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**An exploration of changing identity, linguistic
challenges and cultural surprises**

**-- A case study of a UK University group of diverse Chinese
language students studying abroad**



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Edinburgh

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Lay Summary of Thesis

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There are increasing numbers of international students who choose Chinese studies as their major and come to China to learn the Chinese language. This study investigated the identity challenges, cultural engagement and linguistic opportunities of students of Chinese in one Higher Education institution during this important transitional experience, before, during and after studying Chinese in Mainland China/Taiwan. Interviews and reflective diaries were used as means of gaining rich data and insights into personal experiences, beliefs and perceptions in-depth. Although individuals' unique choices and experiences shaped participants' engagement in the Chinese community, the results showed that, after studying in China, participants gained more confidence to speak Chinese. They believed they could use Chinese as a communication tool, and most of them developed a sense of belonging in the Chinese community, shifting and reconstructing their socio-cultural identity. However, participants believed their original cultural identity played an important role in influencing the learner's sense of self. Even though they believed that they came through studying abroad with a more intercultural identity, they always had some degree of an "outsider" feeling in China.

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Abstract

With the development of the internationalisation of China and Chinese universities as well as China's increasing prominence economically, there are increasing numbers of international students who choose Chinese studies as their major and come to China to learn the Chinese language. However, nowadays, in the research field of teaching and learning Chinese as a second language, few researchers concentrate on the beliefs, perspectives and sense of self of these students of Chinese during their Study Abroad experiences. Therefore, this research focuses on investigating the identity challenges, cultural engagement and linguistic opportunities of students of Chinese in one Higher Education institution during this important transitional experience, before, during and after studying Chinese in Mainland China.

Drawing on poststructuralist perspectives to establish a theoretical position and narrative identity theory as a key conceptual frame, an instrumental case study formed the approach to data collection. The case study involved diverse learners of Chinese as a second language on courses at a UK higher university and with experience of studying abroad in China or other Chinese-speaking jurisdictions. Interviews were used as a means of gaining rich data and insights into personal experiences and conflicting interactions as the students attempted to develop linguistically but also tried to negotiate a sense of belonging within this new environment.

The results are reported using different narrative strands of the Chinese language (CL) learners and how they defined and redefined the concept of who they were and who they were becoming as they experienced Chinese language interactions and Chinese culture during their experiences abroad and on their return.

The findings concluded with three main narrative strands: i) Linguistic self: after studying in China, Chinese language learners (CLL) believed that they were 'not afraid to speak Chinese' and felt a sense of achievement as they engaged in diverse interactions and gradually achieved some degree of acceptance as new Chinese speakers. ii) Social and cultural self: The acculturation process was very much shaped by individuals' unique choices and experiences. The desire to speak Chinese, the acceptance of and engagement with Chinese culture, and native speakers' approval of their efforts, helped them to develop a sense of belonging, creating a shift in CLLs' socio-cultural identity. iii) Hybrid self: Their original cultural identity, whether monocultural or intercultural as part of the learner's background, played an important role in influencing the learner's sense of self in the target language community. Most of the CLLs believed that they came through this transcultural journey with a more nuanced cultural hybrid identity after living in China, but they always had some degree of still feeling like an "outsider".

Keywords: Chinese as a second language (CSL), study abroad (SA), identity transitions, cultural engagement

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List of Abbreviations

CL	Chinese language
CLL	Chinese language learning
CLT	Chinese language teaching
CSL	Chinese as a second language
ESL	English as a second language
HS	Hybridity and self
HSK	Chinese proficiency test
LL	Language learner
LS	Linguistic self
NS	Native speaker
SA	Study abroad
SCS	Social-cultural self
SLA	Second language acquisition
TCL	Teaching Chinese language
TCSL	Teaching Chinese as a second language
TL	Target language

Chapter 1: Introduction

Research background and origins

1.1 Chinese has become a popular second/foreign language

China has developed rapidly during these decades and has become the second-largest economy globally (Haini, 2021). In such conditions, Chinese as an additional language has recently grown worldwide and is increasingly seen as a strategic learning decision (Kecskés, 2013). It is argued that this has raised the language profile and encouraged engagement for instrumental reasons, e.g., to fulfil personal interests and help people find ways to participate more fully in business collaborations (Chen, 2021). Since the 1970s, the Chinese government has begun to promote teaching and learning Chinese (Ma et al., 2017). Over the last few decades, Chinese as a second or foreign language has been an increasingly frequent choice of study inside and outside China (Gong et al., 2020).

The Confucius Institute, which is a non-profit educational institution authorised by the China International Foundation for Chinese Language Education, was established to spread Chinese language and culture worldwide, as well as to promote exchanges between China and foreign countries (*About the Confucius Institute*, n.d.). By December 2019, there were 550 Confucius Institutes and 1172 Confucius classrooms, which have been founded in 162 countries worldwide (Zhao, 2019). In 2005, the United Kingdom (the UK) established the first Confucius Institute in London. By October 2017, there was a total of 29 Confucius Institutes, and 148 Confucius classrooms in the UK, which is thus home to the largest number of Confucius Institutes in Europe (*Confucius Institutes*, n.d.).

The British government also attaches great importance to Chinese language education, as evidenced by initiatives such as the Mandarin Excellence Programme

run by the British Council in England (*Mandarin Excellence Programme*, 2016), and the Scottish Government's 1+2 approach (Hancock & Hancock, 2018), both of which vigorously promote the integration of Chinese education in primary and secondary schools. According to the British Council (2022), there are plans for 100 schools in England to offer Chinese language courses by 2024. Meanwhile, British universities also pay attention to Chinese language education. By the beginning of the 2021-2022 academic year, 31 British universities were offering 243 Chinese-related undergraduate courses; 21 universities offered 38 Chinese-related postgraduate courses. In Scotland alone, 4 universities offer 46 undergraduate studies, and one university offers three postgraduate courses (*Chinese degrees*, 2021). Most of these universities collaborate closely with Confucius Institutes, and work together to promote the development of Chinese education. That is to say, the development of Chinese education in the UK has made great strides in recent years. According to the British Council (2021), apart from European languages, Chinese has become the most commonly taught foreign language in England's schools.

However, according to a report from the Ministry of Education of the PRC (2019) , compared with Asian and African learners, European learners still do not play the major role in learning Chinese as a second/foreign language. Nevertheless, based on the data above, we could speculate that there could be an increasing number of British learners who choose to learn Chinese, and Chinese could become more popular in the world.

In these conditions, British students as international students in China, their learning experience, and their sense of belonging, become an important topic of study. This is why I am carrying out this research.

1.2 The trend of identity and SLA research

According to the China Statistical Yearbook (2020), there are also many language learners who go to China to learn Chinese every year. According to authoritative data released by the Ministry of Education of the PRC in 2019, the number of international students in higher education institutions was 492,185, and there were 234,063 (nearly 50%) of them who came to China just to study the language, rather than to get a degree. The Education Office of the Embassy of the PRC in the UK and the Confucius Institutes have provided different scholarships to encourage Chinese language learners (CLL) to go to China to study. Many Chinese studies courses/programmes in British universities also include some compulsory programmes in which CLLs are sent to China to learn Chinese and improve their engagement with Chinese cultures, which means that the use of a Study Abroad (SA) period has been seen as an important aspect of the student experience.

Due to the development of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research from the sociocultural perspective (Atkinson, 2011b; Block, 2003; Verspoor & Bot, 2022), more research has begun to focus on migrants' experiences in new contexts and their positioning in asymmetric power relations with native speakers (Norton, 2000b, 2013; Norton et al., 2010). In this context, when dealing with language education, it has been widely agreed that language cannot be separated from identity and culture (Kanno, 2003; Riley, 2007).

When they are immersed in the target language community, changing from second language learners to target language speakers means actually changing their social identities and their understanding of who they are (Norton, 1997). Finally, they may find a point of balance between the two languages and cultures (Kanno, 2003).

We know that language learning challenges the sense of self in the individual, so that moving through the SA experience is likely to further challenge Second Language Learners' identities as they change from majority speakers into minority speakers, from members of the dominant culture into members of a minority (Montgomery, 2010).

1.3 Personal experience and the research aim

Personally speaking, some experience of teaching Chinese as a second or foreign language in the international context allowed me to witness the shifting of international students' identities during the learning process. I found that I was intrigued by this subtle shift in identities. Meanwhile, those specific environments were ideal spaces in which the issue of a new culture gained exposure. Nonetheless, there is relatively little information available on how such lived experiences during SA may shape the English language speaker's identity as they not only meet the challenges of learning Chinese in diverse contexts but also negotiate new memberships within a distinctive and very different culture (Ch'en, 2018; Irwin, 2020).

It is important to acknowledge that there are a number of different cultures in China, but for ease of discussion from the SLL's perspective, I will focus on a more generic concept of culture.

As I began to explore the literature in this area, I found that there is a variety of research focused on the identity-related and cultural influences on second language learning or acquisition in intercultural or bilingual contexts (Anderson, 2006; Bearse & de Jong, 2008; Blair, 2022; Day, 2002; Gao, 2012; Kanno, 2003; McKinney & Norton, 2008; Norton, 2013; Norton et al., 2010; Potowski, 2007).

However, most of the research mainly focuses on learning English or French as a second or foreign language.

Few of these studies are about learning Chinese, especially by learners who have gained some basic knowledge of Chinese in their own country and then go to China for a while to improve their language ability.

As a Chinese language teacher for more than five years, I was encouraged by this to thoroughly investigate this aspect of language learning. Therefore, based on my own teaching experiences and reflections as well as the broader literature, this plan focuses on student identity during significant transitions and shifts in cultural contexts. The participants will be learners of Chinese as a second or foreign language (in this case, Mandarin) at a Scottish university, and they will all have been to Mainland China or Taiwan to study Chinese for at least half a year (except for one participant who only stayed in China for one month). This research aims to discover their ways of engagement in the learning of the Chinese language and Chinese culture and to explore the transitions of their sense of self and beliefs socially, culturally and linguistically after studying abroad.

1.4 Research Questions

The identity and SLA research can be developed from many different points of view. In this research, I try to adopt the standpoint of the participants, by using poststructuralist perspectives in establishing a theoretical position and narrative identity theory as a key conceptual frame with which to investigate the experiences, beliefs and perceptions of the learners in both undergraduate and postgraduate Chinese programmes (UG and PG) at a Scottish university. Hence, the main research questions could be formulated as follows:

Question 1:

1 (a) How do learners in the programme above engage with the target language culture before and after studying in Mainland China/Taiwan?

1 (b) In what ways, if any, do these learners believe that their experiences in Mainland China/Taiwan have affected their engagement with Chinese and Chinese culture?

Question 2:

2 (a) How does the overseas experience influence students' sense of self in their different educational and social communities?

2 (b) How do the UK/Chinese university tutors of these students believe that living in Mainland China/Taiwan affects them and their engagement with the Chinese language and Chinese culture?

1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis includes seven chapters.

Chapter One is the introductory chapter, which presents the research background, research trend, and research questions, and introduces the thesis structure.

Chapter Two is the literature review, which introduces four main sections. Section One is about SLA and Chinese, the main aspects of SLA research and the importance of identity in SLA research. Section Two is about identity conceptualisations and some important studies. Section Three is about the importance of the Study Abroad (SA) experience, culturally, linguistically and socially. Section Four is about the conceptual framework built from the literature and the data.

In Chapter Three, I firstly state the research gap and my research questions. Then, I introduce the ontology and epistemology, conceptual frame and the specific research methods and process of this research.

Chapter Four and Chapter Five present research findings. I divide student participants into three groups. Through their individual stories, I analyse their transitions of identity and sense of self before, during and after their Chinese language study in China. Chapter Four is about Group One. Group Two and Group Three are discussed in Chapter Five. There are also some findings from tutors' interviews in Chapter Five.

Chapter Six is the discussion chapter. Focusing on three important topics, I mainly discuss SLA, identity and Chinese learning.

Chapter Seven is the conclusion and implications chapter, in which I draw a conclusion about this research, and offer some indications for future research in identity and Chinese learning studies.

Chapter 2: Background and Context

This chapter is divided into four sections. In Section One, the focus will be on the development of Chinese teaching in both China and the UK. Then, from a sociocultural perspective, I will review the significance of identity research in the SLA field and state the limitations in Chinese as a second language research. In Section Two, I will review the theoretical and practical development of the studies of identity and SLA from the perspective of poststructuralist in detail, trying to find connections with the teaching of Chinese as a second language. In the third section, with the understanding of identity learned from Section Two, I will specifically start from three aspects of studying abroad: linguistic self, social and cultural self, and hybrid self. Through a review of identity shifting at different levels and aspects, I will try to find the connection between identity and studying abroad and interpret the conceptual framework of this thesis in Section Four.

Section One: Teaching Chinese as a Second Language in the UK and Mainland China

2.1 The development of TCSL

2.1.1 In Mainland China

China is a country with a long history, and so there is a long history of foreigners learning Chinese (Wang, 2014). In 1950, the arrival in Beijing of the first group of international students coming from Eastern Europe to learn Chinese was treated as the start of teaching Chinese as a second language (TCSL) in new China (PRC) (Cheng, 2005).

Over the past 70 years, the development of TCSL can be divided into three main stages (Li & Zhai, 2021). In the first stage, from 1950 to 1977, Chinese was

mainly regarded as a pre-session course. The instrumental purpose was obvious (Cui, 2010): Chinese was learnt in order to enter a Chinese university to study other majors. The teaching methodology was the main research topic at that time. However, there was no system for teaching and learning. Even the teaching materials and research were developing, Chinese teachers mainly relied on their experience to build their teaching strategies (Li & Zhai, 2021). The number of international students was limited – 1236 students in 1978 (Xiao, 2009).

The second stage lasted from 1978 to 2010. In 1978, due to China's reform and opening-up policy, there was international communication between China and other countries, and TCSL became an independent subject (Wang, 2014). Since 1989, more and more international self-funded students have come to China to learn the language (Li & Zhai, 2021). Up to 2009, there were 265,000 international students, 91.55% of whom were self-funded (*China Education Yearbook 2011*, 2011). At the same time, in 1993, as a first-level discipline, an undergraduate degree programme – Teaching Chinese as a Second Language – came to life, typically introduced to cultivate international Chinese teachers (Cheng & Shi, 2017). In 2004, the first Confucius Institute was established in Korea, opening the door for Chinese language and culture to spread throughout the world (Hartig, 2015).

The growing number of students also promoted the development of TCSL research. During this stage, there was a transformation from language knowledge orientation to language skills orientation. Sociality was widely recognised, and the role of culture in language communication was increasingly considered (Hu, 1993). In 2008, cultural awareness as an individual part of comprehensive language ability was included in the *General Course Outline of International Chinese Teaching*. The

understanding of and research into TCSL was constantly improving, which merged with the world's mainstream SLA research (Li & Zhai, 2021).

The third stage has taken place from 2010 to now. In this stage, more international students have come to China to learn the language or for a degree. By 2018, the total number of international students in China had reached 500,000 (*Statistics of study abroad in China in 2018*, 2019). At the same time, an increasing number of overseas universities have established Chinese degree programmes, and the number of Confucius Institutes is also developing worldwide (Gong et al., 2020). Over these years, TCSL research became diverse, and some attitudes towards TCSL have changed; i.e., learners changed from *international guests* to *students* (Zhai, 2017); teaching of Chinese changed to education in Chinese (Li & Zhai, 2021). Previously, international students were treated as guests who were distinguished from local students, so that teachers were more tolerant of them and they were offered more help during their study and life in China. Now Chinese universities are becoming stricter towards their study, reducing excessive help and trying to help them engage in social communities like local students (Zhai, 2017). Meanwhile, the teaching aims are developing to include: i) improving students' Chinese language ability; ii) cultivating students to become international citizens; iii) guiding students to know and like China, and to become disseminators of Chinese culture (Zhai, 2016).

Nowadays, China is the largest destination country in Asia for study abroad (Zhao, 2020). However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, human migration is restricted (Chakraborty & Maity, 2020). International students face difficulties in going to China to study, and there has been a decrease in offline courses as well as a decline in enrolment (Li & Zhai, 2021). Online courses have become popular (Ren & Zhao,

2020). It is hoped that the epidemic will end as soon as possible, so that more international students can go to China to study.

2.1.2 In the UK

The history of teaching and learning Chinese in the UK is also very long, dating back to the 18th century (Shei et al., 2019). In 1792, George Thomas Staunton went to China, and it was recorded that he had learned Chinese before his journey (Gao, 2016). Looking back to the past, Chinese language teaching (CLT) also experienced three main stages. The first began in 1916 when five professors of Chinese studies established the School of Oriental Studies. The second stage lasted from the end of WWII until the 1960s, when many universities, such as the University of Durham, the University of Edinburgh and the University of Leeds, established different Chinese-related programmes, i.e., Chinese studies and East Asian studies. The third stage has lasted from the end of the 20th century until the present (Shei et al., 2019). From 2006 to 2012, funded by the Economic & Social Research Council, the Scottish Funding Council, and two more councils, BICC (The British Inter-University China Centre) supervised the training of new postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers in the fields of Chinese studies and Chinese language teaching, a programme in which many British universities were included (*The British Inter-University China Centre*, n.d.). In 2016, the UK and China agreed on long-term ambitions for their educational plan. The plan entailed an agreement on the UK and China working together from basic education to higher education, including support for the teaching and learning of Chinese Mandarin in the UK (British Council, 2016). Meanwhile, owing to the UK having the highest number of Confucius Institutes in Europe (*Confucius Institutes*, n.d.), according to *People's Daily* (a Chinese official newspaper), over 160,000 learners were learning Chinese in that country in 2017.

Now, most universities in the UK offer different Chinese programmes, and more and more primary and secondary schools choose or plan to add Chinese to their second/foreign language teaching curriculum (Shei et al., 2019).

In Scotland in 2011, the Scottish government introduced a strategic approach, called the *1+2 approach*, which called for every child in Scotland to have basic knowledge of two more languages besides their mother tongue. Cantonese and Mandarin (both simplified and traditional versions) have been selected as modern languages within National 3, 4 and 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses (Hancock & Hancock, 2018). This evidences the developing position of Chinese in Scottish basic education. In higher education, most Scottish universities offer Chinese programmes. The University of Edinburgh is a Scottish centre of Chinese studies, providing both single and joint honours undergraduate programmes in Chinese. Students in both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes all have the opportunity to study in Mainland China or Taiwan in order to obtain immersive Chinese practice. At the same time, the university offers the PGDE Chinese, to develop teachers to teach Chinese in Scotland at secondary level. All of this information can be found on the university's official website (University of Edinburgh, n.d.).

Overall, as the UK and China cooperate more closely in various aspects, Chinese teaching and related research will develop further in the coming years (Shei et al., 2019).

2.2 Main aspects of SLA Research

2.2.1 *The Cognitive perspective*

Second language Acquisition (SLA) is a sub-discipline of applied linguistics. In 1916, Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, which marked the beginning of

Structuralist Linguistics, was published. De Saussure (1916) focused on the idealised linguistic patterns and structures that could lead language users to understand and apply the language. This theory has had enormous influence on linguistics and applied linguistics for many decades, even guiding the development of Chinese linguistics studies (Liu & Liu, 2011). Chomsky (1957) developed Saussure's theory, arguing that structuralism could not explain grammar's non-linearity, hierarchy and syntax if it were highly abstract. On this basis, he introduced (1957) his famous theory of competence and performance, which launched a cognitive revolution in psychology, challenging the behaviourism that was dominant in the 1950s, while his Transformational-generative grammar theory (Chomsky, 1957; Chomsky & Halle, 1965) became a fundamental principle guiding the development of SLA research (Atkinson, 2011b).

By the end of the 1960s, SLA had become an independent research subject (VanPatten & Benati, 2015). For the first 20 years of SLA research history (1970–1990), influenced by Chomsky's theory, researchers mainly focused on discovering and explaining the process of learning a second language, including features such as language errors and morpheme acquisition order (Bailey et al., 1974; Corder, 1967; Dulay & Burt, 1974; Selinker, 1972). From this perspective, language may be regarded as a *social semiotic*; in other words, a cognitive product (Atkinson, 2011a), and the process of SLA as an internal cognitive process (Larsen-Freeman, 1991).

Over the fifty-year history of SLA study, the cognitive approach has always played a significant role. In 2003, Long and Doughty edited a landmark book: *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* (2003b). Among 24 chapters of this handbook, 20 chapters are related to cognitivism, which shows the editors' perspectives on the aims and goals of SLA research (Doughty & Long, 2003). In this

book, editors also approved the positioning of more academic approaches in the social and cultural context. Nowadays, the cognitive approach is still treated as the dominant form of SLA in many references (Atkinson, 2011a; Comajoan-Colomé & Naya, 2021; Zuengler & Miller, 2006). However, the social elements such as culture, politics, historical background that promote or obstruct SLA have increasingly attracted linguists' attention (Kramsch, 2013; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), which means that the sociocultural approach has ascended the stage of SLA research.

2.2.2 The sociocultural perspective

From the perspective of sociocultural approaches, the authentic use of language is a fundamental, rather than an auxiliary, aim of learning (Zuengler & Miller, 2006). Language is not regarded as an input but as a resource for engagement in everyday social activities, which means that participation in social activities is not only part of the process of learning but the result of learning (Zuengler & Miller, 2006).

Sociocultural approaches in SLA are rooted in sociocultural theory and first appeared in the mid-1980s (Frawley & Lantolf, 1985). Bakhtin (1981) argued for the need to consider the relationship between language, culture, and identity; he believed that dialogue is a foundation of culture and human development. However, he did not build a related theory of language learning or resolve educational issues. Nevertheless, his idea of dialogue closely links to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasises importance of social interaction and cultural factors in learners' cognitive development (Jackson, 2008). Here, Vygotsky concentrates on studies of the process of cognition, while the distinctive points from the traditional cognitive perspective are "the social dimension of consciousness [i.e., all mental processes] is primary in time and fact. The individual dimension of consciousness is derivative and

secondary” (Vygotsky, 1979: 30). This approach breaks with traditional cognitive theory. It emphasises the importance of social and cultural factors in human cognition and asserts that our mental processes are shaped by the people, society, and culture around us. Applying this theory in SLA research means that when learners participate in activities with social and cultural meanings, where appropriate intermediary means (i.e., language) are available, these learners obtain the ability to control their mental activities and begin to use them independently (Zuengler & Miller, 2006). That is to say, from Vygotsky’s view, the development of cognition and the psychological functions at the higher level are determined by social and cultural experiences (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), and language as a *linguistic tool for thought*, plays an important role in psychological and social activities (Jackson, 2008).

In 2009, at the annual meeting of the American Association of Applied Linguistics, Dwight Atkinson appealed for additional research on sociocultural perspectives. In 2011, Atkinson edited the newly published handbook *Alternative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition*. The book focuses on the six sociocultural perspectives of SLA research and attempts to construct a framework combining cognitive and social views. The six approaches are the Sociocultural Approach, the Complexity Theory Approach, the Identity Approach, the Language Socialization Approach, the Conversation-analytic Approach, and the Socio-cognitive Approach (Atkinson, 2011b). This handbook challenges the traditional cognitive approach that dominates SLA research and emphasises the importance of affective factors, as well as social and cultural factors, in SLA. These factors include motivation, anxiety, emotions, identities, cultural background, and social networks. To a large extent, the sociocultural perspective has established its position in the field of SLA. The table below provides a brief comparison of the two approaches.

Table 2.1

Socio-genetic views: Cognitive and sociocultural perspectives

Distinctive conceptual dimensions	COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVES “Inclusive separation” socio-genesis (Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000)	SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES “Fusion” socio-genesis (Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000)
The individual	Individual as autonomous; promotes individuality	Individual as participant; absorbs the individual in social practices
The social world	Contexts of performance	Evolving systems of socially organized discourse and activity
Individual-social	Individual actions can be independent of social structures or interactions	All individual activity involves socially organized activity
Cognition	Individually constructed structures in memory consisting of conceptual and procedural knowledge	Dispositions to agree with certain propositions being culturally shaped and patterned by social and cultural circumstances
Learner Learning	(Re-)constructor Entails gaining possession over some commodity	Peripheral participant, apprentice Entails contribution to an individual’s identity as valuable participant in social practices
Knowledge	is considered a structure in the person’s mind, and as such a property, possession, or commodity of the individual	is considered as knowing, and as such an aspect of discourse and activity
Key terms	knowledge, concepts, meaning, schema, representation, reception, acquisition, construction, internalisation, transmission	knowing, practice, activity, discourse, communication, social mediation, participation, belonging, situatedness, contextuality, cultural embeddedness

Source. Minds in teams: the influence of social and cognitive factors on team learning (Van den Bossche, 2006, p. 26)

To sum up, cognitive and sociocultural perspectives look at how individuals learn a second language from different standpoints. The cognitive perspective lays more emphasis on the influence of internal mental processes on language acquisition, while the sociocultural perspective lays more emphasis on the social and cultural shaping of language acquisition. Some scholars believe that now and in the future the two perspectives will develop in parallel (Ortega, 2011; Verspoor & Bot, 2022). Lantolf and Poehner (2014) believe that the two perspectives complement

each other and jointly promote the development of SLA while coming from different contexts. Next, I would like to review the application of these two perspectives in Chinese as second language research.

2.2.3 Chinese SLA research

As mentioned in the TCSL history, TCSL developed from the 1950s, while SLA Chinese research started in the 1970s (Zhao, 2018). Lyu (1983) pointed out that TCSL belongs within SLA and should follow SLA rules; this was the first paper that linked these two terms together. Lu (1984) first analysed the causes of Chinese learners' phonetic errors using the term *interlanguage*, as pointed out by (Selinker, 1972). Tian et al. (1987) argued for the differences between learning and acquisition. He believes that learning is an explicit and conscious process, while acquisition is more inclined to be an invisible, subconscious process. This is consistent with Krashen (1982) view that language acquisition occurs naturally through exposure to large amounts of comprehensible input. Since the 1990s, SLA theories have begun to be widely used in TCSL, and researchers began to propose theories of Chinese learning based on SLA theories (Liu, 1993; Lyu, 1993). Since 1995, quantitative research has developed rapidly by creating the corpus which enriched Chinese interlanguage research, especially for error analysis (Zhao, 2018). This work focused on identifying and analysing the errors that Chinese as a second language learners are prone to in the process of learning Chinese according to their different levels of proficiency. At the same time, the establishment and improvement of corpora has also deepened research on the patterns of interlanguage variation, which helps to track the development of learners' language abilities and thus provides targeted guidance for teaching (Chu & Chen, 1993; Lu, 2016; Lu, 1999; Shan, 2013).

TCSL corresponds with the general rules of SLA. At the same time, Chinese has its own special features, which can contribute to and enrich the theories of SLA research (Zhao, 2018). The complex relationships and interactions between tones, words, and phonics; the uniqueness of Chinese characters as a logographic writing system; and the important roles of Chinese word order and function words (Feng, 2022; Guo, 2014) have provided new insights into the mechanisms of second language acquisition. However, most TCSL research is based on traditional SLA research (Duff et al., 2013), mainly derived from cognitive and functional linguistics approaches. Even though it is now popular to conduct SLA English research from sociocultural perspectives, such research for TCSL is still insufficient in number and scope (Duff et al., 2013). This highlights the need for further investigation in the TCSL research field from the sociocultural perspective.

2.3 The importance of identity research in SLA

As mentioned previously in this chapter, the role the social element plays in promoting or hindering language acquisition is under increasing consideration from the sociocultural perspective (Norton, 2013). Thus Norton (1995, 2011) criticised second language acquisition research from the cognitive perspective, believing that research on identity and second language learning should be considered within a broader social environment; that is, in terms of identity, power, and ideology. According to Block (2003), the sociocultural view of SLA (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), according to which communicative ability and collaborative learning are essential during the process of acquiring a language, provides the foundations for *the social turn in SLA* (Blair, 2022). These arguments lay the ground for the study of the social and cultural identity of language learners, as learners constantly communicate with people around them and integrate communicative practices in the

process of acquiring language. They also negotiate their own identities, their relationship to those around them, and their relationship to the target language community. This has stimulated research and development in the area of identity in SLA (Norton, 2013).

At the same time, since the end of the 1980s, economic and cultural globalisation has increased tremendously along with deregulation of the international market (Cameron, 2000). An increasing number of people go abroad for study, and there is substantial immigration and digital and other forms of communication breaking down barriers between societies. Many people have begun to learn one or more foreign languages and use them as a tool for communication, and have led to greater diversity in many countries (Norton, 2013). *Who am I?* is becoming a distinctive question for both native speakers and language learners in this globalised world (Norton, 2013).

At the same time, according to Le Page's term *Acts of Identity* (Le Page, 1986; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 2020), in the complex process of identity, language behaviour is external and could be directly observed. People may perform as members of the community that they expect to belong to by adhering to certain community language behaviours (Le Page, 1986; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 2020). For example, when talking with foreigners, some Chinese people might change their language to English, in the expectation of joining the English-speaking group (Cao, 2012). Therefore, an individual could change languages on purpose (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 2020) – actually shifting their linguistic and potentially cultural identity while engaged with others socially and culturally in different communities. These chances for aspects of identity to respond to these environmental changes and opportunities support consideration of the ways that certain groups might

construct and reconstruct their sense of self as they move more fully into and within different sociocultural contexts.

SLA, specifically CSL, and immersion experiences provide a rich opportunity to explore the possible shifts in identity that may occur during study abroad.

Section Two: Identity and SLA research

2.4 Identity conceptualisations

In this part, I will explore the nature of identity more deeply, the development of identity research in the SLA field, and the dominant poststructuralist perspective underpinning it.

2.4.1 *The nature of identity*

Identity, as a popular topic, is widely studied in the field of social science, within subjects such as psychology, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology. In the last few decades, the number of publications on identity has increased rapidly (Vignoles et al., 2011).

As the topic has gained popularity, it can be found that the term *identity* has been defined in many different ways, using words such as personality, self-values and beliefs, sense of group, and nationalism in the social, cultural and historical context (Brown, 2000; Schildkraut, 2007). That is to say, identity can be treated as a label when a person tries to differentiate and integrate a sense of self in different dimensions socially and personally (Bamberg, 2011). To some degree, in this literature, a sense of self is often equated with an individual's identity (Bamberg, 2011).

Different perspectives can produce different highlights on identity. From a psychological perspective, identity is often treated as an internal factor that includes beliefs, values, and an understanding of individual self (Côté & Levine, 2014). The

beliefs and values can be shaped by external factors, such as social communications, cultural norms, and community values (Erikson, 1968). In 2005, Dörnyei proposed a new concept of L2 motivation, the L2 Motivational Self System, based on the psychological theory of possible selves – what learners might be, what they want to be and are afraid to be (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2005). The central concept in this system is the *ideal self*, the identity that L2 learners hope to obtain in their L2 community, which becomes the motivation for learning the target language (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). At the same time, Dörnyei also proposes the auxiliary concept of *ought-to self*: asking what kind of identity L2 learners should have. The development of these concepts establishes the relationship between motivation and self-concept. Supposing that the ability to speak a foreign language plays an essential part in one's ideal self or ought-to self, in seeking to reduce the gap between the current self and the future self, the L2 learner will have a strong motivation to learn this foreign language. In other words, one's motivation, beliefs and learning experiences can shape one's identity (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009).

Increasingly, identity has also dominated the sociological field as the importance of the social and cultural aspects of human experience and identity have been explored (Jenkins, 1996, 2014). Jenkins views identity as a dialectic between the internal and external world, which is fluid and dynamic, and containing possible tensions and oppositions as individuals experience diverse contexts (Jenkins, 2014). Norton developed the idea of identity from a sociocultural perspective and defined identity from the poststructuralist perspective as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (Norton, 2013, p. 45). According to poststructuralist theory, identity is not a solid thing but is continually

constructed and negotiated by its social and cultural contexts through language and discourse, which are diverse, contradictory, and dynamic (Norton, 1995, 2013).

To some extent, Norton's identity theory bears similarities to the concept of the Ideal L2 Self (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), since both emphasise the importance of self-construction and the complexity of identity. The concept of the Ideal L2 Self is related to learner motivation, but is also affected by learners' identity and social environment (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), which is related to Norton's view of identity as shaped by social and cultural contexts (Norton, 2013). However, differing from the psychological perspective, which is more focused on internal factors, complexity and dynamics are crucial to understanding identity from a sociocultural perspective, as identity is shaped through social interactions and relationships (Norton, 2000a).

Meanwhile, Wu (2011) also pointed out that identity is the concept according to which people label themselves and are labelled by others, so that identity can also be defined as a reflection of individuals' understandings of the relationship between themselves and others (Ige, 2010). Sedikides and Brewer (2015) divided identity into three levels: *individual*, *relational*, and *collective*. Individual identity, the first level, is about self-definition. Self-determination, self-evaluation, self-esteem, beliefs and values may be included in this aspect. Relational identity refers to an individual's different roles when interacting with others. A person, for example, could have multiple identities when facing different people, such as son, father, husband, researcher, and driver. Collective identity is about the social group that they belong to, which means that people in the same group may share some beliefs, faith, and even feelings. Taken together, the three levels of identity compose one's whole identity and no level can be separated from any other (Vignoles et al., 2011).

Studying abroad involves exposure to different languages, cultures, and communities (Berg et al., 2009). Through this experience, learners are likely to encounter diverse experiences and challenges, which could impact their self-perception (Dervin & Risager, 2014). Furthermore, studying abroad provides an opportunity to build new relationships, as learners could interact with individuals from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Berg et al., 2009). At the collective level, learners may develop a new understanding of the new community and may identify themselves as members of the community. Alternatively, they may reject or be rejected by the community (Dervin & Risager, 2014) (which will be discussed in detail in the next section of this chapter). These aspects of the study abroad experience are all relevant to Sedikides and Brewer's (2015) model of identity.

In this study, I built this research on and communicated with learner participants about their language learning experience in China, in an effort to understand the world from participants' perspectives. The position taken in this research is that learning and speaking a new language involves possible shifts in one's identity (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2013). Identity is not solid but continues to change through time and place, influenced by the imbalance of linguistic power and the positioning of the learner, especially during an immersion experience such as SA (Norton, 2013). Meanwhile, some internal factors, such as beliefs, values, and motivations, will also be discussed. That is to say, this study will combine the sociocultural perspective with some psychological perspectives to achieve a nuanced understanding of the construction of the international student: in this case, the UK student of Chinese studying abroad in China.

In the following part, I will review some theoretical and practical research from the poststructuralist perspective in this field to deepen my understanding of these ideas.

2.4.2 Identity and SLA research from the Poststructuralist perspectives

Research based on poststructuralist theory is related to research by feminist scholars (Weedon, 1987); that is, when analysing the relationship between individuals and social factors, the role of language is at the core. Identity is constructed in or through language (Weedon, 1987). Peirce (1995) agrees and develops this theory further. She believes that when a second language learner communicates, reads and writes in a second language, it is not just an exchange of information with members of the target language community. Simultaneously, in this process, second language learners are constantly constructing or re-constructing their understanding of themselves and their relationship with the real world. In other words, this process is not only one of communication, but also one of constructing and negotiating identity. In addition, the *Positioning Theory* in poststructuralism plays an important role in studying language and identity (Norton, 2013). That is, identities are not only constructed and formed under the influence of social structures or others, but are also constructed through negotiation by those who wish to position themselves (Norton, 2013).

On a theoretical basis of poststructuralism, Peirce (1995) uses the term *identity* to capture language learners' understanding of the relationship between the social world and themselves, how this kind of relationship is built through time and space, and how learners predict the likelihood of future outcomes. On this view, when a second language learner uses the target language, it is not only a way of sharing information with others, but also a way of rebuilding his/her multiple

relationships in the social world. In subsequent research, scholars combined the identity of the second language learner with the process of learning and using the second language, emphasising that identity is not an additional product in the learning process, but, like language development, is a significant component (Norton, 2013).

Duff (2007) proposed, in the framework of second language socialisation, that second language acquisition is a process through which, in a specific discourse community, new members acquire the ability to use language through continuous learning, thus becoming members in that community. The proposition of this viewpoint further regards language acquisition and identity as two independent aspects, which consolidates the position of identity as an independent topic in the study of second language acquisition.

Depending on the above, Norton and McKinney (2011) point out two central questions of identity in second language acquisition (SLA). Firstly, there is a need for a developed theory of identity that can combine single language learners with the pluralistic social world. Such a theory emphasises the various situations in which second language learners use the target language to speak, and how marginalised learners can feel more accepting of their shifting identity by respecting the target language society. Secondly, SLA researchers need to discover how the social world could cause individual learners to approach the target language community. That is to say, both formal and informal occasions of language learning are socially structured, giving learners the opportunity to improve listening, speaking, writing and other target language abilities. These arguments and questions encourage researchers to explore the multiple aspects of language learner identity and the power of social communities.

Further, the concept of investment and imagined identity when learning the target language has enriched the knowledge of SLA processes (Norton, 2013; Peirce, 1995). Here Norton highlights the significance of learners' perceived investment in language learning as a means of enhancing experiences and outcomes for their future selves. For her own participants, there was a strong imperative to consider this, as otherwise they faced being marginalised within an English-speaking community. For the students participating in this research, investment in future selves may be shaped differently. Now, I will review three important terms -- investment, anxiety and confidence, and imagined identity.

2.4.2.1 Identity, motivation and Investment. One of the functions of motivation is to help language learners approach learning about the target language society. Motivation firstly belongs to the area of social psychology, to verify second language learners' commitment to learning the target language (Norton, 2013). Gardner and Lambert (1972) contributed the concepts of instrumental and integrative motivation in SLA research. Instrumental motivation means that learners' motivation to learn a second language is built around practical purposes, such as meeting a work requirement. Integrative motivation means learners' desire to learn the language in order to integrate into the target language's cultural community. Some scholars (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994) went on to widen this theoretical frame, investigating motivation in different learning processes and dimensions. However, such arguments and perspectives cannot always truly capture three more sophisticated aspects, which are the powers of the social world, the learner's sense of identity, and the theory of second language acquisition, so as to take them into consideration at the same time (Norton et al., 2010).

Therefore, differentiating it from instrumental motivation, Peirce (1995) firstly points out the term *investment*. This concept illustrates that language learners have a “complex social history and multiple desires” (p. 9) when learning a second language. Learners sometimes have contradictory attitudes when studying and practising the target language both in classes and in daily life (Norton et al., 2010). That is to say, when learners use the target language to communicate with target language speakers, they engage in a process not only of transforming the information, but also of constructing and reconstructing the cognition of who they are and what the relationship between themselves and the social world might be. Thus, an investment in the language learning process is also an investment in the identity of learners themselves, which can continually change across time and space (Norton, 2013). Norton’s emphasis on looking to future selves uses the idea of self-projection towards future benefits and potential social mobility as a key motivator.

Peirce (1995) collected data about study and life conditions from a woman who was a mature English language learner and had emigrated from the former Czechoslovakia to Canada, where she worked in a restaurant. There, Norton found the participant reframing her identity positions in different situations. In the beginning, the investment in English helped the participant to be competent as a mother at home and supporter of the whole family. Then, when she accessed the Canadian social world and found a job, she was always laughed at for her accent, misunderstood others in her daily work and even failed to interact with her colleagues who were L1 English speakers. At that time, the investment in English had changed, as she gradually accepted the identity of an immigrant. She always said that she was stupid, even though she never gave up learning English. In contrast to this highly individual focus, Duff (2002) conducted a classroom-based

survey in a multilingual context, which included both L1 English-speaking students and students learning English as a foreign language in a Canadian secondary school. The findings highlighted that it might be reasonable that L1 English speakers would be showing less or no interest in the learning of English or language practice in a language they routinely speak and are proficient in.

According to the above-described research, it can be concluded that, although a person may be a language learner with high motivation, race problems and even a strange learning place can influence their learning investment. These factors may cause learners to feel reluctant to practise the target language (Norton, 2010). That is to say, investment is influenced by identity in different learning situations, and not necessarily always at the same pace as motivation. Due to different cultural and social backgrounds, the identity of learners of a second language in the domestic context is different from learning in the target language context. Moreover, identities in class and out of class are different. Both of these could have a relationship with students' learning investment. During periods of transition, particularly transitions of place, language and culture, it is likely that particular aspects of identity construction and reconstruction will come to the fore. Therefore, it is valuable to extend this concept of investment to explore learner motivation and investment with regard to SLA in the transitional learning processes involved in the proposed study, both in the domestic context and subsequently abroad in the target language country.

2.4.2.2 Anxiety and confidence. Scholars have differing views on anxiety and confidence during second language learning. For example, Spolsky (1989) believes that language learners will have a sense of anxiety during training in listening and speaking. It is also believed that anxiety is not a mental state that learners will inevitably have, and that the anxiety value is different in different

contexts. However, according to Krashen (1981, 1982) affective filter hypothesis, anxiety is inevitable for English learners with low learning effectiveness. Norton (2013) believes that anxiety or confidence in learning will affect learners' chances of speaking in the target language in an authentic language environment.

Peirce et al. (1993) proposed the term Locus of Control to explain immigrant women's lack of confidence in oral English. Peirce et al. (1993) believe that if learners could control the speed of information transmission during communication, the locus of control would put them in a relatively favourable position. Accordingly, their confidence would improve at this time; but the opposite situation would bring anxiety. In the authentic language environment, communication is “immediate”, so learners do not have much time to process information, and it is also hard to control the speed of information transmission. Therefore, compared with “non-immediate” information input such as reading and writing, daily communication may create learners' anxiety during information transmission (Norton, 2013). As Spolsky (1989) observed, learners' anxiety comes more from listening and speaking skills in natural language communication, and has less relationship with reading skills.

However, Norton (2013) also points out that, although the locus of control explains the creation of anxiety in daily communication, it does not take account of whether the learner's experience and background impact anxiety and confidence. For example, being discriminated against when speaking a second language may make learners feel inferior and dull the next time they speak in that language, which may further aggravate anxiety.

Therefore, the learner's anxiety is not innate; it is not only constructed in daily conversation but is also closely related to the learner's own experience and living conditions (Norton, 2013).

2.4.2.3 Imagined communities and imagined identity. The imagined community is an extension of investment and identity, which means that a language learner has the desire to engage in the imagined community when learning a language (Kanno, 2003; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). The imagined community means a community that we have not engaged in, but with which we might build a relationship by imagining it (Norton, 2013). Anderson (2006) was the first scholar to use the term “imagined community”. He pointed out that the term *nation* is actually an imagined community. Even in a very small nation, an individual cannot know all the people in it. They have not met each other, and they have not heard about each other, but they have a clear concept of the common nation in their mind (Anderson, 2006). As Wenger (1998) said, direct engagement is not the only way to build the connection with a community – imagination is another source. The link of such imagination is both spatial and temporal (Wenger, 1998). Therefore, across time and space, when we build via our imagination a connection with people in the same nation as ourselves, although we have not met, we can have a sense of community (Norton, 2013).

This imagined community has also influenced the tracing of language learning (Norton, 2013). While learners are learning a language, there is an imaginary picture of future relationships and affiliations (Warriner, 2007). Kanno (2008) did research about unequal opportunities for using different languages in five bilingual schools. She argued that students had different second language learning demands if they had different imagined communities, which would increase the likelihood of unequal education among different schools and students (Kanno, 2008). Norton (2000) interviewed a Canadian immigrant about learning English as a second language in Canada. According to the interview, the interviewee’s imagined identity was that of a

fashionable staff member, and her imagined community was a comfortable office. Her purpose in learning English was to engage with this community, so she did not like the language teacher's procedure in her English class of letting the students introduce their home countries one by one – which was far removed from her learning demands.

According to the above, learners' imagined communities were closely related to their investment (Norton, 2013). Learners will invest more if the learning content accords with their imagined community; and conversely, less. As real as the community that learners are engaging with currently, the imagined community influences learners' investment in language learning even more (Norton, 2013).

2.5 Research into identity and SLA

So far, research on second language learners and identity has focused on three main areas:

1. Identity in adult migrant contexts (Learning English).
2. Identity in foreign language contexts (studying L2 outside the target language country).
3. Identity in study abroad contexts (Block, 2009).

2.5.1 Identity in adult migrant contexts (Learning English)

Research on immigration mainly focuses on adult immigrants entering a new country, and an account of a series of identity shifts brought about by cultural, work and life experiences (Norton, 2000a, 2013; Pavlenko et al., 2002). Being uprooted and brought to a new land willingly or as a refugee underpins what can be traumatic experiences as individuals and families try to re-establish themselves in a foreign environment, often without knowledge of the home language and unsure of socio-cultural sensitivities (Fazel et al., 2012). For example, Norton (2000, 2013) used

interviews and diaries to track five women who immigrated to Canada. Based on their different stories, Norton analysed the speaking opportunities in adult language classrooms, how participants created, took advantage of or resisted these speaking opportunities, and analysed learner behaviours in terms of possible changing identities. She treated identity as a site of power struggles in these circumstances because she believed that these female participants were constantly fighting for the opportunity to speak and struggling for rights in order to finally achieve a new positionality in Canada, since they could speak the target language and gain respect from the locals. Although my research did not involve immigration study, Norton's ideas concerning identity and SLA were helpful in my own research, particularly her work on investment, imbalanced power and imaged identity (Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000; Norton, 2013). These provide insights into the dynamic power imbalance between language learners and native speakers and emphasise the importance of language learners' investment in improving their language competence, ultimately leading to the negotiation and construction of their identity within the new community.

2.5.2 Identity in foreign language contexts (Studying L2 outside the target language country)

Norton's work focuses on students who are learning English as a second language through classroom learning and while living in an immersive situation i.e. where English was a dominant language in society (along with French) although it may not have been used in the home. However, for those learning a foreign language, the classroom is usually the main or only place where communication in the target language takes place (Block, 2009). Tens of thousands of primary, secondary, and higher education institutions around the world offer L2 or FL courses for local students (Graddol, 2006). Although their learning environments and student

situations vary, the latter students have one thing in common: language learning is often restricted to participation in that one environment (Block, 2009) unless Study abroad experiences are available. Research on this context covers a wide range of aspects, such as motivations (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), teaching methods (Zubenko, 2022), and teacher identity (Hamilton, 2010; Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Shin & Rubio, 2022; Vinogradova & Ross, 2019). In general, most studies agree that a foreign language learner, learns specific language knowledge and skills (e.g. phonics, vocabulary, and grammar) but may have few opportunities for communicative work and usually lacks experience of sociocultural aspects of the target language (Block, 2009).

Here is a typical practical research that confirms the above argument. Lantolf and Genung (2003) observed the experience of one of the authors, Patricia Genung, who was studying Chinese in the United States. The entire observation was conducted in the form of a foreign language learning diary. At the very beginning, Genung's learning motivation was "social learning motivation", as she wanted to use Chinese as a communication tool. However, throughout the learning process, although the aim of the Chinese course was stated as communication, there were very few interactive activities. Tutors seemed to focus on grammar explanation and pattern practice. Tutors sometimes even criticised students in class because of homework errors, causing students anxiety and stress (Lantolf & Genung, 2003). Over time, Genung believed that her learning motivation changed to "cognitive motivation". That is to say, Genung no longer paid too much attention to whether she could communicate with Chinese people in Chinese but focused on understanding and using the language to achieve good grades. At this time, Genung 's definition of a "successful language learner" was also changing to a student who can get high

marks. Through this study, on the one hand, it can be seen that the influence of the teachers' teaching methods on students' learning motivation and attitude; on the other hand, the foreign language learning diary, as a research method of tracking the observation record. Meanwhile, it can be a good way to collect in-depth data and conduct dynamic longitudinal research on individuals, as it can provide insights into students' reflections on experiences and interactions, and into the shifting of students' identities throughout the entire learning process.

At the same time, Kramsch (2000) argues that writing can be a powerful tool in developing students' identities in non-immersive language teaching environments. Since writing is often not an improvised process, students have sufficient time to think and revise their work. This process allows them to develop a deeper relationship with the target language and consider how they can become proficient language users, which can affect their sense of self to some extent.

In a study conducted by Norton and Toohey (2011), language learners in Canada participated in a remote language exchange programme where they were paired with native French speakers for regular online communication. The study found that the participants felt the programme increased their confidence in cross-cultural communication and gave them a new awareness and understanding of linguistic and cultural diversity. This demonstrates how language and culture can influence one's identity. Meanwhile, many studies have also demonstrated the influence of international teachers on students' identity (Lee & Kim, 2017; Li & Zhu, 2013). For example, international teachers can bring the culture of their own country into the classroom, which can increase students' interest in the language and culture of the target country. Even if students have no chance to experience it personally, the interaction with teachers can help students develop a deeper understanding of the

culture, thereby increasing their sense of self within the target culture to some extent (Stanley, 2013). Moreover, students may sometimes learn and imitate the ideas and behaviours of international teachers (Stanley, 2013), which can also influence their sense of self.

From the above, it can be seen that even if the learner is not physically present in the target language country, learning a language and culture may change their sense of self and awareness of the world (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

2.5.3 Identity in study abroad contexts

Studies on study-abroad contexts mainly focus on the experience of living and studying abroad in an effort to analyse the impacts of study abroad on international students' identity construction in various aspects, such as language acquisition, acculturation, and cross-cultural communication (Benson et al., 2012; Kinginger, 2011; Sánchez Hernández, 2017; Twombly et al., 2012; Viol & Klasen, 2021; Yang & Kim, 2011). These studies show that studying abroad can have a significant impact on individuals' identities as they are exposed to new cultures, languages, and ways of thinking. These SA students have had temporary but immersive exposure to and engagement with the target language in a wide range of authentic situations, experiencing and responding to emotional and sociocultural issues, establishing a new sense of belonging, and actively engaging with communities, groups and individuals (Mitchell et al., 2015). However, some students may find themselves so overwhelmed by the challenges to their sense of identity that they separate themselves from wider groupings and restrict themselves to their temporary home and any formal classroom learning (Savicki & Cooley, 2011). This experience offers opportunities for students to rethink, and even reconstruct, their identities and their relationship with the social world (Dervin & Risager, 2014).

In section two of this chapter, I will present a specific literature review about identity and study abroad.

2.6 Important studies looking at Identity and SLA Chinese

2.6.1 Non-heritage learners of Chinese.

As reviewed above, various studies have been published about identity and SLA in learning European languages, especially learning English as a second language, which highlights how learning a new language can influence one's sense of self (Block, 2003; Clément & Norton, 2021; Kanno, 2008; Norton, 2013). However, there has been limited research related to identity and learning Chinese as a second language (e.g. Liu & Yang, 2012; Shi, 2017).

Several studies have focused on international students' cultural identity and intercultural adaptation while learning Chinese in China. For example, Liu (2000) and Yang (2012) pointed out that international students' cultural identity was multifaceted, fluid, and dynamic. Xiao and Chen (2012) analysed Eastern Asian students' academic achievement, mental health, social network, and cultural identity, and discovered that these students were bicultural or multicultural, which helped to boost their cultural adaptation while residing in China. By investigating international students' different political and cultural backgrounds, Shi (2017) discovered that the original background deeply impacted their cultural adaptation. International students who came from countries where the culture was close to Chinese culture would accept Chinese culture faster, and most of them chose to come to China to learn Chinese because of their interest in Chinese language and culture (Shi, 2017). Jiao (2008) argued that cultural identity consisted not only of engagement with the target culture, but also of acceptance of a different culture. Chen (2015), from the standpoint of identity and Chinese academic writing, discovered that the linguistic

and strategic performances of language learners' academic writing showed development in stages. The reason for this was that the ability to apply a language was influenced by the individual and social characteristics involved in the development of identity (Chen, 2015). Apart from these studies, there is research related to identity and teaching methodology which shows that teachers should design their curriculum to accommodate students' different cultural backgrounds and personal experiences, while demonstrating respect for the students' cultures in the classroom. For instance, teaching materials should be carefully selected based on students' cultures to make them more accessible, and students should be encouraged to express their opinions as much as possible in class (Wang, 2000; Xie, 2009; Zhou, 2012; Zhu, 2008).

From the research described above, it can be seen that identity research in the SLA of Chinese has increased in recent years. However, the publications were still very limited, with quantitative research still playing the dominant role. Meanwhile, the research topic was narrow in scope, being mostly focused on the cultural or cross-cultural perspective (Zhou, 2020). This restricts the possible view of the different aspects of identity that might be impacted by studying abroad such as the shift of identity through studying Chinese in China.

2.6.2 Heritage learners of Chinese.

Outside China, some research has been published on identity and learning Chinese by foreign citizens of Chinese origin, who learn Chinese as a heritage language, examining their Chinese learning motivation and their sense of self when becoming a Chinese language speaker (Duff et al., 2013; Li & Duff, 2008; Zhu, 2016).

According to Li and Duff (2008), unlike the non-heritage learners, heritage learners already have, or at least have experienced, access to Chinese language and Chinese culture at home or in the local Chinese community, which is an inevitable influence on their learning about the languages and culture. However, such influence is limited, since it is often not formalised learning of Chinese in a classroom, and their spoken and written Chinese might be weaker (Li & Duff, 2008) compared with their listening comprehension (Zhang, 2019). Nevertheless, home is still the major resource enabling heritage learners to practise Chinese. Such influence might be rejected or resisted, rather than accepted, when heritage speakers grew up, especially when the wider community's language (such as English) had become the dominant language for them. Shin's research (2010) showed that in some Korean-Chinese families, even though both parents were Chinese native speakers, they were reluctant to speak Chinese with their children – the heritage learners – due to social pressure or other reasons since young people may not want to stand out as different from their friends (Shin, 2010).

The possible desire of heritage speakers to learn Chinese is based on the wish to find a sense of belonging connected to their ethnic background, to form a desired aspect of their identity linked to their heritage (Comanaru & Noels, 2009), and to connect with the past (Duff et al., 2013). Even when the context in which heritage learners study Chinese presents many obstacles, it is confirmed that, compared with non-heritage learners, the heritage learners show more respect for Chinese history and society, and even feel that they are in a contradictory position as learners (Li & Duff, 2008). This is because heritage learners may have already acquired a certain understanding and recognition of Chinese language and culture under the influence of their families or the Chinese community before entering their

classes. As a result, they tend to show more respect and acceptance than non-heritage learners do. On the other hand, their own cultural identity, which may even involve some prejudices, may diverge from what they learn in the classroom, creating a sense of contradiction (Li & Duff, 2008).

Research on heritage learners provides rich data about their special features, which also highlights the differences between heritage and non-heritage learners, and encourages further investigation into the motivation and sense of self of non-heritage learners of Chinese (Duff et al., 2013).

Section Three: Identity and Study Abroad

2.7 Introduction

As students engage with linguistic skills development of the target language in their home country, they may form a limited understanding of the cultures associated with the language and have limited opportunities for conversation in the target language (Kim & Elder, 2009). At this point, it might be argued that students have only a restricted engagement with these elements, and so, if/when they are given the opportunity to Study Abroad (SA) and to gain authentic opportunities for conversation and involvement with the host culture, they may find themselves wrestling with diverse aspects of their sense of self as they progress through transitions from home country to target language (TL) country and back home. It is during such potentially turbulent or challenging transitions that it may be possible to investigate learner identity to help enhance our understanding of the ways that SLA students studying abroad respond to and are shaped by their interactions, relationships and challenges (e.g. Block, 2007; Jackson, 2015; Kinginger, 2013).

During the SA process, improving target language ability is the language learner's main purpose (Pérez-Vidal, 2014). Some students whose language level

reaches intermediate or advanced even follow a further programme in the target country after meeting the language requirements (Isabelli-García & Isabelli, 2020). Apart from this, developing intercultural competencies, increasing global awareness, and cultivating a sense of global citizenship, are further purposes of studying abroad in the current global society (Twombly et al., 2012). That is to say, SA is undertaken not only to acquire the TL, but also to engage with the social-cultural values underlying the language. As Kinginger (2009: 155) argues, identity in SA is a matter of “what kinds of people learners take themselves to be and to become, and how they are welcomed and assisted, or not, in the social settings where they are involved”.

In my particular context, I focused on learners of Chinese in a university, where a mandatory period of learning Chinese was part of the students’ experience and was spent in China. This form of temporary immersion in the language, society and culture called Study Abroad is a fascinating opportunity for individuals to leave the familiar reinforcements of identity such as friends and supporters, and the knowledge of how things work and how one should interact with others. The transition at that time from the known to the unknown across learning/classes, hobbies and group memberships was considered to be a particularly important and interesting period within which to look at potential identity shifts.

Thus, in this section, I will review previous research on the engagement with the target culture, and how this engagement influences the beliefs, perceptions, and sense of self of SA students throughout their linguistic, sociocultural, and hybrid progress. Specifically, I will focus on the studies of SA and explore how cultural engagement can obstruct or develop language learning and cross-cultural competence during this experience, in order to discover how SA experiences affect

learners' sense of selves, along with their relationship with the people around them and the whole social world.

2.7.1 Linguistic self (LS) through the lens of Study Abroad

Learning a new language can change a person's sense of self and self-representation, which means that after a person gains knowledge of a new language and uses it, this person will be different from the previous one (Block, 2007; Norton, 2013). It is through language that identity is constructed and negotiated as we attempt to engage with others and world around us (Benson et al., 2013). I would argue for the importance of acknowledging that it is in our interactions with others that our identity is challenged, confirmed or refined and enhanced. According to Benson et al. (2013) when discussing identity from this social perspective, identity is a dialectical relationship which affects both *inner* and *outer* aspects of the self. In this conception, the inner aspect mainly means the sense of who we perceive ourselves to be, while the outer aspect mainly means how we represent ourselves to others and are positioned by others. However, this conception of a social identity (Jenkins, 2014) is perhaps more fragile and fragmented as well as dynamic than it might at first seem, as it is affected by our individual self and characteristics interacting with social, cultural and political narratives and metanarratives.

As reviewed in the previous section, most research about language learning and development is based on learning English as a second language (Clément & Norton, 2021; Darvin & Norton, 2018; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), because English is generally characterised as a *lingua franca* (Sifakis & Tsantila, 2019). In many contexts, including international business, English language proficiency is highly valued and considered an important skill. As a result, successful English language learners may have more advantages and opportunities in the social community than

individuals who do not possess this skill (Mitchell et al., 2020). The dominance of ELL and its positioning as an LF could lead to native speakers of English being satisfied to remain within a monolingual identity (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). However, there are also some English native speakers who are keen on developing a hybrid and possibly multilingual sense of self through extra language learning (Mitchell et al., 2020). Rather than having an instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972), English learners of other languages may be motivated by the desire to be different, or from a sense of self-efficacy influenced by their early language learning background; or they may enjoy other languages and cultures or need them for future employment (Mitchell et al., 2020).

In recent years in the UK, teaching of typical modern foreign languages such as French, German, Italian and Spanish have seen high levels of attrition in schools (McLelland, 2018). Conversely, there is increasing interest in learning Chinese, and some training programmes now include learners who wish to be teachers of Chinese in UK schools (Zhang & Li, 2010), as I have discussed regarding the increased prominence of Chinese language at the beginning of this chapter. It is the positioning of Chinese as an undergraduate and postgraduate language subject in its own right, which is the focus here.

During the learning process, the SA experience may have a powerful influence on these learners' (English native speakers') linguistic identity through this potential enrichment experience (Block, 2007). During the SA process, their language learning and use of this new language in unfamiliar social and cultural contexts may influence their sense of self (Benson et al., 2013). It is widely believed that living in the target language country offers a good opportunity to enhance language development (Pérez-Vidal, 2014). Traditional SLA theories like the Input

Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985), Output Hypothesis (Swain & Lapkin, 1995), and Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996) all argue that studying abroad (SA) provides an ideal environment for language progression. Unlike learning only in the official language classroom, which is an instrumental environment (Sánchez Hernández, 2017), when abroad, language learners are also surrounded by authentic lived experiences with the target language and have many potential opportunities for input and output. However, it must be remembered that any engagement will rely on the will and resilience of the individual taking part (Sánchez Hernández, 2017). In such immersive conditions, acquiring a language seems to be unconscious – an implicit learning and practice, which can support development of the language in a relatively stable context (Pérez-Vidal, 2014). Thus, I will now review the outcomes and factors that affect language development through SA.

2.7.1.1 The outcomes of language development from SA. SA is a natural learning context, which can lead to substantial progress in TL development (Pérez-Vidal, 2014). This argument is agreed on by many scholars in previous research showing that study abroad can achieve greater proficiency than that gained by at-home students (Freed et al., 2003; Freed et al., 2004; Isabelli, 2003; Llanes & Muñoz, 2013; Magnan & Back, 2007). However, the results surrounding SA are complex (Coleman, 1997; Sánchez Hernández, 2017), and the development in different areas (reading, speaking, writing, listening, interacting) are not equal (Llanes, 2019). Many studies have found that the development of oral skills is the part that benefits most obviously from the SA experience (Llanes, 2019). Improvements have been found in different aspects of oral skills, such as the rate of speech, mean length of runs, and fluency (Huensch & Tracy–Ventura, 2017; Leonard & Shea, 2017; Llanes, 2019). Moreover, Valls-Ferrer and Mora (2014) agree about

the fluency gains during SA for lower-level initial learners given extensive language contact, but they also argue that these results still cannot fully explain the differential influences of formal instruction and SA on the development of fluency (Valls-Ferrer & Mora, 2014). Studies have also found that vocabulary shows significant improvement (Foster, 2009; Zaytseva, 2016), and the outcomes of listening comprehension are positive after an SA experience (Freed et al., 2004; Llanes & Botana, 2015).

However, Yi et al. (2012) investigated 145 international students from four universities in Beijing about their Chinese language exposure. The results of a fifteen-minute questionnaire show the uneven development of participants' Chinese language learning outcomes. This means that this particular research agrees with there being positive results in listening comprehension development, but could not confirm the prominence of development in oral skills (Yi et al., 2012). Zhao (2021) conducted a case study to track the development of a (female) participant's Chinese oral skills over four months. During this period, the results showed an increase in the complexity of her spoken Chinese, but a decrease in both accuracy and fluency, and such changes were nonlinear, influenced by both internal and external conditions (Zhao, 2021).

From the brief review above, it is suggested that language development during SA may be individually determined but overall, research tends to confirm positive language development benefits from the SA experience. In the following parts, I will review the factors that influence language development during SA from both external and internal perspectives which will be discussed in the following pages.

2.7.1.2 External factors. Two external factors that influence language development are reviewed in this part. They are the length of stay for SA and the

kinds of learning environments experienced in formal classes: quality of the class, learning materials, and teachers' feedback).

2.7.1.2.1 Length of stay. Many studies have confirmed the relationship between language development and length of study. For example, Schauer (2006) compared the pragmatic gains by a group of SA students and a control group in the home country, and the results show that length of stay has significant influence on pragmatic error awareness. Meanwhile, according to other research, many scholars believe that the longer the stay in the target country, the more will be achieved (Sánchez Hernández, 2017; Vidal & Shively, 2019; Xu et al., 2009). For example, Milton and Meara (1995) have illustrated the significant development in TL grammar and acquisition speed of students after studying abroad for one year. By investigating 126 international students from 17 countries, Xu et al. (2009) found that the length of study and TL proficiency had a strong influence on their pragmatic and grammatical skills.

However, comparing it with other factors, some researchers believe that the influence of length of study is not that great (Alcón-Soler, 2015; Bardovi-Harlig & Bastos, 2011; Beltrán, 2014; Dwyer, 2004; Han, 2005). Likewise, short-term SA can also have positive outcomes (Czerwionka & Cuza, 2017; Dwyer, 2004). For example, Dwyer's (2004) study shows that a well-organised and intensive summer SA language training programme which lasts for at least six weeks can have an obvious positive effect on students' TL learning outcomes. She also suggests that to ensure the effectiveness of the programme, a minimum of six weeks is needed. Additionally, Llanes & Serrano Serrano (2011) have tested the effect of length of stay on TL writing and speaking development. They collected data from 25 students who studied abroad for two months, and 21 students who studied for three months, and

analysed the data for fluency, accuracy and complexity. The results show no obvious differences between the two groups, which indicates that one additional month may not be long enough to effect TL written and oral development (Llanes & Serrano Serrano, 2011).

To sum up, it is possible that a short-term intensive learning programme could produce positive learning outcomes, but if the programme lasts less than half a year, whether it is longer or shorter may not make a significant difference. If the programme is long-term, that is, longer than half a year, or longer than one year, learners could achieve more. However, it is necessary to take into account the individual's experiences and willingness to engage with language outside the classroom. As these may vary, so may LL efficacy affecting the conclusions that can be drawn with regard to length of stay. Nonetheless, bearing in mind the findings described earlier, participants in this research had mostly taken their SA for more than half a year, which means that the length of stay was relatively stable across participants. Perhaps other contributory factors should be considered.

2.7.1.2.2 Nature of the formal Learning environment. China is a huge country with diverse cultures. The breadth and depth of Chinese cultures lie in its regionality while a broad vision of country, integrated and unified works to support a powerful common identity (Huang et al., 2021). Different regions of China have their special local cultures, which could influence Chinese learning taking place in these regions differently (Huang et al., 2021). According to research, most international students choose to study in cities with a relatively advanced quality of higher education and economic conditions, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Wuhan (Wang, 2021). These places tend to have better resources, more developed logistics, convenient transportation, modern urban construction, good public security,

and many English-speaking residents, which may provide a better place in which they can adapt and study (Song & Xia, 2021; Wang, 2021).

However, Song and Xia (2021) did a study to compare international students' living experiences in two Chinese universities. One university is in Shanghai, the other is in the hinterland of China. According to the results, for students in Shanghai, when they were pursuing both academic and social activities formally or casually, English as a communication tool played a very important role. English as a dominant medium, to some degree, obstructed their engagement with local society, as well as the practice of speaking Chinese. But in the hinterland university, where both lecturers and local students found it relatively hard to communicate in English, Chinese was regarded as a communication medium (Song & Xia, 2021), which prompted the students to learn Chinese.

Based on the above, living and studying in different places of China could produce different learning experiences and even different learning outcomes. Moreover, as regards their living conditions, compared to other way-of-life factors, a homestay seems not to have produced obvious improvements in their TL (Kinginger, 2009). Additionally, according to Wang (2021), the external learning environment such as the curriculum, lecturers' teaching and assessment methods, and teaching facilities, could also influence learners' SA experience. In this research, since participants went to different places in China to learn, different external factors should be considered.

2.7.1.2.3 Internal factors. The impact of internal factors on language learning varies from person to person. Generally speaking, it mainly includes cognitive ability, identity (such as gender, country, and age), social ability and learning motivation.

The interaction of these factors contributes to learners' second language acquisition **(Kinginger, 2013; Sánchez Hernández, 2017; Silvia, 2018; Stewart, 2010)**.

First, gender may play a role in the interaction between LLs and NSs (Silvia, 2018). For example, Shively (2016) studied a Spanish boy learning English. The boy said that he felt himself in a comfort zone in a group of boys about his own age. In such an environment, he felt very relaxed and was willing to communicate with these boys. But in the face of his host mother, an older woman, he felt restrained and less inclined to communicate with her. At the same time, some studies have found that some female students experience more difficulties than male students in communicating with native speakers and integrating into the target language society during SA (Kinginger, 2013). From the perspective of host families, the interaction between host fathers and boys is more frequent than that with girls (Shiri, 2015). However, current research on age has mainly focused on differences between children and adults (Llanes & Muñoz, 2013; Muñoz, 2010, 2014) or between children and adolescents (Muñoz, 2010). These studies have found a relationship between age and language development, which is that younger learners have a relative advantage. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research on age differences between adults who participate in SA programmes within four-year undergraduate study and adults who participate in postgraduate SA programmes.

Second, Stewart (2010) suggests that the desire of LLs to talk with NSs seems to be influenced by the personality of the LLs themselves. It seems to be generally agreed that outgoing people will have a greater willingness to speak (Marijuan & Sanz, 2017). However, among limited studies on personality and desire to speak in a second language. Baker-Smemoe et al. (2014) used personality traits, such as openness and extroversion, as predictors of second language development

in the SA project. Through the analysis, it was concluded that there was no significant correlation between personality traits and second language acquisition. At present, conclusions in this regard are still a research topic in cognitive psychology.

Third, motivation is another important topic involving LLs' desire to speak. Motivation and Norton's (1995, 2013) term "investment" have been specifically reviewed in the second part of the literature review. As stated by Allen (2010), motivation should not be judged statically as high or low but as dynamic, changing over time and in response to individual and/or environmental situations.

In a doctoral dissertation about learning Chinese as a second/foreign language, Yu (2013) conducted a regression analysis and found a positive correlation between international students' desire to speak Chinese and their motivation, language attitude, and view of their target language. In Hao's (2015) study, her respondents all believed that making mistakes when speaking Chinese was ordinary and did not negatively impact their desire to speak. Chu and Zhang (2019) also proposed that if teachers have an in-depth understanding of students' Chinese language ability, know their learning needs in the Chinese classroom, and make better use of classroom feedback, international students' desire to speak Chinese can be further stimulated.

During the process of studying abroad, the learning environment is an external element that needs to be considered. However, personal identity, language ability, and attitudes towards the target language, which are internal elements, are also crucial (Sánchez Hernández, 2017). According to SLA research, learners' attitudes and investment in the target language directly influence their choices of target language learning opportunities outside the classroom (Norton, 2013; Schwieter et al., 2018). In other words, the sense of acculturation is more likely a

particular feeling that the learner believes in, along with their cultural and linguistic identity in the new community (Sánchez Hernández, 2017), which belongs to the social-cultural self that will be discussed in the following section.

2.7.2 Social-cultural self (SCS) through the lens of Study Abroad

During the processes of learning a second language, the target language culture should also be considered. Since the end of the 19th century, many linguists and language educators have begun to pay attention to the cultural influence on language learning (Hinkel, 1999; Kramsch, 2009; Nieto & Zoller Booth, 2010; Rachmawaty et al., 2018; Tsou, 2005). As a matter of fact, culture can be conceived of as the set of achievements of certain civilisations. Beyond this, culture can also cover the set of human activities related to any linguistic activity. As Hymes (1964) observed, communication or interaction between different cultural communities necessarily involves reflection on the speakers' systems of social and cultural norms. That is to say, language and culture cannot be separated. Acquiring language ability means not only gaining competence in grammar and linguistics, but also gaining an understanding of the social and cultural rules and norms (Canagarajah, 2005). Moreover, culture certainly evokes the system in which a specific language is embodied, namely as an expression of a kind of way of viewing that socio-cultural environment, a way of thinking about the lived world experiences of speakers, and a code that is a repository for collective experiences (Kecskés, 2013).

Additionally, investigations into the connection between language and culture produced many impressive and seminal works, such as that of Kaplan (1966), who propounded definitive ways in which rhetorical conventions vary across different cultures, languages and styles of second language writing. Gumperz (1982) tended to draw distinctions between social identity, which referenced the relationship

between the individual language learner, cultural identity, and the social world. Lyons (2017) noticed the effects of the first culture on second language learning, such as the influence of L2 by the L1 culture, and the cultural norms and values that transferred from the L1 culture. Lyons also suggested that the interdependence of language and culture is not as widely appreciated as it ought to be and teaching culture in the language class is important to improve learners' awareness of the target language culture (Lyons, 2017).

Meanwhile, it should be mentioned that the process of learning a second/foreign language is also a process of shifting one's cultural identity, as well as building a new foreign language identity Galajda (2011). Fail et al. (2004) conducted several case studies to investigate eleven former international students whose studies had taken place 20 to 50 years earlier, to test their sense of identity and belonging, and the construction of relationships. Advantages such as adjusting ability in new an environment and multiple diverse backgrounds, as well as the negative effects of possible culture shock are mentioned (Fail et al., 2004). Similar research conducted by Devens (2005) explores participants' cross-cultural experiences and those of some who were struggling with depression during SA. Galajda (2011) focuses on the development of multicultural identity while learning a foreign language. In his research, he finds that learners create a new identity while using a foreign language. Influenced by the target language culture, learners can rebuild their first language identity. For example, learners may adopt new cultural norms in the target language culture, which can influence their ways of thinking and communicating with others, and even result in the formation of a new hybrid identity that combines the two cultures (Galajda, 2011). This result upholds Van Kerckvoorde (2007) argument that a person's beliefs, ways of thinking, behaviour and worldview

can change by learning and using a new language. In other words, SA provides learners with the opportunity to immerse themselves in the target language and culture, which may lead to the development or rebuilding of their original identity into a hybrid one, as well as a change in their sense of self and perspectives on the world (Darvin & Norton, 2015). This is an internal factor that will be discussed in the following part.

2.7.2.1 Acculturation and identity. Acculturation has been called a personal journey through cultures (Berry, 2019). This is a process of social and internal changes resulting from contact between two or more cultural groups and individual members (Berry, 2019). In recent decades, many scholars have defined acculturation in different ways, and the two formulations, widely quoted in this field, are still the foundation of the concept (Berry, 1980; Kim, 1995, 2017; Ngwira et al., 2015; Ward et al., 2001).

The first one is that of Redfield et al. (1936), who introduced the term *acculturation* – meaning phenomena that emerge in groups of people who have different cultures and continually make first-hand contact, so that subsequent changes to the original cultural patterns occur in either group or in both (Redfield et al., 1936).

The second formulation was advanced by the Social Science Research Council (1954), namely, cultural change initiated by the union of two or more autonomous cultural systems. Acculturative change could be the result of direct cultural transmission. It may be due to non-cultural factors, such as environmental or demographic changes caused by an aggressive culture. There may be delays, as in the case of internal adjustments due to the adoption of foreign characteristics or

patterns; or it could be a reactive adaptation to a traditional way of life (Barnett, 1954).

In the first definition, acculturative change is regarded as a wider concept of cultural change and is considered to produce changes in either group or both cultural groups. The second definition adds some properties: changes could be indirect; delayed (possibly due to cultural and internal backwardness, the consequences of which may change for years after contact); and sometimes reactive (i.e. groups and individuals refusing the external cultural impacts and inevitably returning to more traditional lifestyles rather than tending to resemble the target culture) (Berry, 2019).

With the development of technology and society, the dimensions of acculturation have been updated and enlarged. For example, the 'continuous first-hand' element is not that necessary (Berry et al., 2006), since acculturation could take place remotely by advanced network media, some research has shown that remote tools (social media and tourism) can influence the outcome of acculturation (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012; Kumari et al., 2022). From the perspective of social constructivism, behaviours are not considered as *given* from direct empirical observation, but as *socially constructed* in everyday interactions (Lombardo & Kantola, 2021). According to Berry (2009), both the positivist and constructivist perspectives are necessary to fully understand the phenomenon of acculturation. This is because it is not only objective measures, such as changes in language use and living practices, but also subjective experiences, such as learners' perspectives on their new cultural experiences and how they negotiate their sense of self and belonging in the new social community, that should be considered (Berry, 2009). By incorporating both perspectives, a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of acculturation can be achieved.

In the culture-contact situation, changes in the participants are influenced by both the external culture and the converting culture of which the participant is a member (internal). Individually, changes, it is thought, take place in identity, attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours (Graves, 1967). That is to say, acculturation has two sides. On the one hand, language learners are trying to develop their sociocultural understandings and values in relation to the TL community. On the other hand, they still retain their native (heritage) culture (Berry et al., 2006). During this period, the language learners are in a *third place* (Kramsch, 1993), which is an undiscovered place between the native culture and the target culture. In this place, learners can compare, negotiate, and mediate between both sides, and can explore the foreign culture as well as their own (Pegrum, 2008).

According to all the above, not all individuals acculturate in the same way. Even given a common cultural background, individuals will not have the same motivations or experiences. Therefore, individuals may experience different senses of their cultural experiences. Thus, groups or individuals are unlikely to engage in the acculturation process in the same way, and it is unusual for them to produce the same outcomes (Berry, 2019).

2.7.2.2 Acculturation process. During the process of acquiring a TL abroad, learners' intercultural challenges and new culture adaptation have attracted many scholars to investigate them. In this part, I will review the term culture shock, some arguments about cultural adaptation, as well as the key factors and aspects that can influence an individual's transition to a new culture.

During the 1960s, research about living or studying abroad mainly focused on negative experiences (Adler, 1975; Byrnes, 1966; Guthrie, 1966; Singh, 1963). From a time-varying perspective, Lysgaard (1955) conducted a study of 200 Scandinavian

Fulbright scholars who visited the United States. He believes that people who stay in the United States for fewer than six months or more than 18 months have a better experience than those who stay for 6 to 18 months. Based on this result, Oberg (1960) pointed to the term *culture shock*. He argued that people would have deep anxiety when engaged in a new culture because of physical fatigue, unaccustomed food, confusion about their social identity. At the same time, he proposes four stages that he believes people will face when experiencing culture shock. The first stage is the *Honeymoon*, which refers to the fresh, pleasant and enthusiasm-generating emotional experience of first arriving in the destination country, since learners are curious about and surprised by their new life. The second stage is *Negotiation*, which, he suggests, occurs about three months after arriving in the destination country. By this time, people will experience more or less unfavourable things, which highlight the difference between the destination country and the home country, possibly causing loneliness and anxiety. The third stage is *Adjustment*, which, he argues, usually takes 6 to 12 months of residence in the destination country. New cultural habits are gradually formed during this period, life becomes “normal”, and negative emotions towards different cultures are reduced. The fourth stage is *Adaptation*, which generally refers to the person’s condition after one year in the destination country. At this point it can be more comfortable to participate in the destination country's culture, and so it is also called the bicultural stage (Oberg, 1960).

During this period, even though some scholars tried to use an empirical approach to discuss issues related to culture shock, for example Singh (1963), who conducted a study through interviews of more than 300 Indian students studying in the UK, most of these studies are theoretically summarised subjectively, making it

difficult to generalise from them to the whole group of people living abroad.

Additionally, the consideration of individual differences during the SA was insufficient (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Nevertheless, these early studies, represented by the terms *culture shock*, laid an important foundation for later cross-cultural adaptation and acculturation studies.

Some scholars (e.g. Ward & Kennedy, 1999) believed that the previous research was too blurred and its theoretical foundation weak, being based on a single-interview cross-sectional study that did not examine the changes in the same person over time, and so lacked a certain convincingness.

In order to make up for the research gap, Searle and Ward (1990) conducted a follow-up study on Malaysian and Singaporean students studying and living in New Zealand. They collected data four times to measure participants' internal changes: 1 month, 6 months and 12 months after these participants arrived in New Zealand. Surprisingly, the result for Searle and Ward was just the opposite of that for Lysgaard (1955). Ward et al. (1998) believes that the period nodes for international students' negative reaction are the first month and the 12th month after entering the destination country. For further verification, Ward et al. (1998) also measured 35 Japanese students studying in New Zealand. The measurement results show no significant changes in other periods except that the depression value is the highest within 24 hours of arriving in New Zealand. These studies focus on changes and degrees of adaptation over a longer period of time, which had not been examined before. Although some personal factors were still not taken into account, such as learners' personal circumstances, characteristics, and level of fluency, these studies provided important insights into the cultural adaptation of international students, and

proved that individuals could have different stages of adaptation over the time of study abroad.

Up to now, research about cultural conditions remains controversial. For example, Chien (2016) conducted a follow-up survey of 26 first-year international students from a university in the south-western United States through two semi-structured interviews. The results showed that international students' adjustment is a complex phenomenon and cannot be simply classified. Viol and Klasen (2021) conducted interviews with 50 students who had participated in the European Era Snow exchange programme, and the data did not show any significant stages. Instead, the author divided it according to three aspects of participants' experience: success, personal growth, and a three-phase structure. Success refers to the achievements made throughout the SA programme, such as language progress and intercultural communication skills. Personal growth refers to the progress and growth during SA, such as improved adaptability, independence, and self-confidence, as well as increased intercultural competence and global awareness. The three-phase structure refers to the overall process of the three stages before departure, during the programme, and upon return home, encompassing expectation-setting, experiential learning, and reflection. This structure, as identified by Viol and Klasen (2021), helps to develop a more complete understanding of the changes and growth experienced by students throughout their SA programme, including their linguistic and socio-cultural identity development.

At the same time, many Chinese scholars were also investigating the culture shock of international students in China. An earlier scholar is Liu (1995). She believes that international students in China have to experience adaptation to the living environment and cultural differences. However, she did not conduct

longitudinal research on these adaptations but only proposed the structure and content. Lyu (2000) divided 112 European and American international students into three groups according to the length of study abroad in China (1-3 months, 4-6 months and more than 6 months) to measure the cultural adaptation of European and American students. According to the results, she placed participants' adaptation into three main stages: the stage of sightseeing, severe cultural shock, and general cultural adaptation. Chang and Chen (2008) conducted an international study satisfaction survey of 179 international students in China. She divided the samples according to the length of their stay in China: 1-6 months, 6-12 months, 12-24 months and more than 24 months. The conclusion showed that international students who lived in China for 6-12 months were least satisfied with their life compared with the other three groups. These studies have inherited and developed the theory of culture shock from the perspective of Chinese as a second (foreign) language about the stages of adapting the Chinese culture in China. However, these studies have the same drawback as Lysgaard's (1955) study: there is no longitudinal comparison, making it hard to deeply understand a person's long-term changes.

Xu and Hu (2017) conducted a two-year long-term study on first-year and third-year undergraduate international students in China through questionnaires and interviews. The results showed that international students exhibited a more positive attitude when they first came to China feeling curious about Chinese academic and social culture. During the period of 3 months to 1 year in China, international students were more likely to experience discomfort, especially regarding language learning, interactions and attitude towards life. The international students studying in China for two years showed different degrees of adaptation and strove to become

communicators between the two cultures. In Xie (2017) Master's dissertation in the same year, she collected 49 questionnaires and conducted longitudinal observations of 13 participants one year later. Her results show that students' adaptation is dynamic. After one year of study in China, adjustment improved significantly in terms of their personal well-being, but their social and cultural adjustment and academic adjustment declined (Xie, 2017). However, it is not suggested that all students experience the same journey as so much will depend on the individual.

From the above research, it is not difficult to see that these specific international students have all experienced culture shock of varying kinds during SA, but different studies give different results. This illustrates the complexity of cultural adaptation and acculturation and the possible idiosyncrasies that may play a part. Different influencing factors may restrict or encourage the degree of adaptation of international students, as each person has their own experience of studying abroad based on their individual situation. This highlights the importance of conducting long-term, in-depth qualitative research that analyses independent stories to better understand different stages of cultural adaptation and how it could influence and shape the cultural identity. In this next part, I will explore international students' possible adaptations further, and how these adaptations may impact international students' sense of self.

2.7.2.3 Adaptations through the SA process. Research has shown that personal identity, race, values, beliefs, and acquired target language level influence students' possible adaptations during the acculturation process (Adams & Van de Vijver, 2017; Berry, 2005; Sam & Berry, 2010). Study Abroad students may find diverse ways to adapt, and to deal with significant variations in cultural differences. Berry (1980) calls these, *acculturation strategies* and divides strategies into attitudes

and behaviours. Attitude refers to an individual's preference as to how to adapt to a culture, and behaviour refers to actual actions. Attitudes and behaviours are manifested through daily interactions across cultures (Berry et al., 1989).

Coincidentally, Ward and his colleagues (1996) divided cross-cultural adaptation into two domains: psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Psychological adaptation refers to people's feelings, such as the sense of well-being and satisfaction. Sociocultural adaptation refers to the ability to "fit in", which means acquiring, negotiating, and interacting with the host culture (Ward, 1996). Ward and Kennedy (1999) believe that although these two adaptations are interrelated, they are conceptually and practically different. Psychological adjustment is related to feelings and emotions. It is mainly affected by personality, life changes, coping styles and social support (Ward, 2020), such as relationship satisfaction (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward et al., 2020; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000), use of humour (Longo, 2010), psychological difficulties such as loneliness and stress (Chataway & Berry, 1989; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000). In contrast, sociocultural adjustment is defined in terms of behavioural competences, which are more influenced by acquisition of the host culture and of corresponding social skills (Ward et al., 2001). It mainly includes the length of time spent living in the host country, fluency in the target language (also reviewed in language development), cultural identity in relation to the host culture, interaction with host country nationals, and the impact of cultural distance (Bonache et al., 2016; Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). The two kinds of adaptation complement each other and play an important role in shaping people's identities. For example, a person may know the behaviour of the target community and be able to follow it, but may not fully accept it psychologically, so that their inner identity may still be more inclined to fit their own

national culture (Ward et al., 2001). On the other hand, some individuals may partly adapt to the target culture while also retaining their national identity. These processes are inextricably linked to how individuals see themselves and how they see the relationship between themselves and the social world (Ward et al., 2001). Therefore, both psychological and sociocultural adaptation have an impact on identity formation and development (Ward et al., 2001). In the following part, I will review the studies of the developing sense of self, which is mainly related to the internal factors; and the developing relationship with others, which is mainly related to the external factors.

2.7.2.3.1 The developing sense of self through SA. Berry proposed that acculturation faces two issues related to the subject's group orientation and other group orientations: 1. Preferences for maintaining one's own original culture and identity; 2. Participating in a new society, preferences for engagement and integration with other sociocultural groups (Berry, 1980, 2005). Berry (1997) proposed a multicultural strategy based on the two issues above: *Integration*, *assimilation*, *separation* and *marginalisation*. *Integration* refers to being interested in the daily interactions of the host country while maintaining one's own culture. *Assimilation* refers to sojourners trying to engage in daily cultural interactions in the host country without wishing to retain their original cultural identity. *Separation* means avoiding daily interactions with people in the host country in order to maintain one's original cultural values. *Marginalisation* means that, for personal reasons such as discrimination or exclusion the target language community, sojourners do not want to retain their original cultural identity, but, at the same time, are not interested in other cultural groups and are unwilling to integrate (Berry, 1997, 2005).

Berry (1997; 2005) believes that this fourfold paradigm mainly involves issues in cultural attitudes, identities, or practices in acculturation research. In this fourfold paradigm, the position of international students is not fixed, and it is not easy to classify their study experience into one of the categories. Studying abroad is a long-term process, as is the adaptation of overseas students. They will experience different situations and encounter various opportunities and challenges during this time. Therefore, the adaptation of foreign students moves between different strategies and may even overlap between strategies (Berry, 1997; Lee & Yoo, 2004; Sam & Berry, 2006).

However, the fourfold paradigm is also controversial. For example, some scholars believe that this strategy lacks practicality and interpretability. Psychological and cultural analyses are also not enough to effectively explain the differences between different groups (Boski & Kwast-Welfeld, 1998; Rudmin, 2003; Weinreich, 1998). Nonetheless, Ward showed by a t-test that the sojourners who adopted the integration strategy had the lowest levels of depression; that is to say, they had a better emotional state than the sojourners who adopted other strategies (Berry, 2005; Hui et al., 2015; Kieran & Hodgetts, 2019; Ng et al., 2017). The integration strategy is considered the most positive, as international students who adopt this strategy not only retain respect for their own national culture but also demonstrate a willingness to participate in and accept the new culture. This enables them to establish a bicultural identity more easily, as they can find a sense of belonging in both cultures (Berry, 2005). Chen (2004) took as her theme the cross-cultural interpersonal communication between nine Chinese students studying in the United States and the local residents. Through observation and interviews with the students, she conducted a qualitative study based on the dual identities of *outsiders* and

insiders to explore the influence of culture on self-identity, the effects of interpersonal relationships, and how these effects reconstructed the cultural identity of the self.

“Outsider” refers to the sense of alienation experienced by international students, while “insider” refers to their sense of belonging in the US community. She believes that if Chinese international students want to achieve successful cross-cultural communication in the United States, they need to rebuild their cultural identity. The rebuilding strategy is an internalised process, including self-adaptation, self-transcendence, and self-repositioning (Chen, 2004). During the process of studying abroad, Chinese students in that research rebuilt their sense of selves and experienced uncertainty and insecurity as “outsiders” in the process of cultural integration. Some students even developed feelings of inferiority. This coincides with the concept of "marginalization" proposed by Norton (2013) in her study of immigrant women’s engagement in the Canadian community. From my perspective, this may be due to the different status of English and Chinese in the world and the power imbalance (Norton, 2013) behind it. As such, I am interested in exploring whether the opposite result would emerge for native English speakers studying Chinese in China.

In China, Rui (2008) drew on Berry’s (2005) fourfold paradigm to discuss the adaptation of Korean international students to Chinese and Korean cultures from the perspective of social identity. Through qualitative-based and quantitative-based research methods (mixed methods), Rui divides data into three modes: the separative type, the transitional type, and the integrative type. The separative type means that the student only identified with Korean culture and had little or no connection with Chinese society even in China, except for studying. The transitional type means that the student understood their original motivation to study abroad and tried to communicate with Chinese people so as to enter Chinese society, but most

of their interactions had mainly instrumental and mixed purposes. The integrative type means that the student's Korean cultural identity was maintained, but on the other hand, the student established a personal social network with the Chinese that did not have only instrumental purposes. Gradually, these tendencies formed an integrated international student with the intercultural identity of the two countries. The feedback of these students on studying abroad was also more positive than that of the other two types, and their attitude towards the cultures of the two countries was also relatively positive.

In going through some kind of adaptation, international students will constantly face emotional, social and cultural adjustments (Berry, 2005; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). They may obtain positive changes through gaining self-esteem or improving life satisfaction (Sam, 2001; Wei et al., 2008), or they may undergo some negative changes due to various stressors, such as insomnia (Kaczmarek et al., 1994) or anxiety (Sümer et al., 2008). As a result, literature increasingly emphasises the importance of social support for international students (Bender et al., 2019). These supports include the various material and spiritual supports that international students receive during their study and life in the host country.

For example, Ramsay et al. (2007) divided social support into four types: emotional support, practical support, informational support and social companionship support, through research on international first-year students in Australia. The study found that international students needed more emotional support, practical support and information support than local students perhaps because they had left behind their usual sources of support such as friends and family. Shu et al. (2020) surveyed 276 international students' perceptions of social support received from multiple sources (friends, family, and students). The results showed that certain supports,

such as school and friend support, are more conducive to cultural adaptation than other aspects of support. Emotional support for international students is essential. Therefore, it is suggested that schools should promote students' interaction with the host country to achieve better intercultural adaptation (Shu et al. 2020).

Chinese schools support international students in three aspects (Ministry of Education of People's Republic of China, 2019). First, the Chinese government and universities have set up a variety of scholarships and grants for international students to provide timely assistance to those in need. Second, unlike the previous preferential policies for overseas students (Li & Zhai, 2021), the policy gradually adopts the same attitude towards overseas students as towards Chinese students, so as to help overseas students better experience the real life of Chinese college students and help them integrate into Chinese culture and society. Third, activities such as "Chinese Bridge" should be held to encourage foreign students to learn Chinese and promote exchange and understanding between Chinese and foreign cultures. Although such support can be beneficial in helping students adapt to life in China, it's important to note that acceptance and integration levels may vary among individuals.

Baba and Hosoda (2014) investigated factors resulting in international student stress and the relationship between social support and intercultural adaptation. The results showed that social support directly affects intercultural adaptation and is a mediator between stress and interculturality. However, the results showed that social support did not significantly buffer the adverse effects of stress. Bender et al. (2019) systematically assessed the support for international students. The final data showed that mixed sources of support, regardless of host or compatriot nationality, are more influential than a single source. Unfortunately, the results do not differentiate

between positive and negative psychological adjustment influenced by social support. Nonetheless, social support is still regarded as an essential part of helping students adapt to the host country.

Another important factor affecting the adaptation of international students is possible stereotypes and prejudices held by individuals. The term stereotypes refers to the specific knowledge (Starr-Glass, 2018) of people in a certain group towards a group outside them. In other words, pictures in our heads this reflects large culture images of certain groups according to generalised characteristics, e.g. Scots are mean and Americans are loud (Lippmann, 2004). Stereotypes are rooted in the classification of social groups, achieving self-reinforcement (Rosenthal & Babad, 1985), and becoming pervasive in the cultural world. International students need to confront them and realise that they themselves are a subject of stereotypes since they look different from the locals or the locals may harbour some stereotypes about their home country (Starr-Glass, 2018). In foreign countries, they may find they perceive others in relation to such stereotypes; however, this does not arise from the actual interaction, but from moderation by the prism of stereotypes (Osland & Bird, 2000).

Stereotypes in themselves do not lead to discrimination, but when negative stereotypes of a group appear, or the stereotyped group experiences fear of being negatively judged by the outside world (Spencer et al., 2016), the threat of stereotypes may arise.

People in other countries may hold stereotypes of China (Shi et al., 2016). In a much earlier study by Katz and Braly (1933), a survey of 100 college students at Princeton University in the United States showed that their stereotypes of the Chinese included descriptions such as superstitious, cunning, conservative, tradition-

loving, loyal to family ties, and industrious (Katz & Braly, 1933). In 1969, Karlins et al. (1969) conducted a similar survey, again of college students at Princeton. The stereotype of China mainly included loyalty to family relations, love of tradition, diligence, and quietness. In 2001, a survey by Madon et al. (2001) found that the main feature of the European-American stereotype of the Chinese was group discipline, while the main feature of the non-European-American stereotype of the Chinese was loyalty to family. Some scholars have also surveyed the stereotypes of foreigners in China. For example, Zhao (2012) surveyed international students in Shanghai. She found that Shanghainese (a Chinese dialect) had the most stereotypes of “activeness” and industriousness, which is relatively positive.

It can be seen that the stereotypes of “quiet” and “active” are somewhat in conflict. This also illustrates Chen's (2004) point that people who have never been to China mainly rely on the mass media for their stereotypes of China. After arriving in China, if they judge the country based on these limited personal experiences, there may arise stereotypes different from the previous ones, or stereotypes may even be eliminated.

At the same time, through interviews, Yang (2005) found that Chinese people also have stereotypes of international students studying in China. Especially in the case of international students from African and Latin American countries, hostility and suspicion might arise because of the lack of knowledge of these countries. In particular, Gillespie (2014) study pointed out that international students from Africa have experienced somehow racial, factual, and prejudice-related comments in China.

Stereotypes may be prevalent in the minds of both international students and Chinese people, when first meeting each other and these may to some extent,

create obstacles to the cross-cultural interpersonal communication of international students in China (Chen, 2004).

There is little research on Chinese stereotypes of British people. Based on my own anecdotal experiences these can reflect very traditional or even old-fashioned ideas such as being gentlemanly or elegant, taking afternoon tea, loyalty to the royal family, fish and chips, constant rain, and being good at football. Although no specific research has confirmed the particular weight of these stereotypes in Chinese minds. According to Chen's (2004) research on stereotypes and studying in China, Chinese people's stereotypes of British people could also influence British students of Chinese studying abroad in China to some degree. It is because if Chinese people have a misunderstanding of British people, both Chinese people and British students may find it difficult to communicate with each other or may even keep their distance.

2.7.2.3.2 The developing relationship with others – sociocultural adaptation. Different scholars have different views on the dimensions of sociocultural adaptation. Black et al. (1991) divide sociocultural adaptation into three dimensions – general adaptation, working adaptation and interactive adaptation. Selmer (1999) argues that sociocultural adaptation not only consists of adaptation to the environment but should also include adaptation to work demands, interaction with the host country, and adaptation to non-work environments. In the same year, Shaffer et al. (1999) explained these three dimensions: general adaptation means that people feel comfortable in a non-working environment; interactive adaptation means feeling comfortable interacting with local people; and working adaptation means feeling comfortable in assignments during the process. This model has had wide influence and is cited and supported by numerous studies (Gelfand et al., 2007; Maddux et al., 2021; Takeuchi et al., 2005). However, Palthe (2004) suggested that

the degree of sociocultural adaptation is complex and variable; it is not isolated in each dimension but is multifaceted.

Meanwhile, Furnham and Bochner (1982) first proposed the concept of “cultural learning”. They believe that the main task of sojourners is not to adapt to new cultures but to learn their salient features. In his view, sojourners encounter social difficulties in the host country because they lack the necessary cultural knowledge and skills, which leads to discomfort. In other words, cross-cultural adaptation is a process of acquiring the cultural knowledge and skills of the host country. Searle and Ward (1990) studied the impact of international students' developing cultural identity and value differences on sociocultural adaptation. The results led to the conclusion that two significant factors affect sociocultural adaptation: cultural identity and cultural knowledge. The former refers to the degree of identification with the host country's culture. For example, if they have a strong sense of identity with their own nation's culture, sojourners will be less willing to learn and adapt to the culture of the host country (Searle & Ward, 1990). The latter is an understanding of all aspects of the host country's cultural knowledge, such as politics, geography, history, and lifestyle.

As early as the 1980s, Bochner et al. (1985); Furnham and Bochner (1982) conducted a comparative empirical study on social difficulties and social relations among 150 international and 50 local students in London, Oxford and Cambridge. The results showed that cultural distance was significantly associated with the degree of difficulty experienced in the host county for international students. That is to say, the greater the cultural distance between the home country and the host country, the more the social difficulties for international students. Research also shows that these international students found the most challenging situation in the

host country to be building and maintaining relationships with locals. Their usual types of friends still came from their home country.

Since then, many studies have focused on the relationship between cultural distance and cultural-social adaptation (Demes & Geeraert, 2014; Galchenko & Van De Vijver, 2007; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). These studies all confirmed the negative correlation between cultural distance and sociocultural adaptation. At the same time, studies such as Maundeni (2001), Neri and Ville (2008) and Rienties et al. (2013) confirm that international students develop deeper relationships with people of the same or closely related culture when they study in the host country.

However, Maundeni (2001) argues that excessively close relationships with people of the same culture will negatively affect learning of the target language and sociocultural adaptation to the host country. At the same time, Kim (2000) believes that the above behaviours may provide short-term support for the sojourners' sociocultural adaptation. Still, it could be argued that it is important to build friendships with local people in the host country in the long run in order to engage with the target community. Hendrickson et al. (2011) investigated the friendship network, social interactions, homesickness and learning satisfaction of 84 international students. According to the results, international students did not indicate that the friends they made in the host country were mainly from their home country. But the study also showed that international students with a higher proportion of friends from host countries claimed to be more satisfied with their study-abroad life and to experience less homesickness. Lei (2003, 2004) divides the social interaction objects of international students in China into three categories according to cultural background: Chinese, natives, and people from other countries; simultaneously, life activities are divided into two categories: learning activities and non-learning

activities. Studies have shown that international students interact most frequently with Chinese people when they are engaged in learning activities and relatively frequently interact with people from their own countries and other countries when they are not learning (that is, in daily life). This study also shows that, to a certain extent, exchanges between international students and Chinese people are still engaged in for instrumental purposes.

Moreover, for international students in China, the relationship between cultural distance and sociocultural adaptation is even more divergent from that shown in previous studies. Sun et al. (2009) conducted a survey of 341 international students in China. The results showed that European and American students had the highest sociocultural adaptation level in China, followed by students from Southeast Asia and East Asia. Chen et al. (2006) also argued that European and American students have the strongest adaptability, followed by Japanese and Korean students, the least being that of Southeast Asian students. Wei's (2015) findings are the same. She believes that this contrast is found mainly because European and American students are more open-minded about different cultures and more outgoing in seeking to build a new relationship than Asian students. They do not mind a strange community around Chinese people, and they are relatively open to different cultures. Additionally, they may have prepared well psychologically for studying and living in China. They thus may have relatively strong adaptability.

2.7.2.3.3 Academic adaptation. In sociocultural adaptation, the educational environment faced by international students can also be a problem. Although academic stress is not unique to international students, the newly increased second language anxiety and the pressure of the new educational environment may exacerbate the academic stress of international students compared with learning in a

native language environment (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Hashim and Zhiliang (2003) tested the stressors of African and Western international students studying in China and reported that study stress was one of the most common stressors.

In addition to the above-mentioned reasons, international students may experience adjustment pressures due to their academic expectations of themselves and expectations of the education and services they receive during their study-abroad period (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). For example, after arriving in the host country, international students may expect to adapt to the new course quickly, and their academic performance can be as good as or even better than that in the home country (Mori, 2000). However, due to possible incompatibility of various aspects of studying and life, their grades may be lower than they expected, which might perhaps negatively impact their adaptation (Chen, 1999; Oyeniyi et al., 2016). International students may also be pressured by their home schools or families, who expect them to achieve better academic results during their study abroad, which may place further pressure on their academic adaptation (Chen, 1999).

At the same time, when international students are not satisfied with the educational services they receive during their study abroad, or when it is difficult to adapt to the teaching style of the host country, this also would increase the difficulty of their academic adaptation. For example, Aubrey's (1991) study shows that students from countries that place more emphasis on memorisation may find it difficult to adapt to Western universities' educational models, which focus on the development of critical thinking. In addition, studies such as Elliott and Lukeš (2008) and Yakunina et al. (2013) found challenges for international students in adapting to the teaching methods and teaching styles of their destination countries.

Dealing with teacher-student identity and teacher-student relationships is also a concern for international students (Lieberman, 1994). Focusing on the classroom as a learning space, it is thought that students construct a sense of learning self by interacting with tutors and with others (Cummins, 2001; Taniguchi, 2000). It can be argued that in the international classes, students should learn to hold a critical attitude towards their own culture and the host culture, as well as towards other classmates' cultural background (Fantini, 2009). By understanding and respecting different cultures within one classroom, students may have more opportunities to communicate with each other and develop a sense of belonging in the class community. This may reduce potential conflicts between different cultures, such as conflicts between different religions (Malsbary, 2014). Meanwhile, it could be argued that tutors should also spend time understanding students' world views and identities. In other words, the relationship between students and tutors should be built on respect and trust, but this may not always be the case (Cummins, 2001). That is to say, there is often a power differential created through the interactions between students and tutors, and such power could influence students' perspectives and beliefs, creating change in their identity and even in their role in the social world (Cummins, 2001).

Liu (2005) started with the differences between Chinese and Western cultures and analysed the differences in the relationship between teachers and students in Western countries and China. For example, Western students in universities can directly call their teachers by teachers' first names, but in China, students must use the title "Teacher". Actually, "Teacher" is not just a title but also conveys respect for and politeness towards the teacher (Liu, 2005).

Of course, there are also studies showing that academic stress is not directly related to adaptation during study abroad (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008). Like other aspects of acculturation, academic adaptation varies from individual to individual. Academic adaptation, like developing sense of self and sociocultural adaptation, may play a very important role for international students as they study and live in the host country, but evidence is mixed. Both local and international students may appear to have a similar superficial identity as students but there may be subtle or more explicit aspects of the teaching and learning.

2.7.3 Hybridity and self (HS) through the lens of Study Abroad

Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) argue that when international students have become accustomed to or have adapted to life in the host country and return to the home country, they will also experience a culture shock. On this basis, more and more scholars have noticed this phenomenon and put forward the term *reverse cultural shock* (Gaw, 2000; Gill, 2010). This means that after the international students adapt to life in the new culture, they need some time to re-acculturate when they come back to their home country. Similarly to the culture shock model, the influences of the reverse culture shock also depend on individual experience, e.g., the original cultural background, length of stay abroad, and their acculturation or otherwise in the new community (Gaw, 2000). Dettweiler et al. (2015) also show students' reverse cultural shock after returning home from a six-month study abroad. Presbitero (2016) studied the relationship between cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003) and cultural adaptation of international students, and the results show that reverse cultural shock is negatively correlated with students' sociocultural adaptation. In other words, the more students experience reverse culture shock, the more they will suffer from adapting to their original home country's culture. At the

same time, cultural intelligence could alleviate the pressure caused by the reverse cultural shock to a certain extent.

If studying abroad is viewed as a holistic experience, then this experience may have some specific effects on the identity of participants (Barron, 2003; Kinginger, 2011; Regan et al., 2009). For example, Kinginger (2004) conducted a four-year follow-up study of an international (American) student in France. She was originally born into a working-class family. After returning to the United States on completion of her studies, she believed she was no longer a “homeless” person but a French graduate student. She could fulfil her desire to be a language educator and help more people learn a new language. From this participant's viewpoint, the relationship between herself and the social world had changed. Wilson et al. (1996) also proposed the concept of “transnational imagination”, whereby the sojourning experience may build connections between the travellers and others who share the same or similar experiences abroad. For international students, studying abroad may involve established relationships with other international students from the same country as themselves, or may lead to building relationships with alumni of the foreign university, after their return home (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015).

Block (2007) also proposed that SA increases students’ identification with their own country, which refers to their national identity. As Heusinkveld (1997) said, the most significant shock may not be the collision with a new culture but rather the influence of native culture in shaping one's own identity and behaviours. Gu and Schweisfurth (2015) investigated Chinese students' return experience after studying in the UK. They discovered that their participants reinforced a strong sense of being Chinese, but simultaneously developed a self-consciously international horizon, which highlights the benefits of SA programmes in reinforcing national identity,

promoting intercultural understanding, and facilitating the development of a mutual cultural identity.

In addition, some authors have proposed that SA students may also find their self-knowledge and self-awareness have been enhanced in some way. Aveni (2005) studied changes in the self-awareness of international students in the United States after studying abroad and found that students gained a better understanding of their own culture and the target culture. Meanwhile, they discovered that they became more confident, independent and tolerant towards different circumstances. Patron (2007) studied the identity of French students who experienced culture shock and language shock and issues around the nature of their identity and self-awareness during their study time in Australia and highlighted the value of SA programmes in helping students develop the skills and abilities to overcome challenges such as culture shock and language difficulties. Montgomery (2010) proposes that studying abroad allows students to form a more open, social, and independent self.

However, Benson et al. (2013) investigated two respondents from Hong Kong who had experienced English language learning in Australia. They expressed different views when they were asked about their relationship to the English language after studying in Australia. One thought that she was much closer to English, was becoming more aware of and confident in her English ability and could perceive that native speakers regarded her as an English speaker. However, another participant said that she did not learn English in order to become a member of the English-speaking community but used English as a communication tool. Such differences existed because the students' views of themselves when using English were different (Benson et al., 2013). The first participant viewed English as a key to entering the target community and tried to find a sense of belonging there, while the

second participant viewed English solely as a tool for communication. The second participant did not desire to fully engage with the target community or to assimilate, but rather wished to maintain their original cultural identity while still being able to communicate effectively. However, they both mentioned the same phenomenon: they thought they were always considered “foreigners”, no matter how good their English was. They felt that physical reasons determined this aspect, as they were Hong Kong people, and were different in appearance from Australians although it is important to acknowledge that Australia is multiracial in make-up (Benson et al., 2013). At the same time, they suggested that there were deep reasons related to cultural identity which may have affected their experiences. As Wang (2011) argued, although people try to acculturate in a new country, and some values, behaviours, and ways of thinking might change, the underlying structure of their own culture may hardly change fundamentally. This causes LLs and NSs to feel different from each other, and this difference in turn may give LLs an outsider feeling.

All these studies have shown that the whole process of studying abroad, not only a process of self-development but also a process of self-reflection. International students live in a second language society and may interact with local people during this process. They learn and adapt to a new culture and simultaneously reflect on their own culture and consider others. When they return to their home country, students may find that they are no longer the self that they used to be. Like *the third place* described by Kramsch (1993), which is an undiscovered place between the native culture and the target culture, international students may bring their own culture to exchange and negotiate with the new culture, which brings them to a new third place. In this dynamic fusion of time and space, they may find that they can shape themselves into intercultural persons (Montgomery, 2010), which means they

have both the home country self (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015) and the host country self, forming dual or multiple identities (Vertovec, 2009).

Section Four: Conceptual Frame

2.8 Research Conceptual Frame – Narrative theories of identity

I have discussed the idea that language is an essential means of making sense of identity (Clément & Norton, 2021; Darvin & Norton, 2018; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), so that as students shift towards SLA, language learning may challenge or reinforce aspects of the linguistic self. Nonetheless, when we consider the Study Abroad experience in which students are removed from the familiar and placed in an immersion experience that can potentially affect them socially and culturally, it is important to reflect on the other potential aspects of the individual that might be affected by elements beyond the linguistic. Based on my previous literature review, I conceptualised student identity in regard to the linguistic self but also in social and cultural aspects of the SA experience that might influence the individual student. However, it may also be necessary to consider other narratives around political and historical factors, such as the possible goal of the development of a sense of belonging when joining new societies and groups. These were potential areas of influencing and sensitising concepts as I later approached the data analysis, but these were open to change and possible additions as the analysis developed.

2.8.1 The Conceptual Frame develops from both literature review and data

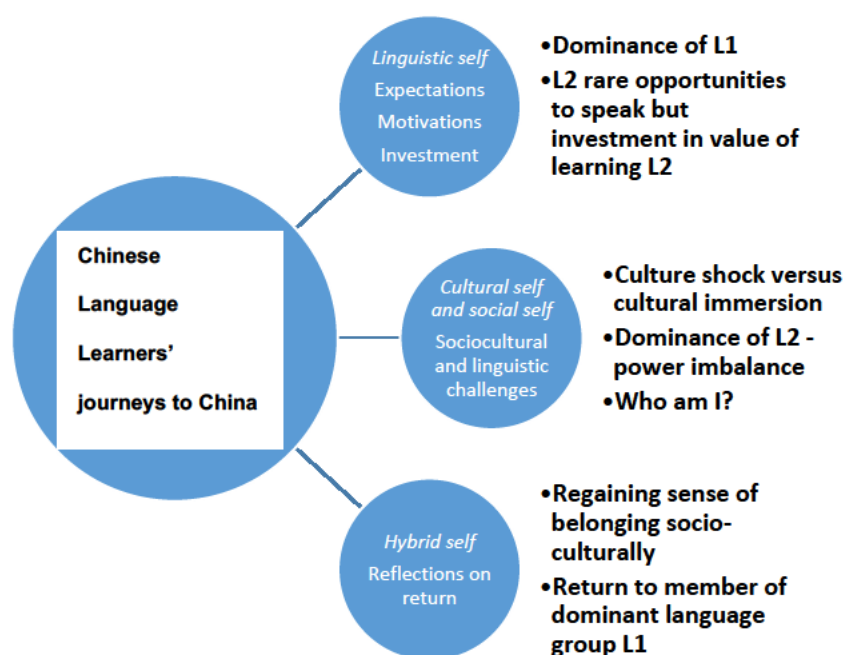
A person's whole identity consists of varied narratives conceptualised by Taylor (2009) as a web of narratives. The core element of narrative identity theory is the story, which means individuals construct his or her identity across their life through stories which are told and retold about who they are and what they believe (McAdams, 2011). In other words, life narratives are the internalized and evolving

stories that can be constructed and reconstructed from past to now, and can be also imagined for the future (McAdams, 2011). For constructing entire life stories, multiple narratives in the social world should be taken into account but the myriad narratives may be overwhelming so it is necessary to establish the key narratives that may hold particular resonance for the topic being investigated, such as a cultural elements, social backgrounds and interactions and inner thoughts, according to McAdams (2011).

Narrative identity integrates a life in time and culture (McAdams, 2011: 111). In this research, identity is seen as narrated stories of the self, dynamic, fluid and responsive to the world and sensitive to transitions across time and space (Hamilton, 2010). Transitions are seen as potentially significant as they can encourage the individual to reflect on and negotiate aspects of the self-again. I have chosen three key narratives and a potential fourth as the focus of this study, across time and space during and after transition. The three key narratives being used here are linguistic self, cultural and social self and a possible hybrid self since these are likely to have particular relevance for those undergoing a literal and figurative journey to a very different country and back again (details are in the chart below). It was evident that the cultural and social aspects overlapped strongly and I began to think in terms of the sociocultural self.

Figure 2.1

Three potential elements of selves during SA



2.8.1.1 Linguistic self

This is a term used to express how language learners perceive their sense of self and their language ability first as a dominant L1 speaker and then as a dynamic shifting linguistic self where L2 becomes the dominant mode of communication.

Uncertainty and anxiety may affect the ways in which individuals choose to engage with the world and people around them, when they learn a second language and use the second language in daily life (Ellis, 2004). In other words, when language learners speak in the target language, how to perceive language helps them to construct themselves, review and shift their sense of identity is an essential medium for interactions and building relationships with others (Montgomery, 2010). Before going abroad, they had few opportunities to speak Chinese when they left the Chinese classroom. But after arriving in China, they were entirely immersed in the Chinese context, both in class and after class. The linguistic self is mainly defined by how the learners consider themselves as language learners and as language users

(Benson et al., 2013). Therefore, in this key narrative, I planned to discuss: before the participants went to China, when they were in China, and after returning from China, how they viewed themselves using Chinese on different occasions, and whether SA had allowed their linguistic self to get evolve.

2.8.1.2 Social-cultural self

When travelling to a country with such different cultures, the participants were given the chance to tell about their initial responses and subsequent shifts in placement of the self in relation to a once foreign and later possible site of adaptations, acceptance of differences and potential sense of belonging (Montgomery, 2010).

An important support for our social self comes from our interactions with family, friends and colleagues, reinforcing who we are and reaffirming our place in the world (Ellison et al., 2010). However, in transition, these supporters and networks may no longer provide the immediacy of presence and reinforcement as before. Other people around them then may become a necessary means of reinforcing a new self, engaging in diverse activities with others in L2. Sometimes small things can play a significant role in building and reconstructing one's identity. Like something funny, locals can quickly capture what makes them laugh, but it is hard to understand and express the meaning as an outsider (Markus & Kitayama, 2003). To understand the meaning behind these, specific cultural knowledge may be required. From this point of view, when in China, for these participants, Chinese classrooms, parties, and travel might be full of unknowns and potential misunderstandings. Every gentle or bumpy collision with Chinese culture, might hold a unique cultural and social significance behind it.

As Geertz (2012) says, faced with the different ideas we observe, the first thing we do is try to understand them. If they reencounter a similar experience, what kind of identity should they perform? In the continuous contact and run-in with Chinese society and culture, some phenomena they would accept and try to imitate, some they just understood and respected. That is to say, some might merge with their original identity, and some might just stay on the surface of understanding.

In this narrative, I would like to focus on exploring how, as their Chinese proficiency improved or worsened and their understanding and engagement with Chinese culture developed or was rejected, as they moved through their SA experience and how these changes affected them, if at all, after their return.

2.8.1.3 Hybridity and self

Hybridity is the term used here to signify possibly a new blending of the self, established within the students' time in China but does not specify the kind of hybridity achieved at this stage. Being and becoming a more hybrid self as a result of negotiating and responding to a new world (Iredale, 1994:7) might be an expected change after studying abroad but here, I was open to hybridity taking different forms or even of being rejected by some participants . Studies have shown that students' experiences before and after studying abroad and returning home are dynamic and may lead to substantial changes (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). During the period of studying in China, each participant was likely to make different choices, build different friendships and become members of specific interest groups. Therefore, in this narrative, I plan to research and discuss the impacts of the participants' experience in China on them after returning to the UK. For example, the reintegration of the home country culture after returning to the UK; how they believed who they were and their relationship with others might have changed.

2.9 Summary

This chapter reviews the literature in three aspects: the development of teaching Chinese as a foreign language both in the UK and China; the development of SLA and identity research; and how the SA experience influences learners' sense of self. Firstly, I discussed the importance of the sociocultural perspective, focusing on both the cognitive and sociocultural aspects. Then, identity research, as an important branch of the sociocultural perspective, the role of language in constructing personal identity has been reviewed. Secondly, I reviewed the relationship between identity, motivation, and investment, from a poststructuralist perspective. Additionally, I examined research on identity in Chinese as a second/foreign language, and identified gaps in qualitative research, particularly in long-term studies. In the third section, I reviewed the international students' experience of study abroad from linguistic, sociocultural, and hybrid perspectives. I explored their language development, acculturation at different stages, identity transitions and changes in the relationship between themselves and the social world. At the end of this chapter, I have also explained how the conceptual frame of this research developed from the previous research and was further revised and refined through my own authentic data. At the beginning of the next chapter, I will propose a research gap based on this literature review and present my research questions and research methodology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the literature relevant to this thesis from the SLA research development, language and identity, and study abroad material. This chapter includes four sections. Section One looks at the research gap, research questions and research assumptions. Section Two examines the theoretical framework. I will illustrate the rationale for the methodology that I have used for this research and explain the reasons why I have chosen them. In Section Three, I will introduce the data collection tools that I have chosen to collect and help analyse my data and my whole research process. There will also be a discussion about the reliability and validity of qualitative data. Additionally, ethical issues have also been considered to make sure this study was completed in an ethical manner. Challenges I have faced during the research design are discussed in Section Four.

Section One: Rationale for the study

3.1 Research Gap

SLA researchers have begun to move their research focus from the fields of language teaching and learning based in sociology and anthropology to sociocultural, post-structural, and critical theory (Block, 2007; Morgan, 2007; Norton & Toohey, 2001) to engage with the world beyond the classroom. In other words, when researchers conduct research about identity in SLA, they not only focus on linguistic studies, such as input and output, but also the whole social world that different language learners inhabit.

Therefore, there is now a developing body of research that explores the relationship between identity, culture and language learning, testament to the fact that issues of identity and power are now coming to influence theories of SLA and other language education. However, when we enter into a relationship with the other

(i.e. learning in the target language country or in the native country), we put ourselves forward to experience through a series of features ascribable to a certain, defined and clear culture, expressed through a clear and defined language, so as to shape and possibly make us aware of our own identity. It could be argued that while there may be a clear, assumption about an overarching notion of culture, individuals may also engage with a variety of subcultures associated with ethnicity, family, and community.

Recently, as reviewed in Chapter 2, research about identity and learning Chinese as a second language is becoming increasingly popular, but it is mainly focused on intercultural adaptation and cultural identity and lacks a sense of dynamics and linearity (Zhou, 2020). The nature of the changing learning background during SA through learning processes, empowerment in the SLA class and cultural identity shifts when learning Chinese are seldom investigated. This study tries to contribute to the existing data in two ways:

3.1.1 A longitudinal study

As the international community's interest grows in relation to Chinese language and culture, it is still not always possible to pay attention to the concept of identity, culture and language during the period of teaching and learning Chinese. Although there have been some longitudinal studies (Chen, 2015) related to Chinese learning and identity, little research has traced the transitions of identity that may occur for the British student of Chinese during Study Abroad. Therefore, this study aims to explore the different journeys of British (Western) learners as they define and redefine the concept of who they are and who they are becoming during SA, from the position of learners themselves. It was originally intended that this research should follow certain students through this experience of living abroad but limited

recruitment meant that only a small number could be followed in this way.

Consequently, this small group was expanded to include those who had already returned from their study abroad period. For this latter group, the aim was to ask them to reflect on their journey abroad and on return. A detailed account of the participants will be given later in this chapter.

3.1.2 Theoretical development

This study used case study, informed by a poststructuralist perspective on identity, to build the narrative stories about learning Chinese and identity transition. The aim was to develop a poststructuralist frame for CLL identity using narrative identity theory and to enrich the data concerning the SA experience and CLLs.

3.2 Research questions

As pointed out above, this work used poststructuralist perspectives in establishing a theoretical position and narrative identity theory as a key conceptual frame, I proposed to investigate the experiences, beliefs and perceptions of the learners studying on an MA in Chinese (SL/FL) programme at a Scottish university during a key transitional period, that of studying abroad. Hence, the main research questions were formulated as follows:

Question 1:

1 (a) How do learners in the programme above engage with the target language culture before and after studying in Mainland China/Taiwan?

1 (b) In what ways, if any, do these learners believe that their experiences in Mainland China/Taiwan have affected their engagement with Chinese and Chinese culture?

Question 2:

2 (a) How does the overseas experience influence students' sense of self in their different educational and social communities?

2 (b) How do the UK/Chinese university tutors of these students believe that living in Mainland China/Taiwan affects them and their engagement with the Chinese language and Chinese culture?

Section Two: Theoretical framework

3.3 Ontology/epistemology

At the starting point of each piece of research, it is necessary to consider the nature of the research based on key fundamental philosophical assumptions; evidence that can support the research; and the methods that can be chosen for the research (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Bernard & Bernard, 2013). Therefore, reflections on the nature of reality became important as I determined my key ontological and epistemological beliefs which, in turn, would influence the shape of the research project, helping to ensure coherence of the research process and the quality of the findings (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). Ontology is the study of reality and being (Crotty, 2020). It sits alongside epistemology informing the theoretical perspective. Epistemology is about how one acquires knowledge of reality, which deals with "*the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis*" (Hamlyn, 2010). For an individual theoretical perspective, ontology and epistemology are often merged together, which embodies the way of understanding what is and what it means to know (Crotty, 2020).

To establish a clear plan, Crotty (2020: 2) mentioned four self-answered questions – "What methods do we propose to use? What methodology governs our choice and use of methods? What theoretical perspective lies behind the methodology in question? What epistemology informs this theoretical perspective?"

Crotty (2020) has stated that there are different arguments and discussions about the terminology related to these four elements. He gave an example that symbolic interactionism, ethnography and constructionism are compared and simply listed as methodologies, approaches and perspectives respectively. However, from his point of view, these are not comparable but related to each other, or may even compete, due to the nature of epistemology. Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) also discuss possible research positions based on ontological and epistemological assumptions, using four main theoretical stances, which are Positivist, Post-positivist, Constructivist, and Pragmatist, which are shown in the following table.

Table 3.1

Theoretical stances

Theoretical stance <i>Positivist</i>	
Ontological assumptions – nature of reality <i>Realism</i>	Epistemological assumptions – how can it be known? <i>Objectivism</i>
Objective reality Independent of human perception Reality can be fully captured	Truth of reality can be known Scientific method can best measure this reality A theory or hypothesis is often starting point to be proved or disproved (deductive reasoning – theory driven)
Theoretical stance <i>Post-positivist</i>	
Ontological assumptions <i>Critical realism</i>	Epistemological assumptions <i>Modified objectivism</i>
Objective reality but doubt as to what extent people can know it	Pure objectivism not possible. Probable ‘truth’ may be possible Reduction of bias important
Theoretical stance <i>Constructivism</i>	
Ontological assumptions <i>Relativist</i> – multiple meanings within historical and social context	Epistemological assumptions Knowledge <i>socially constructed</i>
‘Reality’ constructed within historical and social contexts by individuals. Multiple perspectives may lead to multiple meanings in data	Reality as subjectively constructed by the individual Importance of interpretation of ‘reality’
Theoretical stance <i>Pragmatism</i>	
Ontological assumptions – various	Epistemological assumptions
Strong emphasis on what works rather than issues around knowledge and truth	Deals with different viewpoints and tries to create coherence

Source: *Using case study in education research* (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013, p. 26)

After reviewing the key terms, I went back to my research questions, and considered what the theoretical perspective and epistemology of my study were. The key purpose of my research is about investigating the transitions of the linguistic self, social-cultural self and possible hybridity before, during and after study abroad. Each participant was given the chance to tell narratives based on personal, socio-cultural and geographical contexts. Positivism and Post-positivism believes that the truth of reality can be known; facts can be observed and measured (Bernard & Bernard, 2013) which is very far from my position focusing on the social construction of knowledge. Interpretivism, which developed from critical arguments of Positivism with the subjective perspective, believes humans can create meaning in depth, which could contain deep variables and factors according to different contexts (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). According to this, beliefs of the interpretivist approach is Relativist ontology, which means reality is known through justifying the meanings within social, experiential, and historical backgrounds (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). Participants in my study are people and their rich views and beliefs and one person's views and beliefs could also change in different contexts and conditions. Thus, multiple views might result in multiple meanings in my data. Considering all the above, the ontological assumption of my research is Relativist, so the approach to epistemology would be constructivism which believes that world is understood through our own perceptions and social interactions with it. The social construction of reality and its interpretation place this research very clearly within the interpretive approach to research.

3.4 Theoretical Assumptions underpinning research -- Poststructuralist

Theories of Language

In this socially constructed world, identity is not static and inflexible. When learning a second language, it is not only a process of achieving linguistic knowledge, but also a social practice (Norton, 2010). Such a perspective is rooted in poststructuralist theories of language and identity, which have become increasingly popular for researchers who want to research language education in the last few decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the 21st century (Bourdieu, 1977; Kramsch, 2010; Kress, 1989). This theory originates in the structuralist theories of language (De Saussure, 1916), which focused on the idealized linguistic patterns and structures that could lead language users to understand and apply the language. Saussure (1916) pointed out language is a system of symbols, which ensured symbolic meanings in each linguistic community. This theory has had enormous influence on the field of linguistics and applied linguistics for several decades. However, when dealing with the actual examples of language phenomena, which could be affected by authentic contexts, such as temporary errors and memory lapses, these would not be treated as the idealized patterns. Therefore, this judgement cannot explain conflicts over the different social classes of society (Norton, 2010), which means different people can hold disparate meanings by using the same signs (symbols) in one linguistic community. However, poststructuralists mainly focus on the individual and society, and take the position that the symbolic practices of communities are places of struggle (Norton, 2010). Bakhtin (1981), one of the most famous scholars, who contributes on developing poststructuralist theories of language, considers language as a process to create meanings for using in specific speaking communities, rather than as an idealized form of vocabulary and

structures. That is to say, poststructuralism is applied in language education to develop the relationship between the social theory and the real class activities (Norton & Morgan, 2013).

In 1998, Gass argued that the poststructuralist theories typical for second language learning should be formalised. As mentioned in the last section, Norton is one of the pioneers in this area, following and extending a poststructuralist approach to identity. She (2014) also argues that poststructuralist theories have valuable meaning for classroom settings about what could be “a good teacher” and “a good learner”. By building on poststructuralist theories, she observed English language classroom practice including both reading tests and discussion sessions in South Africa (1995). She found that these practices showed the relationship between language in different social contexts, shifting identities and exchanging power in different communication sessions, which could directly influence the outcome of language learning and teaching (Norton & Morgan, 2013). This indicates that teachers should consider how to construct learner identities with meaning in the multiple conditions, and how to utilize this to improve the educational results (Norton, 2014).

Moreover, Block (2007) points out that the poststructuralist theory of identity is a good choice for researchers who want to discover the relationship between identity and SLA. He detailed reviews of the development of identity in SLA research from research by Firth and Wagner (1997) and discussed a poststructuralist approach to identity. Block (2007) argues that even though Norton (2000) did not provide examples of recorded interactions, she found remarkable changes of economic, cultural and social capital from three of her research participants who emigrated to Canada. As for the foreign language (FL) and study abroad (SA) contexts,

expectations of academic achievement may be greatly different between different social classes (Block, 2007). Therefore, he suggested examining identity work in FL and SA contexts from the perspective of social class.

Overall, poststructuralist theories have come to dominate the SLA research field and have the potential to focus on the relationship between the learning context and learner identities. The main implications of using poststructuralist theories to explore learner identities in transition periods underline a view of identity which is dynamic and malleable. Within this theoretical position, even though much research has been investigated, there are still many points that need to be explored, especially for adult learners learning the target language for a period in the target language country and then coming back to their own country to continue learning. This is the reason why I plan to follow poststructuralist theory as my theoretical positioning and choose narrative identity theory as my key conceptual frame to examine identity work in the SL/FL and SA contexts (in my case, Chinese as a second/foreign language).

3.5 Narrative theories of identity

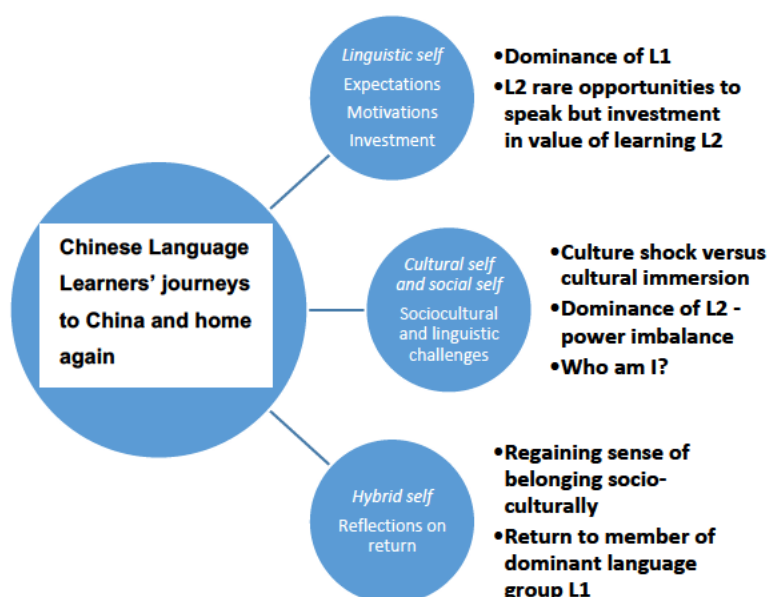
A person's whole identity consists of varied narratives conceptualised by Taylor (2009) as a web of narratives. The core element of narrative identity theory is the story, which means individuals construct his or her identity across their life through stories which are told and retold about who they are and what they believe (McAdams, 2011). In other words, life narratives are the internalized and evolving stories that can be constructed and reconstructed from past to now and can be also imagined for the future (McAdams, 2011). For constructing entire life stories, multiple narratives in the social world should be taken into account but the myriad narratives may be overwhelming so it is necessary to establish the key narratives that may hold

particular resonance for the topic being investigated, such as cultural elements, social backgrounds and interactions and inner thoughts, according to McAdams (2011).

Narrative identity integrates a life in time and culture (McAdams, 2011: 111). In this research, identity is seen as narrated stories of the self, dynamic, fluid and responsive to the world and sensitive to transitions across time and space (Hamilton, 2010). Transitions are seen as potentially significant as they can encourage the individual to reflect on and negotiate aspects of the self-anew. I have chosen three key narratives as the focus of this study, across time and space during and after transition. The three key narratives being used here are linguistic self, cultural and social self and a possible hybrid self since these are likely to have particular relevance for those undergoing a literal and figurative journey to a very different country and back again (details are in the chart below, which have also been reviewed in Chapter 2). It was evident that the cultural and social aspects overlapped strongly and I began to think in terms of the socio-cultural self.

Figure 3.1

Reminder of the conceptual frame



Section Three: Research method: a case study

3.6 A qualitative approach

Quantitative research, qualitative research and mixed-methods are all important to educational research (Hamilton & Ravenscroft, 2018). Quantitative research develops from the positivist position, which aims to seek and explain the facts by doing objective measurement and quantitative analysis (Bernard & Bernard, 2013). The researchers' aim is to be able to quantify the participants' responses and then interpret their results and make the decisions. Often, the researcher is an outsider and has no influence on the results of a quantitative study (Arghode, 2012). Qualitative research is rooted in the phenomenological/interpretative paradigm (Firestone, 1987). In qualitative research, the researcher participates in the research, in the natural environment, through various methods, like interviews and observations, to explore the meanings that the participants understand, and try to find the phenomena and processes that bring these meanings (Arghode, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). As Wiersma and Jurs (2009) mention, *meaning* is perceived and experienced by the participants who are being studied, rather than imposed by the researcher who is studying them.

To decide which approach suited my research best, I needed to go back to the theoretical framework. As I mentioned in the previous part, the ontological assumption of this study is *Relativist*, which believes that world is experienced based on our own perceptions of it. From participants' perspectives, this study aimed to discover their changes of view, beliefs and sense of selves towards Chinese language and culture. I needed to try to explain how these phenomena were constructed, rather than simply showing whether they are constructed. Therefore, I participated in this study through getting to know participants and their stories and

trying to understand possible shifts in a sense of self. I believed my research should adopt a qualitative approach reflecting my ontological and epistemological positions. In this way, the data collected, would be more fully and deeply understood via a qualitative approach (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013).

3.7 Case study

3.7.1 A case study in educational research

It is believed by many that the use of case studies in educational research can strengthen our understanding of contexts, communities and individuals (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). From the 1970s, case study began to gain importance in the UK and the US. In the past nearly 50 years, although scholars hold different ideas about the nature, forms, designs, and descriptions of case study (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013), case study, as a genre (Elliott & Lukeš, 2008), has played an important role in the field of educational research. Based on the aim of capturing the information about the case itself, rather than the whole phenomena, an instrumental case study can obtain rich data through the use of different data collection forms, conducting in-depth research on a certain aspect of the case, and capture the complexity of relationships, beliefs and attitudes within bounded units which are the cases.

In Stake's book (1995) *The art of case study research*, considering the nature and different purposes of case study in social science research, he has divided case study into three main forms, *intrinsic*, *instrumental* and *collective*. *Intrinsic case study* tries to capture the complete case for the purpose of gaining a more complete understanding of the individuals, departments, or institutions that build up the case, to learn about the uniqueness of the phenomenon. *Instrumental case study* places greater emphasis on one aspect, focus, or issue of the case, to develop a wider

appreciation of a phenomenon. *Collective case study* examines multiple cases simultaneously or in sequence, attempting to develop a broader understanding of a specific issue (Stake, 1995). However, the three forms of case studies are not mutually exclusive. In a study, to investigate a specific group of people, *intrinsic case study* can be adopted firstly, to capture the entire issue of this case. Through a further understanding of an issue, it can be developed into an *instrumental case study*. Then, a *collective case study* can be carried out, considering various aspects, so as to discover more general phenomena (Crowe et al., 2011).

The three types of case study have different emphases and complement each other. All of them have conducted more in-depth research on individual cases and enriched qualitative research approaches. My reason for choosing an instrumental case study for my research is that this study focused on an aspect of the case rather than trying to capture a case in its entirety. The purpose of this study is to focus on the group of British (Westerners) students of Chinese, and to observe their interactions, communications, relationships, and practices with the social world by collecting their experience of learning Chinese in China, resulting in a deeper understanding of a SA transition and the perspectives, beliefs, and sense of selves of the members of this case.

In Hamilton & Corbett-Whitter's book (2013) *Using Case Study in Education Research*, beyond intrinsic and instrumental, they proposed five main case study models: *Reflective case study*, *Longitudinal case study*, *Cumulative case study*, *Collective case study*, and *Collaborative case study*. From their names, it is not difficult to tell the different emphases of these case studies. At first, this study seemed best suited to a *longitudinal case study* through the research questions because I wished to focus on the dynamics of the whole process. By analysing how

participants believed the relationships between themselves and others and the social world in the past, present, and future, an understanding of the identity transition might be achieved. Of course, like the three forms of case studies mentioned earlier, there would also be overlap between case studies of different models. For example, in the longitudinal research process, I also needed to interactively reflect on the participants' feelings, questions, and experiences and put forward further follow-up questions based on these phenomena and my own experience related to the reflective case study.

Overall, the qualitative case study used in this study allowed me to describe and explore better the what, why and how to probe deeper into the reasons behind the phenomenon, which could be best to answered in this way. Unfortunately, problems with recruitment meant that only a small number were able to form a longitudinal approach. Consequently, this case study became one with longitudinal elements and reflective elements.

3.7.2 Introducing the case in this research

When defining the case for this study, I had many discussions with my supervisors. At first, as my research case, I planned to invite groups with the same study background – second-year undergraduate students of Chinese who were going to study in China. However, I encountered some difficulties in recruiting volunteers (more details will be introduced in the following research process part). For these reasons at the time, I had to try to expand the scope of my research to find more volunteers who might be suitable for my research. Through various efforts, I mainly found four groups:

1. Second-year undergraduate and first-year postgraduate students of Chinese who were going to study in China.

2. Fourth-year students of Chinese who had returned from China.
3. Students of other majors with Chinese as a minor course.
4. Chinese lecturers teaching in universities.

After the four groups were identified, I was more confused, not knowing whether to identify them as four independent cases and conduct a collective case study or identify all of them as a single whole case. At this time, I asked my supervisors and read my supervisor's book (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). I thought from a different angle to consider what I wanted to discover through case study. With ideas gaining clarity, I reviewed the backgrounds of my four groups of participants. Although their learning backgrounds, Chinese proficiency, and personal experiences were quite diverse, they all had one thing in common: they all learned Chinese and had lived in China. So, I finally decided to treat all groups as a whole case and conduct narrative research on the individuals in the context. My case comprised of Chinese Language Learners (CLLs) who had spent time in China. Some I could follow as they experienced their time abroad while others would reflect back on their experiences.

3.8 Ethics in research

Ethics are defined as norms that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (Resnik, 2022). This study followed the documents formulated by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and the Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA); I abided by the two principles of respect and responsibility; sincerely respecting the knowledge and values of all participants. It was also my responsibility to ensure that no participant came to harm as a result of this research, that data were stored securely and that I took steps to protect participant identities through careful use of anonymity.

Firstly, I sent the application form for ethics to my supervisors and then to the university to get permission to carry out my research. My participants were all adults and I explained my research carefully to all the participants to ensure they understood what I wanted to do and what they would be committing to do. A written Consent Form was provided asking for permission to record the interviews (appendix 1 and 2). At the same time, I also informed them about the privacy of all data: their real names would not appear in the paper, but instead pseudonyms would be used; all data would only be used for academic research, and in the process of data processing, and would be seen by me and my supervisors and I would not discuss this with anyone else. Finally, I also informed them about the voluntary nature of their participation in this study and their right to withdraw from this study at any time without reason.

3.9 Sampling

As mentioned, the backgrounds of the student participants were all defined as British (Western) students who studied Chinese and had lived and studied in China. The background of the teacher participants was that they were native Chinese speakers teaching Chinese at university level. Below, I will describe the participants based on the four groups mentioned above. All participants' pseudonyms were derived from the first letter of their real names.

Group 1. The first group was the most critical group, and their backgrounds fitted my initial research plan -- Chinese majors who were going to study in China. They were also the group I had been wanting to focus on for the longitudinal investigation. I conducted interviews with them before departure, mid-term follow-up, and after they came back to the UK.

This group included five participants divided into two different units according to two different programmes. Their pseudonyms were Vicki, Jim, Andy, Alan and William. Vicki, Jim and Andy were classmates. They studied Chinese as second-year students at a Scottish university during the 2017-2018 academic year and studied Chinese at different universities in China from September 2018 to June 2019.

Alan and William were classmates. They were studying for a master's degree in Chinese studies at the same Scottish university as the undergraduates during the 2017-2018 academic year. They studied at the same university in Shanghai, China, from September 2018 to January 2019.

Group 2. Participants in the second group had similar backgrounds to those in the first group; they all had Chinese majors from the same Scottish university. There were 6 participants in this group. Diana, Fiona and Payne (pseudonyms) who were classmates. They had studied Chinese in China in the 2017-2018 academic year and returned to the UK for their final year in July 2018, which meant they were one year senior to the previous group of undergraduates. Charles and Neta (pseudonyms) were Vicki and Jim's (in group one) classmates, and came back to the UK in July 2019. Colby (pseudonyms) was a master's student and was enrolled in the same programme as the previous group of master's students.

Due to time constraints, I did not conduct a long-term follow-up study with this group of students but only conducted one-time semi-structured interviews. My shortage of recruits for my original focus was of concern as these new possible participants could not be followed through the process of transition as it was happening. So, despite their diverse experiences, it was a pity that I did not witness their changes, and I just listened to their stories in one-time-only interviews. However, this did not prevent them from providing rich data for my research. They

were able to reflect back on their experiences and review their perceptions of change and challenges with the benefit of some distance.

Group 3. The third group consisted of four participants: (pseudonyms) Adam, Alice, James, and Paul. Although this group was the smallest, their backgrounds were the most diverse. None of them majored in Chinese, but due to their interests in Chinese culture or for other reasons, they chose Chinese as a minor or studied Chinese at the Confucius Institute in Scotland.

I will briefly introduce their background in Chapter 5 in some detail, so I will provide only a brief introduction here. Like the second group, I conducted only one interview with them, but they provided me with rich cultural identity data from the perspectives of a non-Chinese major learner.

Group 4. Unlike the previous three groups, this group was comprised of lecturers in the Chinese language. They were Dan (Daisy) and Wei (Wendy) (pseudonyms) from a university in Scotland and a university in China, respectively. As providers of supplementary data, they described the changes they had witnessed as students set out on their SA experiences. Their focus was on Chinese teaching in the UK and teaching Chinese as a foreign language in China. It is useful background data but in retrospect, I would have liked to work more with these individuals to gain further insights into the SA process and the impact upon students.

Table 3.2

A summary table of four groups

Group	Members of the group	Type of participant	Data collected from them	Interview languages
1	5 participants Undergraduate s: Andy, Jim, Vicki;	· Chinese major; · Through this process of transitioning to and back from China	At least 2 semi- structured interviews at different stages of the transition	English: Vicki (1st); Jim (1st & 2nd); William (2nd)

	Postgraduates: Alan and William		Diary entries (although only Jim and Vicki provided these)	Chinese: Andy (2nd & 3rd); Alan (1 st & 2nd)
				Mixed Chinese and English: Vicki (2nd); Andy (1st); William (1st).
2	6 participants Undergraduate s: Charles, Diana, Fiona, Payne, Neta; Postgraduates: Colby	· Chinese as major; · Had experienced this transition in the recent past – over different periods of time in China	Single semi- structured interview	English: Charles, Diana, Fiona, Colby
				Chinese: Payne, Neta
3	4 participants Adam, Alice, James, Paul	· Chinese as a minor/optional course; · Had experienced this transition in the recent past – over different periods in China	Single semi- structured interviews	English: Adam, Alice, Paul
				Chinese: James
4	2 teacher participants Dan (Daisy) and Wei (Wendy)	· Dan (Daisy) was the tutor of the Chinese major student participants; · Wei (Wendy) was the Chinese tutor in Beijing	Single-semi structured interviews	Chinese

Note. 1st means the first interview, 2nd means the second interview, 3rd means the third interview

3.10 Methods

After clarifying the type of case study and its purpose, I needed to consider my specific research methods further in terms of data collection tools. There are various qualitative research methods. L2 learning stories are “heart and soul” sources about the relationship between language and identity in SLA research (Charles, 2012; Koki, 1998). There are two main ways of collecting L2 learning

stories data, one is autobiographical accounts, the other one is about field trips and interviews (Block, 2007). Hennink et al. (2020) has discussed in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and observations as three main methods. In-depth semi-structured interviews can effectively obtain participants' experiences and ideas and can potentially achieve a deep understanding of participants' social and cultural background (Hennink et al., 2020). On the other hand, focus group discussions are generally used to discuss a set of opinions on a socio-cultural context in a group setting to understand community norms and values (Hennink et al., 2020). Observation is to observe participants' natural behaviours and interactions in a specific social situation (Hennink et al., 2020). These methods help qualitative research to capture a depth of personal information, the breadth of multiple voices, and the authenticity of voices in a specific situation (Hennink et al., 2020).

This research planned to adopt two methods: interviews and observations based on all the above. On the one hand, through face-to-face interviews, I could gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' own views, thoughts, beliefs, and experiences. On the other hand, to make up for the lack of feedback from others, observation would allow me to directly see participants' most authentic responses and behaviours in a certain social context i.e. the language classroom (Hennink et al., 2020). Unfortunately, rules in place meant I did not have the opportunity to participate in the on-participant classroom observation as originally planned. I also did not gain permission from the participants to participate in authentic observation. Therefore, my data collection was limited to semi-structured interviews (interview topic schedules are available in Appendix 3).

Interviews can generally be divided into structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews (Leavy, 2014). As their names suggest, the structured

interview is similar to the questionnaire research logic in quantitative research, that is, to ask different participants the identical questions so that the participants' answers can be compared and then quantified. Unstructured interviews are just the opposite. Faced with the participants, the interview is not pre-set, and the interview questions emerge in the communication process. However, semi-structured interviews are situated between the two extremes. There are certain pre-set questions, but some flexible adjustments are made according to the participants' answers (Leavy, 2014). Parker (2004) argues that fully structured interviews do not exist in reality, because participants will always say more than structured questions. Sometimes, however, the answers beyond the structured part become the key to understanding the participant's structured questions (Parker, 2004). Therefore, on this basis, Leavy (2014) proposes that there is no completely unstructured interview, and even open interviews still require certain topics and directions for participants. Based on the above, semi-structured interviews were considered the most appropriate interview method in social science research (Flick, 2018). Compared to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews can better stimulate the potential of the conversation, leaving room for any angle that can be followed up during the interview process. Compared to unstructured interviews, the researcher has more control over topics and can ensure consistency in the interview questions and the direction of the overall communication meaning that participant stories can be compared and contrasted while also providing opportunities for additional data to be shared (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013).

For the researcher, it is impossible to predict what the participant will say in advance, so it is difficult to design specific questions to limit the participant to tell the story of his/her experiences when designing interview questions. Many stories

emerge during the communication between the researcher and the participant. As narrative interviews become more focused, such an interview form moves closer to the middle ground between structured and unstructured interviews, that is, semi-structured interviews. For example, Kanno (2003) conducted fieldwork by using narrative inquiry to analyse the identity narratives of Japanese students who studied or lived in North America for several years and then came back to Japan. In her book, she noted many representative narratives and tried to discover how these students found a way to balance languages and cultures between the two countries. Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) did case studies based on student teachers' narratives to explore how student teachers' values and beliefs influenced their behaviours and how to encourage these student teachers to reflect critically according to the philosophies they had learned on the PGDE programme in a Scottish university. Semi-structured interviews played an important role in these studies, capturing detailed accounts of participant experiences. In this process, the stories of the participants were described through interviews, and their lifeworld was described, which further explained the meaning behind these described phenomena (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Face-to-face interview, telephone interview, and internet interview are the three main interview media that can be used (Leavy, 2014). Different interview media have different advantages. For example, face-to-face interviews can perceive the expressions and gestures of both the participant and the researcher, making the interview lifelike and authentic (Leavy, 2014). At the same time, it can allow better follow-up, causing the participant to think profoundly and answer more complex questions (Shuy, 2003). Telephone interviewing is also a mainstream form of interviewing (Shuy, 2003), which can reduce the influence from the researcher

because the participant cannot see the researcher. Also, telephone interviews provide more possibilities for remote interviews as they are not reliant on researcher and participant having to meet in an agreed physical space, taking up time and potentially disrupted by others. Online interviews are further divided into email chats and online videos. Since the advent of the pandemic, face to face online interviews have become the norm and allow the researcher and researched to choose where they want to speak from. Exchanging emails need typing, so there is a waiting time. The advantages of writing are that it can provide the participant with a medium for expressing himself/herself. In the process of *self-transcription*, he/she can have more time for analysis and reflection (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). However, not everyone has good written communication skills, and there may be less ease than in oral interviews. Video interviews are in real-time (Mann & Stewart, 2002) and, it is easy to conduct and see each other via video, just like in person interviews. In the pandemic context of Covid-19, video interviews provided a safer and more convenient way for doing research and assured the health and safety of both parties. Based on all the above, this study used in person semi-structured interviews. I, as a researcher tried to obtain more authentic and in-depth understandings and experiences of the participants.

However, after settling on the semi-structured interviews, I started thinking about how to follow up the first group's one-year abroad study in China. At that time, under the guidance of my supervisors, the reflection diary became a possible way to follow participants on their journey.

A diary is a chronological record and commentary on the stories, thoughts and feelings experienced (Hewitt, 2017). These step-by-step records of life make hidden changes and progress visible (Elliott, 1997). For a long time, historical and

biographical researchers have used material from various diaries to analyse narratives from multiple perspectives and highlighted their essential role in constructing dynamic human historical stories (Plummer, 1983). Diaries are used as a research method in qualitative social science research to gain richness and perceptions and explore the insights emerging from human practice (Morrell-Scott, 2018). In effect, in the process of writing diaries, the participants become observers. They write down and interpret their thoughts by recording and reflecting on their experiences (Hewitt, 2017).

Dewey once put forward the concept of reflective thinking, arguing that reflection is a kind of "active, persistent and careful consideration of what has happened" (Dewey, 1910). Since then, research about how reflections influence human behaviours have not stopped. Up to now, the research on using the diary as a tool to record reflections and observe people's story construction has become mature (Moon, 2006, 2013; Schön, 2017). Therefore, recording the participant's study abroad life in diaries can capture their subjective thoughts and allow them to show an "ever changing present" (Plummer, 1983). At the same time, because there is no time limit and no interference from the researcher, they can have more time to think and reflect on their experiences and thoughts, although I did provide some advice on aspects that they might consider.

However, because the reflective diary is in written form, the participant's participation was crucial (Bryman, 2016). For example, for the participant who is not good at writing or is unwilling to write, writing a reflective diary regularly is not a small challenge. Moreover, the diary is usually perceived as personal and private. If it is open to researchers, it is challenging to consider how to deal with very private thoughts and concerns. Therefore, the reflective diary can be a good supplemental

research method, but it is not ideal for use as a primary method. To combat these issues, I gave some guidance on content to keep it focused. I also suggested that participants could consider recording rather than writing in order to avoid it becoming additional pressure. However, this became a burden for some students as they engaged with a substantial change in context and high workloads in terms of language learning.

To sum up, this study ultimately decided to use two main research methods: semi-structured interviews with all participants and reflective diaries with Group one participants. However, according to participants' willingness, two participants wrote reflective diaries only, while others chose interviews instead. Although there were not as many diaries as expected, the data were still enriched by these careful reflections on their experiences at that time. Through the in-depth dynamic understanding of each individual, I tried to discover and explain the changes in their perspectives, beliefs and sense of self that studying in China brought to them. Groups 2 and 3 experienced reflective semi structured interviews only. Now, I will introduce my plan for using these two methods.

Semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were designed for all the participants, mainly focusing on individual stories to explore their understandings, notions, beliefs about Chinese language learning and SA socio-cultural and linguistic experiences, as second/foreign language learners (Kanno, 2003). Each interviewee was interviewed individually in English or Chinese (participant choice) for at least 40 to 60 minutes per interview face-to-face or online. Group one students had been interviewed at the beginning and end of the whole process to follow up on their different experiences and relationships to their past and future selves (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). Group two and Group three

students were interviewed once only after they came back to the UK. Group Four teacher participants were also interviewed but only once, depending on their available time. All the interviews were recorded and stored safely on my password protected computer.

Student reflective diaries. The student reflective diaries were completed by Vicki and Jim in Group One, to record their experiences and reflections on engagement with the target language and culture and any motivational changes occurring. There were some guidance questions (see appendix 4.), which took them approximately half an hour to finish per diary entry. Participants were asked to write reflective diaries two or three times a month and to send them back to me once completed.

To sum up, the main data collection tool was the semi-structured interview, and the reflective diary was a supplementary method. These two methods gave me more opportunities to know participants' experiences, thoughts and beliefs. To a limited extent, this gave me a degree of triangulation by method. The main perspectives came from students but the varied nature of this group and their diverse experiences of the language and culture provided contrasting stories of time abroad. Additionally, the views of university tutors provided an additional perspective albeit a limited one.

3.11 Research process

All the interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and transcribed in full.

3.11.1 To pilot: September 2018

A pilot study can help identify some of the problems that may arise in the research process before data are formally collected (Morse et al., 2002). For

example, it can help determine whether the research questions are reasonable, identify weakness in the method of data collection, and assess the feasibility of the research. In addition, timely adjustments can be made in response to the development of any issues, which can help prepare for the formal start of the research (Eldridge et al., 2016; Morse et al., 2002).

Firstly, I invited a British friend who has been a student in China to act as a pilot interviewee. Even though I have been a teacher for several years this was the first time for me to conduct such an interview. I made a recording of that interview. During the interview, I did not realise there was any issue. Whereas when I listened back, a lot of issues were exposed. First of all, when the interviewee's answer was concise, I did not follow up but switched directly to the next question, which resulted in minimal valid data received. Also, my tone of voice sounded a bit like an order, and it did not sound friendly enough, which might have pressured the interviewee. Based on these questions, I watched a lot of academic interview cases on YouTube and discussed interview questions with my supervisors again, expanding some prompted questions. Afterwards, I conducted piloting with a Chinese friend again. According to the recording, I felt that my tone had softened a lot, and I had also made apparent progress in following up and using proper words. After these exercises, I started my main data collection.

After ensuring the principles of voluntariness and privacy, to help gain their trust and build a closer relationship I told them about my own experiences as an international student. When dealing with the reflective diaries, I did not apply pressure, but followed them up as necessary, to encourage their participation.

3.11.2 Oct ~ Dec 2018 – First interviews

After having decided on participants, I began to conduct interviews. During this period, I carried out eighteen interviews in total, which included thirteen interviews with the students who had been to China and had already come back to the UK (Group Two and Group Three), and five interviews with the students who were studying in China at that time (Group One). Each interview took about 40 to 60 minutes. Due to the different backgrounds (e.g. language fluency) of the participants, I designed two types of interview questions.

Group Two and Group Three participants' Chinese learning experiences were quite diverse. Some had passed the HSK 6 test (the highest level Chinese proficiency test conducted by China's Centre for Language Education and Cooperation), while some had just studied Chinese for one year, and they had different aims in studying Chinese. They had all been to China for at least half a year and could speak at least basic Chinese. For these participants, just one interview was considered sufficient, because they had already gone through the Chinese learning experience in China. Considering this, when I designed interview questions, I tried to cover all the information about sense of self and attitudes towards Chinese language and culture in one interview. Even though these were semi-structured interviews, the core questions stayed the same for all of them, which included five main parts – a. first impression of China, including culture, language use, and study experience in the classroom; b. experiences of culture and language use beyond the classroom; c. reflections on experiences; d. benefits; e. personal change.

However, for five participants that I interviewed, who were Martin, Elven, Tom, Fairfax and Josh, I finally decided their data was invalid. That was because during the interview, I discovered that they did not reach the requirements of my research

participants. Martin had not learned Chinese officially in a classroom, and had just taken an internship in China for half a year, which meant he could not speak Chinese then; Elven and Josh had learned Chinese in a classroom for more than half a year during their spare time (they only could speak very basic Chinese, like some greeting sentences, and some very simple sentences) and they had been to China for just two weeks, which was not enough for them to get a sense of Chinese language and culture; Tom could speak basic Chinese, but he had never been to China. The reasons all these problems occurred was because I had not known these participants before, and some of them were introduced by my friends, and some of them noticed my poster and contacted me proactively, so there were some misunderstandings of the requirements of the research participants.

Overall, the valid data of Group Two and Three included eight participants at that time, whose names are Adam, Alice, Colby, Diana, Fiona, Paul, James, and Payne. There will a table to show their backgrounds clearly in chapter 5.

For Group One, I had interviewed all the five participants at that time. Jim, Vicki, and Andy were the Y3 students in the MA Chinese undergraduate programme. William and Alan were Y2 students in the MA Chinese postgraduate programme. These participants were invited to take the interviews twice. Once was at the very beginning when they went to China, the other was at the time they finished their learning in China and came back to the UK. Since there would be another interview for them to fully reflect, the first interview questions that I designed were mainly focused on four aspects – a. the expectation of the study in China; b. first impression of China, including culture, language use, and study experience in the classroom; c. experiences of culture and language use beyond the classroom; d. the aims that they hoped to achieve at the end of the study in China.

The interviews for Group One went quite smoothly. Vicki was the first one that I interviewed. We met at the university library café before she went to China. For Jim, Andy, William and Alan, when I contacted them, they had already been to China, so we interviewed via the internet.

3.11.3 Jan 2019 – Second interviews

For William and Alan in Group Two, because they were on the postgraduate programme, they could only stay in China for half a year, so I conducted the second interviews in January 2019, when they had just come back from China. This time we mainly focused on the reflections of their half year study abroad – a. reflections on experiences; b. benefits; c. personal change. Both of them gave me very detailed reflections, and each interview took more than one hour.

3.11.4 Feb 2019 – First reflective diaries

To follow up the study experience of the participants in Group One, I designed reflective diaries (Appendix 4). But at the time that I handed out the questions for reflective diaries, William and Alan had already come back, so the diaries only worked for Jim, Vicki and Andy. While Andy would come to the UK in April, so he preferred taking one more face to face interview rather than writing the diaries. Thus, only Jim and Vicki took the first reflective diaries.

The diary was in an electronic version. The questions for Vicki and Jim were the same. Cultural differences, unforgettable moments, daily life in and out of classroom, understandings of language and culture, and challenges they faced at that time were the main topics they needed to reflect on. To ensure they understood what I had asked and gave answers, I gave some examples but these examples were very general and open-ended, *such as when I saw somebody did not say thank*

you to me, I thought..., which would not lead them to give some answers shaped under my ideas. Both of them finished the diaries and sent them back to me.

The reflective diary was an individual piece of work. When participants wrote it, they did not need to consider others, and would not be led by the interviewer. They would also have more time to think about each question, rather than responding in the moment as in the interview, when they needed to give prompt answers. Even though I only got two participants who were willing to finish the reflective diaries, they were still valuable additional data giving me insights into their true feelings and thoughts when they were studying and living in China.

3.11.5 April 2019 – An additional interview

As I mentioned above, Andy preferred to have an in-person face-to-face interview. He came back to the UK in the middle of April, and we did a 40-minute interview. The topic of this interview was quite similar to the topic in the reflective diary, which included cultural differences, unforgettable moments, daily life in and out of classroom, understandings of language and culture, and challenges they faced at that time.

3.11.6 May 2019 – Additional interviews

I added some more students, at this time, in order to follow up some ideas that had emerged. They were all Chinese students who studied in the UK. In the process of my interviews with the Western students, I discovered an interesting point, that most of these participants' ideas of British culture and Chinese culture were very different from mine. According to this, I decided to interview some more Chinese students who were studying in the UK, to make a comparison of their ideas, and to try to find the reasons for these differences. Therefore, seven Chinese students with different majors and at different levels of study were chosen as

participants. They were Nuonuo, Xiaoliang, Diwen, Len, Qianer, Xiaoran, Huizong (pseudonyms).

Each interview took 40 to 60 minutes, and the interview questions for these Chinese students were similar to those for Group One, which included – a. first impression of the UK, including culture, language use, and study experience in the classroom; b. experiences of culture and language use beyond the classroom; c. reflections on experiences; d. benefits; e. personal change. The evolving nature of the research became necessary for practical reasons but also as a response to questions posed by the research process itself.

However, due to the topic limitation, I did not use data from this in this final write up of my thesis, but these were very rich and valuable data. I hope I could analyse them to write another paper in the near future about a comparison of different identity transitions between British students (study in Chinese) and Chinese students (study in the UK).

3.11.7 June 2019 – *Second reflective diaries*

June was the last month for Vicki and Jim (in Group One) to stay at the Chinese university, so I chose this month to invite them to finish the second-round reflective diaries. The main questions of the diary stayed the same as for the first one, but I added two more topics – one was their ideas about Chinese songs and movies (to discover their situation of local cultural immersion); the other one was their reflections of the culture of their own country (to observe from an opposite perspective, having lived abroad). Both of them finished the diaries and sent them back to me.

3.11.8 Sep ~ Nov 2019 – Last interviews

During this time, I conducted seven interviews for three different groups. There was one more group named Group Four. In this group, there were two lecturers Dan (Daisy) and Wei (Wendy). Daisy is a Chinese tutor at a Scottish university, who gave me many ideas about the students' Chinese learning performances before and after studying Chinese in China. Wendy is a Chinese tutor at a Chinese university, who shared her ideas about students' learning situations in China. Each interview took about one hour. Obviously, Group One, Two and Three are the main groups, but Group Four definitely enriched my data to explore the influences of overseas experiences for a language learner from the tutors' perspectives.

Around this time, I got a chance to interview two more Chinese major students who had just come back from China, to enrich the data in Group Two, since the Chinese major participants were not enough at that time. Their names were Neta and Charles. The purpose of the interview questions stayed the same, and one interview took 50 minutes and the other one took 35 minutes.

The second-round interviews for Group Two (Vicki, Jan and Andy) were also conducted during this period. This time their interview questions were designed according to their previous interview/reflective diaries individually. But the main topics stayed the same, which were reflections – a. reflections of the whole year language study; b. reflection of their personal change; c. reflections of culture and language use beyond the classroom and their native culture; d. reflections of their achievement. In November 2019, data collection was finished.

3.12 Reflections on data collection – Native language or target language

For the Chinese participants (both tutors), they chose Chinese, which is their mother tongue, to participate in the interviews. Since Chinese is also my mother tongue, these interviews were relaxing. Both participants and I did not need to worry if the listener could understand or not and could respond naturally. The only pressure for me was to translate what they said into English after the interviews.

However, for the Western Participants (mostly British participants), most of them chose English, which is their mother tongue (details are shown in Table 3.2), to take the interview, while some of them chose Chinese. During this time, the problems were, if they chose English, they would worry about if I could catch up with what they meant sometimes; if they chose Chinese, sometimes they could not explain some topics clearly. Even though some interviews were in Chinese, I still told participants that if they could not explain some topics clearly, they could switch into English at any time.

3.13 Data Analysis

It took me 15 months to collect the data, and there were approximately 300,000 words in total, which includes transcribed interviews and reflective diaries. Data collection was not the biggest challenge, but the sorting of data was. According to Bryman (2016), qualitative research methods emphasise contextual understanding; that is, researchers seek to understand behaviours, values, and beliefs, in light of the context of the study. In order to support the data analysis and to gain a deeper analysis and understanding of the context, I once again returned to my original research questions and research purpose. The primary purpose of my research can be summarised as to supplement and develop the existing theories of SLA and identity by observing the identity transitions of British (Western) students

before, during and after studying Chinese in China. For this purpose, to keep the vast data in order, this study uses deductive and inductive approaches to analyse the data.

3.13.1 Inductive approach

As Thomas (2006) said, inductive analysis is a method of deducing concepts and identifying corresponding themes through careful reading of the original data. Therefore, I checked all the data at the beginning of this process. I first transcribed interviews and got the electronic versions of all the transcriptions. Then I printed them out and classified them according to the four different participant groups. From the research questions and interviews contents, I categorised each transcription into ten raw categories, which were first impressions of China, attitude towards Chinese culture, big difference (reflections on experience), uncomfortable moments, and the reason for choosing Chinese as a major/minor, motivation/investment, benefit, personal change, international friendship, and future plans. The determination of these categories was mainly based on previous studies on language learning and identity and the known information, such as the research purpose of this study, the research questions, and the set interview questions (Azungah, 2018; Bradley et al., 2007; Thomas, 2006). According to these categories, I took notes on the side of the transcription.

There is a sample of my raw categories below.

Table 3.3

Raw category sample

Descriptive account	Adam	Alice	Colby	Diana
First Impressions of China	It's great. Yeah, I love it.	I thought it was very warm there. I thought was really beautiful and I like the very tall buildings, which you don't really get in Scotland.	China is the same country as what my imagination, because I had been reading about China for a long time.	It was such a strange completely different culture.
	My first impression was that it was a very large city. Yeah, a lot of people, and really different to Europe.	I think before I met, I didn't really understand too much about it. I also follow it's going to be like more old fashion and it was but like when I went there, I realized it was actually very advanced.		The language was completely different here.
	Shanghai was definitely different in a lot of ways from my imagination.	I didn't expect it to like be big and fashion.		Chinese people are quite interested in me.
	One of my Chinese friends or something when they'd be like normal, but they're nicer to me.	I think before I went to China and I thought it gonna be very like almost getting scary.	The UK does not offer me a lot of opportunity, when China does offer me a lot of opportunity.	It was completely different, completely different experience.

As the concept became more apparent, I integrated and matched the previous categories and reassigned the corresponding texts. Because Group One was a long-term follow-up study, I put the first group of five participants in a file. Then I started to combine and classify their experiences in a cross-sectional way according to their different stories, I explored their use of Chinese, their engagement in the Chinese community and their possible hybrid self. I classified them according to the similarities and differences to find how their sense of self was constructed and reconstructed in different contexts and how they continued to seek opportunities to speak Chinese in the Chinese community.

For Group Two and Group Three, I also used the same method. Still, because of the large number of participants and their complex backgrounds, I encountered a lot of trouble in the integration process. It was challenging to get a specific analysis of some unique personal experiences. I thus tried to switch strategies and conducted a comprehensive, crossover study of both groups of students. I first categorised all their commonalities, then found their differences, and then analysed them individually in the larger social context based on these special circumstances. For example, Payne and Paul, like other students, started to learn Chinese because they were interested in Chinese culture, but due to their own experience in China and their different ideology, Payne obtained a strong sense of belonging in China, while Paul's sense of being and belonging to the West gained strength. These all needed to be taken out individually and explicitly analysed to explore how their identities were affected and reshaped in the process.

I made an overall comparison of all the participants. Although they had very different backgrounds and different language levels, there were some common points in some places, and they also had the same views and opinions on some things, which was very interesting. Finally, I used the three main narratives, *linguistic self*, *socio-cultural self*, and *hybrid self* to gather together the categories emerging from the data.

3.13.2 Deductive approach

In summarising and analysing the existing data, I also drew on some theories and achievements of previous studies. At this time, I also used the deductive approach. The deductive approach uses an organizational framework composed of topics to carry out the coding process (Bradley et al., 2007; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The primary purpose of using this list is to facilitate finding some of the expected

core concepts in the data based on existing literature knowledge on this field (Azungah, 2018; Thomas, 2006). For example, in order to understand the data more thoroughly, based on Norton's (2013) research on motivation and investment, I analysed the desires of the participants who spoke Chinese in the Chinese community and compared the findings with Norton's results. I found some corresponding points throughout this, and I also discovered something new and different. For another example, when analysing the cross-cultural integration of participants, I learned theories on acculturation (Berry, 2019; Berry et al., 2006; Ng et al., 2017) to reason whether these could be applied to my findings. Using these theories to sensitise me to my data has helped me verify my findings, allowing me to better grasp the connections and relationships to develop my views and theories with regard to the data.

Using the sequential approaches of deductive and inductive reasoning, allowed me to find better where the data overlaps between the two approaches, supporting or challenging the relationship between different data. The entire data analysis process was recursive (Neeley & Dumas, 2016), moving back and forth between data and references: some are consistent with previous research, and some are new discoveries, which made this data analysis full of meaning.

3.14 Reliability and validity

Originally, reliability and validity were terms used to measure quantitative research, and now they are also commonly used to examine qualitative research but adjusted to cater for the differences in the qualitative approach to design and analysis (Golafshani, 2003). Reliability represents the reliability and consistency of data. Validity refers to whether the data genuinely reflect respondents' views (Hayashi Jr et al., 2019). In qualitative research, high reliability and high validity refer

to "*credible and defensible results*" (Johnson, 1997), that is, research results can be deemed to be genuine (Golafshani, 2003). This can be achieved in different ways: transparency of research process, consistency of application of questions, member checking and triangulation.

3.14.1 Reliability

Firstly, triangulation. According to Creswell (2014), triangulation is used to ensure the accuracy and dependability of data through the use of different data sources, data collection methods, and data analysis methods. In this research, I used two methods – semi-structured interviews and reflective diaries. Although there were only four diaries in total, these data still provided diverse insights. Together with the semi-structured interviews, these two methods could obtain the data that captured a genuine sense of the voices of the participants.

Secondly, data saturation. Saturation plays a crucial role in ensuring the comprehensiveness and representativeness of qualitative data. It is also important in providing sufficient data for the construction of themes and conceptual frameworks (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To ensure data saturation, the first thing I had to consider was whether the data reflected the true thoughts of the participants (Golafshani, 2003). Since I did not have the opportunity for observation, I could not verify their claims in practice. Nevertheless, I made every effort to ensure the reliability of the data in other ways. Except for two European participants in the last additional student group, all the participants had grown up in the UK. All the participants had studied Chinese and had been to China, which ensured that they had lived in similar social and cultural contexts, thus ensuring the stability of the data. While interviewing, I also observed their expressions and reactions when answering questions, to evaluate their genuine engagement. This could also distinguish to a certain extent whether

participants were lying or not, thus ensuring the authenticity of the data. These methods could ensure that the data were comprehensive and representative to some degree.

Thirdly, reflexivity. Reflexivity is an important consideration during the research process as the researcher participated in the study. This can make it difficult to avoid biases and assumptions about the data. Reflexivity is considered to minimise these biases and ensure the reliability of the research (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). In my study, in order to practise reflexivity as much as possible, first of all, I would express my understanding of the interview content during or after the interview and ask participants to review and confirm its accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Secondly, I would regularly communicate the data I collected to my supervisors throughout my whole data collection session, to discuss potential biases from the perspective of a third-party expert and try to mitigate them (Charmaz, 2014).

3.14.2 Validity

After determining the reliability, I had to consider whether the received data were valid. According to previous studies, the validity of qualitative research is mainly divided into descriptive validity, explanatory validity, theoretical validity and generalization validity (Brewer & Crano, 2000). To achieve these validities, I used rich data, using abundant original data for thinking and reflecting; the comparative method, which compared and reflected my results with previous studies; and feedback method of participants, reviewing and confirming interpretations of their data

In terms of descriptive validity and explanatory validity, I adopted the method of expert assessment, which was, my interview questions and diary questions were

repeatedly guided and revised by me along with my supervisors, which ensured the validity of the questions and thus ensured the quality and purpose of the interviews. During the interview, although it was semi-structured, the essential questions were the same for every participant. This ensured that answers from different participants were in the same target area. Regarding theoretical validity, I made use of theories and concepts from previous SLA and SA research (e.g., Norton's theories about identity) to help enhance the analytical process. In terms of generalisation, this is a case study, each person has different experiences and views of the world, so it is not possible or even desirable to attempt traditional attempts at generalisation. Instead it is possible to suggest that the case typifies particular experiences, what Bassey (1999) calls fuzzy generalisation which will inform and sophisticate understanding of the issue and contexts experienced. It is this kind of resonance that is sought (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013) here rather than a transformation of understanding (Stake, 1995). In terms of evaluation validity, first of all, I directly analysed the original data, from those speaking the target language during the analytical process. To ensure proper citation of the transcription, I first translated the interviews spoken in Chinese into English by myself. Later, I asked a Chinese colleague who agreed to confidentiality agreement who was not familiar with this field to help check whether the translated English was consistent with the original Chinese text, which ensured, that there was no personal bias in the translation process. A careful record was made of the research processes and decision made supporting the transparency of the data collection and analytical procedures.

These all ensured the reliability and validity of the research from the outside and inside.

Section 4: Challenges for the research questions

3.15 Challenges

After deciding on my research questions, there were two main challenges that I faced. One was that I should determine the type of research, the participants and the methods to collect and analyse the data, and to have a clear idea about how to interpret the term language learning, the term cultural engagement, and the term identity transformation. The other one was that I hoped all my participants would be Year Three students of Chinese in an MA Chinese undergraduate programme at a Scottish university, and that they had learned Chinese for at least two years before they went to China, so they might have already shaped a relatively clear concept about Chinese language and potentially culture. Finally, I was looking for participants who might be going to spend time in China so that their views about Chinese language learning (CLL) and culture might be challenged or reinforced or even surprised by time studying abroad.

For the first challenge, I originally decided to choose interviews, a reflective diary and classroom observations as my three data collection priorities. However, when I tried to apply to observe some culture-related courses from the Chinese department in the UK, I was told that researchers were not allowed to go into this class, unless there was special permission, so I had to dispense with this data collection. Also, when I asked the participants to fill in the reflective diaries, only two of them agreed, so the number of the reflective diaries that I received was also very limited. Even though the original research methods were the semi-structured interviews and reflective diaries, the main method used after some setbacks was in-depth semi-structured interviews supported by diaries from two students. The second challenge, was to try to find additional participants in order to research with

students who had already been to China but who were prepared to reflect back on their experiences.

Once I finished my research plan, I began to ask the Chinese programme director and other staff to help me find participants. However, after they helped me to send emails to the Y3 students, or even introduced my research in front of the class, there were still few student responses (in total only 4 students), which was far away from my expectation. To guarantee the richness and the quality of my data, after consulting with my supervisors, I decided to extend the backgrounds of my participants – to find more Western students who had studied Chinese in China, including other majors of undergraduate students and some postgraduates. I posted my *Call for participants* on connected Facebook pages – Facebook and some other online network tools. Finally, I got fourteen more responses. Their backgrounds were diverse, but they were all studying Chinese and had been to China. Thus, I decided that their experiences could enrich my data about Chinese language learners' experiences and ideas about Chinese language and culture.

3.16 Summary

Chapter 3 has presented the methodology used to carry out this study. I initially hoped to create a longitudinal qualitative study in which the participants, 15 British (Western) students of Chinese with diverse learning backgrounds and two language lecturers with rich teaching experience finally participated. Semi-structured interviews and diaries were the research data collection tools, and 23 valid interviews and four reflective diaries were carried out, providing rich qualitative data.

In what follows, Chapters 4 and 5 will present the findings of this study, and Chapter 6 will present a discussion of the findings.

Chapter 4: Findings of Group One

4.1 Participant information

The previous chapter shows the approach to methodology and the data collection process, which involved 23 valid interviews and 4 reflective diaries. Group One, a total of five participants, were included in this chapter, and I obtained data before, during, and after their study abroad in China. There is a brief review of the participants' key information in this chapter.

All of the participants in this group were British. Vicki, Jan and Andy were full-time undergraduate students in a four-year MA in Chinese and linguistics programme at a Scottish university; they all went to China to study Chinese for one year during their Year Three study. William and Alan were full-time postgraduate students in a two-year MSc (Master of Science in Chinese studies) programme at the same university; both of them went to China to study Chinese for half a year during their Year Two study. Even though these five participants were all British and studied at the same university, their backgrounds were considerably different, but they all had one aim – speaking Chinese well. They were always willing to practise Chinese and engage with the Chinese community. However, during this period they had faced some difficulties, which related to their language learning investment. With the improvement of their Chinese language ability, they felt more comfortable in using Chinese and communicating with Chinese people. However, the exception was Andy, who adopted a relatively fuller Chinese identity culturally, educationally and linguistically than the rest of the participants.

Since these five participants studied for two different programmes, to make the analysis clearer and more appropriate, I divided this group into two parts. Part A includes Andy, Jim, and Vicki, who were undergraduate students, as early learners.

Part B includes Alan and William, who were postgraduate students, as more advanced learners.

Table 4.1

Group One participant information reminder

	Pseudonyms	Nationality	Gender	Length of time spent in China	Growing-up background	Type of data
Part A: Chinese major undergraduate students						
1	Andy	UK	M	One Year	British-Taiwanese	Three interviews
2	Jim	UK	M	One Year	British	Two interviews; Two reflective diaries
3	Vicki	UK	F	One Year	British	Two interviews; Two reflective diaries
Part B: Chinese major postgraduate students						
4	Alan	UK	M	Half a Year	British	Two interviews
5	William	UK	M	Half a Year	British	Two interviews

4.2 Identity, transition and reconstruction

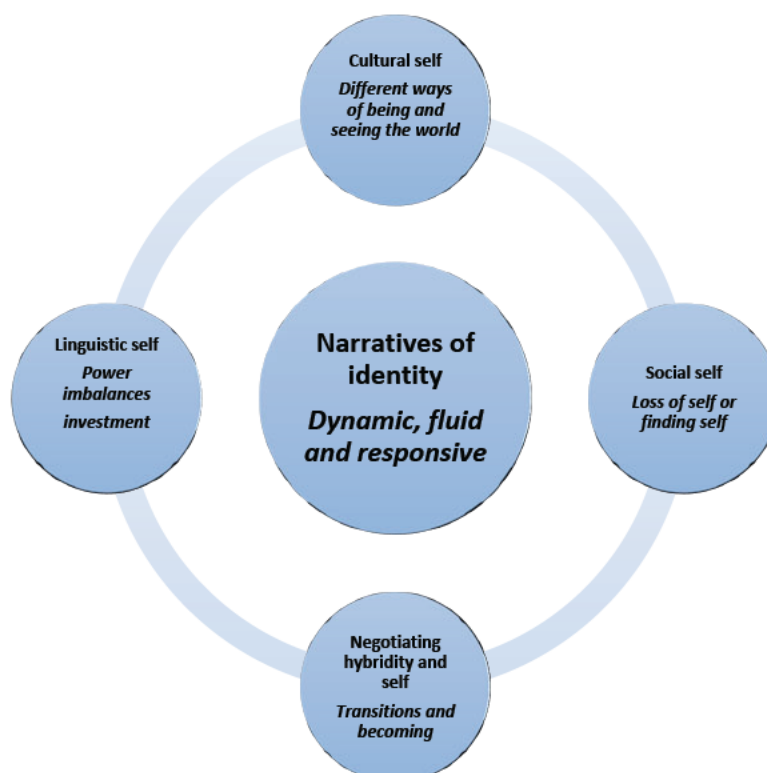
Using the conceptual frame created earlier (page 89), I will be reporting on the stories of individuals in this group, as they engaged with key aspects of their student abroad experiences and the ways in which they responded to these.

Consequently, participants in this research were seen as able to hold multiple identities, some more to the fore than others at any one time. However, here I concentrate on the language student as the primary identity focus and consider and explore aspects of this particular narrative as the students moved through a significant transition to studying abroad. As we consider each of these participants, it is possible to see that each participant has his/her individual story of learning Chinese and the various ways in which they have negotiated a sense of self. In engaging with their language learner stories, I hope to elucidate their learning

experiences, sense of self and their engagement with Chinese language and culture, and seek to explore their identity transition and reconstruction linguistically, socially and culturally.

Figure 4.1

Conceptual frame reminder



4.3 Part A: Undergraduates

4.3.1 Vicki

I am really lucky to have had these experiences, which helped me to come to love this country and its customs.

Vicki was a female participant, and in the first interview she believed she was shy and that she identified as English. She first connected with Chinese when she was at secondary school. She had taken several classes at that time, but she stopped because of other heavy study tasks. When she went to college, there was a huge community of Chinese students, as well as some Chinese teachers. Due to her

interest in distinctive languages, and influenced by her Chinese classmates, she began to learn Chinese again, but not intensely: just for two hours a week. She also had a French learning background, so when she entered the university, she wanted to do something different. Because she believed that the Chinese language system, including its grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary and characters was completely different from English and French, she finally chose Chinese as her major despite the very different nature of this language and the possible difficulties it posed, such as recognising and writing Chinese characters and pronouncing four different tones, which were mentioned in the first interview. Her goals for this one-year exchange programme were to improve her language ability and travel a little around China. She was investing a great deal in this linguistic development in which she might feel particularly vulnerable given the very distinctive cultural and societal norms she was likely to face, since she had never been to China before. The challenges she faced and the achievements she gained will be detailed in the following section.

4.3.1.1 Anticipation of studying in China.

I am not fully sure what to expect. I think it is going to be like a big culture shock.

During her two-year period of full-time study in the UK, she had learned the Chinese language at a basic level, as well as some Chinese classical literature and Chinese history, and had watched lots of documentaries about China from different time periods, which helped her build a concept of China linguistically, socially and culturally. Consequently, she was sensitised to the ideas and differences involved in travelling to China. However, this was tempered by some apprehension as this was the first time she would be going to China. When we talked about how she anticipated studying in China, she was excited to be going somewhere she had

never been before, but this was subdued by her nervousness about going into the unknown. Speaking as little English as possible, achieving cultural immersion, and travelling a little bit were the three main things that she wanted to achieve during her stay in China. However, it needs to be remembered that she was only around 20 years old and had never lived abroad. This mixture of anticipation and trepidation was to be expected, along with strong aspirations. For example, she had limited language skills in Chinese, yet hoped she could improve to the extent of only speaking English intermittently.

4.3.1.2 Daily Chinese class in China – formal linguistic development.

According to Vicki's diary, she felt comfortable in the daily Chinese classes. She thought most parts of the classes were similar to the classes she had taken in the UK, and so were easy for her to get used to. Tutors were more hard-working, and she could ask questions even during their break time. Also, classmates were from different parts of the world. Apart from practising spoken Chinese during class, they always used English as the language tool with which to communicate. Considering all the above, Vicki's investment in the Chinese classes was similar to previous learning experiences. There were no significant unsuitable or uncomfortable things for her to deal with. It was like an international community, where everybody was equal, which was different from the authentic Chinese society beyond the gates of the formal classroom. To some degree, it was like a shelter for her. She could easily communicate with her classmates, share her ideas, and get respect and support.

4.3.1.3 From sensitive to relaxed – cultural and social challenges.

Apart from the daily classes, living in China gave her the opportunity to engage with the real Chinese community and to practise Chinese daily. In the classes, she was under no pressure to communicate. If there was something that she did not know how to

explain in Chinese, her tutor could help her, or she could even speak English, and most of her classmates could understand her. However, when she left the class and went into Chinese society by herself, even though there were still a few people around who could speak English, Chinese became a necessary survival language for her. From buying things at the supermarket to using public transportation, whatever she did or did not desire, she could not avoid speaking Chinese or seeing Chinese characters. According to her goals for studying in China, this was a good thing for her. However, the process of engaging with the Chinese community was not easy. She had experienced some unpleasant moments (quote) and adapted to life in China step by step, moving from feeling sensitive and upset to feeling relaxed and happy.

When I first arrived, I didn't have Wechat pay or Alipay and it was causing a lot of problems whenever I went into shops. In winter, it was extremely cold in my room and I wasn't allowed an electric blanket... The metro is very small here because the ground in Hangzhou is very loose and is prone to collapse if it is dug up too much... At first, I found it very inconvenient.

In the beginning, many unpleasant things happened everywhere in Vicki's daily life. Difficulties with payment methods, climate and even transportation reinforced her sense of otherness; of being an outsider. These sound like tiny things, but some of them she had never experienced before, and these happening every day led to a limited sense of culture shock (Ward, 2020). As an adult, these were not very significant problems for her. She could find ways of solving them and got used to them very quickly. Her adaptability here was a great strength (Wei, 2015).

However, when facing Chinese people in authentic and spontaneous situations, she struggled a lot.

Vicki thought she was too sensitive in the beginning. When she tried to speak Chinese with native speakers, she always thought her behaviour bothered Chinese people and they always seemed angry.

When I took a taxi, the driver looked very unhappy. I didn't know why. At that time, I did not want to speak Chinese anymore. I just spoke English and tried to pretend I did not understand him.

When we talked about this driver, I asked why she had such a feeling. She said it came from the driver's expression, voice and the atmosphere. Finally, for a while, Vicki gave up speaking Chinese and pretended to be a foreigner who could not understand the driver. The identity of foreigner/outsider helped her to escape from any mutual investment with Chinese people in the development of her linguistic self. From then on, she did not need to say anything, but just sat and waited to reach the destination. This undermined what she had originally anticipated, namely that she would be able to engage with Chinese people in the target language. Sadly, anxiety and uncertainty over what she might or might not understand seemed to have led her to retreat from the very linguistic experience she had sought.

Such feelings could be found many times during her first diary – the feeling of being seen as “other”; as someone who doesn't seem to belong.

People frequently stared at me.

I used to go to the gym, but I felt uncomfortable for the staff's attitudes towards me.

My Chinese ink painting teacher was strange. He seldom spoke to me. I thought he felt uncomfortable.

When I spoke Chinese, they thought I was stupid and laughed at me.

From Vicki's standpoint, she could not know what these Chinese people's feelings really were. What she thought was that Chinese people felt uncomfortable and did not want to speak to her, which influenced her to avoid speaking to them. That is to say, if Vicki initially had a feeling that Chinese people were willing to talk with her, she would try to avoid speaking Chinese back to them. It is evident that there existed an imbalanced power between Vicki and Chinese people sometimes. Chinese people were, she believed, fluent speakers and were socially and culturally in the know (Spolsky, 2000). The imbalance of linguistic power meant that she had to reconsider whether she should make herself vulnerable. So her response was a protective one, but one that linguistically undermined her wish to become a more fluent Chinese speaker. Also, from Vicki's stated perspective, she did not want to be laughed at and treated like an idiot. All these factors limited her opportunity to practise Chinese. She felt anxious, lacked confidence and was made uncomfortable. She could not build up a fluent conversation with Chinese people and thought she was not popular in the Chinese community. Therefore, during this period, she retreated behind her known and comfortable sense of self as a British person and as very different from the people around her.

Despite this situation, with time, Vicki's strong desire to practise Chinese recovered and she was willing to invest once more in learning Chinese. She did not want to give up and go back to her own country. *When I found people who I felt comfortable with, I would really try and speak as much as I could*, she said. Instead of waiting for Chinese people to accept her, she began to try to use a relatively open way to get into the community, which means that she strove by herself to find more

opportunities to speak Chinese, and tried to understand Chinese people's behaviours from their perspectives. Then, she gradually noticed the cultural differences between herself and Chinese people. She realised that the reason for Chinese people's social and cultural behaviours towards her lay in the fact that she looked different from them.

I became less sensitive.

I think it's just a cultural difference.

I often hear people say "外国人(foreigner)" or "老外小姐姐 (foreign girl)" when I walk into any establishment. It made me realise that it must be quite uncommon for foreigners to come here. In general, I feel as though Chinese people talk at a much higher volume. At first, I thought they were angry, or that they were being rude to me, but after a while, I realised that that isn't necessarily always the case.

She had a strong sense that she was a foreigner among the Chinese, but she adapted to being a foreigner seeking a place in the Chinese community. There was a small local café that she went to frequently with her Korean friend. The boss there was very warm. There were a few foreign customers and they always played European music. Customers who went there were of a similar age to her, open-minded and accepting of Western culture, and found it easy to understand her. She felt relaxed at this café, where she talked, sang and made Chinese friends. She dared to speak Chinese, found that the Chinese treated her in a different way, and gained their approval, which helped her build a new and more stable relationship with Chinese people.

It is a very social place. I think I was just lucky to have found such a social environment. Um, they'd have like music nights and

they'd be like live, like DJ sets. But everyone was kind of young and quite like progressive, like the types of people who went with fairly progressive, I think, really open towards like foreign culture. And like they knew lots of bands and stuff like that.

From Vicki's viewpoint, the same age group and a mutual understanding may be very important in enabling her to communicate with people from a different cultural background. She felt it was much easier for her to try to engage with certain kinds of groups who, because of being in that age range, had had potentially similar kinds of experience in terms of social cultural life. If the native language speaker is not open enough or does not want to speak to a foreigner, or just does not have the confidence to conduct a conversation with the foreigner, even though the language learner tries hard to conduct a conversation, the attempt will still not be that effective (Jin, 2015). On the other hand, if the native speaker is open and invests actively in the conversation, the language learner may achieve a sense of acceptance, gain more opportunities to practice L2 (Chinese), and even find a sense of belonging in that community (Norton, 2013). That is to say, there is a need to find groups and contexts where such interactions might be seen as a process of mutual investment. In seeking out those closer in age, those who might have had chances to engage linguistically and culturally with those from abroad in person or by social media, some of the obstacles Vicki had previously baulked at seemed to dissolve.

Another event she mentioned twice was the Dragon Boat Festival. It was again the boss of the café who encouraged her to attend. She was the only foreigner at the event. They made Zongzi (s a kind of special food for this festival), watched the dragon boat race, and did some other festival-related activities. One activity that gave her a strong sense of achievement was a game called Chinese whispers.

Several people formed a group and transmitted sentences in a very quiet voice, then checked whether the last person spoke the same sentence as the first one. It was even hard for native speakers to complete this game, while the group that Vicki was in won it.

Our team won and I was shocked because like I was like a foreign person, so maybe I pronounced things right. That was a big achievement for me.

Maybe, at the beginning, the members of that group might have felt worried about this game because of having a foreigner in their team. But Vicki used her Chinese language ability and took part in the game successfully, which closed the distance between her and the other Chinese members. They did not treat her as someone lacking knowledge, but as a friend, or at least as a foreign friend who could speak Chinese.

On the basis of this activity, it can be suggested that Vicki felt she had become a “legitimate speaker” in the Chinese community. The term *legitimate speaker* was introduced by Bourdieu (1977). According to Bourdieu (1977), for a sentence to be considered “legitimate discourse”, it must meet the following four requirements: the speaker must conform to their status (identity); what is said must be in the right context; the audience must be appropriate for the context; and finally, the pronunciation and syntax of the speech must conform to the rules. Norton (2013) shares this view of the legitimate speaker as well. In Vicki’s context, the Chinese participants in that activity were authentic listeners, the game was in an authentic context, and she used her legitimate identity in that game to participate successfully. This was a very important period for her during her time in China. She had used a foreign language to immerse herself in the foreign community. At that point, she

knew that she was not just a foreigner, but a person who could gain acceptance and status within another culture. She had shifted from simply being “other” and different to being accepted and established, at least within this local community.

Vicki also travelled to many places in China. During this time, she talked with local people in Chinese, experienced the diversity of Chinese culture, and got a clearer idea about what life in China entailed. In the last interview, however, she told me she still sometimes had feelings of anxiety and a lack of confidence when facing Chinese people. When I asked her why this was, she gave me a careless smile and answered, *I get used to like ignoring it and just trying anyway.*

It is a problem of time; if you practise more, and become less sensitive, you will get used to this feeling, which won't influence me a lot.

That is to say, the more she spoke in Chinese, the more confident and comfortable she felt and the better she was able deal with any negative experiences. She had changed a lot, not only in her language ability, but in the ability to live by herself, immersing herself in a strange community, and developing a greater intercultural understanding. Linguistically, culturally and socially she had managed to adapt and thrive within this very distinctive society. Finding acceptance and a sense of belonging empowered her to overcome her anxieties and further develop her sense of self, not just as a foreigner but as a legitimate participant within Chinese society.

At first, I felt that Chinese people were really cold towards me and I didn't feel particularly welcomed by them. I was initially very shocked by this experience because I had learnt so much about how warm the people are here. It was after making friends that I realised

that they are in fact very very welcoming, but you have to know them first.

I feel very grateful to have had the opportunity of taking part in this exchange. Meeting new friends from all over the world. Gaining a huge amount of self-confidence and independence. Visiting a part of the world that I have never been to before. Exploring the city and meeting locals. Knowing that my Chinese is improving every day. Having great teachers here. Trying new foods and drinks.

4.3.1.4 Reflection – home transition. During the last interview, when she reflected on her one-year's experience in China, she thought the ability she had developed most was her Chinese language ability. Yet Vicki also achieved some goals which were not directly related to language learning, such as a sense of independence, greater confidence and the ability to deal with different problems. Living in a strange country was not just a challenge for language learning, but also a challenge for survival. There were so many cultural and societal differences; when she tried to accept the Chinese approach to social interactions and cultural norms, she also changed some of her ideas about problems. Now she was more relaxed about the things that she could not control. *I think a lot of the time things you have to get used to, just not going as expected*, she said. Linguistic, cultural and societal differences had been seen at times as overwhelming but as she began to accept rather than challenge these differences, her anxiety diminished.

Despite these gains, Vicki still thought that she did not achieve what she expected to during her time in China.

I don't think I've achieved what I wanted to achieve, but if I'd go again, I don't think I could do anything differently to what I already

did. I think I did everything I could. I think I wish that I could have, like, been a little bit more integrated into like Chinese friendship groups. Um, I was in like a Chinese speaking environment, but it wasn't like as much as I would have liked to have been.

In the diary, she also wrote about her Chinese language limitations and the ways of communicating with Chinese people as the first two challenges she faced.

I feel that my language is a huge barrier between me and the Chinese students here. I find that people either assume I don't speak any Chinese at all or once they hear me speak a little, they assume I am already fluent. I can't seem to find the middle ground. I also find that I am still incredibly anxious about practising my Chinese.

Communication is a challenge because of language, but also because of cultural differences. I find that I don't always know how to approach people or begin a conversation.

Overall, I just find it quite frustrating that my language level isn't enough. Although I can hold basic conversations in Chinese, these conversations are not enough to form really close friendships and means the other person has to use English sometimes. I think that sometimes I am so eager to learn more about the culture from the people themselves, but that my language level inhibits that from happening.

Actually, linguistic ability often directly influenced the outcomes of communication. It was hard for her to find a balanced position between herself and Chinese people. Vicki wanted to practise Chinese. If the native speaker found that he/she could not understand what Vicki said, and Vicki could not understand the

native speaker, she would give up her investment in the conversation. This phenomenon appeared significantly when she had just arrived in China, while, during this one-year learning process, it can be seen that there was increased investment by native speakers in conversations because of the improvement in Vicki's Chinese language ability. However, one year was a limited period; Vicki needed still more time if she wanted to integrate herself more fully into the Chinese community. The transitory nature of this time abroad meant that her investment in this experience could only achieve so much before her return home.

Living abroad also gave Vicki a good opportunity to reflect on her own country and culture. There were many things in daily life that she was used to but had never really noticed. When she left the UK and went to live in a new place, she suddenly became aware of how differently others might live, but as she adjusted to her new context, she began to enjoy these differences and to develop linguistic, social and cultural skills to help her to begin to belong. Yet on coming back home, she quickly acknowledged her strong sense of belonging and a welcome return to the familiar. To some degree, her identity as a British person became stronger but perhaps more objective as she located herself in relation to being an outsider-insider, seeing her country with new eyes.

I think right now is an interesting time for my country. And I think the country I will be returning home to in some ways won't be the same country that I left.

This year I have had the chance to watch my country from the outside in and I have seen that there are quite a few problems with my country; however, I feel as though I have never been prouder to be from the UK.

4.3.2 Jim

Chinese culture is beautiful and will forever hold a special place in my heart.

Jim was Vicki's classmate and a male participant. In the first interview, he stated that he believed he was not very outgoing and confirmed that his background and beliefs were English. Jim had begun to learn Chinese when he was 13 years old, and he persisted in learning it (for two hours a week) over the three years that followed, going on to take the IGCSE-Chinese exam. Then, he stopped for two years during his A-Level study. When he entered university, he chose a joint major MA in Chinese and Economics. He told me that he was not good at languages actually, but thought that Chinese was completely different from other European languages, which attracted his attention and interests. That was the main reason for him to continue learning Chinese. Like Vicki's, Jim's goals for this one-year exchange programme were also being able to speak Chinese and encountering and seeing as much of China as he could.

4.3.2.1 Anticipation of studying in China.

It's a bit different. I've seen all the tourist spots, but actually living here is very different.

In contrast to Vicki, Jim had been to China twice before this time. The first time he went in order to travel around the country and he travelled to several Chinese cities in the north and south. The second journey was a stopover on a longer trip abroad, and he spent three days in Beijing. Therefore, he had already built up a basic sense of China and Chinese people before this formal trip abroad. Based on his previous experiences, he had thought that China was a developing country and that some areas were not modernised enough, so he did not expect too

much this time. Nonetheless, before going to China this time, he had already reached a good reading level, but he said he could hardly hold a conversation in Chinese. Therefore, for this programme, his main anticipation was of gaining the ability to speak Chinese. Jim went to Beijing, the capital of China, to study, so was in a different context from Vicki.

4.3.2.2 Daily Chinese class in China – linguistic self. Jim noted that the Chinese classes he took in Beijing were quite different from those he had taken in the UK. At the Scottish university, tutors always used English as the main language when teaching Chinese, while at the university in China, tutors only used the target language (Chinese) throughout the whole lesson, which made him feel that he was struggling, in the beginning, to engage with the language as well as he had expected. He had changed from a local student to an international student; from being seen as a competent Chinese speaker to being seen as someone who struggled. Things were even more challenging in that the approach to learning Chinese in his formal lessons involved target language use only, in addition to a great deal of hard work to be done afterwards.

At school, work is constantly given out between classes and there is an expectation that students do nothing other than study. To overcome this, I lived a very structured life and would wake up early and go to bed late. I also had to give up a social life. I didn't mind doing this for a year, but it really wasn't much of a life.

They were useful up to a point. Once I had achieved a certain language ability and repeated the same routines so many times, I started to become bored with the lifestyle and searched for alternative ways to study the subject. Sitting in a classroom all day doing Tingxie

(dictation) is not much of a good time. Perhaps the open conversation would make the process enjoyable and so better for speed of learning.

From Jim's words, it was clear that he had found himself in a very traditional Chinese-style class. However, like Vicki's Chinese class, Jim's class was international, and most classmates spoke English together after the class. However, unlike Vicki, who could treat the Chinese class as a kind of shelter, Jim needed more time to adapt to the learning schedule and tutors' teaching methods. After getting used to the Chinese-only class, dictations and recitals gradually became boring for him, which made him lose interest in them. He began to find more interesting ways to invest in his language development in the real Chinese community with authentic speaking experiences, such as travelling around China and making more Chinese friends. As examples, he joined the university football club and tried to find language exchange partners. Moreover, the new learning environment was also a way for Jim to immerse himself in the Chinese language atmosphere, and to become familiar with another approach to learning, which was common in Chinese culture and education. At the last interview, when I asked about his feelings on coming back to the Scottish university, his answer was: *unfamiliar*. To some degree, his newer sense of belonging had been established in China to the extent that what had been known had become strange and different, but this was temporary. For after all the stresses and strains of communicating in a foreign language, and of facing the challenges in trying to navigate the subtleties of a language, culture and social interactions were gone. He said, *everything feels very nice and easy*. However, he did consider that his philosophy of life might be affected by this journey, having a

long-term influence on him. *I think being in China changed the way I saw, kind of made me more grateful to just do my studying.*

4.3.2.3 From nervous to no worries – cultural issues in adaptation. Jim did have some difficult times in the beginning, just as Vicki did. Adapting to unfamiliar aspects of life in Beijing challenged him, such as dealing with the heavy air pollution, tap water that could not be drunk directly from the tap, and people in China who, it seemed to him, were very busy and pushed each other in crowded places. Yet he adapted very quickly to these differences. Unlike Vicki, who thought Chinese people were cold in the beginning, Jim always thought that they were very nice to him. Although there were some misunderstandings when he communicated, he enjoyed talking with Chinese people. Yet these differences in experience might also have been affected by the city context. Beijing is more international and cosmopolitan in outlook than Hangzhou, so the people there may have been more familiar with those from other countries.

Not knowing the language is part of the fun of living abroad but every now and again it is frustrating to be treated like a 5-year-old boy because you can't speak particularly well. So, I guess it has motivated me to work harder.

However, despite this confidence in himself and his ability to adapt and communicate, there were times when he felt people patronised him for his linguistic shortcomings. He felt that Chinese people treated him differently from his real age because of his language limitations.

Vicki lived in a student hall, while Jim had a home-stay set up: that was a traditional Chinese family, father, mother and three children. The family helped him to practise Chinese, while Jim also sometimes helped their children to practise English.

For the family, it was a good opportunity to practise English with a native English speaker, so Jim got corresponding respect and support when he spoke English. Meanwhile, Jim was very diligent in practising Chinese. He tried to speak Chinese every day with the parents and was very modest when they corrected him.

They would speak for like five minutes, and I would, I just go, I don't know. This was the normal conversation when he first lived with the family. *They looked after me and talked to me endlessly in Chinese until I could navigate society and feel comfortable.* The family treated him nicely and helped him to overcome the language barrier. Even though he was still a guest in that family, they tried to give him a sense of home and regarded him as a family member. The family was a safe place for him to practise speaking Chinese and may have given a sense of belonging linguistically and culturally. Consequently, he did not feel afraid to speak Chinese with native speakers. Additionally, Jim joined the university football club, found language partners via APP (an application for mobile phones), and travelled to some places in China to immerse himself in the Chinese community and discover the Chinese culture.

I was an outsider. People thought, oh, he is from the UK, so he must be good at football. So, I felt kind of welcome. Uh, yeah, it was a good experience... Because we had something in common, we talked a lot more. Doing sports is a great way to meet people. We became quite close by the end because we reached the university cup final.

We both share languages. I feel like I could only be friends of people who have an interest in learning English, because my language is not good enough.

In the football club, because of the perceived view of the British being good at football, Jim was welcomed from the beginning, so to some extent, Jim and his teammates shared an identity as the football team, united by a shared purpose and understanding of the game. They mostly used Chinese to communicate, and if there were some limitations for Jim when he tried to explain his ideas, he could use body language to help support him. In this situation, mutual need sustained communication and enhanced Jim's investment in the Chinese language. A similar phenomenon also arose in Jim's relation with his language partners. Jim wanted to improve his Chinese, while his language partner desired to improve his own English. That is to say, the power between the language learner and the native speaker is always imbalanced, and the native speaker usually holds the greater power (Norton, 2013). However, this imbalance may decline when the non-native speaker gains greater fluency and/or there is a mutual need. By this I mean, when one person wants to learn Chinese and the other wants to improve his/her English and the shifting between roles encourages a less stark imbalance.

When Jim travelled, even though there were difficulties in communicating with Chinese people, he was not very worried. *The more time you spend, the less you need to prepare for the conversation. At first, yes, I was worried when I faced Chinese people, but after one year, no worries at all*, he said. To some degree, like Vicki, he had become a legitimate speaker (Bourdieu, 1977); he could explain his ideas clearly by using the target language, which made him feel more confident and changed his relationship with native speakers. After the one year of studying abroad, he thought his ideas towards the Chinese had become more positive.

Getting settled in a foreign culture is a challenging experience for anyone. China has opened my eyes to how so many people in the

world live. I have loved learning a new language, interacting with different people and seeing new places.

4.3.2.4 Reflection – transition home. When Jim reflected on the one-year abroad experience, he felt that what he had achieved most was the development of his Chinese language ability. However, when he reflected on this ability, he still thought his language limitations were the biggest challenge for him when engaging with Chinese people. The nuances of speech and personality could not necessarily be understood or shared at his level of fluency.

When I speak Chinese, I feel like a different person. Almost like motivated, and no sense of humour.

Because the languages are so different, I think it would take a long time to feel totally myself, so I guess it was always the limitation of that.

In terms of like having fun with people, because I could be understood and get what I wanted. But that is not really like much of a life. Whereas with English friends, you know, you have fun. Yeah, whereas I think if you reach that stage, then you are very comfortable in a culture.

As a Chinese language learner he had moved beyond basic speech and comprehension, but there was still a lack of a sophisticated linguistic identity in Chinese and this affected his ability to be a part of genuine interactions. During these conversations, Jim talked about his ideas on the relationship between language and culture. He thought the understanding of a culture was based on ability in the language. The reason he thought that he was a different person when he spoke Chinese was that he could not express himself as easily as when he used English.

As I mentioned above, Jim may have moved towards becoming a legitimate speaker (Bourdieu, 1977). However, when engaging culturally and aspiring to greater subtlety in language use, his language fluency was not enough. He needed to understand the meaning of the conversation below the surface to speculate on the speaker's true feelings. Jim suggested that when the language learner reached this level, it was time to engage more fully with the target language community. That was the reason why, even though Jim said he could engage with the football team and with the host family, and enjoy travel in China, he always explained that he saw all of this from an *outsider* viewpoint. Moreover, he reflected on his daily study in China. As I mentioned before, he said that there were so many dictations and recitals, and that the course was kind of intensive. But he still thought the pressure was less than when he studied in the UK.

Going to live in another country, because no-one knows you, it is much easier to do things that can be much more dynamic. I found the pressure not too difficult here, because in Edinburgh I had lots of things to do, lots of people to see. Whereas here is much more common. I just, you know, I can do what I like the whole time, so I can also, complete my studies quite easily

In the UK, his networks were more complex and his relationships more time-consuming. He needed to do more things other than study; while, when he was in China, he was an international student with a narrow focus and limited possibilities for interactions. What he needed to do every day was just to improve his Chinese and learn more about Chinese culture. During this period, like Vicki, Jim reflected on his views of his own country. He had discovered some more advantages to living in the UK, like drinking tap water, living in a particular kind of democracy, with a smaller

population and fresh air, which he had never noticed before, but really appreciated now. Establishing himself in a very different environment encouraged him to compare and contrast and to view his own country with new eyes.

4.3.3 Andy

I am happy to be treated as a Chinese in China.

Andy was also Jim's and Vicki's classmate at the Scottish university. However, he differed from them, as Andy was mixed race. His mother was Taiwanese, and his father was English. He had studied at one international kindergarten in Taiwan and returned to the UK to get his subsequent education. However, he had never learned Chinese before entering the university. There were two main reasons for him to choose Chinese as his major. One was that he wanted to communicate with his Taiwanese family members. Before he studied Chinese, his mother had had to translate for him. The other reason was that he thought China was developing very fast, and Chinese was becoming a critically important language in the world. For the one-year study abroad, he chose the same university as Jim in Beijing and expected to improve his language ability and get more ideas about Chinese culture there. This experience not only helped him to improve his language ability, but also challenged his sense of identity in a way that was distinctive from that of his classmates.

4.3.3.1 Anticipation of studying in China – familiar linguistic and cultural approaches. Andy had engaged indirectly with the Chinese language and culture through his mother and Taiwanese family and had established, to a limited extent, a hybrid identity as British-Taiwanese. Apart from his early education in Taiwan, he had grown up in the English-based curriculum, while his mother raised him with a knowledge of Chinese culture at home. Andy had been influenced from birth by both British and Chinese culture. He had been to both Taiwan and the Chinese Mainland

many times with his mother. That is to say, he had already known much about China before going there this time. According to the interview, Andy believed that he could not build a whole conversation in Chinese before this one-year programme. I did not check the exam outcomes of his study but based on what Andy knew about himself, apart from his listening comprehension and spoken language, his reading ability had already reached HSK 4 or 5 level (around 2000 commonly used words). Therefore, this time, as with Vicki and Jim, his main aim was also to gain the ability to speak Chinese.

4.3.3.2 Daily Chinese class in China – formal linguistic development.

Since Andy and Jim went to the same university, they faced the same problem at first – the different expectations of learning style. He chose to take the highest-level course with no English spoken in class. Teachers were very strict with him, and there were many tests from day to day. Studying became the biggest challenge for him, compared to other challenges of living in China, such as adapting to the environment and communicating with locals; while, differently from Jim, Andy thought highly of this learning atmosphere.

Beijing is a very good place. The Chinese language education is much better than that in Edinburgh. It is Chinese people who know how to teach Chinese well.

As I mentioned above, Andy grew up in a half Chinese family. His mother had been very strict with his studies since he was very young. When he studied for A-Level exams, he said he went to one of the best schools in England. The study pressure was also very high, and the courses were very intensive. It can be said that Andy had already adapted to a study approach which was similar in style to the traditional Chinese one.

I have always been a student who likes to study. The first year and second-year course requirements were different from the third year and the fourth year, so there was no pressure. It was not that I did not study hard, but I was not too interested in learning, because the course was not that difficult, so I spent most of my time on rowing, while this year was so different.

Andy was strongly invested in the subjects available for daily study. He chose the highest-level course (the most difficult), and learned about Chinese literature, politics, economics and history: not from the authentic social world, but from teachers and books.

Maybe because the university I study at is one of the best universities in China, so students there are really self-disciplined. The whole study environment is very good.

I met several classmates. They are all very hardworking and outstanding, especially the classmates who are from Japan and Southeast of Asia. I also met some Chinese students. They are also very hardworking.

Even though these students whom Andy mentioned were from different countries, and their backgrounds were diverse, they had one shared identity – hardworking and high achieving student, which gave Andy a sense of belonging to this group. Apart from the relationship between himself and his classmates, Andy mentioned the teacher-student relationship at that Chinese university. Unlike his fellow UK students, Andy was not seeking out diverse experiences in the wider Chinese society. Instead, he looked for those who were similar to him in character and outlook.

At a university in the UK, you can call the teacher's name directly. But in China, you must use their surname and add the title teacher behind it. During the communication, the relationship looks like middle school and elementary school here. It seems that students are students, and teachers are teachers. Very clear. This is a kind of Chinese culture. Yeah, Confucian culture, which is to respect your elders.

I like this kind of relationship quite a bit, and I think this is also a reason for the improvement of my Chinese level.

Overall, Andy was quite satisfied with his study time in Beijing. In his last interview he said,

When I first came back, I have not adapted to the study here. I am used to the pace of life in Beijing and the pressure of study there. Coming back to Edinburgh, I have forgotten how I learned before, and I don't know what will happen this semester. I feel like I only accept the learning ways in Beijing now, and only adapt to the academic pressure there.

When I came back to Edinburgh and met my original classmates, I found that I had different attitudes and habits from some of my classmates, and then I felt that I did not want to communicate with them.

Andy's journey was quite distinctive, as his latent Chinese identity appeared to have blossomed while in China: so much so that he felt that his sense of belonging placed him more easily in China than in the UK. This was compounded by his strong support for a different way of learning in China and a particular ethos of

hard work exhibited by his international student cohort. One more interesting thing was that, during the interview, Andy used the word *we* to mean himself and his classmates in Beijing, and used the word *they* to indicate his current classmates. At this stage, it appeared that Andy's Chinese student identity might become long-lasting, rather than temporary.

I used to be a social person and liked extracurricular activities, but after spending a year in Beijing, my original goals have also changed a bit.

4.3.3.3 Lack of social self and authentic experiences. Since Andy had been to China a few times before, it was not difficult for him to adapt to life in Beijing, and he did not appear to suffer culture shock. However, due to the intensive studying he took on, he seldom had time to immerse himself in the Chinese community. He joined only the university rowing crew in the first semester, and failed to join it again in the second. What he did every day was to study in the classroom and self-study or group study after class, so he did not make any good friends apart from some classmates who would study together with him. Since his family members on his mother's side were all Taiwanese, he did not have a strong desire to join in activities in the Chinese community. Thus, the main aim for him was very clear: to improve his language ability, so he invested most of his effort in daily study. This appeared to feel like a coming home for him rather than a journey into a foreign land, but of course it was also a very narrow experience as it was bounded by experiences with a select group of like-minded students who shared an Asian background. However, he did go on to engage with a broader range of individuals during an internship.

4.3.3.4 Authentic experiences via internship. After finishing the programme in Beijing, he also went to Shenzhen for a one-month internship. During that time, he immersed himself in the Chinese working community and gained many Chinese workplace skills there.

The relationship between managers and staff are so complex. I needed to remember their titles, walk behind them, very carefully; when I wrote emails to them I tried to learn the way to communicate with them for the first week, then I gave up. I felt so tired. I just tried to finish my work well.

This was a very different experience from life in university. He tried to interact with his colleagues so as to immerse himself in the Chinese workplace and language environment. However, when he felt it was too demanding of new skills and knowledge, he tried to work even harder to gain the approval and respect of his colleagues. He was worried about what might happen if he said or did something wrong. Finally, he quit to learn such difficult relationship and just worked hard instead. The hierarchical structures in the workplace, and his place as someone learning the subtleties of communication and the nuances involved in office politics, caused him to feel disempowered. This was, perhaps, his moment of culture shock in an authentic Chinese context where study skills were not the main focus.

When he came back to the UK, he took charge of a summer camp set up to guide Chinese junior school students studying and travelling in the UK. And at the beginning of the new semester, he became a residential assistant helping many Chinese students to adapt to the ways of study and life in a Scottish university. In doing this, he seemed to acknowledge, for the first time, negative feelings when in a study abroad experience.

After studying abroad for one year, I can understand more about their feelings, so I think I should take the responsibility to help them feel less isolated in a foreign country.

4.3.3.5 Reflection – a strange transition home. From my point of view, I witnessed Andy's improvement in Chinese during that year. In the first interview, it was hard for him to build a complete Chinese sentence, but in the last interview, there was no gap between us when communicating in Chinese. He could understand me easily and expressed himself clearly.

When he reflected on his language learning, he thought that his Chinese had improved, obviously, but that there were still many problems in conducting a genuine Chinese conversation with Chinese peers.

But I think it is still easier for me to communicate with my friends in the UK, but I still have some difficulties when talking with Chinese peers. This is not the opinion thing, but the barrier of culture or communication. It may also be the limitation of my language. There are so many slangs and words that I don't know.

Here, he mentioned the communication problem arising from his language limitations. Unlike Vicki and Jim, who said that a deeper understanding of Chinese culture was the biggest challenge if they wanted to talk in greater depth, Andy thought that he viewed things like a Chinese person. Although his Chinese language level had not changed greatly, Andy knew much about Chinese culture before he knew the language and this appeared to have led to a more complex negotiation of identity.

I think I am a Chinese among British, and a British among Chinese.

This hybridity could create problems and was likely to raise questions about places of belonging. Andy seemed to have decided to embrace his Chinese background when in China, but he was still seen as an international student.

I am quite willing to be treated as a Chinese because my goal in China is to learn Chinese culture. If they think I am a foreigner, the way they speak will be different from that of the Chinese. It should not be intentional, but they will definitely change, so I hope they treat me like a Chinese.

However, in some special situations, he did not like to be treated as a Chinese, because he did not think that was appropriate.

But doing some official things, like asking about something at the police station, I hope they treat me like a foreigner because once they know that I can speak Chinese well, things will be more difficult.

Overall, as his Chinese language ability improved, he could involve himself better in his Taiwanese family and the Chinese community. In the last interview, he said he would *come back to China*, rather than *go to China*. From these different verbs, it might be argued that a sense of belonging to China might dominate. Andy's questioning of his fundamental national identity, together with the challenges of being someone from two cultures, two societies and two languages, left him wanting to lay claim to one over the other in the hope of finding a sense of belonging in Chinese society. Nonetheless, his engagement with the wider Chinese society seemed limited during his time at the university and he preferred to engage with those who had a similar academic bent and from generally Asian backgrounds. His sense of belonging seemed to be linked to his academic self, yet he did seem to feel a strong

connection to the idea of being “genuinely Chinese”. His perceived insider position distanced him from his fellow Scottish-based students.

4.4 Comparing journeys – challenges and opportunities

4.4.1 Linguistic self

All three undergraduates had chosen Chinese as a major subject. Vicki and Jim, who grew up with only a British background, had learned Chinese before attending university, while Andy, who was British-Taiwanese, had been influenced by Chinese culture from the time he was born, but had not learnt Chinese before. Under such conditions, their positions seemed to be equal – Vicki and Jim could speak some basic Chinese but did not know much about Chinese culture, while Andy could not speak Chinese but knew a lot about the culture; because of the limitations of their knowledge, they all believed that it was hard to use Chinese as a communication tool. Due to their listening and speaking limitations, they were not confident that they would become legitimate speakers (Bourdieu, 1977) in a real Chinese community. Being simply language learners rather than legitimate communicators in authentic situations motivated them to shift their sense of linguistic self towards a more complex and fluent engagement with Chinese. It was this aspiration that underpinned their purpose in going to China. For Vicki and Jim, the preliminary period in China did, as expected, result in a degree of culture shock (Ward et al., 2020) and linguistic confusion as they moved from being native speakers in the UK to being outsiders looking in and unable to communicate as they would have wished. When first faced with the imbalance of power between native speakers and herself, Vicki did not know how to deal with the challenges of trying to communicate in Chinese and found herself on occasion hiding what little she knew in order to avoid feeling vulnerable and making mistakes. Jim also felt frustrated when

he felt that he was being treated like a five-year-old little boy. Yet they did not give up; instead, in the end, this motivated them to study harder and to talk more with Chinese people. Gradually, Vicki and Jim gained a sense of approval and acceptance and appeared to reach a point where they felt that they were still “other” and Chinese people still treated them as foreigners, but foreigners who could speak Chinese. This seemed to give them a legitimate and positive status linguistically and socially.

When they arrived in China, everything was new for them but they were now surrounded by the Chinese language everywhere; on street signs and on buses, on shop fronts and newspapers. Their Chinese language ability increased dramatically during this period, influenced by the changing position of Chinese from a class-only language to a language needed for everyday survival and potentially leading to immersion in an authentic Chinese community.

4.4.2 Cultural and social self

Unlike Vicki and Jim, Andy was familiar with Chinese culture before studying in Beijing, because of his background as a Taiwanese/Chinese-British citizen with a strong sense of hybridity, belonging to, at least, two different cultures. His physical appearance did not mark him out as a foreigner as obviously as it had for Vicki and Jim. His Chinese appearance seemed to help people look beyond his otherness as he tried to establish himself. Although linguistically, Andy was at a similar level to Vicki and Jim on first arriving, the cultural aspects of life in China were not a particular hurdle for him and although the Chinese language was also a limited barrier, he did not feel that he struggled too much to find himself a part of the Chinese community – albeit mainly the academic one, with opportunities to engage in authentic exchanges on academic subjects. Moreover, Andy put a lot of time into

study, but did not invest much in his social life. He quickly adapted to the education system and the study culture in China and increasingly appeared to identify more and more with his Chinese background. Andy's limited social engagement with Chinese people in everyday life activities compares interestingly with the experience of Vicki and Jim, who eventually found ways to become culturally and socially connected with organised groups more broadly. Living in China allowed them to engage with an authentic Chinese community and to practise Chinese daily. Learning a language cannot be viewed apart from its culture (Hall, 2013), so their linguistic development was often combined with cultural learning within diverse groupings such as neighbourhood groups and football teams (Byram & Fleming, 1998). Vicki was the only one who had never been to China before, so all her previous knowledge of China was based on films or informal conversations with other students and she was the one who struggled most in the beginning, but this might also have been because she had not travelled to China before, nor travelled independently of her family. This combination of lack of experience on her own as a young adult and her superficial familiarity with Chinese culture made for greater challenges initially. On the other hand, before going to China, she had prepared herself for the fact that she would face differences and difficulties when she arrived. Hence, she had believed that she had the mental preparedness to tolerate these difficulties (Edwards, 2002). These were their first steps in engaging in the Chinese culture and learning to be members of the Chinese community – learning, tolerating, and trying to live within the Chinese lifestyle. Although there were some misunderstandings when they communicated due to their language limitations, they still felt fine and thought it was nice to talk with Chinese people. Even though they

did not have some sense of belonging during their first several weeks in China, they felt that they were accepted.

However, unlike Jim and Andy, Vicki thought that she was sensitive at the beginning. When she tried to speak Chinese with native speakers, she always thought that her behaviour bothered Chinese people, and that they always felt angry. From Vicki's perspective, Chinese people felt uncomfortable and did not want to speak to her. She felt anxious and less confident. In such circumstances, Vicki thought that she was not accepted in a friendly way by the Chinese community, a belief which impacted her sense of belonging – she was seen as “other” and was always different from the local residents.

There were two reasons why Vicki's feelings were obviously different from those of Andy and Jim. One might have been because they were of different genders and had different personalities. Vicki was rather sensitive, while Andy and Jim might not care too much about people's reactions. The other reason may be that the cities they went to were different. Beijing, where Andy and Jim were located, is more international and open than Hangzhou, so the people there may feel more normal when facing foreigners. Also, in general, people from the north of China (Beijing) are more magnanimous and talkative than people from the south of China (Hangzhou) (Chen, 2014), so that visitors might encounter relatively different attitudes on the part of people from different parts of China.

Luckily, since Vicki's major was Chinese, even though she faced challenges, she did not choose to quit and go back to her own country where she felt comfortable and entirely accepted. On the contrary, she strove to find more opportunities to speak Chinese. Like Andy and Jim, these three participants all tried to find opportunities to speak Chinese in public places and involve themselves in the

Chinese community, culturally and socially, in their own ways. That is to say, they kept investing (Norton, 2013) in Chinese. For Vicki, talking with Chinese people and using the Chinese language was not just like a daily sample conversation in the UK. This was an intercultural communication for both Vicki and the native speakers, in which language and culture should be treated as a whole component (Sysoyev, 2002). In this new linguistic and cultural context, it was, for Vicki, a process of reconstructing her new social network (Montgomery, 2010). At the same time, in Vicki's opinion, a new "social reality" (Alred et al., 2003) might emerge, which Kramsch (1993) called the "third place", the word "third" meaning a new culture emerging from the meeting of two different cultures. From her original British culture, Vicki moved to a new Chinese linguistic and cultural context, which she tried to consider, accept, and compare with the British culture. Then, with her increasing interactions with Chinese people, and her understandings of Chinese culture, a "third place", which integrated British and Chinese culture, was developed in her mind.

Vicki felt very comfortable there because this was a place where people knew or at least tried to accept the Western culture. Some other student participants in other groups also mentioned this experience, in that they found it easy to make Chinese friends who were familiar with Western culture. This third (intercultural) space (Bhabha, 2012), mentioned here, provided optimal conditions for positive interactions. Similarly, a later Chinese whispers game led to Vicki seeing herself as a legitimate speaker (Bourdieu, 1977) in the Chinese community, through gaining a position as a trusted member of her team.

In a similar way to Vicki's, Jim also found alternative means of learning Chinese and engaging with the Chinese community. However, at the beginning, because of his language limitations, he always had a feeling that he was not a

member of that community and was different from its own members. Jim found that he was not treated as a person of his real age. In Jim's words, it could be that both Jim and the Chinese people desired to talk with each other, so that there was a mutual investment between them (Norton, 2013); but that their positions during the conversation were unequal – Jim was "treated like a kid". (from Jim's perspective). Thus, the power between them was unbalanced (Norton, 2013). Chinese people held the power to choose how they talked with Jim, while Jim was passive and could not complete such a conversation during his early period abroad. Even though he felt frustrated, he could not make any changes at that time. Jim was trying to change his position in the Chinese community. He did not want to be seen as just a foreigner, but as a legitimate speaker (Bourdieu, 1977) with the capacity and opportunity (Norton, 2013) to use the target language to speak with and to be part of this new community. Jim later joined a local football team, and even though the language limitations still existed, their shared hobby and willingness to work together to understand each other helped to bridge any gaps. Here a common interest and purpose helped Jim's team to accept him, giving him a genuine sense of belonging to this group. The more the native speaker invested in this experience, the more possibilities there were to promote mutual understanding (Norton, 2013) and a sense of belonging.

While staying with a family, Jim sometimes had a feeling that he was an outsider in that family because of their different opinions and different living styles and cultural aspects. Despite this, he had a strong sense that that family accepted him. Such an experience gave him an excellent opportunity to practise Chinese and discover what a real Chinese family was like, but, more importantly, to have a sense of membership of this small community. These feelings also influenced his social

position in the whole Chinese community, and as a result he did not feel afraid to speak Chinese with native speakers. Here we find Jim, once again, establishing a position within a group which gave him both a sense of belonging and authentic engagements with native speakers.

Unlike Vicki and Jim, who were English, did not know much about China before this one-year programme, and were curious to discover China and Chinese culture, Andy had known a great deal about China and had already been to many places. Thus, he was not that interested in travelling. What he did every day was to study in the classroom and to self-study after class, so he did not make many friends besides some classmates with whom he could study together. Socially, he only joined the university crew in the first semester but failed to join it again in the second semester due to his heavy study schedule.

4.4.3 Hybrid self

Learning in a new cultural and linguistic context can impact a learner's personal development (Iredale, 1994:7). Conducting authentic conversations successfully could potentially gain learners a sense of belonging within Chinese society or certain groups and cultures. The opportunity to live in China and to build a new hybrid self with connections to both languages and cultures was seen positively by all three undergraduates. They believed that they had achieved some goals such as independence, confidence and the ability to deal with different problems. However, Vicki and Jim believed that their language limitations were a barrier for them and that this hindered, at times, any further intercultural understanding as they tried to make Chinese friends. Jim could engage in the football team and the host family, and enjoy travel in China, but he always said that he saw all of this from

an *outsider* standpoint, which means that he always thought he was different from other members of the community.

At the same time, living abroad also gave them a good opportunity to reflect on their own country and culture. There were many small things in daily life that they adapted to but had never noticed in the UK. For example, Vicki, when she first left the UK and lived in a new place, realised that there were so many differences between the UK and China, like the climate, the population, and the daily schedule. When she returned home, she regained a strong sense of belonging and thought that everything became much easier for her.

Jim also reflected on his own country. In comparing home and China, he inevitably found things that he thought were better in the UK such as being able to drink tap water, democracy, a smaller population and fresh air, which he had never noticed before, but really appreciated now. Actually, every time when he noticed something was different from what he was used to, it strengthened his original sense of self as a British person (Montgomery, 2010). This would remind him that his life, his country and himself were different from those in China and reinforced his sense of otherness. Even though he adapted to life in China and handled life easily there, he held an even stronger sense of his British identity when he came back home. His home identity reinforced the strength of his connectedness to family, friends and the familiar interactions of everyday life. However, having experienced life in China, both Vicki and Jim could lay claim to a modified sense of self, whereby that sense of belonging now also encompassed a very different language, culture and society. This hybrid intercultural self-implies a different kind of being and a different perspective on the question of “who I am”.

In contrast, Andy's background while growing up meant that he had a degree of "intercultural competence" (Byram & Golubeva, 2020), which meant that he could understand, to some extent, both British and Chinese culture. This brought him much benefit, as he felt he could more easily understand people's views from both sides. He could also find a ready sense of belonging in both countries, since he had points in common with people in the two different communities. Meanwhile, intercultural competence and the fact of belonging to both countries and cultures also brought him some relatively negative impacts, since he had both similarities with and differences from each society. That was the reason he always thought he was different from others in each community: not wholly one or the other but constantly negotiating between the two.

Language is a medium for conducting understandings from others, and is also a very important link with which to make the speaker perceive *who I am* and *who I appear to be* (Montgomery, 2010). When Andy went to China, he developed his Chinese language ability (up to HSK6), and he also experienced his life like a Chinese person although he did not engage much with the wider Chinese community, but instead focused on engagement with academic colleagues. Moreover, his connectedness to Chinese academic life led him to feel bereft on his return to the UK.

When I first came back, I had not adapted to the study here. I am used to the pace of life in Beijing and the pressure of study there. Coming back to Edinburgh, I have forgotten how I learned before, and I don't know what will happen this semester. I feel like I only accept the learning ways in Beijing now, and only adapt to the academic pressure

there. So, after getting the teacher's request this semester, I was a little worried about it.

When I came back to Edinburgh and met my original classmates, I found that I had different attitudes and habits from some of my classmates, and then I felt that I did not want to communicate with them.

--Andy's interview

During the interview, Andy always used the word *we* to mean his classmates in Beijing, and the word *they* to indicate his classmates in Edinburgh. Unlike Jim, who also accepted the Beijing learning style, but appreciated studying in Edinburgh more, Andy appreciated his study time in China more and found a greater sense of belonging there.

4.5 Part B: Postgraduate

Alan and William were classmates. As part of a programme with which to finish their postgraduate study, they had been to China to study Chinese for half a year together. This time, because they had already passed HSK 6 (the highest level of the Chinese language test) before going to China, unlike the experience of the undergraduate participants, their language ability did not improve significantly, but they acquired more experiences and understanding of cultural aspects. In the following part, I will try to adopt their standpoint so as to explain their true feelings about their identity linguistically, socially and culturally during their half year programme in Shanghai.

4.5.1 Alan

In China, I think people also have a method which suits their language, so I think that naturally produces a very diffident kind of outlook.

Alan was a postgraduate student in Chinese studies at the same university as the undergraduate participants. He had worked for six years before his Master's study, and began to learn Chinese by himself during his working time. His original reason for learning Chinese was that he had noticed that there were four tones in Chinese, which sparked his interest. Additionally, he had been interested in Chinese culture from a very young age. After a period of self-learning, he realised that just textbook-based learning, with less communication, made improvement difficult; then he found a one-to-one tutor. During this learning process, he gained more interest in Chinese language and culture, and due to China's rapid development, he realised that there was career potential for him there. All these previous learning experiences contributed to his decision to go back to university and study for a Master's degree in Chinese studies.

4.5.1.1 Anticipation of studying in China. After learning Chinese systematically for one year at the Scottish university, he went to Shanghai for half a year for immersed language learning. This was his second visit to China. The previous time, five years earlier, he had gone to Shanghai for an internship. At that time, he had just studied Chinese for half a year, and he mostly communicated with Western people, but this time he had passed the HSK 6, which means that he could master more than 5000 Chinese words (*HSK Level VI*, n.d.).

This time I think it would be more enjoyable. My Chinese now is good enough to talk with Chinese people, and life would be easier.

Based on this background, he thought he would not face too many challenges, but his main aims in choosing to study in China were still to improve his Chinese language ability and to know more about Chinese culture.

4.5.1.2 Daily Chinese class in China – formal linguistic development.

Unlike the undergraduate participants, who were studying on campus continually, Alan treasured his student identity more when he came back to university once again after working for a long time. Taking the class and going to the library were the two main things in his daily life, both in Edinburgh and in Shanghai.

However, when talking about his learning experience in Shanghai, even though he thought his lecturers were very kind and had many critical ideas about Chinese culture and Chinese characters, he was not satisfied with the courses.

The curriculum at this university had limited value. I do not think the classes were very interactive. Even in our oral classes, we very seldom spoke Chinese.

There was a total of 16 students in the class, and the teaching strategies were more teacher-centred. For most of the time, Alan could only sit in his seat and listen to lecturers. Compared with the Chinese class at the Scottish university, where there were only two students and lecturers could communicate with him frequently, he definitely thought the opportunities for him to practise spoken Chinese were relatively limited at this university in Shanghai. Moreover, for the listening comprehension training, teachers always played tapes for them, and what they needed to do was to answer the questions according to the tape.

I thought this isn't useful, because I have to simultaneously listen to this tape, read and answer. I could do it at home.

However, *I do not think the classes were poor there*, he said. He still thought he made some progress, especially in listening. On the one hand, when Alan and his classmates did the listening practice together, he could find that some of his classmates did better than him, which encouraged him to practise harder (peer pressure). On the other hand, the voices, tones and content were diverse in the tapes, which helped him adapt to different ways and contexts of speaking Chinese.

Moreover, Alan was the only native English-speaking student in his class. Unlike the undergraduate participants, who could speak English with their classmates after class, Alan always spoke Chinese. *I struggle a bit*, he said. Due to different mother tongues, language learners cannot avoid having different accents when speaking Chinese. Sometimes it was hard for Alan to clearly distinguish their speech, which he called *not pure Mandarin*. Despite such conditions, Alan did not resist talking with his classmates. On the contrary, he tried to get familiar with different accents and talk with them as much as he could. *This is the other thing I think contributes to my listening*, he said.

From Alan's class learning experience in Shanghai, it was not hard to find that Alan had a clear idea about his study. Compared with the undergraduate participants, who were struggling to catch up with the learning tasks, Alan knew more clearly what he really wanted to achieve, and which parts he would invest more effort in (Norton, 2013). He did not care about his identity as home student or international student. What he really cared about was which way would better help him to learn, and whether he could achieve his aims through that kind of education. That is to say, he could persist with his investment if he thought it was useful for his learning, even if this way was uncomfortable for him. On the other hand, if he

thought it was useless for his learning, even if he felt comfortable, he would stop, or at least reduce his investment.

4.5.1.3 Living in Shanghai was just the same as usual – cultural and social life. Since Shanghai is an international city in China (Zhang, 2017), there are many foreigners, and everything is convenient, so Alan did not find that his life changed obviously after he arrived there – he just kept studying every day.

I do not know if I lived a very authentic Chinese lifestyle, because I lived in student dorms and went to university, was only five minutes away on the bike, sat in the classroom.

Alan thought his life in Shanghai was different from that of the local residents, which actually was a comfort circle for him. If he kept in this circle, he did not need to make any changes from his life in the UK – staying with European classmates, going to a Western restaurant and eating Western food. However, Alan was not satisfied with such a lifestyle and tried to break through it.

The main advantage of studying in China is that it's in China, so you can go outside and you're always immersed in the culture.

With this thought in mind, he tried many ways of practising his Chinese. He found several language partners through APP and the university website, paid for a one-by-one tutor to improve his spoken Chinese, and travelled to many different places to create more opportunities to practise Chinese.

I am immersed with people who constantly speak Chinese all around you, and naturally you'll improve a lot.

During this process, listening was the hardest thing for him, but he could understand most of the talk of Chinese people after staying in Shanghai.

I would try; it was quite difficult but gradually I would be used to it. I could speak Chinese back and there wouldn't be that kind of delay where I am like I don't know what's going on.

When he went outside the campus, he was not just the language learner, but the language user (Benson et al., 2013), and a foreigner in local people's eyes. In class, the Chinese lecturers had a responsibility to build the mutual investment between them and encourage him to speak Chinese more, while in the Chinese community outside the classroom, he took on the main responsibility to process the conversation with native speakers (Norton, 2013). Unlike the first time he went to China, when he could hardly conduct a conversation with Chinese people and always stayed with Westerners, this time, with the development of his Chinese language ability, Alan could invest more in Chinese. And the more investment he put into it, the more investment he would get from the native speaker. Under such positive conditions, he had already become a legitimate speaker (Bourdieu, 1977) in Chinese communication. Such approval from the social world also had a positive influence on his formal Chinese class. As mentioned above, Alan thought he improved his listening ability through the listening class, but actually, this also benefitted from his investment in the context of Chinese daily life.

However, in some specific circumstances, Alan would quit speaking Chinese, which meant he quit his investment in Chinese. These phenomena sometimes appeared in his daily life, as when he went to the bank, or to the barber, where there were so many specific words that he did not know that he could not express himself well. That is to say, he was not a legitimate speaker (Bourdieu, 1977) at that moment. Other participants, like both Andy and Vicki, said that they had had such experiences. As Norton (2013) pointed out, the language learner holds the main

responsibility for ensuring the progress of the conversation with the native speaker. Since Alan could not express himself, the native speaker could not make sense of his words and could not find the proper way to invest in the conversation. Both their investments were discontinued at that time. However, Alan also said that, in some situations, like going to see the doctor, he would have to continue with the conversation. Then, he needed to express himself as well as he possibly could, even using some mobile APP or body language, to guarantee that his investment was legitimate. *I had to speak Chinese. That was really a struggle, but I practised a lot and also enriched my vocabulary. That was very good experience*, he said. During this process, Alan's investment promoted the native speaker's investment, which furthered the conversation.

Even though, throughout half of that year, Alan did not think that he was sufficiently trained by the course, he was satisfied with his progress after studying in Shanghai for that half year, especially in his listening comprehension.

4.5.1.4 Reflection – home transition. Unlike Vicki, Jim and Andy, especially Vicki and Jim, who grew up with a British background and were much younger, Alan showed more maturity and calm in facing overseas study and life. More importantly, his Chinese was good enough before he went, so that he did not suffer too much when he was newly arrived there. He thought everything was convenient in Shanghai and he was confident enough to communicate with Chinese people. When he came back, he also did not feel that anything was unsuitable. *It is not that strange to be back home, because I think before I came, I got into quite a regular routine*, he said.

If I do not talk the difficult subject matter, people are talking just as when I speak English to my friends. This was his thought about his Chinese level, which

was advanced. I also had talked with him in Chinese, and there was no gap in our communication. However, when I asked about his cultural engagement, he said, *I think maybe after how long I lived in China, I would still ultimately be a bit of an outsider.* He could understand, he could express himself, and he even knew what Chinese people were thinking. But it was still very hard for him to really engage with the Chinese community.

I do not know what kind of big things are happening in China, I do not know what is reported in the news. And so what people are talking about at the moment, I do not necessarily know that. And I think I do not know exactly how Chinese people communicate.

I learn ultimately from a textbook. I so converse with people, but they are in textbooks. They never come up with things like how to tell jokes.

If someone is speaking very formally, you will not feel your relationship is that close.

Obviously, my appearance anyway, no one will ever mistake me for being a Chinese person. I do not think I will ever be entirely integrated into Chinese society.

From the sentences above, it can be seen that even though Alan could speak very fluent Chinese, he still held a very strong identity as British, or at least, as a foreigner, in the Chinese community. He always felt he was different from Chinese people, from this appearance to his inner world, an identity to which he applied the word *outsider*.

This is not the problem of the language level, but the culture. Having knowledge of Chinese culture and knowing the target language very well did not

mean that he could engage well with the Chinese community – unlike Vicki and Jim, who were still at the language and culture learning level, and would feel satisfied once they could communicate with Chinese people independently, because this was evidence of their progress in Chinese. To some degree, their language level was still not enough for them to conduct a deep conversation with Chinese people. But Alan was different; he had reached the level of understanding most of the talk of Chinese people, but he still sometimes could not catch its true underlying meaning, or found it hard to grasp the points that Chinese people were really interested in. As he said, *I do not know where their line is.*

Alan also said that this did not mean that Chinese people made him feel uncomfortable. It was just that he thought he was different from them. As a second language learner, even with a language distance far from the native language, he can handle the target language, he can know the culture, he can balance the power between himself and the native speaker, and become the excellent legitimate speaker (Bourdieu, 1977), but his identity still belongs to his native culture.

4.5.2 William

There is always an outsider feeling.

William was also a postgraduate student in Chinese studies, and he also went to Shanghai for the study abroad, so he and Alan were classmates both in Scotland and China. He began to learn Chinese Kong Fu when he was very young. From that time, he had the opportunity to experience Chinese culture, which he felt was very interesting. When he studied at college (in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme), he selected Chinese history, which further sparked his interest. However, Chinese was not his major during his undergraduate study, but he did the online course to learn the language. In the interview, he spoke many times about his

mother letting him learn, and how she played Chinese movies for him when he was young. Thus, his interest in Chinese was also influenced by his mother. Moreover, finding a good job was another incentive for him to learn Chinese. Like Alan, after several years of work, William returned to university to study for his postgraduate degree in Chinese studies, and he said he also planned to apply for the PhD programme in this field in China.

4.5.2.1 Anticipation of studying in China. William had been to China many times before his postgraduate study for different reasons – travelling, learning Chinese Kong Fu, teaching English, learning Chinese, and visiting friends. Like Alan, his previous Chinese learning experience helped his language ability to reach a high enough standard (he also passed the HSK6 test) to enable him to communicate with Chinese people, so this time, during this study abroad, neither living nor studying challenged him. *I am proud of my Chinese, and I am not afraid of communicating with Chinese locals*, he said. Additionally, William's girlfriend is Chinese, and they planned to marry in 2019, so his identity was not just that of an international student, but also that of a prospective Chinese son-in-law.

Considering all the above, William's anticipation this time was of improving his Chinese language ability and involving himself in the Chinese community as much as he could, goals which were similar to Alan's.

4.5.2.2 Daily Chinese class in China – formal linguistic development. William also told some unpleasant stories about learning at one Shanghai university, such as that his writing teacher was old and had an accent, the teaching methods were teacher-centred, and he could not debate during the class. As he was in the highest level, he had learned many words which were seldom used in daily life. And his teacher was sometimes exam-oriented, which meant that the teacher just

showed what the characters were and let him remember some phrases directly. He thought he could only put them into the short memory without actually knowing how to use them. Because these words were difficult to learn and very literary, he did not know if it was necessary to learn or to remember them, which directly affected his investment in learning them. He even gave me an example of one of his classmates who thought his Chinese got worse after studying at that university, because he could not get along with his teachers and could not adapt to the teaching style.

However, considering the overall learning environment and learning outcomes, he still delivered a positive judgement. He thought the teachers were strict, which pushed him to invest himself more in learning Chinese so as to meet their requirements. He also said the *teacher spoke only in Chinese and quite fast Chinese. That is a very useful part.* To catch what the teachers said and understand them, he could try to improve his Chinese level, which stimulated his investment in learning Chinese, to some degree. In terms of the curriculum, *I like the separation of classes like from listening, reading, speaking and writing. This is definitely useful,* he said. After the half year's study, he thought his Chinese had improved.

William also pointed out one perspective on learning Chinese – even if he learnt Chinese in different places both in the UK and in China, and teachers had different teaching styles, the knowledge he would gain stayed the same that is, from Pinyin, to characters, reading and speaking. The grammar could not change. Thus, to his mind, all these classroom differences did not influence him too much to affect his motivation to learn Chinese. In other words, to learn Chinese he did not depend on his teachers, but rather on learning the language itself. Also, he could hold this opinion because he was mature enough, like Alan. He knew what his aim was, and

had a clear plan for achieving it. Wherever he was, his identity was that of a student of Chinese, and his aim was to improve his Chinese.

4.5.2.3 Living in Shanghai – cultural and social life. Because William had been to China many times, he did not face many challenges when he arrived in Shanghai this time. Everything went smoothly for him. In regard to his language learning, William held the same idea as Alan. *Just being in Shanghai, being in China, talking to people, like doing regular meetups were the true value of my going to China*, he said, which means that engaging with the Chinese community was the most effective way for him to learn Chinese. *Everybody becomes a teacher*, he said.

He had two distinctive experiences. One was attending his Chinese friend's wedding. The other was becoming engaged to his Chinese girlfriend and taking the Chinese style wedding photos at a very famous location. During the interviews, he used the word *hilarious* many times. He gave me much vivid information about these two experiences. For example, when witnessing the process of the Chinese wedding, he did not know what the new couple was doing on the stage, and why the guests were laughing. When the wedding photos with his Chinese fiancée were being taken, he also felt confused as to why they should go to such a crowded place to take photos, and why there were so many new couples taking photos at the same place, even using the same gestures. *I am being absolutely as confused at the end as I was at the start of it*, he said. He told me he knew that was a case of cultural differences, and he could respect them, but it was still hard to accept.

His confusion during these two activities showed his level of engagement with Chinese culture. He could attend, accept matters and even do some favours according to others' order in the wedding, but he could not understand the culture

behind it. Because of this, he could not fully engage with it. He could relate these experiences to me and to his British friends clearly. From this story, it could be speculated that he would know more about the process of the Chinese wedding and find it clearer the next time he attended. However, even though he obtained knowledge of Chinese wedding culture, in his mind, this still belonged to *their stories*, but not to *his story*. He could know and respect it, but inwardly, his cultural identity was still British. As a result, his sense of self made him feel different from the Chinese people around him in these specific situations.

William also told me about some unpleasant moments he had experienced when he was in China. When he travelled with his fiancée, one Chinese person, who might not have met foreigners before, became very excited, directly grabbed his arm and said to him, *take photos*. At first he did not know what had happened. When he realised it, he felt kind of offended. *I will be a toy for Chinese people*, he said. He knew all these things could happen because he was a foreigner. Regardless of the character of that Chinese person (who perhaps was not well-educated or polite), if William had been a member of the Chinese community, that person would not have done this. That is to say, from this unfortunate experience, William could get the feeling that he was different from the Chinese, and Chinese people treated him differently, which influenced his sense of belonging, as he felt – *I am a foreigner in China*.

4.5.2.4 Reflection – home transition. When I asked William about his feelings on coming back to the UK, he said *pretty good*. Because he could go to a British pub, which he thought was a very important part of his social life. But he also said he did miss being in China. The reason for this, he said, was that there were many things in China that he could not experience in the UK, while, when he was in

China, the pub was about the only one thing he missed. From these words, it could be inferred that he was now adapted to his life in China. On this basis, I asked what his idea of his identity was now, and his answer was: *I still think I am British, but after living in China, I realise what it means to be British, as much as I have come to realise that I am not fully British. The things that I considered normal have improved what defined being British.* His identity became multiple, and he began to have a sense of now belonging in China.

One of the main reasons for this was that he would be a Chinese person's husband. To some degree, China became his second home. Another reason was also very important, which was that he spoke Chinese, and he knew how to communicate with Chinese people. However, when we reflected on his life in China, he said *there is always an outsider feeling*, which was, coincidentally, nearly the same as what Alan said. He became a member of one Chinese family, but thought that he was still not a member of the big Chinese family. *This is kind of normal like the guest in the house. You might not be a part of them.* He also gave me an example of some foreigners who could speak Chinese perfectly, and he believed that they would have the same feeling as him.

It's just not something you can change, he said. Chinese people treated him as a guest, actually; he also always held the identity of a foreigner. That is to say, no matter how perfect his Chinese is, he still thinks that he is British. He can have the sense of belonging in China, but his identity still belongs to his original family roots, which was the same as Alan's.

4.6 Comment

Alan and William are of similar ages, around 28 years old, and they studied the same programme at the same university. Alan's Chinese level was slightly higher

than William's, but they had both passed the HSK 6 (around 5000 commonly used words) test. Unlike Vicki, Jim and Andy, who had experienced hardship in adaptation to the language atmosphere, Alan and William did not find it difficult to communicate with Chinese locals, using the target language from the beginning of this period. Although in the target community, as mentioned previously, the native speaker played a very important role in progressing the conversation with the language learner (i.e., so as to navigate the topic and to continue the talk), the power between Alan/William and the native speakers was nearly balanced. This was perhaps due to the fact that they did not feel it was difficult to express their ideas in Chinese most of the time. Consequently, native speakers tended to treat them as advanced language users and Alan and William were not worried about communicating effectively with Chinese speakers. Thus, their investment in conversation, through their high degree of fluency, also came close to establishing a mutual balance of power. To some degree, they had achieved legitimate speaker status (Bourdieu, 1977).

They both had a British background. When they were in China, they used Chinese as their tool for living, while they spoke English when contacting their families. They did not feel uncomfortable in switching languages and shifting their linguistic identity from that of an English speaker to that of a Chinese speaker. This means that, to some degree, they built a hybrid identity and believed that they were advanced Chinese speakers who could speak Chinese in most situations in which they wanted to. They had some negative opinions on the Chinese course they had taken at that Shanghai university, but they appreciated that the course helped them to engage with the Chinese community. If they had not taken the course, they might have had more trouble in learning Chinese. But they also thought that the ways of speaking they learnt from the textbook were too formal, which could widen the inner

distance between them and the native speaker. Thus, both of them agreed that their best Chinese teacher was daily life. That is to say, their investment in the formal class promoted their investment in the social and cultural life, and vice versa.

They had plenty of opportunities to practise every day in China, and they could observe the native speakers' behaviours and ways of dealing with affairs, and even learn from them. They were no less confident when speaking with native speakers, and could express themselves very well to ensure the progress of the conversation. However, they still had an *outsider* feeling. They thought that the native speaker treated them differently, and also that they were different from the native speaker. According to the term *legitimate peripheral participation* (Lave & Wenger, 1991), a new member participates in a specific group, interacts with the existing members, and accumulates experience through continuing practice. That is to say, once the interaction has occurred, the participant begins to be a member of the new community. Linking this to Alan and William, it is seen that they interacted with Chinese people every day, and so they had actually become members of the Chinese community. The native speaker accepted them, and they were willing to engage in the conversation.

Because their original background was obviously different from the new community they participated in, they had a sense of difference. If they wanted to participate in the core activity of the new community, they needed to attend the relative activities and meet the existing members widely, so as to find more information and opportunities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). At the same time, it was necessary to abandon some of their original culture. Both these aims are difficult to achieve, especially the latter one. That is why they always had an "outsider" feeling.

Actually, they were not outsiders, but members who were not close enough to the core activity of the community.

Alan and William are two typical examples of the features of successful second language learners. They had a feeling of being outsiders, but they hoped to be accepted, and also hoped that their differences could be understood and respected. Actually, their sense of self had already transited imperceptibly through their increasing opportunities to speak Chinese in the Chinese community.

Chapter 5: Findings of Group Two, Three and Four

5.1 Structure Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are a total of 17 participants, including 23 interviews and 4 reflective diaries in this research. In chapter four, the data from five participants in Group One, which is the main group, have been analysed respectively. In this chapter, the data from all the other 12 participants will be analysed.

This chapter will include three main parts, which are the findings for Group Two, Group Three and Group Four. All the student participants in Group Two and Three were interviewed once when they had finished their study in China and returned to the UK. I will organise and analyse these data in a synthesised way, and some stories will be analysed together. Group Four is the tutor group, analysed to discover participants' changes and development from their tutors' viewpoints. Tutors were also interviewed once.

5.2 Brief Introduction to the participants

There are six participants in Group Two. They were all of British growing-up background, studying Chinese at the Scottish university. Except for Colby, who was a postgraduate student, all were undergraduate students. All had studied in China for at least one year.

There are four participants in Group Three. Since they had studied Chinese as a minor course, their backgrounds were relatively diverse: one undergraduate student, two postgraduate master students and one PhD student; and their majors were different. Except for Perry, whose nationality is Polish, all the others are British nationals or British residents. Adam had stayed in China for just one month; all the others had the learning experience in China for at least one year.

There are two participants in Group Four. They are experienced language tutors, teaching Chinese in the UK and China respectively, and their mother tongue is Chinese.

Table 5.1

The summary of participants in Group 2, 3 and 4

	Pseudonyms	Nationality	Gender	Programme	Length of time spent in China	Educational background
Group 2 -- Chinese major students (Interviewed once)						
1	Charles	UK	M	UG	One Year	Chinese - Major
2	Colby	UK	M	PG-Master	One Year and a half	Chinese - Major
3	Diana	UK	F	UG	Two Years	Chinese - Major
4	Fiona	UK	F	UG	14 months	Chinese - Major
5	Neta	UK	F	UG	Two and a half Years	Chinese - Major
6	Payne	UK	M	UG	One Year	Chinese - Major
Group 3 -- Chinese minor students (Interviewed once)						
1	Adam	Slovenia (UK resident)	M	PG-Master	1 Month	Computer Science - Major Chinese - Minor
2	Alice	UK	F	UG	One Year	History - Major Chinese - Minor
3	James	UK	M	PG-Master	1 Year and a half	Philosophy - Major, Chinese - Minor
4	Paul	Poland	M	PG-PhD	One Year	History - Major, Chinese - Minor
Group 4 – tutors (Interviewed once)						
	Name	Nationality	Gender	Occupation	Teaching experience	
1	Dan (Daisy)	China	F	Lecturer	15 Years in the UK	
2	Wei (Wendy)	China	F	Lecturer	8 Years in China	

5.3 Group Two – single interview for Chinese major students

The six participants in this group all grew up in the UK, and their major was Chinese at the same Scottish university as the participants described in the previous chapter.

In the degree aspect, Charles, Diana, Fiona, Neta and Payne were full-time undergraduate students in a four-year MA Chinese programme. Like Vicki, Jim and Andy, discussed in the last chapter, they had all gone to China to study Chinese for one year during their third year. Colby was a full-time postgraduate student in a two-year MC (Master of Chinese) programme. Like William and Alan in the last chapter, Colby had gone to China to study Chinese for half a year during his Year Two study.

In the learning experience aspect, Charles, Fiona and Payne had never learned Chinese before starting university study, although some of them had previously travelled there in a private capacity. By contrast, Diana, Neta and Colby had more learning experience. They had been to China to study the language systematically for one year before their university course, through the Confucius Institute or some other programme, so this one-year journey was not unfamiliar to them.

The following table provides their information.

Table 5.2

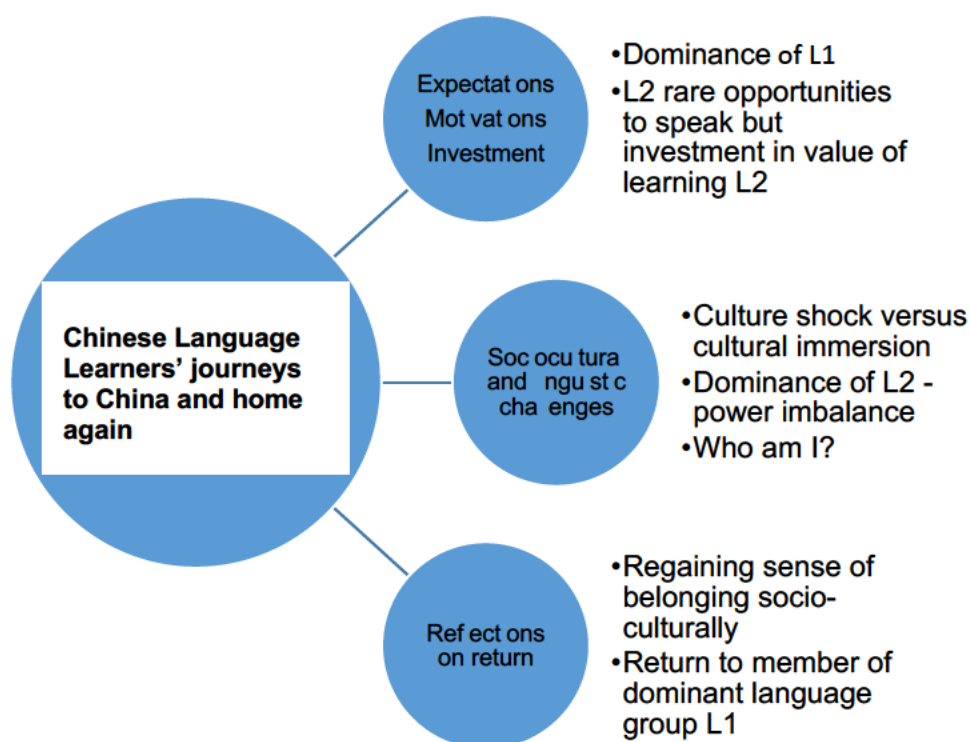
Backgrounds of Group 2 participants

	Charles	Fiona	Payne	Diana	Neta	Colby
Undergraduate	√	√	√	√	√	
Postgraduate						√
Had learning experience in China				√	√	√
Had no learning experience in China	√	√	√			

They all improved in their Chinese language ability after their study abroad, but their ways of learning, their learning experience, and the challenges and difficulties they had faced were diverse. Gradually, they were accepted by the Chinese community and found more opportunities to speak in front of Chinese people, which prompted their sense of belonging in the new community and altered their identity. As with the structure of the last chapter, for this group also, I will try to adopt the standpoint of these language learners to elucidate their learning experiences, sense of self and engagement with Chinese language and culture and try to explain their identity transition and reconstruction.

Figure 5.1

Conceptual frame reminder



5.3.1 Opening a whole new world – learning Chinese

These six participants had various backgrounds, and their reasons for choosing Chinese as their major were also diverse, as shown in the following table.

Table 5.3*Participants' reasons to learn Chinese*

Pseudonyms	Reasons to choose Chinese as their major
Charles	<i>I always like travelling to different counties and I really enjoyed the trip to China. I like languages, as I was doing French and German, but I didn't want to keep doing them really. I wanted to do something new.</i>
Fiona	<i>I've always been good at languages. Getting into European languages is really difficult here, so I chose to take that pressure off from getting really good grades. Actually, my grandmother grew up in Shanghai and my great grandfather lived in Shanghai. I chose based on the fact that I have the most links to China.</i>
Payne	<i>Before I entered the university, my father and I talked about my future, and I thought arts or languages were important skills for me. Then, I wanted to choose the most difficult language to learn, so I considered Chinese, Japanese and Korean. Then I thought Chinese is more important for the current world, so I chose Chinese as my major.</i>
Diana	<i>I had no intention to do Chinese initially. Then I had the opportunity to go to China, and I fell in love with the country, and I stayed for another year and that's why I decided to do my major.</i>
Neta	<i>I am interested in languages. Actually, I majored in both Chinese and Spanish in my Year 1. After Year 2, I quit the Spanish major and only majored in Chinese, because my Chinese is better than Spanish, and I think there are many people in Europe who can speak Spanish, but not too many can speak Chinese, so I think Chinese might be more useful.</i>
Colby	<i>All my life, I've been interested in China since I was a small boy. When I was a teenager, I began to be very interested in Chinese politics and history of the communist party. I had the personal ambition to learn Chinese, because I personally felt that, if I learned something that I was interested in, I would succeed in it.</i>

According to their words, it can be concluded that there were three main reasons for learning Chinese: the interest in languages, the interest in Chinese culture and other Chinese-related elements, and the important position of China and the Chinese language in the world. Therefore, their learning motivation included both instrumental motivation and integrative motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). The reasons of getting good grades and the importance

of Chinese tended to be the more instrumental motivations, because they treated Chinese as a tool to learn. The reasons of having a real interest in Chinese language and culture tended to be the more integrative motivation, because these showed their real desire towards and interest in Chinese. They valued Chinese as interests and as their way to access a new world, so they learned it on their own initiative, rather than being pushed by others.

From all the above considerations, I formed an assumption that these participants had an open-minded cultural identity and were prepared to accept a different culture, or at least that they were risk-takers and had the curiosity to try something new. Otherwise, they would not have chosen an unfamiliar and difficult language as a major. In the following part, I will explain more clearly how this open-minded identity helped them to learn and to engage themselves in the Chinese community during their learning process both in the UK and in China.

5.3.2 In the beginning – learning Chinese in the UK – dominance of L1

Participants' backgrounds in this group were different: Charles, Fiona and Payne had not learned Chinese before entering the university, so they were not confident with their spoken Chinese before beginning the one-year programme. One of the most common reasons for this was the non-Chinese speaking environment. In Diana's words, *There are a lot of Chinese students, but they're kind of in their own bubble, in their own world, and I don't really come across Chinese people so much here*; and in Payne's words, *In our first two years here, it was done totally in English, so yeah, well not totally English, but a lot in English*. This meant that they seldom had opportunities to speak and practise Chinese either in or after class. On the other hand, they also acquired many related pieces of knowledge about Chinese history, politics, and literature. Although some of these courses were taught in English, these

helped them to know more about Chinese development and culture, as well as about what living in China might actually be like. In Fiona's words, *We watched quite a few modern films from China, and I think that probably gave quite a good picture of life in China*. For these three participants, during this stage, Chinese was just a subject to them, and their investment in Chinese was mainly focused on obtaining the necessary education (Norton & Toohey, 2001), so the relationship between themselves and the social world did not seem to be significantly changed. However, developing their Chinese language ability through official class learning was also a process through which to develop cross-cultural understanding (Byram & Fleming, 1998), so they could cultivate an awareness of differences they would probably face in China. That is to say, they might have already built the cultural awareness and sense of tolerance towards differences (Edwards, 2002; Montgomery, 2010), to prepare themselves for their forthcoming study abroad.

Diana and Neta, who had already learnt Chinese for one year in China before entering the university, had already attained HSK 4 level in their Chinese. Since the programme they studied was designed for beginners, they thought the course was relatively easy, so they did not improve very much in their language ability in the first two years. Neta said, *Courses in Edinburgh were too easy for me. Because after studying in Tianjin, I was at about the HSK 4 level, but in Edinburgh, the course was for about the HSK 2 level. Also, they did not teach us in Chinese, so it was a waste of my time actually*. From Neta's words, it could be seen that she was strongly motivated to learn Chinese, although her investment (Norton & Toohey, 2001) in Chinese was not sufficient during this stage. The courses were not that suitable for her, and she thought she was different from her classmates who had not learned Chinese before. Also, it was hard for her to find opportunities to practise Chinese

outside the class. This period, which I called a frozen time for Diana and Neta, was a time when they did not improve obviously from their perspectives, either in their language ability or in cultural awareness. On the other hand, this two-year experience also strengthened their interest in Chinese. They missed their life in China, hoped to speak Chinese, and wanted to go back to the Chinese community. Thus, in other words, the learning experience in the UK also helped them to deepen their awareness that they could speak Chinese and that they would like to be members of the Chinese community.

Colby's experience was a little different from that of the other five participants. He found himself housed with Chinese students who wished, quite naturally, to speak Chinese at home. *I consider myself very lucky that I live with only Chinese people, and they moved me into a block of just Chinese...We don't talk English, and they only address me in Mandarin and they only call me by my Chinese name*, he said. Compared with others who rarely had opportunities to speak Chinese after the official language class, Colby engaged with a small temporary Chinese community with his Chinese roommates in Edinburgh. In Colby's view, he was lucky to live with Chinese roommates, but more importantly, from his previous learning experience in China, he knew how to communicate with Chinese people. That is to say, he had a random opportunity and he seized it through his previously developed ability. When he communicated with his roommates, there was a mutual investment (Norton, 2013), as Colby accepted his roommates and his roommates accept him as well. It satisfied him to be called by his Chinese name and to be immersed in the Chinese speaking environment. He believed in himself as a learner and as someone belonging within a Chinese-speaking context which already included Chinese people and Chinese culture. Therefore, for Colby's learning experience in the UK, he

obtained the official linguistic language training and also had plenty of opportunities to speak Chinese socially and culturally. Even though this community was temporary, he still gained a sense of belonging from it and thought that the situation resembled being in China.

To sum up, for the majority of the participants, studying in the UK limited their opportunities to speak Chinese after class, and their improvement in language ability was mostly focused on the linguistic aspect. In the case of those who had not learnt Chinese before, their sense of belonging seemed not to change significantly, but they learned to be open and to prepare for the coming study in China. In the case of those who had previously gone to China for a certain period, they had already built an identity as members of the Chinese community, so they were not curious about life abroad, but eagerly awaited their journey.

5.3.3 Learning Chinese in Mainland China/Taiwan -- socio-cultural and linguistic challenges

5.3.3.1 The official classroom learning. For the formal classroom learning in China, these six participants' experiences were similar to those of the participants in Group One, such as teachers only using Chinese (the target language) to teach and preferring to use teaching methods like dictation and repetition. Those who had never learnt Chinese in China before (Charles, Fiona and Payne) reflected that they struggled in the beginning. It was hard to follow the teachers' steps because they could not understand some of the teachers' words. By contrast, Diana, Neta and Colby, who had previous learning experience, felt that they were very familiar with such a teaching style and found it easy to engage in the class and catch up with the teaching content.

After studying for several weeks, they all appreciated the immersive Chinese class, finding that it helped to improve their listening comprehension. While some of them found that they were bored by the relatively inflexible teaching methods, such as continual repetition, they discovered that these methods helped them significantly to remember difficult Chinese words. Moreover, some participants also mentioned that the first class of the day began too early, usually at 8am. They needed to get up very early, which required a different biological clock from the one they had experienced during life in the UK.

Actually, these learning methods and this daily schedule reflected the traditional Chinese learning style. That is to say, they were immersed in the Chinese university culture when they were on campus. Whether or not they were willing to, they had to perform like local Chinese students. In other words, in the UK, they were just language learners, but in China, they were not only learning the language, but were also trying to adapt to learning in the Chinese way, which could improve their awareness of differences they faced and changes they were making, compared with their study experience in the UK. From these conditions, their sense of self changed from that of a local student to that of an international student (Osborne, 2012).

5.3.3.2 When facing cultural challenges. If the campus learning was treated as a shelter for them, because the teacher would help them with some language difficulties and even some other problems they faced, when they entered the real Chinese community, they needed to face and deal with problems by themselves. As most of them mentioned, daily life in China could not be learned when they were in the official class, which means that they needed to acquire knowledge and practise on their own. During this process, they encountered many cultural and social difficulties.

Charles, Fiona and Payne had travelled to China before, but they had not really lived there, so this one-year programme was their first opportunity to know about real life in China. *I was quite nervous, because I did not know what to expect. I knew it was gonna be hard at times as well*, Fiona said. She had imagined life in China, but was still frightened of unknown things.

Thus, the first challenges for these three participants were the physical and geographical differences, such as the high levels of air pollution, the accommodation, and the weather. As Payne said, *It was too hot in Taiwan, and I could not even fall asleep at night, but using the air conditioner made my nose feel sick*. Fiona said, *I was expecting it to be not the same as the UK, but I was a bit disappointed seeing the accommodation*. They had expected differences that they might face, but there were still some problems that went beyond their expectations. In such circumstances, they developed a very clear awareness that they were in a different country physically. Luckily, they all said that they adapted to this very quickly. *It is not difficult to get used to*, Charles said. Colby, Diana and Neta, who had gone to China several times, did not mention these kinds of shocks too much.

Apart from the physical and geographical issues, when these six participants met local residents, additional cultural differences and challenges appeared. People crowded together, sharing food on the table, not queuing in an orderly way, taking photos of them secretly, and spitting in the street, were the five main kinds of behaviours that they thought were strange, since some of them may seldom be found in the Western cultural context. Convenient public transportation (e.g. public bicycles and underground), mobile payment, respecting and helping elderly people, delicious and strange Chinese food, were the four main positive things that they encountered as fresh experiences. As Diana said, *I didn't know anything, I had no*

idea. It was so strange. Charles also said, Just the lot of things in the canteen that I hadn't eaten before. We wouldn't eat it here, so that was surprising.

These participants could be risk-takers, which means that they liked undertaking challenging, different, and risky experiences to achieve their goals. In the interviews, most of them mentioned that they would like to experience something very different from their current environment. In doing this, they believed that they were taking a potential but acceptable risk. This could be interpreted as meaning that they were willing to take a risk (that is, a risk of making mistakes) when using L2 spontaneously. This was not meant as a real-life risk, but a risk in their mind.

Chinese culture and Chinese language were strange; most of them did not know much about these things before they chose their major. They needed to undertake risks as to whether they liked it and whether they could persist in learning it and getting the degree. Such a risk-taking spirit might lead them have an open mind, so that when they faced a different culture or weird behaviours, their first reaction would not be revulsion but rather an attempt to understand and accept it. As Charles said, *It wasn't difficult to get used to. The main difference is that like, when I was there for one year, there were a lot of things that would annoy me just for a short time. I got used to them or they became good.* Diana was even more open, saying, *For me, I loved it so much! Because I love different cultures.*

However, there is a huge distance (Lojeski & Reilly, 2008) between Chinese culture and British/European culture, which means that, even though they tried to accept it, there still existed many features that were far removed from their ideology. Colby said, *Some of their behaviours I still don't agree with [spitting on the street], but I know that's a different culture. I respect and accept them.* Payne also mentioned that he did not really appreciate the relationship between Chinese parents

and children. He thought Chinese parents held too much power and even represented their children in making decisions. *This is not an obstacle for us [himself and his Chinese friends] in communicating, but may lead to our having different views towards the same things*, he said. Fiona shared similar feelings. She thought that there were stereotypes about relationships; in particular, women took the lesser role. *I came across friends, then one of my friends' boyfriends didn't allow her to go with us, and my friend just said, oh, my boyfriend will not like it, and I follow him. I really did not like that*, she said.

Above all, Chinese culture includes many aspects. The superficial aspects, like behaviours, daily schedule, and diet, were easier to adapt to and accept. During this stage, the students obtained a sense of belonging within the Chinese cultural community. They learnt from the locals, and even lived as Chinese persons. By contrast, in the case of the inner aspects, which were cultivated within Chinese cultural education, such as thoughts and views about themselves, relationships with others, and the world, they found it hard to approve of these things and change their minds. During this stage, they began to know this culture and tried to understand Chinese people's thoughts, but they were clear in their minds that they were different from Chinese people, and the sense of belonging was not that obvious. That is to say, this was more like observing their experience from the outsider's point of view.

5.3.3.3 How to find opportunities to speak Chinese in the Chinese community – linguistically and socially. Developing knowledge of the culture means developing linguistic ability and cross-cultural understanding (Byram & Fleming, 1998; Sysoyev, 2002). The process through which these participants developed their understanding of Chinese culture was also a process of gaining Chinese language ability, which means that they had many opportunities to speak

Chinese during this process. As mentioned at the beginning, their motivation to learn was very strong, so they all showed a positive attitude towards such opportunities and tried to find more chances to practise.

However, at the beginning, since Charles, Fiona and Payne had not lived in China before, their Chinese level was not standard enough to enable them to conduct a conversation with native speakers. During this stage, they were not standard legitimate speakers (Bourdieu, 1977), which means that they could not use legitimate pronunciation and grammar to express themselves (Bourdieu, 1977). They felt nervous and unconfident. *I could not understand what they were talking about,* Payne said. *When I bought a ticket, I tried to speak three times in Chinese, but the seller could not understand me; I finally gave up. This made me feel upset,* Fiona said. From these words, we see that participants did not just worry about whether they could understand the native speaker's words, but also about whether their words could be understood. Norton (2013) mentioned that language learners took on the main responsibility to ensure mutual understanding. One main reason given was that the investment between the language learner and the target language speaker was unequal. That is say, in such conditions, the language learner felt more anxious when using L2; they were nervous about paying attention both to what they had heard and what they needed to say when using a language they were not familiar with; while the native speaker felt more confident of using their L1 since the context and the language were very familiar. Therefore, to make sure the conversation could proceed, the language learner had to invest more. Such unequal investment also influenced the language learner's sense of self. In such an anxious conversation, they felt that they were far removed from the native speaker and the target social world.

However, Norton also pointed out that the more that native speaker invests, the more mutual understanding will be promoted. According to the participants' experience, Chinese people's expectations (just as in daily life) of a foreigner's Chinese ability was not high. That is to say, Chinese people always felt surprised and happy to hear foreigners speak Chinese, even if it just consisted of some very basic words, and were very willing to help foreigners practise their Chinese. *Once Chinese discovered that I could speak Chinese, they would become very warm and happy*, Charles said. *They [Chinese] were very happy to help me with my Chinese*, Payne also said.

Therefore, anxiety and low confidence definitely existed at the beginning, but Chinese people's attitude to them gave them a sense of being accepted, which encouraged them to invest more in practising and improving their Chinese and engaging with the Chinese community, to some degree.

Among these three participants, Payne showed the greatest motivation to engage with the local community. He joined the university soccer club. To avoid his teammates speaking English with him, he presented himself as a Russian and said he could not speak English. *This is not a good idea. I was lying. But they accepted my poor Chinese and helped me to practise*, he said. Actually, he put himself in a "dangerous" place. He set out to hide who he was as a native speaker, in order to try to find a different form of encouragement to communicate with native speakers in Chinese. If he could not understand his teammates' words, he could not express himself, and their communication could not continue. He said that both he and his teammates suffered a lot at the beginning. His teammates had to speak very slowly and repeat their words many times. *I know I found it very hard at that time. I had to*

speak Chinese, even during my rest time. It was very strict, but very useful. My Chinese improved very fast, he said.

Charles and Fiona also shared their ways of improving their Chinese, such as trying to make Chinese friends, and speaking Chinese as much as they could when they went out. They all said that Christmas was the point at which, after living in China for four months, they felt more confident in speaking with a native speaker. *I can use Chinese to talk with my Chinese friend, Fiona said. When I travelled to Datong [a Chinese city], I faced some problems, and the police came and did like an interview with me. I had to speak Chinese the whole time, and then I realised that I was able to solve problems by using Chinese, Charles said.*

Therefore, through formal language treatment and initial practice, Charles, Fiona and Payne gradually became legitimate speakers (Bourdieu, 1977); they could understand native speakers' words and express themselves. During this stage, even though they still needed to invest more than the native speaker in the conversation, since their vocabulary was still limited compared with the native speaker's, their investment in Chinese tended to be more equal. In other words, language for them was like a key to entry into the Chinese community. The more Chinese they could speak, the more equal they were when they communicated with the native speakers, and the more they would be accepted by the Chinese community.

Since Colby, Neta and Diana had their learning experience in China, this time for them was not strange. They all thought life was easy for them. They could understand Chinese and could express themselves well. *My classmates said they faced some strange things, but I thought these things were normal; I had already got used to them, Neta said. Chinese people accepted me more because I could speak Chinese quite fluently, quite easily. They [Chinese people] actually enjoyed being*

around me, because it was kind of funny for them to meet a foreigner who can speak Chinese and who understands or tries to understand their culture...I made friends really easily and for the second time, Diana said. I have been learning Chinese for so long now. I am quite confident with it, Colby said.

Unlike Charles, Fiona and Payne, who struggled with their Chinese when they first arrived in China, these three participants showed obvious confidence and calm. Neta shared the story that when she was travelling, she met a blind person and talked to him, and that blind person guessed that she was a Chinese person with something of an accent. When she said that she was a foreigner, the blind person was very surprised and could not even believe that she could speak Chinese so well. *I was so happy to hear this then, Neta said. In Neta's mind, it was very exciting to be recognised as a Chinese native speaker.*

Colby also shared a story: when he worked in a Chinese restaurant, they met some foreign customers who did not know how to use chopsticks. His Chinese colleague laughed at the foreigner, thinking that the foreigner was stupid. Colby said he was also a foreigner, and his colleague said that *No, you are Colby. It was quite offensive, but I did not take it in an offensive sense. I took it as integration. Because that means they did not see my identity as British. They saw my identity as Chinese, because I only talk to them in Mandarin, Colby said. In the same way as Neta, Colby showed a strong willingness to be accepted by the Chinese community. He was a foreigner, but his Chinese colleague did not treat him like a foreigner. That was, I kind of take it, more like they were not talking about me, but talking about other foreigners, he said.*

From the stories of Neta and Colby, it could be concluded that positive approval encouraged them to practise more, gain a sense of belonging, and pursue the desire to be a real member of the Chinese community.

The degree of confidence is closely related to the use of the target language (Norton & McKinney, 2011; Teimouri et al., 2019). The more they spoke Chinese, the more confident and free they would feel. For example, in Payne's story, with the improvement of his Chinese, he believed that he could live more like a local in Taiwan, which means that he gained the confidence to talk in Chinese, stay with Chinese people, and engage in Chinese culture.

Although these six participants still had a strong awareness of being foreigners, they knew they were accepted by the Chinese community, and they obtained by their own effort more and more opportunities to speak Chinese.

However, while these participants engaged in the Chinese community, they found another group of people who were also foreigners in China but did not learn Chinese. *Some foreigners, who are proud of their mother tongue and are not interested in learning Chinese, especially some handsome white foreigners, have a sense of superiority. They think all Chinese girls love them and set themselves high above the masses. It's kind of so rude and not so respectful,* Payne said. Colby also mentioned this phenomenon: *I do not like some white foreigners in China. They are very rude, and they do not want to know the local culture. If they go to the bar, they will be even ruder and say something unrespectful to Chinese ladies.*

Colby also said that because of the presence of such foreigners in China, some Chinese people created a stereotype of white people. He was once considered one of those *rude* foreigners. *That is hurtful for me and other partners in China who*

love this country. Chinese people thought I was the same as them, but I was definitely different from them, he said.

Discovering these *rude* people in China also provided a way for these participants to reflect on themselves. The participants and those foreigners were all white people, and some of them even had a similar cultural background, but the participants regarded them as significantly different from themselves, and would feel ashamed if they were regarded as foreigners in that group. That is to say, participants had the awareness of being foreigners in China; but at the same time, they were aware of being different foreigners from those who did not learn and accept the Chinese language and Chinese culture.

This made participants rethink the relationship between Western culture and Chinese culture and why such abnormal phenomena could arise. *I find that some Chinese put foreign people on a pedestal. Some foreigners notice this and just kind of take advantage of being a foreigner in China. That is quite sad, Diana said. I think the interesting differences in thought is they think they are choosing to live in Taiwan. This is not so. Actually, Taiwan accepts you to live there. The only reason they are allowed to live there is because Taiwan is really open and really accepting of foreign people. That is the same in Mainland China, Payne said.*

In the participants' view, it was China's decision to accept and respect them, so they needed to accept and respect China. *If you go to another country, you should learn the customs and the language, Colby said. Mutual understanding and mutual acceptance could develop the sense of belonging. Facing such a group of foreigners in China made participants feel clearer about their sense of self – they were Chinese language learners, they were trying to accept Chinese culture, and they wished to be accepted and to be members of the Chinese community.*

5.3.4 Reflections on return

In the same way as Group One, when these participants came back to the UK, they shared some of the changes in their sense of self and the relationship between themselves and the social world.

5.3.4.1 Linguistically. Since this was the first time Charles, Fiona and Payne had lived in China, the one-year programme influenced them more in terms of their language ability than it influenced Colby, Diana and Neta, who had lived in China before. Charles, Fiona and Payne all believed that their Chinese language ability improved significantly, especially their listening and speaking. As Charles said, *My speaking was not very good at all, so the biggest improvement for me was the speaking.* Fiona also said, *My level of Chinese was ridiculously different.* This was because they lived in China and used Chinese as a tool to communicate, not just as a subject that they needed to learn, which was unlike their learning status in the UK. However, Colby, Diana and Neta did not believe that their Chinese had significantly improved. Some of them mentioned that they acquired the vocabulary, and could speak more frequently, but they did not think that was remarkable.

5.3.4.2 Culturally and socially.

5.3.4.2.1 Charles, Fiona and Payne. As with the linguistic changes, in the case of Charles, Fiona and Payne, their attitude towards Chinese people and Chinese culture, and their position in the Chinese community, shifted more obviously. They believed that living in a new country and experiencing a different culture made them more open to accepting different things. They also gained knowledge about the different cultural identities of the Asian countries and the difference between Mainland China and Taiwan, so they knew how to conduct a conversation without offending the native speakers. Meanwhile, native speakers had supported them and

helped them when they tried to speak Chinese, which increased their confidence in talking with native speakers in the Chinese language, and developed their sense of belonging in the Chinese community. They mentioned that when they communicated with Chinese people in the end, they did not feel as anxious as when they had just arrived in China. As Charles said, *I can understand things more easily, and I can just always speak Chinese to deal with different things, just like normal conversations.*

From the transitions in their beliefs, it could be seen that their linguistical development gave them more opportunities to speak Chinese in public, so that gradually they believed that they were members of the new community. Payne, in particular, said, *When I was in Taipei, I really wanted to make friends with local people and wanted to live just like a Taiwanese.* According to Payne's story in the previous section, he tried to engage with Chinese culture and the Chinese community, and he did so quite successfully. When he came back to the UK, he believed that he would go back to Taipei as soon as he finished his study in the Scottish university, because he missed his Chinese friends and had already built his career in Taipei. These facts confirmed his identity transition and the shift in his sense of belonging.

Moreover, their beliefs about the social world also changed. As Fiona said, *before I left, I had no awareness of what it is like to live in a foreign country, where you do not understand the language and you do not understand the culture. Now, the way that I look at foreigners in the UK has certainly changed.* Having had the experience of living in another country, she gained greater understanding of foreigners who lived in the UK. She knew she was different from foreigners, not just on grounds of nationality, but in different aspects, such as adapting to the living environment, accepting a different culture, and conquering a different language. This

changed her social relationships, to some degree. Thus, she could understand foreigners' situation in the UK. As a result, she was more accepting of them. Through her understanding, she could overcome some cultural and emotional differences, to some degree, which helped to bridge the gap between foreigners in the UK and herself.

Charles also thought about his own culture. He said, *Maybe British people are a bit complacent with things. Just why they feel UK is fine. However, I feel China is always trying to improve, which makes me feel we would be overtaken.* He also said his ideas about China became more positive after he had lived there for one year; for example, he had changed some of his stereotypical images of Chinese people's relationships. These changes in his ideas led to changes in his attitude towards the UK and China, and some other related aspects of the social world. This was a new viewpoint from which to consider themselves and their native culture, in turn bringing them a new socio-cultural identity.

5.3.4.2.2 Colby, Diana and Neta. These three participants had had the experience of living and studying in China before this programme, unlike Charles, Fiona and Payne. Diana said, *the first time was a completely different experience; everything was strange for me, but I think the second time, all the Chinese accepted me more, because I could speak Chinese quite fluently, quite easily. I made friends really easily the second time.* Neta also said, *my friends who went to China for the first time said that wow, it was so different! But I have already got used to the things that felt strange to them. Everything was normal to me.* In their minds, talking with people in China was not a strange practice, and cultural differences also were not challenges for them to conquer. In other words, they already believed that they were members of the Chinese community.

These three participants had been to China, and they chose to go to China again on their own initiative. From this decision, it could be concluded that they accepted Chinese culture and held positive ideas about living in China. Therefore, according to their reflections on return, their sense of belonging in China seemed stronger than that of the students who had gone there for the first time. Colby said, *I was seeing the Chinese community with my own eyes and from my own view... I want to spend more time in China, and I consider China my second home, so I really want to go back quite soon.* Neta also said, *I have come back for three months, but I still did not adapt to the life here. I think my mind is still in Beijing, and I miss a lot of things there.* Diana said, *I know how to actually meet different people. It was nice to experience different parts of China.*

This time they did not transit or change of their sense of self significantly, but they gained the identity of being members of the Chinese community. They were open to Chinese culture, they thought Chinese people were also open to them, and they had many opportunities to speak Chinese in different public situations.

5.3.4.3 Other achievements. It is very interesting that these six participants all said they had formerly been very shy. After living in China, they became braver, more confident and open-minded. As Diana said, *I have experienced a lot more, and I kind of have more experience to draw from when it comes to problems. I have different ways of looking at problems now.* Iredale (1994) and Montgomery (2010) pointed out that being educated in a new cultural and educational background could change a person's perceptions and foster personal development.

Those who lived in China for the first time also thought that they gained independence of self when they were in China, as they lived far away from their family and the environment that they were familiar with, and needed to face

challenges and deal with different problems by themselves. As Payne said, *I thought I grew up, and I was not a little boy anymore*. Based on this statement, independence of self means that they thought they became independent and individual people, who were their own masters.

That is to say, the new social and cultural learning experience not only updated their views on others but also developed their viewpoints so as to cause them to rethink themselves.

5.3.4.4 Who were they? In their minds, even though they gained a sense of belonging, and of membership of the Chinese community due to their language improvement, they still believed that they were British people, and were different from the Chinese native speakers. As Charles said, *Edinburgh seemed a lot quieter and it is a lot less lively, but I feel like I adapted back quite quickly, because I lived here for such a long time. I did not feel unusual when I came back, and maybe more relaxed. Yeah, just know community feelings*. Payne, who had already gained a strong sense of belonging in Taiwan, still thought he had a sense of safety when he spoke English. When he spoke Chinese, he was worried that what he said might make native speakers laugh. Colby, who treated China like his second hometown, also mentioned that he still had a strong sense of being British.

The sentence "where are you from?" might be the question they needed to answer frequently when they were in China, and this question could remind them of their national origin (Montgomery, 2010). This also means that their national stereotypes were conspicuous in the eyes of Chinese people. Meanwhile, in their own eyes, it was also normal to be treated differently, because it was true and acceptable that they were always different from the native speakers.

That is to say, their original community belonging always remained. Wherever they went and wherever they lived, the identity that came first in their minds and in the view of the new community was British. However, they also believed that they were different from the British who never went to China. Neta said, *I still think I am a foreigner, but I feel closer to the real China*. Diana said, *I still have a strong identity awareness, but I think I am accepted by Chinese people, because I have understood some and I am still trying to understand their culture more*.

Therefore, they had an identity transition, and this kind of transition was more like an additional identity, which means that they obtained an identity in a new community without the disappearance of the existing identities. Just as in the term *third space* (Kramsch, 1993) that mentioned previously (Vicki's story) – a new *culture* emerges from the meeting of two different cultures. Cultures are dynamic systems which are constantly renegotiated and cultural meaning is created through the interactions of speakers/writers (Finkbeiner, 2008). In the new social, cultural and educational context, they created a new cultural identity on the basis of their previous perspectives and beliefs, which enabled them to be members of a global community (Montgomery, 2010).

To sum up, the one-year abroad study programme in China transformed the participants from language learners into both language learners and users, and they demonstrated a strong desire to integrate into the Chinese community. Throughout the language learning process, they made efforts to accept and adapt to Chinese culture and the Chinese way of life, while still retaining their own cultural identity in most cases. Thus, for the answer to *who were they?* could be: they were British; they were British possessing Chinese language ability; they had British cultural identity

with the identity approval of the Chinese culture. Finally, they were intercultural persons in the global community, which means that they had a new hybrid identity.

5.4 Group Three – one-interview for Chinese minor students

There are four participants in this group. Alice and James were local Scottish people. Paul was born in Poland and Adam was born in Slovenia, but both had lived in the UK for many years. Although English was not their mother tongue, their English language ability was at the advanced level, especially in the case of Adam, who thought his English was better than his Slovenian.

They all studied in the same Scottish university as the student participants in the other groups, but they had their own majors. Alice was an Undergraduate student in History, Adam and James were Master's students in Computer Science and Philosophy respectively, and Paul was a PhD student in History. Chinese was selected only as a minor or as an optional course of study.

However, they had all been to China specifically to learn the Chinese language. Among them, only James had directly learned Chinese in Taiwan from the very beginning during one year and a half, and others had all learned some Chinese in the UK before going to China. Alice and Paul had studied in China for one year, but Adam had only done so for a month.

Unlike the student participants in the other groups, whose major was Chinese, participants in this group did not have much pressure to learn Chinese, because they did not need to pass different Chinese exams and study Chinese for their degrees. Therefore, my reason for inviting these participants to join my research was to enrich my data. In particular, I can elucidate their learning experiences, sense of self and engagement with Chinese language and culture, and to explain their identity

transition and reconstruction. After that, I will compare them with the Chinese-major students.

As with the last group, I will divide the data of these four participants into three parts – motivation to learn Chinese, socio-cultural and linguistic challenges in China, and their reflections on return.

5.4.1 The first step in learning Chinese – expectations, motivations and investment

Alice's and Adam's reasons for learning Chinese were rather similar. They did not imagine many things about it before; they had both had travelling experience in China before starting to learn Chinese, and they discovered that China was a country that they liked. After coming back, they decided to learn the Chinese language and hoped to go to China again. Adam said, *I visited my friend in Shanghai, and then I really liked China... After that, I said I mean this place is awesome, so I wanna learn the language, and I really like languages.* Alice said, *the first time I went, it was on a school trip for two weeks. I thought China was really beautiful and I like very tall buildings. Then after that, I decided to learn their language.*

Paul's answer was more like that of the Chinese-major students. He had not been to China before he decided to learn Chinese. His purpose in learning Chinese was to *get out of a certain area and try something different and difficult.* Then he found the topic was interesting and he continued to study it. However, he also mentioned that the Chinese was not his priority, and he just *learned Chinese as an optional choice.*

No matter what the reason, it could be determined that interest and curiosity were their main incentives to learn Chinese, which was the same for other student

participants. However, compared with those participants who chose Chinese as their major, these three participants would find it easier to withdraw if they did not want to persist, because they did not have a related degree objective. In Paul's words, Chinese was an *optional choice*. He would learn it when he had the free time, and if he was busy with his major study or work, he would give it up for a while. Alice and Adam also used similar words. Considering the standing of Chinese in their minds, it would not be hard to judge their investment in Chinese, particularly when they were living in countries outside of China. They all had their main everyday work to do, and Chinese was just an interest. They did not apparently have expectations of what they would do after gaining this language ability. In other words, at least at the beginning of their study of Chinese, they did not treat it as a must thing, so their investment in it would be less than that of students whose major was Chinese.

James was a slightly different participant in this group. He had been interested in Chinese culture since he was very young. James thought China was the country that was farthest away from him, which sparked his interest in exploring it. He had read some books on Chinese history and Chinese politics. While studying for his undergraduate degree, he had met many Chinese friends, which made him feel more interested in that country. Up to then, he was still not sure whether China was the same as he imagined it, and whether Chinese was worth learning. After travelling in both Mainland China and Taiwan, he thought that China was really a country that he liked. Finally, he decided to learn Chinese in Taiwan, and he aimed to learn it well. From his statement, it could be seen that before deciding to learn Chinese, he had experienced prolonged thought and hesitation, which means that he was prudent in making his decision. Once he made up his mind to do it, his expectation would be high. In other words, he expected to learn Chinese well.

Therefore, even though his major was not Chinese, his investment in Chinese was substantial.

5.4.2 The process of learning Chinese – socio-cultural and linguistic challenges

5.4.2.1 In the beginning – learning Chinese in the UK – the dominance of L1. Unlike the full-time Chinese major students, participants in this group had limited time to learn Chinese when they were in the UK. Adam and Paul learned in the Confucius Institute, where the class size was less than ten, and they took the class for four hours a week. Alice took the elective Chinese course in the university, learning Chinese for two hours a week in a class of a hundred people. That is to say, they did not have enough learning hours and training during the class. After the class, their learning environment was similar to that of the Chinese-major students – they were surrounded by English.

Therefore, before they went to China, their investment in Chinese was relatively limited. Even though they had a strong interest in their Chinese and motivation to improve it, the circumstances did not allow them to learn and practise more. Accordingly, during this stage, Chinese was just an interest for them. It did not change their daily life, or serve as a tool with which to communicate. Furthermore, Chinese did not change their sense of self and their views about the world.

5.4.2.2 Learning Chinese in Mainland China/Taiwan – Socio-cultural and linguistic challenges. Paul had learned Chinese for three years before going to China. *The effect was not really good*, he said. Alice had learned Chinese for one year in the UK, while Adam learned it for just one term and passed the HSK 1 (around 150 commonly used words) test. Because they all learned during their spare time and did not receive intensive training, so they all believed that their Chinese

level was elementary, which would be of little help in making conversation with Chinese native speakers.

However, they decided to spend their time in learning Chinese in China specifically, from which it could be seen that their motivation was very strong. An exception was Adam, who only stayed in China for one month, while Alice, James and Paul all learned Chinese in China for at least one year. During this period, they were immersed in the Chinese language atmosphere, and they took official daily language classes in Chinese universities. That is to say, before going to China, their investment in Chinese was less than that of the full-time Chinese-major students. However, when they arrived in China, even though they were not under the same study pressure as those full-time Chinese-major students, their opportunities to learn and to speak Chinese both in and out of class were equal.

Unlike Chinese-major students, who had undertaken the typical education in Chinese for two years in the UK, participants in these groups did not mention prominent uncomfortable official classroom learning experiences when they first arrived in China. On the contrary, Alice and Adam were satisfied with their teachers and the classroom environment from the very beginning.

I think I got a lot of practice because the class size is much smaller, Alice said. This may be because they did not learn Chinese systematically when they were in the UK and did not have a strong, dependable learning habit, as a result of which they would find it easier to adapt to a new way to learn. Also, the class level that they were in was lower than that of the Chinese-major students, so their learning tasks might have been more manageable. Both of these reasons might cause them to engage with Chinese classes faster and more easily.

James, who began Chinese directly in Taiwan, had not had learning experiences in the UK, so he did not compare the two. He learned Chinese by using the Chinese language from the very beginning. As I explained when introducing his learning motivation in the last section, his expectation of learning Chinese was relatively high. He thought his teacher was not strict enough with his Chinese pronunciation, especially with the tones. He asked his teacher to pay attention to these when he was speaking and correct him in time.

Some foreigners have learned Chinese for many years, but their speaking was still without any right tones. I don't think they really have the ability to speak Chinese. I think teachers should require more of their students from the first class, or we have paid much money to learn, but we still have a strong accent at the end. That's not a good thing. (James)

On the one hand, James needed to make a high investment in Chinese if he expected to acquire the perfect standard language. On the other hand, this attitude was related to his identity as being a good language learner. He was not satisfied with fluent language ability with an accent, but strictly evaluated accuracy and fluency. He asked his teachers to continue correcting him, and he would feel upset if he could not pronounce words correctly. This meant that he wanted to speak like a Chinese native speaker. He wanted to be approved of by native speakers; he did not wish Chinese people to think he was different from them (in the language aspect).

Given these circumstances, I will now explain the socio-cultural and linguistic challenges these students faced after official classes, and how these influenced their sense of self and the relationship between themselves and the Chinese social community.

5.4.2.2.1 When the participants faced cultural differences. All of the participants in this group had gained some knowledge of Chinese history and culture before going to Mainland China/Taiwan. Still, they all believed that what they had learned was far removed from what they experienced. In Adam's words, *I think it's definitely different. I can't learn everyday life in China, like WeChat or something like that.* Paul also said that *China was more like a traditional country before in my mind, because many Chinese things I came into contact with in Europe were traditional. Like Chinatown, Chinese restaurants, and Chinese supermarkets; these were always decorated in the traditional Chinese way.* Alice shared the same idea – in her mind, China was *old-fashioned*. Paul also mentioned *everyday experiences that were not really included in the books; I can't know how Chinese actually is until I live there.*

Before they went to China, there was an imagined community (Kanno & Norton, 2003) in their minds. They indirectly built an image of the Chinese community through books or some Chinese elements they could see outside of China. When they arrived in China, the imagined community changed into reality. There would be some differences between what they had imagined and what they saw.

It's the air that smells different. That was the first thing that I noticed. When I got off the plane, it smelt different for some reasons...Some people are very funny in China, like an angry grandmother [yelling at children in the street], or like some women who are like around sixty years old dancing, like before malls...Those, like, never happened here. I've never seen that before....Some small things are like amazing, like the mobile payment, and the public bicycle... Security seems like less

standard, um, in terms of like less clean in some places...But otherwise, it's great, I love it. (Adam)

Adam only stayed in China for one month, so his study and learning experiences might be less rich than those of other participants. From his words, it could be seen that everything in his mind was positive; even when there was some unpleasant thing, he could always think in a positive way.

Alice held similar ideas. *China is a really nice place. I didn't expect it to be like big and fashionable. I thought it was gonna be like small towns and villages. There are a lot of skyscrapers and stuff like that. Many things are like very advanced, which I really like... It is true that some people stood really close to me, some people spat onto the street, and some people took my photo secretly... I don't think this means Chinese people are rude. It's just a cultural difference. China doesn't have as many things from abroad as Scotland. When you see a foreigner and stuff like that, it's more shocking that some people would say "oh, wow". (Alice)*

In the same way as Adam, Alice's attitudes towards the differences she faced were almost all positive. She also tried to consider the reasons from Chinese people's viewpoint and see the weird as more reasonable.

James also expressed positive ideas. *I am open, and I like learning about a different culture. Like when I was in Beijing, the waiter in the restaurant spoke loudly. I thought it's really interesting. I just discovered these habits with curiosity. Some of these habits I learnt and then they became my own habit, like drinking the hot water. I never drank hot water before. I know and feel inquisitive about those things I won't do, like some habits. For example, I also saw somebody spit onto the street. I think that's the thing that most Europeans couldn't accept, but I think that's natural. But of course, I won't do this thing. (James)*

Adam's, Alice's and James's experiences were individual, but they found some everyday things that were different from those in Europe. As I mentioned in the last part, there is a significant cultural distance (Lojeski & Reilly, 2008) between Chinese and British/European cultures. The cultural differences would lead to different behaviours and habits, so it would be expected that they would find some things strange. It was not hard to find that these three participants all had an open mind and tried to understand and accept things. This was the first step for them in engaging with the Chinese community. That is to say, to engage with the Chinese community, they needed to discover, to know and to accept the differences from their inner world. It was like jumping across a gap from one community to another. They opened their minds and hearts; then the fresh culture and differences would positively fill their minds and lives.

However, Paul's experience was not as positive as that of those other three participants. *I've heard of that, like a bit of pollution, but I never expected it to be worse... There are many people on bikes. It's really noisy... I didn't imagine there would be one thing in Chinese which really strikes me, umm, buildings which were around twenty or thirty years old, but they looked worse than in Europe and even Eastern Europe, which had fifty or sixty years... That's pretty strange that many people stared at me. (Paul)*

Adam and Alice also pointed out some features that Paul mentioned. From Adam's and Alice's words, it could be concluded that even though they found these things uncomfortable, they tried to understand them and think positively, while Paul's answers were relatively negative. I do not know what his previous education was like and whether he had some negative impressions towards China before. According to him, Chinese was an optional choice; he learned it during his spare time. If he had

hated China, he could not have sacrificed his rest time to learn the Chinese language. In the circumstances, these negative feelings might mainly have emerged during his experiences in China. In my view, Paul had created an imagined community (Kanno & Norton, 2003) of China before going there, and had already expected that there would be many positive and negative things, such as that Beijing was polluted. However, when he arrived in China, the good things he found were less positive than he had imagined, while the bad things he faced were more negative. The real community he engaged in was worse than the community he imagined, which might have led to his sense of resistance. Such a feeling would also lead him to feel that he was different from the people in the new community, and that he would not want to be a member of it.

In the face of similar problems, people's different attitudes could contribute to different feelings, so their roles in the Chinese community would also differ. At the start, they were all international students with just fundamental Chinese language ability. As time went by, students who tried to accept Chinese culture would learn and accept some of the Chinese lifestyle and think that they were members of this community, more or less. Meanwhile, the student who was not satisfied with what he faced and did not want to change and accept it, would not have the sense of belonging in the Chinese community and would always think he was different from the local people around him.

5.4.2.2.2 How could the participants find opportunities to speak

Chinese? Norton (2013) agreed with West's (1992) perspective, that identity should be based on desire – the desire to be affirmed, the desire to be engaged in it, the desire to obtain stability and security. The term “investment” (Norton, 2013) could explain diverse desires during social interaction and community practices. That is to

say, in some situations, if the language learners desire to be affirmed by or to engage with it, their investment in the target language would be greater, while if the desire is not that strong, the investment would be less.

When the group participants first arrived in China, they all felt too shy or nervous to talk with the native speakers, because of their limited language ability. They were very clear that if they wanted to practise and improve their Chinese, they needed to build interactions with native speakers. Then, they tried to find opportunities to speak Chinese, such as forming language partnerships, travelling, and attending some activities. During this process, they discovered that the locals were always very kind and willing to help them and to speak with them, which made them feel respected and accepted.

People are nicer, definitely. They are really kind...They spoke slowly to let me understand, and I never saw their impatience. (Adam)

When I like to speak Chinese to Chinese people in China, they're like wow, that's amazing. They are usually very happy and encourage me to try to speak. (Alice)

Actually, I did not expect that Chinese people could treat foreigners so nicely. No matter in Taiwan or mainland China, they were all really warm-hearted. I never believed that I could have such a wonderful experience. (James)

However, Paul expressed the opposite opinion. *The thing is that some people in China get treated better than other types so often, which means that it's even visible on the job market. It's not really offensive, but annoying... It's nice that Chinese people can be really interested in you, but keeping on having hundreds of the same conversations with different people was too tiring. (Paul)*

Effective communication and mutual understanding require participation from both target language users and learners. However, the more investment from language users, the more mutual understanding can be contributed (Norton, 2013). According to the transcription above, it is not hard to find mutual investment between language learners and target language speakers, which means that language learners were trying to engage, and Chinese people were trying to accept. In these participants' view, Chinese people were patient in helping them with Chinese, which means that the investment from language users was abundant, so their conversations became more understandable. Such conversations happened more often, and participants felt less nervous and more confident about speaking Chinese with Chinese people, which also gained them a sense of acceptance and belonging.

However, Paul, who did not like to be treated differently, felt tired of practising fundamental conversations with many different Chinese people, which means that his investment in Chinese was less during this process. As I mentioned above, there should be a mutual investment. If Paul did not desire to engage, even if Chinese people tried to build the conversation, it was still inefficient. That is to say, Paul did not acquire much sense of belonging during such practice.

After several weeks, they gradually engaged with the new community and made some new friends.

My Chinese friends and I, we sometimes got together. It's quite fun because we could do all kinds of like real hard Chinese. They were very kind to help me with my errors, grammar and something like that... Except with some European friends, I communicated with my friends mostly in Chinese. (Alice)

Alice studied in a foreign language university in China, so there were many overseas students and the Chinese students there were more open towards

foreigners. This was one reason why Alice thought it was easy to make Chinese friends and speak Chinese with them. The most important reason was that she always found opportunities to speak Chinese and engage with that community. Apart from the above activities, Alice attended the university's international food festival, singing contest and some other activities. In the process, she made new friends, sang Chinese songs, learned more about how to communicate with Chinese peers, and spread Scottish culture (her native culture) as well. She thought that she was respected and accepted by Chinese people, and she definitely believed that she was a member of their community.

As I mentioned in the previous part, James was strict with his pronunciation. He thought that if he could handle this language, he could gain more opportunities to interact with the locals and learn more about their culture. *The more Chinese I learned, the more chances I could have to know the whole Chinese culture, which made me feel very excited to learn Chinese*, he said. A person may or may not engage in the intense social connections that provide opportunities to speak in the target language (Norton, 2013). The Chinese language was like a key that would gain him entry into the Chinese community and enable him to gain acceptance and a sense of belonging in it. He smiled when saying that he gradually learned how to communicate with the Chinese elderly in the Chinese way, and how to communicate with his peers. He felt proud of this.

Turning to Paul, things became less positive. He did not share many stories about finding opportunities to speak Chinese, but told me he thought there were fewer learning materials, such as Chinese songs and series, that were suitable for him. He often heard himself being called LAOWAI (a nickname for foreigners in Chinese). Because of this, he thought Chinese people liked calling others according

to their looks, which seemed strange to him. He also said, *When I came out of university, then I had to communicate in English.*

Unlike Alice and James, Paul seems to have been unwilling to engage with the community. Considering his attitude towards cultural differences, this result was not unexpected. He did not accept the Chinese culture that he faced every day, so he did not want to invest his time and energy in the people who embodied this culture. He spoke English outside the campus and thought he was different from Chinese people. If the Chinese community is treated as a circle, Paul was close to the edge. This was not because language users marginalised him, but because he himself did. He abandoned his opportunities for engagement of his own accord.

However, like student participants in other groups, Adam, Alice, and James also experienced some moments when they did not want to speak Chinese. These happened relatively similarly. When they faced some Chinese people speaking very fast and sometimes with strong dialect accents, they chose to stop communicating. This did not mean that they did not want to learn Chinese. Rather, it was hard for them to understand and engage in that conversation at those specific moments, which made them anxious and unconfident, so they stayed silent.

In Adam's words, *I would feel like embarrassed, um, because I didn't know enough... This encouraged me to learn more.* Even though this caused embarrassment, he still had strong motivation to learn, and even put more investment into learning, rather than quit.

James also mentioned that when he talked about something in depth, he wanted to transfer to English. *Their [his Chinese friends] English is better than my Chinese. From my viewpoint, I'd like to speak Chinese all the time, but I really feel ashamed to keep reminding them to slow down, which would also affect the topics*

we were discussing, he said. In James's view, the investment between himself and his friends was imbalanced. If he spoke Chinese, he thought his friends needed to invest more in considering his feelings and making sure that he could understand, which would pressure him. When they spoke in English, James thought his friends' English was good enough, and their power was relatively equal during the conversation. When they transferred to English, he became the native speaker, and his friends were the language learners, so their roles in the conversation were reversed. Returning to his language when talking about fields he was not that familiar with would make him feel more comfortable and confident.

5.4.3 Reflections on return

When they came back to the UK, all four participants shared their changes linguistically and socio-culturally.

Firstly, what they appreciated most about their exchange experience was the improvement in their Chinese language ability. They all believed that they would not feel afraid to use Chinese when talking with Chinese people. They thought their listening comprehension had become better. They were not persons who just had some knowledge of the Chinese language, but persons who could use Chinese as a tool for living.

Secondly, they thought that Chinese culture was the essential thing that they acquired. Paul said, *I discovered China with my own eyes and understood how current China worked and how Chinese people lived.*

James believed that language was like a key that opened the door to a new culture. When he obtained language ability, he could involve himself in the local community and explore the locals' thoughts. This also made him feel closer to the locals.

Adam agreed with this idea. He also reflected that he still found it difficult to understand Chinese humour and the meanings of some words, emoji, and numbers from their surface appearance. He thought that there were many pieces of knowledge he could not acquire only from learning the language. Although he came back, he was still strongly motivated to learn such cultural features, not only because he was interested in Chinese culture but also because he did not want to offend his Chinese friends when they talked.

Alice said she missed many things in China, like her friends, the food, and the life. She said she still used WeChat to contact her Chinese friends in Chinese. She thought that even though she came back, Chinese had become a part of her life and was present every day in the UK.

Before they (Adam, Alice, and James) went to China, Chinese was just an optional language course, and China was just a country of their imagination. When they came back, they returned to their original study and work, Chinese reverted to being an optional course, but the position of Chinese in their minds had changed. They believed that they had some relationship with China; they would feel happy to find some Chinese elements in the UK, and they would introduce China to their European friends. They became more open to accepting different things, and they knew that the Chinese community would always accept them. They relied on membership of their native community, but they also believed that they had entered the edge of the Chinese community circle, and they were trying to move forward.

These changes also influenced their future plans. Adam, Alice, and James all said that they planned to go back to China, whether to work or to study. That is to say, learning Chinese helped them build a new identity as members of the Chinese

community. They approved of this identity and expected to hold on to it to open up a new linguistical and social world.

Paul seems different from the other three participants, apart from his reflections that he had learned more about China. When he came back, he reflected, *I probably appreciated more about what Europe is like and the values in Europe more after being in China... The foundations of what they are, actually, have to be appreciated much more than earlier.* He compared Europe and China in his mind, and it was clear that he preferred Europe. When he talked about his future plans, he said, *I probably would not endure living in China for a longer period, um, because of the noise, pollution and the stressful daily life...It would be pretty hard to settle for long in China.*

As I have analysed it above, Paul was in the place which was close to the edge of the Chinese community circle. He had been a marginalised member because he lived there but was not open enough to accept things that were different from those in his native culture. Unlike other participants in this group, Paul did not have much sense of belonging when he was in China, and when he came back, such belonging became weaker or even disappeared. Compared with Alice, Adam, and James, who admired their new identity and expected to persist in it, Paul's identity as a Chinese community member was relatively temporary. When he engaged in the community he was familiar with, he would abandon it to some degree.

5.5 Group Four – Teaching and learning experiences in Scotland and China – tutor views

This group includes two experienced language tutors. Both of them are Chinese native speakers. Dan (Daisy), who has been teaching Chinese in the UK for

17 years, is one of the lecturers for almost all the student participants in the Scottish university. Wei (Wendy) has been teaching Chinese in Beijing (China) for 9 years. Since the participants went to different cities in China, Wendy was the lecturer at one Beijing University where some participants studied, but she did not teach them. However, her ideas and experience were still valuable, because even though she was not their teacher, the whole learning background at that Beijing university was the same.

In this chapter, I wish to focus on tutors' views on student experiences of study-abroad programmes, in which they faced a mainly immersive experience in relation to learning Chinese. The chapter is split up into the following three sections – differences in teaching and learning experiences, teaching and learning about Chinese culture, pastoral support and reflecting on student journeys and readjustment on return.

5.5.1 Differences in teaching and learning experiences

One of the largest cores of our project is to allow students to go to China to learn Chinese. It is an immersive way of learning Chinese, and students will also do some research about China. (Daisy)

In keeping with the participants' expectations, improving language ability was the main purpose of studying in China. During this year, students should finish 60 credits for their degree. It was planned to add one more research project and a language test as assessments to improve students' motivation to study in China in the following academic year, so these participants did not need to finish these two tasks. The ideal result of this programme was that all the students should reach the advanced level of their Chinese when they came back. From these tasks, it can be

seen that the aim for participants was very clear – being an international student, improving Chinese, and studying for credits.

5.5.1.1 Diverse class of students in China – international profile, larger class and fewer chances to speak. When they arrived in China, participants would meet learners with different purposes.

In the classroom, some are exchange students, some are there to find a job in China, some are just interested in Chinese, and some are even aiming to find a girlfriend in China. Regardless of their purposes, we just divide classes according to their levels. (Wendy)

The class is international. Usually, there are 40-70% students who are from Europe. (Wendy)

That is to say, before these participants came to China, their Chinese class was relatively uniform, most of them at least were Europeans, and they were all studying for their MA degree. Teachers would use English to explain things that it was hard to understand. By contrast, when they went to China the classroom became diverse. They would meet many kinds of people with different purposes from different parts of the world, and some of their classmates might not even be able to speak English. Unlike the class in the UK, the students did not have a common mother tongue (L1).

Daisy said that, according to her students' feedback, in this kind of mixed class, the numbers of students in the classroom were larger than in Edinburgh (usually 5-6 students in the speaking class), and teachers always stood on the stage and taught continually, which was quite different from the teaching style in Edinburgh. Under such conditions, it was relatively hard to interact with the classmates, because of the students' very different backgrounds and fewer speaking

opportunities. Wendy agreed, saying that there were usually more than ten students in the speaking practice class. She tried to ensure that every student could obtain practice, but because of the class scale and the time limitation, students could still not practise enough. In other kinds of classes, like the reading class, the teacher would speak even more, and students would have even fewer opportunities to speak.

5.5.1.2 Chinese (L2) being often used as the teaching medium. Wendy also mentioned that, even though the speaking practice was not sufficient, apart from of some special words that she would use English to explain, she would always use Chinese to teach, which she thought could help to improve students' listening comprehension. At the start, she would speak very slowly and use some body language to help students understand. With students' development of their language ability, she would speed up her speaking pace, and by the end of the programme she could teach at the normal speed, using no English at all.

Teaching Chinese by using Chinese was highly accepted by student participants. According to the previous groups, most of the student participants agreed that the Chinese-only class helped them to improve their listening ability. Daisy also agreed that, on the premise that students could understand, communicating in Chinese was a better choice.

Brown (1994:45) pointed out that “the target language system is learned through the process of struggling to communicate”, which emphasized the importance of using L2 in the language class. Some scholars (Miles, 2004; Nation, 2003) believed that using L1 for teaching and learning could bring “error transference”. At the same time, some researchers (Al Sharaeai, 2012; Ghorbani,

2012; Zulfikar, 2019) believed that using L1 properly in the L2 class could help in learning and acquiring L2 culturally and linguistically.

Based on these two teachers' teaching experience, it is hard to judge which teaching approach is better. In Daisy's words, *We need to find a point that is the best combination of the Chinese education and the Western education, which may be what we want to achieve.* According to this tutor's idea, learning Chinese by using English helps students open a door to get close to Chinese easily, while learning Chinese in a traditional Chinese way gives students more opportunities to increase their knowledge of the Chinese language and the Chinese educational culture.

5.5.1.3 Contrast between learning in UK and China classes. Regarding students' learning experience in the Chinese university, *Several teachers in China told me that our students were very hard-working and had very good study behaviours. They were satisfied with our students,* Daisy said. However, as some student participants mentioned earlier, they thought that Chinese students studied very hard, which put them under much pressure. What they needed to do every day was to study from morning until night and finish different learning tasks – just performing like traditional good Chinese students themselves.

Actually, this is a different concept of what a good student should be, in relation to their different growing-up background and the different university curriculum and culture. The Chinese students paid more attention to their scores if they wanted to enter a good university, so they needed to spend plenty of time studying the textbooks and preparing for exams; while the British students needed to consider additional aspects if they wanted to be good students, such as exam scores, after-school activities, and some social practice. These differences contributed to their having different study habits. In Daisy's opinion, considering the

participants' experience, this one-year abroad study would not push them to study like real Chinese students, but was a way for them to experience Chinese students' life and to help them get closer to the Chinese education system. In other words, it was a way of seeking common ground and setting aside existing differences.

During this process, the student participants gained independence of self and improved their perseverance (Montgomery, 2010). They studied very hard until they believed that they had succeeded culturally, socially and academically in a completely new context. They tried to change their approach to adapt to the new study life, in keeping with the "idea of adaptability" and "changing the nature of self" (Montgomery, 2010:104). They gained positive feedback from tutors both in China and in the UK. Actually, this was a period for them to consider the concept of "adaptability" in their minds, whether they had the ability to fulfil such a concept, and who they were when they used the target language to achieve their goal.

5.5.2 Teaching and learning about Chinese culture – living in and adjusting to Chinese culture

5.5.2.1 Limitations of learning about the culture from a textbook. Daisy said, *Textbooks always describe a fantastic and ideal China for students.* That is to say, it would be easy for learners to have a high expectation of China; whereas, when they arrived there, if they found that things were different from what they had learned, there would be a huge psychological gap which might have a negative influence on them in regard to learning Chinese. *There are many things in the daily life that they cannot learn from the textbook, which are actually things they should know,* Daisy also said. To help students learn what the real China was like, there was a course called *Chinese for the year abroad* during the year before going to China. This course showed real life in China, including an introduction to the train station,

the restaurant and some native daily conversations. There were also many workshops to help students prepare well for the year abroad.

Don't set up expectations. I usually tell this to my students. It is just like a preventive injection, to avoid students' psychological gap to some degree. (Daisy)

5.5.2.2 Authentic cultural experiences in China – expectations and reality. However, in Wendy's teaching experience, it was normal for students to face different challenges that they could not adapt to for the first several weeks after they arrived, such as the air pollution, the whole environment, and the food. As some student participants mentioned that they might have heard about these, but some of them had never experienced them before, so they still caused some students anxiety and discomfort.

Except for a very small number of students who always used negative eyes to observe China, most of the students can adapt their daily life after some weeks, Wendy said, so she does not think living in China would be difficult for most students. This was confirmed by most of the student participants. Actually, the transportation, the payment methods, the food, the polluted air and some other problems that participants said they had faced were basic, superficial and physical cultural issues. To adapt to these, they just needed to learn from the local people how to handle them, or to accept them physically (Shaffer et al., 1999). In the case of some things that they really could not accept, like some particular Chinese foods, they could just avoid them, which did not influence them too much as regards living in China.

5.5.2.3 Language acquisition – the important factor for adapting.

However, when facing communication with Chinese people and engagement with the Chinese community, the level was updated to accommodate more advanced, deep

and psychological cultural issues. These were more difficult and required the students to spend more time on thinking about who they were and how they could perform.

Some Chinese teacher had complained to us that our students' emotional quotient was too low, and they did not know how to communicate with Chinese people. This does not mean that they could not speak Chinese, but they did not know how to make mutual cultural communication, so what they had said made Chinese people feel uncomfortable. (Daisy)

One of the student participants had also mentioned this worry, that she always thought Chinese people were angry with her. This is an issue that goes beyond language knowledge, involving the culture behind the language. *I always tell my students, you can speak Chinese, but you cannot speak Chinese*, Daisy also said. Actually, the culture is different, so the way to express the culture is different. Daisy gave a clear explanation of this:

They have not mastered the sense of space and distance between people. It is not that the students have not mastered the language well. It is that neither the language learners nor the native language speakers could understand each other. It can't be said that they cannot talk with each other, but that they are on two parallel lines, and there is no intersection, so they cannot talk freely, and they will feel alienated from each other.

Daisy's idea linked to the term "investment" (Norton, 2013), meaning that there is a mutual investment between language learners and native speakers. Both of them should take responsibility for proceeding with the conversation. As Daisy

said, although the students had learned Chinese language for at least two years, and had obtained knowledge of Chinese words, grammar and pronunciation, it was still built on stilts, and much knowledge was gained based on their native cultural understanding. They still did not have a clear idea of real Chinese conversation. On the other hand, Chinese people who had never or seldom met foreigners before would also feel puzzled as to how to communicate with these language learners. Even though both of them intended to talk, due to misunderstanding they would feel upset and abandon their investment in the conversation so that it could not continue.

It is very important for us to let students know the significance of the language for them to engage with the Chinese culture, Daisy said. Learning Chinese and using what they had learned to communicate were like a key enabling them to open the door to Chinese people. Even though it was hard at the beginning, at least using the target language closed the gap between them and Chinese people, and they were gradually accepted by Chinese people and the Chinese community, as in some examples from the student participants.

5.5.2.4 Tolerance of difference. However, engaging with the Chinese community is not only a process of Chinese people accepting these language learners, but also a process of the language learners accepting the Chinese community. It is a mutual practice (Norton, 2013). During this process, as Wendy said, students might find many phenomena that were significantly different from their original expectations, such as people spitting on the street or speaking loudly in public areas, or males receiving more love from their parents than females. All these impressions might have a negative influence on their motivation to learn Chinese. That is say, they also faced some problems in accepting the Chinese culture and community.

Every time when students ask me such questions, I will explain these things to them, Wendy said. First, I will say that we also do not think these are good. Then I will explain some present conditions in China. For example, China is a huge country, and the educational quality is not balanced for different areas. Some people in the rural areas are still struggling for survival, and they did not have the opportunities to get a good education, so you cannot require them to perform as a developed citizen, because maybe nobody told these things to them before.

From Wendy's perspective, she did not think that it was a negative thing that students found these details problems. On the contrary, this actually was a good opportunity for them to learn more about China. This also reflected Daisy's ideas that there were many things they could not learn from textbooks, and that they should learn what China actually was when they were in China. Wendy was in the exact position to help students understand some unpleasant phenomena which they faced. Actually, Wendy did not think that explaining them would improve their language ability, but she thought she should explain them nevertheless. There were certainly many unacceptable things facing them in China every day. No-one could force them to accept these, but she thought it was her responsibility to let students know how they happened in the total, real, political, and cultural Chinese context.

5.5.3 Pastoral support – culture shock, adaptation and surviving a new environment

To guarantee students' mental health and wellbeing in China, the Scottish university provided a personal tutor for each student, and it also had a year-abroad

programme coordinator. If the students sent emails to say they felt anxious or depressed, the tutor would contact the relevant specialists to give them prompt help.

The first semester, especially for the first several weeks, they contact us frequently, but for the second semester, they contact us much less often, and most of their feedback became positive. (Daisy)

From Daisy's words and also considering participants' interviews, the first several weeks were their hardest time in China. They faced many expected difficulties and frequently needed help. However, during that time, their Chinese was not good enough to conduct fluent conversations with native speakers, and some of them felt shy or did not know how to ask for help properly from Chinese people. That is to say, at that stage, the inner distance between these students and Chinese people was great. In their minds, they still thought they were distinctively different from Chinese people, and were separated from their tutors in the UK, even the actual distance being more than ten thousand kilometres. That was why they asked Daisy for help. After several weeks, they gradually adapted to the life in China, improved their Chinese language ability, and acquired some skills with which to communicate with Chinese people. During this period, they knew how to solve problems by themselves or how to ask for help from the locals more or less, so they decreased the frequency with which they contacted the tutors in the UK.

Unfortunately, both Daisy and Wendy mentioned that the mental support in Chinese universities was not enough. *My aim is teaching Chinese in class, but I feel that I am providing help for my students 24 hours every day*, Wendy said. That is to say, the language teacher also took on the main responsibility for helping and supporting students after class in China. Here, it is not difficult to discover that teachers in both China and the UK paid strong attention to students' wellbeing.

I think teaching Chinese in China should feel different from teaching Chinese in the UK. Because they are all British, they are clearer than you about what they should do after class, and sometimes you can even ask them for help in your daily life. But in China, I am the local; there are many things they do not know, so I need to tell them about many things, including restaurants, museums, viewpoints, etc.... We have a WeChat (a Chinese social APP) group; they can chat with me or ask me in it anytime. (Wendy)

From Wendy's words, there is a point that needs to be paid attention, which is the identity of the teacher. In the UK, the teacher was both a teacher and a foreigner, while the students were considered the hosts and were familiar with the place they lived in. In contrast, in China, the teacher was both a teacher and a local, and the students needed to transition from their identity as a local to that of a foreigner. As a result, in the UK, students primarily needed to focus on learning the language, but in China, they also needed to learn how to adapt to living in a new and unfamiliar environment. During this time, they would show a kind of dependence on their teacher. Wendy told me a story about helping her student.

Two weeks ago, I had a student who was ill, and she called me for help. That was on Sunday; actually that was my rest time, but I gave up my rest and went to the hospital to help her.... That student's Chinese was not good enough to describe her illness in Chinese, and she went to the hospital by herself.... That time she called me, in my mind, I felt that she trusted me, and treated me just like a person who she could rely on in China. Nobody likes going to a doctor alone, right? ... When I arrived at the hospital and met her, I saw she had changed her impression.... I

know that was not the thing that I must do, but I think being a teacher and being a local, I should do that to give her help.

Multiple identities gave Wendy more responsibilities, creating a sense not only of spreading knowledge, but also of being relied on. Several weeks after the students' arrival in China, Wendy also said that the demands for her help dwindled, which was the same as Daisy's experience: *I am helping them engage into the Chinese community*, Wendy said.

Therefore, the Chinese community is like a sea, the teacher is like a boat, and the student is like someone learning to swim in the sea. They need help from the boat while learning, and when they obtain this ability, they seldom need the boat and can swim in the sea freely.

5.5.4 Reflecting on student journeys and readjustment on return

The most obvious change was their Chinese language ability. Some of the students could even come close to the level of the native speaker. And also, I think, their personalities have changed a lot. Like one girl was shy and unconfident, but she became outgoing and open-minded. Just like change in a person. (Daisy)

Moreover, Daisy discovered one interesting phenomenon. When her students went to China, they used the Chinese social APP, like WeChat or Weibo, frequently to share their life, while when they came back, they would not use these as often as before and returned to Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. This makes it obvious that when they were in China, they involved themselves in the Chinese community, because only Chinese people use those social media, and they used these APPs to communicate their Chinese friends. When they came back, they left that social circle and re-entered their original circle.

From Daisy's perspective, these changes happened because they had been immersed in a kind of culture which was obviously different from their native culture. During the one year abroad, they had tried to accept Chinese culture and to engage with the Chinese community. There were plenty of unexpected things happening for them in China every day. Maybe at first, they would find these things unbelievable and unacceptable, but when they faced them more, they would treat them as normal, which influenced their attitudes towards the world and increased their tolerance and acceptance.

But a whole inner personality is congenital; one year abroad cannot change it, but they will not feel so anxious or scared when they face something beyond their expectation. This is the change in their life attitude. (Daisy)

Their attitude towards a different culture, their language ability and adaptability are the three main changes that I discovered, Wendy said, in an answer similar to Daisy's. Both of them mentioned the word *attitude*. Actually, attitude represents a person's identity. Their identity changed from that of a British student of Chinese, to that of an international student, then to that of a member of the Chinese community, and again to that of a British student of Chinese. It looked like a circle, but when they came back, the identities in the middle could not be removed. All these identities mixed together, and changed their attitude towards the world.

However, both Daisy and Wendy mentioned that they had experience of a few students who could not adapt to life in China and quit the programme, and there was one for whom everything in his eyes was negative when he was in China. On this basis, both teachers believed that these students formed a minority group, but that it did exist. It cannot be avoided that somebody would think everything was terrible.

This was mainly because of the student's mental health, or pessimistic life attitude, or some prejudice against China, or some terrible unexpected experiences in China. These students had a negative study abroad experience that may make more averse to China and Chinese culture, leading to a psychological and emotional distancing from China. Furthermore, this experience may also affect their original identity, resulting in a stronger sense of belonging with their own ethnic group and a greater rejection of the Chinese community.

5.5.5 Some suggestions

Daisy said that, in some Chinese universities, the campus for international students was divided from that for the local Chinese students, and many university clubs or societies did not allow internationals to join. That was because international students and local students were managed by different departments in most Chinese universities. In her opinion, living and studying together and taking part in activities together offered good opportunities to engage with the peer Chinese community. This could not only help them to improve their Chinese language ability, but also to know more about Chinese people of the same age as themselves. Daisy suggested that, if possible, Chinese universities should give international students more such opportunities.

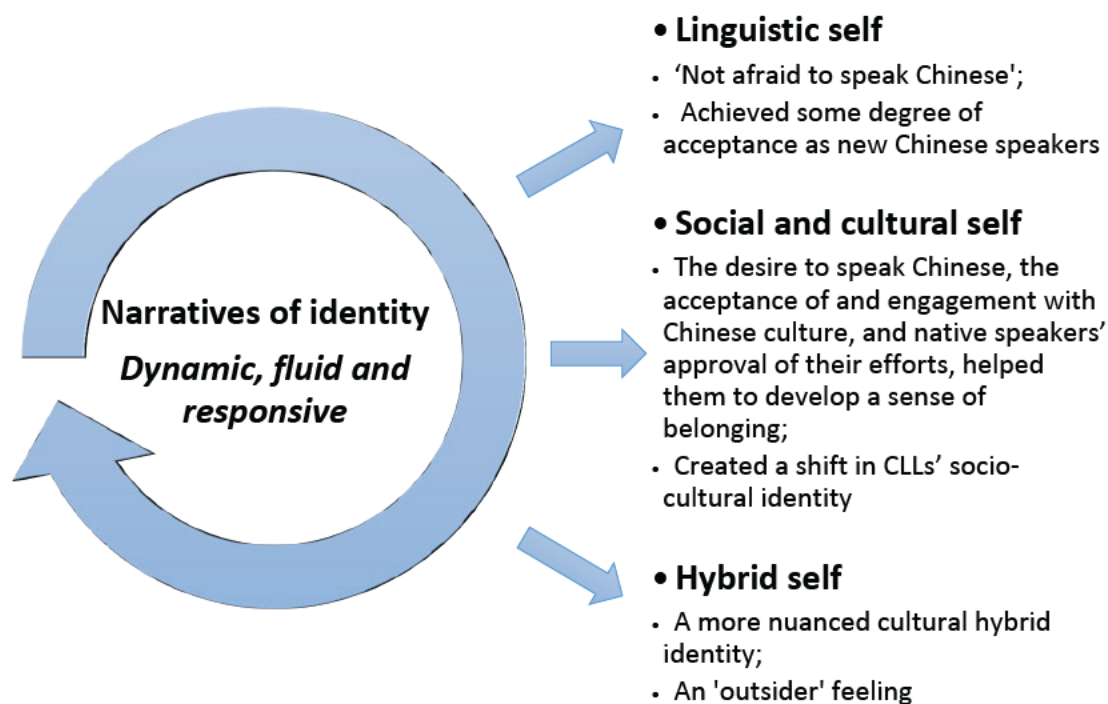
5.5.6 Summary

Based on the interviews with these two experienced teachers, they both believed that the one year abroad study was really helpful in enabling students to improve their language ability and to know more about Chinese culture. The out-of-campus life, like travelling around China and making friends with Chinese people, helped them engage with the Chinese community. After one year, more or less, their attitudes towards China and Chinese culture, and towards their own culture, would

have changed. But the levels of these changes really depended on students' individual motivation and investment. Most students gave positive feedback on their study, but different students had their own different outcomes.

Figure 5.2

Key findings of this research



Chapter 6: Discussion

Language is a medium through which others understand us and thus it is inextricably linked with who we are perceived to be.

(Montgomery, 2010: 36)

As mentioned in the literature review in chapters one and two, I am adopting Norton's view of poststructuralism, that identity is diverse, contradictory and dynamic (Norton, 2013). Self-concept and subjectivity are constructed by language (Weedon, 1997). Implicit in this view is that language helps us make sense of our world, our interactions and experiences, and in the telling and retelling of our life stories. We try to make sense of, in this case, the socio-cultural and linguistic shifts involved in studying abroad. The intense time-limited immersion in the target language and culture is an experience for language learners to learn Chinese in the native country and to use Chinese as a language tool to survive and perhaps to flourish in a very different context. According to the terms mentioned above, during this period, even though some learners might not expect it, they were influenced by Chinese culture some more or less, positively or negatively, which impacted the construction of their sense of identity.

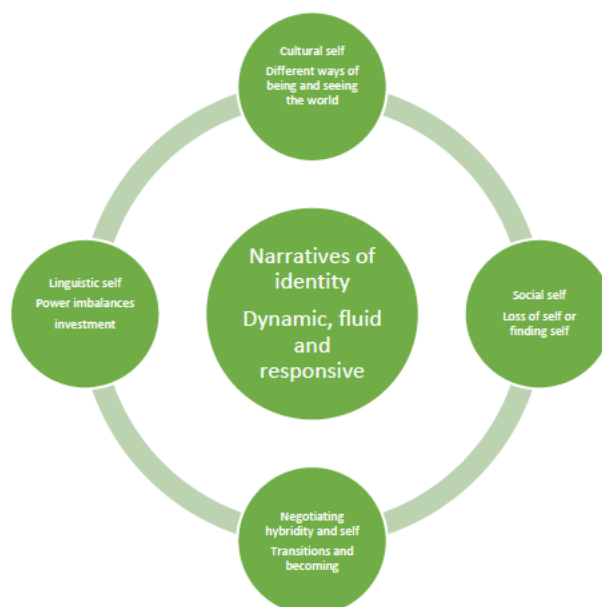
These students' identities were also influenced by their learning motivation and learning outcomes. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, there is much research about motivation without considering the social context (Norton, 2013). For example, from Krashen's (1981, 1982) *Affective Filter Hypothesis*, the affective filter includes learner's motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. These are individual variables rather than affected by the social context. According to Norton's (2013) research, considering the unequal power between LLs and TL speakers, high learning motivation may not result in ideal learning outcomes sometimes. That is to

say, learners' affective filter should not be separated from the frequently inequitable social structure experienced by language learners when they live or study abroad (Norton, 2013). Learning from these, participants in this research all had a high motivation for learning Chinese. Judging by their different learning backgrounds before SA and their different learning experiences in China, their sense of self could be reimagined and repositioned through time and place, and their learning outcomes were diverse.

After analysing the participants' stories, this chapter will focus on the term identity to discuss the three main themes: linguistic self, cultural and social self, and different kinds of hybrid self (identity transition). To make different groups of participants clearer, UG will represent the Chinese major undergraduate student; PG will represent the Chinese major postgraduate student; FLL (foreign language learner, who studied Chinese as their optional/minor course) will represent the students who chose Chinese as a minor or optional course to learn. Here is the figure of the conceptual frame of this study below.

Figure 6.1

Original conceptual frame



Learners in this study all had different starting points in relation to their sense of self and their positioning as monolingual and monocultural individual or as someone already moving through a process of reimagining and repositioning the self in relation to language and culture, for example, the PG students. When students spent time in China, a meeting of two or more cultures and immersion in the Target Language led to possible repositioning within a transcultural space where negotiation of engagement could lead to a stronger sense of belonging within the community. Similarly, the choices made by students in terms of linguistic interactions were important in reimagining the linguistic self. The uniqueness of each journey meant that any new transcultural/linguistic identities were distinguished by the choices and responses of individuals within these new communities they joined. The question was did students move from that transcultural positioning to a fully-fledged cultural hybrid by the time they returned home and began the process of readjustment to their home context or did they reject the opportunity to do so.

Figure 6.2

Linguistic and socio-cultural journey through SA

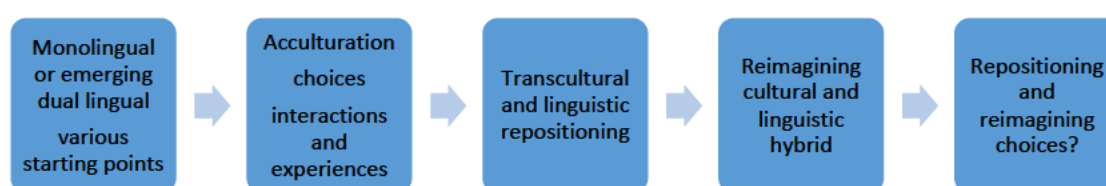


Figure 6.2 captures the process as a linear one but, of course, the messiness and complexity of such a process will mean that individuals may find that elements overlap or they may return to earlier parts of the process because of choices made or interactions and experiences which cause doubt or concern.

Theme 1: Linguistic self

As identity is changing through time and place (Norton, 2013), Linguistic self-concept is a model of second language identity development from a second dimension (Benson et al., 2013). Benson et al. (2013) used to illustrate such developments by analysing two SA narratives that went to Australia to study English. From the learners' perspective, linguistic self-concept is the core of second language identity, which is about the relationship between the language learner and the target language (Benson et al., 2013).

6.1 Reimagining the linguistic self - language learning in the UK

In the formal Chinese class, whether they were at the Scottish university or at the Chinese universities, their identity was very clear – that of Chinese language learner (CLL). Their aim was simple and straightforward, which was to learn Chinese in an official and formal way. This usually involved learning Chinese through different kinds of courses, which could cover the aspects of listening, speaking, reading, writing and some Chinese culture. Norton (2013) has mentioned that throughout learners' learning experiences, their investment in the target language and their sense of identity may change from time to time. Since this research did not test participants' learning outcomes through official exams, the data cannot help evaluate their language ability improvement. Instead, their perceptions of their experiences mainly focus on how these participants' investments and identities changed during their time abroad and their transition back to the UK.

Dominance of L1

In the formal language class at home, according to most UG PG and FLL participants' interviews, they reflected that the opportunities for speaking Chinese were not enough. Although they agreed that lecturers had given them many chances

to practise in class, for a considerable number of the students in the class, the chances were still very limited. Meanwhile, lecturers preferred using English as the medium to teach Chinese, which reduced student opportunities to receive direct Chinese language input to some extent. According to the MA Chinese programme curriculum¹, UG students needed to learn Chinese language, culture, history, politics, translation, and even some basic projects related to Chinese studies during their Y1 and Y2 study, which means that their studies were demanding. Thus, they needed to study very hard to pass different Chinese paper exams, so there was a focus on vocabulary building and reading comprehension.

However, for some of the UGs, the programme tried to help them with their spoken Chinese outside of the formal classroom. After the class, they were connected with a Chinese native speaker as a language partner. They could make an appointment, and the language partner would speak Chinese with them. Some of the participants also tried to make some Chinese friends who studied as international students in the UK. However, during this process, they still had their English safety net to protect them, since everyone involved spoke English well and lack of understanding could be clarified by speaking in English. If they did not know how to explain themselves or forgot some words, it was very easy to switch their language into English, because most of the Chinese people they met in the UK could speak English fluently. While living in the UK, they still spent their time engaging themselves in the British community and in attending the local social activities, where there was the whole English-speaking environment. All these also occupied their spare time and reduced their opportunities to practise spoken Chinese.

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<https://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/undergraduate/degrees/index.php?action=view&code=T100>

Considering all of the above, their opportunities to improve their spoken Chinese was still limited and might involve giving brief right or wrong answers rather than communicating in authentic conversations. Their sense of investment mainly lay in learning Chinese grammar, vocabulary and characters, and doing Chinese readings. Therefore, before they went to China, for most of the UG participants, their knowledge of vocabulary was good, and they could read at an intermediate level (around 1200 commonly used words), while most of them said it was very hard for them to build a whole sentence while speaking. They could recognise many Chinese characters, but they were still not confident enough to speak in Chinese. On the other hand, for the PG participants, they believed their Chinese levels had been good enough to communicate with Chinese people fluently in a variety of contexts that they were familiar with, such as buying things in the Chinese supermarket, taking Chinese transportation, or dealing with daily problems in Chinese. For the FLL participants, since Chinese was an optional course, or just seen as a hobby, most of them only knew some basic words (around HSK 1 or 2 level). Compared with the UG and PG, their Chinese level was quite limited. Chinese was treated as a formal academic subject and little time was given to developing communicative competence.

However, all the participants, including the UG, PG and FLL students, had created an imagined future identity built on their beliefs about the nature of the study abroad experience that when they went to China, they would have many opportunities to practise Chinese and their Chinese fluency level would improve. They would become a bona fide Chinese language user capable of communication and engagement across a range of experiences.

To sum up, before they went to China, they had built a knowledge of Chinese, which could help them to adapt to life in China. Apart from the PGs, who already believed they were both Chinese learners and users, others' second language identity seemed to remain stable -- when they were speaking Chinese, they believed they were just Chinese language learners, within L1 environments. They were *British who were learning Chinese* and they did not have a very strong association or affiliation with the language or culture of their target language.

6.2 During study abroad

6.2.1 The formal classes in the Chinese university – dominance of L2

When participants went to China, they were in the native Chinese class along with other international students from different countries. Teachers used the target language (Chinese) as a medium for teaching and interacting, which meant they could not speak English during the class. There is much research about the benefits and drawbacks of using the first language (L1) or target language (L2) within the language classroom. Some researchers have pointed out that using L1 to teach L2 is *judicious*, since they believe using L1 is affective and easily understood (Carson & Kashihara, 2012; Macaro, 2001; Schweers Jr, 1999; Zulfikar, 2019). Other researchers have argued that using L2 as the teaching medium can improve student listening comprehension, cultural awareness and fluency of speaking (Bachelor, 2017; Lightbown & Spada, 2020).

This research does not aim to judge which approach is better, but tries to discuss these two approaches from the view of the learner's identity. Using L1 as a medium appeared to be an effective way to teach the L2 grammar in classes in the home country (the UK), and learners felt confident acquiring this knowledge in English, which was their mother tongue or at least the language they were very

familiar with. However, during this process, learners would feel a sense of reassurance, and there were fewer challenges for them when they faced some Chinese language problems they did not understand because they knew the lecturer would help them to solve these in English. Even the lecturer, whose mother tongue was Chinese, would also have a sense of responsibility that she should explain the knowledge clearly in English. Under such conditions, for both students and the lecturer, English dominated in the UK even although they were in the Chinese classroom, and their lecturer was a Chinese native speaker. Therefore, relying on English as a medium, learners still treated English as the tool for them to understand aspects of Chinese. This means that their sense of self hardly changed, and they treated Chinese as an academic subject rather than an important communicative medium. Students did not find it challenging to keep up with the lecturer's words. This also influenced the learners' identity implicitly – they were British/Westerners, and even when people were from other countries, they could also communicate with them in English.

However, once learners entered the classroom where they were immersed in the Chinese language, everything changed, their lecturer was Chinese and the lecturer taught everything in Chinese. This direct method immersed learners in the language during the formal learning process. At the same time, their classmates were from different countries and some of them could not speak English. English was no longer their effective communication tool. For the tutors, it was important to consider the pedagogical approaches for delivering the course, given the diversity of learners.

When facing challenges and problems, students could not just simply say *I don't understand* and wait to solve the problem in English, but instead they tried to

understand the Chinese and expressed themselves in Chinese. Accordingly, the lecturer would not take the responsibility for explaining in English, but tried to guide them to adapt learning Chinese by using Chinese. Under such conditions, Chinese played a more important role than English. That is to say, during this time, learners began to lose their dependence on English, and tried to adapt to using Chinese as the language tool. Chinese was not just a subject, but a real language that they needed to use during the class and their daily life. Just as Spolsky (2000) said, in the authentic learning condition, the target language exists in real communication as the medium of use, rather than elaborately designed classroom teaching content. Their identity shifted from being a mainly monolingual language learner to a language learner and the user in a dynamic and contextualised way. Even their lecturers in Scotland and China were all Chinese people, but lecturers in China would not give them the previous sense of safety from use of their mother tongue but led them into a zone which was more dynamic and also involved not only listening but being prepared to speak and make mistakes in the TL. This suggests a transitional stage linguistically as the use of the mother tongue became much less prominent.

Krashen (1985) suggested the hypothesis of comprehensive input, which means that the learner's language ability would improve after understanding a large amount of input that was slightly more difficult than what was encountered at the current level. If this thinking is applied to the Chinese language classroom in China, participants' data in this research appear to agree with this hypothesis. Since their teacher was speaking Chinese all the time, such intensive input helped them improve their listening comprehension. Some UG participants said they could not understand many of the teacher's words at the beginning, but they could catch up with the pace of the class after several weeks' study. Since they could understand more of their

lectures, they felt the relationship between lecturers and them were closer and their confidence increased at the same time. Such improvement also influenced their daily life outside the university, which benefited their engagement in the Chinese community.

6.2.2 Daily life in China – dominance of L2

Different from life in the UK, where they could go back to English after the class, in China, participants were still immersed in Chinese everywhere in their daily life. Under such conditions, Chinese was no longer just a subject but a language tool they needed to use every day. Their association or affiliation with Chinese seemed to be stronger as they not only began using the TL more and more but this was also shaped by choices students made about involvement in cultural aspects of life in a Chinese city.

6.2.2.1 Unequal power between language learners and native speakers.

According to Norton's (2013) theory, due to the unequal power between LLs and NSs, their investment in the conversation is also unequal. Under such conditions, Bremer et al. (2014) argues that it is the responsibility of language learners to ensure mutual understanding during conversation. Norton (2013) adds that it could benefit mutual understanding if the NSs invest more in the conversation. Unlike the immigration stories in Norton's research, where participants had feelings of being marginalised and it was quite hard for them to balance the power to engage in the Canadian community. In this research, most participants said Chinese people were proactive. They tended to use easy words and sentences and slowed down their speed to help LLs understand, and tried to conduct conversations with them. That is to say, the NSs also took the responsibility for developing the communication. To ensure a successful mutual understanding, there should be a mutual responsibility.

However, I agree with Norton's idea that the main responsibility for successful communication lies with LLs (Norton, 2000a). Even though NSs may scaffold communicative interactions to ensure that participants can engage with them, if LLs cannot understand NSs' words or cannot express themselves clearly, no matter how hard NSs try, it could still be difficult to continue the conversation without proper engagement from LLs (Swain & Lapkin, 1995). In this case, NSs may stop investing and may finish the conversation. It can be argued that mutual scaffolding is important for best results (Mackey & Gass, 2015), but in genuine conversations, individuals may take on a lesser or greater role in making the conversation work, which may be a dynamic and changing process. For instance, sometimes the NS will take on the responsibility, and sometimes the LL will, depending on context and circumstances. It may also vary within one conversation.

Accordingly, it might be easier for participants in this research to communicate with Chinese NSs than the participants in Norton's research who desired to speak English in Canada. Whereas the power between NSs and LLs is still unequal, because of the fluency of the NSs along with their familiarity with the culture, NSs are in a more powerful position and may lead the conversation. As LLs' language skills developed, conversations might have more readily achieved the mutuality mentioned above.

PGs and many UGs after living in China for more than half a year, were gaining greater fluency and were able to try to use Chinese to express themselves more successfully, and Chinese people could understand them with less support needed. During this process, the LLs' linguistic self was shifting towards a hybrid language identity, and their position in the Chinese community was changing

gradually. They were establishing a place for themselves within communities and social groups.

6.2.2.2 Affective issues in linguistic development. Emotions or feelings are closely related to language learners' engagement and success of learning (Benson et al., 2013). Garrett and Young (2009) point out that emotional responses not only provided insights into how learners evaluated their learning experiences, but also shaped learners' language learning experiences. Such emotions could include learners' feelings involved in trying to engage in SL interactions, their anxiety as they lost a little of their first language confidence, their sense of success and failure from interaction to interaction while learning and their gradual identity development (Benson et al., 2013) were part of the emotional journal, the learners undertook. However, there is no general agreement about how emotions influence SLA (Norton, 2013). Bailey (1983) argues that anxiety is not a permanent personality state, but is restricted by the social context. While according to Krashen (1981, 1982) *Affective Filter Hypothesis*, anxiety and loss of confidence are treated as the inherent characteristics of the poor language learner but it could be argued that all language learners at different times may experience such emotions. Norton (2013) believes that learners' anxiety and confidence can influence their opportunities for practising the target language, but the nature of such *influence* is diverse. For example, in the natural SLA context, learners' anxiety is mainly related to their oral ability, rather than their writing ability (Spolsky, 2000). Like Adam (FLL) and Vicki (UG) described their experiences, they always had a strong desire to speak Chinese. However, when taking a taxi, due to the strong dialect accent of the driver or the "unfriendly" atmosphere, they felt anxious and insecure in that environment and gave up communication with the drivers temporarily. This was caused by their language

limitation, which prevented them from obtaining native speaker's information effectively when speaking and expressing themselves well. It was related to their speaking and listening abilities, rather than reading or writing skills.

My data also suggest that different emotions could happen in different contexts, and happy, anxiety, confidence, or lack of confidence could be influenced by the learner's innate personality, but these are also dynamic depending on situations. According to experiences, most of the student participants mentioned their anxiety when they first arrived in China. They could not understand NSs' words properly and found it hard to express themselves. After several months, their emotions changed. They gradually were not afraid to talk with Chinese people, and they found their way forward to deal with any possible "failure" during conversations (i.e. smiled, or asked the NSs to say again). The lessening of anxiety occurred as individuals began to adapt to interactions in L2 and with an immersion in the language both within and beyond the classroom. With the improvement of their Chinese fluency level or less anxiety in making mistakes as a normal part of language learning and conversation, participants felt more comfortable speaking Chinese. As their confidence grew so did their ability to generate and maintain relationships with Chinese people.

However, anxiety could arise in some special situations. According to the concept, the locus of control (Peirce et al., 1993), if learners could control the rate of the information transfer, the locus of control could be beneficial to learners. Because in this way, learners can acquire information more effectively and then build up their confidence in their language ability. Otherwise, learners could find it harder to build their confidence (Norton, 2013; Peirce et al., 1993). By this I mean that, if the conversation happened in real time (time-dependent), learners might not have

enough time to process the information and respond. They could not control the rate of the information transfer, which could increase their anxiety. An example of this is the student who had to attend the police station and another in a workplace context. In such situations, it was not reasonable to ask policemen or a boss to repeat and repeat again, and he was not confident enough that he could understand what the authority figure meant exactly. There was also the concern that if the answers were not appropriate, greater trouble might come. Additionally, other situations could lead to confusion and embarrassment when a language learner admitted to speaking some Chinese. This could sometimes lead to NSs believing that the learner could speak very fluent Chinese leading to the NSs talking to her/him very fast. Anxiety made some learners lack confidence, impeding understanding. However, if it was not a time-dependent activity, learners could have enough time to think and respond, so reducing anxiety. Norton's argument that anxiety is constructed through social life experience seems to be reinforced here but it is worth noting that there were ways in which learners could reduce such negative emotion (Norton, 2013).

As noted by Norton previously, there is sometimes an unequal power balance between the Language Learner and the Native Speaker. However, from my point of view, a NS's anxiety could also be considered a possibility. The NS might also feel anxious, worrying that they would not be able to understand the language learner and might not be able to start or maintain the interaction. In such a case, if there is no important thing that needs to be discussed, the NS may also choose to remain silent. Therefore, anxiety could happen for both LLs and NSs. Using the TL to communicate in authentic situations for SLA students could be an emotional and challenging experience, but it could also be a challenging experience for the NS as they tried to understand and mediate the language used by the foreign language

learner. An important aspect influencing the nature of dynamic communications would be the level of fluency attained by the student.

As Mackey and Gass (2015) suggest, as LLS improve in their second language, they become more confident in understanding NSs and expressing themselves, which leads to a decrease in anxiety. Participants in my research generally reported feeling a sense of belonging and becoming more confident, as well as having a positive study experience during the study abroad programme, which reinforces the point that increasing proficiency can lead to greater confidence and reduced anxiety.

6.2.2.3 Using English or Chinese: managing diverse needs. The positions of Chinese and English are different in the world. Even although Chinese is gaining importance because of China's high functioning economy and its increasing prominence on the world stage, encouraging many people to learn the language for instrumental reasons, English is treated as an essential *lingua franca* (Sifakis & Tsantila, 2019) across the globe; while Chinese is one of the official languages in the United Nations (Kim, 2015), there are still relatively few learners who choose Chinese as a second language, compared with English. Reviewing this recently, China, noted there had been over 150-years of English teaching and learning history (Wei, 2020). Nowadays, English still stands in a very important position in the Chinese education system. At the same time, with the development of globalisation, English is also included in business, trade, tourism and personal lives in China (Zhang et al., 2019).

Under such conditions, many Chinese people also had a desire to learn English, so participants were positioned as foreigners learning Chinese but were sometimes perceived as a means for Chinese people to practise English. However,

they also moved from a position of power in their home context where they were fluent in their mother tongue to being a neophyte or at least non-native speaker in China. The challenge of learning and speaking Chinese in a place where it was English (participants' mother tongue) that people wished to use could be problematic. Because their language identities were interchanged in this case -- Chinese native speakers were eager to become English language learners. Chinese people were catching more opportunities to speak English, which means that these participants reduced the opportunities to speak Chinese simultaneously. In reviewing the literature, it was suggested that international students who studied in the Southeast of China adapted to their studies and way of living relatively faster than other parts of China (Song & Xia, 2021). One reason given was because this area is modern and advanced, and perhaps more importantly an international community already exists there. In the Southeast of China, especially in Shanghai, there are many foreigners, and many Chinese people there can speak English, so English could be a useful communication tool to some degree. Participants (Alan and William) who studied in Shanghai also mentioned their ease of experience as being English speakers was considered normal and acceptable.

Apart from Shanghai, some of the rest of the participants also mentioned their experiences of speaking English in China and the complexities of language needs – Jim's host mom asked him to practise English with her children, but he also suggested it would be helpful to speak more Chinese at home; James' (FLL) and William's (PG) wives wanted them to speak English at home to help them practise English, but they also asked their wives to speak Chinese to them in turn. This need for reciprocity in language use suggests the need for an additional kind of negotiation needed in this context. Payne (UG) stood out as being unusual in this regard. He

predicted such a phenomenon would happen, so he pretended to be Russian and avoided speaking Chinese from the very beginning. From their different experiences, it can be seen that the popularity of English in China and the need for opportunities to speak English in authentic conversations played a part in the kinds of interactions experienced. However, most of my participants desired to speak Chinese as much as they could, rather than put themselves in a comfortable zone where their mother tongue was sufficient.

This can be linked to Norton's term *investment*. Norton (2013) points out that learners' motivation to speak the TL builds on two main parts – part of it is the desire of the learners to speak a second language. This desire is actually an investment that is closely related to the learner's dynamic self-identity construction and expectations for the future. The other part is other investments that learners make when encountering conflicts with their desires. For most of my participants, their investment in Chinese persisted and they tried to find more opportunities to speak Chinese. Once there were some conflicts against their desire, they would find alternative ways to gain more opportunities.—Usually, participants looked different from indigenous Chinese native speakers, who were frequently positively surprised when they heard a person with blue eyes and ginger hair speaking Chinese well. Because of this, some Chinese people tended to invest themselves more in helping foreigners learn Chinese. From this perspective, if LLs persisted with their investment in Chinese, they might gain more help from NSs.

To sum up, learners' linguistic self constantly changed and developed as they learned Chinese. Their relationship with the Chinese language has also changed through their study in China. They believed that they were no longer just Chinese learners but became both Chinese learners and users. Under the influence of these

changes, how they see themselves was also changing invisibly. In the following section, I will further discuss the identity changes that social and cultural engagement in the Chinese community has brought to participants.

Theme 2: Sociocultural self

As mentioned in the literature review, Study Abroad (SA) is not only about the process of developing the target language, but also the process of finding the social-cultural experiences behind the language development (Twombly et al., 2012).

During this personal journey, from one familiar social and cultural context to another, there can be a range of cultural and psychological changes, as participants move through a process of acculturation (Berry, 2019). In this section, I will mainly focus on participants' rejection, acceptance and engagement with Chinese culture to discuss their adaptations socioculturally.

Physically, most of the participants looked different from Chinese people and so were easily identified as different and sometimes people would comment on their distinctiveness. This made some participants feel uncomfortable and made some way of interactions with native speakers. Culturally and socially, due to their different backgrounds, their ways of thinking and their views about particular issues were also not the same as many Chinese people. They compared, negotiated and mediated both Chinese and British culture. In this section, I will highlight the following key aspects of this socio-cultural journey: misunderstandings and negotiation,

6.3 Rejection, acceptance and engagement with Chinese culture

Schein and Schein (2016) have noted that there are three levels of culture, which are artifacts (can be observed and felt), espoused beliefs and values (invisible like goals, values, and ideologies), and basic underlying assumptions (unconscious beliefs and values). He also argues for a dynamic definition of culture that new

members should be taught to perceive, think, feel, and behave in the new group in new ways, so learning is an on-going process (Schein & Schein, 2016). However, if there is no formal process, experiences may be mixed, negative or positive, successful or otherwise as participants navigate their own ways into interactions and experiences in a new culture.

Culture is complex and contentious in terms of defining what it means according to different perspectives, and it includes different dimensions that contribute to a sense of being elsewhere. When participants first arrived in China, especially for those who had never been to China before, the first thing they noticed was the Chinese climate, the nature of transportations, buildings, and ways of greeting, which they observed, felt and sensed. This was the first stage for them to get to know China as they became saturated with multiple impressions of heat, noise, differences in transport and even common interactions in the street. During this period, they felt more like an outsider. Everything was new for them. If we regard the Chinese community as a circle, for many of the students, they felt they were just at the edge of it. For some students, for example, the PGs, who had some familiarity with China, they were already aware of strategies they wanted to use to further enhance their familiarity with China, which to them was both exotic and familiar at the same time.

According to Oberg's (1960) theory, culture shock includes four stages, which are honeymoon, negotiation, adjustment, and adaptation. Thus, this period should belong to the honeymoon, which means they might be excited, happy, and curious about the new culture. However, Ward (1989; 2020) suggests the opposite results that the most difficult time is the first and the last month. The results of this study indicate that the culture shock is very much an individual experience. Some

participants did not have obvious difficulties in the beginning and were satisfied with their experiences throughout almost the whole programme, like Jim (UG), Andy (UG), and Adam (PG). Some participants reflected that they faced some troubles and felt kind of worried during those initial days or weeks, like Vicki (UG), Diana (UG) and Payne (UG). A possible explanation for these results is that the experience of SA is quite individual, some may experience the U-curve; some may experience only some parts of those four steps; some may experience them in a different order.

According to previous research (Wang, 2011), the smaller the cultural distance, the easier it is to understand each other; the greater the cultural distance, the more difficult it is to communicate across cultures. The social and cultural distance between China and the UK is great. However, a number of recent studies have shown that European and American students appear to have the highest level of social adaptation among the international student group in China (Sun, 2009; Chen, 2004). In this study, although there were some complaints initially (like the food, the climate, and the huge population) from participants in this study, none of them said it was too hard to live in China. They all said they could adapt to the socio-cultural changes. Thus, In the following part, I will discuss participants adaptation socio-culturally.

6.3.1 Affective influences on sociocultural adaptation

According to Ward (2020), psychological adaptation means the mental health, sense of personal and cultural identity and emotional satisfaction in cross-cultural engagement. This is also an individual issue. Some students were able to manage a positive psychological adaptation. They never or seldom experienced depression, anxiety or loneliness when living abroad. Students will often be emotionally affected by such a major change and these affective elements may impact on aspects of their

socio-cultural experiences and responses (Berry, 2005). If a student is depressed, he/she may lose his/her investment to talk with people, or to study, which will lead to greater inner isolation in turn. At its extreme, the study abroad experience may fail. From the teacher participants' interviews, both Daisy and Wendy said they had experience of some students feeling depressed and finally quitting the programme leading to them returning early to their home country. Luckily, the data in this research did not show the students had obvious psychological problems. Although there were some periods of depression; Vicki (UG) felt down when she thought Chinese people were cold to her; Neta (UG) did not want to talk with any one when she worried about her high-pressured study, these were temporary, and students felt able to progress through the acculturation process.

From the aspect of openness to a different culture, most of the participants were happy to talk with Chinese people and were curious about Chinese culture, which benefited them in developing sociocultural adaptation. A special example was Paul, who felt it challenging to adapt to Chinese culture when he arrived in China. He found unacceptable such as the over close social distance and being struck up for too many times, and his cultural identity of being a Western person became stronger. This directly impacted his life in China and engagement in the Chinese community negatively. As he said, *it is hard to live in China*.

6.3.2 Sociocultural adaptation

Black et al. (1991) divides sociocultural adaptation into three dimensions – general adaptation, work adaptation and interactive adaptation. The general adaptation is related to the adaptation in daily life, like the food, the accommodation, and the transportation. The work adaptation is about the working task, the working responsibility, and the working environment. This model has a wide range of

influences and is cited and supported by numerous studies (Gelfand et al., 2007; Maddux et al., 2021; Takeuchi et al., 2005). In this study, I have changed the work adaptation into academic adaptation, because participants were students and their main aim in going to China was to study, rather than to work. Interactive adaptation is the comfortable feelings that can develop when interacting with native people (Black et al., 1991). In the following part, I will discuss how these three dimensions of adaptations influenced students' sense of belonging.

6.3.2.1 General adaptation and interactive adaptation – the acculturation process. Many studies have shown that the greater a country's cultural distance, the less is the cultural adaptation of international students (Demes & Geeraert, 2014; Galchenko & Van De Vijver, 2007; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). However, in some studies of international students in China, European and American students show the strongest adaptability in that country (Chen et al., 2006; Sun et al., 2009; Wei, 2015). Despite the great cultural distance between China and the UK, the participants in this study did not show significant discomfort with their life in China. Even though some of them mentioned that they were not adapted to some of China's phenomena such as the climate and the huge population when they first arrived there, they all said that there was no big problem for them after a while. Since this study did not include international students from Japan, South Korea, Latin America and other countries, it is impossible to make a horizontal comparison. However, as many participants said "I am open to different cultures" when facing different cultures and lifestyles, they held a relatively open attitude, resulting in strong adaptability.

In terms of making friends, according to Lei's (2003) study, people that international students make friends with in China can be divided into three categories: Chinese people, people from the same country as themselves, and

people from other countries. But in this study, perhaps because there were few British students in their host universities, the participants did not mention many British friends, but mentioned more friends from China and other countries. In this case, of course, it was no phenomenon that they were more inclined to make friends with British people in China. Kim (2000) states that building friendships with locals is a long-term solution to the problem of sociocultural adaptation. In this study, most participants told their stories of friendship with Chinese people and elaborated on the benefits of Chinese friends in adjusting to life in China and learning more about it. However, they said that, while it was not difficult to become friends with Chinese people, it was difficult to become close friends. Sometimes this was because of a language problem and sometimes because of a more profound ideological difference (which will be discussed later in the section on the “outsider” feeling). Therefore, they generally said that it was easier to be friends with Chinese people who had experience of studying in the UK or had watched many European and American movies and had a certain understanding of European and American culture. In that case, there was a mutual understanding between them.

Integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation are the four main acculturation elements (Berry, 2005). The purpose of this part is to examine how participants adapted and engaged to life in the Chinese community, and how such engagement influenced their sense of self and sense of belonging. As they moved into this transcultural phase, it became clear that where there was a desire to engage with the Chinese community, in part in order to gain approval and support from Chinese people, there was a likelihood of an obvious positive impact on student acculturation.

Prior studies have noted that integration (being interested in the daily interactions of the host country while maintaining one's own culture) is the most effective method of acculturation, and marginalisation is the least (Berry, 2005; Hui et al., 2015; Ng et al., 2017). However, as stated in the literature review, some scholars believe that there is a bias between the measurement and the results of this argument, as well as a lack of strong evidence to support it (Boski & Kwast-Welfeld, 1998; Rudmin, 2003; Weinreich, 1998). According to this study, it is not easy to draw a clear line between integration and assimilation. In most cases, some participants, such as Colby, Payne, and Neta, showed an integration strategy: to actively participate in interaction with the Chinese community, learning, understanding, and integrating into that community while maintaining British cultural identity. But sometimes, they also showed a certain assimilation strategy. Taking Payne as an example, when facing the relationship with elderly people, he tended to abandon his previous behaviour and thoughts acquired in the UK because he was more in agreement with the Chinese youths' way. In the face of different Chinese cultural features, participants would adopt different strategies according to different situations. Even Paul, who disagreed with some particular aspects of Chinese culture and practised a separation strategy in many circumstances, would still sometimes adopt a particular integration strategy, such as travelling in China or making Chinese friends. Therefore, no individual strategy could be completely isolated. It can only be said that when different participants faced the same Chinese cultural feature, they would show different tendencies according to their own circumstances. In most cases, they showed an attitude supporting integration.

6.3.2.2 Academic adaptation – socialisation. Different from foreigners who travel to China or immigrate to China, apart from the psychological and social-

cultural adaptation, international students also face the academic adaptation, which includes their academic performances and interactions (e.g. classmate relationship, teacher-student relationship, and society activities) (Wang, 2011). Since language development has been discussed in the linguistic self-section, in this part, I will mainly focus on their engagement with the university community.

Regardless of the Chinese immersion class, which has been discussed, most participants also mentioned their university study life was different from that in the UK. The first was the nature of the teacher-student relationship. Students were expected to call their Tutors by their title of Teacher plus their surname whenever they met them. This contrasted with the more informal situation in the UK where students often use their tutors' first names. Also, Chinese teachers were strict in terms of behaviour and work completion and they had many different dictations, quizzes and tests every day. The second was the very different learning schedule. Participants needed to get up early in the morning to catch the first morning class. They also found Chinese students studied very hard, and even wondered if they only had time to study in their life. The third was the university social life. In contrast to the Scottish university, where international students were together with local students, in Chinese universities that participants joined, it seemed there was a special study zone for international students learning Chinese. The student societies or clubs that were open to international students were quite limited, and they also believed their opportunities for interactions with local students were intermittent.

Their study experiences reflect a particular kind of cultural engagement within the Chinese university community. From the beginning, they felt uncomfortable in the formal nature of staff-student relationships, and they were clearly identified as different from the local students and connected with the sub group of international

students. At the end of the programme, most of the participants had adapted to the Chinese study approach, and some even believed they could now study in accompany with their Chinese teachers like Chinese students. One issue that is worth paying attention to is that they did not have enough opportunities to join Chinese student societies which would have allowed them to engage with other young people and popular culture in that area. On the one hand, for international students, the quality of facilities and living standards were higher than for local students, which provided them with a better learning environment. On the other hand, the opportunities to talk with and make friends with Chinese students or engagement in the “authentic” Chinese university community were reduced. Like Schein and Schein (2016) culture level definition, they may have discovered some Chinese specific university culture through observations, but due to the lack of engagement, it was relatively hard for them to understand some of the values and beliefs underpinning it. This mean that the academic community did not provide the best opportunities for cultural engagement.

6.3.3 Stereotypes and prejudices – barriers to successful transcultural experiences

6.3.3.1 Prejudices. Stereotype is a generalised beliefs or perspectives towards people from a particular outside group (Cardwell, 2014). Bond (1986) investigated the stereotypes between American exchange students and the local students in Hong Kong from three aspects -- *auto-stereotypes*, *hetero-stereotypes*, and *reflected stereotypes*. He argues that even if there are stereotypes, if the two groups of people are in a state of voluntary and equal coexistence, and both of them have strong motivation for cross-cultural communication, then they can get along well (Bond, 1986; Bond & Yang, 2019). However, the relationship between

international students and the local people were not always equal and voluntary, and the stereotypes were not always corrected, which could lead to prejudice, or even discrimination (Zhu, 2011).

As I mentioned in the linguistic self-section, there was frequently a mutual investment between the participants and the local people. From participants' points of view, they did not always feel comfortable because of stereotypes they believed Native Speakers might hold. As Colby (PG), Payne (UG), Diana (UG) mentioned, due to historical interactions/disagreements and the influence of the media's influence, some Chinese people, it was thought, might have had one-sided stereotypes towards western people – they were perhaps perceived as privileged and possibly arrogant i.e. they had gone to China just to earn money; they thought they were better than Chinese people.

Some Chinese people treated participants in an inappropriate way by their use of stereotypes and were thought to sometimes ask participants offensive questions. Once these participants heard such stereotypes several times, they would have a sense that they wanted to escape from such label. Like Colby said, *I am westerner, but I love China, and I am not those westerners (others)*. That is to say, from some Chinese people's viewpoints, western people all belonged to one group. However, from the view of these participants, they hoped to be distinguished from that generic group label. Actually, a new stereotype came from these participants' comments. This means these Chinese people might have hostility towards these participants, while these participants potentially transferred such hostility to those *western people* who had left such a stereotype in mind.

6.3.3.2 An outsider feeling. “Where are you from?” is probably the one of the most frequent questions that international students have been asked, and this

encourages people to present themselves as bound together with their national origin (Montgomery, 2010), an obvious way of signalling a sense of belonging and a connection to national identity. To some degree, from both the views of the international students as well as the person asking this question, this emphasizes the national stereotypes (Bochner et al., 1977; Page & Chahboun, 2019). Though China has a very long history, China has not been traditionally an immigrant country although there are ethnic minorities within it. With the continuous development of China's economy, the number of international immigrants to China has also increased rapidly (Wang et al., 2020). However, in comparison with the whole population, the immigrant groups are still only a small part, which means Chinese people have a relatively clear concept of their ethnicity as Chinese and as Montgomery (2010) argues, it may be more difficult to make cross-cultural understanding the culture if the actual boundaries of the culture are strong.

Alan (PG) and William (PG) whose Chinese language ability were close to that of a native speaker, narrated their experiences, showing great confidence about speaking Chinese. Similarly, Colby (PG), who accepted Chinese culture enthusiastically, and even imagined himself as an honorary Chinese person, still admitted that he was British and he was different from Chinese people. With each of these students, there seemed to be a genuine blurring of identity and perhaps the realisation of a cultural hybrid identity. Nonetheless, despite such positive perceptions of China and Chinese culture, there were times when they experienced a strong outsider feeling in a Chinese group and their physical differences reinforced a sense of difference. As Alan said, no matter how good his Chinese was, he was British; he looked different from the Chinese. Wang (2011) suggests that although people try to acculturate in a new country, some values, behaviours, and ways of

thinking might change but the underlying structure of culture is unlikely to change fundamentally.

Theme 3: Transitions and the self

Participants reflected on their journey and any changes and shared their different feelings and a renewed sense of belonging after they arrived back in the UK. In this section, I will discuss how participants rethink about themselves, the relationship with the social world, and the identity transitions.

6.4 Cultural background and identity transition

6.4.1 Beliefs and behaviours

Learner's beliefs about language and language learning relate to their linguistic self, because these influenced learners' learning aims, expectations and possible learning methods (Benson et al., 2013). Before the participants went to China, most had built an imagined identity connected with potential linguistic fluency that they believed would come about through immersion in the Chinese community, from plenty of opportunities to speak Chinese, and from learning more about Chinese culture after arriving in China. Thus, when participants were in China, most of them chose distinctive ways of learning Chinese via socio-cultural engagement with individuals and groups, such as travelling around China, making Chinese friends, and trying to participate in different Chinese group activities. They were learning through their daily interactions but also within specific groups focusing on a hobby or interest creating a bridge between themselves and Chinese people. However, these activities could sometimes lead to a shift beyond increased fluency and belonging to a group. For example, Payne (UG) believed *learning Chinese is learning how to be humble*. The more Chinese people he met, the more he believed that this sentence was true, speaking Chinese involved something more. He saw the

TL as representing a particular way of being, the cultural and linguistic aspects coming together to create a sense of hybridity. He thought that he was becoming two different people when speaking these different languages. When he was speaking English, he believed he was confident and ambitious; and when he was speaking Chinese, he believed he tended to be humble, and hid some of his British personality. Vicki (UG) had a similar experience. She used to be shy in her home country, but when she arrived in China, she believed she should be more open to a new culture and try to take the initiative to make Chinese friends, or she would not have had enough opportunities to improve her Chinese. She thus tried to break away from her original self and tried to speak Chinese as much as she could. Moving to another country and using another language gave her opportunities to reinvent herself and so in her home language she saw herself as shy but in Chinese she was forthcoming. Another example is Paul (FLL), when he first arrived in China, he discovered China was not the same as his imagination, and he disliked Chinese people asked him simple questions again and again. In his case, he changed his thinking and he decided that after the formal class, he would only speak Chinese when he must speak, and when he was together with his international classmates, he would only speak English. His approach to living with the language and culture led to him immersing himself in the language at times.

Their initial beliefs had influenced their imagined relationship with the Chinese language and Chinese people but their subsequent choices about the self they would present in this new country and/or their interactions and experiences in China, replaced their earlier imagined relationship with a new authentic one where they were able to generate a sense of belonging within this very different culture. For those students who had been to China before, such as Diana, Neta, and William,

they had already, to some extent, moved through many of these shifts and changes on a prior visit and on this occasion were to make new choices about how and when they might further deepen connections with China, its language and its culture. The degree of hybridity achieved was unique to the individual and his or her circumstances, beliefs and choices about moving towards engagement with the language and the people.

6.4.2 Returning home

6.4.2.1 Reverse culture shock. Scholars have paid attention to culture shock since the '60s, but nowadays there is agreement that there is such a thing as a reverse cultural shock (Gaw, 2000; Gill, 2010), which means that after international students adapted to life in the new culture, on their return to their home country, they still needed some time to re-acculturate to this once familiar environment. As with the culture shock model, the influences of the reverse culture shock also depend on individual experience, e.g. the original cultural background, the length of stay abroad, and the nature of the acculturation taking place in the new community. Neta (UG), Payne (UG) and Colby (PG) were interesting examples of students suffering reverse culture shock. They had tended to retain a stronger sense of being British. However, since they had also had a strong desire to engage with the Chinese community and subsequently gained a new sense of belonging in the new culture group, adapting to life in China, when they came back to the UK, they spent some time re-adapting to life in the UK, and brought back habits that they had developed in China. This kind of experience encourages comparisons – “why do British people and Chinese behave differently? Why do they not engage with cooking in the same way as the Chinese?” That positive sense of belonging that they had established in China was now making a return to their home country uncomfortable. They even believed that they had

adapted to life in China more easily. However, for other participants, reverse culture shock seemed not to be so obvious. For example, Vicki (UG) and Jim (UG) regained a comfortable place and had a strong sense of belonging once they came back to the UK. Thus, according to participants' different experiences, it could be the case that the reverse culture shock was linked to the extent of participants' acculturation in the new culture. The more readily they acculturated, the greater the sense of belonging they acquired in China, the more reverse culture shock they might suffer when they came back.

6.4.2.2 Awareness of British culture. Gu and Schweisfurth (2015) investigated Chinese students' return experiences after studying in the UK. They discovered their participants gained a strong sense of being Chinese and developed a self-consciously international horizon at the same time. As Heusinkveld (1997) said the greatest shock may not be the collision between a new culture and an old, but maybe, a reflection of the influences of native culture on shaping one's identity and behaviours. In a new culture background, it is normal to face differences and conflicts with the native culture, an inevitable culture shock. As Vicki (UG) said, there were many formal things in the UK, taken for granted but these were hard to find in China. When such differences occurred, a comparison with students' native cultures may develop but this could happen too on their return to their native culture.

This study found that all the participants reflected on their native culture during their SA and on their return, but the reflections were not always positive as they negotiated the nature of hybridity. As William (PG) said, *it is hard to judge which is right, or which is wrong. Which is good, or which is bad. It is just different.*

Participants sometimes discovered some facilities, behaviours or values that they appreciated more in the UK. Meanwhile, there were also some things that they

preferred in China. Participants all believed they were proud of being British or Westerners. However, Vicki (UG), Jim (UG) and Paul (FLL), discovered more things that they appreciated in the UK, during their reflections. They had gained a stronger awareness of their Britishness (Western culture). In contrast, Dina (UG), Neta (UG), Payne (UG) and Colby (PG), found themselves more comfortable in the Chinese community, which meant that they had developed and retained a strong sense of cultural identity connected with China.

A rather unusual example was Andy (UG), who was an English-Taiwanese student. He characterised himself as English-Taiwanese initially but after his acceptance in China and embracing the culture and language there, he said that he defined himself as Taiwanese-English after he came back. He was distinctive from other participants in that Chinese was a second or foreign language for him but Chinese was also a heritage language for him. Even though he had not learned Chinese before, he had accessed Chinese culture at home or within the wider migrant Chinese community (Duff et al., 2013). After he acquired the Chinese language and engaged with the Chinese community, he gained such a strong sense of belonging and acceptance, that he found that he perceived his cultural identity to be more Chinese. He started out with a mild hybrid identity with a slightly greater emphasis on being English but this was transformed after his time in China. He used “we” to describe he and his classmates in China, and used *they* to describe his Scottish classmates. *We* meant that he was a member of that group, while “they” meant that he believed he was different from that group. That is to say, when he reflected on British culture, he believed his values and beliefs were more aligned with Chinese culture.

Golbert (2001) highlights the term *double consciousness* meaning that students may be influenced by both native culture and the hosting culture to such an extent that there is a powerful connection across national and cultural borders transforming the individual. Such connections could change overtime, meanwhile, the awareness, values, and beliefs might persist or change depending on future choices about his/her self and sense of belonging.

6.4.2.3 A new imagined identity. Shifting back to native speaker status and being confident that they knew the subtleties of engagement with people and culture, most participants believed that they were different from those who had never been to China. According to the concept of diaspora consciousness (Vertovec, 2009), many transnational individuals have been marked by more than one cultural and national identity and have gained a sense of belonging in more than one place. Therefore, after they came back, they could claim a British self, and an international student self as well or even honorary Chinese (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). Due to the dual or multiple identities possible (Vertovec, 2009), participants gained a different sense of self from their time in their original group. At the same time, such awareness might promote them to bond with others who had similar stories (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). For example, they might bond with other British students who had also been to China; bond to other students who had studied in the same Chinese university or lived in the same Chinese city; or even with Chinese students who studied in the UK. This could be linked to Norton's (2013) imagined identity. Because they had new identities - international students and Chinese language users- they built imagined identities of people who had the same or similar experiences, even if they had not met. Diana (UG), Fiona (UG), Neta (UG) and Andy (UG), all had mentioned that when they came back to the UK, they could understand more about international

students' feelings abroad, and when they met Chinese students in the UK, they felt their distance from them became closer than before. They did not know each other, but they all had developed an international self and knew Chinese culture, so they believed they would have something in common, which means their new identities enabled them to become part of a larger connected community, a new kind of belonging going beyond the physical and linking to a new imagined community.

6.5 Development of self

Living in a new country by themselves and speaking in a language which was not their mother tongue these participants left a group that they were familiar with, to go to what seemed to be an alien environment and culture. However, when participants returned, almost all of them believed that they had become more open or able to deal with difference but were also capable of greater independence. In addition to the independence of self, from another view, it is also the achievement of perseverance (Montgomery, 2010). Many participants had mentioned how hard it was to adapt to the Chinese only classes, how hard they tried to break through to make Chinese friends and engage in the Chinese community. It was not a thing that they could achieve in one day, but something that required long-term perseverance. As Montgomery (2010) says, in this situation, it is about the concept of adaptability and the changing nature of the self as increasing engagement enhanced a new linguistic and socio-cultural self. Some participants said that once they thought back, they could not believe that they could overcome so many unexpected things in China. After returning to the UK, they believed they were not afraid of facing challenges. They believed that this was a long-term influence on their personal growth through the study abroad experience.

6.6 Summary

Participants don't simply put on the identity of a Chinese student and then remove it on return to the UK. Instead, many of the students adapted and attempted to become a different version of themselves, emphasising the qualities sought after in the Chinese classroom. Even then, simply having these experiences, becoming the foreigner trying to fit in and adapting to socio-cultural and linguistic changes would be likely to affect some of their perspectives and beliefs. They believed they were different from other British who had never been to China, and gained a transnational conception of themselves, their relationships with others, and the whole social world.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In the last chapter, I discussed the shifting stories of identity of the British (Western) students who studied Chinese using three themes: linguistic self, social-cultural self and hybrid self. This chapter pulls together the answers to my research questions. At the same time, at the end of this chapter, I will also present this thesis' research contributions and limitations and some directions for future research.

Section One: Conclusion of this study

7.1 Question 1

How do learners in the programme above engage with the target language culture before and after studying in Mainland China/Taiwan? And, in what ways, if any, do these learners believe that their experiences in Mainland China/Taiwan have affected their engagement with Chinese and Chinese culture?

Here, I set out to investigate how CSLs and their experiences in Mainland China/Taiwan had affected their engagement with Chinese people, the language and Chinese culture. The student participants were composed of three groups, reflecting different levels of fluency, lengths of experience and familiarity with the Chinese context and culture. Some had already had a relatively rich study experience in China previously (PG students), and some had not been to China before this programme (UGs). In this first section, I will focus on those who were completely new to this study abroad experience.

7.1.1 Participants who had not been to China before this SA programme

For the student participants who had not been to China before, this SA experience involving immersion in a language and culture was unnerving. Before going to China, they had learned enough Chinese to engage at a basic level in oral

communication as well as reading and writing, and they had already had an introduction to Chinese culture in the classroom. However, because they had not yet had the chance to become integrated into an authentic Chinese community, China was still an imaginary future existence to them. At the same time, living in an English-speaking environment, it was difficult for them to find opportunities to speak Chinese after their Chinese classes.

After arriving in China, life changed dramatically for them. Because China and the United Kingdom have a considerable difference in climate and cultures. These students had experienced different degrees of culture shock initially (Ward et al., 2020). They suggested that they that found some life challenges in trying to establish themselves, for example, in adapting the conditions of accommodation, climate differences, using public transportation but overall, they managed to adjust and adapt well There was only one exception, Paul. Even though he lived in China for a year, he still found it hard to live there as he found it difficult being the outsider and did not like aspects of Chinese culture. This highlights that acceptance and adaptation are not inevitable but are very much affected by individual characteristics and flexibility (Berry, 1997, 2005).

While adjusting to life in China, other undergraduates began to find ways to integrate culturally and linguistically. In contrast to their experience in the UK, where they could speak their native language freely, in China, all teachers in the classroom spoke Chinese and they were constantly surrounded by Chinese signs, street names, newspapers, and other materials. As a result, they lost their confidence as native speakers and had to adapt to a new society where they needed to use the target language to function, build relationships, and adjust to different cultural norms. Therefore, at this time, whether they were actively seeking to join in or more

passively enduring being different, they all needed to speak Chinese in order to survive in this foreign land but engaging with deeper activities leading to a sense of belonging in this new environment were not always sought after (Benson et al., 2013; Ellis, 2004).

Although individuals had diverse reasons for learning Chinese, they were usually clear about their purpose for going to China to live: to improve their Chinese proficiency and fluency (Pérez-Vidal, 2014). Most of them tried very hard to find opportunities to speak Chinese in the Chinese community, for example: making friends with local Chinese college students, travelling around China, and even some participants inviting one-to-one conversations with Chinese teachers to help them practise Chinese. They had a strong motivation, which made them invest themselves in Chinese. This investment, in turn, enabled them to gain more opportunities to speak Chinese. Under the influence of these opportunities, their Chinese proficiency continued to improve. They also felt that the Chinese people accepted them more and more, and their integration into the Chinese community and culture was gradually getting deeper. If the Chinese community can be likened to a circle, most of the students seemed to be at the edge of the circle at first, and as their integration deepened, they moved forward towards the middle of the circle (Norton, 2013).

After returning to the UK and to their familiar places and relationships, they generally reflected a comfortable sense of home coming just after returning. At the same time, because they could use their native language, they also regained a sense of security and confidence (Montgomery, 2010). However, some of them also said that because they had adapted to life in China, they also experienced a brief reverse culture shock when they returned (Gaw, 2000). Overall, this was short-lived and no one said there was any real difficulty reintegrating into the British community.

7.1.2 Participants (UGs, PGs and FLLs) who had been to China before the SA programme

For student participants who had been to China before, especially those who had studied and lived in China for a period of time (i.e. not just traveling), learning and living in China was much simpler. However, they still said that after first arriving back in China, it would take a short period of time to adapt, and then they would be able to communicate with local people in Chinese as they had done before. Their willingness to become familiar with China meant that that previous adaptation could help to facilitate a speedier adjustment on their return. They already had a certain understanding of Chinese culture and so this SA experience further improved their Chinese level and continued to deepen their engagement with the Chinese community and to develop a deeper understanding of Chinese culture as well.

7.1.3 Similarities of experiences and sense of self

For these student participants, regardless of whether they had gone to China before, or not, they all believed that studying in China had influenced their attitudes and thoughts on China, whether in a positive or negative way. Most of them liked China more, while a small number of students felt that China was not a suitable place for them after getting to know China more deeply. One participant said that only living in China could actually know China. With the continuous improvement of their Chinese proficiency, they had become more and more knowledgeable about the Chinese community and culture. They had also become more skilful and sophisticated when communicating with Chinese people (Montgomery, 2010).

However, most of them mentioned the same phrase at some point: an outsider feeling (Chen, 2004; Wang, 2011). Even if they adapted to life in China, their Chinese level improved, they could gradually communicate with local people in

Chinese, they still believed they were different from local people and stood apart from them. The first and most obvious was the physical reason because for most of these students, their external appearance was different from that of Chinese people, so whether it was themselves or the Chinese people or both who perceived difference, they acknowledged subconsciously detecting a sense of difference in the communication process. Secondly, cultural integration was an extremely long process, and fundamental aspects of who these students were, how their historical and cultural selves had been developed persisted but perhaps shifted slightly to allow them to develop a new sense of belonging (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). As a result, even though they felt they could engage with the local community, they still had an inner distance from the Chinese people, as so-called outsiders with their own distinctive positioning.

7.2 Question 2

(a) How does the overseas experience influence students' sense of self in their different educational and social communities?

7.2.1 Student participants' sense of self

Again, using the three themes in Chapter 6, which are linguistic self, socio-cultural self and hybrid self, I outline here the important aspects of the individuals' sense of self. Previously, there was a focus on expectations and adaptations as a result of this study abroad experience especially at two key points- prior to travelling and on their return but in this section, I want to emphasise the ways that students' sense of self, linguistically and socio-culturally was nurtured or challenged through a process of acculturation (Berry, 2005), transculturation and hybridity mediated by developing linguistic skills and insights.

7.2.1.1 Linguistic self. Before going to China, due to their English-speaking background, student participants did not have many opportunities to practise Chinese after class. Therefore, at this point, or UGs, Chinese was just an academic course for them, and they regarded themselves as Chinese language learners but as linguistically and socio-culturally detached. At this time, for these participants, especially those who had never been to China, speaking Chinese was challenging, and they even felt anxious when communicating with a Chinese person. They also did not know much about how to use the most appropriate ways to communicate with the Chinese. This superficial engagement with language and culture initially did not create discomfort or challenges to who they were.

After arriving in China, their language environment changed significantly. In addition to learning Chinese in formal classes, they also needed to live with Chinese people after class. Therefore, their relationship with the Chinese language changed. They were no longer just a simple Chinese learner but also became a speaker and communicator in Chinese.

With the increase in the frequency of using Chinese, they became more familiar with the Chinese language and knew more about communicating with Chinese people. At this time, their attitude towards themselves when speaking Chinese also changed. As a participant said, *I am not afraid to speak Chinese*. Even though some participants said they still felt nervous when speaking Chinese, they adapted to this feeling and were no longer fearful of using Chinese to communicate.

From a basic learner to a person who could communicate by using Chinese, their inner distance from Chinese became closer, and they became more confident and believed they had created a genuine place for themselves as Chinese speakers (Benson et al., 2013).

7.2.1.2 Sociocultural self. The acculturation process was very much shaped by individuals' unique choices and experiences negotiating the new sociocultural self (Darvin & Norton, 2018; Gałajda, 2011). However, the three main aspects that impacted their cultural identity in China were the desire to speak Chinese and overcoming the fear of making mistakes, the acceptance of and engagement with Chinese culture, and the approval by native speakers of their efforts.

According to Norton's (2013) research, the need or desire to use and communicate in the target language is related to learners' sense of investment in the language. That is to say, the stronger the desire, the more investment, and vice versa. Similarly, investment reacts to learners' sense of self, the more investment, indicating that learners desired to engage with the community at the time. Therefore, from this study, most participants showed a relatively strong desire to speak Chinese. Some participants even hid their identity as English native language users to strive for more Chinese speaking opportunities. This also reflected their investment in Chinese and their desire to engage in the Chinese community. However, in certain situations, such as when they were not confident in speaking Chinese (such as Andy), afraid of making mistakes (such as Neta) or too tired to deal with similar questions (such as Paul) from different people, they would find themselves with a reduced desire to speak Chinese. Accordingly, their *foreigner* identity would be more prominent at that time and they would appear to be moving away from the transcultural identity being developed (Vertovec, 2009).

The acceptance of and engagement with Chinese culture is also a very important point for participants to better understand Chinese society (Schein & Schein, 2016). According to the experience of most participants, they had a relatively open attitude towards Chinese culture although a small number felt hostile to the

manifest differences while others found social and cultural aspects of life in China, difficult to adjust to, after a short time immersed in the language, social life and culture of China, most CLLs were able to embrace culture and social life in their host country. By living in China for a long time and gradually coming to understand and accept China's local customs and ways of interacting socially, they came to understand the world from a Chinese perspective and achieved varying degrees of cultural hybridity (Montgomery, 2010).

Faced with cultural differences, different participants showed different strategies. One was to recognise, accept, imitate and adapt (Berry, 2005; Schein & Schein, 2016). This appeared to be a positive approach to cultural engagement, which meant retaining the mother country's cultural identity while developing an increasing engagement with the new culture (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). Those students taking this approach seemed to build a stronger sense of belonging in China. Moving towards a transcultural identity, this aided students in establishing a legitimate space for themselves within this new culture. The second was to recognise, understand and adapt to some extent, but not to imitate. Rather than engagement, they had a stronger sense of identification with their own nation making it more challenging to adapt to this new transcultural positioning. In the face of cultural differences, they spoke of respecting the host culture, but engagement was more superficial. In this case, the feeling that they were different from Chinese people would be relatively stronger- an onus on finding difference rather than belonging. The third one involved neither much recognition nor much acceptance, holding an unopen attitude to cultural differences and only appreciating their own nation's culture. In this latter case, the participants would feel alienated from the Chinese community, resulting in a strong sense of difference. In fact, there were no

clear boundaries between these three approaches. Participants might agree with some differences, respect some, and reject others. This mean there was a more complex possible pathway through these transitional experiences. Students' sense of belonging in the Chinese community ultimately depended on how these elements and approaches combined.

The approval by native speakers of their efforts is also an important factor in increasing participants' sense of belonging in China. Many studies (Bender et al., 2019; Ramsay et al., 2007; Shu et al., 2020) have shown that support from the local community can increase the intercultural adaptation of the target culture of international students. In this study, many participants expressed that they would find a sense of belonging in China when local people approved of their Chinese proficiency or when they were treated as friends rather than as foreigners.

7.2.1.3 Hybrid self. In this thesis, I set out to understand the nature of the experiences of CLLs as they moved to immersive Chinese language contexts and how this might have affected their sense of self, linguistically, and socio-culturally. Linguistically, there was evidence of challenges and sometimes issues around trying to understand and trying to communicate within this context despite how exhausting it was to try to communicate effectively, especially in the beginning of their study abroad experience. However, a particularly challenging aspect of this SA time, was the students' engagement or lack of engagement with the socio-cultural world they had entered. A powerful need to find a sense of belonging and acceptance often encouraged students to allow malleability of identity (Norton, 2013). By this I mean, that they were often prepared to develop a transcultural identity possibly leading to a hybrid one where identity became more amenable to shifting ingrained stories of the British self towards a complex hybridity of self.

The cultural background of participants affected their sense of selves during this study experience. For participants who came from a mainly or only British background and had never been to China before this experience gave them an understanding of Chinese culture and encouraged them to reflect on the culture of their home country with new eyes. Meanwhile, they found a sense of identity in China, reinforced pride in being British, and developed more cultural awareness of British culture (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Montgomery, 2010). Also, some participants believed they appreciated Chinese culture more, so they hoped they could live like a Chinese person in China in the future. For the participant, who was British-Taiwanese, the cultural engagement in China helped him to find a strong Chinese cultural identity which, at least in the short term, allowed him to transform his sense of self. By reflecting on British culture from a place of recognition of his Chinese links, historically and socio-culturally, he believed that he had become Taiwanese-British rather than British- Taiwanese. For participants who had lived in China before, this programme enabled them to understand Chinese culture and gain more cultural engagement in China, joining in with group activities within communities and developing relationships with Chinese people. At the same time, many participants also believed that their confidence and independence improved, and attitudes towards others in the social world became more open (Viol & Klasen, 2021). All in all, no matter the participants' backgrounds, they all believed that this experience had brought changes to their sense of self. They saw themselves no longer as singular but as a composite, with British and Chinese cultural identities, which reflected, a more nuanced cultural hybrid identity.

7.2.2 From tutors' views

Question 2 (b) How do the UK/Chinese university tutors of these students believe that living in Mainland China/Taiwan affects them and their engagement with the Chinese language and Chinese culture?

The tutors' interviews provided me with a view of the possible perceived changes to student participants from a third perspective, a Chinese language tutor in the UK and one in China. This part mainly deals with three aspects: the support to students, the improvement of students' Chinese proficiency, and the development of character traits.

In terms of the support to students, both tutors said that the first few weeks were the most intensive time for students to ask for help. Feeling helpless in China, some students even sent emails to their teachers in the UK, who they believed would help to reassure them. As they adapted to life in China, they asked for help less often. Both teachers believed that providing students with the necessary in-time help could benefit them scaffolding the process of acculturation and supporting their engagement with Chinese culture and communities. This confirmed students' stories about their adaptation to life in China when problems rose initially, and they tried to find a way to cope.

In terms of students' language proficiency, both teachers believed that studying in China had significantly improved their Chinese proficiency. The tutor in China said that during the initial months abroad, she needed to slow down a little or pause the lesson at times. When necessary, she needed to add some English explanations. However, as time passed, and she found she could teach at the normal speed of Chinese. The tutor in the UK said that before going to China, students were more inclined to speak English to her after the class. When they came

back from China, they began to be willing to communicate with her in Chinese, and she discovered that students were more confident and comfortable in speaking Chinese.

As for character trait changes in students, both teachers said that some personalities were unlikely to change substantially. However, during studying in China, participants had seen so many different things and met so many different people, which broadened their horizons and also had involved learning to be independent and capable of reaching out to groups of people in order to join in hobbies. This SA experience, to some extent, made them gain subtle changes in their attitude towards problem-solving and their willingness to express themselves, which confirmed what the students said, that they felt they were more open, more independent and more confident by the end of the time abroad.

Finally, the tutor in the UK also mentioned an interesting point that the students began to use Chinese social APPs, such as WeChat and Weibo, when they were in China. After some time back in the UK, their social APPs changed back to their familiar British ones. For those Chinese APPs, they rarely or no longer used them. This showed that some of the SA's changes were potentially long-term or even lifelong, and some were short-term, and the students might revert to their familiar behaviours after returning to the UK.

Section Two: Contributions, limitations and indications

7.3 Contributions to the field

Through a focus on chosen key narratives from narratives of identity theory, this study investigated the identity transitions of participants through their different stories of living and studying abroad. The analysis of data has provided helpful insights that might be of use to teachers of Chinese as well as to students about to

undertake on a SA experience. At the same time, this research was not simply focused on individual snapshots but instead set out to capture experiences across time and space as participants narrated their stories of self before, during and after studying abroad. Data were collected over several months but students' journeys varied in length. Thus, this study filled the gap in long-term qualitative research on Chinese as a second language learning and identity.

In a statement at the beginning of Chapter 3, it was noted that interest has grown towards the Chinese language and culture but most of the research on international students learning Chinese is limited to understanding Chinese culture and how students adapt to life in China (Zhou, 2020). There are few types of research on identity construction and cross-cultural identity. Long-term follow-up studies are even fewer. Therefore, the most significant contribution of this study is in exploring the nature of Chinese language learners' different journeys through SA as they defined and redefined the concept of who they were during the learning programme. This process of becoming or rejecting new ways of being and interacting was articulated from the position of learners themselves as they narrated. Furthermore, this study also developed the poststructuralist theories of language learning and identity (Norton, 2013), within the Chinese context and enriched the data sets around the teaching of Chinese as a second language. I concur with poststructuralist theories, such as those articulated by (Davies & Harré, 1990), that identity is a contingent, variable, and context-dependent construct. While individuals are socially positioned in society, they also actively participate in shaping their identities (Norton, 2013). When designing the study, I adopted the perspective of the participants and aimed to explore how language learners construct and reconstruct their relationship with the world through their SA experiences. According to the

findings, this study strongly suggests that learners' identity is dynamic and changes with time, different environments, and learners' own experiences. Power dynamics between LLs and NSs are often imbalanced due to different speaking contexts and the varying language proficiency of NSs. Despite this power differential, LLs often take on the main responsibility to continue the conversation (Mori & Hayashi, 2006; Norton, 2013) Participants' experiences, whether positive or negative, have confirmed this view through the perspective of Chinese as a target language in this research, which is rarely explored in previous studies.

However, while a number of people have written about and questioned the idea of English as a *lingua franca* (Jenkins & Leung, 2014; Kecskes, 2019; Sifakis & Tsantila, 2019), most current studies focus on learning English as a second language (Kanno, 2008; Norton, 1997, 2013; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Therefore, when native speakers of English are learning Chinese, the way they see their mother tongue, the way they see Chinese, the way they see the relationship between English and Chinese, and even the way they regard Chinese culture, will all have different features from those displayed by native speakers of other languages. These are the aspects that this study has focused on and that previous studies lack. For example, this study found that Chinese native speakers showed a strong desire to practise English with English native speakers, thus causing a certain degree of obstruction to the participants' Chinese learning. When discussing the unequal relationship between LLs and NSs in the communication process, this study confirmed Norton's (2013) argument that LLs take the main responsibility for mutual understanding. However, this study also found that NSs have anxiety and lack confidence when facing unfamiliar foreigners. Especially due to China's history, some Chinese people have rather stereotypes of Westerners, which complicates the

power relationship between them. It thus cannot be explained simply by applying Norton's (2013) theory.

Meanwhile, this aspect also provides a foundation for other work in this area. This study uses a case study in order to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews about individual cases, providing some practical qualitative research experience for future studies on identity and TCSL, and even on other aspects of TSCL and SLA.

7.4 Limitations

This study comprised a group of students who formed my case, so the data were specific to this particular set of students and it was not expected that generalisability in a traditional sense would be possible. However, as Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) suggest, the case may hold a resonance for others experiencing similar transitions or involved in teaching them and may help to illustrate key shifts in identity typified in this study in the Chinese context (Bassey, 1999; Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013).

Participants were small in number -- only focusing on one university, so there might be completely different stories if participants were from other Scottish or English universities. My original intention had been to investigate a small number of undergraduate students in depth as they progressed through their SA year but due to difficulties in recruitment, this was not possible. The compromise involved looking at different kinds of students, some of whom were going through the SA experience during the research and others who had already done so and had different levels of expertise and maturity. These more reflective accounts still provided me with a sense of the journeys undertaken and the shifts in identity experienced but did not capture the longitudinal aspect. However, it lays the groundwork for the creation of stronger longitudinal case studies of different groups of students from different universities, as

here, studying Chinese and spending time in China, while also looking into students of English as a Second Language in China making a SA trip to the UK. Another option might be looking at ESL learners across SA in different western countries. There was also a strong focus on qualitative material, meaning greater depth was sought rather than breadth. However, the variety of data collection methods and member checking have reinforced the internal quality of the research and helped verify the conclusions being drawn.

7.5 Indication for future studies

Research on identity and teaching Chinese as a second language is still in its infancy. On the one hand, since Chinese has unique features, such as Chinese characters and grammar, some results and conclusions should not be referenced directly on the basis of SLA and ESL theories. On the other hand, the reliability and validity of qualitative research objects and research methods also need to be further considered. Therefore, I propose two suggestions for future studies of TCSL and identity.

1. Deepen the qualitative research, combine the existing identity theories, establish a long-term, dynamic and systematic grasp of the samples, and then study the dynamic process of international students' Chinese learning and identity transitions.

2. Broaden the research area. Instead of mainly focusing on acculturation, we can try to study the influence of international students on identity construction from a broader perspective, such as ideology and cross-cultural identity.

Based on the above two points, combined with the limitations of this study, I suggest furthering the research with the following studies.

1. A comparative case study of the identities of international students from different cultural backgrounds.

2. A long-term qualitative study on the cultural identity of individual international students, using the methods of observation and study diaries.

3. A study of the influence of studying in China on the identity of foreign citizens of Chinese origin.

4. Research on the influence of interaction with local Chinese students on the cultural engagement of international students.

5. A study of how the university's policies, such as rules that treat international students differently from local students, might impact international students' identity and sense of belongings.

6. An action research about the preparation and management of expectations of students and tutors in the UK and in China.

All these studies could be deepened and developed in the future, since there is still a long way to go in the study of TCSL and identity.

Appendixes

Appendix 1: Call for participants poster

The poster features a central cloud-shaped graphic with the word "Identity" written inside. Seven red arrows radiate from the cloud to the following terms: "Culture Shock", "Feelings", "Motivation", "Food", "Future", "Learning Experience", and "Language". The background is a whiteboard with various objects like a coffee cup, a pen, and hands pointing at the text. At the bottom, there is a red banner with white text: "Your experience of learning in China Call for participants". To the left of the banner is a QR code, and to the right is a Wechat icon with the text "Please add my Wechat (mengke9258) here!".

Your experience of learning in China
Call for participants

Please add my Wechat (mengke9258) here!

Appendix 2: Student participant Consent form

Informed Consent Form for Learners

Culture, identity and Second/Foreign Language Learning

– the Case of Chinese

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Mengke Li in the Moray House School of Education at the University of Edinburgh.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research aims to focus on student identity during significant transitions and shifts in cultural contexts, and find how overseas experience influence language learners' sense of self in their different educational and social communities, as well as the engagement with Chinese and British language and culture.

PROCEDURES

You will be invited to participate in **one** interview (about **20-30 minutes**) via face to face, Wechat or QQ to talk about your experiences, beliefs and perceptions of learning in the UK. With your permission, these will be audio-recorded in the interview procedure.

POTENTIAL RISKS / DISCOMFORTS AND THEIR MINIMIZATION

You may find talking about your personal experience during the procedure somewhat uncomfortable. Such discomforts, however, should be no greater than what we experience in everyday life.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

The research will give you the chance to gain new insights into your experiences abroad and your engagement with others and with the Chinese language in a new and distinctive context.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information obtained in this study will remain strictly confidential, will be known to no-one (only me and my supervisors), and will be used for research purposes only. Codes, not names are used on all test instruments to protect confidentiality.

DATA RETENTION

Raw data files will be retained securely on a laptop accessible only by password and securely on university server. The raw data will be retained for up to 3 years as further analyses and writing is carried out after completion of doctoral study. The data will then be erased.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. This means that you can choose to stop at any time

without negative consequences.

STORAGE OF DATA

Data will be transcribed and archived with all personal identifiers removed and will be kept indefinitely and securely.

QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Mengke Li at UoE. Telephone: [+447759671843]; Email: [Mengke.Li@ed.ac.uk].

SIGNATURE

I _____ (Name of Participant)

understand the procedures described above and agree to participate in this study.

I ** agree / do not agree to the [audio-recording] during the procedure.

Signature of Participant Date

Date of Preparation: [Date]

Appendix 3: Samples of interview questions

3.1 Semi-structured Interview Questions for those who just came back

Then key areas –

2. first impressions – culture, language use, studying?
3. Teaching and learning? Culture and language?
4. a) and b) Experiences of Culture and language use beyond the classroom?
5. Reflections on experiences – a) culturally? B) linguistically Other?
6. Benefits
7. Personal change

1. How does it feel to be back home? Do you miss anything about living and studying in China?
2. Which city did you study? Do you remember your first impressions of that city? For the Chinese culture, the food, the language, your first class there, or anything you would like to say.
3. What did you learn during classes in China?

Prompt – did you learn something knowledge about Chinese culture in class? If yes, was it the same as what you learned before you went to China? Language?

4. Did you have Chinese friends when you were in China? Or did you always communicate with Chinese people?

Prompt – Is there any difference about Chinese culture between what you learned in class and what you really experienced in you daily life? Especially compare the classes you learned in the UK. If yes, would you please give me some example? What do you think mainly results in such phenomenon?

5. Did you have friends who came from other countries, I mean, you have totally different mother tongues, in China?

Prompt - If yes, what language did you usually use when you were talking? If the answer is in English, why did not you choose Chinese? If the answer is in Chinese, do you think is there any different feeling when you talk with a Chinese language learner and a native Chinese speaker?

6. A) According to the answers above, do you think you have changed some ideas about Chinese culture now?

Prompt - If yes, which part, and do these ideas have some positive or negative influences for your Chinese language study? If no, what is your ideas about Chinese culture all the time?

7. What benefits do you think you got from this one-year study in China? Culturally? Linguistically? Socially? Other?
8. How do you think you have changed personally, if at all, over this last year?
9. Do you have the plan to go to China again in the future?

3.2 Interview questions for the Tutor of Chinese at the Scottish University

1. Should all the students in your MA programme go to China to learn Chinese in their Y3?

2. I know students have the opportunity to choose the universities they want to study from five universities in different parts of China (from northeast to south east). What's the reason for cooperating with these universities?

--Judging by the different local culture in China, did your students have very different reflections according to their different experiences?

--Have you noticed any changes that happened on your students, i.e. personality, learning behavior, attitude towards Chinese language and Chinese culture? Some others?

3. In your mind, which is the most beneficial part of the one-year exchange programme?

-- Did most of the students meet the Y3 study requirements?

4. According to my interviews, some students were very happy in China, and some were not, especially for some sensitive students who reported they found it hard to adapt to the life in China, which relatively influenced their learning outcomes. What do you think of this issue?
5. Are there some things in common among all these students who chose Chinese as their major?
6. In your opinion, are there any differences between the Chinese class at UoE and the Chinese class at the Chinese universities?

-- To teach Chinese in Scotland, according to the cultural differences, what do you think you need to pay attention to?

--Do you think it is important to teach Chinese culture to improve their language ability? Why?

--What kind of Chinese culture do you usually teach to students?

--Are there any different reactions of the students before and after they studied Chinese in China when you teach Chinese culture related knowledge? What are these?

7. What is the average level of their Chinese ability when they graduate?

--Are their levels distinctly different? What do you think is the main reason for their different learning outcomes?

--Different from learning Chinese in China, students here seldom have opportunity to immerse themselves in Chinese community after the class. How do you usually deal with this issue, to improve their learning investment?

--Facing the relatively lower level students, what are the kind of ways that usually help them?

Appendix 4: A Sample of the reflective diary

What's the date today?

27/03/2019

What kind of cultural differences have you faced in China up to now?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Different kinds of food	100.00% 1
▼ Table manners	0.00% 0
▼ Different clothes styles	100.00% 1
▼ Different communication (social) styles	100.00% 1
▼ Different network tools (i.e. Wechat, Alipay, No FB)	100.00% 1
▼ Daily timetable	100.00% 1
▼ Climate	100.00% 1
▼ Accommodation	100.00% 1
▼ Public transportation	100.00% 1
▼ Other (please specify) Responses	100.00% 1
Total Respondents: 1	

Please chose the 3 most important items from Q2 and say a little about how you dealt with each.

Different network tools: When I first arrived I didn't have Wechat pay or Alipay and it was causing a lot of problems whenever I went into shops. As soon as I got a bank account I got Alipay and it has made life a lot easier. I think its a very convenient way of paying for things. Climate: When I first arrived it was extremely cold in my room and I wasn't allowed an electric blanket. I bought a hot water bottle and used the hot setting of my air conditioner. In the past few weeks there have been a few really hot days. I have dealt with this by wearing summer clothing (even though the locals are still wearing coats) and drinking a lot of water. I also bought an umbrella because it rains very frequently here. Public transportation: The metro is very small here because the ground in Hangzhou is very loose and is prone to collapsing if it is dug up too much. I frequently use the bus and am now used to journeys taking a bit longer than usual, but at first I found it very inconvenient.

Have you experienced any significant moments/experiences/interactions that have made you stop and think about language and culture? 🙌 For example: When Chinese people refuse me, they always say "no", rather than "no, thank you". Firstly I felt kind of offended, but later I realized that it is not because Chinese people are rude, but because.....

People frequently stare at me and try to take photos when they think I am not looking. I still haven't fully gotten used to it, it makes me feel rather uncomfortable. I suppose that it's just because there aren't many foreigners that choose to come to this city and so the locals aren't used to it. I often hear people say "外国人(foreigner)" or "老外小姐姐(foreign girl)" when i walk into any establishment. It made me realise that it must be quite uncommon for foreigners to come here. In general, I feel as

though Chinese people talk at a much higher volume. At first I thought they were angry, or that they were being rude to me, but after a while I realised that that isn't necessarily always the case.

What do you think of the daily Chinese classes in China? How helpful were these in developing your language skills? How could these classes be developed?

On the whole, I find the teaching quality is very good here, the workload is manageable and I feel I have already learnt a lot. I think the area I struggle with most is speaking and I find that in speaking, we often do similar exercises as we do in grammar class, reading from a textbook. I think that it would be more effective if the classes focused more on spontaneous conversation as opposed to memorizing a text which represents an unrealistic and artificial conversation.

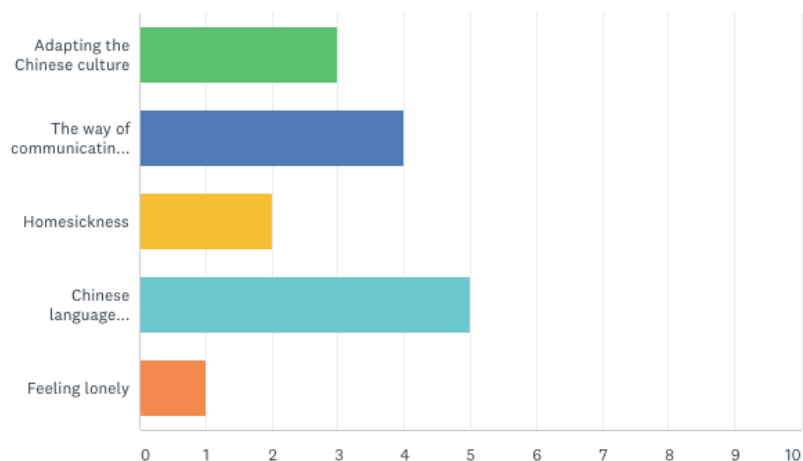
Besides daily classes, how do you seek to improve your knowledge language and culture?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Language exchange groups (just like Tandem at UoE)	0.00% 0
Making Chinese friends	0.00% 0
Travelling	100.00% 1
Joining in different student societies (clubs)	100.00% 1
Other (Please specify) If you chose more than one, please rank them in order of importance. Responses	100.00% 1
Total Respondents: 1	

Could you give a couple of examples of particularly helpful experiences developing your understanding of the language and/or culture ?

Joining the crossfit gym near my university has helped me to come into contact with authentic chinese. It is very challenging at times, but I feel that this is the best way to learn. I joined a Chinese Ink Painting class in which the teacher only speaks Chinese. I have already learnt a lot of specialised vocabulary for this and I have only attended 2 classes so far.

Please rank challenges you face now. Number in order of importance to you 1=biggest, 2= next biggest etc.



Based on your answers to Q8, could you please give some information about why you think your 3 most important choices were so challenging? And how you coped? If you have some other challenges, please also specify here.

Chinese Language Limitation: I feel that my language is a huge barrier between me and Chinese students here. I find that people either assume I don't speak any Chinese at all or once they hear me speak a little, they assume I am already fluent. I can't seem to find the middle ground. I also find that I am still incredibly anxious about practicing my Chinese. I know from having a similar experience when I was in Belgium, that I will get used to it and eventually, but at the moment I find that I still don't feel confident. The way of communicating with Chinese people: communication is a challenge because of language, but also because of cultural differences. I find that I don't always know how to approach people or begin a conversation. I have coped by just being persistent and persevering. Adapting to culture: There are a few things that I found hard or strange when I first arrived. Just daily behaviours that are common here such as spitting in the street, shouting and invading another's personal space or shoving a little to get past etc. all bothered me, but after a few weeks they are just things that need to be accepted. There are aspects of the culture that I don't like, however I found that it really helped me to find aspects of Chinese culture that I really did like such as taking a nap mid day or going for a walk after eating a meal, along with exploring China's abundance of history and art.

Reflect on your experiences in China overall to this point. Could you describe some of the highlights and challenges?

Overall my experience so far has been amazing. I feel very grateful to have had the opportunity of taking part in this exchange. The highlights have been: Meeting new friends from all over the world. Gaining a huge amount of self confidence and independence. Visiting a part of the world that I have never been to before. Exploring the city and meeting locals. Knowing that my Chinese is improving every day. Having great teachers here. Trying new foods and drinks. Strangely enough, feeling closer than ever with my friends and family. I feel as though we talk more frequently than we usually do when I am studying in the UK. The challenges have been: Feeling like there is a very big distance between me and the local students here. Getting used to being stared at and always feeling like a foreigner. Feeling that my language isn't good enough yet. Finding it hard to get around the city without good transport links. Setting up a bank account. The time difference makes it a little more difficult than usual to talk to my friends, family and boyfriend back home.

Appendix 5: One interview sample

Fiona (Group Two) – Chinese major student – interviewed once after came back from China

Ok, so firstly, thank you so much for attending my research. And my name is Sarah. And I'm a second year phd student at the Moray House School of education. And my topic is about cultural identity and Second language learning. So the first question I want to ask is that how many times have they been to China?

Um, I've only actually been to China once, but I spent about fourteen months and thirteen. So it's quite a long time, but just once. Yes, just once.

So firstly, you want to Shanghai and then Taipei?

Yes.

Okay, is China the same country as it in your imagination?

Um, I don't know. I before I went I was quite nervous because I didn't know what to expect, so I tried not to think about it, and, um I knew that would be really amazing things, but also I thought I knew it's gonna be hard at times as well. Um but I think moving around to different places. So from Shanghai that made it easier because then I saw different parts of China and so Shanghai was, um, it met my expectations and what I think about Shanghai. But then the things I didn't like about Shanghai. Um it was fine. But then I went to Taipei and things I didn't like about Shanghai. Taipei didn't have. But the things I did like about Shanghai and Taipei.

Could you please give me details about this?

Um in, Taipei the night markets, we went to with all the foods were like delicious, but Shanghai didn't have the same. Um and in Shanghai um well because Taipei is not as Chinese as Shanghai. So I felt I wasn't getting a real experience of China as much as I would have that I stayed in Shanghai before. Yeah.

So you have you think it's totally different experience?

Um. Not totally different, but it is different. Yeah. Yeah.

Okay. So you learn the Chinese courses in Shanghai?

Yes, I was in Fudan university to study Chinese. Summer Programme.

So is there any differences for the courses you learned in Shanghai and Taipei?

Well Fudan was in simple characters and Taipei was in complex characters which is the first thing is like different. Um in terms of the teaching, I think it was actually quite similar in terms of the language we were guessing. Um, just maybe slightly different vocabulary. But the grammar and the way we were using it was the

same. I would say in Taipei was speaking Chinese a lot more than Shanghai. But there was less uh written and vocabulary in Taipei as it was in Shanghai.

Do you think the cause is different from you learn in Edinburgh University?

Yes, totally different. Yeah. Um, in Edinburgh it's um particularly in second year, it's very translation based, whereas in Taipei and Shanghai we weren't doing any translation. Um, um, and I also did teaching in Taipei and Shanghai were done totally in Chinese, but in our first two years here it was done totally in English. So yeah well not totally English, but a lot in English.

So have you learned some courses related to Chinese culture before you went china?

Before I went to China in my first year at Edinburgh, I did a course on, uh, modern Chinese literature and film. Um, and then a course on modern Chinese history, so one history of China, Japan and a little bit Korea. Yeah.

So what you learn about a Chinese culture is same as what you experienced.

Um, oh, I don't know. Um, I think, um, for my modern Chinese film course. Um, we watched quite a few modern films from China and I think that probably gave quite a good picture of life. And in fact, that probably fed into what I was expecting China was going to be like. Um, uh, so yeah, I'd say that helped it. I think um, what we were learning those first two years, it was more about the history, the politics, like bigger things. Whereas, in the day stayed, we weren't really learning about the day to day culture in that we would experience in China.

Do you still remember the first day when you went to Shanghai?

Yeah!! Because it's so hot. So, hot. yeah, um...

Did you find something that strange or amazing or different?

Um, well, like I said I went without, I didn't want to expect anything when I went out there. So I didn't want to be disappointed, or like, so I wanted to, I think I want to get out there for it to be better than I thought it was going to be. But the first day, um, it was really, really hot that day. And and it would have been, um, and we went to accommodation which is in student dormitory, which is fine, but it wasn't, um, it wasn't like accommodation the UK. So but I was I was expecting it to be not the same as the UK, but I was a bit disappointed seeing accommodation. But then we went out in the evening, and we had our first like a Chinese meal. And so so that was yeah, yeah, that's good.

So did you make some Chinese friends there?

Yeah. Both in Shanghai and Taipei.

Do you think when you communicate with the Chinese friend is different from your communication with your European friends?

So when I speak in Chinese?

You speak Chinese with your Chinese friends?

Uh, uh, uh, at the start English, at the end of the year Chinese. Yeah. So, um, I definitely think the, uh, when I'm speaking to Chinese people, um, I definitely speak in a different way. I think I um change what I'm saying. I change talk about um mostly because I know the culture is different. So I can't talk about what I feel like. I can't really talk about certain topics with my Chinese friends that I would freely talk about with my western friends. For example, when we were in Taiwan. Before I went to Taiwan, um, I felt uncomfortable talking about the fact that I was going to Taiwan to study with my Chinese friends. At that point, because I didn't know at that time, I didn't know much about the relationship between China and Taiwan, and I didn't want to say something stupid or say something that would offend someone. So I avoided talking about topics. When I'm with my European friends, I would definitely take.

Oh, yeah, it's about the culture.

So do you find something that strange in China that you cannot accept?

Uh, um, uh, um, let me think, um, uh, one thing, which, um, I know it's like a development thing, but the um, stereotypes about relationships, um, particularly the women are more ah, take the lesser role in relationships. There's like the stereotypes of women being like, the men being in charge and the woman not being so much in charge. Um, sometimes I came across friends, but at that point in Shanghai didn't know anyone in that position, but they would be really good friends with me, and then they get boyfriends and then they weren't allowed to go out with us. They want allowed to do this because they said, oh, my boyfriend won't like it, which I didn't like. Yeah, yeah.

So you mean a boyfriend try to control his girlfriend.

Yeah, yeah, I really didn't like that.

Yeah, sometimes it's true.

Yeah. So is there something else that made you feel offended. For example, something, um, people on the road, the crowded public traffic...

Um, one thing that um I got used to, I really got used to it, but when I first got out there, um on public transport, the elderly would get priority, which I totally understand. And by the time I left, I was I would get out the way and help them and make sure some people would do. But when I first got there I couldn't understand why everyone was just waiting for these old people to get on the bus, and then I want to get on the bus, but I couldn't. But by the end of my time there, I got used to, got very used to it. But when I first got there, It was like....

Yeah, that's the same as me. When I got on the bus and I helped some elder people here, the seniors here, I think maybe he failed offended.

Yeah, yeah, it's totally different.

He didn't like me to help him.

Yeah, yeah, I know I will. Yeah, yeah.

That's it the problem. I think the different way of people treats different people. So you think when you live in Taipei for the social life, you normally communicate with Chinese, I mean Taiwanese there, or European friends?

Um, social. When I first got there and for the first six months, I would say I was almost exclusively apart from like I had a language exchange, so we met one or two hours a week, but apart from that, I was only with European friends. But then once my, once I felt my Chinese got to a certain point and I was more able to talk to people, so around Chinese new year after Chinese new year I think, so like February, at that point, I felt more comfortable making Taiwanese friends who speaking Chinese, and so by the time I left I was spending most of my time to time with Taiwanese people. So the first half of the year mostly with European people, and in the second half year mostly with Taiwanese people.

So you tried to get into Taiwan social.

Yeah. Yeah.

Have you tried some Taiwan, I mean the society a club?

Um, my friends have, I haven't got around to it yet. I have too many, too much work to do. Yes. Um, I go to tandem here. I guess a tandem cafe where it's like language exchange. So we can speak Chinese together.

So, um, can I ask because the Chinese language totally different language system from the English, so why do you choose this major? It's a big challenge.

Um, so I've always been good at languages. Um, I can speak French really really well, um and at school as best languages. So when it came to apply for university uh, to get into European languages at Edinburgh particular is really difficult. You have to get quite good grades. Um so to take that pressure off from getting really good grades, I knew I didn't want to do a European language. So that kind of leaves Russian Japanese and Chinese are the major ones, that you can learn the unknown European languages. So um, actually my grandmother grew up in Shanghai and my great great grandfather lived in Shanghai.

Um, are they Chinese ?

No, they are English. but they were just working there for the maritime customs. Um, and he was an officer. He's written those of books about China in his time in China. Um, so I chose based on the fact that I have the most links to china. Um, that's why I chose Chinese.

Uh, so before your first year. You didn't learn the Chinese language, just maybe learn some Chinese knowledge?

Yeah, yeah.

oh, up to now, do you regret your decision?

Oh, it's it's um, there have been times where I found it really difficult, when you just never feel, because you have to learn the characters. I just never feel like I've learned enough characters. So there have been times where I've really regretted not taking Japanese or Korean, which seemed much, much easier than Chinese. Um, but I think I'd do the same again, if I went back. I think I do the same again. The opportunities that learning Chinese gives you um, really worth it.

So after your graduation, do you have a plan to go to china?

Yeah, well, I want to find a job, hopefully in Shanghai or Hong Kong, maybe. Um, maybe Taiwan, but I don't know, because I wouldn't find. Um, but I just want to find a job. Basically, I don't want to study again. I really want graduate and earn some money, find a job, so I won't be doing a masters or anything like that.

So you want to go to china to find a job?

Yes.

That is a very good idea!

Yeah.

So what benefits do you think you get most from the one year study in Taiwan?

Um, the language firstly like, um, the just comparing when I first got that when I left, my level of Chinese is ridiculously different. Um, I also think, um, just in terms of the way you think about um, foreigners in the UK. So now when I before I left, you have no awareness of what it's like to live in a foreign country, where you don't understand the language, you don't understand the culture. So after spending a year in a living where you don't know the language well, and you don't know the culture well. It gives me, I think, the way that I look at foreigners in the UK now has certainly changed. Um, yeah. Um, I think that's a benefit. Yeah. And also um, just like eating Chinese food and Taiwanese food great benefit. Amazing really enjoyed that.

And when you were in Taipei, did you miss something in the UK?

It was food, it was a really, yeah, um, just um because western food is really expensive like good western food is really expensive in Taipei, and in Shanghai. Um, so I really miss like cheese and bread. Um, and my dog, I really miss my dog. Yeah, my family came out and visited me, so I wasn't particularly homesick for my family. But my dog and cheese are typical of what I missed.

Yeah, the cheese is expensive.

Yeah, really expensive.

Um, do you have some moment that you don't want to learn Chinese or you don't want to speak Chinese.

Um, when I don't want to speak Chinese. Um, so if there was, if we got into trouble in Taiwan, if we did something not opposed to, and someone will come over and tell us off, we would all say, or I would say, I can't speak Chinese. I don't know Chinese, I can't speak Chinese, because then they let you go, because they can't communicate with you. So yeah, that was when I didn't want to speak Chinese. Um, when I, when I um, there was a moment when I had a lot of work. It was just before the Chinese new year, I had an essay that I had to send back to Edinburgh and there's a lot of work on at that point. And at that point moment, I wanted to stop the Chinese. So I could focus on um, I work for Edinburgh which was an essay in English. Um, so that point, because I think the balance, finding a balance between learning the Chinese language and learning all the other parts of such as Chinese politics, Chinese history, finding a balance between those two is quite difficult.

So you learn Chinese history in English.

Yes. Uh, yeah, yeah. And yeah, in English we do it. So this year I'm doing Chinese economic history and Chinese politics and they're all in English, and it's just the Chinese language is in Chinese. Yeah.

I think it's quite difficult.

I think I got a better understanding in English than I would if I learned to in China.

And so do you think your ideas towards Chinese languages as cultural changed during the one year study? Compare with you study Chinese at Edinburgh University?

Um, I think the original reason that I learned Chinese stayed the same. I think the way I look at China and Chinese language changed. So my original reason for not learning a European language and wanting to live and work in China or get a job in China, that stayed the same, that was quite constant. But the way I look at China is a country and Taiwan and other Chinese language have changed.

You mean the relationship between china and Taiwna?

Yeah, it's quite sensitive. I thought was really interesting.

Yes. even I ask the person, are you from China or Taiwan, it is sensitive. Yeah. So I have heard that you can choose five different cities to go to study. So why do you choose Taipei rather than Beijing?

So I was really torn between Beijing and Taipei. The reason I chose Taipei is that they study complex characters and this year half a translation course half as in complex characters and half are simple characters. So I chose to learn complex characters just to make this year easier for me. That was the main reason I just went to Taipei. And also um, in Taiwan they have lots of mountains and surfing and stuff and I quite like interactive things like that. So and it's quite convenient to do in Taipei. So that was another reason that I just goes Taiwan.

So you mostly learn this traditional version Chinese.

Yeah. And uh oh, not mostly. Um about half. Yeah.

So you have to learn two versions of Chinese?

Yes, but we don't have to write the tradition characters. We just have to recognize it. But I still think it's worthwhile learning. Yeah.

As for me, I cannot write down traditional version. I just I can recognize it.

Yeah, yeah.

This afternoon a person asked me a Chinese character is a traditional version of XIANG, but I cannot recognize. Traditional is very very hard.

Yeah I'm really bad at writing it. I forgot how to write traditional really, really quickly.

Yeah, It's really hard to memorize. Maybe sometimes kind of easy to recognize. So do you think your personality has changed a little bit for after learning Chinese or you identity?

I think, um, I think the way I learned has changed. So to study Chinese, to just constantly write out characters like this can be really straightforward and you just have to get it done. I think that has impacted how I learn, uh, English topic when I'm learning in English. So um, that's one that's one part I think has changed. I don't think, I don't know my personality. I think um...

Towards the Chinese people or the way to communicate with Chinese people, even the way you communicate with European friends..

Um, I think, so last summer, I worked at a hostel and the girls that I were working with were very Taiwanese, um, young girls. So I think the way that they acted in Chinese has really impacted how I speak in Chinese. Um, and this time they use in the way they talk and what they talk about. So I think um like the colloquialism of these, so they definitely impacted the way that I speak in Chinese. I wouldn't say affected so much the way I communicate with my European friends, other than the fact I talk about China a lot.

But yeah, I don't know if Taiwanese call the foreigners LAOWAI?

Uh, they don't. Yeah, in Shanghai they could do.

What do you think of that?

I think it's quite funny, I think because it rhymes a lot with English words. So um, do you know what fly means in English? It means like ah XING GAN, PIAO LIANG. Yeah. So so you can say pretty fly for LAO WAI, which means like you're looking good for a LAO WAI. So I think it's quite funny. I quite enjoy. Ah yeah.

But yeah, but do you think maybe in some special, particular moment, you think that you are called LAO WAI is kind of discrimination?

Um, no, I don't think so. I think on the principle that um, most Chinese people, um, treat westerners in a different way than they treat other Chinese people. And in fact, this is sort of preventable the way white people get treated in China, um, which I don't think it's necessarily a good thing. So I would say actually if if they're using it in a bad way, I'd be actually pretty pretty ok with that. Because most of the time they're using it in a, um, quite a sort of a privileged way towards white people. Yeah, you get what i'm saying. Yeah?

I guess so. Do you still miss some thing in china?

Yeah, the food dumplings, I really miss dumplings. I've tried buying them from the Chinese supermarkets here, but they're not the same. The food is the big one I miss. And also now it's getting colder. I miss the temperature, how hot is was in Taiwan.

The summer in Taiwan is really hot.

Really hot! I'll see me some.... in fact this is one of the benefits of year abroad. I had a lot of opportunity to travel around Asia last year, just because I was so close to all these other countries. So I had the chance to go to like Vietnam and Philippines, China and Taiwan, and then like Hong Kong. So I got to travel a lot. Whereas here, yes, I can go to Europe, but it's not the same as like just going to the Philippines. So yeah, I miss being able to travel a lot in cool and like really exhausted places. Yeah.

So do now do you have a more clear ideas about different countries in Asia?
Yeah, yeah, yeah definitely because, um, when we went when I went to Vietnam, I didn't know, I just thought it would be like China. It must be the same. But when I got there, it was totally different. Yeah, yeah yeah.

Because in my mind I heard that most European people think that Asian people are the same.

Oh yeah, no I definitely, um, I mean I knew they were different before I went. But now I have a much more clear idea of the different cultural identities of the Asian countries. Yeah, yeah. Uh, actually, particularly because, um, when I was in Taiwan, quite a few of my classmates were from those of different countries. So we had quite a few Koreans, quite a few Japanese, some like Indonesia and some all sorts of

places said that was that interaction with those different cultures as well as interesting in that way.

So what do you think of the Chinese tones images have? So what do you think of it?

Um, I should use them now when I talk, I don't even think about tones. And I really hope that they can understand whoever I'm talking to they can understand one saying, Sometimes I have to look up it because I know I'm getting wrong. But um, on the whole, I ignore them, quite a lot, because I can't remember when you're talking. You can't remember you're not gonna stop before everyone be like, oh, this system.

At the very beginning, you learned Chinese, was your teacher very strict with it?

Yeah, quite strict. We would pay attention to like all the tones whenever and um, yeah, much stricter than they are now. I think now I like to think that uh, tones come on naturally to me. So when I'm talking, I'll unconsciously say the right tone but I don't know how accurate that is.

So but you know the Taiwanese has a different accent with the mandarin. So do you think that influence your pronunciation?

Yeah, I wouldn't say mine is Taiwanese or I have a Taiwanese accent. I would say I have more just generally southern accent. It's um particularly some of the vocabulary we used um is quite Taiwanese I think. Yeah.

I have learned IT. Maybe last week I have learned Taiwan word from a Taiwan friend, JI CHE.

No I didn't hear that. no, I learn um I didn't realize that GUAN GUANG KE, like YOU KE it's like apparently, that's really Taiwanese, but I didn't know.

So that's all that I want to ask. Thank you for the interview.

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