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language* (IATEFL) take great interest in developments within EAP and language teaching respectively. Both convene specialist interest groups, for example, BALEAP has groups which focus on Research and Scholarship, Testing and Assessment and Leadership and Management, whilst IATEFL focuses on, amongst others, English for Specific Purposes, Global Issues and Learner Autonomy. However, special interest groups focusing on the needs of students in higher education is lacking, and setting up a specialist interest group would be a powerful way to communicate with the constituencies I detailed in Chapter 5.

4.5.4 indicated that having unrealistic expectations was a confounding factor for the participants in this enquiry. There is therefore a need to ensure that future students have clear and accurate pre-departure information, so that their expectations can better match the reality of being a post-graduate students in the UK. To this end, I am currently in contact with a doctoral colleague who runs an educational website in China. We are collaborating on pre-departure information for students intending to study in the UK regarding typical practices and procedures in UK higher education.

5.8 Revisiting my commitment to trustworthiness

Denzin (1996) argues that a commitment to emancipatory positions offers hope but few assurances, so in this chapter I have proposed real actions which could be brought to bear in order to effect change. This enquiry, therefore, can be considered to make a **contribution** to the field, and has relevance for, and is of interest to, more than simply abstracted philosophical positions, which is a prerequisite of social research (Silverman, 1997:25, in Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). Social enquiry should have **resonance** at the level of local practice and at institution level, (O'Leary, 2005), which I have considered in 5.3 – 5.5. I have also, in 5.6, made suggestions for how projects in similar settings could benefit from my experience, thereby making a **methodological contribution** to the field.

Chapter 6

Closing some doors; leaving others ajar

6.1 Overview of this chapter and a rationale for the title

This thesis has at its heart the experiences of Chinese post-graduate students in higher education in the United Kingdom. In Chapter 1, I drew attention to the need for this research and the claim I make in relation to it, laid out who I am in relation to the enquiry and provided four illustrative vignettes, prefacing a review of the substantive literature and prior knowledge in this field in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 clarified the project's philosophical and methodological underpinnings, whilst Chapter 4 drew on the interviews I carried out in order to construct what it is like to "be" a Chinese post-graduate student in higher education in the UK. Chapter 5 drew out implications for practice, given the participants' experiences. This final chapter aims to bring together a number of threads. The five years I have spent in the field have increased my substantive knowledge and methodological know-how, of course, but have also been a catalyst for significant and far-reaching changes in me as a practitioner, as a researcher, and as a person, and these changes have been as noteworthy for me as the outcomes of the project.

6.2 Learning and changing as a researcher

Su et al. (2010:88) write that the doctoral experience is, by its very nature, characterised by periods of elation tempered by bouts of dejection, and that this is "what it means to be, and identify oneself as, a researcher". Although moving from novice to more proficient researcher entailed, for me, an initial "anxiety-making, rather uncoordinated stage" (Gillham, 2001:22), the experience has been both exhilarating and humbling. In this section, I reflect on how I have learned and changed as a researcher, and chronicle how this has been a process of "dynamism and flux" (Brown, 2010:173).

Before embarking on my project, I was manifestly aware of the "rigour and seriousness" (Trafford & Leshem, 2009:305) which characterises doctoral enquiry. I was not, however, prepared for the plethora of philosophical and methodological choices available to me as a researcher, nor for the fact that descriptions and interpretations are multifarious, and even contradictory. I was under the impression that my own enquiry required me to select one of the options available. This impression caused problems for me initially, especially at the time of my preliminary research (see 3.9.1): I believed that there was a right way to "do" research, and that, once that was identified, everything would fall into place [🗨6.1]. Over my doctoral journey, however, I came to recognise the opportunities which exist in adapting and merging paradigms, approaches, methodologies and methods in order to suit my own enquiry, and a critical moment on my doctoral journey occurred when I realised that, whilst methodological choices need to be principled and suitably justified, they can be adapted for context and purpose. The methodological literature (e.g. Charmaz, 2006; Taylor & Hicks, 2009; Chamberlain, 2012) validated this recognition, particularly Etherington (2004:100), who writes "increasingly, researchers create methodologies to suit the purposes of the research from a range of approaches and methods that reflect their

> [🗨6.1] Mackenzie & Knipe (2006:np) call methodological choices a "daunting prospect for the inexperienced researcher" that can lead to a state of *methodolatory* (Chamberlain, 2012), in which researchers try to look for a ready-made, "off the shelf" methodology for their own enquiry. I initially believed that this was precisely what good researchers do, though, and that to veer from well-tried methods and approaches would be both risky and taboo. I was relieved to find that approaches can (and should) be modified, in order to reflect my "personal views of reality" (Etherington, 2004:110) in order to "constantly create new methods and approaches" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998:118), rather than being viewed as a "methodological straightjacket" (ibid., p2). In short, I did not simply adopt, but rather, adapted, and through a process of doctoral alchemy, have produced something similar to yet fundamentally different from what I had envisaged five years ago.

personal views of reality and their beliefs about how we know what we know". Of course, I still had to make sensible, sensitive and justifiable choices, but I feel now that the decisions I made were fit for purpose. Struggling with this dilemma was actually, in retrospect, a positive: it was through the muddle and untidiness that I came to understand better the essential nature of systematic and robust social research.

At this point, towards the end of the project, I have been reviewing the reflexive notes I made in the field, and looking back at reports written at different stages of my EdD. In doing so, I cannot help but notice how, at the outset, the research was all about me, and what I wanted. To illustrate, in 3.9.1 I recounted how my reconnaissance study aimed to corroborate hypotheses I had about my participants' experiences of life in the UK, rather than letting their

ideas come to me, which in retrospect was not an effective or sensitive way to generate data. However, "being there" in the field (Rossman and Rallis, 2003) gave me increased awareness and understanding (van Manen, 2001), and I gained "pragmatic knowledge" (Kvale, 2007) as I progressed: my ability to carry out interviews, transcribe, identify what is relevant and important in them and then, from that, hew out interpretations and conceptualisations is greater now than five years ago. My reading and thinking became more focussed as I progressed, and I learned to harness the messiness that interpretive research entails, and gained confidence in taking sensible, sensitive and valid decisions. This led to a heightened sense of self-credibility: in effect, I made the jump from being a student of knowledge to what Thomson & Walker (2010) call refer to as a "scholar-steward", and I feel I can now speak with greater authority about my field. Initially, I felt that I was being pushy and brash, but Littleton (2017) advises, "do not apologise", and it has been powerful, affirming and liberating to write this thesis.

Finally, I came to recognise the responsibility that is inherent in writing an account of this sort. I had a responsibility to represent the lifeworlds of my participants accurately, and in a way which the audience can follow, as this account may be the only contact that a reader who is not immersed in a similar setting has with this kind of experience.

6.3 Learning and changing as a practitioner

Carrying out research at the same time as being a practitioner was, for me, a case of managing entrenched and occasionally conflicting dualities. I had to gain new understandings in order to cope with the "researcher" side of this dual identity, drawing on new, and different, knowledge(s) and practice(s) (Taylor & Hicks, 2009) from those I was used to drawing on.

One of the greatest challenges of being a researching practitioner is dividing time between the job and the research. This has been a demanding five years: working and being a part-time researcher is an enormous pull on time, and I was unceasingly envious of full-time doctoral students [🗨6.2]. However, the

> [🗨6.2] It was frequently the case that I would spend a weekend working on my project, and by Sunday evening I wanted to come back to it again on Monday, as I was in a writing purple patch. This was rarely viable, though, and I frequently felt that momentum was lost. However, I also came to realise that stepping away from the project for a few days allowed ideas to macerate. Often I had stopped writing because I had reached an impasse – but when I returned to writing a few days later I was able to move on more easily.

pressure of time was oddly positive in some ways, as it also kept me focussed, and prevented me from heading down interesting but irrelevant side roads. I was fortunate to have identified an aspect of my professional practice which was stimulating and in which I had a deep interest: this allowed to me to maintain motivation and impetus.

Importantly, being a researching practitioner allowed me to problematise the critical incidents that occur in my own day-to-day practice (see 1.4), and to revise how I view and work with my own Chinese post-graduate students. My research has, in effect, been a form of profound and prolonged professional development. Freire (2001:31) famously reasoned that "the person in charge of education is being formed or re-formed as he/she teaches", and whilst I concur, I would say that in my case, I was being "formed and re-formed" as I researched, in addition to as I taught.

6.4 Learning and changing as a person

This project has been the biggest professional commitment I have undertaken, and certainly one of my proudest achievements, and so I recognise what Clough & Nutbrown (2007) mean when they claim that the process of research has the power to change many things, not least the researcher her/himself. It has been a long trek, full of the "joys and fears" (McCormack, 2006:183) which characterise such journeys. I have delved into the experiences of my participants but have also delved into myself. I have become conscious of biases and affiliations which had previously not been fully formed in my mind, and have come to see what Pillow (2003) means when she urges, "researcher, know thyself". I have gained confidence in being able to articulate my worldview and justify it – I have "learned to be", as Hargreaves (2003, in Forbes, 2008:451) couches it, and as a result, one of the greatest rewards of this enquiry has been an ability to take a social and political stance on the world and defend it. The opportunity to grapple with important and influential philosophies has been instrumental in this respect, and postmodernist critiques of meta-narratives and neo-Marxism have been particularly stimulating to explore.

6.5 Revisiting my commitment to trustworthiness

In this final chapter, I have considered how my doctorate journey has been an instance of professional development and self-appraisal (Taylor & Hicks, 2009), and I have talked about the **contexts** in which I have operated during this period, and given **details** of how I managed the challenges of being a researching practitioner. In this way, I have talked about my own **inclinations and reflections as a researcher**.

6.6 Final words

Trafford & Leshem (2009:308) argue that writing a thesis is akin to a jigsaw puzzle, which "can only fully be appreciated when all the components are present and fitted together". I would argue, however, that my project has not fitted all the pieces of the jigsaw together, in some fixed, permanent manner. Nevertheless, a point occurs when editing becomes meddling, and so this is the version of my thesis that I present at this point [💬6.3]. It is necessarily the case that some of the choices I made may not have been the most suitable, and hindsight will undoubtedly led me to question many aspects of this project, as Wagner (2010:37) presages:

> [💬6.3] And, more prosaically, which deadlines require me to present.

> *"For many doctoral students, the most notable lessons from their dissertation research will not be clear until their research is well along, or, in some cases, over and done with."*

I am aware that the theories and concepts I have chosen to engage with, as well as the sense I have made of my participants' experience, are just one of myriad ways of interpreting this setting. In this sense, then, this enquiry and what emerges from this is an occasioned telling, drawing on situated knowledge, and grounded in a particular setting and in a particular interpretation.

Over the course of my doctoral journey I have become increasingly more despondent at the assaults on progressive, liberal democracy. The tumult unleashed by the EU referendum and the election of Donald Trump as US President, and the shift towards authoritarianism in

Turkey, Poland, Hungary, China and Italy, represent, to me, a challenge to the values and opportunities of diversity, and have made me more convinced than ever of the need to promote and pay heed to the kinds of marginalised voices I have represented here.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Sample literature review record card

Source	
Authors	Paloma CASTRO, Jane WOODIN, Ulla LUNDGREN & Michael BYRAM
Title	Student mobility and internationalisation in higher education: perspectives from practitioners
Date	2016
Journal/book	Language and Intercultural Communication, 2016 VOL. 16, NO. 3, pp418–436
Main Idea	
Type of article	Research
Key words	Student mobility; internationalisation; higher education; intercultural dialogue
Main idea	Internationalisation is one thing at institutional level and another on the ground.
Lit Review	
Ideas synthesised	<u>**INTRODUCTION**</u> • Internationalisation has two idealisations – the neo-liberal, instrumental, economic, and the educational, developmental, socially progressive: "respect, tolerance, equality, dignity and common purpose" (p420). • But of course not either/or – weighted depending on time, location, and even place in the institution. • Unis, like it or not, as in a market-driven context. Need to be high on rankings, so attract lots of international students (therefore scoring high on the international criterion). Thus they get more students, and more money, can employ (buy?) renowned internal scholars. Thus "a circle which might be called virtuous or vicious depending on the point of view" (p419).
Research	
Quant / qual / mixed	Mixed?
The aim of this study / RQs	Practitioners' perspectives on internationalisation.
Population	25 + 10
Sample	28 unis in 15 countries
Methods	Questionnaires
Results, findings and conclusions	• Top comments = internationalisation relates to mobility (staff & students), recruitment, partnerships • "In the UK, my impression is that it is market-driven". • Mismatch between strategies and teaching and learning actions – what is said and what is done. Economic rationale for the institution, but social for the practitioner: • "This may happen because they find that learning and education values are neglected at the level of the institution, which is more focused on the recruitment of students and establishing collaboration between institutions" (p425) AND: "when internationalisation (and within that, the mobility agenda) is articulated at the top level, it becomes more of an operational plan; it is not a pedagogic, philosophical position." (p432)

	•	For many respondents, "mobility" is a tool to attract more students.
	•	Overseas students = more opportunities for home studies, and also more economic growth for institutions.
	•	Lack on engagement - "they seem to just study here, they don't participate much in campus (or internationalisation) activities" (p426).
	•	Also, home students work together because unsure of language level of international students.
	•	Maybe the university is already multicultural and multilingual e.g. in urban UK, so not deemed necessary?
	•	Intl students arrive expecting white Christian community – but not the case in contemporary UK.
	•	Large numbers of (e.g.) Chinese students on a programme also mean the programme fails to be fully multicultural.
	•	Insufficient programmes for staff. "With regard to preparation for staff, the verdict was unanimous: there is none" (p428). Lack of funding or time made available.
	•	Insufficient contact between mobility staff and teachers: "There is a whole office or unit which is working with international relations and I don't really have any contact with them'" (p427)
	•	Lack or orientation: "'there is also (usually) a presentation [for incoming mobile students] in which the university/faculty is introduced… there is an office but I don't know how prepared and helpful the staff are'" (p427)
	•	There is lack of support from home students.
	•	Many people do amazing things- but locally, without institutional level support or recognition.
Implications or recommendations	•	Preparation for incoming/outgoing staff and students;
	•	Measures in place for the integration of staff and students (whether temporary or permanent)
	•	Preparation/training for staff in working in international teams (language/cultural issues including research cultures);
	•	Devise programmes of integration of international students and staff, and home students (who also are part of the process);
	•	Require threshold of intercultural competence for all staff and students;
	•	Develop materials/programmes which address the issues raised in ICD;
	•	Active and critical participation of agents involved;
	•	Commitment from participants.
Opinion		
Evidence / rigour	•	Takes frameworks from Stier 2006 and Knight 2004 – interesting possible approach?
Improvements / gaps		

Appendix 2

Research Ethics Review Checklist

RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW CHECKLIST FOR FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Student Name	Jonathan Stoddart
Student email	
Route (for MPhil/MEd only)	
Supervisor	
Supervisor email	
Thesis Title	The emotional wellbeing of Chinese PG students in a UK HEI
Programme	EdD

Code of Practice relating to Educational Research		
1a	Have you read the *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (2011) of the British Educational Research Association (BERA)? (if you have not read it, the latest version is available at http://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/bera-ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2011	Yes
1b	Is this Code relevant to the conduct of your research? If you have answered 'no', please briefly explain why:	Yes
1c	Do you agree to subscribe to the Code in carrying out your own research?	Yes
2	Are there any aspects of your proposed research which, in the context of BERA's Code of Practice, might give rise to concern amongst other educational researchers?	Yes

If you have answered 'yes', please briefly list possible causes for concern below:	
A	Paragraph 12 of the guidelines raise awareness of the need to attend to any dual roles the researcher may have. This is a concern; I intend my participants to come from my home institution. This may bias the data. For instance, students may not feel that they can discuss problem areas freely if a member of faculty is conducting the research.
b	Paragraphs 16-21 refer to research with children, vulnerable young people and vulnerable adults and the need for safeguarding these populations

Whilst the respondents in my enquiry are not vulnerable *a priori* in a legal sense, the fact that I am enquiring into emotional and psychological aspects of their sojourn in the UK may result in emotional issues being raised, which may be troublesome or unsettling for some. I have gone some way to ensuring that the interviewing I carry out will be as unthreatening as possible, through reviewing the literature on sensitive research (e.g. Lee, 1993; Dickson-Swift, James, & Liamputtong, 2008) and also through attending an introduction to counselling programme, which has equipped me with some key skills in speaking to people who may be undergoing emotional disturbance. If, during the data-gathering process, it becomes apparent to me that any of the participants are unduly distressed by longer-term problems with adjustment, then I will ensure that I provide them with information about relevant support available to them at |

	College level, such as the King's College London Heath Centre and the College Counselling Service.	
3a	Will you be analysing an existing data set that has already been collected by someone else?	No
3b	If you answered YES: can you confirm that the data you will be using is *either* Already available in the public domain for anyone to analyse Or You have been given permission by the owner of the data set to undertake your own analysis and results[1]	N/A
4	Will you be collecting your own research data for the study (through such techniques as interviewing people, observing situations, issuing questionnaires etc)? ***nb. If you have answered NO to this question, you may proceed to Section C and need not answer any further questions in this section.***	Yes
Obtaining 'Informed Consent'		
5	Are you familiar with the concept of 'informed consent'? (if you are not familiar with this concept you should first consult the following source: page 5 of the BERA guidelines above).	Yes
6	Does your research involve securing participation from children, young people or adults where the concept of 'informed consent' might apply? *Permission is likely to be needed to report any information about people or institutions that is not in the public domain, and which you have been able to obtain due to your privileged access to the research site(s) in whatever capacity* [2]	Yes
If you have answered 'yes' to Question 6 above, please answer the following questions.		
7a	Do you believe that you are adopting suitable safeguards with respect to obtaining 'informed consent' from participants in your research in line with the Code of Practice?	Yes

---

[1] *this permission should only be given if the owner of the data can make it available for secondary analysis on the basis of the informed consent they obtained from their original participants*

[2] *Professional work (such as teaching) can involve the collection of evidence to better understand problems/issues and to evaluate innovative practice - leaving practitioners with the question of when these activities become formal research requiring informed consent. This comment is meant to highlight how the collection of data for public reporting **beyond the institution** (e.g. **in a thesis**) should be considered as a key criterion for deciding when informed consent is required.*

7b	Will all the information about individuals and institutions be treated on an 'in confidence' basis at all stages of your research including writing up and publication?	Yes
7c(i)	Will all the information collected about the institution(s) where research is based be presented in ways that guarantee the institution(s) cannot be identified from information provided in the report? *Note: in a thesis written by a researcher about a research context where they have a publicly acknowledged role, it is difficult to disguise the identity of the institution whilst also providing the expected detail of the researcher's relationship with the research context.*[3]	Yes
7c(ii)	If not, has the appropriate responsible person given approval for the research on the understanding that the identity of the institution cannot be protected in the report of the research?	N/A
7c(iii)	Will all the information collected about individuals be presented in ways that guarantee their anonymity? *Note: a person with a named role, or having a specific set of reported characteristics that is unique in the research context, cannot be assured of the anonymity when the identity of the research site cannot be protected.*	Yes
7c(iv)	If not, have these issues been explained to the relevant participants (and appropriate gatekeepers in the case of children or other vulnerable participants)?	N/A
The Involvement of Adults in the Research		
8a	Will your research involve adults?	Yes
If you have answered 'yes' to Question 8a above, please answer the following questions; otherwise move to Question 9.		
8b	Will these adults be provided with sufficient information *prior* to agreeing to participate in your research to enable them to exercise 'informed consent'?	Yes

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[3] *At present the implicit assumption is that anonymity is always desirable*, and is always achievable. In many studies these assumptions are sound. However, a practitioner (e.g. teacher) reporting research into their own practice/institution in a thesis would normally need to be explicit about their professional relationship to the research context to give an authentic account of their research. As the staff lists of many educational institutions are in the public domain and often readily found by a web search, a thesis by a named member of staff allows the institution to be readily identified from the name of the thesis author.*
Given that an institution can readily be identified, this also has consequences for the degree of anonymity that can be promised to participants - for example those with named roles such as Head of Year 11, Student Voice Coordinator, Head Prefect, etc, or those identifiable from detailed reported characteristics.
* Some institutions or participants may welcome being acknowledged by name in a thesis, and their views should be taken into account and balanced against other considerations.

8c	Will the adults involved in your research be in a position to give 'informed consent' themselves with respect to their participation?	Yes
8d	Will these adults be able to opt out of your research in its entirety if they wish to do so by, for example, declining to be interviewed or refusing to answer a questionnaire?	Yes
8e	Will these adults be able to opt out of parts of your research by, for example, declining to participate in certain activities or answer particular questions?	Yes

The Involvement of Children, Young People and other potentially Vulnerable Persons in the Research

9a	Will your research involve children, young people or other potentially vulnerable persons (such as those with learning disabilities or your own students).	No

If you have answered 'yes' to Question 9a above, please answer the following questions; otherwise move to Question 10.
In educational and social research 'informed consent' regarding access is often given by a 'gatekeeper' on behalf of a wider group of persons (e.g. a head or class teacher with respect to their pupils, a youth worker working with young people, another person in an 'authority' position).

9b	Who will act as the 'gatekeeper(s)' in your research? Please list their position(s) briefly below and, where this is not self-evident, describe the nature of their relationship with those on whose behalves they are giving 'informed consent'. **The researcher cannot act as the gatekeeper (see 9g below)**	
i	Dan Butcher, Senior Research Ethics Officer, King's College London	
ii		
iii		
9c	Will you be briefing your 'gatekeeper(s)' about the nature of the questions or activities you will be undertaking with the children, young people or other potentially vulnerable persons involved in your research?	Yes
9d	If another person (such as a teacher or parent of a child in your study) expressed concerns about any of the questions or activities involved in your research, would your 'gatekeeper(s)' have sufficient information to provide a brief justification for having given 'informed consent'?	Yes
9e	If unforeseen problems were to arise during the course of the research, would your 'gatekeeper(s)' be able to contact you at relatively short notice to seek advice, if they needed to do so?	Yes
9f	Could your 'gatekeeper(s)' withdraw consent during the research if, for whatever reason, they felt this to be necessary?	Yes

9g(i)	Are you undertaking research into your own professional context/institution (e.g. with students in a school where you work)? If you answered 'Yes' then you should identify (in 9b above) a suitable senior person who has agreed to act as an independent point of contact for participants to act as the gatekeeper, and answer the following two questions:	Yes
9g(ii)	Will you ensure that other people in the research context are aware of the identity of the gatekeeper?	Yes
9g(iii)	Will you take reasonable precautions to ensure that research participants (and where appropriate their parents/guardians) know that they should contact the gatekeeper (and not you) if they have any concerns about the research?	Yes
Other Ethical Aspects of the Research		
10	Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time? (eg covert observation of people in public places)	No
11	Will the research involve the discussion of topics which some people may deem to be 'sensitive'? (e.g. sexual activity, drug use, certain matters relating to political attitudes or religious beliefs)	No
12	Does the research involve any questions or activities which might be considered inappropriate in an educational setting?	No
13	Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to study participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind? *If you have ticked 'Yes' it is vital to refer the matter to the Faculty Research Office for onward reference to the University Insurance Section.*	No
14	Will blood, tissue or other samples be taken from the bodies of participants?	No
15	Is pain or more than mild discomfort likely to result from the study?	No
16	Could the research involve psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	Yes
17	Are there any other aspects of the research which could be interpreted as infringing the norms and expectations of behaviour prevailing in educational settings?	No
18	Are there any other aspects of the research which could be to the participants' detriment?	No
19	Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?	No

20	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses or compensation for time) be offered to participants?	No

SECTION C: Interpretation of Results

If any of your answers coincide with the response options having a coloured background, then you should assume that further discussion involving Stage 2 procedures is required because some aspect of your proposed research is likely to be 'ethically sensitive'. In practice, many issues can be resolved at this stage.

*If you have ticked 'yes' in response to one or more of questions 10 to 20, both Stage 2 **and** Stage 3 clearance will definitely be required.*

Stage 2 Clearance
Any 'ethically sensitive' responses identified above should be discussed with your supervisor.

My respondents are not vulnerable by dint of belonging to a definable group. However, there is the possibility that some of them may be suffering from acculturative stress or even affective disturbances emergent from that acculturative stress. In interviewing them, it is possible that the discussion will touch on aspects of the participants' experience which they may find upsetting to discuss. As mentioned above in (2b), I am aware of this risk and have procedures prepared should any of the participants appear to be distressed.

On completion of the discussion, the supervisor is asked to choose one of the following three responses, to delete the other two and to affirm their views by adding their signature	
a	I have discussed the ethical dimensions of this research and, as outlined to me, I do not foresee any ethical issues arising which require further clearance.
b	There may be some ethical issues arising from this research. I think it would be prudent for the researcher to seek further advice and, possibly, Stage 3 clearance.
c	Ethical issues arise in this research which require further discussion; my advice is that Stage 3 ethical clearance should be sought.

Date	30ᵗ October 2014

Supervisor Name/ Signature	
Date	

Appendix 3

Participant information and informed consent form

Study Title: The emotional well-being of post-graduate Chinese Students in a UK higher education institution

Investigator: Jonathan Stoddart, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge

Purpose: The purpose of this research study is to examine how post-graduate Chinese students adapt to studying in the UK, what makes the experience challenging, and how challenges are managed. The data gathered will be used to identify any particular areas of particular interest.

Procedures: If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be asked to take part in a three-part procedure:

1. An initial meeting to discuss the nature of the research and what will happen to the information you give me. This will not be recorded, although notes will be taken.
2. An interview which will be recorded on video, although the video will not be made available to anyone but me. The interview should take approximately 1 hour. The recording will take place at a mutually-convenient time and place, either at King's College London or outside the College, if you prefer.
3. A follow-up conversation a week after the initial interview, so that you can check and confirm that you are still happy with what you said, or ask for comments to be deleted, should you wish.

Confidentiality: Your records will be kept confidential and will not be released without your consent except as required by law. Your identity will be kept private; if the results of this study are written in a scientific journal or presented at a scientific meeting, your real name will not be used. The video recording will be transcribed without any information that could identify you. After the end of the study, the video recording will be destroyed.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal: You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and for any reason.

Questions: If you have any questions about the research now or during the study contact Jonathan Stoddart

Statement of Your Consent: I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to being video recorded. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Name (printed):

Signature:

Date:

Appendix 4

Pilot study interview schedule and vignettes

Pilot study interview schedule

- Why did you come to the UK?
- How is it being a Chinese student in the UK?
- Can you tell me about three things which are not so good about your experience and three that are very good?
- Were the three bad things disappointing for you?
- Who do you get most help / support from (both personally and academically)? (Colleagues? Co-nationals? Housemates? Significant others? Individually?)
- How are your tutors sympathetic to the fact that Chinese students have a different approach to learning?
- How have you adapted your practices (or not)? Someone said that Chinese students are like "stuffed ducks" – do you agree?
- How about selective adaption (i.e. adopting some new approaches but maintaining own)?
- How important to you in studying here is your level of English? How do you feel yours is? What problems does this cause you?
- Some students report being lonely. When have you ever felt like this?

Vignettes

Your friend tells you she is missing her family and friends at home.	Your friend tells you she is worried about her academic progress.
Your friend tells you she is not eating well and cannot sleep. Her body feels very tired.	Your friend tells you she is finding it difficult to get used to life in the UK (such as the food, the weather and customs).
Your friend tells you she is finding it difficult to get used to the way people interact and relate to each other in the UK.	Your friend tells you she is worried about her English.
Your friend tells you she is finding it hard to make friends in London.	Your friend tells you she thinks the way classes are taught in the UK is very different from at home, and she is not sure what she should do in seminars and lectures.

Appendix 5

Extract of annotated transcript from the reconnaissance study

Dan	and so July is the time normally which many of the universities has closed their… their… their access
Interviewer	So deadlines
Dan	So it's about the course grades and the university application. Two things
Interviewer	[To Dan] And when you say….I'll talk about than in a moment, but what about you Alison? Anything that worried you, or made you feel sad or upset?
Alison	The first one is as they said, the time management, because every time I just… I just delay to the last moment, several times, you know, I did not hand in on time. It's… it's not a very big thing… it's big thing… but it makes me not only think about the essay itself but it makes me doubt, you know, my personality
Interviewer	[Right]
Alison	Maybe I will do something, I will cause some more… some bigger result because of this and also the second one, sometimes I miss my family so badly
Interviewer	[Uh huh]
Alison	And er… but friends make me feel better
Interviewer	Missing family is difficult, isn't it? Is it better now than it was at the start of the year?
Alison	Yes, it's much better. Because the weather is good, so good these days.
Interviewer	And how do you keep in touch with your families? Do you use Skype to talk to them, and mobiles, and…?
Ray	Face Time
Alison, Dan	Face Time
Interviewer	Face Time, yeah. Ok. And do they give you support? If you're worried about something? So you said… if you were missing your family or you were worried about your grades, would you talk about that to your family?
Ray, Linda	No, no.
Interviewer	Why not?
Dan	I… I… I wouldn't want to worry…
Interviewer	[Worry about you?]
Dan	So I will only tell them some happy things
Interviewer	That's very interesting. And, and, is that the same for you, Linda? You don't want to worry them?
Linda	For me yes. They are not familiar with the things here, so if I want to tell them about this, I have to tell them from the beginning and tell them all the details about this. So I like to talk about this with my friends and my classmates here about this issue and find the solution about this situation, so rather than to talk to my friends. But if I have some confusing things about the life or the future I would talk to my family If I have worries about my future I talk to my family So if it was a personal thing you talk to your family but if it was related to your studies you'd talk to your friends?
Linda	So the things I talk to my family it's more general, but about my future, or my life way, or something more general
Interviewer	That's very interesting. Ray, you said you wouldn't'?
Ray	I… I… I… sometimes do talk about the worries to my parents because I need to let them know so far I get where and if… if… it's possible to get the B+… I need to tell them the… the… the… future process or the… the… the erm how to say
Interviewer	Future prospects… or possibilities?
Ray	Yes yeah… yeah yes if I should drop this to do this thing or not, I need to tell them and let them know, so about the personal issues, I seldom talk with my parents. I would like to talk with my friends, so. Yes
Interviewer	Ok. Erm, Alison, you said that you have a sister here and you said that you have friends who had studied here previously. Did you know anyone in London before you came? Did you have friends and family here?

Expectations	Cultural comparisons and diversity	What would make this better?	Cushioning factors	Why are you here?	The challenge of study	Seminars
In the first day, the lecturer asked how many nationalities in the whole classroom, and I noticed there are just small percentage of English students; I'm really surprised. So, I expect, maybe I can meet more English students here [xxxx] but I don't, I don't feel disappointed because I also met many students from other countries; not just from China or Asian region. Yes, so I think, it's good for me.	I found it very diverse; includes, I would say, almost every nationality. And, I think, that's really interesting because you can communicate with people from different backgrounds and we can recognise, you know, their culture. It is really different from my own culture, so I would say, that's a valuable experience for me. Not just Western culture or Asian culture; there is other minority cultures so I would say, that's really interesting. Okay, and you mentioned that there are lots of students from lots of different nationalities in the classroom and that's good for drawing on each other's experiences. Could you give me an	How could that gap be fixed? It's a big question. N Yes, I think, what is really useful for education, not only for seminars is, I think, encouragement like reward, like saying some positive thing to their students and not... who are quiet or reluctant to speak. I think, it is really useful. N From the tutor? N Yes, from the tutor expert [?] because people like reward, encouragement. They, even though they're not doing well but they need encourage to do further, to move further. So, I think, encouraging them will be practical or reward. I don't know if, for practical reward or just speaking alone but, I think, reward is good. for international students,	we will organise a little activity, going out together or have a chit-chat, eat together, or cooking together. Yes, that kind of event will help the, to reduce that kind of feeling	So, I think, more Chinese students in [name of programme] who have seen that so it can suggest that this industry is really popular in China. As well as that, many Chinese students study overseas, through agencies, you know, that, and many agencies will recommend [name of institution and programme] as it sounds interesting. You know, the ranking is really important, from Chinese perspective so, actually, [name of institution and programme] have high-ranking, like, two or three or sometimes first and they're mostly on media ranking.	And, yes, I think, of one point: The academic requirements actually varies from countries; you know, we have different assessment system in China but we have to learn or get used to new academic assessments here. So, that would be really tough for some international students because, you know, UK colleges always give low grades, compared to other countries. So they may find it hard to accept their grades or they are worried, it's more, yes.	In seminars, I don't think that it's much, as interesting as our Asian group's activities or other group's activities because in seminars, we just talk about a topic in an academic way I think, there should be more performance in the seminar. Not just give questions and we answer it. Maybe we can think of different ways to promote the communication and encouraging students to speak of their thoughts from their bottom of heart. Mm-hmm, yes. And, I think, everyone just speaks really quietly, yes, and with the good manners, so in that way, we never can become good friends, you know, we're just classmates. We
I wanted to meet more students from other nationalities. At first, I expected more English students but after I got here, I think, other students from US or other, well, other regions from the world, of the world is good too. Secondly, I expected, I expected Western teaching methodology and I get that too, which is really different from our Chinese teaching method. And I want to explore my international horizon and	sometimes the same nationality always clusters together and, whereas you can see the improve, you can see the different, the distinction between groups and they talk about their countries and Asian students maybe talk about their own topics. Even though there are communications between groups, I think, that's superficial; we just talk some common-sense and actually, I really don't ever [xxxx], learn more from that communication	Actually, recently, I got my feedback of my essay of last term. Teacher who says encouragement to me, inspires me to study more, even I want to study at a PhD degree, further. So, I think, encouragement means a lot. Of course, they need to point out your mistakes as well, of course. Yes, but maybe in a quiet way or good manner or tell you how to do in detail, not just you are not good and		I think, this is a diverse place where you can meet different people and many different things you may have never seen before, yes. And never felt many.	I think, still, academic problem is the first problem that upsets most international students. They worry about they cannot get through the exam or they cannot get their degrees, yes. The problems that surrounded study like preparing exams, writing essays, getting grades and getting feedback, actually, are more important than anything else.	teacher should give more time for students to express their own thoughts like assign [xxxx] work but not really in an academic way like in, from your own experience or from some interesting examples. If a student can present interesting examples, that will attract everyone's attention and lead to interesting discussion. I heard from other seminars, not my own seminar, that my classmates said, they

Appendix 7

Main phase of the project indicative interview schedule

Indicative interview schedule:

- Why did you come to the UK?
- How is it being a Chinese student in the UK?
- Can you tell me about three things which are not so good about your experience and three that are very good?
- Who do you get most help / support from (both personally and academically)? (Colleagues? Co-nationals? Housemates? Significant others? Individually?)
- Are your tutors sympathetic to the fact that Chinese students have a different approach to learning?
- How have you adapted your practices (or not)? Someone said in an interview that Chinese students taught like "stuffed ducks" – do you agree?
- How about selective adaption (i.e. adopting some new approaches but maintaining own)?
- How important to you in studying here is your level of English? How do you feel yours is? What problems does this cause you?
- Some students report being lonely. When have you ever felt like this?

- Some students feels valued and acknowledged by their tutors, but others do not.
- Some people like to get help and support from other Chinese students more than people from other places.
- Some people have felt quite lonely and not really mixed with British people.
- Some students feel being in the UK has helped them become more independent people.
- Being at [this institution] has given people new ways of thinking about the world and about learning too.
- Being a post-graduate student is different from being an undergraduate.
- Most people are concerned about their level of English.
- Some people feel that the content of their courses could make more reference to other countries and cultures.
- People have appreciated their experience here in the UK.

Appendix 8

Sample thematic analysis

EMERGENT THEMES	ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT	EXPLORATORY COMMENTS
	So, what I'm exploring is the experience of Chinese postgraduates in the UK, like yourself, so first of all I'd like you to tell me your experience of being a Chinese postgraduate in the UK.	
• Things are different • Worrying about language proficiency • Educational practices • The challenge of studying: trying hard but this is not enough / effort over ability • Negative comparison with others • Awareness of her own depression	Ok so I have been come here about… more than two months and everything is different in in my country and some things really change especially the language is the... the biggest challenge I think, and term actually the life… life… to live here is easy for me. I think it's convenient but when it comes to study you have to try to understand what the teacher talking about and try to do the long reading list and sometimes it just make me feel depressed because I just can't understand that they are talking about and …… in the seminar I can't I can't erm talk well when I am in a group with native speaker or something and sometimes they just talk a joke which I cannot understand what they are talking and that really, really depressed me	1. Sense of being different from home but no evaluation so far – just description. 2. Language already flagged up as being a major difference and the most pressing concern. 3. Notice emphasis on the student to understand not the teacher to show – and how this contrasts with what is said later about the approach in China where the teacher seems to spoon-feed. 4. Notice the use of *try* – implying that this is not successful, or at least not yet. Reflectors of Chinese perception of effort over ability? Especially when in conflict with outcomes – "trying" is not enough in the West. 5. Comparison with others, and with more proficient users of language. 6. First mention of depressive state this leads to.
	You said many different things and you've talked about English and subjects, but you think life is okay, so what… what things are different?	
• Cooking	I think, think that life is XXXX maybe you can travel to some place… interesting place and you can practise your cooking skills because I... I really think the most improvement in for these two months is the cooking skills.	7. What Tina has learnt has been about life, not her subject. She has become a better cook, not a more able or knowledgeable scholar. Start of the central theme of food throughout this discussion.
	[Laughs]	
• Cooking is a new skill • Accommodation • The challenge of studying	Yeah, yeah, so I can try the new dishes. I never cooked before, so I can now… now I can try a lot of new dishes and I can eat whatever I want to eat, yeah, and erm... I think the food here is acceptable and just […] erm yeah… yeah I think the room I have now is also okay, so… so I think live here is good and if I can just cook and eat dishes and to visit some interesting place, it's very fine for me. But when it comes to you have to study and get improvement it's complicated.	8. This is a new experience and an important life skill – one which everyone else can do but Tina only learnt in the UK. 9. Accommodation is fine. 10. Studying and getting better at the subject is a challenge.
	Ok	
	And difficult.	
	What makes it complicated, do you know?	
• Worrying about language proficiency	Yes, I think the most [complicated] point is language, and it's the style because in China we don't have seminar, we just have a teacher told the key points of the	11. Language is the biggest challenge. 12. Academic practices are a challenge too – no seminars in China. There is a focus on reproducing knowledge, not creating it. This

• Educational practices • The process of getting used to a new style of learning and teaching	things and sometimes they may review and keep talking about one specific important thing again and again so you can get it even if you missed it in the first time, but now its.. I think everything is too fast for me, because I don't think I… erm… get used to… to the study style yet and semester is just over so everything is just too quick for me.	contrast is a hock – a sense that here studying is too fast – but perhaps it's more about expectations of both sides? *13. Get used to – is it viewed as a process?*
	Uh huh	
• Challenges in studies are leading to emotional issues • Depression has no cause • Loss of confidence	And that makes me feel sometimes feel very sad like… two weeks ago and I feel very… very depressed with no reason, I just don't… I just lose confident and think I can't do anything well and… I just want to stay in my small room and watch the video TV series like *Friends*.	14. Challenges in studies are leading to emotional difficulties. Note use of depressed overtly. The lit seems to indicate that Chinese people tend not to be that aware of emotional / mental issues and somatise, but in fact Tina is quite overt about her mental state.
	Uh huh	
• People are kind but she doesn't want to interact.	And I just don't want to talk to anybody even if … I have foreign roommates, and they are kind but at that time I just even don't want to say hello to them and ask how is you day, yeah, so that was a hard week I have been through.	15. Typical symptom of depression – withdrawal into one's own personal space and avoiding interaction with others.
	And you said that as two weeks ago. Do you feel the same now or is it a bit better?	
• Improvement in her wellbeing is "by chance"	Yeah, yeah it's a little better because maybe … by chance I got a ticket to a concert	16. By chance – so the first step to feeling better was out of her hands. Confucian sense of destiny and inability to influence one's own situation?
	Uh huh	
• Importance of other co-nationals? • Successful people have more experience.	And I come there alone with a... in in Saturday night and there met a pretty girl there who is also graduated from my Chinese undergraduate study. Yes, at university, and she had been here for more than six years.	17. Bumping into an old friend made her feel better. Mot her flatmates who make her feel better. 18. Notice how others are always better / have greater experience than Tina.
	Uh huh	
• Other people have better jobs/lives.	And she… she… told me she worked in the BBC	19. As above – this friend has a prestigious job (or, at least, works for a renowned organisation).
	Uh huh	
• Other people are better than she is	And I think, yeah, it's… it's fine to have a talk with her and I think maybe I lost my confidence to stay here and study as well as my classmates but if she... she can do it, maybe I can do it too.	20. Inspired by her former classmate. (Was the former classmate not very good – if she can do it, I can.?)
	Ah. That's very good. Did you talk to her about your concerns, your challenges	
• Language proficiency • Others are better	Yeah, yeah, she told me because she also learned the media and generally the … and she… she… she learned is... she works more harder than me because the language requirement for her major is erm 5.5 in IELTS test and what I have only 7, yeah. So she told me she's only the Chinese in her class and something is also difficult but she can't [xxxx] so, yeah, so I think maybe she… she… she told me she has an English friend and… and they .. and he said erm… erm they are one time they should he feel very difficult in choosing one course but after he get	21. Intelligence and ability to deal with studies and life in general is related to language ability again – this girl has one well because she is IELTS 5.5 (not just because she has a good degree or is well suited to the job). 22. Negative comparison with this friend.

		through that class he find it's really helpful for her… for his career and so that is so she said I should insist and try to get used to it.		
		Okay, and this was an English friend of hers?		
		Yeah		
		And he had similar problems, is that right?		
•	Language proficiency	Actually she said that because she started two courses… postgraduate courses in England, so the first one she said she's play… play hard and don't work that much [laughs] and the second, yeah, yeah. I think maybe because she stayed in England for a long time so she may get used to studying, staying here, so the language is not as difficult as I … yeah	23.	Length of time in the UK equated with academic and linguistic success – as Tina is only here for one year, she may be thinking that she will never be able to achieve the same level of knowledge or ability.
		Ok, ok. You mentioned seminars before. Are seminars and how seminars are different from your experience in China, so what is difficult in seminars here?		
• • •	She is unable to keep up with pace of classes Others are better Lack of understanding	I think maybe because the seminar here, the teacher give you a topic and you can get a group to discuss it, but I think the first [reason] is, I maybe don't get the pace of the study, so I miss at the first time to come up with some new ideas and the … my group, my classmates come up with some and they talk about it and I just can't understand what they're talking about, so it's hard for me to … to join in, so I can only listen and try to get some keywords from it and try to understand what they're talking about, not in relation to … to give all my own ideas, yeah.	24. 25.	Her inability to contribute in seminars is because of the pace of the classes, not because of her own academic ability. *I can't understand* – but notice how the others can, and again she is the weak link in the class.
		And what made it difficult for you to understand? Was it English, or the subject, or both?		
•	Cultural differences between Europe and China	I think it's both. First I think maybe what we are interested in is not like some... like European people are interested in. They are mainly interested in history or culture or maybe it's just have some diversity so, so...	26. 27.	Problems are due to both language problems, and substantive knowledge. Background of students is what makes for success? European students are "closer" to the subject matter.
		And what are Chinese people interested in?		
		Yeah [laughs] I think different people have different interests. I don't know about others but I am interested in maybe … yeah… music, and art or something. Yeah.		
		Ok. Very interesting. Erm, the difficulties that you had, have your friends had similar difficulties?		
•	Others are better	Yeah, but actually I… in my opinion [laughs] I think my friends are all better than me.	28.	Friends are all better than me.
		Uh huh		
• •	Language proficiency Others have better language	Yeah. I have a roommate in undergraduate study, she take the language course here for 13 months and she still feels, feels the same, and changed the course to another subject and … but when I met her, I felt like just she have a	29.	Compatriots with better language ability make her feel nervous.

	<mark>great improvement in oral English and that makes me feel very … nervous.</mark>		
	Mmmm		
• Language proficiency • Change of subject	Yeah. Yeah. And... and she, I think, because <mark>I have the IELTS test for 7.0 and I... I am beyond the requirement but I still think my English is not that great,</mark> and I … I am a little regret not to take the language course but I just don't think my classmates may be Chinese but some of them studied undergraduate in here, so the English is better than me, and some… yeah, <mark>because my undergraduate major is Engineering, yeah, I changed for Arts now.</mark>	30. 31.	Even though she has exceeded the entry requirement, she still feels challenged and not up to the right language level. Her bachelor's background was engineering so she has a lack of prior knowledge which classmates have.
	Ah, very interesting		
• Language proficiency • Other are better	Yeah, yeah, so… so lots of my classmates were from the Arts in undergraduate, and <mark>some even learned English major so I am sure they are better than me, so that makes me feel bad.</mark>	32.	Some colleagues studied English at UG level, so they're better than she is. Is there a possibility that she feels she has made the wrong choice, either for UG study, or in choosing CMCI as a PG route?
	So your background in Engineering is different from lots of your fellow students whose background is in Humanities or Digital Humanities. Okay, that's very interesting. Erm, so before you came to England, when you were in China, what did you expect studying here would be like?		
• Comparison with life in China • Experience is harder than she imagined	Erm… actually, at that time I think the future is all very good. <mark>I think the life is better than in China</mark>, and I can have a lot of foreign friends, and I can get used to living here quickly but now I think it's kind of hard because I .. <mark>I have friends who were studying undergraduate in a foreign language and they talked with me and said its hard but I just don't know how hard it is, and now I understand [laughs]</mark>	33. 34.	UK is not all bad news – she prefers being here than in China. Prior to choosing the UK she was not fully aware of just what the challenges might be of being here, despite being told by friends who were studying abroad.
	Mmmm. Have any things happened that you didn't expect? Any good things?		
	Good things?		
	Yeah.		
• Good things are due to luck • Language proficiency • Success due to luck not ability	Erm. Actually, I think I … Actually, <mark>I think I am a lucky girl because I don't expect my English can get that high level, I think it's... it's lucky for me to get that IELTS score so I don't think that</mark> … that .. Is because of my ability is good but because I am lucky. I applied to this university by myself, not the agent and erm, I applied very late as my classmates, as my roommates in undergraduate, she has already had a … applied for all the universities she wanted to go to by her agent but the agent say that I just start to write my personal statement, yeah, so everything is just all time for me. <mark>Yeah, so I feel very lucky I can go here</mark> and when I applied for the accommodation it's about nearly the end of August and … and … and when I came here I know that I .. <mark>The only reason I can get my accommodation is because some of the people failed in language test and they</mark>	35. 36. 37.	Any good things that happen are due to luck – the god ILETS score was lucky, with an examiner who took pity on her. Feels lucky to be in the UK as she applied late, and her place was only confirmed because other, better people failed the language ability condition. KEY QUOTE: lucky, not able.

		<mark>score … they withdrew their application, so I have the chance to go. Yeah, so everything I have is only mine because I am lucky and not because I am strong or I am good to deal with it.</mark>		
		Uh huh. You have an IELTS 7 which is very good...		
•	IELTS score was lucky	Yeah, actually, because, yeah… yeah I actually take three times of IELTS test, and the… the Speaking module, the first time is 5 and the second time is 5.5, <mark>but the third time the kind person gave me 7 points,</mark> so… so that makes .. And the second and the third time just about ten days...	38.	Good IELTS result was due to a kind examiner, not her ability.
		Ten days between them?		
•	IELTS score was lucky	Yeah, yeah, so I think maybe, <mark>maybe it's not because my speaking is good, it's just because maybe the kind person like the person like me,</mark> or they think I try hard so they just give me that [laughs] so I don't think … I never think it's because my English is good, and when I come here, it's come true, so I really think it's not because my English is good.	39.	Result was due to kindness.
		<mark>**Okay. And when you think about yourself compared to other Chinese people in class, do you think you're equal to them? Better? Worse?**</mark>		
•	Others are better	<mark>Yeah, I think it's worse.</mark>	40.	Worse than other people in the class.
		Can you give me an example?		
•	Nearly giving up	They have a... a formative assessment last month and although I'm not try hard to do that because yeah, [xxxx] I find this thing is hard I … it's [xxxx] in here, <mark>I almost want to give up and I have to keep that work until the deadline</mark>		
		Uh huh		
		Yeah, and I just finish that ………… I... I... I handed up without... without to check it whether the grammar is okay or something because there is no time for me to do that, so the score of it is... is not that good		
		Okay		
•	Self-perception = lazy	Is only C, yeah, yeah, but my classmates … one of my classmates in Chinese, he got 70… more than 70 points, so <mark>I think everyone is try hard to get a high score but for me I think I'm lazy, poor girl [laughs]</mark>	41.	Self-perception as lazy. But this can be changed, so why is this a good attribute to talk about?
		[laughs]		
		Yeah		
		So why do you think your colleague got 70?		
		Yeah, the teacher give him.		
		Yeah. Why did he get 70 do you think?		
• •	Others are better Effort / ability	I think it's because <mark>he has a better understanding of the topic, and he had good skills, and he make a lot of preparation before he write his before he write his essay</mark>	42.	Effort and skill are attributes other people have, but not Tina.
		Ok, so you know what to do next time?		
•	Challenge of dealing with expectations	Yes, but <mark>sometimes that makes me feel depressed, and I don't want to do it again, so I just want to get away from that difficult things. I don't want to face it and</mark>	43. 44.	She appears to have some challenges in dealing with requirements and expectations. Instead of working, she wants to run away from the problem.

•	Wants to run away from demands	<mark>overcome it.</mark> It sometimes makes me have [xxxx]		
		So you put it behind you?	45.	
•	Expectations on her	Yeah, yeah, and <mark>I know it's not possible to ignore it and don't do that,</mark> but I just think if I play before maybe I can I can be happy for a moment.	46.	But she knows this is not possible. Tension between personal feelings and the requirements / constraints of formal study.
		Okay. I think that's very important, yeah. Erm. I'm going to give you some different situations to look at and I'd like you to tell me what you think your friend in each situation should do. Okay. What the problem is, and what she should do. So, first of all, your friend tells you she's finding it difficult to get used to the way people interact and relate to each other in the UK. What would you say to a friend who said that to you?		
		Yeah. Actually a lot of friends told me that.		
		Okay		
•	Cultural differences between China and UK	Yeah. And … I think … what I responding is "<mark>me too</mark>"!	47.	Admits to finding the interaction and ways of dealing with people interpersonally in the UK rather difficult.
		Uh huh		
		Yeah, and maybe just share the experience which I go through and how hard I find to get used to it too, and… but at last I will tell her.		
		And when you found it difficult, did you talk to anyone about it?		
•	Importance of contact with home / parents	Yeah. <mark>I don't talk to friends in here but in… in China. And I talk to my parents.</mark>	48.	Its friends and parents who she talks to about her experiences and concerns.
		Uh huh		
• •	Sense of being a burden? Support from others / interpersonal relationships	Because <mark>I don't think I can bring the bad mood to the friends.</mark> I... I have here, because they may not care about it, and they may… I may make them feel not happy. But <mark>I think the best friends and my parents will understand me and give me some, erm… some advice to go and get through it.</mark>	49. 50.	Sense of burdening friends if she talks about her worries and concerns. However, best friends and parents can be helpful when she's in a stressful situation.
		Okay, so what did you say to your friends and family about interacting with people in the UK?		
•	Language proficiency	Yeah. I told you <mark>my English is not that good, so I can't to talk about... talk about some deep things</mark>. Only we can just talk about wh... How is your day, and did you eat much, or something like that, but not like emotions or ac... Academic things. So, yeah. And I also feel very hard to find like find an internship or something I need. The internship may need some guy like me that is not good at English and also need them with [xxxx]	51.	English level prevents her accessing better support from people here
		And what did you friends and family say to you? What advice did they give?		
•	Others have this feeling	<mark>My friends just say everything will be fine, and just insist to study and try your best, because some of my friends also</mark>	52.	Problems do not seem confined just to Tina – she acknowledges that lots of people feel the same as she dos but seem to want to cheer

	study abroad, and they… they are also going through a difficult mood.		each other up and help each other along. A sense of con-national solidarity.
	Uh huh		
• Support from parents	Yeah, and my parents may ... they told me don't… don't… don't mind to... it doesn't matter if you are not good at English but you have the … willing to make friends with others and with your [xxxx] emotion	53.	Parents are supportive.
	Uh huh. So they gave you lots of support?		
	Yeah.		
	And did you contact them by… How do you keep in touch with your friends and family in China?		
• Contact through social media	Oh, there are some social media, like we have QQ and we can use the FaceTime to talk.	54.	Contact is maintained through social media.
	Okay. And how often do you talk to them?		
• Frequency of contact with others	Erm, about friends, maybe sometimes I need support I will contact them, or sometimes they will call me up, and for FaceTime to... with my parents, I think it's once per week.		
	Uh huh		
	Yeah		
	So you keep in regular touch?		
	Yeah, because I need to contact them but life in here is busy, so… and they are there are there are some time issues; yeah… we will have to pick a perfect time to do that.		
	Okay. Okay. And it's nice to talk to them.		
	Yeah. Yeah, we can know each other, how is the day going, are you okay or are you happy, yeah		
	Okay. That's very interesting, thank you. What about this one: Your friend tells you she's finding it difficult to life in the UK such as food, the weather, and customs. Have any of your friends talked about those things?		
Cooking	Yeah, yeah. But I just say, come here and I will cook for you [laughs]. I invite a lot of friends to come here and I cook dishes for them, yeah	55.	Return to the sense that cooking is good for the soul.
	You've mentioned cooking before. Is that something you enjoy doing?		
Cooking	Yes. Mainly because I never do this before, so it really make me happy to find out I can do it, yeah, I can do it better and better	56.	New-found skills in cooking seem to be very rewarding, perhaps these are a substitute for academic skills and social interaction? "I went to the UK and learned to cook"?
	That's great		
Cooking	I think it's easier for me to cook than study, and that makes me feel happy and confident, so that's why I like to do it.	57.	See previous point
	And does your mother give you advice on cooking?		
	No! She's not good at cooking either, but she has seen a lot of people cook, so she thinks I have the talent to do that		
	Impressive! So you'll have to cook for her when you go home.		
	Yes, and she say I have a great improvement because she could not imagine a few month ago that I could cook and that I could live individual. In		

		fact, I actually live in accommodation before, in high school and university, but she think I am being far in a strange country and that really makes me feel … makes her feel I have a great improvement		
		Okay		
		And besides, I am a little younger than my classmates. I am 20 years now and… and my classmates always 22 or 24, yeah, so she's… she … she think it's enough for me to do in that level, but I was always want to have a good improvement, so I'm not satisfied with my situation, but she always told me she is proud of me and that's enough		
		That's very nice to hear.		
		Yeah		
		How does that make you feel?		
•	Paying back parents	That's make that actually makes me feel I actually need to be better to… to give something back to them…	58.	Need to reward parents and pay back for everything they gave her.
		Okay. So is there pressure to make them happy?		
•	Pressure to make parents happy	Yeah.	59.	There is pressure to make parents happy.
		That's interesting. What about this one? Your friend tells you she's not eating well and cannot sleep. Her body feels very tired. What would you..? Has that happened?		
•	Somatisation	Actually… not, because a lot of friends like me is getting used to … erm… play or work at night and to work late, and… and I think it's .. it's a familiar situation in my friends I call, so I think, I think it's not happened, and if somebody told me that, then maybe I will comfort them and talk them to have a… take a good rest and start…	60.	Lots of friends also seem to suffering from insomnia and poor appetite.
		Okay, that's good, thanks. Your friend tells you she's worried about here academic progress, her studies.		
•	Academic progress	Yeah, that's when I say "Me too"! [laughs] yeah, actually, I just mention it at lunch today to one of my friends and after we share our emotions and we have a conclusion, it's that every Chinese in here have the worry about it, so I'm not alone, so we just don't… don't… it… it… it may be a problem but it's not as big as I think it was.	61.	Tina has concerns about her academic progress.
•	Others have similar concerns		62.	Tina shares her concerns with her friends, who seem to have similar concerns.
•	Sharing problems helps		63.	Realisation that others are in the same boat means that the intensity of the problem is diminished.
		Okay, that's interesting.		
•	Cultural differences	Yeah, because… I have a lot of classmates in Chinese, so even if I am not good at English, I'm still better than if all of the classmates are European students, yeah, so maybe I'm not that … in that bad situation.	64.	Again, these seems to be a tension between Chinese and European students in the same class.
		Do you think European students worry about the same things?		
•	Language proficiency	Actually, no, I don't think so, because I am bad. I am bad, I don't think... I think nobody's English can be worse than me.	65.	Her English is the worst in the class, she feels.
		Really?		

		Yes. So I… so I… Maybe they have worry about it, but in a different level. They… they can listen and con… communication with people that for me is a big problem, so …		
		You said before that, erm… being in a seminar is different and often in China the teacher keeps repeating important points until you understand. Do you think that's different from European students, or the same, or…?		
•	Cultural differences	I think… I think European students may get used to the study skills like… like here, but, and then there's another point, because in China we, we study in Chinese not in English, so we are not that get used to learning in English.	66.	The European and UK approaches to education are seen as being similar in philosophy.
		Learning in English.		
		But they maybe, I think maybe they are in English, because one of my… my roommates who is from Ban… Bang…		
		Bangladesh?		
•	Different educational styles	Yes, Bangladesh, she told me she taught… her teacher taught them in English, so it think maybe they have already get used to this style, but for me it's new, so it's different.	67. 68.	Lacking critical thinking / world knowledge? Tina has not considered why the student from Bangladesh was taught in English. Conflation of language and educational philosophy.
		Ok. Do you think the teacher could do anything to make it better?		
		Teacher?		
		Yes, for you.		
• •	Different educational requirements Access to teachers	Erm… I don't know. I think the style here, you have to study by yourself, and the teacher just mention it and they give you the slides and hand-outs, you have to study after class for a long time. Mmmm... Yeah. But I think maybe for me erm, if the teacher had more time to... with me, and if... if they can mention some key point it will be helpful.	69. 70.	Being an independent student and studying autonomously is a challenge. Access to teachers' time would make the situation better.
		Okay, when you say "with me" do you mean talking 1-1 like this?		
		Yeah.		
		So more time to ask questions to the teacher?		
•	Face	Yeah, yeah. Because sometimes in with a lot of people you are not that … have not the courage to raise the question… Whether my question is silly or something like that, whereas face to face it doesn't.	71.	Asking questions in plenum is stressful, but asking 1-1 is fine (less loss of face?)
		And do you ever ask questions in seminars?		
		Erm…. No. I think… No.		
		Why not?		
•	Face	Yeah, because I can't catch everything, so I don't know what questions should I ask, and sometimes [xxxx] I ask these questions, I was afraid what if they can't understand what I am talking about, and what if when they understand what I am talking about but I can't understand the answer of them, so I was afraid to…	72.	Again, language ability appears to be impacting on ability to engage with the study process.
		And why wouldn't they understand you?		
		Why..?		
		You said you'd be scared they wouldn't understand you. Why?		

• Language proficiency	Because I'm not confident with my English, and sometimes I don't have the faith, so I don't expect others can understand me, because I… even myself, I don't … I don't believe in myself.	73. Language proficiency again, coupled with self-belief and confidence.
	Are you the same in Chinese, when you were studying in China?	
	I think… I think… I think in Chinese I can ask questions because at least I can express what I think, but now is difficult	
	Uh huh. And the Chinese students ask questions in class?	
	Yeas. Most of them are study here for undergraduate study, and yeah, some active classmates also raise questions but it's not that xxxx and in seminars, they are in the same condition with me, yeah, yeah. Rarely talk and only listen. They may sometimes raise a question but it's very little	74. There is a pattern of behaviour which is typical of Chinese learners. Is this learned helplessness?
	And what about European students, do they ask questions?	
• Cultural differences	Yes, they are very active, and they talk just like chat and they can also understand some humour, and laugh, and we can just look at them and we don't know what happened.	75. Comparison between European and Chinese students.
	Ok, and how does that make you feel?	
	Embarrassed!	76. She seems to know that this is not good.
	Ok.	
	And I don't know, should I smile? What should I … smile? The reason is that I smile, but if I don't smile I don't feel that am in that group, so it's embarrassing.	
	Ok. And does the teacher ever make jokes that you don't understand?	
• Language proficiency	Yeah, often [laughs]	77. Linguistic issues cause problems – unfamiliarity with idiomatic / humorous language is causing problems.
	And how does that make you feel?	
• Personal Tutor • Lack of self-confidence	Embarrassed. I told this once to my Personal Tutor, and I said that his support means a lot to me, and he said that my confidence should come from myself, from inside, But I think for myself now, my confidence only comes throughout others' respect, or pride for me. Yeah, because if you told me you have a great improvement, yeah, I'd believe, but if I told myself I don't believe it.	78. Personal Tutor seems to be shrugging his shoulders – it's the job of the student to deal with problems; the PT is not responsible for helping her, or for building her confidence for her. 79. Individualism not working or her – she believes she's improving only when others tell her.
	That's interesting. So, in this term do you feel you have improved?	
• Expectations not met yet	Yes, I feel that I have improved but just a little, not that huge, so it's not like what I imagined. I think… I think I may get used to study soon, but it's not like this. I have improvement, I know that, but it's just below my expectation, so…	80. This experience has not matched her expectations (yet).
	Okay, that's very interesting. Okay. That's English, we've talked a lot about English, what about that one. Your friend tells you she's missing her family and friends So you talked about your family and friends, So if your friend says she was missing, them, what would you say?	

	Erm, maybe that you can go back to China in holiday to see them, or you can talk to them. And I will show them the feeling when I first leave home and study in a strange city… me, I think maybe helpful for her.		
	Because you've had a lot of experience of this yourself?		
	Yeah. Yeah.		
	So that's something you feel confident talking to other people about, and giving them advice?		
	Yeah because I have already [xxxx] and I think I am happy [xxxx]		
	And how about you? When you came to London, did you miss your family and friends?		
• Relationship with parents	Well, it's fine. When I talk to my friends in China who also studied abroad, and I talk to them, "Did you feel…? What did make you feel the most sad?" it's out parents. Because we have friends and we have a new environment to get adjust, so every day for us is new. And so I think it's just… it's just a happy situation, but for our parents, they miss us, and they have to keep to... in the same place, and they don't have something new to attract their attentions, so they only thing they have maybe is missing us.	81.	She doesn't feel lonely but feels guilty about leaving her parents who have to go about their-day to day like without here. She's in an enviable position as she is having new and exciting experiences.
	Okay and…		
	I think they may be, they may be more missed that us.		
	That must be a difficult feeling?		
• Relationship / duty to parents	Yeah, yeah, I think actually, when I was in high school I really missed my family, but in university I think I got used to live alone and make friends and to... To travel to a lot of different place and have fun. That makes me feel happy, and sometimes when I have to come back to home, I… I will think, "Oh, I'd rather stay here with my friends, sometimes", but when I come back to home, I will miss my family and I don't want to go back to university. So I think it's… yeah… yeah… with friends it's okay.	82.	The pull between friends and duty to parents.
	Uh huh		
	And now I think it's… I like to make friends, but sometimes different have different functions for me.		
	Uh huh		
• Sharing emotions • Depression • Being alone	Yeah, some may be just go out and have dinner, and some may play with them, but only a few friends can talk about some feelings or emotions, so… I… I'm kind of… I don't want to… to… to get new friends on purpose, but I'm kind of like to go somewhere or go shopping or go somewhere alone and sometimes I may know a lot of interesting strangers. Yeah… and that makes me… yeah. Maybe I'm depressed and I go the concert alone, and I meet a stranger who gives me a lot of help. That makes me feel that life is better than I think, so that makes me	83. 84. 85.	Not all friends are suitable for talking about feelings; need to match the conversation to the person. Sense of feeling depressed and doing things alone. She's happy spending time alone – is this the same in China?

		feel very happy, so I… yeah… some of friends may feel lonely, and they *have* to go shopping to go to a place or eat in a restaurant with friends or company, but sometimes for me, I'm happy to go there alone		
		Uh huh		
		And I can listen to music and know some strangers.		
		Have you always been like that, or is this a thing in England?		
•	Personality	[….] Erm, actually, I think my personality is like this, but in China, I have a best friend, so I'm happy with that, but now I find… find a person who likes like that because it takes time to get to know a person and become best friends. But now I don't have it, so I prefer to be … with … alone. I enjoy my time, because it's quiet. I don't to try to think about some topic to talk with you … if we are walking together. It's embarrassing is we don't… don't talk, so I think alone means freedom, and I think it's quiet and sometimes, erm… it makes me feel peaceful.	86.	She shows a level of self-awareness – she recognises that this solitary approach to like in the UK is not about the UK *per se* but more about who she is.
		Okay, You mentioned before that you… you don't talk about … or people don't talk about their emotions with everybody, they have a few close friends that they talk to. Do you have that in London, or do you have close friends in China?		
•	Being a burden	[xxxx] I don't know, but I used to be a child… if I was happy, you can see the happy face, and if I'm not happy you can see I'm angry or something, But I used to talk to everyone about my bad feelings, but then I feel… yeah… somebody don't care about you. They don't want... they don't want to listen to your feeling, and sometimes they may laugh with you. Yeah, yeah, when you don't… yeah, yeah… it's like I talk about it and you listen and you may talk… talk this to another person and laughed at me. So I think maybe I should not talk to everyone about my emotions, yeah. Only for the friends and family that can understand and really cares about me.	87.	Talking about negative feelings may be cathartic for Tina but she is aware that not everyone wants to hear about her problems, and that she may drive people away if she goes on too much.
		Mmmm, those very close friends?		
		Yeah		
		Ok, you mentioned before that you felt depressed and sad. What did you do?		
•	Depression	Yeah, just stay in bed and eat, sleep and watch the TV series. I watched *Friends* again and again in that whole week.	88.	Experience of being depressed.
		Ok. And why did you feel depressed? Because you're worried about your English and your studies?		
•	Language proficiency	Yeah, my English and my studies. And I need to find an internship because I joined the internship module, but I still don't have a perfect CV to apply for a job, and my classmates are all ambitious, and they are active in finding internships, but that	89.	Causes of depression where her level of English and the development of her studies.
•	Lack of ambition?		90.	She is slipping behind here workmates because she is not sufficiently ambitious (or interested?).
•	Agency?			

		<mark>makes me feel very … nervous. I'm afraid that I can't find it, and I'm afraid that no-one would want me to work for him. Yeah, so that makes me feel nervous.</mark> And at that time I just don't want to have to do that but try to ignore it.		
		And does the College help you, or do you need to find your own?		
		Huh?		
		Does the College help you find an internship?		
•	Personality insights	Yeah, they have some lectures, and they post some opportunities. But for me it's still… <mark>I'm a little lazy</mark> [laughs]	91.	Self-awareness – she knows she's lazy.
		[laughs]		
•	Wants to make problems go away	• I know I should modify my CV for a specific opportunity of each job but I just don't want to do that 'cos it takes a lot of time, and sometimes I think about it and I just don't want to do it. I want to do the internship, but <mark>I just want to pay… pay… pay the person to try to… to get it, I want… I want to work there but I don't want to try to get it</mark>	92.	Is willing to pay instead of work. Is this common? Does it reflect the current neo-liberal Chinese view of the world?
		• *[laughs]*		
		• I know it's wrong but…		
		• *I understand, I do understand*		
•	Personality	Maybe everyone has this feeling, but they can control themselves to work hard for that but for me, <mark>maybe I'm too kind to myself. I allow myself to not do that, only do what I like or what I think.</mark>	93.	Self-awareness again – she's good at identifying her character traits.
		Okay, and why do you think you don't want to do that?		
		Because… I… maybe because, erm… if I want, I do this [xxxx] I want to be perfect, but sometimes it's hard for me to do it in a perfect situation, so I know how painful it is, how… how hard for me to persuade myself to do it again and again, to modify. But my mind kept to tell me we have to do it in perfect time, so I know it's hard for me to... to go through this process.		
		And are you the same in different parts of your life as well?		
•	Personality	<mark>Yeah, everything, I want to be perfect. I can do it as I expect, but it have to pay a lot of time to do that, so sometimes I'm not willing to do that</mark>, as… once I have to do this, I will push myself to do that so, sometimes I think maybe I don't push myself, I can ignore it and I can get through that hard time.	94.	Perfectionism – is this maladaptive perfectionism?
		That's difficult! Why do you want to be perfect?		
•	Personality	I don't know, <mark>I just want to be perfect.</mark> I don't want to have to go a long way, and I don't want to make a wrong choice, and if I do this, then I want to do it as better as I can, yeah., I think maybe because my father keeps me, when I was only a child, because at that time I studied piano and Chinese calligraphy when I was only a little girl, and I have passed the highest level of the examination in China, and at	95. 96.	Perfectionism again.

		that time I was interested in piano, and I told my parents that I wanted to learn it, and my parents told me, if you want to learn it, we can bring you to a teacher and we can but a piano for you, but you have to insist and finish at the highest level of the examination, and I said Yes, so I think maybe it's a habit.		
		Ok, and when you finished at the highest level, they must have been very proud of you.		
		Yeah, but at that time I wasn't interested in it. At that time I wanted [xxxx] I had to practise again and again for one piece of music, and that makes me feel boring, so... it's like a habit, and everything I want to be perfect and I want to be the best.		
		And what would you parents say if you weren't the best? Would they be disappointed?		
•	Duty to parents	I think what's the point, because they never said you have to be the best, so in my opinion I have to be very good to repay them.	97.	Being perfect is away to replay her parents for all they have given her.
		Okay, that's very interesting, but they sound like very understanding parents.		
		Yeah they understand, and they said… but they told me, you have to try your best, but if you fail, that's okay, but for me I think I already tried my best xxxx I have to get something. I don't want the failure. The feeling of failure is not good.		
		You mentioned a moment ago the time you spent in bed eating and watching TV. Did you talk to anyone about how you felt?		
•	Personal Tutor	At the time, no. The whole week, no. After I got through that week, I told to my Personal Tutor and my parents.	98.	Her Personal Tutor's reaction to her depression was very poor – Are you ok now? Good.
		And what did your Personal Tutor say?		
		He just said… Yeah, he just asked me if I got through it, and I said yes, and he said that's fine [laughs]		
		If you felt like that again, because a week is a long time, and it's not a good feeling….		
•	Stigma of depression?	Yes, you are in a bad time, and you feel that everyone hates you, and when you walk in the street you think that everyone has a not good look at you and that makes me feel really bad. But I just don't want to make my parents worried about me, and I don't want to talk with my friends, and my friends here, so I have to... I just hide this feeling by myself. Actually, it's kind of lonely, and, yeah… So…	99.	Shame / stigma / fear of disclosing her situation to others.
		Do you feel better now?		
•	Metaphor / idiom	Yes, at that time I really feel that I need… How to say? An angel. To help me.	100.	Help would not come from within – externalisation of the illness.
			101.	NB no idiomatic language apart from this.
		An angel to help you? Okay.		
•	Being a burden	If someone could listen to me and give me some advice, that would be fine, but I don't want to bother my parents, so…	102.	Doesn't want to burden parents

		You now that at [this university] there are people you can talk to who can give you advice?		
•	Language proficiency	Yes, but I can't express myself very well. If I can talk in Chinese, that will be fine, because I can express what I want to say, but in English, maybe when I want to make an appointment with you to talk about this feeling, I have to look up some words in the dictionary and know how… how... how I can express this, it's not that freedom for me to talk about it	103.	Even her personal mental health is governed by her level of English and her perception of her ability to communicate effectively.
		In future if you do need to talk about this, there are professionals, and there is a Chinese speaker.		
		Yeah, I think there is some couns… couns…		
		Counselling?		
•	Counselling	Yeah, counselling office. Maybe I can get help. But maybe, I think that what they work for is someone really in a bad mood, but I think I'm not in that level, so whether it's suitable for me to talk to them… yeah. I think maybe they may think it's a waste of time for somebody like me because they may help some people who want to suicide or something, yeah, but I'm just … just not feeling very well but it's not a big problem for me.	104.	Counselling is for people with really big problems, not for her.
		I think they want to help everybody, so… if you feel bad they're very good at helping people if they need an angel. They're very good at that, and they do have Chinese speakers specially for people who want to speak in Chinese… so if you need to, do remember that.		
•	Counselling	Yeah, I used to talk to a counsellor in China.	105.	There seems to be some prior experience of counselling.
		Uh huh.		
•	Counselling	It's… It's... It's an officer in my university and I talk with him… her for four years, yeah, the whole undergraduate study, and we almost meet once per week and she really helped me a lot to understand… Sometimes I just wanted someone to hear what I'm talking about. I think that may be helpful.		
		Can you tell me what things you talked about?		
•	Counselling	Yeah, sometimes I just not feeling good, I'm feeling angry about something or someone, or maybe I can't deal with my classmates or roommates, yeah… some problems. Just little problems but I'm not feeling very well, so I talked to her, and it was helpful for me to get it down, yeah.		
		To... to… to talk about it and feel better?		
		Yeas. I could abandon this feeling and keep working...		
		Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?		
•	Counselling	Erm… no… I don't think so [laughs] Yes! I think it's really a bit chance for me to talk to another person in the university. Actually, I think there's strange thing, because… our roommate – I have three	106.	Talking to someone from outside her milieu has been beneficial for her. The therapeutic nature of research?

		roommates, one is Chinese and two is English and one from Bangladesh and one is from France – and we… we.. we go to the baker Street, the Holmes Museum together last month, and we really have fun, and the other day, I have to talk to them in English, so I practice English again and again, and I… I feel like my English has a good improvement after that day, but after that day I am in a bad mood, and not even English… I… I can't... I really cannot talk fluently in Chinese! I don't know why! Maybe because I talked too much and then they saw I … [xxxx] person. So I don't know, but after that, I fell into a bad mood	
		Okay	
		I don't know why?	
		And that was the beginning of your bad week?	
• Depression	Yeah, I thought maybe it would be a good improvement, both in our relationship and in my English, but I just don't know what happened.	107. Depression has not clear onset or cause.
		That's very interesting.	
		Yeah	
		I think… maybe it's life is up and life is down and it's one of those things?	
• Cultural differences • Others are better	Actually, to be honest, another feeling that I often think … European friends or classmates... they talk and think like adults, but for me, I think I'm like a child.	108. European students are adults; she (and other Chinese students, by extension?) are children.
		Really? Wh... why do you think that is?	
• Language proficiency	I think… some of them may have worked before and then come back to study, and some people just like their major, and they are more… knowledgeable, and something, than me, and for me, I just think I'm weak and I can't deal with English, not even the study. Yeah, and I always feel bad. Sometimes just because somebody may… just... I just feel… I may think a lot, and sometimes I just… I think I am too sentimental, yeah, and too emotional, so I think I'm like a child, and their nature, they know how to deal with friendships or relationships, but for me I think it's like a mess. The only thing I can do is to treat somebody [xxxx] but I don't know whether there is some skill in dealing with relationships and, yeah, sometimes some people very have a... a good… good... a lot of friends. They know how to deal with that but I think for me, they only thing I have is my heart, but I don't have any skills or something It's just like I was a child.	109. Again, English is the root of all issues.
		And is that the same in Chinese, or is it only when you're here in England?	
• Cultural differences • Language proficiency	I think in Chinese is not mature, but for Chinese people, they are better than me.	110. Chinese people are not mature.
		Okay. That's… wow. You said before that you said your English is improving from when you arrived until, so do you	

		think that in future you will continue to improve?	
•	Personal Tutor	Yeah, I think so, but I think that if I continue to be in a bad mood and not want to talk to anybody, that will not help my English. My… my friends told name, you have to … yeah, my Personal Tutor gave me some interesting advice, he told me he once studied abroad and he know a girl in that country, and his language in that country improved a lot because you have to talk to her every day, so I asked whether he suggest to me to date and English guy and he said, it's just a suggestion [laughs]	111. Personal Tutor suggests getting a boyfriend. It sounds like he has no real ability to deal with students' emotional issues.
		[laughs]	
•	Has tried to integrate	But I know if I want to improve my English, I have to talk to native speakers and make friends with them, but sometimes with them, I actually join a, what? A group? A social?	112. Tina has made an effort to integrate with other non-Chinese students by joining a student meditation group.
		Like a society? A social activity?	
		Yeah, it was meditation.	
		Meditation?	
•	Language proficiency	Yes. It's fun there, and a lot of people, but I am the only Chinese… no, Asian person there, and... at first they always talk… told us to know each other, to introduce ourselves and to talk about some interesting topics, but at that time I was really in a bad time because I was the only Asian in that room and besides, I'm not good at English so some people may talk to me only because they're polite.	113. She was the only Asian and her English, she felt, was the worst in the group.
		Mmm	
•	Language proficiency	And after I tell them what's my name and what I'm studying, and made me feel not interesting, or they may feel hard to understand what I am talking about, so they may talk to another person, yeah, from their own country, or to someone who has a good skills in English, so I always feel embarrassed in that society, so... so… so sometimes I… They have friends they brought. I feel embarrassed because I don't think I can make friends with them. Yeah, they applied, but I don't think they may accept a friend like me, so I think it's hard to... make friends with them, so it's hard for me to improve it.	114. She felt marginalised because her English wasn't as good; the other group members would prefer to talk to someone whose proficiency was higher. 115. This led to embarrassment and consequently she has missed the last two weeks.
		Is this a university society?	
		Yeah, yeah, yeah. Every Thursday.	
		And do you still go?	
		Yeah, yeah, but I didn't go there two weeks.	
		Mmmm	
		And thinking if a friend of yours in China, who hadn't studied in the UK, said next year I want to study in London, what advice do you give me, what advice would you say?	
•	Language proficiency	Erm… just… try to learn English as much as they can… you can, and… yeah. I think that's the most important.	116. The secret to successful PG study is learning English as much as possible.
		English?	

•	Language proficiency	Yeah, <mark>English. You have to improve it. Yeah, not only for the exam or the requirement. It's for whether you can… live in here, because some of my friends told me, the first three months you come here, if you can know a lot of persons, you may hang out with them in the next... rest of the time, but if you don't have foreign friends, the… it may never have the chance to join them, because they have largely built a team, and... And the others may not welcome to get into that team.</mark>	117. Without good English, you have limited access to social groups.
		And do you feel you've built a team?	
•	Social relationships	<mark>Noooooo!</mark>	118. Not integrated
		But you have your flatmates?	
		Yeas, but we are just not that… we… we… we are polite and friendly, but not that kind. Everyone has their own friend group and the French girl has French friends, and I think it's just friendly but not that close. I don't know whether we can be closer in time, but I hope so.	
		I hope so too. Erm, well thank you very much. You said some very, very interesting things and you've been very honest and thank you very much for that. And as I said, if you ever don't feel great, the counselling service is very good and they do have Chinese speakers. I hope it doesn't happen, but if it does there are places for you to go and talk to. Thank you. I will now type what we said and then we can meet again next week…	
		Oh, next week I'm in Germany	
		Okay, well, after Christmas we can meet, I'll send you an email of what we said.	
		Okay	
		And we can meet and you can tell me whether you agree with what we said or not.	
•	Therapeutic experience?	Actually, it's... I think… <mark>I want to express my thanks you for you, because it's also a chance for me to tell some feelings of myself, and at the same time I can practise my English.</mark>	119. The experience has been therapeutic – and a good chance to use English.

Appendix 9

Sample reflexive field notes

Title:	
Date	24.04.16
Where	Library, London
In response to	**Reflections on my place as a researching professional**
Reflection	
	Early stages, lots in the air. BUT some questions about organisation (rather than content). This fits my style – I need to have scaffold to build up around. So my questions: • I've done an initial analysis of themes emerging from the data, and from that, have put together two schematic representations (in the Chapter 7 doc) which I then go on to unpack. I'd really appreciate your perspective on this. • Ditto for the conceptual underpinning which I've put together (Chapter 3) • Some of my chapters (e.g. the Methodological choices chapter) are more descriptive than others, chronicling what I have done and giving a rationale for those choices. Is this suitable? • I find I'm putting in a lot of signposting ("In this chapter, I describe and rationalise the..."). To what extent should my "Context" chapter (which is my review of the lit) reflect the areas which emerge in the analysis? I'm going back to the lit in the light of what emerges, and am finding that very fruitful (I now know what I should look at!) – but there are areas which *haven't* emerged in the interviews which I think tower over the whole project.

Appendix 10

Interim matrix of the chapters of the thesis

Chapter	Focus	Content	Reflexive observations to make
1 1,000? Currently 2,587	Briefing / prologue (?)	• My RQs • Me as a practitioner and a researcher • How this thesis is organised and why - varying the ILMRaD format (Pat Thompson) – what is my *architecture*? • Use of reflexive observations – there are two voices in this report.	• Comment on why I have taken this organisation (my interest is always in comments and findings – later go back to find out what was found. Also true for lit review but aware that non-specialist readers may not chare my contextualise knowledge and so will welcome some contextualisation and situatedness first). • NB kept RQs at top – hope that what follows shows how this thesis addresses those questions. • Didn't initially realise that RQs are the focus on whole thing (HOW??!!!) – looking back at Reg Viva I realise that there was no explicit section, so foregrounding them here and throughout this thesis.
2 2,000? Currently 2,141	Vignettes leading to my choice of enquiry	• Some stories from the past – INCLUDE AN EXAMPLE OF BAD COMMENTS ABOUT CHINESE LEARNERS FROM TUTORS also example of TAKING COMPLAINTS OVER TUTORS' HEADS in fact, make each vignette correspond to the lit review? • Learning styles – deficit models • Some nascent RQs – at the time just ponderings. • Firming up as a potential field of enquiry – PGCAP thesis (personal tutoring – actually opened up more questions than it answered!) • Decision to do EdD. • Why EdD not PhD? • Return to RQs and show how these have evolved (from massive ones at proposal stage to refined at RS to more honed at RV to now). • Much of the work on the international student experience is about improving institution-level issues such as communication, welcome weeks, integrating students into the student union etc but almost nothing on curriculum or teaching approaches. • Often ignored and therefore need a voice. • Especially in these times of acceptable xenophobia and anti-immigrant rhetoric.	• NB what about other way – Westerners in China?
3 15,000?	Methodology	• From reconnaissance to pilot to study • The *triple* hermeneutic – LOTS ON THIS • It what ways is my purposive sampling appropriate in a	• Problems with NNS participants (just getting them to respond to recruitment – add in email reply; transcription choices; metaphor; misinterpretations linguistically etc.)