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An Investigation into Acculturative Stress A Multiple-case Study of Three UK Students Studying Abroad in China

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**An Investigation into Acculturative Stress:
A Multiple-case Study of Three UK Students Studying
Abroad in China**

Wenxuan Li

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education

**University of Bath
Department of Education**

April 2019

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I am the author of this thesis, and the work described therein was carried out by myself personally.

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For my parents, Li Yuan and Ma Li

ABSTRACT

The cross-cultural adaptation of *study abroad* (SA) students, especially those moving from Western countries to Asian contexts, is an under-researched phenomenon. In recent years, however, a notable increase in the number of students from traditionally host cultures, such as the UK, have moved to Asian countries such as China to fulfil their foreign language learning requirements. This study thus aimed to investigate the experiences of such students, as understanding such cross-cultural adaptation may be significant to foreign language education in the UK, where the integration of study-abroad components is compulsory in language-related degree programmes. This study specifically investigated the cross-cultural adaptation of three students from the UK who were enrolled at different Chinese universities. An adapted version of Kim's (2001) theory of integrative communication and cross-cultural adaptation was used as a theoretical lens to analyse the experiences of the participants; this was chosen as it foregrounds host social communication and host media communication as representing key components of adaptation and growth in host cultures. In addition, Hymes' (1974) SPEAKING model was adopted in the data analysis as it brought a contextual perspective to the topic.

To facilitate the multiple-case study, a combination of diaries, reflexive photography, and interviews was employed to collect data over the course of the students' SA period in China. The key findings of the study reveal that these SA students experienced considerable acculturative stress as a result of engaging in social communication. However, in contrast with Kim's (2001) model, which emphasises the role of crisis in terms of giving rise to conflict and stress, the study reveals that for the participating students, it was in fact intrapersonal communication that conflicted with social communication in SA contexts and gave rise to acculturative stress based on participants' self-concept, perception, and expectations. On the basis of these findings, an adapted model that integrates the notion of intrapersonal communication as a contributor to stress is proposed in order to facilitate a more nuanced understanding of cross-cultural

adaptation in SA students subsequent to Kim's theory (2001).

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	II
ABSTRACT	V
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	VII
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES	XII
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS	XIII
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	XIV
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Origins of the study	1
1.2 Rationale for the study	3
1.3 A brief outline of the research design	3
1.4 Outline of the thesis	4
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1 Study abroad as a research concept	7
2.1.1 Defining <i>study abroad</i> in an age of globalisation.....	7
2.1.2 UK students studying abroad in China.....	10
2.1.3 Impact of the SA experience.....	12
2.2 Theoretical frameworks for the study	15
2.2.1 Communication and adaptation across cultures.....	15
2.2.2 Theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation as the framework for the study.....	18
2.2.3 The impact of Kim’s theory.....	20
2.3 Key concepts and understandings of studying abroad	23
2.3.1 The Stranger.....	23
2.3.2 Acculturative stress.....	24
2.3.3 Cross-cultural adaptation.....	25
2.3.4 Personal growth.....	27
2.3.5 Host social communication.....	27
2.3.6 Sources of dissonance in the SA context.....	30
2.4 Kim’s integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation	33
2.4.1 The process model.....	33
2.4.2 The structural model.....	34
2.4.3 Limitations of integrative theory.....	37

2.5 Justification for conducting the research.....	38
2.5.1 Gaps identified in existing literature	38
2.5.2 Research questions	40
2.6 Summary of Chapter 2	41
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY	43
3.1 Overall research design	43
3.1.1 Epistemological and ontological stances.....	43
3.1.2 A qualitative approach.....	44
3.1.3 Case study as a research strategy.....	45
3.1.4 Sampling of site and participants	47
3.1.5 Academic context of students and programme details	50
3.2 Four-stage empirical research	51
3.2.1 Stage 1: Preliminary period	51
3.2.2 Stage 2: Pre-SA	52
3.2.3 Stage 3: SA period.....	53
3.2.4 Stage 4: Post-SA.....	54
3.3 Data collection tools	54
3.3.1 Diaries.....	55
3.3.2 Reflexive photography	56
3.3.3 Interviews	58
3.4 Thematic analysis.....	60
3.5 Quality criteria: credibility, transferability, credibility and comparability.....	63
3.6 Ethical considerations.....	65
3.7 Researcher Reflexivity.....	66
3.8 Summary of Chapter 3	68
CHAPTER 4 THREE CASES	69
4.1 Participant information.....	69
4.1.1 Melian.....	69
4.1.2 Natalie.....	70
4.1.3 Tom.....	71
4.2 Causes and effects of acculturative stress in SA students	71
4.2.1 Teacher-centred pedagogies	72
4.2.2 Teachers’ practices concerning feedback, privacy and personal boundaries	77

4.2.2.1 <i>Feedback</i>	77
4.2.2.2 <i>Student privacy</i>	80
4.2.2.3 <i>Professional boundaries in after-class communication</i>	82
4.2.3 Mismatched expectations of teachers and students	84
4.2.4 Students' apprehensions about racism.....	87
4.2.5 Dissonance in engagement with host mass media.....	90
4.2.5.1 <i>Perceptions of political and ideological images in the media as a tool for propaganda</i>	90
4.2.5.2 <i>Disregard for individuals' privacy in media reportage</i>	95
4.2.5.3 <i>Dissonance with Chinese social values, norms and practices highlighted in the media</i>	99
4.2.5.4 <i>Racism and white favouritism in host media</i>	109
4.3 SA Students' adaptation strategies and personal growth	113
4.3.1 Demonstrating an improved positive outlook	114
4.3.2 Communicating with others through socialisation	118
4.3.3 Using 'cultural difference' and 'selective inattention' as stress relievers	121
4.4 Summary of Chapter 4	126
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION	127
5.1 Adaptation of Kim's framework to cross-cultural adaptation	127
5.2 The main causes of acculturative stress for participants during their SA period	130
5.3 Participants' perceptions of and methods of coping with acculturative stress through the use of social communication.....	134
5.4 The impact of acculturative stress on students' personal growth	136
5.5 Implications	138
5.6 Limitations	143
5.7 Future research	145
REFERENCES	147
APPENDICES	161

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 2.1	The stress–adaptation–growth dynamic: A process model (Kim 2001, p.57)	p.33
Figure 2.2	Structural model: Factors influencing cross-cultural adaptation (Kim 2001, p.87)	p.35
Figure 3.1	Data collection process	p.51
Figure 3.2	Six steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)	P.61
Figure 5.1	Model adapted from Kim (2001)	p.129
Table 3.1	Numbers and types of data produced by the participants	p.60

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 1	P-1-1 News: ‘Long Live Property Permits’!	p.90
Photo 2	P-1-2 Political advertisement: Socialist Core Values	p.90
Photo 3	P-2-8 News: Ban the pursuit of the Western lifestyle in variety shows	p.92
Photo 4	P-3-6 Notice: Announcing scores in the class social media groups	p.95
Photo 5	P-3-8 Shared picture: Playing with kids	p.96
Photo 6	P-3-9 Social media advertisement: Showing parents how kids were learning	p.96
Photo 7	P-1-5 News: A tragic accident	p.97
Photo 8	P-1-6 News: A girl rescued at Accident& Emergency	p.97
Photo 9	P-1-7 News: 5-year-old girl jumps from 11th floor imitating cartoons	p.98
Photo 10	P-1-8 Poster: Use fire safely for my country, for my family, and for myself	p.99
Photo 11	P-1-9 News: A single 28-year-old girl who has never fallen in love was labelled a neurotic by her mother	p.100
Photo 12	P-1-10 News: Parents of a girl who married a foreigner and decided to live abroad. ‘We changed our big flat for a medium one for her tuition fees. If she lives abroad, who will take care of us’?	p.100
Photo 13	P-2-1 Public service advertisement: A folk story of an impoverished couple killing their kid in favour of supporting the mother	p.103
Photo 14	P-2-2 News: A company owner had compromised their staff’s salary to send money to their parents as a sign of respect and love	p.103
Photo 15	P-3-5 Slogan: Improve one point in your score and you can ‘kill’ (beat up) numerous competitors	p.105
Photo 16	P-2-5 News: Middle school students attended exams outdoors despite heavy smog	p.106
Photo 17	P-2-6 A slogan in a classroom: Improve one point in your score and you can ‘kill’ (beat up) numerous competitors	p.106
Photo 18	P-2-7 Slogan: Attend the key national universities for our parents’ sake	p.107
Photo 19	P-3-3 TV drama: Anti-Japanese drama	p.110
Photo 20	P-3-10 News: Anti-Christmas protest	p.110
Photo 21	P-3-11 News: A customized advertisement with African kids as models	p.111
Photo 22	P-2-3 Advertisement: a high-tech automatic hair wash machine for local Chinese women with a white model	p.112
Photo 23	P-2-4 Advertisement: laundry capsules for changing skin colour	p.112

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AH	At Home
HCC	Host Communicative Competence
IaC	Intrapersonal Communication
IC	Interpersonal Communication
ICC	Intercultural Communication/Communicative Competence
MC	Mass Communication
SA	Study Abroad
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TL	Target Language
YA	Year Abroad

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Given the growing internationalisation of higher education across both the developed and developing world, cross-cultural adaptation of students engaged in *study abroad* (hereafter referred to as SA) through communication is a phenomenon that merits further exploration. It is anticipated that such students will not only learn their host language but also develop an understanding of the habits, lifestyle, customs, and social norms prevalent in the host setting (Coleman, 2013). However, it is rarely acknowledged that such an experience is inherently challenging, especially where such students experience difficulties and personal growth in relation to cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 2001); this situation is therefore the focus of the current study.

1.1 Origins of the study

This study stems from my long-term interest in students studying abroad, and in particular the interplay between SA students' adaptive difficulties and personal growth. When I was doing a teaching internship at my university in China in 2006, I was given the task of tutoring an Italian university student, Alice, who was doing her SA year at my university. We soon became close friends. At the same time, I got to know more international students in other SA programmes. These interactions provided me with a better understanding of the nature of their studies and their perspective on social life in China, especially in the context of experiences they labelled as unpleasant or stressful. Yet, I was confused by the causes and reasons for their negative attitude towards their encounters. For example, when we attended a course together, I was charmed by the teacher who was strict but knowledgeable and motivated by the high standards of student learning required in her course. But I was rather surprised when I heard that most international students in that class felt very stressed and uneasy about the ways the teacher communicated with them. I knew it was a matter of cultural difference, but at that time I wondered if there were any other factors contributing to their perceptions.

Shortly afterwards, I started my master's course in Australian social and cultural studies

at the same university, but in the English School, where I started to delve into the challenges of cultural studies. I was surprised to find that my teachers and supervisors, both Chinese and Australian, tended to communicate with students in a more equal and friendly way, and that the teaching atmosphere was pleasant and encouraging. This student-centred attitude contrasted with what I had experienced at the Chinese School, where most teachers were friendly, but where teaching was quite serious and hierarchical. Subsequently, I began to understand why these SA students had had negative perceptions towards our teacher a few years ago, and I started reflecting on issues of adaptation in cross-cultural contexts. I began to recall my experiences and those of my friends who were studying in cross-cultural contexts and I kept asking myself a question: How and to what extent could international students in SA programmes and their local teachers achieve closeness and trust? These reflections shifted the focus of this study to the cross-cultural perspective.

The current study was also partly inspired by my four years teaching experience at a university in the UK. The two degree-modules which I taught were compulsory courses (Mandarin) with six teaching hours per week, which gave me sufficient time to get to know my students well. Their degree programme required them to go to China for six months or one year for their SA learning during Year 3. For Year 4 students, who had just returned from China, a series of workshops were held so they could share their SA encounters. Attending these workshops in the past four years, I had the opportunity to learn more about their social encounters from pictures they took and stories they shared.

One of the things that I learned from these students was related to the prevalence of issues labelled as 'stressful' and their adaptation in handling those issues. A considerable number of students reported that their SA was full of 'stress' and 'personal growth'. I therefore started to wonder about the nature of 'stress' and 'growth' and how they are related to each other. As a teacher with an ethnic Chinese background, I had been convinced that SA students' acculturative stress during their SA period in China, if any, had to be more related to their feelings such as homesickness or loneliness as a result of

cross-cultural differences. I was surprised that sometimes their experience was quite different to what I had expected. I also considered how their daily communication activities impacted on their viewing of and dealing with their acculturative stress and personal development. Based on my observation and understanding of SA students' frequent 'stressful' feelings and the related adaptation and personal growth through their social communication, I decided to research the development of SA relations with teachers and locals in the host setting.

1.2 Rationale for the study

The current study explored the cross-cultural experiences of UK university students who had spent their SA period in China. Kim's (2001) integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation was employed due to its conceptualisation of cross-cultural adaptation as a communication-based phenomenon, which is consistent with the influence of social communication activities on SA students. I argue that this theory, if updated and adapted, can be useful for understanding the current features of SA students' social communication experiences. The communicative environment has undergone dramatic changes in recent years, particularly in terms of its increasing interactivity. For example, in the past two decades, the importance of traditional mass media has receded, and has been overshadowed by the emergence of 'new media' (see e.g. Arceneaux & Dinu, 2018) which is supported by digital technologies that allow people to communicate, learn, and engage with others instantly on the Internet without having to meet face-to-face. These new media allow people to be both publishers and critics, and it also addresses both interpersonal and mass communication needs. In short, the communicative environment is different from the one in which Kim originally developed her theory, and these changes therefore necessitate its reconceptualization.

1.3 A brief outline of the research design

In this study, I approached Kim's (2001) theory with a critical perspective on its effectiveness in modelling students' experiences in SA contexts in terms of four factors,

namely their stress, adaptation, growth and host social communication, which are the focus of this study. I examined their interplay and explain their links to the experience of UK university students from an interactive, holistic perspective.

This multiple-case study is qualitative in nature and involves three university students from the UK while they were undertaking their SA in China. Data were largely gathered during their six-month stay in China and the findings are presented and discussed in a cross-case analysis. In particular, it employed a triangulated methodological approach which combines three methods of data collection: participants' diaries, reflexive photography and interviews. Reflexive photography was adopted as the means of data collection, and presents an important feature of this study because it draws together the methods used to capture the participants' developmental changes during SA. By combining these methods of data collection, the study aims to better understand the current lived experience of SA students.

While this study focused on the students' experience with stress, a necessary but complex part of the development process according to Kim's (2001) theory, it should also be noted that this study was conducted from a cross-cultural perspective and not a psychological one.

1.4 Outline of the thesis

The thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter 2 provides a review of the theoretical framework of SA and in particular Kim's integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation (2001). At the end of this review, a number of gaps in the existing literature on SA are identified, thus creating the space for the current study. Chapter 3 provides a critical account of this study's methodology, with specific reference to the research paradigm, the choice of a multiple-case study, the sampling and research procedures, and the data-collection and data-analysis strategies. It concludes by dealing with validity, reliability and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the cases of the three SA students in a cross-case analysis, highlighting key themes and linking these to

the concepts of stress, growth and adaptation. Chapter 5 concludes the thesis with a summary of the main findings in relation to the research questions, a discussion of the contributions and limitations of this study, in addition to outlining suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with an overview of *study abroad* (SA) as the research background for this inquiry. Firstly, *study abroad* is defined, followed by an examination of what it takes for UK students to undertake their studies in China as well as how the SA experience impacts them. Secondly, I present the theoretical model of this study with emphasis on a critical review of communication and cross-cultural adaptation. The chapter further focuses on how Kim's (2001) theory has been applied, and its impact on this research field. Thirdly, the key concepts and understandings of SA are examined in detail, including the SA student as stranger, acculturative stress, cross-cultural adaptation, personal growth, host social communication (social communication within the host context) and sources of dissonance in the SA context. Fourthly, it presents Kim's (2001) integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation with a focus on *the process model* demonstrating 'personal evolution towards increased functional fitness and psychological health and a gradual emergence of intercultural identity' and *the structural model* 'in which key dimensions of factors that facilitate or impede the adaptation process are identified and their interrelationships specified' (Kim 2012, p.234). The chapter concludes with a justification for conducting this research by identifying the gaps in the literature, and with an explication of the research questions framing the study.

2.1 Study abroad as a research concept

2.1.1 Defining *study abroad* in an age of globalisation

Due to globalisation, the number of students who choose to go abroad for their studies has increased significantly worldwide. It is estimated that currently there are 5 million students studying transnationally in comparison with only 2.1 million in 2000 and 1.3 million in the 1990s (OECD, 2017).

Although not in every country, student mobility is generally on the rise, thereby contributing to the popularity of SA, either as a programme which allows students to live

and learn abroad or as a learning context for second language acquisition (SLA). SA programmes, while varying in orientation, length, content, goal and participants, are available in a broad range of forms such as classroom study, research, internships, training and service learning (Coleman, 1997; 2005; Sussex Centre for Migration Research, 2004). The multifarious forms of SA programmes, together with the phenomenon having been studied from diverse perspectives such as linguistics, education, psychology, social studies, and arts, have made it difficult to establish consensus over the definition of SA (Coleman, 2013).

SA has been defined in different ways within the linguistics field, most notably in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Taken as a ‘sub-field of applied linguistics’ (Kinginger, 2009, p.29), SA has been described by Freed (1995, p.5) as ‘language and/or content learning in a formal classroom setting along with immersion in the native speech community’. Extending this understanding, Collentine and Freed (2004, p.156) observe that:

[...] Studying abroad heavily involves both communicative and learning contexts which may entail a hybrid communicative-learning context. Students attend formal classes and thus employ the L2 in learning contexts. They also negotiate communicative contexts. Furthermore, informational exchanges frequently involve NSs and are within the target culture, requiring that students develop sophisticated strategies of social interaction.

Thus, the SA period is based on immersive language learning that involves formal L2 instruction, along with language use being learnt in classrooms through social exchanges occurring within the target language community and culture.

Some researchers view SA in a broader sense and regard it as the study choice for learners to be educated in cross-country contexts, in particular for learners in higher education (e.g. Coleman, 2013; Kinginger, 2009). According to Coleman (2013), SA is defined as ‘simply undertaking all or part of university education abroad’ (p.22). For instance, reflecting on this broader understanding, Kinginger (2009, p.11) chooses to define study abroad as ‘*a temporary sojourn of defined duration, undertaken for educational purposes*’

(emphasis in original). In this regard, SA encompasses whole-programme mobility wherein students get a degree from an institution abroad; within-programme mobility whereby students go abroad as part of their programmes in their home university; or mobility for personal reasons (Higher Education Statistics Agency-HESA, 2018). These views approach SA as an over-arching term, parallel to the notion of *education abroad* or *residence abroad* undertaken by students who pursue educational opportunities outside their home country for a certain period.

Some studies also choose to narrow down SA as temporary within-degree mobility of students at university level. This is a very popular study route within the North American and European contexts, whereby university students majoring in modern languages or fulfilling the requirements of a language component in their course pursue an immersive language learning experience in the L2 language community abroad. According to Peterson et al., SA can be defined as ‘education abroad that results in progress toward an academic degree at a student’s home institution’ (2007, p.176). With reference to SA in the context of foreign language learning, Coleman (2005) observes that living in the target language community over a period of time is integral to the tertiary programmes involving the study of a foreign language or languages. According to this definition, SA may include students who go abroad through university partnership or exchange programmes, summer courses, language learning courses or student-visitor programmes. However, it excludes students who go abroad for a full academic degree as well as students who undertake whole-programmes abroad for personal reasons or for tourism purposes. Students are required by their home institution to live in a target country for a pre-defined period, which can comprise a *sandwich year* or *year abroad*, a typically short-term stay spanning less than eight weeks, or a six-month semester (Forum on Education Abroad, 2011).

Within UK higher education settings, students enrolled in language learning programmes are required to study the target language(s) in the L2 community abroad for a period of about six months or one year in the second or third academic year. This requirement differs from those prevalent in European countries where language learning abroad is

recommended but not obligatory. Therefore, Alred and Byram (2002) suggest that the term *year abroad* (YA) is applicable only to British higher education.

However, in this study, I do not follow the British tradition to employ the term *year abroad* or *residence abroad*. I adopt the term *study abroad* because this accommodates the fact that the students participating in this study, while undertaking degrees with a foreign language learning component in their home country, were expected to proceed for study abroad that incorporated formal language instruction as well as residence in the host culture. In this context, particular emphasis is placed on acculturative stress, cross-cultural adaptation and personal growth as issues common to students studying abroad in host contexts, irrespective of their programme, educational background, length of stay or study discipline. In this respect, the next section provides an overview of what it involves for UK students to study in China.

2.1.2 UK students studying abroad in China

This study concerns UK university students undertaking SA in China; thus UK is taken as the home country whereas China is the host country. The preferred destination for UK SA students is Europe, with particularly popular destinations being France, Spain and Germany (UK Council for International Students Affairs-UKCISA, 2018). These programmes are mainly funded by schemes such as Erasmus, which is the largest channel for UK students taking the SA route (Universities UK International-UUKi, 2017). Outside Europe, USA, Australia, Canada, China as well as Japan are included amongst the top ten destination countries for UK students. In terms of discipline and courses, foreign languages feature prominently in the study programme choices of UK students, with business administration and social studies also being popular programme choices, in addition to linguistics and the creative arts and design (UUKi, 2017).

A close examination of UK education studies also reveals that the UK is the second largest host country for international students worldwide (HESA, 2018), implying that the UK attracts many international students who come to pursue their education. However, it

seems that UK students themselves are less motivated to study abroad. The percentage of UK-domiciled students going abroad lags far behind that of students from other European countries like France, Germany and Spain or Anglophone countries such as USA, Canada and Australia (Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura & McManus, 2017). This is due to a number of reasons. Owing to the status of English as a global language, UK students are less motivated to learn a second language (Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura & McManus, 2017). Furthermore, a report by the British Council based on a survey of 2239 UK students has highlighted that limited information on studying abroad deters students from applying to study overseas, as they are concerned about the cost of SA as well as language competence needed to pursue education overseas (Coldwell, 2013). Therefore, it is unsurprising that UK university students have been reported to be less eager to choose to SA (Coldwell, 2013; King, Findlay & Ahrens, 2010).

The last decade has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of UK students who have selected the People's Republic of China (henceforth China) as their SA destination (British Council, 2015; Chinese Ministry of Education, 2017). The number of UK students who have proceeded to China has been increasing since the late 1970s when China announced the 'Opening Up Policies' and began to welcome international students from the West. While in the beginning there were only 16 UK students who came to China to study (Liu, 2016), this number swelled to 3,500 in 2011 (British Council, 2015) and rose even further to 7,800 in 2015 (Liu, 2016). In fact, in 2015 more than 700 UK university students went to China for their 'sandwich year' in line with the requirements of their degree programmes at home. According to a British Council (2015) report, the number of UK students going to China by 2020 is expected to rise to 80,000 due to sponsorship by the British Council Programme *Generation UK*.

One of the reasons students choose China as a SA destination is that they are motivated by professional and economic opportunities (Wang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2016). In recent years, China has become a very attractive destination for international students from all over the world. It was reported that in 2016, almost 400, 000 international

students were studying in China with most students originating from Korea, the USA, and Thailand, compared to only 200, 000 in 2008 (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2017). Students are also motivated by various programmes that are funded by both the UK and China as these offer a great range of opportunities enabling students from the UK to undertake academic as well as work-experience based programmes (British Council, 2015; Chinese Ministry of Education, 2017). Another contributory factor pertains to the rising internationalisation of Chinese higher education wherein China has set its target as attracting ‘500,000 international students to study in [the country] by 2020 (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2010). China, as a host country, has established a set of higher education systems open to international students. Generally speaking, in China, international university students are commonly categorised into two main types: degree students (Associate, Bachelor, Post-graduate or Doctorate) and non-degree students, with the latter normally referred to as ‘Jinxiusheng’ (a Chinese phrase for visiting students). Most of these students take the SA route and account for almost 50 percent of all international students in China (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2017). Typically, these types of students are further divided into advanced visiting students (students with a master’s degree or above), general visiting students (students with a bachelor’s degree, or at least in the second year of university) and language visiting students (Mandarin) (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2017). The participants in this study belong to the last category, as they are language students undertaking SA for the purpose of learning Mandarin, wherein they must attend a Chinese university for six months or one year so that they fulfil educational requirements by engaging in intensive language and culture study (see also Chapter 4).

2.1.3 Impact of the SA experience

Most research on students’ experience of SA outcomes has focused on linguistic gains, and this kind of research was influential for quite a long period (Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2009). SA has been widely acknowledged as an ideal and productive context for SLA, compared to the AH (at home) context. Several studies have demonstrated that SA could

contribute to the improvement of host language abilities in terms of factors such as greater vocabulary, aural and oral proficiency or functional ability (Coleman, 1997; Freed, 1995; 1998; Jackson, 2011; Kinginger, 2009). These findings generally show that SA as an immersive context for SLA is beneficial and it often has a decisive impact on student learning outcomes. Yet, Collentine and Freed (2004) contend that the influence of SA on language outcomes such as grammatical competence and written and reading abilities have been less observable.

Apart from language achievement, SA has been shown to be influential and beneficial for learners' personal growth. It has been found that SA students in and/or upon return from the host country have demonstrated improved abilities regarding adaptation (e.g. Eby, 2005; Engberg, 2013; Gu, Schweisfurth & Day, 2010; Jackson, 2008; Milstein, 2005; Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013). For example, it has been reported that SA has a positive impact on students' global awareness, intercultural competence and appreciation of cultural difference (Engberg, 2013). Similarly, it has been found that the achievements for SA students are related to individual maturation and improved intercultural understanding and competence (Gu, Schweisfurth & Day, 2010). It has also been suggested that SA plays an essential role in bringing about improved intercultural communication (communicative) competence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and a strong sense of self (Jackson, 2008). Support for further development of personality within SA students has been offered in research carried out by Eby (2005) and Zimmermann and Neyer (2013). Moreover, SA has been found to provide students with 'an important sociological and functional status' (Collentine 2009, p.218) that equates with improved employability in today's global society (British Council, 2015).

Hence, the concept of personal growth is relevant to this study because it is important for understanding SA and enables examination of the interplay between stress and adaptation.

Yet, it should be noted that SA does not necessarily guarantee positive outcomes. Research thus far has also indicated that the SA period is full of psychological and emotional challenges, such as disorientation, identity crisis/confusion, academic

problems, social withdrawal, depression, anxiety, grief, stress and interpersonal difficulties. As pointed out by Cushner and Karim (2004, p.292), SA entails a substantial amount of attendant stress and necessitates students having to face and adapt to experiences and transformations both physical and psychological in nature. In addition, the impact of the SA period is a continuously occurring natural process even upon re-entry into the home culture. For that reason, many SA studies have turned their focus to the reverse culture shock experienced by students when they return home after an extended period abroad. These experiences, according to Kartoshkina (2015), are 'bitter-sweet' as the SA students' sense of happiness at seeing their friends and family is counter-balanced by a sense of losing newly-acquired lifestyles and friends in the host country. Interestingly enough, SA students have difficulty in communicating with people who have not undergone similar experiences and end up adopting a critical perspective of their own home culture. This is not necessarily a negative effect, as it may suggest the development of a critical capacity that allows returning sojourners to resist a blind valorisation of their home cultures, or a misunderstanding of other cultures based on a uniformly favourable view of the former. Hence, the SA experience can be seen as a journey of psychological and emotional difficulties and personal growth. Unfortunately, these two apparently conflicting features of SA have not drawn the attention of researchers thus far.

Having examined the impact of the SA experience on SA students, the discussion will now move to a presentation of the theoretical framework of this study. First, the discussion focuses on the concepts of communication and cross-cultural adaptation from different perspectives. These include examination of how individuals adjust to the host culture, with particular emphasis on non-European contexts. Second, I focus on the theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation developed by Kim (2001) as she presents an integrative theory, irrespective of cultural context. Third, the discussion examines the impact of Kim's theory within current literature.

2.2 Theoretical frameworks for the study

2.2.1 Communication and adaptation across cultures

Researchers working within the areas of communication and cultural studies have used several theoretical frameworks to investigate aspects of contemporary cross-cultural communication. In this section, I highlight a number of influential models and frameworks which are relevant to this study (e.g. Berry, 2006a, 2006b; Garner, 1994; Hall, 1976; Hymes, 1974; Miike, 2015).

According to Berry's classic model of acculturation (2006a; 2006b), individuals can orient themselves to the cultures of host countries in four fundamental ways to achieve acculturation (in many cases, acculturation is also referred to as cross-cultural adaptation). The first approach is through assimilation, wherein relationships with members of other groups are maintained, but the individual's own cultural identity is not maintained. The second way is separation, wherein individuals seek to hold on to their own cultural identities without attempting to maintain relationships with members of other groups. The third way is marginalisation, wherein individuals maintain neither their own cultural identities nor relationships with members of other groups. The fourth approach within Berry's model is integration, whereby individuals seek to maintain not just their own cultural identities but also their relationships with individuals from host cultures. In Berry's model (2006a; 2006b), these types of adjustment are dictated by—and at the same time are based on—the methods the individual adopts for communicating with members of the host culture, especially when cultural differences are significant. However, Berry's model (2006a; 2006b) has been questioned on several fronts. The criticisms are largely centred on the validity of categorizations of marginalization and integration (Schwartz et al, 2010), which are too broad and unclear to identify individuals in cross-cultural contexts (Rudmin, 2006). It was also true for SA students. Hence, I did not follow Berry's model in the current study since it was difficult to categorise SA students into any of the types shown in Berry's model. Taken together, these points suggest a need for other perspectives from which to explore SA students.

Hall (1976) categorises cultures into high-context (where messages cannot be understood without a great deal of background information) and low-context (where messages rely on explicit information). Hall's framework is intended to explain differences in communication styles and cultural issues across nations. - Hall (1976) claims that individuals seeking to adapt to host cultures are likely to find themselves facing distinctive cultural patterns of communication, and unfamiliarity with these might influence the success of communication with individuals from the host culture. Nevertheless, Hall's framework (1976) has been criticized by a number of scholars in recent years largely for the inadequacy in interpreting and categorizing national cultures and national contexts (e.g. Piller, 2011). I agree with Hall (1976) that some similarities can be found among national cultures (i.e. communication patterns); but in the current study, I have taken the dynamic nature of national cultures, as well as the possible dynamic nature of the cultural identity of SA students throughout their SA period into consideration.

By way of extending Hall's (1976) framework and Berry's model (2006a; 2006b), various studies have examined communication within specific cultures and have identified distinct patterns unique to each culture. For instance, Garner (1994) describes how African-American communication is characterised by four main patterns within their strong oral tradition, including indirection, improvisation and inventiveness, and playfully-toned behaviour. Distinct patterns or themes have also been identified among individuals belonging to Asian cultures. Similarly, Miike (2015) proposes that Asian communication is characterised by circularity, harmony, other-directedness, reciprocity, and relationality. He argues that these patterns or themes of communication are influenced by the ideas of religions and philosophies like Buddhism, Confucianism, and Hinduism, which promote concepts of togetherness, interdependence, empathy, and giving back to the community and the universe. The studies above have explored the cultural and communicative nature of adaptation; however, there is a risk that employing culture-specific frameworks may lead to cultural stereotyping by generating over-simplified perceptions of a particular cultural group.

To this end, Hymes (1974) suggested the need to study communication in real situations, and accordingly developed the ethnography of communication SPEAKING model, incorporating factors such as ‘setting’, ‘participants’, ‘ends’, ‘act sequences’, ‘key’, ‘instrumentalities’, ‘norm’ and ‘genre’, as listed below:

Setting: *the time and place or the physical circumstances in which communication or language use transpires.*

Participant: *speaker–listener, addressor–addressee or sender–receiver fulfilling socially specified roles.*

End: *purpose or outcome of the communication exchange.*

Act Sequence: *the actual form and content of the speech acts within speech events and the precise words used, how they are used, and their connection to what is being discussed.*

Key: *tone, or the manner or spirit in which a particular message, whether written or verbal, is communicated.*

Instrumentalities: *the choice of channel (written or verbal) and the choice of language, dialect, code, or register used in communication.*

Norm: *specific socio-cultural behaviours attached to speaking—such as loudness, silence, and gaze-return—in the communicative exchange.*

Genre: *categories of utterance, including genres such as poems, lectures, sermons, or editorials.*

According to Hymes (1974), such a descriptive framework serves a useful purpose as it allows researchers to develop a context-based understanding of socioculturally-informed ‘ways of speaking’. In other words, communication needs to be examined as a specific social and cultural practice and the interpretations of the participants themselves should be considered. Hymes’ model (1974) is creative since it pays particular attention to matters of context (Keating, 2001) when studying the linguistic and cultural practices of sociocultural groups. In line with Hymes (1974), Farah (1998), among other scholars, adds that Hymes’ focus on communication was based on the idea that language speakers within particular communities communicate with one another in ways that are correct as well as socioculturally appropriate to their context, involving ‘a shared knowledge of the linguistic code as well as of the socio-cultural rules, norms and values which guide the

conduct and interpretation of speech and other channels of communication in a community' (p.126). Hymes' (1974) SPEAKING model is of relevance to this study and its eight factors are used in the data analysis of this study due to their focus on the nature of 'context' which is essential to the exploration of e communications among SA students in China.

All the research discussed above demonstrates the possible links between communication and cross-cultural adaptation. The discussion will now progress to an elaboration of why Kim's (2001) theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation was chosen to frame this study.

2.2.2 Theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation as the framework for the study

Since the 1970s, Young Yun Kim has published a series of studies and works on cross-cultural adaptation and proposed an integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation embedded in a progressive and communicative perspective. Moreover, Kim suggests the wide applicability of the two models of her theory to individuals with various backgrounds, either short-term or long-term, from 'any cultural origin, to any new destination, for any voluntary or involuntary reason' (2001, p.93), which is suitable for the current study investigating the cross-cultural adaptation of the three participants from the UK in the host culture of China.

There are two prominent advantages of Kim's theory (ibid.). On the one hand, Kim approaches cross-cultural adaptation as being both dynamic and multidimensional, which is a departure from earlier research adopting a more static and narrow view of such adaptation. This dynamic nature centres on its view of cross-cultural adaptation as both problem-oriented and growth-generated. In this way, adaptation, whether short-term or long-term, is viewed as a cyclical and dynamic process. By taking into consideration factors supporting or hindering the process of cross-cultural adaptation at the macro as well as the micro level, Kim takes a 'big picture' view of the phenomenon of adaptation,

thereby providing systemic insights into cross-cultural adaptation. On the other hand, by associating communication with the process of acculturation, Kim argues that adaptation is fundamentally communicative and that adjustment within the new culture is contingent upon participating in social communication that comprises interpersonal as well as mass communication activities within the host society. In doing so, Kim theorises the communication process as a means of cultural learning and of coping with stress. In sum, Kim's theory (2001) was considered a suitable frame for this study due to her conceptualisation of the interplay of stress, adaptation and growth, and of adaptation as a communication-based phenomenon, which is consistent with the impact of social communication activities on SA students. In this study, I follow Kim in viewing cross-cultural adaptation as a dynamic, multidimensional and communication-based process.

Another reason for adopting Kim's theory (2001) pertains to its consistency with the ideas of social constructivism, although the latter philosophy is not explicitly foregrounded within the theory itself. Social constructivism is a branch of constructivism philosophy which argues that reality is jointly constructed (McKinley, 2015). It is particularly concerned with 'the construction of relationships, the process of such interaction and their meaning-making rather than the nature of things' (Stead 2004, p.391). Social constructivism is based on the idea that people seek to understand the world they reside in and that they accord their own subjective interpretations and meanings to what they experience, directing these meanings towards specific objects and things. According to Crotty (2003), individuals build up meanings and interpretations during the process of their engagement with the world. Indeed, they make sense of this world from a socio-historical perspective which is bound by their culture.

In contrast with the objectivist view that it is possible for a single objective reality to exist, social constructivists argue that the socially constructed reality is reproduced through interactions (Creswell, 2014). More specifically, social constructivism focuses on people's interaction with social practices, and views knowledge through social practices. Accordingly, knowledge is seen as being derived from interactions between people, and

this, in turn, guides the behaviour of people, and meaning-making achieved through perceptions and interpretations within a social community context (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996). In adaptation studies, social constructivists suggest that strangers are likely to become acquainted with concepts and to develop meanings about specific notions while interacting with others and interpreting this world through proactive meaning-making (Frank 2009, p.388). In a nutshell, social constructivism believes that reality is socially situated, and knowledge is constructed through interactions.

Hence, the construction of 'reality' in this study is viewed as an on-going social communication process. The 'reality' in fact comprises the participants' growth and its interplay with stress, both of which are perceived and interpreted by participants as well as by me as the researcher. The reality is created through interactions between participants and their social environment, and between the participants and me. Hence, this reality is socially constructed. Moreover, for the three participants, social communication during their SA also functioned as the source of knowledge, whereby subjective and multiple meanings of their experiences were located and developed. In short, participants' knowledge and reality were created by their social relationships and interactions transpiring through engagement with their host social communication. More significantly, social constructivism informed the conceptual framework of this study, with the notion of socially situated and constructed reality also constantly underpinning the entire study.

Kim's (2001, pp.89-92) theory is based on a range of concepts. These include a triad of assumptions, in addition to a corresponding number of boundary conditions and ten axioms and multiple theorems (see Notes 2.1 and 2.2, Appendix 1). The theory is broadly represented by two models, the process model (see Figure 2.1) and the structural model (see Figure 2.2).

2.2.3 The impact of Kim's theory

The integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation has been widely deployed in recent cross-cultural studies, most of which focus on the adaptation

experiences of strangers in host contexts (e.g. Akhtar, Pratt & Bo, 2015; Hendrickson & Rosen, 2017; Hendrickson, Rosen & Aune, 2011; Kok, 2018; Lee, 2018; Qian, 2009; Tian & Lowe, 2014). Research foci range from the influence of ethnic communication on an individual's cross-cultural adaptation, development of intercultural awareness, the importance of friendship networks with host country friends and co-nationals, as well as the acculturative impact of host media on individuals.

One of Kim's (2001) key theorisations was that individuals endeavouring to adjust in host cultures would find cross-cultural adaptation to be a challenge if they continued to engage in intensive social communication with individuals of similar ethnicity. Conflicting findings have been reported in studies examining the influence of ethnic communication on sojourners' adjustment to the host culture. In one study conducted within the US context, the findings suggest that the Korean immigrants' strong engagement with well-established co-ethnic communities and entertainment gave rise to a 'significant negative relationship between host language competence and ethnic entrainment (sic)' (Lee 2018, p.16). Hence, Lee concluded that there is a need to research environmental stimuli as a key element of a general systems theory (ibid.). On the other hand, other recent research has found that social communication with co-ethnics in the contemporary communicative environment does not necessarily have a negative influence on the cross-cultural adaptation of individuals in the host culture. This is because 'global social networking sites which provide means for both mass and interpersonal communication' have blurred the lines between host and ethnic communication prevalent at the time Kim's theory was formulated (Kok 2018, p.3). In his study, he points out that 'mass self-communication' is an innovative means for non-Korean English teachers in Korea to adapt to their host culture and maintain ethnic culture ties as well. It is possible that the difference in findings may have arisen due to the existence of more well-established co-ethnic communities in the instance of the Korean immigrants in the US than in the case of the English teachers in Korea. It could also be due to participants' characteristics in both studies such as age or gender, which are important variables in influencing the use of new media and subsequently greater inclination towards ethnic communication over host communication.

In a study that anticipated the findings of Kok (2018) to an extent, Hendrickson and Rosen (2017) examined the influence of new media on cross-cultural adaptation and the development of international student friendship networks. They found that international students increased and adapted the way they used new media during study abroad, not only using it to keep in touch with their friends and family worldwide but also to maintain social contact with their host culture friends. However, they found that the formation of a social network with host national friends did not prove adequate for developing close relationships with these individuals. On the other hand, Hendrickson and Rosen found that when SA students interacted with ‘established face-to-face host national friends and friend groups via new media platforms’, this led ‘to an increased understanding of host communication patterns’ (Hendrickson & Rosen 2011, p.81). Hendrickson and Rosen (ibid.) also encouraged future researchers applying Kim’s cross-cultural adaptation theory to make use of host new media communication as a key concept.

Kim’s (2001) cycle of stress-adaptation-growth as well as the simultaneous acculturation/deculturation processes she theorised suggest that sojourners acquire greater intercultural awareness as they experience stress, learn to adapt and to grow in the host culture. This theorisation has been corroborated by Tian and Lowe (2014) who found that the sojourning students participating in their study outgrew their initial cultural naivety as they shifted to greater intercultural awareness and cultural critical capacity. The data were collected by exploring the cases of eight American students and their intercultural experiences while they studied in China.

Research has also confirmed the positive influence of friendship networks on the cross-cultural adaptation of sojourners in the host culture. For example, Akhtar, Pratt and Bo (2015) showed that heightened expectations of studying in China as well as natural phenomena like the Chinese weather obstructed African students’ adaptation, while their positive adaptation was attributed to factors like ‘broad network of friends, prior cross-cultural experience, and prior knowledge of cultural differences’ (ibid., p.98). The role of friendship networks on cross-cultural adaptation has also been researched from another

angle. Researchers in the US found that SA participants at the University of Hawaii who experienced more friendships with host country individuals reported greater satisfaction and better social connection (Hendrickson, Rosen & Aune 2011, p.281). Hendrickson, Rosen and Aune (2011) found that over time, the composition of the participating students' friendship networks changed from friendships with co-ethnics to more diverse ties with friends from the host culture as well as their own culture. They suggest that the examination of such changes over time in close relation with the friendship network grid used in their study could serve to effectively assess how adaptive change occurs in accordance with the postulates of Kim's (2001) theory.

The acculturative potential of host media and its impact on the cross-cultural adaptation of sojourners is a key principle of Kim's theory, and recent research has found that host mass media serves as a major influence on the growth in host communication competence of the participating students as well as their acculturation in the host country, as theorised by Kim (2001).

2.3 Key concepts and understandings of studying abroad

The key concepts of Kim's (2001) theory that underpin this study include stranger, acculturative stress, cross-cultural adaptation, personal growth and host social communication. Moreover, understanding teacher-student communication and host mass media are two additional aspects considered in this study. The type of relationship developed between the teacher and the student is a key issue when exploring student identity because it is an everyday point of reference at school and it entails the experiencing of some sort of hierarchical power. Rather than print media such as newspapers and magazines, the commonest way of coming into contact with the SA culture is through mass media, and in particular, social media, internet and TV broadcasting.

2.3.1 The Stranger

In the literature on migrant groups in a host context, migrants are categorised according

to four main types: voluntary immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and sojourners (including tourists, students and business travellers who reside in a place temporarily, normally between six months and five years) (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). SA students have generally been labelled in recent studies as sojourners (Cox, 2004), strangers (e.g. Brown & Brown, 2013; Coates, 2004; Starr-Glass, 2016) or new strangers (e.g. Murphy-Lejenue, 2002).

The term *stranger* was initially adopted by Simmel in the field of sociology to refer to people who were part of the social system without being attached to it (Simmel, cited in Coates, 2004). In the context of this research, strangers are considered to be those students who 'enter a host culture for the first time' (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988, p.108). Likewise, Kim (2001) also uses the term stranger to refer to groups whose members are migrants or refugees, or in other cases comprise sojourners as well as ethnic group members crossing subcultural borders albeit without setting time limits for their first entry into the host country. Kim (ibid.) argues that any previous entries into or encounters with a host country do not necessarily guarantee that individuals would have sufficient knowledge of or familiarity with its culture. Thus, the term stranger is not limited to a specific type of people nor is it related to their period of stay in a new culture. Despite its negative connotations such as being an individual who is unaccustomed, inexperienced or lacking in security, the term itself as it is used in academic literature is not pejorative in any sense.

2.3.2 Acculturative stress

The overall process of cross-cultural adaptation has been identified as being replete with a wide range of psychological or emotional problems and difficulties, including discomfort, disorientation and anxiety, self-doubt, sense of loss and depression to name only a few, all of which are related to negative feelings. These problems and difficulties also include concerns about cleanliness, health and safety, excessive drinking, isolation, and social withdrawal, which prevent strangers from dealing with daily activities smoothly in a new environment (Jandt, 1998). In some cases, those problems and

difficulties are associated with irritability, aggression, hostility towards the host culture and people, or increased risk of suicide (Berry, 2006b; Black & Gregersen, 1999; Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). Some scholars prefer to use ‘culture shock symptoms’ to describe these issues broadly while others tend to focus on specific emotions, such as anxiety, stress, confusion, uncertainty, distress, ambiguity and frustration (e.g. Gudykunst, 2005). For example, Gudykunst emphasises the influence of anxiety and uncertainty on effective communication as well as on cross-cultural adaptation and defines both anxiety and uncertainty in a comparatively broad way. Gudykunst indexes anxiety as including feelings of being uneasy, tense, worried, or apprehensive, and uncertainty as pertaining to feelings of being incapable of predicting and explaining one’s own behaviour and that of others.

Berry (2006c) presents his notion of acculturative stress and uses it to refer to negative psychological reactions, including anxiety, depression and psychological as well as psychosomatic symptoms. His notion of acculturative stress has been widely adopted within recent research on students in cross-cultural contexts (see Bai, 2012; Mahmood & Burke, 2018; Rajab, Rahman, Panatik & Mansor, 2014). Concurring with Berry (2006b), Kim (2001) depicts stress as ‘the internal turmoil’ (p.55), which is a negative imbalanced state featuring and being reflected in uncertainty, confusion and anxiety. In this study, I describe acculturative stress as a low emotional state in order to explore how participants perceived acculturative stress during their SA period, considering stress as having both a positive and negative impact on students. As such, the focus of the study was primarily on the way students coped with the effects of stress, rather than on explaining its causes.

2.3.3 Cross-cultural adaptation

Sussman (2002) defines cross-cultural adaption as ‘a complex, multistage process of cultural encounters’ (p.391). In most cases, this refers to the process of adapting to fit in with a changing or changed environment. While the terms adaptation and adjustment are used interchangeably by Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001), these are distinguished by Anderson (1994) and Berry (2006b) who contend that adjustments are smaller short-term

subjective changes to meet immediate needs, while adaptation is the long-term outcome of the process of fitting better into another culture.

The literature on cross-cultural adaptation is dominated by four main models or theories, informing the psychosocial stages accompanying the complicated process of adapting to other cultures. For instance, the *U-Curve* model elaborates on the emotional upheaval experienced by sojourners upon insertion into a new culture (Pedersen, 1995). The *Anxiety/Uncertainty Management* model explains that upon entry into a new culture, sojourners are likely to experience anxiety as they find it difficult to understand or to anticipate the behaviour of the members of the host culture (Gudykunst, 2005). The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) positions cultural adaptation as an organic process integral to human experience (Bennett, 1993). The degree of complexity within this process depends on a range of factors, including the psychological personality characteristics of the individual, the readiness for transformations, and the objectives, ambitions and expectations related to the transitional stage. The communication-based cross-cultural models, which serve as the foundation for the current study, have been established by Kim (2001), who argues that adaptation actually occurs through communication and the building of social networks.

In Kim (2001), cross-cultural adaptation is an independent variable in the process model as well as the structural model. According to Kim, adaptation is one of the three components of the stress–adaptation–growth model. In this regard, adaptation is employed as an independent variable, referring to the intersection of individuals and the environment. Within the structural model, Kim (ibid.) discusses factors influencing cross-cultural adaptation. She employs the term cross-cultural adaptation as a superordinate concept incorporating terms such as acculturation, integration, adjustment and assimilation. The term therefore encapsulates the latter concepts as the ‘entirety’ of the adaptation phenomenon which includes the person, the environment, the process and the outcomes of communication activities for both short- and long-term adaptation (ibid.). She further points out that the cross-cultural adaptation process is underpinned by

deculturation and acculturation. These two aspects will be used as components of adaptation in the thematic analysis (see Chapter 4). The adaptation of strangers could be thought of as ranging along a continuum where they are moving from deculturation to acculturation while struggling to set aside what they culturally take for granted and to embrace the new culture.

It should be noted that in Kim's (2001) theory, adaptation as an independent variable and the notion of cross-cultural adaptation share the same features. In this study, these two models are holistically integrated.

2.3.4 Personal growth

In Kim's process model (2001), there is a lack of clear description about growth in the process model, which is generated by the interplay between stress and adaptation. According to Kim (2001), the 'stress-adaptation-growth' dynamic is a dialectic process informing a series of notions which can all be related to growth. This can be greater intercultural transformation, including enhanced functional fitness and mental well-being, as well as the emergence of an integrated home and host cultural identity in host contexts (Kim, 2001) or improvement of intercultural communication skills over time (Kim & Ruben, 1988). It can even be a kind of learning (Kim, 2001). In some cases, Kim tries to use the idea of psychological growth to cover all these issues by arguing that growth can be a combination of 'a greater maturity and psychic integration' and 'an increased capacity to cope with varied environmental challenges' (2001, p.67), which for me as the author, can be embodied as personal growth.

2.3.5 Host social communication

Compared to communication that covers all forms of message exchange in a wider sense, social communication as a concept has attracted greater attention over the last ten years. However, rather than being a new concept, social communication in the 'new media' age may be thought of as a re-organised and re-grouped incarnation of previously known concepts, including social interaction, pragmatics (verbal and nonverbal), social cognition

and language processing (expressive and receptive) in social contexts (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, n.d.). According to Kim's (2001) theory, social communication can be viewed in terms of two dimensions, which comprise *host* social communication and *ethnic* social communication, each of which consists of interpersonal and mass communication activities. Through relational communication activities, not only could strangers acquire verbal and nonverbal 'norms' in the local context but they could also gain emotional support and the chance to reflect on their thoughts and behaviours (ibid.). It should be noted that in Kim's (ibid.) theory, host interpersonal or relational communication refers to the strangers' contact with members of the local culture, who have successfully adapted. Through mass media in the host context, strangers are supposed to become acquainted with culture and language, especially during the initial stage of the adaptation process when their interaction with local people is limited. According to Kim (ibid.), host social communication comprising interpersonal as well as mass communication activities in the host society can serve as an indispensable channel for strangers to gain important information about the host country. At the same time, it is critical for successful adaptation.

Regarding SA students' interpersonal communication in a host context, recent research has shown that students' interpersonal communication with host nationals is crucial and beneficial for their SA outcomes. The empirical evidence gathered over this period pointed to the deep impact of positive social relationships on students' language gains, suggesting that interpersonal relationships with host nationals such as host family, local friends, and fellow students are closely related to students' host language learning outcomes (see Dewey, Belnap & Hillstrom, 2013; Isabelli-García, 2006; Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura & McManus, 2017). Yet an aspect that has been largely neglected in relevant research is strangers' communication with their teachers within the SA context. Studies by Dobranksy and Frymier (2004), den Brok, Brekelmans and Wubbels (2006) and Gu and Schweisfurth (2006) all indicate the prominent role of communication with host teachers for SA students. Clearly this field is an under-studied area that requires further attention. This gap is partly attributable to the misunderstanding of teacher-student

communication as formal and non-social. In fact, this understanding can be questioned since students' communication, including that of SA students with their teachers, is essentially social in nature (Frymier & House, 2000).

More importantly, with reference to language strangers who study in China, a context relevant to the current study, it is worth noting that programmes were all designed for international exchange students to study intensively in a small classroom (less than 20 students). Hence, all the programmes shared a similar curriculum, based on 20 teaching hours (for compulsory modules) in the intensive-learning class (about 4 hours a day, 5 days a week) as well as 2-hour cultural activities in the afternoon Monday through Friday, which were organized by their programmes. The intensive learning course arrangement and small class size provided all three participants with enough time and opportunity to communicate with their Chinese teachers. Considering its great impact as a factor of influence and the existing gap in the literature, together with findings of the two focus group interviews, I narrowed down my investigation of SA student's interpersonal communication to their communication with host teachers in the present study.

On the other hand, host mass media has been identified as 'a cultural practice' (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2017) for strangers, including SA students. This type of media provides platforms on which a great variety of issues, such as power, identity, and social structure, are negotiated (Jensen, 2002). Thus, host mass media can become an effective channel for strangers to learn the conventions of the host language, culture and customs, establish contact with other people, entertain themselves, and reduce or even allay their fears and worries upon entering the host culture. However, few scholars have paid attention to the interplay between SA students' cross-cultural adaptation and host mass media. More importantly, there are only a few studies that have focused on how and in what ways host mass media affect SA students negatively. For example, in her autobiography, Keshishian (2000) illustrates her adaptation difficulties as a result of increasing mutual alienation caused by the negative images of immigrant stereotypes, which were reinforced by host mass media (i.e. US mass media). According to Qian and Scott (2007), personal

information from social media may prove to be detrimental for establishing an appropriate intercultural relationship in host contexts. Forbush and Foucault-Welles (2016) and Sawyer and Chen (2012) suggest that social media now plays an even more important role in facilitating SA students' cross-cultural adaptation, although the challenges it poses are unprecedented. This marks a departure from the ideas advanced by Kim (2001) who stressed only the positive role of mass media in strangers' adaptation process. Host mass media does not merely function as a carrier of host society content but also as a platform for students to be engaged more interactively in the host country. Although the findings of this study showed to an extent that social media did play an important role for three participants, it behoves us to be cautious and favour a more critical perspective of the impact of new media on human society and adaptation, which are still in the initial stages of being researched (Chen, 2012).

2.3.6. Sources of dissonance in the SA context

Previous studies show that students who move abroad to pursue their studies are likely to encounter a number of issues as they learn to live, study and communicate in a different culture. These dissonances, confusions or shocks are likely to incorporate: problems of interpretation due to 'cultural representation' (Hall, 1976; 1997), recourse to cultural explanations for linguistic misunderstandings (Piller, 2007), exposure to 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995), and 'learning shock' (Gu & Maley, 2008) within the educational setting.

Hall (1997) explains cultural representation as the connection between language, culture and representation. He observes that 'culture is about "shared meanings"' and that 'language is the privileged medium in which we "make sense" of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged' (ibid., p.1). According to Hall,

[.....] the sharing of meanings can occur only through 'our common access to language'. This enables participants to create 'a culture of shared understandings', through which they 'interpret the world in roughly the same ways'. The participants operate as a 'representational system' embodied in

'signs and symbols' that include words, images and objects. Hall emphasises that language serves as 'one of the "media" through which thoughts, ideas and feelings are represented in a culture. Representation through language is therefore central to the processes by which meaning is produced' (ibid., p.1).

The participants in this study were SA students from the UK living and studying in China, who were exposed to this 'representational system' not only in their academic life but also in the wider setting. This included socialisation with peers, interaction with locals and exposure to the country's media. Thus, issues linked to such interaction and exposure can be expected.

However, cultural representation should not be taken as entirely monolithic. Nor should it be assumed that issues arising from the 'representational systems' of the SA students and their SA context always occur due to cultural differences alone. This is because the cultures of the SA students and the SA context are not static and homogenous. Piller (2007) contradicts the cultural essentialism that such homogeneity would imply. Piller argues that 'whether culture is viewed as nation, as ethnicity, as faith, as gender, or as sexuality, all these "cultures" have one thing in common: they are imagined communities' (2007, p.211). She points out that some misunderstandings that are seen as cultural are in fact linguistic:

Some misunderstandings that are considered 'cultural' are in fact based on inequality and taking recourse to 'intercultural communication' can serve to obfuscate relationships of global inequality and injustice.'

To illustrate the above, she considers research by Chaney and Martin (2004), which seeks to match 'verbal style' with 'ethnic group'. Chaney and Martin (2004) supported their claims by noting that, for example, the German language was structured so that speakers did not immediately get to the point, and in Japanese, the word 'yes' could have multiple meanings. Piller (2007) rebuts the premise of this research, arguing that since culture involves a great number of contexts, it cannot be defined in only one way.

Therefore, within the SA context, SA students and others may try to explain misunderstandings in terms of culture, whereas their basis might be linguistic or be linked to inequalities unrelated to cultural explanations.

Other potential sources of tension for SA students adjusting to life outside their home country may be exposure to strong nationalism and associated values in their daily lives and communication, both at home and in their host country. The work of Billig (1995) has led to the development of the concept of banal nationalism, which refers to ‘ideological habits which enable[...]established nations [...] to be reproduced’ and whereby ‘the nation is indicated, or “flagged”, in the lives of its citizenry’ and ‘nationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nations, is the endemic condition’ (Billig 1995, p.6). Within the SA context, the thread of nationalism and national identity could be discernible in both host and social media.

Finally, in adjusting to the Chinese educational setting, SA students may experience what Gu and Maley (2008) have described as ‘learning shock’. They define this as

[...] some unpleasant feelings and difficult experiences that learners encounter when they are exposed to a new learning environment. Such unpleasant feelings can be intensified and impose a deeper psychological and emotional strain on learners when they study abroad (p.224).

In line with this, SA students may experience psychological and cognitive struggles of ‘learning shock’, which primarily result from a developing but insufficient ability with the Chinese language and unfamiliarity with different pedagogical traditions in China.

All the above issues may hamper communication and make both learning and daily life difficult, thus leading to psychological, emotional and cognitive challenges for SA learners. Dissonance in the SA context for the three participants in this study will be furthered elaborated on in Chapter 4.

2.4 Kim's integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation

The core of Kim's (2001) theory pertains to two main aspects. The first relates to the essential nature of the adaptation process, which is represented via the process model, whereas the second aspect is about successful adaptation and factors influencing it, which is illustrated by the structural model.

2.4.1 The process model

Kim (2001) offers a broader perspective for examining stress as it occurs during the processes of cross-cultural adaptation. In this process, the model of 'stress-adaptation-growth dynamic' presents three conceptual representations of 'the psychological dynamic underpinning the cross-cultural adaptation process' (Kim 2012, p.234).

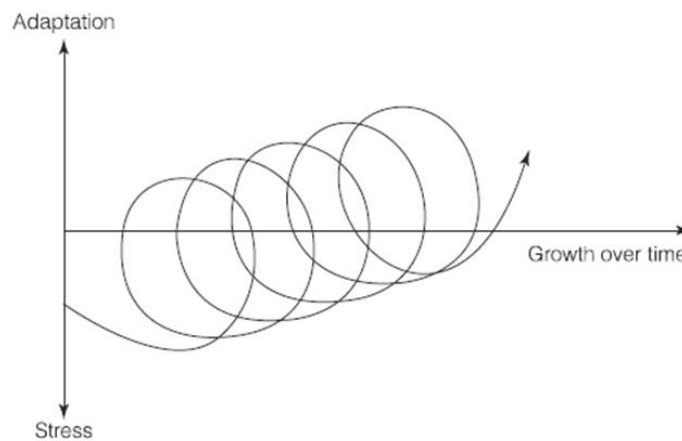


Figure 2.1 The stress-adaptation-growth dynamic: A process model (Kim 2001, p.57)

Figure 2.1 illustrates the psychological movement in a 'draw-back-to-leap' cycle and continuous pattern. This model produces an imbalanced state reflective of unsureness, perplexity and anxiety wherein stress also works to push strangers to overcome these emotional difficulties and to engage in further adaptation, thus gradually moving towards greater adaptation and growth. As for strangers, each stressful experience can bring about the process of 'drawing back', which then functions as an impetus for later adaptive activities and drives sojourners towards adaptation. In Kim's (2001, p.234) words, this model displays stress and adaptation as functionally interrelated and serves as 'a dialectic

between disintegration and reintegration, between regression and progression, and between permanence and change’.

Kim (2001) also developed a similar ‘stress–adaptation–growth’ model with emphasis on diminishing fluctuation over time. This model illustrates that the fluctuations of stress and adaptation, reflecting the progress of the strangers’ adaptive changes, are likely to lose their intensity and thereby to produce a soothing of the stranger’s internal state over an extended period of time (*ibid.*, p.59). However, the focus of this study is the association between stress and other dimensions in cross-cultural adaptation, rather than the severity of the stress itself.

2.4.2 The structural model

Kim’s (2001) structural model is built on the process model and has multiple dimensions. It examines the influential dimensions and factors for differential rates or levels of cross-cultural adaptation. As shown in Figure 2.2, the structural model showcases six key dimensions that may support or hinder the process of cross-cultural adaptation. These include host communication competence (HCC), social communication, ethnic social communication, environment, predisposition and intercultural transformation in the host settings. In this study, the focus is on host social communication as a key concept (see also Section 2.3.5).

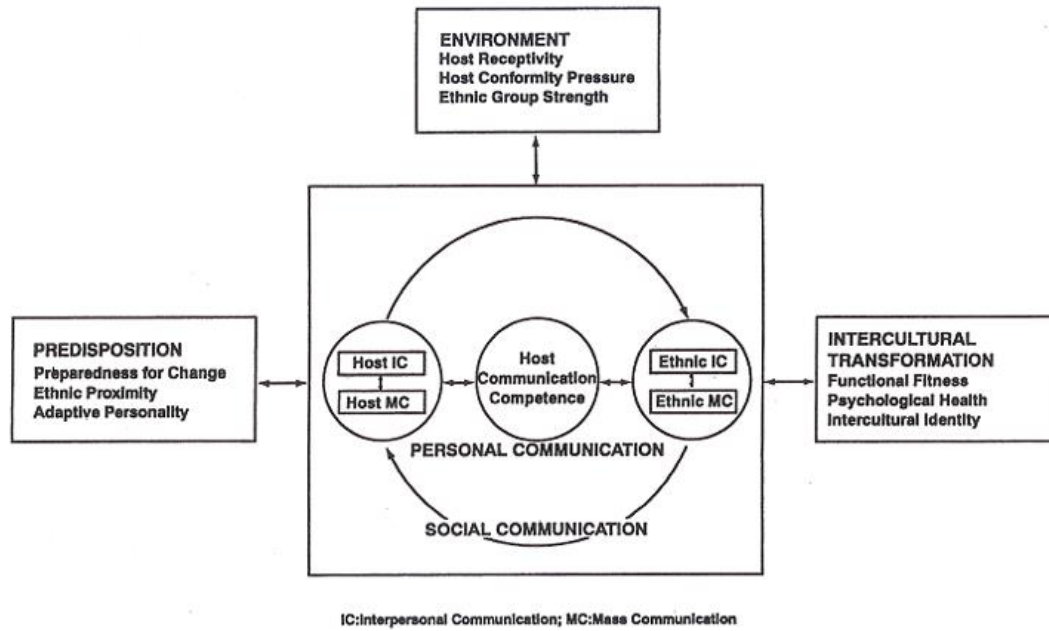


Figure 2.2 Structural model: Factors influencing cross-cultural adaptation (Kim 2001, p.87)

Kim (2001) coined the term HCC to refer to ‘the overall capacity of the stranger to receive and process information appropriately and effectively (decoding)’ in addition to designing ‘plans to initiate messages or respond to others (encoding) in accordance with the host communication system’ (p. 73). In other words, this concerns the ability to communicate psychologically and socio-culturally in a host environment. These three interrelated dimensions of HCC, cognitive, affective and operational, are also consistent with the previous studies of intercultural communication competence (ICC) (e.g. Byram & Feng, 2006; Chen & Starosta, 1996).

These studies use *intercultural sensitivity* to conceptualize the affective dimension of intercultural competence. Their model examines the individual’s capacity to initiate and process encouraging emotional signals prior, during and subsequent to intercultural interactional encounters. If these emotional responses are positive in nature, they will lead to the acknowledgement and respect of cultural differences.

Byram and Feng (2006) argue that an absence of such responses could signal to SA students that they are isolated. Access to native speakers is not always easy, and this lack of contact could be a frustrating experience when studying abroad. Especially in informal

language learning contexts, culture learning should be recognised and analysed from the perspective of learners (ibid.). HCC is considered to be a key driver of the cross-cultural adaptation process. Hence, HCC, based on the same affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions as ICC can be taken as a type of ICC that is specific to host contexts.

Both host social communication (Host IC and Host MC) as well as ethnic social communication (Ethnic IC and Ethnic MC) involve strangers' participation in activities that are related to the interpersonal aspect and to mass communication. However, while host social communication is concerned with the strangers' participation and engagement in a host context, ethnic social communication emphasises communication with people from the same ethnic background. Kim (2001) points out that the host social communication of strangers is essential for their adaptation process. Through their interpersonal communication with local people, strangers could become familiar with the rules of local communication practices, verbal and nonverbal alike, thus securing emotional support from locals while gaining the chance to reflect on their own communication practices. On the other hand, ethnic social communication is about communication with people from the home culture or with a similar national or ethnic background. This type of communication tends to impede strangers' long-term adaptation into the host context, although it is considered helpful for short-term adaptation (ibid.).

The environmental dimension consists of three parts: host receptivity (the local people's attitudes towards strangers), host conformity pressure (the degree to which strangers are expected to follow the host cultural patterns), and ethnic group strength (the strangers' ethnic groups and their influence on the host society).

Predisposition is about the strangers' own conditions prior to their arrival in the host setting. This dimension is concerned with how ready the entrants into the host culture are for change, the proximity or gap between their ethnic groups as well as the capacity for adaptation as reflected in their personalities. This readiness is related to the level of strangers' preparation for facing the upcoming challenges of living in a host culture. Ethnic proximity refers to the distance or disparity between the strangers' ethnicity and

that of the locals. The adaptive personality is characterised by the strangers' openness, strength, and positivity. Both the environmental dimension and predisposition were considered to demonstrate close connectivity with the three participants' overall cross-cultural adaptation process and outcomes.

Intercultural transformation is the result of adapting across cultures, including aspects such as functional fitness, psychological health and transcending cultural outlook, respectively demonstrable in the performance of their daily activities, psychological and mental well-being, intercultural identity, and tolerance and acceptance without the restriction of ethnocentric biases.

The six dimensions are interrelated in several ways. The structural model serves as an interactive framework in which 'all the linkages indicate mutual (and not unidirectional) causations' (Kim, 2001, p.86), whether positive or negative. These dimensions and their inner factors could be employed to explain the outcomes of a stranger's cross-cultural adaptation. Yet, the influences of each dimension and factor on an individual may vary from case to case, which is important for the current multiple-case study.

Due to the limited scope of this study, the focus is only on host social communication. However, other relevant factors, such as motivation, personality and ethnicity were also integrated into the pre-departure interviews, and possible links between these and the three cases were explored.

2.4.3 Limitations of integrative theory

One key limitation is the conceptualisation of host mass communication which 'requires little or no involvement in personalised relationships with specific individuals [which] are governed by little mutual obligation, effort, or responsibility on the part of the spectator' (Kim 2001, p.76). In fact, this emphasis on mass communication as being unidirectional (i.e. the influence of mass media on strangers) may be considered outdated because it is more congruent with the needs of the late twentieth century when this theory was first invented and developed. In this research, it is argued that contemporary citizens

of the world are experiencing mass media that has become highly interactive and seeks to facilitate audience engagement.

In addition, although Kim (2001) has illustrated each model on its own (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2), she fails to make explicit associations between them. Doing so could lead to a fuller explanation of the whole process of cross-cultural adaptation and the interplay between how stress can lead to growth and eventually adaptation, as reflected in the research questions framing this study (see Section 2.5.2). Thus, reflection is needed on the possibility of combining the two models into an integrated whole with factors interactively connected. It was this approach to research that allowed this study to present an integrated framework based on these two models.

2.5 Justification for conducting the research

2.5.1 Gaps identified in existing literature

Despite extensive research in SA, I have identified four main gaps in the existing literature. These include a lack of rigorously conducted process-based qualitative research, paucity of innovative methodological approaches and of long-term studies, dearth of studies about stress on individual cases and social communication, and a lack of studies with an emphasis on the case of outbound UK students in a China SA context.

A salient gap in the SA literature is attributable to the prevalence of quantitative studies that are overwhelmingly outcome-based. Kinginger (2009) argues that two groups can be chiefly identified in terms of approaches: one is outcome-based quantitative studies and the other is process-based and qualitative approaches. The quantitative approaches are primarily concerned with SLA and in particular language proficiency outcomes or specific language skills (see Freed, 1995; 1998; Kinginger, 2009). They are regularly based on comparisons of variables during the pre- and post-SA period, or both in SA and non-SA contexts (e.g., Ginsberg & Miller, 2000; Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). Being quantitative studies, they do not make reference to the qualities of SA experience,

making it difficult to obtain a comprehensive understanding of students' experience during their SA period.

According to Wilkinson (1998), SA studies require a research shift from language or attitudes focused outcomes to the process of the SA, and in particular what is really happening during the whole process of SA. The present study addresses this methodological gap in the literature by employing a qualitative process-based approach to attain a deeper as well as more meaningful insight into the process.

Most studies on SA are conducted in a time-restricted mode, especially during summer courses over a period of less than eight weeks (see Alred & Byram, 2002; Ding, 2014). Also, the over-reliance on methods such as interviews, surveys, and questionnaires may fail to capture emotions, reactions or other feelings emerging at that time. Thus, in this study, in order to get a wider picture of the students' SA experience and track their lived stressful encounters, data collection has been triangulated by combining diary writing and reflexive photography with notes and follow-up interviews. Diaries and reflexive photography are interactive and spontaneous tools that provide the necessary freedom and space for participants to record data based on their own subjective judgement on any occasion. More importantly, follow-up research of 6 months enabled the researcher to analyse data in depth and rigorously, identifying subtle changes over time and changes perceived after SA.

There is still a lack of a comprehensive understanding of SA students' cross-cultural adaptation from the perspective of stress, adaptation and growth in terms of individual cases and their association with the social communication during the SA period. Although studies have recognised the existence and impact of stress, research has yet to investigate this systematically and holistically. Existing SA studies on this issue have mostly been from the perspective of learners' language anxiety in SLA (see Wang, 2009). Few studies have shed light on the association between students' stress and possible growth, or broader sociocultural factors such as social communication which give rise to their stress and to their growth. A detailed examination of the interplay between these factors within

individual cases is a core part of the current study. Moreover, although there is extensive literature on students' social communication, there has been little or no direct investigation of students' social communication with their teachers and with the host mass media, nor how these communicative interactions impact on their cross-cultural adaptation process.

Lastly, limited attention has been paid to the specific group of outbound UK university students in the China SA context. The great majority of SA research tends to focus on US students (Kinging, 2009) with comparatively few studies focusing on SA students in the European or Asian context. Amongst studies focused on Europe, Erasmus students have received great attention (Gallucci, 2011; Kinginger, 2009), whereas UK and other European students studying abroad in countries like China have been largely overlooked. SA studies in China have focused on international students with an East Asian background due to numerous students coming from countries such as Japan and South Korea, or international students who are of Chinese origin but have been born outside China and have acquired Chinese as a heritage language. Western SA students in China, especially from the UK, are rarely given attention within the literature. Given this gap, this current study sought to develop insights into the life experience of three UK university students undertaking study abroad in China.

2.5.2 Research questions

The research questions were arranged in accordance with the three core aspects focused upon in the present study: acculturative stress, cross-cultural adaptation and personal growth. Relevant data were gathered through diaries, reflexive photography and interviews to answer the following questions. Based on this data, the study examined how the participants reflexively evaluated their own host social communication. It also examined how they could relate acculturative stress to these factors as a means of investigating their adaptive changes in a cross-cultural adaptation process. The research questions that frame this study are as follows:

RQ 1. What are the causes of acculturative stress for SA students prior to and during SA as well as subsequent to the SA period?

RQ 2. How do SA students perceive and respond to acculturative stress?

RQ 3. How does acculturative stress impact students' SA personal growth?

These questions will be addressed in the empirical part of this study (see Chapter 4) by examining how the three strangers made sense of their experiences by means of personal diaries, reflexive photography and interviews (see Section 3.3.3).

2.6 Summary of Chapter 2

This chapter provided the background for this study by discussing the concepts pertaining to and definitions of SA, thus progressing the discussion towards an examination and critique of the theoretical framework for this study based on Kim's (2001) theory of communication cross-cultural adaptation. It also elaborated upon concepts central to an understanding of the study abroad experience and process for sojourning students, which included notions of acculturative stress, growth, adaptation, sojourning student as stranger and host social communication. In addition, based on a survey of existing research, the chapter established the gap for this study, in view of the dearth of qualitative, in-depth studies focused on the SA experience rather than on linguistic gains or student outcomes, which were identified as prevalent themes in existing, predominantly quantitative, studies. The chapter also discussed the research questions addressed in this study. The next chapter will present details of the methodology adopted in this study to address these highlighted questions.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I introduce the methodology and rationale for the chosen methods. I begin by introducing the overall research design and in particular the epistemological and ontological stances of social constructivism. Then, attention is paid to the qualitative approach I adopt for the research design, followed by the implementation of a case-study research strategy and the choice of the site and participants. The four-stage design presented in this chapter consists of the preliminary stage, pre-SA, SA period and post-SA. Next the three data collection tools, namely, diaries, reflexive photography and interviews are presented. A combination of these methods provides innovative approaches to SA studies. These methods are also consistent with the qualitative orientation of the study because they provide a unique perspective, reflecting the complexity of participants' lived experiences as an ongoing and dynamic process. Thematic analysis was employed in order to generate useful insights through the identification of themes, allowing for the identification of similarities and differences within and across cases. This chapter concludes by examining validity, reliability and ethical considerations, all of which were implemented throughout the entire research process. These factors were of high importance in this study due to the involvement of participants' emotional difficulties during the SA period.

3.1 Overall research design

3.1.1 Epistemological and ontological stances

Epistemology refers to the relationship between the researcher and reality, as well as the nature of knowledge, while ontology concerns the nature of reality (Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaug, 2001; Richards, 2003). In general, both have an impact on how researchers in social science conduct their research, especially in analysing and making sense of the data they collect.

In this study, the ontological and epistemological stances are formulated within the social constructivist paradigm (see also Section 2.2.2). According to social constructivist theory, reality is relative, multiple, and socially constructed, and knowledge is dependent on the interpretation of those involved (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 2003). Accordingly, in the context of this study, multiple realities were constructed and reconstructed by all participants, who developed subjective meanings and made sense of their experience as a way of gaining knowledge through ‘interactions with others’ (Creswell 2014, p.8).

Multiple realities were present not only through participants’ social interactions (i.e. social communication), but also through their interactions with the researcher during the data collection period, especially in the interviews. In summary, the ontological and epistemological stances featured in social constructivism allowed the attachment of great importance to the subjectivity of this study, and co-constructed meaning through social interactions.

3.1.2 A qualitative approach

As has already been mentioned in Section 2.5, quantitative approaches have been widely used in SA studies. This study turns the methodological focus towards a qualitative approach for two main reasons.

Unlike a quantitative approach that aims at establishing cause and effect relationships among factors, a qualitative approach is often used to gain an in-depth understanding of how people think, feel or react in a natural setting. As pointed out by Denzin and Lincoln (2018), qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world, namely, ‘a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible’ (p.10). Being interpretive, the qualitative approach of this study can only identify possible relationships, causes, effects and dynamic processes, rather than generalise. The naturalistic feature also fits well with the exploratory nature of this study; that is, to find out what was actually happening to the three participants in their SA context. Moreover, this approach gives more weight to the views of the participants, whose subjective experiences imply a

qualitative and inductive approach to investigate their feelings, experiences and stories in a SA context. In a nutshell, this qualitative approach was useful for examining the inner thoughts of the SA participants' experiences, for thoroughly investigating the individual cases and, finally, for acquiring a much more comprehensive and insightful understanding of the topic at hand.

In addition, this study reflects a recent tendency in cross-cultural communication research to adopt more interpretive qualitative approaches that use methods such as ethnography, in-depth interviews and case studies. Such research, according to MacDonald and O'Regan (2011), is informed by ontology and epistemology that is predominantly social constructionist. Aiming at a deeper understanding of social phenomena, a qualitative approach highlights situational and contextual constraints that shape the whole research process. The qualitative approach is 'grounded in the lived experiences of people' (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.2) and emphasizes how individuals' social experience is given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), which comes closer to the primary concern of this study; i.e. how the participants perceived their lived experiences and how they made sense of those experiences in the SA context. Moreover, a qualitative approach can help gain a deeper understanding through close examination of the research topic, seeking to understand the context and setting of examples in the three cases. Overall, the qualitative approach helped to develop a deeper understanding of how the participants, along with me as a researcher, perceive and react to the social realities (i.e. participants' social communication activities in China) and how they were created and given *meaning*. In this regard, the qualitative approach is consistent with the social constructivist perspective of this study.

3.1.3 Case study as a research strategy

Case studies have been widely used in social sciences and other disciplines. Yin (2014) states that the case study is both a research strategy and an empirical study investigating contemporary context-bounded issues, especially when 'the boundaries between phenomenon and context are clearly evident' (p.16). Creswell (2013) proposes a similar

definition and refers to the case study as an in-depth inquiry of one or multiple bounded system(s) that are ‘bounded by time and place’ (p.97). Simons (2009) further points out that the case study is research-based and evidence-based. He describes the case study as ‘an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme, or system in real-life context’ (ibid., p.21). Merriam (2009) extended the definition of case study, describing it as a context-specific bounded system with a focus on the process. Despite the variety of definitions, case studies tend to focus on the interplay between contextual factors and the entity.

Moreover, the incentive to conduct this case study came from the researcher’s intention to investigate issues related to students’ cross-cultural adaptation during their SA. In this regard, it also takes on some inherent features of the case study as proposed by Stake (2005) who argues that it is ‘not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied’ (p.443). Stake (ibid.) does not suggest that a case study has little to do with the method or methodology and emphasizes its broader context. Here, it is proposed that a case study is not only a method but also a type of research strategy, encompassing a series of qualitative methods.

As Yin (2014) points out, the research questions of case studies should have the form of ‘how or why’ examining contemporary educational issues over which the researcher has little control. This study is concerned with the experience of three UK higher education students in China, a natural educational setting in which the researcher has little external control or intervention. The proposed research questions ask the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of ongoing phenomena of students’ developmental change, such as adaptation and growth, as well as how they interact with each other.

Contexts are highly pertinent to case studies (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014) and especially relevant to the current research into personal and social communication. These contexts are embedded in cultural and social norms and can be influenced by personal beliefs, perceptions, and understandings, as well as experience. Case studies can provide various sources of evidence, be they documents, archival records, interviews,

direct observations, participant-observations, and physical artefacts, in quantitative and/or qualitative ways (Yin, 2014). Using case studies with multiple tools of data collection, such as diaries, reflexive photography, and interviews, allows the possibility of eliciting much more detail to facilitate the understanding of SA students and their developmental changes in host contexts.

In the present study, three participants were recruited, each constituting a separate case. It fits into the multiple-case study design which contains more than one case (Yin, 2014). Compared to a single case study, the multiple-case approach is adopted for understanding the differences and similarities among several cases with the data, within and across situations through a replication strategy (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014). Accordingly, data from a multiple-case study is considered reliable and convincing, though time- and resource-consuming (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014). By analysing within and across the cases, both similarities and differences among cases were revealed, thus allowing underlying complexities to be revealed and understood compellingly (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014). Thus, this research has an exploratory design in which crosschecking between different participants could provide a more holistic understanding of a specific phenomenon.

It should be noted that this study is limited by the number of cases (i.e. three separate cases). This was partly due to the restrictions posed by the length of this thesis. However, it is argued that the quality of a multiple case study is not assessed by the number of cases it comprises, but by the extent to which insights about relationships can be described appropriately and understood within the context.

3.1.4 Sampling of site and participants

Non-probability sampling was used in the selection of the research site and participants. Characterised by the researcher's subjective judgement rather than random selection (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014), non-probability sampling is often employed for site and participant sampling because it can 'purposefully inform an understanding of the research

problem and central phenomenon in the study' (Creswell, 2013, p.156). In short, this sampling method is more suitable for in-depth qualitative research focusing on complex social phenomena, such as the current study.

Based on this non-probability sampling, I selected a UK university (hereafter, referred to as the University of Britain) as the sampling site because it is one of the first universities in the UK to offer Mandarin as a degree course and establish SA programmes in China. Since I had already taught two modules at this university, I was quite familiar with the educational setting, its personnel and some of the students. The cultural background and resources of this university, and my familiarity with its context, afforded me the opportunity to obtain sufficient data relating to the study. Site sampling was used only to select this university and not the students' university or location in China since, for most students, their choice of SA destination in China varies.

As regards participant sampling, considering that most UK university students who go to China for their SA have a Chinese language-related background (UKKi, 2018), the selection criteria for participants included majoring or taking classes in Mandarin. In most cases, students taking classes in Mandarin go to China for six-months to one year for their SA experience in the third year of their studies. To better investigate the cross-cultural adaptation process of students as 'strangers', this study chose to focus on students who had no previous long-term learning experience (i.e. no more than six months) in China, excluding short-term visiting and learning, such as summer schools or trips.

The selection process of participants was not limited to students with UK origin or nationality due to the high level of internationalisation in the higher education system. In terms of SA, non-UK domiciled students accounted for more than one fifth of all students from UK institutions participating in SA in the 2015/16 academic year (UUKi, 2018). The exclusion of non-domestic UK students, who account for a noticeable proportion of SA students in UK higher education, would result in narrow applicability of the findings.

Initially, I recruited eight participants whom I believed would present rich information about the issues under investigation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). I took several factors into consideration, such as their interests, gender, nationality (to include students from different cultural origins and backgrounds) and willingness to participate. I arranged a face-to-face talk with them, and I took the chance to outline the data collection requirements in detail. Two of the students that were interested at first proved to be quite slow in replying to my emails and were sometimes hard to get in touch with. Thus, I decided to have six students in my research but given the word limit set by the thesis, I finally decided to select four cases for data collection and analysis. I recruited four students as participants from the University of Britain who were given the pseudonyms Melian, Natalie, Tom and Lucy. Their majors are China-related and in each of their course requirements, like many other Chinese studies courses in the UK, there is a ‘sandwich year/placement’: a whole year abroad for students majoring in a language. These participants accepted their offer in June 2016 from four separate Chinese universities for one or two terms of an intensive course.

Data collection was mainly conducted in the Chinese higher education context. The universities involved are labelled Universities A, B, C and D, all four of which are in different Chinese cities, located southwest, along the east coast and far south. A variety in geographical and cultural backgrounds can help to provide a fuller account of the issue at hand. The four Chinese universities run two semesters a year, the autumn and the spring semesters, which is typical across China. The autumn semester lasts from mid-September until early January, with the last four weeks used for revision and final exams, followed by a 4-5 week winter holiday. Since most courses and modules are semester-based, the autumn semester was deemed appropriate for investigating participants’ social experience intensively.

One participant, Lucy, withdrew from this study after data collection was completed, including part of their analysis and discussion. As previously agreed, all transcripts were returned, along with the discussions of her case with the other students to double-check

if the transcripts were accurate. After discussing Lucy's concerns with her, I supported her decision to quit the study. I confess that her withdrawal affected this study to some extent but, in the end, the effects turned out to be less observable since I had obtained sufficient data from the other three participants during the empirical research.

3.1.5 Academic context of students and programme details

The SA programme (Mandarin) at the University of Britain investigated in this study is structured to enable students to study Chinese language and culture in China. In either Year 2 or Year 3, students spend a full year in China, undertaking a study placement at a Chinese university which lasts either six months or a full year. Students studying a combined degree of Mandarin and a second foreign language could stay in China for six months and then move to the other target-language country for the remaining six months. Their scores gained in China during the SA period will not be accredited to their score at the University of Britain. In this study, two participants (Melian and Natalie) spent the whole year in China, while one participant (Tom) spent the first six months in China before moving to Japan for his Japanese SA courses.

During the academic year 2016-2017, when data collection was carried out, 27 of the University of Britain's language students went to China for their SA. 18 students were sponsored by the Confucius Institute Scholarship, while the remaining 9 students were self-funded. In this study, all the participants were funded by the Confucius Institute Scholarship.

The programmes at the Chinese universities involved in this study are all designed for international exchange students, enabling them to undertake intensive study and experience a similar curriculum, with 20-24 teaching hours (for compulsory modules) per week for the intensive-learning class in the morning, and 2-hour cultural activities in the afternoon from Monday to Friday. All the courses are taught in Mandarin Chinese. The SA students are admitted to the intermediate level courses, where they are expected to learn 5200 phrases (including 2200 Chinese characters). The modules in a typical course

for the SA student include but are not limited to: Intermediate Chinese, Reading, Listening, Speaking, Basic Chinese writing, Business Chinese/Newspaper Chinese and News (for the curriculum of the SA programme of Universities A, B and C, please see Appendix 7).

3.2 Four-stage empirical research

The empirical research was divided into four main stages: the preliminary stage, pre-SA, SA period and post-SA (see Figure 3.1). This multiple-case study was conducted in a longitudinal and qualitative way.

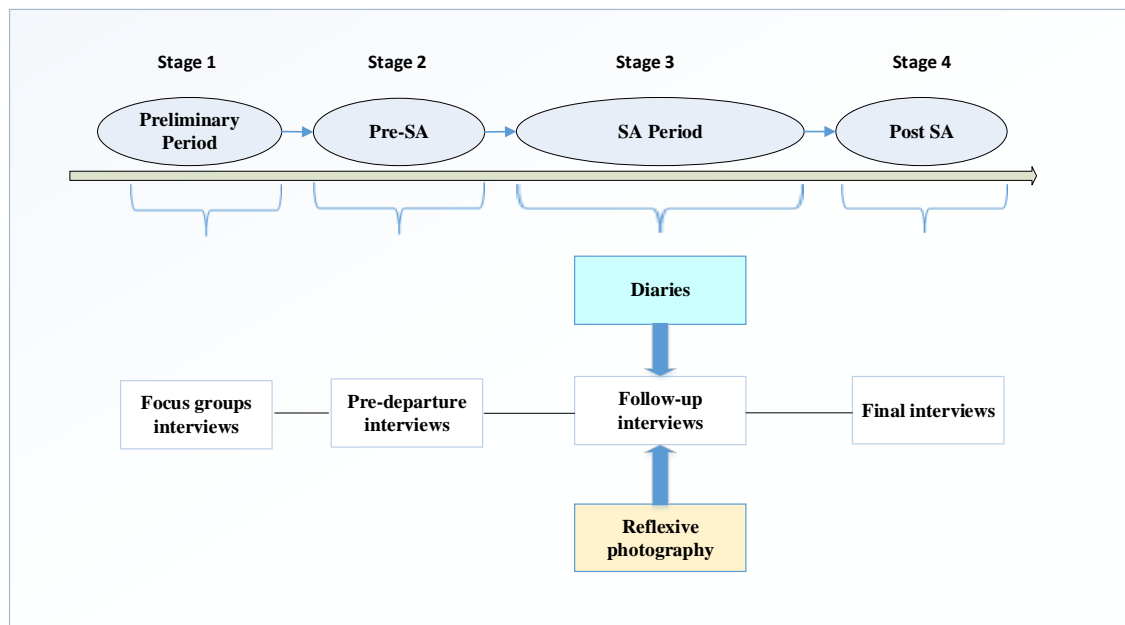


Figure 3.1 Data collection process

Three data collection methods were employed: diaries, reflexive photography, and interviews (see Section 3.3). Data from these methods were considered sufficient for providing a solid foundation for recording participants' exploration-based experiences in a cross-cultural context.

3.2.1 Stage 1: Preliminary period

At the beginning, the participants were informed of the general purpose, procedure, and confidentiality of this study, and of their right to withdraw. All this information was

included in the informed consent given to them along with the tasks they would be asked to perform. In order to minimise inconvenience and interruption to participants' lives and studies, they were assured that all the activities would be scheduled according to the dates and times that best suited them.

The preliminary stage took place in the UK, prior to the students' departure for China. Given the various types of host social communication and their broader implications, the starting point was to identify the most salient domain in host social communication through interviews. In particular, two focus group interviews were arranged with students in the third and fourth years at a UK university. Each group consisted of 7–8 students who had re-entered their home culture, and the discussions lasted for about one hour.

The Year-3 participants had just completed their SA and returned from China. Year 4 participants had been to China for their SA one year ago. All participants in the two interviews were familiar with one another, and they had spent at least six months in China (see also Section 3.3.3). The familiarity and similar backgrounds of participants, as suggested by Krueger and Casey (2015, p.6), is 'a basis for recruitment' so as to elicit more insightful and shared feedback.

3.2.2 Stage 2: Pre-SA

The pre-SA period included meetings with each participant separately prior to departure. During these initial meetings, it was important not only to discuss expectations about their future studies, but also to elicit information as to why they wanted to study abroad, and their goals for the programme. Setting rules, procedures, a rough timetable, and their expectations were essential components of their participation in the empirical research.

At this stage, the participants were told that they would receive an incentive in vouchers (40 pounds) for participating in this study. It was my judgement that, considering the time and effort this study required, this incentive was not so attractive as to induce participation against better judgement, but was an appropriate token of appreciation for participants' contributions. More importantly, all participants showed great interest and eagerness to

participate in this study. Therefore, giving vouchers to participants in this study did not affect the trustworthiness of the research and is not problematic from an ethical perspective.

3.2.3 Stage 3: SA period

The second and main data collection stage was the SA period. Three qualitative methods were used, covering the whole autumn academic semester 2016 for fifteen consecutive weeks (including a one-week national holiday in early October 2016). Participants were asked to keep written diaries to record what they experienced or observed in relation to their teachers during their stay in China, mostly relating to the classroom on campus. In these diaries, the participants could record and reflect on their affective and cognitive dimensions from their personal point of view (Bailey, 1990; Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014).

There was a change during the study in terms of diary writing. Diary data were designed to be collected three times per week, with each entry to be no less than 500 words in length. This word limit was agreed upon by both the researcher and participants prior to data collection. After the first week, I realized that although the data collected was valuable, it failed to reach the required word limit. I immediately communicated with the participants and discussed their feedback with them. I also realized that too much writing might be a burden for them while facing heavy academic workloads and adjustment issues in China. It became obvious that to set a word limit for diary entries was meaningless since what I needed was effective data, not entries of a certain length.

As a result, I decided to make diary data collection more flexible and effective by reducing the requirements: writing on a weekly basis without word limits. Participants were still very welcome to record and submit as many entries as they wished. Additionally, they were informed that if nothing happened in relation to the diary instruction questions during a certain period, it was acceptable to note it down in their diary entries. This action

turned out to be very successful, ensuring both the effectiveness and timeliness of data collection.

The participants were asked to keep diaries to record their interpersonal communication experience (both verbal and non-verbal) with their teachers during their SA, along with their perceptions and reflections. Overall, diary writing concentrated on two aspects: anything related to participants' teachers that either made them feel stressed or not; and anything related to their teachers that influenced their studies or their life positively or negatively. At the same time, they were asked to take photographs of whatever caused them stress in the host mass media (see also 3.3.2). As regards note taking, participants were also asked to record details of photos, such as date, time, sources, location, and description of the reasons why they deemed the situation stressful. There were no other requirements for the pictures so as to allow for greater flexibility and to provide participants with a tool to witness and collect data according to their own perspective.

3.2.4 Stage 4: Post-SA

A final interview was conducted with each participant in July and August 2017 when the participants came back to the UK. These interviews aimed to explore the developmental changes in relation to the issues under investigation that emerged or became prominent in the spring semester (see also Section 3.3.3). In doing so, it was hoped to gain a holistic perspective of their experience during the SA period. This goal is in line with Berry's (2006d) argument that 'acculturation is a process which takes place over time, and which results in changes both in the culture and in the individual. As for all processes, it is really only possible to observe change when the study design is longitudinal' (p.135).

3.3 Data collection tools

Three data collection tools were employed in this research: diaries, reflexive photography, and interviews. These methods were chosen in order to allow for a reflection of participants' true thoughts and feelings about specific incidents, and to examine how they

constructed pictures of social realities. All three methods are inherent to the interpretative and social constructivist paradigm within which this study was conducted.

3.3.1 Diaries

The current study used diaries to explore participants' interpersonal communication with their teachers. In particular, the participants were asked to keep written diaries to record their experiences or observations regarding stress in their communication with their teachers in the autumn semester.

In the research field, the diary was originally used in the study of historical or biographical events (Bryman, 2016) and then became an umbrella term referring to individuals' (auto)biographical writing and records based on their own experiences (Alaszewski, 2006). It has been employed as a data-collection tool based on first-person observations and interpretations to gain insight into the details of daily lives, such as the behaviour, events and other aspects of individuals (Corti, 1993).

In educational settings, it has been used as a tool to record introspective and first-person reflection with regards to learning or teaching (Bailey, 1990). Both teacher diaries and student (or learner) diaries focus on educational incidents or issues and how problems are solved in this process, providing a rich source of data for better understanding practices and perceptions of teachers and students. In the context of SA studies, diaries have been used widely to capture details of a variety of variables in the SA period, including language ability, behaviours, emotions, cross-cultural encounters, and other developmental changes over that period (see Ding, 2014; Gallucci, 2011; Pen, 2012).

Lines (1998) suggests the use of diaries enable a student's voice to be heard. Bearing this in mind, the participants here had the chance to express their true feelings and attitudes about their encounters during the SA period in China. To encourage participants to record their true feelings and perceptions, diary writing in this study was less structured (Thomson & Holland, 2005).

On the other hand, diaries, like other qualitative research methods, are often considered unreliable, offering nothing but biased stances (Corti, 1993; Symon, 2004). The subjective and retrospective nature of diaries are attributed to factors such as memory constraints, unconscious and purposeful editing, respondents' conditioning, insufficient recording, biased sample selection, categories, coding, interpretation and consistency of quality (Bell, 2012; Carson & Longhini, 2002). Therefore, it was taken into consideration that the records in diaries are sometimes 'factual' or 'fictional' (Alaszewski, 2006), and needed to be cross-investigated in the subsequent interviews.

3.3.2 Reflexive photography

In the present study, reflexive photography was employed as a means of triangulating data collection. This method consisted of two parts: photographs taken by the participants, and their notes about their interpretation of these photographs. Visual research is a growing area in applied linguistics (Kalaja & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2018). They point to the shift in focus from using images from the researcher's perspective, to having participants take photographs from their own perspective. Photographs, together with other visual images, have been increasingly used in a variety of ways in social science research and have gradually emerged from their 'marginalized status' (Harper, 2002). Yet, at the same time, less attention has been given to this type of method since interpreting images could be subjective, multiple, and ambiguous. Despite these doubts, the role of photograph-based studies is highlighted in exploring participants' experiences and meaning making (Frith, Riley, Archer & Gleeson, 2005).

There are two main ways for photographs to be used in qualitative studies: images produced by participants, and images produced by researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Photos taken by participants are referred to as reflexive photographs (Harper, 1988). This term was coined by Harper (*ibid.*), who used it as a means for data collection. Unlike photo-elicitation, which aims to provoke a response from participants, specifically in interviews to generate and extract information (Heisley & Levy, 1991), reflexive photography is a method in which participants are asked to take photographs and then

discuss and reflect on them in follow-up interviews with the researcher. According to Harper (1988, p.65), in the reflexive photographic method ‘the subject shares in the definition of meaning; thus, the definitions are said to “reflect back” from the subject’. In particular, in the interview prior to photographing, the researcher elicits from the participants certain types of information, and then he/she asks them to take relevant photographs of specific events/situations. Afterwards, these reflexive photos produced by participants are used in the subsequent interviews (Berman, Ford-Gilboe, Moutrey & Cekic, 2001).

The use of photographs taken by participants in cross-cultural and educational studies for student-based discussion is a common research practice (e.g. Douglas, 1998; Harrington & Lindy, 1999; Harrington & Schibik, 2003; Ziller, 1990). This method was used in the current study to examine students’ perception of their educational experiences. Studies employing this method are largely based on two theories: individual-environmental interaction theory and symbolic interactionism (Harrington & Schibik, 2003), which resonate with the social constructivism underpinning this study.

In this study, participants were first asked to capture objects in relation to mass media they encountered in their daily life during their SA in China. These objects were to be those conveying stress based on their own understanding. Then, participants had to record their thoughts and feelings along with their photographs. In particular, they needed to explain how these photos illustrated their stress since photographs may only capture an object or a moment during a dynamic process, whereas reflectional comments can add insight into this type of data. I collected the pictures on a fortnightly basis, together with their comments. As required by this study, participants selected one photo weekly that best illustrated the stress they believed they had undergone as a result of the pressure of mass media. In total, each participant was requested to submit a collection of 10 photos to the researcher for the follow-up interviews.

3.3.3 Interviews

In this study, all interviews were audio recorded, and lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes each. They were in-depth and semi-structured, and included both closed and open-ended questions. The dialogic and flexible nature of in-depth semi-structured interviews encouraged the researcher and the participants to communicate in a more relaxing atmosphere, which was quite necessary for this study since it dealt with participants' ongoing acculturative stress.

It also provided the flexibility to change the questions depending on the situation and new findings during the interview. Thus, both participants and the researcher were involved in more open discussions, creating multiple realities, as guided by social constructivism.

The participants were interviewed regularly throughout the data collection period, including focus group interviews, pre-departure interviews, follow-up interviews and final interviews. As Yin (2014) points out, the interview is the most frequently used tool in qualitative research, such as case studies. Interviews were conducted not only because they are a rich source of data, but also because they provided the researcher with channels of communication with the participants so as to have 'meanings' negotiated interactively.

Focus group interviews

The focus group interview is based on an in-depth discussion with a number of participants, focusing on a specific or given topic (Puchta & Potter, 2004). Data from focus group interviews are often deeper and richer than that gained from individual interviews due to group dynamics (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Morgan, 2002).

Two focus group interviews were organized in the preliminary period (see Section 3.2.1) around certain themes regarding SA students' conceptions of their social communication in China, after their return to the UK.

Pre-departure interviews

The participants were asked about their personal and educational background, their motivation for studying Mandarin, and their expectations for their studies and life in China.

Follow-up interviews

These interviews began in early October 2016 and ended in the middle of January 2017. As scheduled, follow-up interviews in China were set out to be held weekly, and were based on the diaries and reflexive photography. As pointed out by Corti (1993, p.1), the diary-based interview is considered ‘one of the most reliable methods of obtaining information’. In this study they allowed further exploration of the issues participants recorded in their diaries, providing insights into the details of the situations presented. Regarding the reflexive photography, these interviews were meant to elicit information and encourage participants to further explain ‘visual symbols’ in the photos and their comments from a contextual and situational perspective. Moreover, follow-up interviews provided further explanations and interpretations of items that were ambiguous in diaries and reflexive photography.

Final interview

In the final interview, questions focused on participants’ developmental changes in the past few months throughout the spring semester (see also Section 3.2.4).

Overall, the combination of three data collection methods turned out to be mutually supportive and provided a rich source of data. The details of data for each case are listed in the following table.

Case No.	Participants	Number of diary entries	Number of reflexive photos with comments	Number of interviews
Case 1	Melian	24	10	11
Case 2	Natalie	24	10	9
Case 3	Tom	25	11	10

Table 3.1 Numbers and types of data produced by the participants

3.4 Thematic analysis

Once data collection was completed, I moved on to deducing meaning from the data. As suggested by Yin (2014, p.126), ‘data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, and testing or otherwise recombining evidence, to draw empirically based conclusions’. In this study, I employed thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke’s (2006, p.79) definition that it is ‘a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data’.

Thematic analysis is an analytical approach as well as a synthesizing strategy for meaning-making and has been widely used as a qualitative research method of analysis (Lapadat, 2010). Codes and themes are two frequently used terms in studies using thematic analysis and were used this study as well. In short, themes are seen as coding categories, whereas coding is a stage in the process of working towards themes (Howitt, 2010). Conducting thematic analysis allowed greater flexibility in interpreting data and generating potential themes, as well as eliciting similarities and differences within the data. In this study, I chose a multiple-case analytic method.

First, multiple layers of analysis were constructed, each bearing a specific phenomenon of interest (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014). Second, data analysis was conducted through in-case and cross-case analysis to compare each coded data unit and then search for relationships between and among categories or themes. Based on these themes, findings were further explored and discussed. This thematic analysis was also employed for the reflexive

photographic method, based on the descriptive data given by participants in their comments and subsequent interviews.

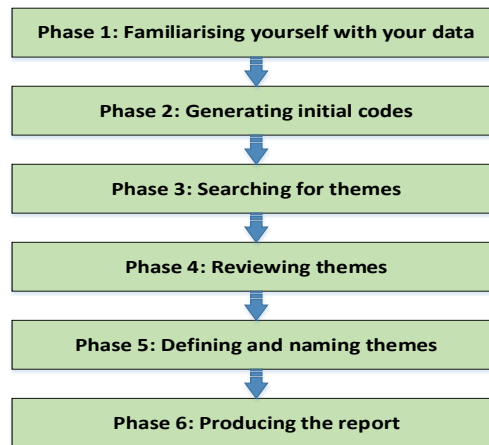


Figure 3.2 Six steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Figure 3.2 presents the process of data analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This straightforward and step-by-step framework facilitated the organisation and description of the data in great detail, and the identification of themes.

In this multiple-case study, I adopted the four stages of thematic analysis:

Step 1: Data familiarisation

A great amount of data was gathered throughout the 16-week collection period. After receiving participants' diaries every other week, I read them very carefully and repeatedly and took notes for further analysis and interview questions. As regards the reflexive photographs, images within these photos and the comments that came with the photos were carefully examined for any implicit and explicit information they might convey, which were adopted for later interviews. To glean necessary information from the data generated by the series of interviews, I transcribed them in full, rather than merely transcribing the key parts. Though this process was rather time-consuming, it helped me to better understand each of the three cases and contributed to understanding the data. As soon as each transcription was completed, I immediately started reading the data several times. Simultaneously, the additional interview questions that were formulated facilitated a reflexive understanding of the research data.

Step 2: Structuring initial coding

Howitt (2010) argues that the structure of the initial coding can be influenced by the theory used by the researcher. Following Kim's (2001) integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation, I structured initial coding based on three main categories, namely stress, adaptation and growth, in line with the research questions. By free-coding the causes of stress, the features of adaptation and growth could be found and further analysed with an inductive approach (themes will be generated inherently from the data). These initial codes were generated to elicit themes, which were identified and refined later. In short, through the process of reviewing and refining the data generated in this step, many possible themes were identified, leading me to the next step.

Step 3: Emerging themes within the case

Themes were created, defined, and redefined at multiple levels. Potential themes were internally consistent and externally distinct (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 1990). First, I conducted within-case analysis and sub-theme identification for each of the three cases separately. I repeatedly read data from each theme to ensure that each theme and its data were coherently related. Moreover, I took steps to ensure that the data from the whole study could be matched to the themes. After a series of readings, I finally discarded some themes and refined others. Once selected, I defined and named the story for each sub-theme.

Step 4: Cross-case analysis

Through cross-case analysis, the similarities and disparities across the three cases were determined, and the main themes, which were recurring and salient across cases, were finally identified in this study. At this stage, based on the themes generated, the findings on those themes were discussed, as shown in the following chapters.

3.5 Quality criteria: credibility, transferability, credibility and comparability

Due to the subjectivity, potential inconsistencies, and personal factors (e.g., personal bias or judgements) inherent in qualitative studies, the reliability and validity of qualitative research are constantly challenged or criticised (Bryman, 2016).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that trustworthiness should replace validity, reliability and objectivity in qualitative inquiries. Their proposed alternative criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. For them, credibility is one of the most essential factors in establishing the trustworthiness of any study. To this end, a detailed examination of the data from all three cases was conducted by the researcher to ensure the credibility of the data. Care was taken while transcribing the interviews, and discussions were held with participants to elucidate any instances of ambiguity. All participants were given their interview transcripts so they could check them for errors and were also invited to examine the transcribed data and analyses in order to point out any inconsistencies between their own understandings and the researcher's interpretations. I sought to investigate the congruence of the study's findings with the results of past studies, and also used a triangulation of different data collection methods to strengthen the findings, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

The reflexive approach is another key way to strengthen the credibility of this study. With regards to positionality, as pointed out by McKinley (2015; 2017), researchers need to be aware that the sociocultural conventions of academic discourse can influence results. In this study, I was acquainted with the participants prior to starting the empirical research and I continued to contact them frequently while they were in China. However, despite this familiarity, I sought to maintain a neutral stance as a researcher during all my interactions with the participants which related to the study. I was fully aware that my dual role as a teacher and student in the UK and my previous teaching experience in China could easily influence my own attitudes. In the interviews, as regards participants' awareness of my professional role as a teacher, I stressed the importance of this study and their contribution to it by taking a friendly and encouraging approach. Nonetheless, there

is no doubt that this study and its findings are value-laden, and that subjectivity, from the three participants and the researcher, did exist or had an impact on several research aspects, such as the interpretations given and made by the participants and me. Thus, I strove to be alert to any instances where my subjectivity might impact the study's methods or results, particularly when conducting interviews with participants and helping them make sense of their experiences. All the above measures served to strengthen the credibility of this study, and particularly the reliability of the findings.

As noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability refers to the extent to which the findings produced by one study can be generalised to another context. Owing to the small-scale sample, the exploratory nature of this study, and their educational background in Mandarin, the three participants cannot represent the experience of all other SA students from the UK as a whole. Nonetheless, the findings provide invaluable insights into the experience of UK students studying Mandarin in a SA context in China. I have provided sufficient information with regards to the contextual factors operating in the three cases so that readers can judge whether or not and to what extent the findings of my study are transferrable to their own experiences or research (Baxter & Eyles, 1997).

As regards the dependability of this study, I adopted a multiple-case study design in which replication can be achieved when 'two or more cases are shown to support the same theory' (Yin 2014, p.31). However, it must be noted that the small number of participants could be a major shortcoming in terms of dependability. To overcome this limitation, a combination of data collection tools was employed (see Section 3.3) for triangulation, since the 'convergence among multiple and different sources of information [could] form themes or categories in a study' (Creswell & Miller 2000, p.126). This triangulation of the three cases was meant to improve the dependability of the findings.

Confirmability concerns the consistency of the work's findings with the ideas of 'the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher' (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p.72). Efforts to ensure confirmability, which is understood as 'the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity' (ibid., p.72) were made by creating an

audit trail and detailed methodological descriptions to explicate my research decision making and procedures.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Protection of participants' personal data has been of primary concern in this study. A great deal of personal and confidential information relating to personal backgrounds, stories, daily lives, and studies was discussed. Participants' teachers, classmates, and universities in both China and the UK were also mentioned in the data. Several 'reasonable precautions' (Robson & McCartan, 2016) have been taken to ensure participants' anonymity. Thus, to protect their personal data, all participants and those who were involved in their diaries and photos were ensured anonymity and confidentiality. Although pseudonyms were assigned without any indication of participants' ethnic background, their gender was disclosed because it was not the focus of this study. To avoid any disclosure of personal information, I was more cautious when dealing with data from their diaries, photos with comments, and interviews. Any data with information concerning their identities were disguised (i.e. by blurring or deleting) with their permission. No personal information would be released without the written consent of the participants, all of whom are over 18 years old. They were asked to read and sign an informed consent (see Appendix 1) with detailed information about the purpose of this study at the beginning. At the end of the data collection period, participants were given the transcripts of their own interviews for their reference, and to confirm the accuracy of their statements.

Finally, it was expected that exploring stress factors would be a difficult task due to its potential influence on participants. Recording and reflecting on stressful experiences could itself bring out unpleasant feelings, which, in turn, could aggravate the participants' stress, thereby influencing data collection. Thus, as a researcher, I adopted a reflexive approach being very careful, sensitive, patient, and encouraging during the study, and tried to diminish any negative effects on the participants' lives and studies during their stay in China. All communications, whether emails, online conversations, Skype calls, or

face-to-face interviews, were scheduled at times that best suited the participants to mitigate the effect of stress and to cause minimum interference in their daily lives. Acknowledging potential risks and influences at the beginning of the data collection, I explained to them how and to what extent they would participate in this study, and informed them of their right to withdraw from participating in the research for any or no reason, and at any time (Creswell, 2014). As mentioned earlier, after data collection was completed, one participant withdrew from the study. No matter how frustrating this may be for a researcher, I did understand, respect, and support this decision, even though I had spent a considerable amount of time and effort on that case.

3.7 Researcher Reflexivity

In designing and carrying out this study, I was conscious as a researcher of the need to be ‘focused on the self and ongoing intersubjectivities [and to] recognise [...] mutual shaping, reciprocity and bi-directionality, and that interaction is context-dependent and context renewing’ (Mann 2016, p.28). In line with Attia and Edge (2017), I strove to adopt ‘prospective reflexivity’, which pertains to the impact of the person-researcher on the study, as well as ‘retrospective reflexivity’ which pertains to the effect of the research on myself. To this end, I maintained a research diary during the study. As suggested by Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2001), I divided the diary into four sections comprising observational notes, methodological notes, theoretical notes and analytical memos. With the aid of these sections, I have been able to demonstrate my reflexivity as a researcher (for example see sections 1.1, 3.2.1, 3.6). In addition, I made entries regarding the impact of the study on my own self as a researcher and person. Thus, maintaining the reflexive diary encouraged me to reflect on and manage my own positioning and subjectivities. For instance, just as the SA students in this study were experiencing living and studying in another cultural context, I had myself made a similar transition, working as a Chinese language teacher in the UK and then taking up doctoral studies in the same country. In a way, I had a window to both cultures, but experience of and a sense of belonging to my home country made it difficult for me to comprehend some of the findings the study

produced. For instance, I found it difficult to look at my home culture from the perspectives of the participants. Living in China, I had not been conscious of the ‘racism’ experienced by the participants in the media as well as in the educational setting towards certain ethnicities, and this finding made me reevaluate my own perceptions about values and attitudes in my home culture. While I could not find anything amiss with values such as respect for teachers or high teacher expectations of students, I could understand why students with exposure to different pedagogical traditions might find these values overwhelming. Thus, while interpreting the data, I took extra care to avoid glossing over or misinterpreting what the data indicated in an attempt to make the findings agree with my own schemas. As a person, since undertaking the study, I have tried to develop a greater awareness of my own attitudes and values to see if these are grounded in what might be taken as a culturally-programmed bias towards other ethnicities, or if they are based upon factual information. Thus, some of the study’s findings have helped me to become more reflective and reflexive and to transition towards developing a more rational and balanced view of my home culture, which were reshaped by my positions and my active involvement in the study. For example, the origin of the study was initially linked to my teaching experience in UK higher education. As a new Chinese immigrant in the UK, I tended to position myself within a more Chinese perspective when considering the possible influence of Chinese culture on UK SA students. While the study was being conducted, I had access to the participants and the data they generated for the study. Although I tried to maintain critical self-evaluation and professional positionality as an academic researcher, I was aware that my previous position affected the research process and outcome (Pillow, 2003) to some extent, and I thus began to re-examine my previous interpretations and identified cultural biases and over-generalisations that had influenced my study. These changes affected my theoretical conceptualisation of my data in the end in light of my experiences conducting this research.

3.8 Summary of Chapter 3

In this chapter, I have described the methodological process of conducting this research. I provided my explanation of the methodological tools and described several research factors (including problems and difficulties) and the measures I took to deal with them. I have also explained the methods of data collection and analysis. The methods I chose were meant to empower the participants and me as the researcher so as to explore the phenomenon under investigation in depth and holistically, and gain new insights which might otherwise not be easily available. In the next chapter, I will present three cases along with the emerging issues for each case, themes across cases and my critical discussion.

CHAPTER 4 THREE CASES

This chapter presents the data collected from the study's three participants, with the pseudonyms Melian, Natalie and Tom. It provides the profiles of each participant, in addition to identifying key themes emergent in the data pertaining to the research questions. The themes are identified through an adapted model of Kim's (2001) theory, which is discussed further in Chapter 5. The findings presented in this chapter are highlighted with reference to the causes and effects of acculturative stress, the strategies used by SA students and their personal growth in a communicative environment, which is highly interactive due to being increasingly mediated by digital technologies and social media.

4.1 Participant information

4.1.1 Melian

As an international student from an EU country, and the only non-British participant in this study, Melian is proficient in spoken and written English and Mandarin. At 17, Melian accompanied her family on a trip to China and became interested in the language and culture. Melian observed that she spent most of her time improving her proficiency in Mandarin in the UK, choosing to keep 'a social distance' from others on campus, as she had considerably high academic expectations for herself (I-1-1).¹

While Melian confided in me that she was shy and reserved, despite being a top student in her class, she was quite vocal when it came to discussing her academic performance. She showed considerable enthusiasm for her upcoming SA year in China, observing that she was 'thrilled by this chance to experience a different culture and to learn more about Mandarin and Chinese culture' (I-1-1). She seemed quite relaxed and explained that she

¹ Notation system for data sources: D – diary, P – photograph, I – interview; and participants: 1 – Melian, 2 – Natalie, 3 – Tom. Example: **D-1-6**: 6th diary entry by Melian (case 1); **I-2-3**: 3rd interview with Natalie (case 2); **P-3-4**: 4th photograph and comment by Tom (case 3).

had attended a series of lectures and workshops on Chinese culture and was, therefore, not afraid to live there. However, her expectation that studying and living in China would not be difficult did not reflect her actual experiences. When she was interviewed six months later, she used the word ‘silly’ to describe her pre-departure expectations.

Melian had chosen University A in Chengdu, a south-western Chinese city based on information gathered from attending a presentation during her first year on campus. The presentation was given by a student who had just returned from China. Having learned that there were fewer foreigners at this university, Melian saw this as an opportunity for greater communication with the locals, and for learning more deeply about their culture. This was quite different to her earlier practice in the UK of being reluctant to communicate with her fellow students.

4.1.2 Natalie

Natalie is a British-born female of Sri Lankan heritage who was raised in London. Her ethnicity is noted here because Natalie’s complexion drew negative attention during her SA in China (see Section 4.2.5). An easy-going and amiable person, Natalie was studying a combined course in German and Mandarin at university. She applied to University B in Suzhou, a city in eastern China, for her SA, and was awarded a 12-month scholarship.

Fluent in seven foreign languages, Natalie had an impressive linguistic repertoire, although she mentioned that she did not have much confidence in speaking Mandarin, observing that, ‘for example, I don’t believe that I can achieve, like, amazing grades’ (I-2-1). Natalie was excited at the thought of making new friends, learning Mandarin more effectively, and gaining greater familiarity with Chinese culture. Like Melian, Natalie showed confidence in her expectations of her SA year, reflecting that her communication skills would help her to overcome any potential difficulties. This was based on her belief that she was ‘good at communicating, especially with Chinese students here’ (I-2-1). However, as she later discovered, during the entire autumn semester, her stay in China was quite ‘troublesome’, and left her feeling very depressed. She observed that ‘my

feelings about coming to China before my departure was very excited, but I was ignorant to all the problems I would meet, so I did not expect there were so many problems. I was being a little bit naïve' (I-2-9).

4.1.3 Tom

The only male participant in this study was Tom, who was of British heritage. Tom was studying a combined course in Mandarin and Japanese in the UK. His proficiency in Mandarin was advanced, approximating that of a native Mandarin speaker. I was impressed by his proficiency in Mandarin, as he was able to use high-level and idiomatic vocabulary to communicate with me. Tom commented that 'English people say work hard and play hard, and I think I'm that kind of person' (I-3-1). He told me that he was diligent at his lessons, so his language skills were above average.

His original plan was to move to Japan after graduation. However, instead, he fell in love with Chinese culture and decided to carry on learning Mandarin. He had applied for a six-month scholarship at a university in China, and for another six months at a university in Japan. Like Melian and Natalie, Tom also showed great confidence about his prospective performance in China. He also expressed a desire to improve his proficiency in Mandarin, and said he wanted to get into an advanced Mandarin class to make the most of this learning opportunity. As academic standards were his top concern, he chose University C which had been recommended by his Chinese friend. Later, however, he found teaching was not up to his expectations, which contributed to his feelings of frustration and stress.

4.2 Causes and effects of acculturative stress in SA students

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Kim (2001) failed to present the causes of acculturative stress in her theorisations, focusing largely on the interplay between stress, adaptation and growth. Based on analysis of the data, this section seeks to address this gap in the theory, framing this study by presenting causes and effects of acculturative stress in SA students in China.

At the outset, it is also important to clarify that, as the three participants were specifically asked to label incidents that they found stressful, the extracts presented as pertaining to stress in this chapter align with the students' own interpretations. This holds true even in cases where the students appeared to be experiencing 'boredom', rather than stress, as in accordance with their interpretations.

4.2.1 Teacher-centred pedagogies

While most *strangers* do engage in communication with host nationals in social contexts, SA students also faced the challenge of communicating with SA teachers in a pedagogical context. The difficulties can be greater if SA students find themselves in an educational setting shaped by a pedagogical culture distinct from their own.

Three participants in this study experienced considerable stress in adjusting to teaching methods in China and to the way the teachers communicated with their students within and outside the classroom. To be specific, evidence suggests that the teacher-centred pedagogic approaches of host teachers was a prominent factor contributing to SA students' dissonance in the host setting, leading to stress, in varying degrees.

Melian had five teachers (H, M, W, Z and L) in the autumn semester. Melian's feelings of stress, as observed in her accounts, were predominantly related to learning efficiency as a result of teacher-centred pedagogy.

The first stressful incident Melian reported in her diaries was concerned with teacher H, whose classes Melian labelled as 'bothering and confusing' (D-1-1) due to the dreary atmosphere. Two weeks later, Melian recorded that she felt 'better about H's class' after H chose to use a constructive approach to engage students' involvement (D-1-4). She thought highly of this new approach, as it allowed 'students to express their opinions and ideas' (I-1-3). However, much to Melian's disappointment, H chose to stop using this method soon afterwards, which led Melian to feel that the course was 'very boring' and 'very disappointing'. Melian ranked it as a kind of stress for her and she reflected:

I think that it is a big shame that he did not carry on with this activity, Eventually, I found this class to be very boring and very disappointing altogether with the teacher (I-1-3).

Evidently, H's teaching lacked space for student-teacher dialogue or peer-to-peer communication. Melian's prior learning experiences had taken place in the West, where learning cultures were more dialogic, and value was placed on student input. It may also be concluded that her frustration with H's teaching approach stemmed not just from classroom management, but also from the apparent lack of importance afforded to students' opinions and experiences. Furthermore, as noted in Section 4.1, Melian was a high-achieving student who possibly found it difficult to maximise her learning in a classroom environment that failed to meet her needs.

Another element of teacher-centred pedagogic approaches relates to the instructions provided by teachers to enable students to complete assignments and work effectively. A further source of stress for Melian was the way in which teacher M provided instructions, which led Melian to feel 'very bored and dissatisfied' (D-1-5), reporting this event as another case of stress in her diary. Melian explained that homework instructions given by M were unclear, with slow homework marking accounting for 20 minutes of class every time, which made Melian constantly unsatisfied: 'I felt very bored and dissatisfied because we could have used the time more effectively' (D-1-3). In an interview, she added:

When we finally realize that we were given some criteria for that homework, it sometimes actually takes us a few minutes to figure out what she wants us to do. This is very surprising for me. [...] I cannot understand why she is so disorganized when it comes to a homework (I-1-2).

Another example concerns teacher Z, a Year-4 Chinese undergraduate student with no teaching experience, whose classes were observed by Melian to be 'extremely ineffective, disorganised, and painful' (I-1-5). Melian recorded one of Z's classes in her diaries:

Today she (Z) played us some very old videos, which were not related to our lesson's topic. The quality of sound was very poor, and it was without Chinese subtitles, which made it more difficult for us to understand. When Teacher Z wanted to explain us some phrases they have used in the video, she did not

*pause it, but spoke over the recording; therefore, we were unable to listen and understand either her or the recording. The result was that we just sat in the class, watched the video without any idea what was going on. I found this to be **a real waste of time and painful**. Moreover, she kept asking us questions about the video, but because not of us understood, we remained silent and told her that we did not understand. Instead of trying to explain us what it was about, teacher Z just kept asking us the same questions patiently waiting for our answers, which was another example of **wasting time**(D-1-7).*

It can be seen that the lack of a bridge between teaching and students' learning abilities was another source of frustration for Melian. This is a typical example of pedagogical miscommunication, where the teacher failed to present appropriate material.

There are two issues to be considered here. The first is the lack of planning and foresight on Z's part in using an outdated and unrelated medium for teaching the students. The second is that an untrained teacher – a university student herself – was given the task of teaching international students. This differs considerably from Melian's earlier educational contexts, in which untrained teachers were unlikely to find themselves teaching languages to students studying in UK higher education. The difficulties created by having untrained teachers teach SA students is also explained well in diary data from Tom, who noted that he felt the 'university let us down by making students teach the SA students, as the student-teachers were very inexperienced' (D-3-21).

It can be seen that in the case of Melian, her experience of teacher-led educational methods that resulted in poor pedagogical communication, evident in the teaching of H (lack of student engagement), M (poor communication of instructions for assignments) and Z (poor communication practices when delivering teaching points), appeared to cause stress due to the differences between her prior educational experiences and those she had during SA.

Data from the second participant, Natalie, also suggests a certain struggle with the teacher-centred educational style adopted by the Chinese teachers. Her problems were related to the unexpected 'memorisation-based learning' and 'limited' feedback from her teachers.

During her SA, Natalie discovered that teaching in China was ‘very textbook based and it’s all memory based, meaning that when we learn a text and new vocabulary, we are expected to read and repeat it several times’ (D-2-12). Natalie found it was difficult to adjust to this kind of traditional memory-based pedagogy. As she admitted, she disliked memorisation and recitation, which are rarely foregrounded as ways to learn in a Western context; however, her SA teachers thought highly of this method. She believed that comprehension was the most important thing when learning a language while her teachers insisted on the traditional learning methods of memorisation and recitation. As in the case of Melian, who became stressed by the nature of the teacher-student communication during her SA experience in China, these quotes from Natalie suggest that the focus on textbooks, and the memorisation and recitation of material, did not allow for the kind of dialogic learning that Natalie was accustomed to.

The following extract shows Natalie’s growing understanding that her difficulties stemmed as much from issues with teacher-student communication in a SA context as from her own lack of familiarity with the ‘Chinese style of teaching’. She reflected that:

*Due to the fact that I am **not used to** the Chinese style of teaching, my attention span can become quite problematic, leading me to **missing out** on things in class when they are being explained and then having to go back through it after lesson. I will **need to find a way to manage this problem** as I keep getting caught out in class, and therefore not comprehending what is being said, **even though I am perfectly capable of doing so** [D-2-20].*

The demanding and sometimes harsh and discouraging attitudes towards students was another thing that initially upset Natalie, although, with time, she began to view teacher-student interactions in China more positively.

For Tom, his communication with some teachers also proved stressful, although in a different way. For example, he wrote in his diary that:

Today we had Speaking and Writing classes. There was a very obvious difference between the attitudes of our teachers regarding our ability to pass the midterm exams with a high grade. Kou, the somewhat childish and unprofessional teacher said that she didn’t want to talk to us one-on-one as

*she believed it was difficult to make any of us as a class talk, she was worried it would be awkward, so she set us a different kind of test. She asked us to send sound files over WeChat answering one of 6 very vague questions - such as “what did you do over the national holiday or talk about your countries food in comparison with China’s”. This made me feel like I had been **underestimated**, I like speaking Chinese and would prefer to talk face-to-face with my teacher, but she did not give us that option. She said, “You never talk in class anyway, so you won’t talk during the exam”, which I think is unfair and untrue. She then proceeded to stop class half way through to ask us how she should teach us. She said teaching us was too difficult and we don’t understand enough to be considered a high-level class. This was both **insulting, and a knock to our confidence** (D-3-2).*

Tom’s feeling of stress was largely related to a feeling of ‘being underestimated’ when his Mandarin abilities were impugned by teacher Kou. In contrast, Xie, Tom’s writing teacher, provided helpful feedback on the students’ previous assignments, ‘explaining what was good and what was bad’, while also delineating areas to revise for the exams, and even hinting at the topic that would appear in the writing exam. From the extract above it is evident that Tom valued the teacher for not criticising the students harshly, which was the inverse of the approach adopted by Kou. He appreciated the fact that ‘she is a much better teacher, as she doesn’t criticise us for not knowing, she teaches us, like a teacher should’ (D-3-4).

Like Melian, Tom seemed to value teachers who were professional, organised and well-prepared, and seemed more accepting of their criticism, as long as it was constructive:

*Zonghe class teacher (Zong) was an amazing teacher that clearly put so much care and preparation into her classes and **really cared about** her students. She was very direct and did **not mind criticizing** people in order to make her point (I-3-3).*

Obviously, a teacher-centred pedagogy, with its focus on textbooks, memorisation and recitation, contrasted with what the participants had experienced in the dialogic, discussion-based pedagogy of Western universities. This conventional Chinese teaching approach (particularly in Mandarin teaching) also centres on the teacher as the expert and director of class activities and learning, thereby disengaging students who are accustomed

to being actively encouraged to participate in discussions (teacher-student dialogue) and share their ideas with teachers and other students as a valuable way to learn. As the analysis above describes, experiences of stress are shaped by how classes are organised, and the way in which activities are planned and carried out by teachers.

These extracts can also be interpreted according to the SPEAKING framework offered by Hymes (1974; see Chapter 2), in which the participants' disorientation within the educational culture in China could be attributed to differences between the style and form of classroom instruction and lectures used in university settings in the UK and those used in China. For example, in contrast to Western educational culture, which places importance on individualised pedagogy, the lack of individualisation in the SA context in China narrows the space for student voices, making the learning process difficult for students like Natalie, who are used to being treated as individuals by their UK teachers.

In most Western universities, there is an emphasis on teachers communicating directly with students in order to convey their expectations of students and their work clearly, whether through verbal articulation in class, a course outline and policies, or written assignment criteria. As a result of none of these methods being adopted by their teachers in China, the SA students experienced additional stress and were unsure about their teachers' expectations.

4.2.2 Teachers' practices concerning feedback, privacy and personal boundaries

While teachers' pedagogical choices were found to influence how students perceived stress, teachers' attitudes toward public praise, privacy and boundaries were also identified as stressful, which needs be considered when accounting for SA student experiences and adaptation.

4.2.2.1 Feedback

In this study, teachers' practices when conferring feedback, which in many cases were characterised by giving 'public praise' or 'being extremely strict' or 'harsh', were a

prominent trigger for stress for the students in the current study.

Melian noted how she felt agitated when W, the only teacher who truly motivated her during her SA period, praised her in the classroom and read Melian's essay in front of the whole class without her permission. Melian wrote that she 'felt like the biggest nerd and teacher's pet and was actually ashamed of what I wrote' (D-I-12). During her interview, Melian recalled that 'on that day, she [W] did not ask me about it and simply read it despite my objections. She did it without permission and despite objection from students' (I-1-5). This statement indicates that her stress was provoked directly by the actions of the teacher. When asked why the public reading of her work upset her, she explained that she was ashamed because this practice made her 'question' and even 'criticise' herself (I-1-5)

This reluctance to have her essay read in class was found to be linked to her feeling that answering teachers' questions (as in the case of Melian's teacher, H, who posed questions directly to students on each topic) approximated to 'grovelling'. The decision of the teacher to read her essay out loud against her wishes, and Melian's negative reaction to this action, can be explained in terms of the differences in norms of interaction (Hymes, 1974) existing in their respective cultures. What was socioculturally appropriate in the Chinese classroom was not appropriate in terms of Melian's own expectations, coming from a UK educational setting. In her diary, Melian wrote that students in H's class were not enthusiastic about answering teachers' questions because:

In the West, being active and always answering teacher's questions is however still viewed as grovelling and has a negative effect on one's popularity among other students, and by that, I mean whether or not you will get a label as a 'teacher's pet' (D-1-2).

Melian's reluctance to have her work held up publicly as an example, or to respond promptly to the teacher's direct questions, was stressful for Melian because it made her feel like a 'teacher's pet', thereby making her unpopular with her peers. Nevertheless, as the data shows, it was not that Melian did not enjoy positive feedback from W, but rather

that she enjoyed praise that was justified and developmental rather than celebratory. As she wrote in her diary, W gave ‘temperate praise’, which ‘can help you realise your strengths and weaknesses’ (D-1-18).

Natalie and Tom described the feedback they received from their teachers as ‘harsh’, sometimes unnecessarily so. Natalie explained that feedback received from her SA teachers was ‘restricted’ (D-2-7) and ‘stricter than the [feedback given by] teachers back home’ (D-2-11), since in most cases her assignments returned to her by her SA teachers just provided ‘marks’ without any written feedback. She believed that this kind of feedback discouraged students and added to their stress, as it was achievement-oriented and not developmental. She commented:

*We all know the Chinese saying that ‘talented students are trained by strict teachers’. But receiving extremely harsh feedback is **discouraging**.*

Like Natalie, Tom found the feedback was ‘harsh’ (D-3-5; I-3-4). However, Tom’s perceptions of negative feedback varied depending on the context in which it was given. For example, in the case of Zong, his general Chinese teacher, her ‘slightly harsh and insulting’ comments, while hurtful, were mitigated by Tom’s understanding that these were motivated by Zong’s idea of a hierarchy, wherein teachers have a dominant role. Interpreting this in light of Hymes’ framework, Tom’s perceptions of Zong’s comments were based on his ability to recognise the outcome of the communicative exchanges between Zong and her students and relate his teacher’s comments to her belief in the hierarchical superiority of teachers. In addition, Tom also seems to have appreciated that she was ‘a professional and experienced teacher’, and he enjoyed her ‘confidence’ in his ability as a student, as she had ‘personally selected’ him and another student as ‘class leaders’ (I-3-4).

For Natalie, the feedback she received in the UK made her understand the learning material and aims and also gave her clear guidance on how to improve her learning. However, her feedback in China was less encouraging in helping students who might need more support (D-2-11). This contradicts Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick’s (2006) definition

of good feedback practice as ‘anything that might strengthen the students’ capacity to self-regulate their own performance’ (p.205).

As elaborated on in Hymes’ SPEAKING grid, the way in which Chinese teachers typically give feedback represents the key differences in tone and spirit between teacher-student communication in China and teacher-student communication in the West, where Chinese teachers’ style of offering feedback reflects their traditionally high expectations concerning student performance.

4.2.2.2 Student privacy

In this study, the three participants reported that teachers attached less importance to student privacy than they were used to from their experiences of Western universities (see D-1-10; I-2-2; D-3-9). For example, some teachers mentioned errors students had made or concerns over their personal issues in the course of classroom discussions or would announce student marks in class or share them on social media platforms. This obliviousness to privacy was a stress trigger for all three participants.

For example, Melian found it ‘disrespectful’ that her teacher, W, always announced the students’ marks in class. As the extract below shows, Melian was stressed by this practice because it took away her right to decide whether to make her mark known or keep it private:

I personally think that publicly announcing someone’s mark is disrespectful; people generally do not want let others to know what their mark is no matter it is a good or a bad mark. Whenever a teacher pinpoints my mark in public, it makes me feel very uncomfortable, because I feel that it should be my decision whether I want to let others know or not (D-1-10).

Tom reported similar concerns over the privacy of his work. He provided two examples of occasions where his general Chinese teacher referred to things he had said on the class group chat (WeChat), criticising his phrasing of a certain sentence openly before the class. This was stressful, as he found being put under the spotlight in this way to be ‘quite embarrassing’. As the extract below shows, the teacher would frequently mention the

mistakes he made in his messages to her. He also found it ‘disconcerting’ that this same teacher posted test results on WeChat. He believed it should be a matter of individual choice whether to share results or to keep them confidential:

On Mondays we have general Chinese class and Reading class. My general Chinese teacher has often made references to things that we as a class say on the group chat on Wechat, and today was the same. Today she criticized the way I phrased that I had been ill. I said “I would not like to be that ill ever again” which apparently sounds very weird in Chinese. I did not know this, but the teacher proceeded to tell the class how funny she found it, and I found this quite embarrassing. She has done this before in class, mentioned how I have used new grammar structures on WeChat in my story or in messages to her, but sometimes she mentions things that I have said wrong and tells the whole class. This teacher also often posts our results from tests publicly on WeChat so that the whole class can see, although I don’t mind as my grades tend to be higher, I don’t think this is the best way to share results and I think we should be able to choose whether to share our results or not (D-3-9).

For Natalie, the encroachment on her privacy was of a different kind. Her first two diary entries suggest that she had begun to feel emotionally low. As she reflected, it was the first time she had lived so far away from home and had been without her family for an extended period (D-2-1). Living alone meant a lot to her, in that it took an emotional toll. After a series of issues, such as early accommodation difficulties, homesickness and a break-up, she reported she was under great pressure and that she could not concentrate on her studies (D-2-2). After one absence from A’s class due to low mood, she felt very sorry and met with A to explain her recent suffering and difficulties. She noted that ‘I trusted her [A] so much’ (I-2-2).

However, several days later, without making an effort to offer Natalie any support, A suddenly used Natalie as an example in an illustrative sentence when she was explaining a Chinese word meaning ‘sad and upset’ to her class (D-2-4). Humiliated, Natalie rushed out of the classroom and started to cry. She felt betrayed by someone she had trusted and respected. Even worse was the feeling of having her privacy violated in such an unexpected way, when she had believed that whatever was said to A would remain confidential.

*What I thought was something I discussed to the teachers in private, had **been publicly announced** and it has **angered** me ever since. As a result, this has strongly **discouraged me to communicate** to the teacher about personal matters (D-2-4).*

Natalie told me in an interview (I-2-3) that, after that experience, she began to miss some classes, recording in her diary that she deemed her clash with A ‘a serious issue’, and subsequently became very stressed. It took her three days to return to class after the incident.

4.2.2.3 Professional boundaries in after-class communication

While both Melian and Natalie found teacher-student communication in the pedagogical context to be stressful (although in different ways), interview and diary data from both participants showed that after-class communication with their teachers also shaped their experiences of stress. Melian appeared to be stressed to the greatest extent by teacher-student boundary issues faced in the SA context. In one diary entry, she recorded an incident involving her friend, Anna, and teacher L. An active and positive teacher, L had worked for a few years in the UK, which Melian thought might have helped her develop an understanding of international students, their ways of thinking, and their problems with adapting to a Chinese environment (D-1-17). On one occasion, after noticing how the students in her class were shy and unwilling to communicate with each other, L invited the students to a café for a get-together. This café gathering proved instrumental in breaking the ice between the students and easing the class atmosphere. Anna told Melian that everybody was quite comfortable from that day on, and the awkwardness was alleviated. However, Melian reported that there was one particular thing that made Anna feel uneasy:

*There was something, which made Anna **a little bit uncomfortable** –L paid for everything the other day. Everybody expected to pay for himself/herself, which is why they ordered a little bit more expensive food. It is a little bit weird since she is teacher, **not a friend** (D-1-17).*

Melian explained to me that Anna was very grateful for the teacher’s kindness. However, both Anna and Melian thought the teacher had overstepped the boundaries within a proper

teacher-student relationship. Melian's reaction to this occurrence suggests that her perception of L's actions was influenced by her own acculturation; in the UK, students do not expect teachers to pay for them when meeting them in a social context.

In contrast, Natalie had a far more positive view of teacher-student communication outside the classroom. In her diary, she recorded a series of events she participated in, a number of which were also attended by her teachers. She recorded how, unlike in the UK, where there were 'boundaries' between teachers and students, in China 'we (she and her teachers) can hang out like friends in a way, which is very sweet' (D-2-23). She recalled that in the UK, although teacher-student relationships tended to be very good, students had fewer chances to communicate with teachers outside the classroom and beyond their fields of study (I-2-8). Natalie believed that these informal conversations with teachers outside the classroom served as a valuable chance for students to reduce academic stress. In Natalie's case, this was especially true in the case of teacher A, with whom Natalie had experienced conflict.

Tom's interaction with teachers outside the classroom in social situations also seemed to go well. His diary entries suggest that he was able to take most social communication in stride, such as when attending an end-of-term group meal with teachers to discuss extracurricular activities, such as photoshoots showing the multiculturalism of his Chinese institution. He also accepted invitations to help prepare for various university events, such as setting up a forum to discuss the American elections. As Tom noted, he did not really mind doing 'extra things' on occasion, viewing them as a 'positive opportunity' rather than as a 'burden' (I-3-8). In his diary, however, he observed that, 'I feel sometimes in this university that I am more of a novelty than I am a student' (D-3-14), which reflects stress at being sought out to participate in activities and events yet had little to do with his learning. In this way, previous background and personality factors also influenced the level of stress each participant experienced, with Tom experiencing the least stress due to having lived in China before and having been introduced to the Chinese way of doing things by a Chinese friend.

4.2.3 Mismatched expectations of teachers and students

In most cases, effective teaching and learning are likely to be achieved only if there is a match between the expectations of teachers and students. In this study, the SA students at times experienced stress, not only while communicating with teachers, learning from them in the classroom or receiving feedback and praise from them, but also while seeking to understand teachers' expectations of their academic performance and while trying to adjust the expectations that the students themselves had brought with them into the SA context.

Especially in the case of Natalie, not being able to understand what the teachers expected of her in terms of her performance was a cause of significant stress. She had originally applied for the intermediate level class, but had been placed in the advanced level class. Initially worried about being able to succeed in this class, she eventually decided to embrace the challenge, but soon started to regret this, as she realised that her studies would be 'a mission impossible' (I-2-3) because she was pushed to Level 4 (advanced intermediate level). Soon, she noted that 'I was struggling with the content a lot and I found it too hard. I am slow in learning these things and I am worried about it' (I-2-5). This is in line with Gu and Maley's (2008) delineation of 'learning shock', where students experience struggle in their adjustment, due to linguistic difficulties or their limited linguistic proficiency.

After a difficult beginning, Natalie's study and life seemed to be 'getting back to normal' (D-2-5) when she made an effort to adjust to Chinese pedagogical practice. Soon, however, she realised that her rejection of the memory-based learning method made her slow at answering some of the questions, and her attitude upset A, with whom she soon faced another incident. Due to her clash with A regarding privacy (see Section 4.2.2.2), she had been feeling embarrassed, but eventually decided to find an opportunity to communicate with A. She went to A's office to ask her a question, thinking she would take this opportunity to improve their relationship. When she met A in her office, A's reaction made Natalie 'desperate':

*She asked if I didn't understand something, and I said yes. Then she **sighed heavily and looked really exasperated at me** and explained the meaning. Her reaction to me saying I don't understand the sentence **made me feel really embarrassed to not understand**. I have already **felt annoyed with myself** because I didn't understand such a simple sentence, but she made me feel even worse. I was **desperate** at that moment (D-2-15).*

Natalie told me that A's reaction made her unwilling to ask for help in the future, and she was confused about why A ignored her learning needs, which she thought should be central to the learning experience. Later, when the scores of the mid-term exams were announced, Natalie discovered that she had failed A's exam.

Failing the mid-term test in A's class turned out to be the last straw for her. Subsequently, Natalie began to experience stress to a significant degree and started to feel 'extremely stressed' about her studies (I-2-5). She began to harbour the feeling that 'I knew less and less while the expectations of all the teachers were too high to meet' (I-2-7). She started to attach greater importance to, and worry about, academic achievement, particularly in relation to exam scores.

I feel like teachers here are caring but they prioritized grades than anything else before a person's wellbeing. That was the impression I got, maybe it was just me, I don't know. I was left to my own devices to get myself better so that my grades would come up (I-2-7).

Natalie felt that teachers in China expected students 'to know things, which you have never learnt before', and that 'all students [would be] at the same level' (D-2-11). These extracts show that mismatched teacher-student expectations in an educational context can lead SA students to feel great stress, affecting not just their attitudes towards their studies and grades, but also their emotional wellbeing. It is possible that Natalie's resistance to 'recitation-based' learning methods made A believe she was reluctant to learn.

Tom also experienced a gap between his teacher's expectations and his own understanding of his performance. Having attained the second highest score in the class, Tom was happy with his test results, but as the extract below shows, his teacher's reaction to Tom's results made him unhappy with what he had achieved:

For our general Chinese class, we went through our test results. Zong made sure that she made sure whoever had the lowest grades knew about it and told them to study more, she once again sent our results over WeChat. The thing that surprised me the most was that I was the second highest in the class with a score of 93 and she gave me back my sheet and said “haikeyi” (acceptable). I was originally very impressed with my own hard work, but I thought “haikeyi” sounded a little bit disappointed. I was no longer as happy with my result as I was when I got it (D-3-7).

It is possible that the teacher may have expected a better performance from Tom, in view of his being a high-achieving student, whereas, for Tom, achieving the second highest score in the class was more than adequate (D-3-16). This example is in line with Hymes’ (1974) framework, which suggests that the ‘end’ of a communicative exchange is shaped by sociocultural dynamics. Hence, Tom’s reaction to Zong’s lukewarm praise conflicted with his self-perception of his academic performance as being good, although, in Zong’s case, it may simply have been that she expected better from Tom, given his ability and potential as a high achiever.

The extract below from Melian’s interview gives insight into how her previous educational experiences might have led her to feel stress as a result of teachers’ expectations in the SA course. She commented that:

*Maybe it was **a little bit naïve of** me, since I thought that the teachers in China would be more less the same as in the UK. My reasons for such conjecture were that 90% of my teachers in the UK are Chinese; they were born and raised in China, received Chinese form of education and gained working experience in China. Therefore, I **assumed** that it would be only logical to think that the way of teaching and approach to students will be similar (I-1-5).*

My teachers in the UK [...] Although they still hold on little fragments of Chinese way of education, their teaching style is suitable and more compatible with western-born and raised students, and it fits the British curriculum. It is very understandable that my teachers in China keep their typically Chinese way of teaching, though it is very good of them to try to approach foreign students more individually in order to make it easier for them to adjust and adapt into different environment (I-1-6).

This shows that Melian had based her understanding of Chinese educational culture on her experiences of studying in the classrooms of UK-based Chinese teachers. She came to the conclusion that she was 'naïve', given that her UK-based Chinese teachers had, in all likelihood, been prompted to adjust their teaching styles to a UK context. The extract above also reflects the high value Melian places on open-mindedness and individualisation.

The data in this section suggests that, when considering the experiences of SA students, expectation is another aspect that should be accommodated for in the existing model.

4.2.4 Students' apprehensions about racism

Experiencing or observing racism while studying abroad can be a source of great stress for students, and, in the case of the participants in this study, the Chinese teachers' attitudes to students of colour tended to be driven by racial preference. For example, Tom wrote in his diary that his teacher's attitude towards African students in the class was unduly harsh, and that she had reacted very sharply to one of Tom's African classmates when he had expressed displeasure about having to attend lessons over the weekend during the Golden Week at school. The full diary entry is quoted below to demonstrate how Zong, Tom's teacher, displayed a serious level of impatience towards a black student. According to Tom, Zong's attitude may have been influenced by local perceptions that Africans living in the area were troublemakers. Tom observed that:

*Today, our Zong teacher was telling us about the protocol for lessons during the golden week period, that we would have 5 days rest and then have to make up for it by having lessons over the weekend, as is standard protocol for everyone in China during this period. One of our African classmates, Agolo (pseudonym), who is a bit of a loud-mouth and often shares his opinion when not asked piped up that he did not want to do lessons on the weekend, and he found it unfair. I had noticed before that our Zong Teacher **had very little patience when it came to our African classmates**, and she sometimes came across as a little racist. Hearing Agolo's objection, Zong quickly snapped at him **"if you don't want to come, don't come, I don't care!"**. I was very surprised by this, normally Zong is extremely calm and professional, but this time she was actually outright rude to a student, and I feel that maybe if*

*another student had said the same thing, **perhaps her reaction would have been different**. I have noticed that there is a considerably large population of Africans in Guangzhou, and because of this the locals have grown to dislike Africans, they say that they cause crime and are up to no good, and I see that despite working with them every day, our teachers also share some of these ideas towards our African classmates. I just thought that our teacher, having worked at this university for so many years, and worked with so many African students she **would have been able to handle the situation a bit better** (D-3-9).*

Tom also identified racism in the attitudes of the Chinese towards the Japanese. In one of his interviews, Tom talked not only about how the teachers exhibited nervousness around African students, but also about how a Chinese teacher had used a Japanese orthographical character banned in Japan due to its symbolic connection to the Japanese government during the Second World War (D-3-8). Another extract from Tom's diary shows how he experienced indirect racism or hostility toward the Japanese. He had an incident on a train, in which a Chinese man took his phone away from him and criticised him for using a phone made in Japan, which was seen as an act of supporting the Japanese economy (I-3-6). Tom commented, 'It is weird. It was about 8 o'clock in the evening. He did not do anything bad. He just wanted to make it clear that I should not buy a Japanese product [and] not be so racist' (I-3-6).

While Tom did not experience racism in relation to his own ethnicity or colour, his observations show how Chinese attitudes to foreigners, especially those of colour, could be challenging to SA students. In contrast, Natalie, being of Sri Lankan heritage, did experience being perceived negatively due to her skin colour. She felt that she was often met with an undercurrent of hostility and negative perceptions on the basis of her dark skin, and that she was 'treated more like an Indian', which made her feel 'that there's a sort of lack in understanding of cultural diversity or, you know, different races living in different countries' (I-2-6). She also reported that there was a great deal of bias in favour of being white. Whenever she visited shopping malls, she would come across skin-whitening products in the cosmetics section. She was curious as to the reason for this and posted her question on a student online blog. She was told that this 'obsession' was

‘related to an old mentality’ which held that being fair-skinned meant a person had money, as only manual or outdoor workers became tanned due to exposure to the sun (I-2-6).

In her interview, Natalie talked about being called a ‘*laowai*’ (an informal, and somewhat impolite, way to address foreigners) by others. She wrote in her diary that ‘being a person of colour myself, I have faced stares daily and racist abuse [and] have even been called *dirty*’ (D-2-15). This may also be explained with reference to instrumentalities in Hymes’ (1974) SPEAKING framework, which sought to explain communication across cultures according to a number of key components, of which instrumentalities or the selection of language is one. What might seem to native Chinese speakers to be an unremarkable term for foreigners in their own language was in fact a source of great consternation to Natalie, whose own socialisation and ethnic heritage have led her to perceive the use of terms such as *laowai* by the Chinese as impolite or derogatory. Tom’s and Natalie’s experiences and observations illustrate how SA students might be made uncomfortable by somewhat racist and white-centric Chinese attitudes to foreigners, irrespective of whether the student is a person of colour themselves.

The cross-case analysis (from Section 4.2.1 to Section 4.2.4) showed that the three participants experienced different forms and levels of stress as a result of communicating with teachers. These findings clearly reflect the ‘learning shock’ (Gu & Maley, 2008) experienced by Natalie and Melian, especially as they struggled to adjust to the differences in pedagogical traditions and classroom practices. From Melian’s struggle with the lack of clarity in pedagogical communication to Natalie’s difficulty with teacher-centred learning and the lack of developmental feedback, to Tom’s issues with unjust criticism and harsh words, each student experienced stress in a distinct way.

The following section presents a cross-case analysis of the pictures and comments provided by the three participants to record their experience of stress while engaging with mass media in China.

4.2.5 Dissonance in engagement with host mass media

Pictures taken from host media platforms, along with comments detailing their responses to the pictures, were provided by Melian, Natalie and Tom (with the permission of one of the participants who had dropped out of the study, Tom commented on some of the pictures she had provided). Based on their thematic connections, I categorised these photographs into the following types: ideological images, social norms and traditional values, media reporting practices, and racism in the media.

4.2.5.1 Perceptions of political and ideological images in the media as a tool for propaganda

Melian shared and commented on the following pictures, which can be classified as being ideological in nature.



Seeing this picture made me **feel very confused**. The first thing, which caught my eyes, was a picture from the period of Cultural Revolution in China. My first thought was: **how is it possible** that they still use this kind of picture in the news? To me, as to a foreigner, Cultural Revolution is not an event, which the Chinese should be so proud of. ↵

P-1-1 News: 'Long Live Property Permits'!

Source: a local newspaper app, by Melian



It was shocking to see 'democracy' and 'freedom' as some of the core socialist values in China when Google has been banned. ↵

P-1-2 Political advertisement: Socialist Core Values

Source: a wall at a construction site, by Melian

The first picture (P-1-1) commented upon by Melian featured figures from the Cultural Revolution. This picture is a news illustration. It contains people who look like Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution, when it was fashionable to carry the ‘Little Red Book’ (Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong). The Chinese words in this photo translate to: ‘The mistakes that you make when you register the house under the name of the child’. Melian was perplexed by these images in the Chinese mass media. In a later interview, she also expressed her confusion at the residual celebration of an era (the Cultural Revolution) in the media that had encroached upon people’s personal freedoms and victimised many, according to Melian’s understanding:

‘I find it quite shocking to be still able to find any traces of that era (Cultural Revolution). With a second glance at the picture, the other outstanding fact is the usage of words: Wan Wan Sui (in Chinese, it means ‘Long long life’!). These words are connected with emperors and the old China, which I find very contradicting to the image itself – After all, wasn’t it one of the aims of the Cultural Revolution to abolish anything old and from the past? This was a very strange picture with a lot of discrepancies, which left me very confused, and I had no way how to explain it to myself. (I-1-7)

P-1-1 also confused Melian because the language used was connotative of China’s imperial past, and therefore antithetical to the socialist values of Communism in China. The image was in contrast to her previous knowledge of Chinese history and culture, as well as her Western democratic values. This also suggests the contradiction that can be engendered by differences in the ‘act sequence’ (Hymes, 1974) of the advertisement, which has sociocultural appropriateness in China, but contrasted with Melian’s view of Chinese history and her own values. That she could immediately recognise the images featured during the Cultural Revolution (P-1-1) indeed demonstrated Melian’s grasp of Chinese history and her sensitivity to these figures. To a large extent, it was her knowledge of the host culture and history that contributed to her feelings associated with stress. Likewise, Melian displayed her unease at the political advertisement (P-1-2). This wall advertisement proclaims the ‘Core Socialist Values’ of prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity

and friendship. It is a set of new official interpretations of Chinese socialism, issued by the Communist Party of China in 2013.

To this, she commented:

*Knowing the situation of (media) censorship, which is still present in China, makes me very **doubtful** about this 'propaganda', and I find it very **disturbing** (I-1-7).*

It was difficult for Melian to see how democracy and freedom could be socialist values if China prevented individuals from accessing information through state media censorship. In a later interview, Melian further explained the reasons behind her stress pertaining to the advertisement. She observed that she had been aware of the prevalence of internet censorship in China, but she had not been aware of the true scale of such expurgation.

After her arrival, she learned that the 'firewall' involved blocking a considerable number of websites. For example, sites that she had often used for reading news, accessing entertainment or as search engines were inaccessible. Indeed, Melian noted that her low morale was due to these two images, as they made her start to question herself and what she had learned regarding Chinese culture and history. More importantly, she believed that her personal life was seriously affected by the blockage of Google and other websites, all of which contributed to her stress at the beginning of her SA period.



It is understandable that China's aims are to keep traditions and to pursue its own way of life, however I feel as though it has gone to a too extreme measure as to outright ban Westernised behaviours in China.

P-2-8 News: Ban the pursuit of the Western lifestyle in variety shows

Source: a news app, by Natalie

When she read this piece of news (P-2-8), Natalie was perplexed by what comprised the Western lifestyle, wondering why it was banned on Chinese variety shows. In this news picture, there is a poster of ‘the Voice of China’, an imported programme from overseas. The news said the government was greatly concerned about scandal in entertainment circles and the related hype, which were believed to originate from Western countries. She immediately linked it to a recent talk with a Chinese friend who had boasted that Chinese culture is the greatest in the world. For Natalie, the disavowal and fear of Western culture identifiable in Chinese media translated into censorship that not only limited people’s freedom to interact with other cultures, but also made it difficult for people like Natalie, who were sojourners in China, to keep in touch with family. She noted that:

It could be a slight indicator to China’s globalisation, due to the fact that they are willing to expand their interests onto the people of China. I feel as though this is a very positive aspect, due to the fact that China is finally opening their doors to the outside world and are finally willing to learn more about other cultures (I-2-6).

*Personally, I think countries should merge and learn from each other, all whilst keeping their own traditions rather than shutting themselves off from the rest of the world. The first time I went to China, I knew it was two weeks. Now I am actually living in China, I found it was really hard to not to have frequent contacts with my family and my friends. So I had to download a VPN even though I know it was not the most safe thing to do. But I feel I need to contact my family with Facebook. It was interesting that without the VPN, you feel so disconnected to the world. You feel you cannot socialize, and you cannot socialize outside of China. So I feel that was **very restricting and was very limiting** (I-2-5).*

The feelings of stress are evident in Natalie’s use of the words ‘limiting’ and ‘restricting’ to describe constraints upon her social media use. As the extracts below show, while acknowledging the importance of patriotism for one’s own country, Natalie found it difficult to accept the contradiction between restricting access to means of learning about other cultures.

*It is extremely important to have a sense of patriotism to your own country, however banning one’s right to learn from others can be considered as **insolent and can undermine international relations with other countries,***

*which can affect all kinds of things such as trade. From this, it is easy to see the importance of understanding other country's cultures and values but also how China almost comes across as **paranoid** in order to go to such great lengths so as to refrain people from learning from other countries (I-2-6).*

*Despite China's attempts at globalisation, such as the One Belt One Road policy, or its association with other BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), it still truly is closed off to the rest of the world, and its ideological traits are evident here. I feel this depicts China's sense of patriotism and love of their country. I understand it, however I feel as though this may be **a little too patriotic and could come across as offensive** if it were in other countries (I-2-7*

As the extract below shows, Natalie's experience of Chinese propaganda, particularly in the southern part of the country where Natalie was based (where there was less exposure to foreigners than in the big cities), made her wary of sharing her viewpoint about China's greatness, vis-à-vis other cultures that might have contradicted what was believed locally.

*And it was **actually quite frightening** how much, you know, propaganda has, they must have seen to be having this ideology. Um, and what scared me the most is that they were not willing to listen to my side of the story, so they weren't willing to understand that, you know, China's, you know, it's, it's great, but it's probably, you know, other countries are also great. They wouldn't accept it quite, but there's no competition in a way, but there are other options, if you see what I mean (I-2-7).*

So I think they (people in big cities) were more willing to accept the fact that you know, we can learn from other cultures and make, you know, make China greater in a way from learning from other people. But when, as I said, when I was in, in the south, it was just, they, it almost seemed like a lack of education, um, or it sounds very harsh, but it's the fact that they had been so exposed to all this propaganda of, you know, China is the greatest, China is the best, China is number one, that they didn't want to listen to anything else, because they didn't want to admit that, that might be a possibility, that something else is better (I-2-8).

For both Melian and Natalie, the ideological propaganda found in the host media was a source of stress, especially as it not only conflicted with their own cultural understanding of democracy and perceptions of Chinese history and policies. It also made it difficult for them to communicate with their families. These extracts also serve to demonstrate the

preponderance of ‘banal nationalism’, which indicates the daily flagging of the ideological habits of nationalism in the lives of Chinese citizens (Billig, 1995, p. 6).

4.2.5.2 Disregard for individuals’ privacy in media reportage

Privacy of data is a theme that has already been explored in Section 4.2.2.2. It is also a theme that is echoed in participant comments on social media. For example, Tom found it hard to understand why teachers would share test scores on social media (P-3-6).



This is a post my teacher shared in my class group chat publicly, displacing our grade. I found it was a bit strange, since In English, we are very private about these things.

P-3-6 Notice: Announcing scores in class social media group

Source: WeChat, by Tom

Another picture (P-3-8) that perturbed Tom was the way images of children were frequently shared on social media in China, which is contrary to the practice in Tom’s own context in the UK. This is a class group chat for the group ‘中四班’ (‘Zhong Si Ban’; Intermediate Level Class 4). A teacher posted the score of the second test on October 14th. The names of the students (blurred by the author) are followed by their scores.



This is a post I find very weird because people often share pictures of children on social media in China, whereas in England taking pictures of kids, let alone sharing them on the Internet is frowned upon.

P-3-8 Shared picture: Playing with kids

Source: WeChat, by Tom

Tom also found it difficult to adjust to the idea of how people’s pictures could be used to advertise tutorial services without prior permission. In this case, the picture is of Tom himself during his stint as a tutor in China. This is a shared picture from Tom’s friend, showing children who were attending a course at an early learning centre. In this picture (P-3-9), Tom is teaching two Chinese girls English. This picture was used as an advertisement for the company.



This is a picture of me when I was teaching English. It was shared on WeChat Circle to show parents the process of learning. I feel like I might have been used to advertise without my permission which I felt a bit weird, but I don’t mind.

P-3-9 Social media advertisement: Showing parents how kids were learning

Source: WeChat, by Tom

On the other hand, Melian was concerned about the way video footage of accidents and incidents reported in the media were shared without any attempt at ensuring the privacy

of the individuals involved by anonymising their images (P-1-5, P-1-6). P-1-5 is an image of a tragedy at a supermarket, where a customer was knocked out by a store equipment and P-1-6 shows a girl being attended to at the emergency centre in a hospital after falling from a high building. The face of the girl was blurred by the author.



This was kind of a shocking video to me. It did not expect to have access to the whole video, but it was publicly broadcasted on the WeChat news. Also, another shocking thing was that neither people involved, nor the moment of the accident was blurred. This was a tragic accident and the least thing to do is to respect people's anonymity.

P-1-5 TV News: A tragic accident

Source: a video on TV, by Melian

3月4日22时30分，乌鲁木齐市第一人民医院（儿童医院）急诊科接收了一位坠楼女孩。医院重症监护室大夫于方介绍了孩子的情况：孩子是高空坠落伤：症状包括创伤性休克、全身多发伤、头部外伤（右顶部硬膜外血肿、蛛网膜下腔出血、脑挫伤）、脊柱外伤（腰椎、骶椎骨折）、骨盆骨折、右肺下叶挫裂伤、血气胸。



I found it awful that they felt the need to publicly expose the parties involved in the incident, especially when a child was involved.

P-1-6 News: A Girl Rescue

Source: a local newspaper app, by Melian



This is a **sad example of priorities set** in China (or at least in this news). The first and main news of the day is not about a girl who jumped out of a building and hurt herself (mentioned in the case above), but it is about flowers in blossom. Another evidence that human life is not considered being that important here. **I feel very sad.**

P-1-7 News: A 5-year-old girl jumped from the 11th floor imitating cartoons
Source: a local news app, by Melian

P-1-7 is a collection of news items. The first is about the ideal place for viewing flowers, followed by the tragedy of a five-year-old girl who jumped from the 11th floor. Melian also found it difficult to understand how the media could prioritise flowers in bloom as the headline story and make only peripheral mention of the girl jumping out of her apartment building (P-1-7).

On arriving in China, Melian started to download various kinds of Chinese news and social apps to better understand Chinese culture and language. However, the news, such as the stories mentioned above, turned out to trigger her stress. ‘This kind of picture makes me really sad whenever I see similar news and pictures’ (I-1-5). She further pointed out that, while China was still quite conservative regarding many topics, and banned many things from entering the market or the internet, images of children were still frequently adopted by mass media in official news stories (I-1-7). She wondered why images like these were not ‘against the laws and against the humane values?’ (I-1-5).

Tom’s and Melian’s responses to the media converge around themes of privacy. However, while Tom found it ‘weird’ or ‘strange’ that student grades were announced on social media or that pictures of children were circulated widely on social media, his responses

were shaped by concerns of personal privacy or that of children, in accordance with the societal and media norms that he was brought up with. For Melian, the stress arose from concerns over violations of privacy in media reporting and links to wider issues of what is humane or not.

4.2.5.3 Dissonance with Chinese social values, norms and practices highlighted in the media

Dissonance with traditional Chinese values and practices was also experienced by the participants. For example, Melian struggled with how depictions of Chinese culture in her chosen images seemed to place emphasis on prioritising the family over the individual (P-1-8), viewing being single as a social aberration (P-1-9), and putting filial piety above personal happiness (P-1-10).



A safety sign which proposes reasons for fire safety. As expected, the main reason is considerations of the safety of one's country, then family and then 'yourself'. That's exactly opposite to the western perception: 'you' are in the first place, then the family and then maybe your country. I know it is the Chinese culture, but I **still feel upset**.

P-1-8 Poster: Use fire safely for my country, for my family, and for myself

Source: picture taken at a subway station when travelling in China, by Melian



The first time I read this news **I could not believe** that it happened. It amazes me that even now, in this era, parents are still eager to marry off their child, especially daughter, as soon as possible.

P-1-9 News: A single 28-year-old girl who has never fallen in love was labelled a neurotic by her mother

Source: a local newspaper, by Melian



It was **neither disturbing nor amusing**. It only made me realize the cultural differences between China and a consideration amount of Western countries.

P-1-10 News: Parents of a girl who married a foreigner and decided to live abroad: We changed our big flat for a medium one for her tuition fees. If she lives abroad, who will take care of us?

Source: a local newspaper app, by Melian

P-1-8 presents an image of a poster with a slogan made by a local fire brigade. P-1-9 is a news photo containing some popular questions raised by parents of people in their 20s or 30s in China: ‘Why don’t you have a boyfriend or girlfriend?’, ‘Why not date?’, ‘Are you

sick of being alone?'. P-1-10 shows news about an old couple who sold their house so that their only daughter could study in the US, but after her graduation, the daughter refused to come back to China, instead deciding to marry an American and live in the US permanently. These three images are all expressive of traditional Chinese values. As noted in her comments, Melian felt upset about the slogan in P-1-8. She further explained it in the following way:

I can understand this sign in two ways; first - the remaining of Confucianism suggesting the hierarchical relationship and mutual obligation, and second - the fact that individualism is oppressed by collectivism and that life of a single human being does not have a big value (I-1-7).

Melian's quote shows that she measures Chinese values according to those of her own cultural background and finds them wanting. In particular, the value she found most difficult to accept seemed to be linked to the sacrifice of *the individual to the collective*. Melian's stress seemed to be triggered by the stories focusing on Chinese females and their implied deviance from the Chinese values of timely marriage and filial obedience (see P-1-9, P-1-10). She was shocked to read this news and felt sympathetic toward the females in the stories, as she felt that what their parent(s) were saying was excessive.

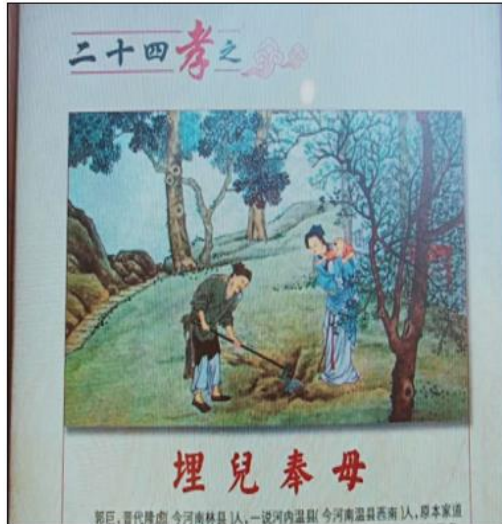
Thus, Melian's stress was based on the contrast between her own and Chinese culture because, in Western culture, relationships are the private concern of individuals, and the individual comes before the family. However, Melian found that Chinese parents were still deeply involved in this matter. She told me that she had been assured that Chinese females had gained markedly greater equality than before, but that she found it sad that a mother would think her daughter had a mental disorder simply because she was still single (P-1-9). This feeling extended to the couple who was upset that their daughter decided to marry and remain abroad after they had sold their house years ago to fund her studies (P-1-10). She asked her Chinese friends whether being single at a certain age was stigmatised and was told it was a common phenomenon nationwide. Her friend informed her that being over 25 years old and still single was a cause for concern, and that, in some extreme cases, it was even taken to be a matter of shame for the family (I-1-9).

Moreover, Melian started to query the value of such news, wondering whether its publication was related to the indirect promotion of traditional values, as indicated in the extract below.

*What surprised me was that such thing would be even mentioned in the news.
At that moment I was not sure what was the purpose of publishing this story
– just to inform the public or to indirectly promote traditional values (I-1-5).*

Natalie experienced a similar struggle to Melian's in comprehending the notion of filial piety promoted in the media. P-2-1 depicts a traditional folk story in the East Han Dynasty (25–220 AD). About 2000 years ago, Guo Ju was a man from a poor family. After the death of his father, he gave all the family wealth to his brother and he offered to support his mother. His wife gave birth to a baby, but he decided to bury the baby, so as to save some food for his mother. When he dug a hole, he found a jar of gold from God. In the end, the couple returned home to support their mother and raise the child.

P-2-2 displays news about a company that issued a policy requiring employees to send 5–10 % of their salary to their parents as a way of showing their respect and love. Looking at an advertisement promoting filial piety, Natalie could not understand how a father could sacrifice his child to provide for his mother (P-2-1), and she was equally shocked that a company owner could forcibly have money sent to staff members' parents by deducting the amount from their salaries (P-2-2).



This advertisement is based on China's concept of filial piety. In my opinion, I feel as though it should not have been featured in our modern society. Although filial piety is extremely important in Chinese culture, this example is immoral and frankly, disturbing.

P-2-1 Public service advertisement: Folk story of an impoverished couple killing their child in favouring of supporting the mother

Source: from a wall at a local park, by Natalie



Despite being an issue about filial piety, I feel as though there is an element of corruption. There are other ways of doing so, and therefore I feel as though this is not right.

P-2-2 News: A company owner had compromised his staff's salary to send money to their parents as a sign of respect and love

Source: a news app, by Natalie

These two images relate to Natalie's perceptions of one Chinese cultural element – Chinese filial piety, which is a Confucian guiding principle of Chinese socialisation that underscores respect for, and willingness to follow, the elders in the family (Ho, 1996). As can be seen in her comments, she ranked P-2-1 as 'immoral' and 'disturbing', as it was anti 'modern society'. She told me that she used to enjoy learning about classical Chinese culture and traditions, but that it was at that moment that she realised she needed to reconsider her past interest. The confusion, together with her self-doubt, made her

question her view of traditional culture, which she began to realise had negative connotations. These two pictures worried her because they contradicted her values and made her concerned about her future life in China (e.g. the possibility that her salary could be deducted by her boss in China and given to her parents).

With respect to P-2-1, Natalie reflected that, from what she had learned in class back in her first year in the UK, she believed that filial piety referred to the actions of children to support their parents, but she argued that this advertisement was setting a bad example. She explained:

I would have just said that it was a very foreign concept to us because, um, in a way, we take our parents for granted because they do everything for us, um, and they don't expect anything in return. But, um, I feel like it can be a little bit of a bad thing because, um, I feel like these, like Chinese parents expect filial piety, so they will expect to get, I don't know, like a monthly, um, monthly allowance from their son or their daughter or, you know, they will expect things from, from the children (I-2-3).

She had an even stronger reaction to P-2-2, commenting that if her salary was to be deducted and given to her parents without her consent, she would be very angry:

I would be extremely angry. Um, I would file complaints. I would talk to Human Resources. I would do anything that I can to get my salary back up, because, um, it's, you know, it's not fair to take, you know, someone's salary, you know, their hard-earned money to give, you know, for their personal gain. It's just not right. So, I'd be extremely angry if that happened to me, and I, I would do anything that I can, even to the extent where I would quit that job (I-2-4).

Natalie told me that she knew that, according to Chinese culture, it could be seen as a sign of filial piety. However, it was 'highly disturbing' because it raised the issue of legitimacy. Like Melian, Natalie's reactions to the pictures are linked to wider issues of ethical conduct in accordance with her own cultural context, and she seems worried about how such norms and practices could translate into workplace rules and expectations.

I think it is not merely a cultural problem. If we were to follow these example, there would be a great ethical problem. Regardless of one's social status,

*financial or cultural background, it is **inhumane** to kill and improper to force young people to support their parents. It almost raises the question of who should have prioritise, whereas in the West for example, the priority lies in the children without a doubt (I-2-4).*

Another key theme to emerge from analysis of the pictures and the participants' accompanying comments was that of puzzlement over Chinese cultural attitudes towards education. P-3-5 shows a slogan in a middle school classroom. This picture was originally taken by Lucy on a news app, and was given to Tom with her permission for its use in this study. Although both Tom and Natalie observed how media images showcased the competitiveness in Chinese education (P-3-5, P-2-6), Natalie felt that the image, along with the slogan was too 'extreme' and 'oppressive' for students, and made her fearful, while Tom was more pragmatic about the image in the context of his own competitive attitude to studying. Another image that shocked Natalie was one depicting a mobilisation rally for the National University Entrance Examination (P-2-7), which made her feel uncomfortable in that these media images were showing extreme competitiveness in education.



This picture would make me feel that Chinese education is extremely competitive, which of course **makes sense** when the population is so large. I **would probably be a little intimidated and feel bad for the students when I first arrived**, but I personally am very competitive when it comes to study, so I also feel that this way of thinking is effective and true. ↵

P-3-5 A slogan: Improve one point in your score and you can 'kill' (beat up) numerous competitors

Source: local news app, by Lucy

Natalie was also shocked by the picture showing middle school students participating in outdoor exams in heavy smog (P-2-5):



I found this piece of news very laughable. However, it is almost horrible. This could affect the students by making them sick from the heavy smog whilst being outside and could lead to lung infection and other respiratory problems. ↵

P-2-5 News: Middle school students attended exams outdoors despite heavy smog

Source: a news app, by Natalie



I felt that this is a **very extreme way** to encourage students to study. As this is in what looks like a classroom, that kind of mentality is **way too extreme and oppressive for students**. It is a **very scary thing** to think about. ↵

P-2-6 A slogan: Improve one point in your score and you can ‘kill’ (beat up) numerous competitors by the thousands

Source: a local news app, by Natalie;



I was shocked by this picture. I can feel their passion, but I feel sad for them to some extent.

P-2-7 A slogan: Attend the key national universities for our parents' sake

Source: on a news app, by Natalie

The three pictures selected by Natalie (P-2-5, P-2-6, P-2-7) pertained to Chinese cultural attitudes toward education and its norms. One image (P-3-5) offered by Natalie is the same as Lucy's (see P-2-6). P-2-7 shows an oath-taking rally and mobilisation meeting before the National Higher Education Entrance Examination in China. Natalie reflected that, while she understood the fierce competition underlying Chinese education, it made her wonder about the purpose of education. For example, in P-2-5, students were taking exams outdoors on a smoggy day. Natalie said she understood why it was encouraged that children should study outdoors; however, these weather conditions were certainly not healthy and could lead to detrimental effects.

*There are many benefits from being in the outdoors, such as being able to concentrate more, however it is essential to assess the weather conditions before choosing to do so, which is why I find this situation **extremely contradictory** (I-2-6).*

This issue made her anxious and question the purpose of education, and she was further stressed by the two slogans demonstrating students' passion for education in P-2-6 and in P-2-7.

*China places extremely high importance on children's education. It is evident throughout history that education comes first. There have been several articles about Chinese students on IV drips whilst studying hard for college entrance exams, etc. **which in turn is extreme in itself** (I-2-8).*

In her interview, Natalie revealed that she was unhappy with the words in these two slogans. Regarding P-2-6, she told me she was worried about the mentality of students in that atmosphere, just as she wrote in her comment. She linked the extreme competitiveness in Chinese education to their collectivist values, which made them prioritise studying over individual health. She felt that this was very unlike her own culture, which encouraged individuals to pursue what they wanted. Her views are reflected in the extracts from her interview:

They are all competing for the same thing. As they seem to do things in force, rather than individually, although. I feel as though this picture shows China's collective spirit, rather than taking individual and competitive approaches like we do in the West, where we apply the rule 'each to their own' (I-2-8).

Based on her own cultural conditioning and values, Natalie was of the view that education should not be sought for the sake of making one's parents happy, but rather as a matter of personal fulfilment. The fact that Natalie chose to use cultural explanations for images and slogans that she was uncomfortable with suggests the dangers of essentialising Chinese culture, and not exploring the possibility that a misunderstanding of the language rather than the culture may be the source of the discomfort (Piller, 2011). Natalie noted:

I do not think a national exam, important as it may be, is something that teenagers should take pride in, nor as the slogan says, going to 'key' universities just for their parents (I-2-8).

In the extracts below, Natalie talks about a homeless lady whose son had dropped out of school, noting that interacting with her and listening to her story made her think about the competitiveness of education in the pictures she had selected for this theme:

In China, I have barely seen any homeless people in big cities. However, the other day I came across an elderly lady sat on the side of the pavement. She was silent and did not ask for anything, regardless of the silver bowl sat right in front of her....I turned around, went to the closest shop and bought her a hot drink.... She was so pleased, she actually cried and kept thanking me and so I conversed with her for a little bit... I feel as though this situation really shows how dire her situation was and no matter how small, I'm glad I could show her just a little bit of kindness. Very saddened by this lady's situation. I

*know her son just dropped out of school. I was **quite sad**. It reminds me of my pictures about education (I-2-6).*

It was her encounter with a woman that made Natalie re-evaluate Chinese educational conditions. By communicating with the woman, she learned about the possible significance of attending a key national university for Chinese teenagers from impoverished families, and started to understand the deeper causes for this intense competition among teenagers.

4.2.5.4 Racism and white favouritism in host media

Racism and white favouritism were recurrent themes in the pictures the participants selected and commented upon. For example, the images chosen by Tom highlighted the anti-Japanese and anti-foreigner sentiment among the locals. The first image (P-3-3) is a screenshot of an anti-Japan war drama, in which a soldier is talking to a woman during the anti-Japanese war period (the 1940s), while the second one (P-3-10) is also anti-foreign in theme, depicting two girls in ancient Chinese dress holding anti-Christmas placards. It says, 'Chinese people should say no to Christmas Day and other foreign festivals. Do not let Apple win our support!' However, the third image chosen by Tom (P-3-11) shows an advertisement provided by Chinese companies in Africa, with African children as models for tailored product services. This picture was originally taken by Lucy from a news app. In this picture, the children are holding a board that reads 'Buy bicycle at Hong Xing Shop'. Contrary to Lucy, who believed this advertisement was just making use of children for commercial purposes, Tom holds another view. He argued that it was 'a charity action for Chinese companies to help African children' (I-3-8). This picture was presented by Tom deliberately to show me his different understanding of racism in China. It is further discussed in Section 4.3.1.



This is one of the many war films between Japan and China. Every time I watch TV there are at least 10 different channels showing these kinds of things. This makes me feel relations are still very tender and the government is still happy to show these kinds of things. ↵

P-3-3 TV drama: Anti-Japanese drama

Source: taken in the room, by Tom



If I were greeted with this view from the airport, I would feel extremely unwelcome. I have never seen anything so blatantly anti-foreigner in China myself, so this is surprise me. I would feel unwelcome; however, I know that after my time in China that the majority of the people are very warm and welcoming to outsiders. ↵

P-3-10 News: Anti-Christmas protest

Source: a news app, by Tom



I find this picture **very warming**. I feel my feelings towards it would not change between just arriving in China and now; the fact that Chinese companies are working to help the less fortunate in African is **admirable and touching**.

P-3-11 News: A customised advertisement with African children as advertising models

Source: a news app, by Lucy

Natalie shared two images that really distressed her. The first was an advertisement (P-2-3) for a hairdryer that used a white model to market the product. Natalie felt that this was a very white-centric choice, given that local models would have served the purpose of marketing the product just as effectively. The second image (P-2-4) was an advertisement that begins with a girl doing her laundry; when her black boyfriend enters, she squeezes him into a washing machine with detergent. After the wash is done, a young, clean Chinese man emerges from the machine. Natalie was even more bothered by this picture because, in her opinion, it displayed the ‘Chinese obsession with all things whitening’.



I feel **very unhappy** about it. I know that there are still stereotypes regarding foreigners (especially foreigners who are of a white ethnic background) which play a strong role into today's consumerisms here in China. I find this **difficult to comprehend** as Chinese people are also perfectly capable of doing the same job.

P-2-3 Advertisement: A high-tech automatic hairdryer for local women local Chinese women with a white model

Source: a news app, by Natalie



I was **mad** about it. Relating back to the picture, the boyfriend was considered as **'dirty'** and coming back as a fair/almost white Chinese man. This picture is **sadly all but offensive** in the eyes of the Chinese population. This advert can also be related to China's **obsession** with all things whitening.

P-2-4 Advertisement: Laundry capsules for changing skin colour

Source: a news app, by Natalie

In the interview, Natalie explained that her Chinese social media apps often sent advertisements and articles in Chinese, such as this one (P-2-4). Natalie found that most advertisements and articles on social media in China seemed to use white foreigners as models, such as P-2-3. She then spoke to a Chinese friend at the university, asking why companies preferred using foreigners in their ads. Natalie recalled that 'I was told that the

reasoning behind this is the idea that if a foreigner is using this product, etc., it has to be good' (I-2-5).

When I asked her about perceptions of such opinions in mass media, Natalie responded:

From my point of view, I feel this is, because there are still strong beliefs that the Western World is better, more privileged, and wealthier, hence people would be more attracted to reading the article or buying a certain product simply because a Westerner has advertised for it (I-2-6).

To make it worse, the advertisement (P-2-4) she found on an app made her 'mad' because it associated whiteness with privilege and darkness with manual labour, and to Natalie, this was a prime example of 'casual racism'.

*Having lived in China for several months, I **was extremely shocked** by this advert when it first came about. To this day, where we live in a free world, it saddens me that casual racism still exists. I feel like there's this **mentality** of if you're not (white), then you're not beautiful. I think someone told me that it was because of, if you worked in agriculture, you'd be tanned (I-2-7).*

The extracts below show Natalie's negative emotions as a result of racist advertisements in the media:

It's just very difficult, being, you know, a person of darker skin, living in China. I feel like it's not only China. Um, it's also, you know, South Korea and all sort of East Asian countries. It's hard to find a moisturizing cream that doesn't make my face white (I-2-7). There'd be protests in the UK. There'd be a lot of things going on to, to make sure that this never ever happens again, um, because the UK is a very open country. It's open to diversity. It makes me angry to think that there's this perception of, you know, being dirty (I-2-8).

These two ads struck a chord with her, particularly because she is a person of colour herself, and observing such casual and rampant racism and white preference angered her greatly.

4.3 SA Students' adaptation strategies and personal growth

While the three participants in this study all experienced adaptation, which converged on

some points, the trajectories of this cycle were distinguishable in several respects. For example, among the three participants, Natalie was the one to experience the most significantly stressful SA experience. While Melian did experience stress, this was largely in response to differences in the academic culture and culture in general. On the other hand, Tom's SA experience was perhaps the least stressful, despite some issues with teacher communication and the privacy of student test data. Tom's growth, however, unlike that of Melian and Natalie, seemed to be related not to stress, but rather to his previous knowledge of the SA experience and social communication inside and outside China. In this section, an analysis of the data is presented, suggesting that the SA participants made use of several strategies to build up their adaptive capacities, and achieve personal growth in the process of adaptation.

4.3.1 Demonstrating an improved positive outlook

Positivity was a theme pertinent to the stress-coping process for the three participants. Accordingly, responding to challenges with a positive attitude in China helped the participants grow and, in most cases, they reported growth in their confidence, tolerance and/or independence.

Despite the struggle with adapting to SA teachers' practices, in some cases, Melian recorded many memorable moments of teachers' good practices, without having been prompted to do so. She deemed that those positive aspects 'indeed reduce or counteract my stress to some extent' (I-1-7). Several lines of evidence support this. For example, even though she was unhappy with H's teaching, Melian also expressed great appreciation because H appeared interested in making 'positive changes even [if] it only happened once'. Even regarding Z, with whom she felt quite unsatisfied, she showed appreciation for the fact that the teacher was genuinely interested in the student views of their teaching performance, as shown in the extract below:

Z came to us and asked us what we think is the problem of her class and how it can be changed. At this situation, I could see that our voice, as of students, actually has an effect on teacher and they are eager to be given feedback in

*order to improve their teaching methods. This fact **really amazed** me. Even though we are given a feedback sheets in my university in the UK every year, I rarely have a feeling that my teachers actually want to know what the students about their teaching performance and are willing to change. But in China, I could see the result with my own eyes. And I was **happy** for the teachers and for us, students, as well to **feel the difference (D-1-3)**.*

Melian recorded that, one time, when she was expecting L to publicly point out the students with high marks, as all Chinese teachers tended to do, instead, L handed the students' tests back 'turned over so that no one would be able to see the mark' (D-1-10). Melian explained to me that, since then, she began to think very highly of L, who attached importance to protecting student privacy (I-1-8). Similarly, she recorded how W and L helped students overcome the fear of communicating in a new classroom and to integrate into the local culture (D-1-5, D-1-6).

Tom also demonstrated a high-level of positive attitude towards dealing with things that would normally daunt individuals from non-Chinese cultures. He observed that his tolerance had definitely improved, as the extract below shows:

*I think a lot of foreign students, when they go to China, they're asked to do things, and a lot of foreign students will complain that it's unfair, or they shouldn't have to do it, and they'll argue, and they'll resist, and I think, I kind of expected to be asked to do extra things, and I **didn't really mind**. I think people just need to accept what's going on, and **see it all as a positive opportunity**, rather than see it as something they have to do, and it's a burden (D-3-14).*

Further evidence of Tom's positive perceptions toward host mass media is found in his comment on P-3-8. While Lucy deemed this picture stressful, Tom insisted that that picture conveyed kindness (Chinese companies employing African children as models for tailored services). Since Lucy had dropped out of this project, her data was not available, nor were her perceptions. What is clear is that Tom held a contrasting positive view to this image. He made his arguments on the basis of his experiences and knowledge of Chinese people and companies. In his words, 'most of them are very warm and kind' (I-3-7), thus making the suspicion of racism less obvious to him.

Natalie, who suffered a relatively long period of stress, even began to re-evaluate stressful events when reflecting on her first semester. She noted,

*I think stress was **really beneficial**. I really, really pushed myself to like make conversation, uh, with people even though I was making mistakes. If I hadn't pushed myself, I don't think I would be at this level.*

She also revealed that she had really grown as a result of the stress during her SA experience.

*I've **grown so much** during that year. It's amazing. Like so many friends, so I, I kind of know myself better. I feel like I've done a lot of progress instead of, like, in terms of independence, so doing more things for myself and, you know, handling problems, problem-solving, making myself better to, you know, solve the problems and just live a happy life in China. And that was the, the best thing that I have ever done. So I've **really grown** (I-2-9).*

As the extract below shows, one of the ways in which Natalie was able to develop her tolerance was by travelling around the region to nearby countries, and she counted this as major evidence of her personal growth:

It (travelling) really pushed me to socialize. Like, I've made so many amazing friends through that. And, um, I even got a job through someone that I know. My tolerance level, I have to admit, has grown immensely since coming back from China (1-2-10).

Meanwhile, the three participants' increasing positivity was also linked to their initiative in actively responding to host mass media, rather than being passive receivers of it. For example, with regards to the example of the Chinese parents placing pressure on their daughter and her emigration and relationship plans (see P-1-10), Melian told me that, after she had read the news, she went to her Chinese friends for more information. She was quite surprised to discover that parental intervention in young people's personal lives could be explained by the fact that many Chinese parents had sacrificed a great deal to secure a good future for their children (I-1-6). Thus, she began to think and understand it in a different way. As she observed in the interview:

...in China, it is expected that such devotion will be return when parents grow old. It's hardly imaginable that many Western parents would voluntarily give up on their housing just as to allow their children to study abroad. Of course, there are exceptions on both sides, both in China and the West, but my conclusion is based on generalisation of most families (I-1-8).

Likewise, Natalie reacted to the host mass media in a positive way. Experiencing a breakdown and study difficulties, Melian began to learn how to overcome her negative feelings. In my follow-up interview, she offered to discuss her pictures from another perspective. For example, after a trip to Guizhou (an impoverished area in China), she told me about her new insights regarding her picture of Chinese education.

I have realized that the one special aspect of the picture (P-2-7): it used 'Die' (father) and 'Niang' (mother) instead of 'Bama' or 'Fumu' (two popular expressions of parents in Chinese). I started to remember that my teacher told us in the countryside, or in the previously generation, people used this kind of expression to address their parents (I-2-7).

After discussing it with a friend, she knew that these test preparation schools and academies were quite famous in China. She then searched for the name of the school on the internet, and was shocked to learn why the students in the picture were acting so enthusiastically. Most of them were from poor families, and going to a good university might be their only chance of changing their lives for the better. In another interview, she observed that the students in her pictures were not to be mocked, as their passion for education was genuine and they must be respected for it (I-2-8).

Seeing an image seemingly proactive against foreigners, Tom was less affected since he knew that 'the majority of Chinese people are very warm and welcoming to outsiders' (P-3-10). Moreover, when he found out he had been used as a model without his permission for an advertisement on social media, he replied that, 'it was a little wired but I don't mind' (p-3-9) since it did not affect his life.

These findings pertaining to the host country social media also allude to the three participants' possible understanding of language as a representational system (Hall, 1997). This allowed Melian to unpack the motivations behind what she was encountering in the

news and media, where the values being promoted were no longer dismissed due to their conflict with Melian's own values. The data show that it was positivity that helped the three participants to cope with, or be less susceptible to, stress. They learned from their experiences and grew in terms of their abilities, such as confidence and tolerance and, in some cases, they became stronger and more independent.

4.3.2 Communicating with others through socialisation

Interacting with others through socialisation turned out to be another effective strategy for the participants in adapting to Chinese culture. In her interview, Natalie shared that, at first, when she was experiencing a low mood, she just closed herself off from most social interactions inside and outside the classroom (I-2-2). After the conflict with teacher A, and when she finally realised her life had begun to be affected, she decided to ask for help to cope with it. She found a therapy website and talked to a therapist geographically located in the UK, which helped her to adjust to living and studying in China (D-2-9). When asked about the reason why she had got in touch with an online therapist, she explained that, in China, when she was feeling very stressed, she felt that she could not go to anyone for help.

Because back in the UK, mental health is quite important in terms of education or work place things. So there is always help available. I feel like in the UK you can go to your teachers for help and they can refer you to some people who can help you (I-2-4).

After a short period of treatment, she told me that she felt that she had gained more confidence and that going out and exploring more things would be better for her than staying in the dormitory (I-2-4).

Apart from professional treatment, her interaction with friends and some of her more empathetic teachers also helped her greatly, and she found herself motivated by the fact that she could understand more of the Chinese language than before. As she recorded in her diary after the failure of her mid-term exam, 'Today I became motivated more when I turned my focus to [my] studies again' (D-2-23). Natalie also reflected that, after the

time of her depression, she had received support from several friends, and that encouraging remarks from classmates, friends and even strangers made her feel ‘very flattered and gave me a huge confidence boost’ (D-2-23).

She found that she was capable of performing well in her studies, and she kept encouraging herself to learn new words and talk more with Chinese friends. She began to converse with her classmates, commenting that there was great improvement through more in-class engagement. Natalie found that simply speaking to people was helpful for her and, in many ways, helped her to alleviate her loneliness. Thus, just getting used to people and communicating more with them turned out to be useful in terms of undergoing medical examinations, going to the doctor or dealing with visa problems. Explaining things to doctors in Chinese also proved to be very helpful, and she believed that her passion for further communication helped her a great deal.

She also reflected that, when others called her *Laowai*, she did not become as angry as she had been earlier. Instead, Natalie took the initiative to communicate with those who were using the term, believing that by communication, they would get to know her better and not label her as a foreigner in an impolite way (D-2-6). Natalie used communication as a strategy to engage with others by saying ‘hello’ and making conversation with them, thus allowing them to see that she was just a person like any other.

On the other hand, her trips abroad served as a means to not only escape from her stress and promote a feeling of comfort, but also to provide her with a useful way of gaining more knowledge, thus further alleviating her stress.

And I felt that going out and exploring more things would be better for me, rather than staying at the dormitory. I think another thing made me to look forwards was planning trips, trips, and trips. You know, not only in China, but around Asia. So far I have been to HK, Guangzhou, Tokyo, and I went home as well for two weeks over the holiday. But I feel that going home is one of the many things I was looking forward to, and that is how I alleviate my stress little by little (I-2-6).

She visited Hong Kong because it was both Chinese and British in terms of its culture and features. The familiarity of the culture made Natalie feel better:

*HK is a good place to go since it is. It **reminds me of London** as well. Different manners as well, like standing the right side of the escalator for example, it was something so small but it reminded me of my home, of something we would do. Whereas in China, people would crowd on the escalator, and you would not be able to move. Or, as for the internet censorship, I feel **I was not restricted as I was in China**. I would have access to everything. So that was a nice thing*

After her holiday in Hong Kong, she asked for two weeks' leave to return to the UK for a Christmas break. This trip also helped to reduce her stress, giving her a chance to review herself and her life. After the break, Natalie realised that her attitudes towards China and her life there had changed. As she noted:

*My trip back home actually made I realized that how much I like China. Being in China for me is the experience for a lifetime. I don't think I will have this experience ever again. So I think coming to China although my health is not good, it is still a part of the world. It doesn't mean I cannot do it. And I **motivated me more to get better my Chinese language**. And it allows me to travel and expertise things that I would thought I could (D-2-24).*

Also after coming back from the UK in January, Natalie began to review her problems from another perspective.

[...] On the other hand, I do feel as though I am too preoccupied in my travels at the moment, rather than my studies, and it may be showing in not only my dictation grades and my concentration in class (D-2-24).

In her final interview, Natalie confessed that her pre-departure expectations of life in China had been naïve, reflecting that this left her somewhat unprepared for all the challenges she encountered. However, over time, she began to see many of these as opportunities to learn Chinese and about Chinese culture, as well as to travel to expand her knowledge of other cultures.

Increasing communication activities with locals also furthered their understanding of the

host culture, which, in turn, accelerated their adaptation to local society. For example, Natalie observed that she had learned to accept compliments in a Chinese way, rather than by responding as she would in England with an abrupt 'thank you'. In China, this meant simply saying, 'I am flattered', when people complimented her, for example, on her fluency in Chinese during taxi rides or visits to shops. Tom also found himself handling things without becoming too stressed once he had taken his time and reflected on the best way to deal with it, which he believed was something that living in the local Chinese culture had taught him.

He learned that, while 'a lot of things seem very overwhelming at first, you just need to take your time and take deep breaths and it will pass. I learnt this from China' (I-3-7). Melian also found that becoming familiar with the local area helped her to adjust more effectively, and to integrate better within her surroundings. Her adjustment took the form of becoming familiar with local places and eateries, as well as feeling welcomed when they remembered her on successive visits, commenting that the shop and restaurant owners around the campus 'would remember what you buy and what you like', and that this felt very 'friendly and welcoming' (I-1-10).

4.3.3 Using 'cultural difference' and 'selective inattention' as stress relievers

As the participants adjusted to life in China, they began to use cultural differences or adopt 'selective inattention' as two typical ways to relieve stress over Chinese norms and practices. It should be noted here that I use the term 'selective inattention' to refer to the conscious or unconscious acts of ignoring or downplaying. It differs from 'stress-coping avoidance' in psychology which has been ranked as a disorder, a reaction to psychological damage. Here, I argue that this act of 'selective inattention' is a proactive mechanism for coping with stress.

For example, in one of her diary entries, Natalie reported her unwillingness and dislike of being photographed for her foreign looks without her permission. She recorded:

*One day, a friend of mine (who is of Chinese origin but born and brought up in Canada) and I were walking around the streets of Suzhou, and it was clear that it was a residential area. A lot of the residents would stare at me intensely with questioning eyes as I was moving around. I could also see that some were not-so-discreetly trying to take pictures of me as we walked by. On the other hand, I did **not appreciate the stares and pictures taking**. It made me feel as if I was **an animal at a Zoo**; it showed a lack of respect to not even ask it if it was ok to have my pictures taken. To this day, I still feel uncomfortable when I walked in quiet areas. I did not appreciate the lack of privacy and respect for other people (D-2-8).*

In this diary entry, she also said that she did not mind if people approached her and asked to take pictures with her. She told me in an interview that she understood that in some of the areas, the locals had not come across foreigners like her before and were simply curious. She said she would have no problems with it, since she knew it was popular in Chinese culture. She added: 'I would just find it very funny and have fun with it'.

Melian employed cultural differences as an explanation for things that caused her stress. In most cases, when faced with stress, Melian would remind herself of the existence of the cultural difference and reflect on these different ways of doing things from a cross-cultural perspective. At this point, cultural difference began to be used as a tool by Melian to defuse her stress. For example, when faced with a question about the causes of the 'misbehaviour' of some of teachers, Melian showed more understanding in later interviews, attributing these earlier tensions to a 'cultural thing'. When asked about Z, who had scolded her unreasonably on the school trip, instead of complaining, Melian ascribed it to the lack of a sense of individuality in Chinese culture, whereby people were seen simply as a 'member of a bigger group' (I-1-6). Likewise, when H's teaching method was discussed, Melian again chose to ascribe his inconsistency to cultural reasons, specifically the Chinese preference for 'knowledge-based' teaching (I-1-4). While cultural explanations for these experiences may have served to relieve Melian's tensions, it does suggest recourse to an unconscious cultural essentialisation along the lines of Piller's (2011) notion that culture is frequently used as the basis for what might actually be linguistic misunderstanding.

In her final interview, when asked about the overall evaluation of her teachers in China, Melian commented that her stressful experiences were only ‘small fragments’ of ‘insignificant value’, and that simply because one is brought up in a culture with ‘individuality and originality’ does not mean that other approaches are necessarily wrong. She also observed that, while she may not have agreed with how some of the teachers taught, it was her responsibility to adjust to the Chinese way of doing things, as the system worked for other students and would also work for her if she let it:

*[...] though I do not fully agree with the teaching style of my teachers, I know that it is **my responsibility to adjust** in order to make my studies go smoothly. Therefore, I have learnt the different ways and different requirements and rather focus on what should do to make I work than how to complain that it does not work. The Chinese teaching system is not very close to me, but I realized that if this system worked for many other students before me, why it would not work for me as well? That is why, I believe, it might have been easier for me to get used to the Chinese education than it was for my fellow students (I-1-11).*

Melian’s eventual adjustment is evident from this revelatory extract from her diary, in which she wrote that, ‘I would like to provide more information on this topic [stress], but I am afraid that I am having the time of my life in China, and I hope my life could be more occupied with happiness than stress here’. She gradually began to persuade herself to keep an open mind to allow herself to taste and absorb all the new experiences, even the bad ones, which would all be valuable.

*Of course, there were some moments when I thought that this is so strange or ridiculous of disturbing or too hard to stand, but then I thought: “well, **this is China that is probably how it works here**’ and I **laughed about it**” (I-1-11).*

Melian attached importance to contextual factors beyond cultural difference, inconsistent with Hymes (1974), who argued for the contextual factors to explain cultural phenomena. Melian was quite active in reflecting on the interrelationships between causes of stress and contextual factors, including cultures, society, and institutional and personal factors (e.g. personality). In other words, Melian explored, in depth, the causes of conflict, and tried to understand them beyond cultural difference. When questioned why she had not

complained to her university if she was very unhappy with some of the teachers, Melian explained that she knew that it was improper in Chinese culture to complain about teachers, as they were accorded great respect. She explained:

*I believe that things work differently in different places, so there no use to complain – this was a problem of many students here criticizing the administration procedure and incompetence in the office for foreign students, and they kept comparing it with European countries. This is I believe **a very wrong approach** when you arrive into a new country (I-1-9).*

As for her previous expectations, Melian recalled that, while one can strive to be well prepared in advance, the differences can still surprise newcomers. She observed that, ‘my point is, it is a good thing to have some expectations, but you should not depend on them, as it is very likely they will be surpassed’. For example, Melian used to feel very unhappy about W reading good students’ essays, sometimes despite the students’ objections. Gradually, however, Melian changed her attitude towards this, noting that there was benefit in listening to others’ essays. Thus she began to see it as ‘exchanging more opinions and getting support and confidence from peer students’.

As for L, who had paid for everything at the café, which had shocked Melian, she was able to interpret it as generosity on the part of the teacher, rather than an attempt to impress everybody. Demonstrating her increasing adaptive capacity, Melian observed that, as it was, she was the ‘intruder’ in China. It was up to her to make adjustments to the Chinese way of doing things, while preserving her own cultural roots and making things work in tandem with her ‘values while adapting to new things’. She felt that the best way was not to criticise, but to try to understand the differences and work on self-adjustment to the new setting. She noted that all one had to do was ‘to learn; learn the differences and try to understand their roots and reasons’.

She also felt that it was understandable that her Chinese teachers should want to teach in their own ways, as it suited them. She noted that her Chinese teachers in the UK, perhaps influenced by their work environment, were open-minded and treated the students individually, in accordance with the needs of ‘western-born and raised students’ and the

British curriculum (I-1-10). Thus, for Melian, it was understandable that her teachers in China maintained their ‘typically Chinese way of teaching’ (I-1-10).

The data shows that the participants also chose to make use of selective inattention as another positive coping strategy to deal with stress. Melian chose to offset her stress by cultivating a positive approach to everything she was experiencing in China. At times, this involved choosing not to pay attention to negative aspects of certain events and experiences. This strategy is observable in the way she made extra efforts to ignore stress-inducing scenarios and to ‘think positively while being in China, because I like it here very much, all the good things can beat even bad influential aspects’ (I-1-8). Tom also demonstrated similar selective inattention as a coping strategy when faced with anti-Japanese sentiment in China. Having experienced negative reactions to his Japanese learning by Chinese locals, Tom learnt not to tell anyone that his degree was also in the Japanese language:

*I did not tell many people that my degree is Chinese and Japanese. Instead, I **just tell** them it was Chinese. Because a couple of people I met when they heard I am studying Japanese says ‘why, why do you need to study that language in China’. ‘China is better. Just stay here. So **I don’t mention that any more** (I-3-6).*

Melian’s adaptation was characterised by her high positivity, insofar as she tended to evaluate and react quite positively towards her stressful experiences, thereby minimising how these experiences negatively influenced her. When asked about how she chose to reduce her stress, she reported that she did so by thinking and responding positively. In her words, ‘as for these (stressful) things, I try to think positively while being in China, and because I like it here very much, all the good things can beat even [the] bad influential aspects’ (I-1-8).

Compared to Melian and Tom, Natalie reported a more seriously stressful SA experience, but overall, she was very open-minded. To alleviate her stress, Natalie adopted two main approaches – engaging in more communication with others (including a professional psychologist) and frequent travel away from China. These two strategies, despite some

limitations, did help her to adapt to her SA effectively. Like Melian and Natalie, Tom reported that he had a growing tolerance level, but he reported this growth was largely related to his cross-cultural communication competence (I-3-10).

Natalie used selective inattention as a coping strategy by ignoring things that were unavoidable and that she would find unacceptable at home. Despite finding spitting on pavements an intolerable custom in China, she learnt to not pay attention to it. As she commented:

*I feel like I **will never be able to get over some barriers**. Because it was something still affected even to this day. It may be a normal custom for people to spit. But **even it is something I am not get used to, it is something I had to ignore** (I-3-7).*

These extracts show that each participant chose to use selective inattention as a coping mechanism to deal with the different things they found challenging during their SA period in China.

4.4 Summary of Chapter 4

This chapter analysed data collected from SA students studying in China. It established that SA students experienced acculturative stress as a result of the difference between home and host pedagogical cultures, in Chinese teachers' praise and feedback practices, the gap between their own expectations and those of their teachers in China, environmental racism and dissonance arising from engagement with the host country's media. Analysis also showed that growth was not experienced as a result of stress by all the participants, as in the case of Tom, whose growth was stimulated, to a great extent, by his desire to excel and learn more about the language and culture he was studying, rather than by stress during his SA experience. This points to a need to consider individual and contextual factors when contemplating the wide applicability of the stress–growth–adaptation cycle. The next chapter discusses these findings with reference to the relevant literature.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the model adapted from Kim's (2001) theory and developed in this study (Section 5.1), as a way to address the research questions, drawing on the analysis of findings presented in Chapter 4. It then discusses the wider relevance of this study in terms of communication and cross-cultural adaptation studies, with a special focus on Kim's (2001) framework. Finally, the chapter highlights the key limitations of the study in the wider context of SA research. The research questions framing this study are thus restated for clarity:

RQ 1. What are the causes of acculturative stress for SA students prior to and during SA, as well as subsequent to the SA period?

RQ 2. How do SA students perceive and respond to acculturative stress?

RQ 3. How does acculturative stress impact SA students' personal growth?

5.1 Adaptation of Kim's framework to cross-cultural adaptation

The first question focuses on the causes of acculturative stress among the participating SA students, while the second question explores how the participants perceive and cope with acculturative stress, with a focus on social communication; this latter point arises as, according to Kim's (2001) model, this kind of communication is central to the process of adaptation to host cultures. Question 3 then examines how acculturative stress influenced the personal growth of these students. Key insights from the analysis of the findings in Chapter 4 enable a reworking of Kim's model of cross-cultural adaptation (2001) to reflect the dynamics of SA students' adaptation to host culture in China.

According to Kim (2001), the cross-cultural adaptation of strangers in host cultures occurs by means of a stress-adaptation-growth cycle. Central to this model is the concept of social communication, a process which enables strangers to adjust to their host culture and to learn to communicate competently within this new environment. Kim categorises such communication by ethnic group or host nation communication. However, as the

findings of this study show, the communicative environment of the contemporary world is radically different to that in which Kim first proposed her model of cross-cultural adaptation. In this new context, neat categorisations of host or ethnic communication are no longer viable, as new media and social media technologies have made it possible to engage in both ethnic and host communication (interpersonal and mass communication) simultaneously.

In contrast with the long-held understanding of interpersonal communication as a key source of stress during cross-cultural adaptation, the findings of the current study suggest that the participants largely experienced acculturative stress due to conflict between intrapersonal communication (self-concept, perception, expectations) and social communication (host *and* ethnic social communication) needs. The notion of intrapersonal communication (IaC) is thus an important one in this study, taken from the concept articulated by Smith (2008), who defined it as that communication occurring within individuals themselves for the purpose of clarifying understanding, analysing situations, or reflecting upon experiences. The three aspects which comprise IaC are self-concept, perception, and expectations. Self-concept pertains to the ways in which individuals see themselves and develop their orientation towards others; this forms the foundation of intrapersonal communication, which may be shaped by beliefs (prescriptive or descriptive self-defined schemas of what is true or untrue, good or bad), values (embedded orientations and ideals aligned to beliefs), and attitudes (learned inclinations toward or against topics aligned with values). Smith (2008, p.36) argues that, collectively, “beliefs, values and attitudes all influence behaviour”, resulting in the formation of opinions or even actions. Perception, which is external-looking, is also linked to beliefs, values, and attitudes and is thus closely connected to self-concept. Smith (*ibid.*) describes expectations as ‘future-oriented messages’ that deal with ‘long-term roles, sometimes called life scripts’ which may be ‘projections of learned relationships within the family or society’.

This study's results confirmed that while the participants' personal growth was stimulated by the interplay between stress and adaptation, as Kim (2001) theorised, stress arose due to the dissonance between an individual's intrapersonal communication and social communication; further adaptation sometimes occurred as a direct result of SA students' social communication; it was thus not necessarily linked to stress at all. More importantly, personal growth could also encourage intrapersonal communication and contribute to SA students' social communication.

Based on Kim's (2001) two models (Figures 2.1 and 2.2, pp.41-42), a framework (Figure 5.1) can thus be developed for the purposes of discussing the complex interactions amongst acculturative stress, adaptation, personal growth, intrapersonal communication, and social communication.

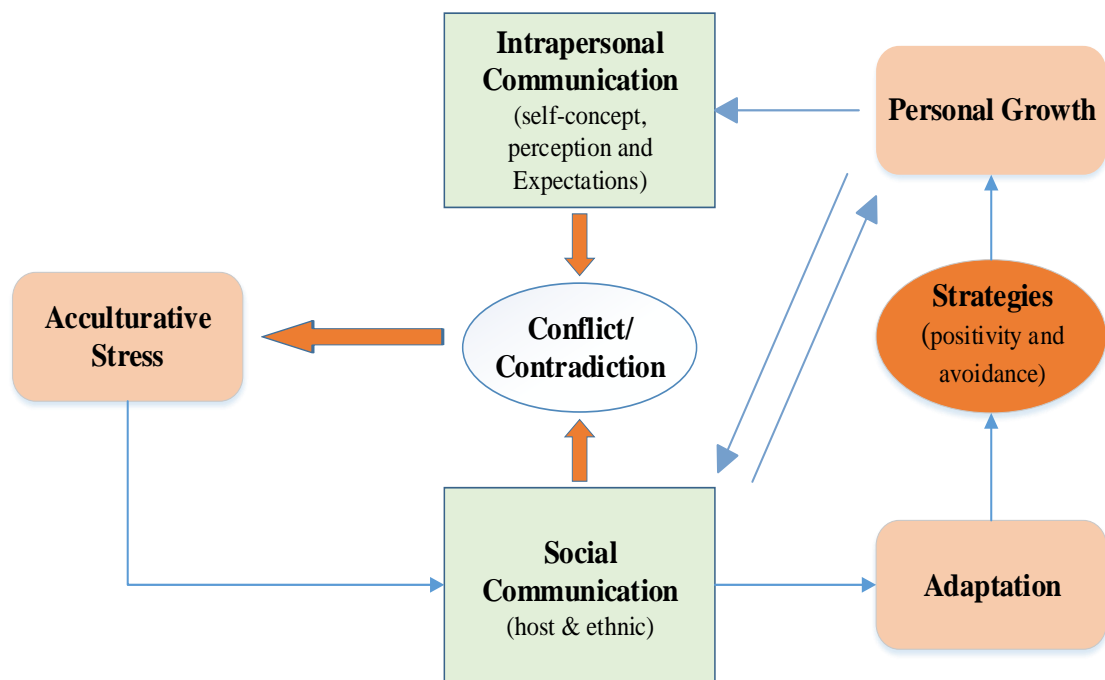


Figure 5.1 Model (adapted from Kim, 2001)

The adapted model (Figure 5.1) shows that when SA students' self-concept, perception and expectations (intrapersonal communication) conflicted with social communication (ethnic and host) in their new environment, acculturative stress was generated, leading to SA student adaptation and growth. Importantly, this model presents 'strategies' (positivity and avoidance) and allows the user to distinguish whether or not these

strategies were intentional, and whether they proved effective in transforming stress into growth. The adapted model also accommodates a key finding of this study, that adaptation and growth were not necessarily linked to stress, which at times occurred solely as a result of social communication.

The next three sections will address each research question and related findings in turn, explaining how analysis of the findings in each case led to the final changes to the model of cross-cultural adaptation offered by Kim (2001).

5.2 The main causes of acculturative stress for participants during their SA period

As the findings showed, the causes and effects of acculturative stress varied among the participants. Based on the analysis, an argument can be made that the acculturative stress experienced by the SA students arose from the conflict between host social communication and the SA students' self-concepts, perception, and expectations, as influenced by their prior learned relationships, roles, and 'life scripts' (Smith 2008, p.36) within the cultural settings of home, school, and wider community. These three aspects regulated the participants' intrapersonal communication. The key findings are discussed below with reference to these three aspects of intrapersonal communication, as delineated by Smith (2008).

Self-concept

Self-concept issues were found to be linked to the lack of individualisation in teaching. Students who were used to being treated as individuals in the UK and being encouraged to express their ideas and opinions found that the host culture's style of teaching limited the space available for their voices as individuals to be heard. The idea of self-concept was also affected by student privacy issues. In this study, the participants felt stressed when their teachers announced their marks in class, shared scores online, publicly announced their errors or raised concerns over personal issues during classroom discussions, or revealed their emotional state to the class.

By way of being associated with self-concept, the participants' social and educational backgrounds also contributed to this conflict in host social communication. All three SA students, including the participant with Eastern European heritage, had spent all or most of their lives in the UK, and had received most, if not all, of their previous education in the UK. It has been argued that the educational culture of the UK is influenced by Socratic principles (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006), supporting the enactment of more equal relationships between teachers and students within the Western classroom through the expression of personal hypotheses, and a desire for self-directed tasks (Tweed & Lehman 2002, p.93), which leads to the promotion of learner individualism. In contrast, supported by Confucian principles, the Chinese educational culture is believed to be characterised by 'hierarchical social relationships' and an expectation of 'teacher-directed learning' (Hau & Ho 2010, p.196). Hence, as the adapted model shows, the SA students experienced conflict in terms of host social communication due to the divergence between the latter system and their own culturally learned behaviours, relationships, and roles as students.

A key dissonance felt by the SA students with regard to Chinese social values, norms, and practices presented in the media was related to *filial piety*. Images prioritising the family over the individual and putting filial piety above personal happiness perturbed the participants. Similarly, acculturative stress was caused by video footage of accidents and incidents shared in the media without any attempts to anonymise the individuals involved. The participants measured Chinese values by the values of their own culture, which made it difficult for them to agree with Chinese values, norms and practices; this clash was due to the self-concept of the participants,

Expectations

The teacher-led educational culture experienced in China resulted in poor pedagogical communication due to a lack of dialogic learning activities, poorly-communicated instructions on assignments, and poor communication practices in delivering teaching points. When the participants' academic goals were not met as a result of what they

viewed as inept and disorganised teaching, they reacted strongly and negatively to Chinese styles of teaching.

Conflict also arose due to participants' prior socialisation in an educational culture with different norms and practices, which led to clear instructions and guidance for completing assignments being expected by the students. As discussed in Chapter 4, the focus on memorisation conflicted with the SA students' prior experiences, where the students had been expected to engage with the content and thus understand it. Instructions and guidelines were thus accorded priority as aids to enable the effective completion of work.

As Zhang (2011) notes, Chinese mass media, including social media, is strictly controlled and reflects the culture's embedded political ideology. The participants knew that internet censorship was prevalent in China, but they were not aware of the full extent of this censorship. The censorship of Western culture in Chinese media limited and restricted the participants' interactions with other cultures, while the host media not only contradicted their own cultural understandings of democracy and perceptions of Chinese history and policies but also made it difficult for them to communicate with their families. Again, this represented a mismatch between the participants' expectations and what they actually experienced in China.

Mismatched teacher-student expectations led the participants to experience great stress, affecting not just their attitudes towards their studies and grades but also their emotional well-being. Another cause of stress was teachers' expectations of better performance from participants who had been identified as high-achievers even when they themselves felt satisfied with their scores.

Perceptions

The way classes are organised, and the way activities are planned and implemented, shapes classroom communication. When communication was led by the teacher in the teacher question-student answer format, this failed to elicit learner participation, thus restricting the space for student-teacher dialogue or peer-to-peer communication. Poorly-

managed communication of assignment criteria also frustrated the participants, who were accustomed to receiving clear instructions and criteria in their home institutions. The participants perceived teacher-centred instruction and the lack of organisation negatively in contrast with their earlier pedagogical experiences.

The findings show that participants' experiences of racism during SA was another source of great acculturative stress. Racist attitudes towards non-Chinese students were considered to be driven by the locals' perceptions of people living in the area as being troublemakers (e.g. Africans) or by wider socio-political issues (e.g. Japanese involvement in WWII). With regard to colour, besides the prejudice against African students, white favouritism was also observed in cases of British-born students of South Asian heritage.

The participants also found that feedback was restricted in comparison with that received in the UK. The lack of constructive feedback discouraged them and added to their stress, as any feedback they did receive was achievement-oriented and not developmental. The demanding and sometimes harsh and discouraging attitudes of teachers towards them also initially stressed the participants; perceived unjust criticism was a source of stress for the participants, as were feelings of being disrespected and unduly censured. After-class communication also shaped student adjustment in the SA context; at times, the teachers were thought to be crossing the lines of appropriate relationships between teacher and student. Participant perceptions of teacher intentions were influenced by their own acculturation; on social occasions, students expected teachers to maintain a distance from them by not demonstrating unduly hospitable behaviour.

As Figure 5.1 shows, SA students' self-belief, perception, and expectations, which were developed as a result of socialisation in their home culture, led to conflict with the norms and values of host social communication. This result is in line with the literature, which suggests that 'during the transition to the host environment, international students are faced with contrasts regarding their own culture' and that 'the discomfort between prior ways of knowing the world and new cultural norms' can challenge sojourning students

(Sue et al., 1998, cited in Arthur 2004, p.23). As Arthur (2004, p.23) explains, ‘for some students cross cultural dissonance results in a firm grasp on home values and rejection of the host culture’. The findings of this study reflect an initial rejection of the cultural dissonances arising from host social communication, generating acculturative stress, which in turn gave rise to adaptation by the SA students.

5.3 Participants’ perceptions of and methods of coping with acculturative stress through the use of social communication

The participants perceived and coped with acculturative stress by developing confidence through socialisation and travel, demonstrating positive outlooks, engaging actively with host media, communicating with others, using cultural differences as stress relievers, and familiarising themselves with the host culture. The participants’ receptivity to new experiences in China helped them to develop confidence in their own abilities, improving their Chinese proficiency and increasing their knowledge of Chinese culture. They also became very independent during their SA period, travelling to nearby countries, which also developed their tolerance of cultural differences, reducing their stress. Despite the participants’ struggles to adapt to the host teaching practices, they reported many memorable moments and perceived good practice arising from their teachers. This positive outlook helped to reduce their stress to some extent. The participants expressed great appreciation even in cases where positive changes only happened once, particularly when teachers showed genuine interest in their feedback on teaching performance. The participants began to think very highly of those teachers who protected their privacy or helped students to overcome their fear of communicating in a new classroom and integrating into the local culture. The participants’ optimism was also linked to their attempts to engage with host mass media rather than remaining passive receivers. This involved visiting and talking with classmates or finding alternative ways to stay in touch with their families back home.

Interacting with others was an additional strategy used by the participants to adapt to the new culture. Using a therapy website to consult with a therapist in the UK; exploring the environment; talking to friends, classmates, and occasionally teachers; and refocusing on studies were further examples of the strategies used by the SA students to gain more confidence in their new surroundings. In addition, rather than getting angry with local people who used what they perceived to be impolite expressions, participants took the initiative to interact with them, believing that this would improve locals' understanding of foreigners.

As soon as the participants started to interact in Mandarin with other foreign students in class and to practice English with others, they began to learn more about other students' cultures and countries. The participants' pre-departure expectations of life in China were acknowledged as being naïve, and they felt that this left them somewhat unprepared for the problems they encountered during their stays. However, over time, they began to see many of their problems as opportunities to learn Chinese language and culture, as well as to travel and expand their knowledge of other cultures.

As the participants adjusted to life in China, they began to use their awareness of cultural differences as a way to relieve stress caused by their experience of Chinese norms and practices. For instance, while the participants did not like being photographed for their foreign looks without permission, Natalie and Tom did not mind people approaching them and asking to take pictures with them. Rather than complaining to local people about their responses to everyday issues, the participants attributed these to the lack of a sense of individuality in Chinese culture, and acknowledged that it was their responsibility to adjust to the Chinese way of doing things; importantly, they believed that since the SA system of teaching and learning had worked for other students in the past, it would also work for them if they fully engaged with it. They persuaded themselves to retain a sense of open-mindedness in order to be receptive to new experiences, even bad ones; these latter were considered to be just as valuable learning opportunities as the good experiences. According to the adapted model based on Kim's theory, this approach is a

sign of personal growth, supporting the idea that acculturative stress leads to adaptation and growth.

One participant attached importance to contextual factors, discussing the potential causes of conflict in order to develop explanations beyond cultural differences. Despite cultural expectations, the participants did change their attitudes, noting that, as visitors to China, it was their responsibility to adjust to the Chinese way of doing things, although still preserving their own cultural roots.

Another important strategy used by the participants was learning about the host culture. This involved items such as responding to compliments in the Chinese manners, taking time to reflect on their next steps, becoming familiar with local hangouts and eateries, and enjoying the feeling of being welcomed when they were remembered upon successive visits. These are examples of how cross-cultural adaptation can catalyse personal growth, as seen within the adapted model based on Kim's theory.

As the modified model of cross-cultural adaptation developed in this study shows, acculturative stress caused by the conflict between intrapersonal communication and social communication can lead to the adoption of strategies such as those that helped the SA students to adapt to the host culture. In some cases, the strategies the participants adopted did not always arise as a response to stress, however. For instance, in the case of Tom, his previous experience living in China and his communicative competence helped him to adapt to life as a SA student, and to grow as a learner and an individual.

5.4 The impact of acculturative stress on students' personal growth

In this study, the impact of acculturative stress on students' personal growth was seen to be related to the strategies they developed in order to adapt to the host culture, and to the interplay between stress and personal growth, in accordance with the third aspect of the adapted model based on Kim's theory.

The participants' adaptation strategies and personal growth were closely linked. The SA students coped with acculturative stress by building up confidence through socialisation and travel, demonstrating positive outlooks, engaging actively with host media, communicating with others, using cultural differences as stress relievers, and familiarising themselves with the host culture. As the adapted model shows, the conflict that the SA students experienced as a result of dissonances in communication with their teachers, environmental racism, and host media communication gave rise to acculturative stress, which led them to deploy a range of strategies that both enabled them to cope with their stress and to adapt and grow as individuals.

When the participants started to socialise with their classmates, their teachers, and local people, they became motivated to study harder. The communication with a professional psychologist practiced by one of the participants can also be considered an act of socialisation. Frequent travel to countries neighbouring China and stays in hostels also facilitated the participants' socialisation processes, and socialisation was also related to active engagement with host media. As soon as the participants started to communicate with people outside China, they felt less restricted. Although one participant was not accustomed to receiving requests to be photographed by strangers, she accepted the fact that local people were simply curious due to her foreign looks, and by responding favourably to such requests, on the condition that she was asked first, she was able to accept and be amused by her 'celebrity' status. The participants acknowledged that cultural differences, such as the absence of individuality in the classroom, should not prevent them from developing as students, and familiarisation with in-class activities, such as reading other students' essays (initially viewed as a violation of privacy), was gradually understood as a way to learn from one another. As a result, the cultural-educational gap became a stress reliever and offered opportunities for peer-support and growth in peer-confidence.

The second main factor was the interplay between the participants' stress and their personal growth. Acculturative stress contributed to the participants' development and

encouraged personal growth, as suggested by Kim (2001) (see process model). For some participants (such as Melian and Natalie), their growth was particularly closely related to their acculturative stress. Melian's stress over the perceived violation of privacy in media reportage made her reconsider what is and is not humane, while from a more self-reflexive point of view, Natalie argued that 'it is stress that made me what I am today' (I-2-9). Acculturative stress also acted as a catalyst to encourage the students to engage in more practical, everyday tasks such as calling the bank or setting up a health check.

For Tom, his personal growth was not as clearly linked to acculturative stress; instead, his growth was deeply related to his previous knowledge and experience of living in China and to his cross-cultural communication competence. In this regard, his experience differed from the notion propounded by Kim (2001) of acculturative stress as mediated by host communication being the trigger for adaptation and growth; however, his experience still supports the key role of social communication (even without acculturative stress) in triggering adaptation. In his case, Tom was able to use his previous knowledge, experiences, and communicative repertoire to adapt and grow further as a SA student.

Positivity and avoidance strategies, whether purposeful or not, were essential variables in transforming stress into growth for all participants. Here, the term 'avoidance strategy' is conceptualised as 'selective inattention'. Natalie's positive expectations based on her previous trip to China two years earlier helped her to deal with the dissonance caused by her naivety at the beginning her SA period. Developing a positive attitude towards communicating with Chinese teachers even outside the classroom allowed her to accept that her network of friends could also include teachers. Melian's adaptation involved a positive evaluation of, and reaction towards, her stressful experiences, minimising and transforming the negative influences of those experiences on her.

5.5 Implications

The construction of 'reality' in this study was viewed as an ongoing social communication process. Thus, 'reality' referred to both participants' growth and the interplay of this with

their acculturative stress, both of which were perceived and interpreted by participants and by the researcher based on the interactions between the participants and their social environment, and between the participants and the researcher. In line with the theoretical framework of McKinley (2015) and Stead (2004), this reality could thus be said to be socially constructed. For the three participants, social communication during their SA period also functioned as a source of knowledge from which they were able to develop subjective and multiple meanings for their experiences. Participants' knowledge and reality were therefore created by their social relationships and interactions in their host social communication structures.

Kim's (2001) integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation was used in this cross-cultural study as a lens to focus on the adaptation experiences of three SA students in a Chinese educational context. In this study, it was also shown that, as Kim (2001) proposed, as soon as the participants initiated more interaction with host students and local people, they started to feel more satisfied and connected (Hendrickson, Rosen & Aune, 2011).

The study's findings verify Berry's model of acculturation (2006a; 2006b), especially with regard to negative psychological reactions to acculturative stress such as anxiety, depression, and psychological and psychosomatic symptoms. These effects have been described by Kim (2001, p.55) as 'internal turmoil', representing a negative, imbalanced state featuring uncertainty, confusion, and anxiety (Kim, 2001). The data in the current study showed that all three participants experienced acculturative stress to varying degrees, based on their experiences and self-concepts, perception, and expectations. As Berry's model suggests, the participants tried to assimilate with Chinese culture by maintaining relationships with non-Chinese classmates, teachers, and local people, as well as striving to maintain their own cultural identities through contact with their home culture (e.g. talking to family and seeking online psychological help) or marginalisation, by closing themselves off (e.g. being passive receivers of cultural messages). As the participants developed a sense of optimism, however, they began to maintain their own

cultural identity while developing relationships with other groups (e.g. spending time with teachers and accepting their offers to pay bills). The findings show that these approaches affected the coping strategies participants deployed in order to adapt and grow in the SA context.

Some of the Asian-centric themes identified by Miike (2015) were also confirmed through use of the adapted model based on Kim's theory. For example, initially, the teacher-led communication promoted in the classroom was questioned by the participants. As seen within the adapted model, this was reflected in the intrapersonal communication of the participants, as prior learned behaviours, relationships, and scripts for life led them to question the teacher-led culture prevalent in China. However, as they adapted to the SA environment, the participants came to recognise that complaining about or questioning teachers' authority was seen as exemplifying disrespect towards the teacher: the need to accord respect to teachers means that, in a Chinese classroom, students are more likely to be humble and obedient (Wong, 2014). This Confucian heritage of learning (Kingston & Forland, 2008) is a teaching-learning aspect that students who have studied at Western universities should clearly consider when they enter the Chinese educational system.

Effective and constructive in-class communication with teachers was thus difficult for the SA students and required time to achieve. However, once it was established, a close relationship between the teachers and the participants developed based on a shared sense of trust and intimacy, which allowed the students to become active learners (den Bok et al., 2006). As a result of their SA experience in China, and in the context of classroom activities, the students also developed tolerance for doing extra things on occasion, viewing these as positive opportunities rather than burdens. This change of attitude towards learning confirms the idea that cross-cultural adaptation is a process of adapting to fit in with a changed environment (Sussman, 2002).

Similar responses to problems were identified as the students became more engaged with after-class communication. Evidence of this type of communication empirically verified

Dobransky and Frymier's (2004) assertion that the teacher-student relationship is strengthened when students engage in out-of-class communication with their teachers as long as this type of communication becomes habitual rather than an occasional event. The social event at the café crossed the SA students' traditional boundaries between teacher and student from an ethical perspective. While Asian students might perceive the teacher's gesture of paying for students' drinks to be caring and warm (Bell, 2012), the SA students felt embarrassed that they had not ordered cheaper drinks. This example demonstrates the association of interpersonal communication with the process of acculturation during the adjustment period in the host culture (Kim, 2001). Simultaneously, it shows how intrapersonal communication is rooted in learned behaviour, roles, and relationships, as shown in the adapted model based on Kim's theory, and can thus also contribute to acculturative stress, which in turn influences cross-cultural communication. This phenomenon highlights the inextricable link between stress generated by social communication and cross-cultural adaptation.

Contrary to the findings of Akhtar, Pratt, and Bo (2015), data from the current study suggests that prior knowledge of cultural differences between cultures (e.g. models of teaching and learning) was not necessarily associated with increased satisfaction and adaptation. Furthermore, Akhtar et al. (2015, p.1) emphasised that the weather in China had 'negative associations with [student] overall satisfaction and with their adaptation to their environment'; the participants in the current study argued that Chinese students attending outdoor exams, which took place in heavy smog, was certainly not a healthy situation and could in fact be detrimental. However, they did begin to understand the social context in which these exams are the best option for children from poor backgrounds. These environmental conditions thus shaped their understanding of the Chinese educational system and culture in general, as they questioned the practice of exposing children to pollution during open-air examinations. This verifies the coherence of the adapted model based on Kim's theory, wherein cross-cultural adaptation is expected to catalyse personal growth.

The empirical evidence confirms the deep impact of positive social relationships on the participants' language gains, implying that interpersonal relationships with host nationals are closely related to students' host language proficiency. This corroborates Isabelli-García's (2006) argument that motivated learners who considered their L2 learning period abroad as an 'investment' tended to have extended social networks. The social networks developed by the participants (e.g. recurring visits and talks with people in services and shops) verified the corresponding theory, which views second language learning as being linked to socialisation in a host society (Gallucci, 2011).

A significant contribution of this study is its consideration of the negative effects of host mass media on the participants. The stress caused by non-consensual public sharing of personal information on social media platforms suggests that social media plays an important role in facilitating, or damaging, SA students' cross-cultural adaptation (Chen, 2012; Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2016). Similar concerns arose when this lack of privacy was evidenced in media reportage of incidents that infringed upon the privacy of individuals. Paradoxically, some adaptation difficulties were attributed to advertising images which appeared to stereotype local people rather than being linked to the SA students' own cultures. This could be attributed to media marketization and the commercial models adopted by mass media in China. The underlying social idea of prioritising 'the group' (i.e. country and family) over the individual and putting filial piety above personal happiness was also seen to signify social control and political ideology (Zhang, 2011), which acted as a cause of acculturative stress as the participants compared such media references to cultural understandings rooted in their own backgrounds.

The implication of these findings for policy and practice can be summarised with reference to two aspects:

First, UK universities as SA programme organisers and Chinese Universities as programme providers, teachers, administrators, and policy makers must work from a shared knowledge of the ways in which SA students suffer from acculturative stress and the extent to which their experiences are shaped by stress. Efforts should thus be made to

facilitate SA students' adaptation. For example, conventional Chinese education pedagogical practice, communication patterns, and mass media practice should be covered in pre-SA departure training; within the Chinese SA host programme, teaching training regarding international students' privacy, Western professional teacher-student boundaries, and international standards of improper practice such as racial preferences or favouritism should also be introduced. It is imperative to promote cross-cultural awareness and competence among Chinese teachers who teach SA students.

Second, the findings of this study also underline the frequency and impact of acculturative stress on SA students. It is evident that the extent to which SA students suffer from acculturative stress is shaped by a combination of factors, among which their knowledge of cross-cultural communication, competence, and stress-coping strategies help define their SA experiences. SA programme policy makers and programme leaders should therefore incorporate cross-cultural communication, competence training, and stress-coping strategies into the SA curriculum in order to increase awareness of stress issues and ways to address possible difficulties in SA contexts.

5.6 Limitations

Although this study has produced significant insights into SA cross-cultural adaptation, it nonetheless has several limitations. The first limitation pertains to the participants' educational backgrounds, their purposes in going abroad, and their home cultures. While all three participants loved learning Mandarin, had visited China previously, and were somewhat familiar with Chinese culture, they could be categorised as strangers in the SA context because any earlier visits had been short-term. However, their advanced proficiency in their host language, which atypical of most SA students, made them exceptional rather than normative cases, making the findings less generalisable. Participant characteristics also pose a limitation, as these students had learned about China from their own visits to the country rather than from the media as is usually the case with SA students. Furthermore, while two of the participants were British, one of them was Eastern European in origin, which added a variable not factored into this study.

By integrating the notion of intrapersonal communication into the cross-cultural adaptation of SA students, the adapted model was based on the understanding that, as the three participants were all European in origin and background, they would still share ideas and experiences pertaining to pedagogy and communication.

The second limitation relates to methodology, including the case study approach, the data collection tools, and the presentation of data. In principle, systematic procedures for case study research are deficient due to their reliance on overgeneralised methodological guidelines. Although in this study the four-stage empirical research design was clarified, and its methodological techniques and epistemological grounding developed, the researcher retained the freedom to divide the empirical research into a predetermined number of stages, which allows subjectivity that has the potential to influence the reliability and replicability of this study. The data collection tools highlighted only selected aspects of the research problem and certain perspectives, although the use of multiple data collection methods was intended to help achieve data triangulation. Furthermore, the use of photos selected by participants and their accompanying commentaries may be challenged as leading to overgeneralisation and misinterpretations of the relationships between the variables and processes. It should also be noted that the findings were not presented in chronological order, such an approach was initially planned.

A final limitation arises from perspectives on host social communication by SA participants in the study. The focus on communication with a target population (i.e. SA teachers) and on engagement with host media was effective at generating efficient data; however, it naturally excluded consideration of other forms of interpersonal communication, such as between peers in class, or with friends (local people or people from an international background) and neighbours during the SA period. This focus on SA students' communication with their SA teachers therefore risked overemphasising the significance of one particular type of social communication.

5.7 Future research

Based on the scope of the adapted model of cross-cultural adaptation of SA students, future researchers could pursue research trajectories to construct new understandings of the phenomenon in the context of both the framework as originally offered by Kim (2001) and the adaptation proposed herein. Future studies focusing on selected aspects of Kim's (2001) integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation could further help to refine her theory and develop a better understanding of the foundational concepts. Future research could also examine how 'strangers' of various origins, cultures, and educational backgrounds adapt in politically, culturally, and environmentally challenging contexts, as these SA students did in China, which until recently has not been a standard destination for SA students from Western contexts. Researchers could also make use of a combined data collection tool for SA experiences consisting of diaries and reflexive photography. Based on such multimodal texts, experiences and observations could be recorded using written text and photographs taken (or collected) by the participants interchangeably; given the availability of Wi-Fi networks and the widespread use of smart phones, action cameras, and other web-based platforms of (social) communication, such a diary could also take a variety of electronic forms.

To evaluate the applicability of the adaptations proposed to Kim's theory (2001) in the current study, it is suggested that future researchers conduct a longitudinal, mixed-method study involving groups of exchange students within two countries. Studying their experiences could help to determine if and how intrapersonal communication in student participants from two different cultural settings contributes to student adaptation in the SA context.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Notes 2.1 and 2.2

3 Assumptions:

1. Humans have an innate self-organizing drive and a capacity to adapt to environmental challenges.
2. Adaptation of an individual to a given cultural environment occurs in and through communication.
3. Adaptation is a complex and dynamic process that brings about a qualitative transformation of the individual.

3 Boundary conditions of 'the strangers'

1. have had a primary socialization in one culture (or subculture) and have moved into a different and unfamiliar culture (or subculture)
2. at least minimally dependent on the host environment for meeting their personal and social needs
3. at least minimally engaged in firsthand communication experiences with that environment

10 axioms

1. Cross-cultural adaptation involves both acculturation and deculturation, an eventual possible outcome of which is assimilation.
2. Underlying the cross-cultural adaptation process is the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic.
3. The stress-adaptation-growth dynamic brings about an intercultural transformation in the stranger.
4. As the stranger undergoes intercultural transformation, the severity of fluctuation in his or her stress-adaptation-growth dynamic subsides.
5. Intercultural transformation is manifested in increased functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity.
6. Intercultural transformation facilitates, and is facilitated by, host communication competence.
7. Intercultural transformation facilitates, and is facilitated by, participation in host social (interpersonal and mass) communication activities.
8. Extensive and prolonged participation in ethnic social (interpersonal and mass) communication activities deters, and is deterred by, intercultural transformation.
9. Environmental conditions (host receptivity, host conformity pressure, and ethnic group strength) influence, and are influenced by, the stranger's intercultural transformation.
10. The stranger's predispositional conditions (preparedness for change, ethnic proximity, and adaptive personality) influence, and are influenced by, his or her intercultural transformation.

Note 1: Assumptions, Boundary Conditions and Axioms in the Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation (Kim 2001, p.89-90)

21 theorems

1. The greater the host communication competence, the greater the host interpersonal and mass communication.
2. The greater the host communication competence, the lesser the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication.
3. The greater the host communication competence, the greater the intercultural transformation (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity).
4. The greater the host interpersonal and mass communication, the lesser the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication.
5. The greater the host interpersonal and mass communication, the greater the intercultural transformation (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity).
6. The greater the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication, the lesser the intercultural transformation (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity).
7. The greater the host receptivity and host conformity pressure, the greater the host communication competence.
8. The greater the host receptivity and host conformity pressure, the greater the host interpersonal and mass communication.
9. The greater the host receptivity and host conformity pressure, the lesser the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication.
10. The greater the ethnic group strength, the lesser the host communication competence.
11. The greater the ethnic group strength, the lesser the host interpersonal and mass communication.
12. The greater the ethnic group strength, the greater the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication.
13. The greater the preparedness for change, the greater the host communication competence.
14. The greater the preparedness for change, the greater the host interpersonal and mass communication.
15. The greater the preparedness for change, the lesser the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication.
16. The greater the ethnic proximity, the greater the host communication competence.
17. The greater the ethnic proximity, the greater the host interpersonal and mass communication.
18. The greater the ethnic proximity, the lesser the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication.
19. The greater the adaptive personality, the greater the host communication competence.
20. The greater the adaptive personality, the greater the host interpersonal and mass communication.
21. The greater the adaptive personality, the lesser the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication.

Note 2: Theorems in the Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation (Kim 2001, p.91-92)

Appendix 2: Information sheet and participant consent form

Information sheet

Title of the study: An investigation of acculturative stress: a multiple-case study of three UK students studying abroad in China

Dear students,

Welcome to take part in a research study. The study is designed to explore the cross-cultural adaptation of UK students during their SA period in China. Students who participate in the study will be invited to collect data about their SA experience in the following three ways: participants' diary, reflexive photography (you are invited to take photos and make your comments) and interviews.

This study is expected to take you up to 30-40 minutes for interview each time (one pre-departure interview, a series of follow-up interviews throughout the semester) and one final interview), 20 minutes for two diary entries per week, in addition to some time on presenting 10 photos with your comments. Your personal information will be treated confidentially. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time.

If you are interested in participating, please provide your contact information below from the next page.

Your name and email address: _____

Informed Consent Form

I have been informed that the data collection methods to be used include participant diary, reflexive photography and interviews. I have been explained the nature of these methods to my satisfaction. I understand that my whole participation will take about one year. I have been informed that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without giving any reason and without being penalised. I have also informed that I am free to decline to respond to any particular question or tasks. My real name will be not identified in this thesis and my data will not be released to a third party without my permission.

I have read and understand the above and consent to participate in this study.

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix 3: Guidelines to participants on data collection

Instruction of Participant Diary

Throughout this autumn semester, you are invited to write about your interpersonal communication with your SA teachers in China, in particular your stressful feelings in relation to your SA Chinese teachers. There is no word limit to your texts, but you are advised to spend approximately 20 minutes on each diary entry. As soon as you finish each entry, I would appreciate it if you sent your texts electronically to the email address below. Your diary entries will be used for research purposes only, and all information supplied, including any names, will be treated confidentially. Anonymity is guaranteed.

It would be useful if your diary could include some of the following points:

- Date of the particular lesson and the teachers
- Your description of the events and why you found it stress-provoking
- How (if at all) anxious you felt when speaking in class
- In what way(s) your teacher could impact on your stress

Instruction of reflexive photography

In this study, you are first asked to capture objects in relation to mass communication you encountered in your daily life during the SA period. These objects were those conveying stress based on your own understanding. Then, you are invited to record their thoughts and feelings along with your photos, in particular you need to explain how these photos contribute to your stress. Photos can only capture the moment of objects and moments of a dynamic process whereas reflectional comment can add an insight into this type of data.

You are also asked to record details of photos, such as date, time and sources or location. There were no other requirements for the pictures. Please send your photo(s) with your comment(s) to me at any time. I will then conduct follow-up interviews.

In the end, a selection of 10 photos with your comments are required.

Sample questions of interviews

Pre-departure:

What are the reasons for you to learn the Chinese language?

Could you tell me about your educational background?

What are your goals and expectations of yourself during your SA period in China?

In SA period:

What are the causes of the issue you mentioned in your diaries/ or photos on (date)?

Could you tell me about [X issue] that you wrote about in your diary?

Why does this particular incident mean for you?

Post SA:

Overall in what ways do you think your stress affect you?

Could you please tell me about a time when you felt positively/negatively about your growth while you were in China and now in the UK?

Appendix 4: Samples of diaries entries and interviews

Today we had an assessment in Zong's class. Our teacher was supposed to set us a test for units 5&6 from the textbook, however when we received the tests we noticed that there were a lot of words and Chengyu that we had not studied before. About 10 minutes into the class one of my classmates said to the teacher that she had made a mistake and we had not studied this before. The teacher appeared to not understand what my classmate was saying and proceeded to argue with him, she said that we should just complete what we could do. The student got angry and said that he refused to do the test, if we had not studied the materials before then it was not fair to make us do a test on it. The teacher also got angry and criticized his attitude, she said that although she had made a mistake he should at least try rather than just getting angry and storming out. The student threw the test on the floor and stormed out. After half an hour, the teacher looked again at the test and realized her mistake. She apologized to us as a class and told us to just do what we felt that we could, and it would not count towards our final grade. Later that night she sent a public apology on WeChat to everyone, and the classmate she had argued with. I was extremely surprised to see the argument and it made the class feel very awkward, but I understood why both sides were angry. I found it strange that the teacher didn't realize her mistake earlier though, and it seemed that she was angrier about the fact that a student had been disrespectful to her than anything else. This teacher clearly really cares about the hierarchy in society, and feels that students should always be respectful to their teachers.

Researcher: You mentioned in your diary entry last week that your expectation to your teacher before your departure to China was wrong. Could you please tell me why?

Melian: I think I had similar expectations to my teachers back home because obviously all the lecturers back to the UK are Chinese. Expecting their teaching styles to be similar, to be the same.

Researcher: So what is the difference?

Melian: When I came to China we started our lectures I found it was a very traditional way of teaching, a very old fashioned way.

Researcher: In what ways?

Melian: I found it harder than expected. Because I found teachers expected you know things, which you have never known before. And they expected all students to be at the same level.

Researcher: What do you think of it?

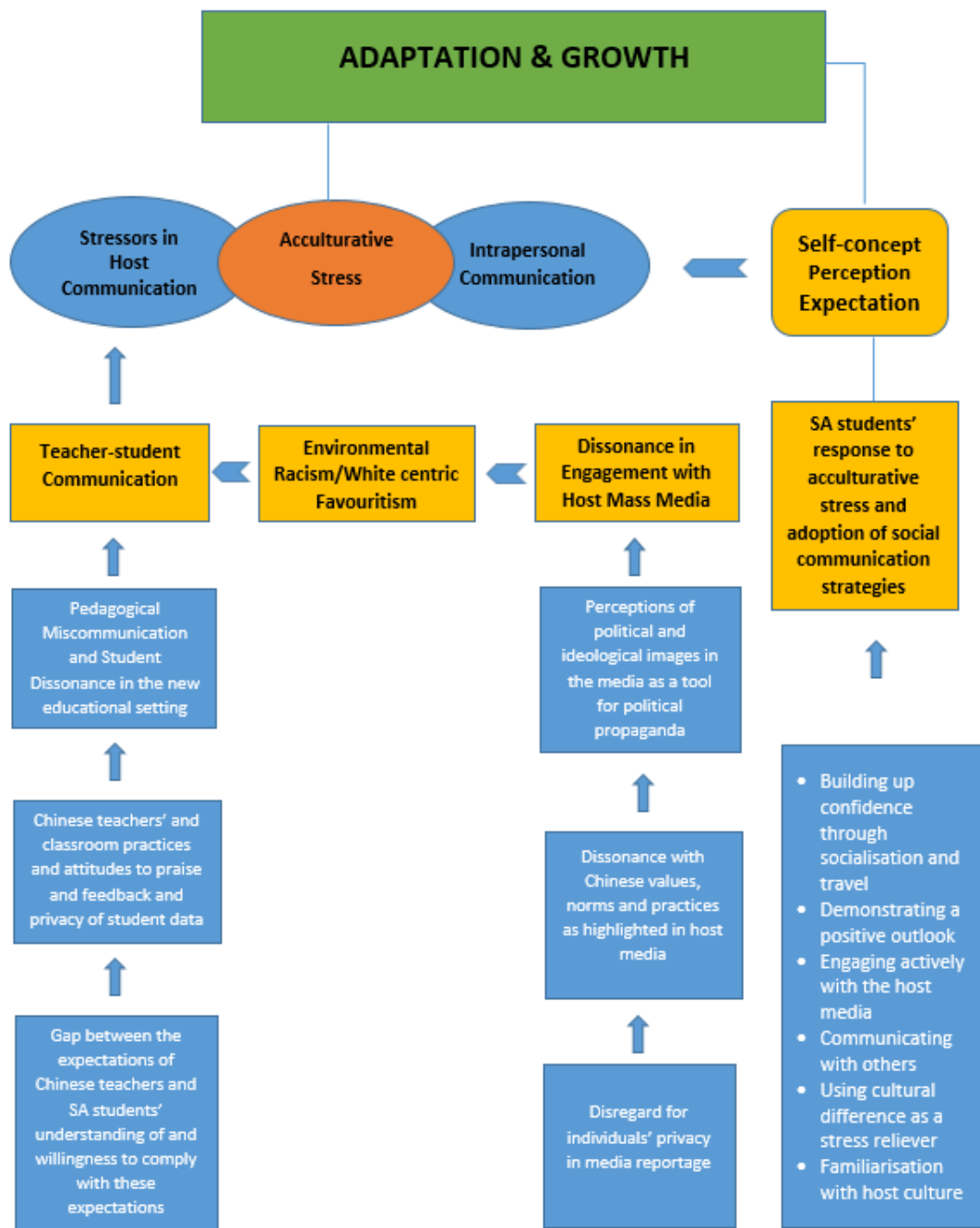
Melian: So I was a bit disappointed when I received my final exam grades. But it taught me how to revise things. I feel that although the teachers are very nice and can be very helpful, but they only help you to certain extent.

Researcher: For example?

Melian: They don't give you methods on how to revise things. You don't know what their expectations are apart from very high grades.

Extract from the 3rd interview with Melian

Appendix 5: Coding Framework for Qualitative Data Analysis



Appendix 6: Example of initial diary coding

	Diary data/Raw data	Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding	
1	<p>The day I arrived in China (I mean the day before yesterday), I was very tired and stressed. After a chaotic day of registration placements tests and running around trying to find things on campus, it was time for me to find a new room in the university dorms so that I could finally take a shower and rest. A girl told me my dorm was on the 6th floor. Looking at my suitcase, weighing 32 kg exactly I asked if there was another way. She shook her head and said, 'JIA YOU' (You can do it)! So with low spirits I went to the stairs and started lifting my suitcase. To my despaired, all the students who I bumped into saw me and went off their own way, without so much of pitiful glimpse or an offer to help. With this experience on my first day, I came to a very sad and lonely conclusion: I am left to fend for myself.</p> <p><i>In England, it is very natural for people to help if they see someone in a tough spot or are struggling with something like this.</i> It is possible that the girls were in a rush, but even then, I came across a large amount of girls that lived there when I was trying to lift my suitcase up six flights of stairs.</p>	<p>I was <i>very tired and stressed.</i></p> <p>So with <i>low spirits</i> I went to the stairs and started lifting my suitcase.</p> <p><i>To my despaired,</i> all the students who I bumped into saw me and went off their own way, without so much of pitiful glimpse or an offer to help. With this experience on my first day, <i>I came to a very sad and lonely conclusion: I am left to fend for myself.</i></p> <p><i>In England, it is very natural for people to help if they see someone in a tough spot or are struggling with something like this.</i></p>	<p>Stress as a result of cultural dissonance with host communicative environment</p> <p>Loneliness as a result of cultural dissonance with host communicative environment</p> <p>Dissonant perception and expectations of communicative behaviour in SA context</p>	<p>PERCEPTION EXPECTATION</p>	<p>STRESS</p> <p>INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION</p>
2	<p>Having had a troublesome start to my year abroad, I am finally able to fully engage and focus myself into my studies here at my University. The first month had been extremely hard on a personal level. Missing home, breaking up with my boyfriend, and more importantly, adjusting to life here in China. Due to my breakup and other matters at home back in England, I</p>	<p><i>a troublesome start to my year abroad,</i></p> <p>The first month had been <i>extremely hard on a personal level. Missing home, breaking up with my boyfriend, and more importantly,</i></p>	<p>Influence of personal life events on adjustment as SA student in Chin</p>	<p>TEACHER STUDENT COMMUNICATION AS A SOURCE OF STRESS</p>	<p>STRESS</p> <p>STRESS</p>

	<p>have had a very negative start to my education here. I had missed classes as my moods were very low, and moreover, teachers' attitudes towards me have been very mixed as a result.</p>	<p><i>adjusting to life here in China.</i> Due to my breakup and other matters at home back in England, <i>I have had a very negative start to my education here.</i> I had missed classes as my moods were very low, and moreover, <i>teachers' attitudes towards me have been very mixed as a result.</i></p>	<p>Impact of negative emotions on SA communication with teachers</p>		
3	<p>The teacher in charge of scholarship students (of which I will name Teacher D for future reference), such as myself, has been extremely understanding and therefore very helpful and supportive, which had made me feel very positive. On the other hand, there are other teachers (Teacher A, Teacher B) here who do not comprehend that a person's mood would affect their studies. I find that extremely interesting, due to the fact that in comparison to most teachers back in the U.K who place the students' wellbeing above all else.</p>	<p>[teacher] <i>has been extremely understanding and therefore very helpful and supportive,</i> which had made me feel very positive</p> <p>On the other hand, there are other teachers (Teacher A, Teacher B) here <i>who do not comprehend that a person's mood would affect their studies</i></p> <p><i>. I find that extremely interesting, due to the fact that in comparison to most teachers back in the U.K who place the students' wellbeing above all else.</i></p>	<p>Feeling supported as a result of successful communication with scholarship teacher</p> <p>Experiencing communication gap with unsupportive SA teachers</p> <p>Negative perception of Communication Style of SA teacher in comparison with UK teachers</p>	<p>TEACHER STUDENT COMMUNICATION AS A SOURCE OF STRESS</p> <p>TEACHER STUDENT COMMUNICATION AS A SOURCE OF STRESS</p> <p>PERCEPTION EXPECTATION</p>	<p>STRESS</p> <p>INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION</p>
4	<p>I am not implying that these teachers here do not care, it's simply the fact that they do not know how to deal with</p>	<p><i>I am not implying that these teachers here do not care, it's simply the fact</i></p>	<p>Lack of communicative competence on the</p>	<p>TEACHER STUDENT COMMUNICATION AS A SOURCE OF STRESS</p>	<p>STRESS</p>

<p>such issues. For example, after not having been to class for a couple of days, I finally gather the courage to go. Everything goes well at first, we analyse different grammar points, and then we try to give examples. One thing I did not appreciate was the fact that Teacher A had used me as an example for the word ‘不好受’ (sad and upset). They had publicly stated to the class in their example (quote: ‘她的心里不好受’ (she felt unhappy and upset) that I was not in good form on a mental level. What I thought was something I discussed to the teachers in private, had been publicly announced and it has angered me ever since. As a result, this has strongly discouraged me to communicate to the teachers about personal matters.</p>	<p><i>that they do not know how to deal with such issues</i></p> <p><i>One thing I did not appreciate was the fact that Teacher A had used me as an example for the word ‘不好受’ (sad and upset).</i></p> <p><i>What I thought was something I discussed to the teachers in private, had been publicly announced and it has angered me ever since. As a result, this has strongly discouraged me to communicate to the teachers about personal matters.</i></p>	<p>part of SA teachers</p> <p>Negative perception of teacher communication norms</p> <p>Violation of student privacy</p> <p>Conflict in beliefs and values about confidentiality of information norms in SA context</p> <p>Violation of student privacy</p> <p>Discouragement of future communication with SA teachers due to fear of privacy being violated</p>	<p>PERCEPTION</p> <p>TEACHER STUDENT COMMUNICATION AS A SOURCE OF STRESS</p> <p>SELF CONCEPT</p> <p>TEACHER STUDENT COMMUNICATION AS A SOURCE OF STRESS</p>	<p>INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION</p> <p>INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION</p>
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5	<p>Things are slowly getting back to normal. I am overall enjoying China a lot more and slowly getting accustomed to my university life here. I am now revising at least two hours a day, I am understanding a lot more of the content, as a result of being more focused on my studies here. Nothing eventful has happened, except the fact that I feel more motivated to study and to do my best academically.</p>	<p><i>I am overall enjoying China a lot more and slowly getting accustomed to my university life here.</i></p> <p><i>I am now revising at least two hours a day, I am understanding a lot more of the content, as a result of being more focused on my studies here.</i></p> <p><i>Nothing eventful has happened, except the fact that I feel more motivated to study and to do my best academically</i></p>	<p>Familiarization with host culture</p> <p>Demonstrating a positive outlook</p>	<p>SA STUDENTS' RESPONSE TO ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AND ADOPTION OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE ADAPTATION</p>	<p>ADAPTATION</p>
6	<p>I still feel negatively about teacher A, due to the fact that I am distrustful, however, it does not impact the content learned in their class.</p>				
7	<p>Today, I only have one class, which is Chinese writing. I find this class a very tranquil class and I enjoy it fully. There are a lot of things to learn and the homework for this class is both numerous and difficult. However, Teacher C is an incredibly helpful teacher. She has been very understanding, yet firm. I find her highly encouraging. I find feedback here very lacking for all classes, teachers A and B rarely grade the homework if it is not very good, however when Teacher C gives the homework back, she always verbally comments at least, and that I find extremely helpful so that I can improve on the next homework piece. I find that I always leave her class feeling positive!</p>	<p>Teacher C is an <i>incredibly helpful teacher. She has been very understanding, yet firm.</i> I find her highly encouraging.</p> <p>I find <i>feedback here very lacking for all classes,</i> teachers A and B rarely grade the homework if it is not very good,</p>	<p>Feeling supported by SA teacher</p> <p>Teacher feedback practices</p> <p>Conflict due to prior understanding of teacher feedback and SA teacher practice</p>	<p>POSITIVE TEACHER STUDENT COMMUNICATION</p> <p>TEACHER STUDENT COMMUNICATION AS A SOURCE OF STRESS</p> <p>SELF CONCEPT PERCEPTION</p>	<p>STRESS</p> <p>INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION</p>

8	<p>This week seems as if it will be a difficult week! Today, we have gone through a lot of things in class but I still find the teaching methods in China very hard to understand. For example, when learning new vocabulary from the texts studied in class, the teachers seem to go on many rants about different words that have no relation to what we are studying. Therefore, it is difficult to understand the differences between what is necessary for our Midterm exams and what can be left out. I do appreciate that extra knowledge is good and very useful most of the time, but on the other hand, with our Midterm Exams fast approaching, it is proven difficult to keep up! Not only do all teachers give us copious amounts of homework, we have to revise everything from lesson one on top of that! It seems impossible to adapt to the Chinese teaching and learning methods!</p>	<p><i>It seems impossible to adapt to the Chinese teaching and learning methods!</i></p>	<p>Perceptual conflict due to prior understanding of teacher methods</p>	<p>SELF CONCEPT PERCEPTION</p>	<p>INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION</p>
9	<p>Today, I felt a great sense of achievement! I paid a lot of attention in class and participated when I could. I felt more motivated due to the fact that I understood more of what was going on in class. I usually find myself struggling to keep up with everything, as they have put me in the Class Four, which is otherwise known as the 'advanced intermediate'. I did not think it was possible to put me in that class due to my level of Chinese, but I realised today that I have the potential! I understood all the grammar points, and for once the teachers were very encouraging.</p>	<p>Today, I felt a great sense of achievement! I paid a lot of attention in class and participated when I could. I felt more motivated due to the fact that I understood more of what was going on in class.</p>	<p>Demonstrating a positive outlook</p>	<p>SA STUDENTS' RESPONSE TO ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AND ADOPTION OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE ADAPTATION</p>	<p>ADAPTATION</p>

10	<p>Today, I felt comforted with familiarity. I had my first real cup of coffee! It reminds me that we are in the depths of autumn after having had a long day at Huqiu. The colours were very bright and beautiful and the weather was comfortable. It also reminded me that Halloween is very near! It's interesting to see how the Chinese celebrate Halloween. I don't find that it is very popular in comparison to Europe or America, as people here in China are not very inclined to this kind of culture, but I do find that it is another marketing potential that brings some comfort to Westerners like me. As a result, there are Halloween parties that are organised by various bars and night clubs which I find interesting!</p>	<p>There <i>are Halloween parties that are organised by various bars and night clubs which I find interesting!</i></p>	<p>Communicating with others Socialization</p>	<p>SA STUDENTS' RESPONSE TO ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AND ADOPTION OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE ADAPTATION</p>	<p>ADAPTATION</p>
11	<p>November so far has been a much better month, although stressful due to our midterm exams fast approaching. Our teachers are becoming stricter with preparation for our midterms. Additionally, due to the sheer pressure, I feel like I am understanding less and less. All teachers seem to have a certain expectation for each and every student, however I feel like their expectations are almost impossible to achieve. This proves the vast differences in expectation between teachers in the West, and teachers here in China. Back home, it would seem as though teachers are more encouraging and will offer additional support in order for the student to achieve a higher mark, however here in China, I feel as though you are expected to know most things from the tip of your tongue.</p>	<p>All teachers seem to have a certain expectation for each and every student, <i>however I feel like their expectations are almost impossible to achieve.</i> This proves the vast differences in expectation between teachers in the West, and teachers here in China</p>	<p>Gap between the expectations of Chinese teachers and SA students' understanding of and willingness to comply with these expectations</p>	<p>TEACHER STUDENT COMMUNICATION EXPECTATION</p>	<p>STRESS INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION</p>

		<p>Back home, it would seem as though teachers are more encouraging and will offer additional support in order for the student to achieve a higher mark, however here in China, I feel as though you are expected to know most things from the tip of your tongue.</p>	<p>Differing understanding of teacher support and learner roles based on prior experiences and expectations</p>		
12	<p>So far, I can really tell the difference between teaching style, and I also feel like the exams will be very different to ones we have back in the United Kingdom. The teaching style here in China is very textbook based and it's all memory based, meaning that when we learn a text and new vocabulary, we are expected to read and repeat it several times. However, on a regular basis, the teachers start off by explain each and every word in the vocabulary list, and start talking about things completely unrelated. On the other hand, back in the UK, we are expected to understand more than what we are able to memorise (unless it is for a dictation), which I personally much prefer, due to the fact that it allows us to comprehend more rather than blindly knowing something but not being able to explain it. I find this contrast very interesting. As for the exams, I find that it is quite troublesome to understand the structure of the exams, therefore I am simply learning and memorising as much as I can, rather than understanding and revising things I do not know.</p>	<p>The teaching style here in China is very textbook based and it's all memory based, meaning that when we learn a text and new vocabulary, we are expected to read and repeat it several times. However, <i>on a regular basis, the teachers start off by explain each and every word in the vocabulary list, and start talking about things completely unrelated</i></p> <p><i>On the other hand, back in the UK, we are expected to understand more than what we are able to memorise (unless it is for a dictation), which I personally much prefer, due to the fact that it allows</i></p>	<p>Pedagogical miscommunication and student dissonance in the new educational setting</p> <p>Role of prior educational socialisation and experiences on understanding of learning pedagogies in the SA context</p>	<p>TEACHER STUDENT COMMUNICATION</p> <p>SELF CONCEPT PERCEPTION</p>	<p>STRESS</p> <p>INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION</p>

		<i>us to comprehend more rather than blindly knowing something but not being able to explain it</i>			
13	Finally, our midterm exams are over. I felt that my speaking exam went particularly well, my writing exam was a piece of cake, however my comprehension exam on the other hand was terrible. I found that the comprehension exam was very complex and hard to understand, regardless of the amount of time that I had prepared and revised for it.				
14	I felt extremely stressed throughout the two days of exams and I felt extremely panicked when I saw the comprehension exam as I ironically did not comprehend the exam. My speaking teacher gave me very positive feedback after the speaking exam, as it consisted of a dialogue and a PowerPoint presentation. On the other hand, it was difficult to know how the other exams went as it was all individual written exams, therefore I will have to wait until next week to find out my results, of which I am very nervous for!				
15	She (teacher A) asked if I didn't understand something, and I said yes. Then she sighed heavily and looked really exasperated at me and explained the meaning. Her reaction to me saying I don't understand the sentence made me feel really embarrassed to not understand. I have already felt annoyed with myself because I didn't understand such a simple sentence, but she made me feel even worse. I was desperate at that moment	<i>Her reaction to me saying I don't understand the sentence made me feel really embarrassed to not understand</i>	Teacher feedback	TEACHER STUDENT COMMUNICATION	STRESS

16	<p>Walking on some of the old parts of this city can sometimes be a little bit daunting. Some of these parts rarely have foreigners visiting in comparison to well built up areas. One day, my friend and I were walking around the streets and it was clear that it was a residential area. A lot of the residents would stare at me intensely with questioning eyes as I was moving around. A few old women even came up to me and tried to touching my skin and hair, as it was evident they had never seen a person with brown skin before, whereas they were naturally conversing with my friend. I could also see that some were not-so-discreetly trying to take pictures of me as we walked by. I found it so interesting that these women had not seen a personal of my collar before. We conversed and they were very pleased to hear me speak Chinese. On the other hand, I did not appreciate the stares and picture taking. It made me feel as if I was an animal at a Zoo and to me; it showed a lack of respect to not even ask if it was ok to have my pictures taken. To this day, I still feel uncomfortable when I walked in quiet areas. I did not appreciate the lack of privacy and respect for other people. However, if someone came up to me and asked, I would have no problems with it. I would just find it very funny and have fun with it.</p>	<p>On the other hand, I did not appreciate the stares and picture taking. <i>It made me feel as if I was an animal at a Zoo and to me; it showed a lack of respect to not even ask if it was ok to have my pictures taken.</i></p> <p><i>it showed a lack of respect to not even ask if it was ok to have my pictures taken.</i></p>	<p>Feelings of stress due to being considered a novelty for her ethnicity</p> <p>Influence of prior socialisation and acculturation on perceptions of communicative behaviour in SA context</p>	<p>RACISM IN THE ENVIRONMENT</p> <p>SELF CONCEPT PERCEPTION EXPECTATION</p>	<p>STRESS</p> <p>INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION</p>
17	<p>Exactly a week later and I have received my midterm results back. I am very pleased with the grades for Speaking and Writing, of which I received 89 and 93 points for, however my Comprehension exam went worse than I expected. I had always feared that I would fail an exam here in China, and unfortunately, my fear came true. I had failed the Comprehension exam by</p>			<p>TEACHER STUDENT COMMUNICATION</p>	

	<p>achieving a mere 30 points, whereas the pass grade is at 60. Teacher A made it blatantly obvious that she was extremely disappointed in my grade. I was one of many to have failed the exam in our level. I always felt that the level I was at was too advanced for me, however, with hard work and determination, it is possible to boost my grade depending on my final exam grades, of which I will complete in January</p>	<p>Teacher A made it blatantly obvious that she was extremely disappointed in my grade.</p>	<p>Teacher feedback</p>		
18	<p>As a scholarship student, I have mandatory events to take part in. One of those events was a reading of one Confucius's writings to a crowd at an event as it was Confucius's birthday. We wore red costumes to represent scholars and we stood and read on stage. Before and after, a lot of people came up to us to take pictures and initiate in conversation with us. I felt like a celebrity as the some of us got interviewed by the local news and we ended up on WeChat news, as well as on TV. Very flattered that Chinese people's approach towards foreigners. It seems as though it pleases them greatly that we take interest in such events. It is unusual to be made a big deal out of, due to the fact that seeing foreigners is very normal thing back home. Therefore, I feel it was both amusing and interesting to see just how big of an impact we made!</p>	<p>I felt like a celebrity as the some of us got interviewed by the local news and we ended up on WeChat news, as well as on TV. <i>Very flattered that Chinese people's approach towards foreigners. It seems as though it pleases them greatly that we take interest in such events. It is unusual to be made a big deal out of, due to the fact that seeing foreigners is very normal thing back home. Therefore, I feel it was both amusing and interesting to see just how big of an impact we made</i></p> <p><i>It is unusual to be made a big deal out of, due to the fact that seeing foreigners is very normal thing back home.</i></p>	<p>Communicating with others</p> <p>Conflict in perceptions of SA engagement with foreigners based on prior participant socialisation and acculturation</p>	<p>SA STUDENTS' RESPONSE TO ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AND ADOPTION OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE ADAPTATION</p> <p>SELF CONCEPT PERCEPTION</p>	<p>ADAPTATION</p> <p>INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION</p>

19	<p>However, the sheer deception given by my teacher is highly demotivating, as they do not seem to care as much as they used to in comparison to prior the exams. On the other hand, my other two teachers are highly pleased and it shows in their attitude towards me and learning their curriculum. They are more inclined to ask me questions and encourage me to talk in class. I feel as though this type of attitude is a lot more motivating and encouraging to learn and participate in their lessons.</p>	<p><i>The sheer deception given by my teacher is highly demotivating, as they do not seem to care as much as they used to in comparison to prior the exams.</i></p> <p><i>I feel as though this type of attitude is a lot more motivating and encouraging to learn and participate in their lessons.</i></p>	<p>Teacher communication style</p> <p>Influence of prior acculturation on views of teacher communicative behaviour</p>	<p>TEACHER STUDENT COMMUNICATION</p> <p>SELF CONCEPT EXPECTATION</p>	<p>STRESS</p> <p>INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION</p>
20	<p>A week after results, I feel as though I have more time and space to breathe and to make the most out of the free time we have after class. I am soon leaving for Hong Kong for a 5-day trip, and I am extremely looking forward to that. On the other hand, I do feel as though I am too preoccupied in my travels at the moment, rather than my studies, and it may be showing in not only my dictation grades and my concentration in class. Due to the fact that I am not used to the Chinese style of teaching, my attention span can become quite problematic, leading me to missing out things in class when they are being explained and then having to go back through it after lesson. I will need to find a way to manage this problem as I keep getting caught out in class, and therefore not comprehending what is being said, even though I am perfectly capable of doing so.</p>	<p><i>A week after results, I feel as though I have more time and space to breathe and to make the most out of the free time we have after class. I am soon leaving for Hong Kong for a 5-day trip, and I am extremely looking forward to that.</i></p>	<p>Building-up confidence through socialisation and travel</p>	<p>SA STUDENTS' RESPONSE TO ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AND ADOPTION OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE ADAPTATION</p>	<p>ADAPTATION</p>

21	<p>Whenever I take taxis to get somewhere, or when I go to shops, drivers and shopkeepers are usually so shocked that I could speak Chinese. They then proceed to initiate conversation, asking me where I am from, what am I doing in China, how long I have studied. After small chitchat, they usually compliment me on how good my Chinese is and how fast I have learnt it so far. Very flattered in the compliments that they give me as it gives me a huge confidence boost. I usually reply the Chinese way and say 'Nali, Nali'. It is the polite way to accept a compliment in China therefore to somewhat play your skills down. On the other hand, in England, for example, we would usually accept a compliment with a single 'Thank you'!</p>	<p>After small chitchat, they usually compliment me on how good my Chinese is and how fast I have learnt it so far. Very flattered in the compliments that they give me as it gives me a huge confidence boost. <i>I usually reply the Chinese way and say 'Nali, Nali'. It is the polite way to accept a compliment in China therefore to somewhat play your skills down</i></p>	<p>Familiarisation with host culture</p>	<p>SA STUDENTS' RESPONSE TO ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AND ADOPTION OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE ADAPTATION</p>	<p>ADAPTATION</p>
22	<p>To this day, I still cannot believe the fact that people will spit on the side of the streets. Although it is seen as normal in China, it is difficult to get accustomed to. I feel like this is something I will never get used to. Every time I hear it, my stomach drops and I feel horrified. I understand this is normal but for some reason I just cannot bear it.</p>	<p>Although it is seen as normal in China, <i>it is difficult to get accustomed to. I feel like this</i> is something I will never get used to</p> <p>Every time I hear it, my stomach drops and I feel horrified. <i>I understand this is normal</i> but for some reason I just cannot bear it.</p>	<p>Negative perception of Chinese norm of spitting</p> <p>Using cultural difference as stress reliever</p>	<p>PERCEPTION</p> <p>SA STUDENTS' RESPONSE TO ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AND ADOPTION OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE ADAPTATION</p>	<p>INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION</p> <p>ADAPTATION</p>

23	<p>Today I became motivated more when I turned my focus to studies again!</p> <p>In my class, many people come from various countries, as it is a language class for foreigners. What I find interesting is that when I communicate with some classmates, we tend to use Chinese, rather than the go-to language which is usually English. It is so interesting how our common language is therefore Chinese rather than the more widely used English. However, there are also some people who know very little English and want to practice with me, which I find very sweet. Intrigued that I cannot use English everywhere. I feel very pleased that I can converse with my classmates in Chinese to learn more about their culture and their countries, etc. I also feel please when people ask to practice English with me sometimes.</p> <p>I feel very pleased as it is more of a challenge and it allows me to practice my Chinese language skills to communicate on a day to day basis.</p>	<p>However, there are also some people who know very little English and want to practice with me, which I find very sweet. Intrigued that I cannot use English everywhere. <i>I feel very pleased that I can converse with my classmates in Chinese to learn more about their culture and their countries, etc. I also feel please when people ask to practice English with me sometimes.</i></p> <p><i>I feel very pleased as it is more of a challenge and it allows me to practice my Chinese language skills to communicate on a day to day basis.</i></p>	<p>Communicating with others</p>	<p>SA STUDENTS' RESPONSE TO ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AND ADOPTION OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE ADAPTATION</p>	<p>ADAPTATION</p>
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24	<p><i>My trip back home actually made I realized that how much I like China. Being in China for me is the experience for a lifetime. I don't think I will have this experience ever again. So I think coming to China although my health is not good, it is still a part of the world. It doesn't mean I cannot do it. And I motivated me more to get better my Chinese language. And it allows me to travel and expertise things that I would thought I could.</i></p> <p><i>On the other hand, I do feel as though I am too preoccupied in my travels at the moment, rather than my studies, and it may be showing in not only my dictation grades and my concentration in class.</i></p>	<p><i>My trip back home actually made I realized that how much I like China.</i></p> <p><i>I do feel as though I am too preoccupied in my travels at the moment, rather than my studies, and it may be showing in not only my dictation grades and my concentration in class.</i></p>	Communicating with others	SA STUDENTS' RESPONSE TO ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AND ADOPTION OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE ADAPTATION	INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION
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Appendix 7: Curriculum of SA programs of Universities in this study

Curriculum of Melian's SA programme at University A

	Mon.	Tus.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.
08:00-10:00	Listening Comprehension	Chinese Writing	Speaking	Reading	Intermediate Chinese
10:00-11:50	Intermediate Chinese	Intermediate Chinese	Listening	Speaking	Writing
14:00-16:00	Cultural experience courses (non-credit)				

Curriculum of Natalie's SA programme at University B

Time	Mon.	Tus.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.
08:00-09:30	Intensive Reading	Intensive Reading	Intensive Reading	Intensive Reading	Intensive Reading
09:50-11:20	Writing	Listening	Listening	Speaking	Writing
12:00-13:20	Cultural activities				

Curriculum of Tom's SA programme at University C

Time	Mon.	Tus.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.
08:00-09:45	Comprehensive Chinese (II)	Oral Communication	Listening (II)	Comprehensive Chinese (II)	Oral communication
10:00-11:45	Listening (II)	Newspaper Reading	Comprehensive Chinese (II)	Listening (II)	Writing
14:00-15:00					
15:00-16:00	Elective modules				