International Students in China

Education, Student Life and Intercultural Encounters

Edited by
FRED DERVIN,
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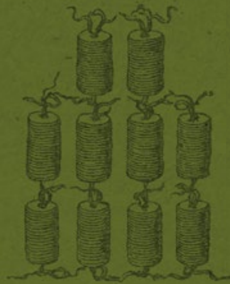
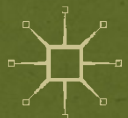
& ANU HÄRKÖNEN



Palgrave Studies on Chinese Education in a Global Perspective



Palgrave Studies on Chinese Education in a Global Perspective

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International Students in China

Education, Student Life and Intercultural Encounters

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Palgrave Studies on Chinese Education in a Global Perspective
ISBN 978-3-319-78119-8 ISBN 978-3-319-78120-4 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78120-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018943623

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Printed on acid-free paper

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The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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1

International Students in China: A Dream Come True?

Fred Dervin, Anu Härkönen, and Xiangyun Du

Introduction

In his memoirs entitled *Intruder in Mao's Realm*, British academic Richard Kirkby (2016: 7) recalls his feelings when he was selected to go to China in the 1970s: 'It was like being chosen from amongst thousands of candidates for a mission to outer space. Unbelievably we were off to China!' Forty years later, although China is still in a sense exotic and remote for many in the 'West', choosing China as a destination for studying or working does not represent such an extraordinary mission anymore.

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F. Dervin et al. (eds.), *International Students in China*, Palgrave Studies on Chinese Education in a Global Perspective, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78120-4_1

Indeed, the population of international students in higher education has been increasing steadily in China over the past decade. In 2015, there were 397,635 international students from 202 countries and regions (in comparison to 100,000 in 2004). They studied in a wide range of geographic areas within China: for example, in 2015, 31 provinces and regions received international students, the top three being Beijing, Shanghai, and Zhejiang provinces (MOE, 2016). The cities outside Beijing and Shanghai have become increasingly popular: in 2016, 68% of international students studied outside these two traditional study abroad destinations in China (student.com, 2016).

In 2015, the top five sending countries were South Korea (16%), the USA (5%), Thailand (5%), India (4%), and Russia (3%). In comparison, in 2004 the top sending countries were South Korea (40%), Japan (17%), the USA (7%), Vietnam (4%), and Indonesia (3%) (MOE, 2016). Hosting international students is high on China's soft-power strategy. Yang explains (2015: 25): 'China is recruiting students from all parts of the world, with particular focus on developing countries. These future generations of elites will certainly be sensitized to Chinese viewpoints and interests, with knowledge of the Chinese language, society, culture, history, and politics'.

The populations of international undergraduate and postgraduate students have diversified with significant difference among the choices of study fields and places, experiences, and expectations (Hu, Min Wotipka, & Wen, 2016). As such there is more diversity in terms of study programmes: some international students study in China to pursue a degree, others to study as exchange students, to do their internship, or to participate in some other form of short-term mobility. China's University and College Admission System (CUCAS), the official online portal for applying to Chinese universities, has information about different kinds of English-taught programmes at over 300 universities in over 70 cities. Hybrid institutions such as the Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University at Suzhou, the University of Nottingham and Zhejiang Wanli University at Ningbo, and L'Institut franco-chinois Renmin at Suzhou also contribute to attracting international students to the Middle Kingdom.

Why China?

Considering the current global competition between countries, regions, and higher education institutions to attract university students, what does China have to offer compared to other countries? In other words, how has China been able to increase the number of international students so rapidly? According to CUCAS, one of the first contacts to Chinese higher education, which also helps international students to choose an adequate programme, studying and living in China is first and foremost less expensive/cheaper than in most 'Western' countries. The CUCAS website explains that:

> For example, for non-EU citizens the tuition fee for studying at a UK university is at least 7000 pounds (about 10,000 U.S. dollars) annually. The cost of living can even reach up to 13,000 pounds. Meanwhile, the United States and Australia have the world's most expensive tuition fees. (…)
>
> On the other hand, in China, the tuition fees per semester are generally no more than 1000 U.S. dollars, a number of short-term language courses cost just a few hundred dollars. Food and consumption in China are as affordable as it gets. A good pair of jeans sells for 10–20 U.S. dollars, the bus fare only 15 cents, and a subway ticket in Beijing only 30 cents. All in all, everything is more than affordable in China; it's cheap!

In addition, besides information about hundreds of study programmes offered in English, a wide range of scholarship possibilities available for international students are promoted on the CUCAS website, with a clear intention of underlining the affordability of studying in China and making students feel welcome to the country. There has been nearly a fivefold increase in the amount of Chinese Government grants for international students during the last ten years: in 2015, these grants were given to 40,600 students. The grant scheme has favoured especially international degree-seeking students, as approximately 40% of them receive financial support from China (student.com, 2016).

Secondly, CUCAS explains that there are an increasing number of employment possibilities for international students after graduation in China. In a 2016 article published by *Global Times*, a journalist describes

the first ever job fair targeted for international students in China. The fair was organized by the Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange (CSCSE) in Beijing in April 2016, and it attracted over 1700 international students from nearly 100 countries. At least 300 positions were on offer at the fair. At the beginning of 2016, the Chinese government also announced a series of new policies that expanded work rights for international students. Since then, students have been able to pursue internships, hold part-time jobs, and even start their own businesses in the Zhongguancun area of Beijing (中关村), one of the most important technology hubs of the country, often referred to as 'China's Silicon Valley'.

For such an important institution as CUCAS (which can be seen as a window to Chinese higher education to the outside world), economic and financial arguments seem to appear first—like in many other contexts. The other arguments used by CUCAS include quality of education, international recognition, and experiencing Chinese culture first hand. For us, specialists in interculturality, the way CUCAS discusses the last point is interesting as it avoids falling into the trap of 'the imagined unicity of China', revealing China as 'gargantuan in its complexity' (Kirkby, 2016: 29).

> Though it may surprise many, Chinese culture and people are extremely diverse and multicultural, consisting of 56 different ethnicities. For example, in Lijiang, in the southern province of Yunnan, twelve different minorities have dwelled together in social harmony for thousands of years, practicing an array of religions spanning from Chinese Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, and Islam, to many lesser known ones like Tibetan Buddhism and Bimo Religion of Baiyi. (…)

The usual Procrustean approach, whereby 1.3 billion Chinese are fitted to an arbitrary standard, is clearly avoided, and a message of diversity, 'official' diversity, is thus sent to applicants. Of course, the question remains if this diversity becomes apparent to international students during their stay.

On their website CUCAS also utilizes narratives written by international students who are studying in China. The students who share their experiences come from different countries, they study different subjects,

and their home universities are located around the world. Let us look into three of these narratives chosen randomly, bearing in mind that they were meant to serve as advertising for China as a destination for study abroad and, thus, selected for a purpose and potentially edited by CUCAS.

> Ahmed is a student from Egypt who studies medicine in Changsha (Central South University). Throughout his narrative he keeps telling his readers that the Chinese are 'kind-hearted', 'smiling' and 'great'. When he came to China, he tells about meeting "a beautiful and kind Chinese face of a lady who offered help without even any hesitation. Besides she accompanied me to Changsha then to my dormitory". He even confesses that he found his "whole life greatest love": "She is a great Chinese sweetie with fascinating voice, attractive eyes and great personality. She spreads happiness and charm, wherever she goes. I hope she will be mine one day". On several occasions he mentions that places at the university (canteens, dormitories) are *clean*.
>
> A student from Vietnam, who studies in a Chinese-taught degree programme at Beijing Jiaotong University, is less positive in her narrative. She says she felt very confused by her classes and the teachers. She thus advises her readers to "choose the right teacher for you" and to "get friend with your classmates." In general, her narrative concentrates on the university environment but nothing is said about Beijing or China.
>
> A Zimbabwean student studies aeronautical engineering in English at Shenyang Aerospace University. He first congratulates CUCAS for the excellent work that they are doing. About his arrival at the university, he tells his readers that "on your first days of arrival you will be given a Chinese name" and advises them to choose their own name. He then comments on the affordability of accommodation and food, and on the social activities organised by the universities to allow interaction with Chinese students. He writes about the latter: "The local students are generally very friendly and will not miss any opportunity to help you or invite you to an activity".

The other narratives on the CUCAS website are mostly very positive and try, in a sense, to reassure potential candidates with matters related to personal safety, money issues, friendliness of people, and so on. It is noteworthy that some issues and concerns—such as air pollution, human rights, or racism—that we have discussed ourselves with international

students in China and that are usually mentioned in so-called Study in China handbooks (see, e.g., McAloon, 2014) do not find their way into the narratives. As an organ of the authorities, CUCAS may avoid discourse on such issues that can possibly decrease interest of international students in studying in China or, simply, the students do not wish to comment on these issues.

Research on International Students in China

A global literature review on study abroad shows that there is still a large emphasis on the mobility of Chinese students abroad, but that research on the experiences of international students in China is still marginal. Taking into account the Chinese soft-power strategy related to international students and the fact that Chinese universities have attracted more and more international students each year during the past 10–15 years, this is somewhat surprising. Hu et al. (2016: 154) argue that it is important to do more research in this area 'as prior findings from a Western context are not necessarily generalizable'. In what follows we propose a short review of recent publications on international students in China. This will allow us to identify gaps in the literature and to position our volume.

Let us start with studies that look into the 'general' experiences of students. Hu, Min Wotipka, and Wen's (2016) study is exploratory and deals with a sample of students from different parts of the world. The authors note than in general the students were happy with their learning experiences but that support services were lacking. They also observe regional differences in choices, expectations, and experiences. For instance, their results show that 'African' students were more employment-oriented compared to 'Europeans' and 'North Americans' who tended to be more interested in Chinese language and culture. The reason why we use inverted commas when mentioning the origins of the student is related to the problematic 'methodological regionalism' that such results translate.

Ding's (2016) study which is based on a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews in Shanghai is less positive about the study and living experiences of the students. The author calls for China to improve its supply and support services to make international mobility to China

more sustainable. Also Akhtar, Pratt, and Bo's (2015) article about actors in the cross-cultural adaptation of 'African' students in Chinese universities indicates the need to improve campus programmes for acculturating not just African students but also other international students in Chinese universities.

Research on aspects of teaching and learning can also be found. In 'Success strategies for international students in China', Guo (2016) discusses the need to develop new teaching strategies to cater for international students. The chapter examines the perceptions and performances of international students in an undergraduate course of International Economy and Trade and calls for internationally oriented teaching. Many courses for international students in China are taught in English. A few studies examine this important aspect. Bolton and Botha (2015) investigate the reception and use of English by students in a medicine programme in China's leading universities. He and Chiang (2016) also work on English-medium instruction in China, questioning how well this kind of education is working. Kuroda's (2014) article focuses on master's degree programmes that have been developed for international students in China and the role they have in boosting China's soft power. Finally, in their study about Sino-Danish brain circulation, Bertelsen, Du, and Søndergaard (2014) note that the exchange of highly educated individuals between the two countries has been of paramount importance for the technology and economy development of both societies. The exchanged Chinese and Danish individuals have networks and deep knowledge and understanding of the other society; this brain circulation has been contributing to 'creating tightly integrated networks of innovation, knowledge-production, investment, manufacturing and sales between Denmark and China' (ibid: 147).

An increasing strand of research that has seen publications appear about international students is that of interculturality and adaptation. In their 2013 article entitled *Intercultural Identity and Intercultural Experiences of American Students in China*, Mei Tian and John Lowe describe a longitudinal multiple case study of American students' experiences on their identity. The authors show that a shift occurs after some time in China in terms of self-other orientation. In a similar vein, Du (2015) focuses in her article on American college students' identifications

as 'Americans' and 'foreigners' during one-semester study abroad in China, and Li (2015) explores the sense of belonging of international graduate students from different countries in relation to their language proficiency, engagement with 'culture', and the status of native speaker of English. Finally, Liu et al. (2016) are interested in the acculturative stress experienced by international students in China, with an emphasis on depression. They found that self-confidence is essential in dealing with acculturative stress and made proposals for effective counselling. The topic of interculturality, based on a critical and reflexive perspective, is central to our volume.

About the Volume

This volume is interested in investigating the many and varied experiences of international students in Mainland China. The volume follows a certain number of principles when examining these experiences from an intercultural perspective:

1. As China and the Chinese are often constructed as archetypes of 'otherness' and turned into stereotypes (even in research), the authors pursue a critical approach to questions of interculturality and try to avoid as much as possible the pitfalls of essentialism and culturalism which tend to 'museify' China and the Chinese.
2. Whenever possible the authors use theories, concepts, and methodologies from 'peripheries' and question easily accepted and uncritical models or ideas in relation to questions of the integration of students, cultural differences, 'culture shock', and so on (Dervin, 2016).

Contributions collected in this volume do not only address China's hosting international students as a whole but also cover a geographical variety of hosting regions within China. This perspective adds another angle to the diversity of experiences and practices.

The following important topics are covered in the volume:

- Intercultural adaptation and growth experience
- Learning strategies related to language and the intercultural

- Understanding of Culture
- Transformations of perceptions of the significance of culture
- Chineseness and Britishness in reflecting about their study abroad experience
- Soft power and interculturality

Students from different parts of the world have participated in the studies (Australia, Britain, Denmark, students from One Belt One Road countries, the USA). Some of the students studied medicine, others Chinese as a foreign language and they were located in Central China, Chengdu, southeastern China but also Beijing. Some of the chapters contain data collected in different locations.

The rest of the book is structured as follows:

In Chap. 2, **Genshu Lu** and **Mei Tian** investigate factors influencing international students' decision to pursue education in China. Drawing upon quantitative data from a survey of 109 first-year students from One Belt One Road (OBOR) countries who were studying in Shaanxi province (located in Central China), the study results show that the most important reason driving these international students to study in China was family influence: family expectations, financial support, and parents' experiences of studying abroad. Reduced opportunities in their home countries played a second important role for these students' decision to go to China. This group of international students did not report encountering difficulties in academic studies because they studied in English programmes. Nevertheless, inadequate Chinese proficiency created obstacles in the students' daily interactions and communication with teachers, administrators, and local people, which made their adaptation to the host culture and society difficult.

In Chap. 3, **Ping Yang** examines international students' experiences of studying Chinese language and culture while living in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou in southeastern China through an analysis of online video sources. Using the framework of lingua-cultural communication model and intercultural adaptation theories, the study reports a general positive experience of these students. Informal learning seemed to play an important role in their language learning and cultural immersion. This chapter also reveals youth life of Chinese current society through the eyes of young international students—changes in Chinese culture, in

particular youth culture, due to the influence of globalization, as well as changes of classroom culture and teaching methods to more active learning environments.

In Chap. 4, **Jiayi Wang** investigates the study and living experiences of students through a discourse analysis of reflective reports about study abroad in China collected at a British university. Grounded in the theory of interculturality, the author analysed how culture was used in discourse to justify and explain the students' thoughts and actions. Findings showed that while the participants widely used the word 'culture' in their reflections, and while their cultural discourses demonstrated their development of intercultural understanding, their writing reflected essentialist views of culture. It is suggested in this chapter that a critical analysis of the use of culture is vital to shift from culturalism to interculturality in foreign-language education through the discussion of multiplicity in order to develop a more sophisticated intercultural understanding.

In a similar vein, Chap. 5 asks the question whether the experiences of international students in a short-term stay programme in China help the students learn culture and develop intercultural competence. Drawing upon social-cultural learning theories, **Niels Erik Lyngdorf** and **Xiangyun Du** studied a group of Danish students' experiences of studying in a summer school in Beijing through an analysis of logbooks and observation of their studying and living experiences. Throughout their two-week long study, most of the students only reflected upon culture uncritically. Only a small portion of the students demonstrated a more complex understanding of culture. One reason for this could be due to the design of the programme, which tended to offer beginner international students descriptive aspects of Chinese culture. The short-term stay could be another important reason for their seemingly surface learning of culture. The study also suggests that it is necessary to reconceptualize the understanding of culture that laid the groundwork for assessing the learning outcome.

In Chap. 6, the authors, **Steve Nerlich, Ross Tan, Donna Velliaris, Ping Yu,** and **Christopher Lawson**, investigate Australian students' study and living experiences in Beijing through in-depth interviews with 11 university students in order to gain knowledge about whether 'study abroad' leads to expected transformative learning and intercultural

competence achievement. Despite their fruitful learning about Chinese culture and language, participants in their study reported limited success in developing close friendship with Chinese students. This experience of being seen as 'others' helped them reflect how they stereotyped Chinese and other foreign students. Nevertheless these students developed a good sense and awareness of global citizenship while socializing with other international/foreign students.

In Chap. 7, **Jin Hui Li** explores the impact that transnational higher education has on students' perceptions of the significance of culture. Her data was collected through 15 interviews of Chinese and Danish students who study at the Sino-Danish Center for Education and Research (SDC) in Beijing. The chapter reveals that even though the SDC is a new dynamic educational space ran in collaboration between Danish and Chinese universities, the state-building efforts are still embedded in the educational practices, and thus, there is competition between Danish and Chinese scientific knowledge and practices at the centre. Due to this, SDC students' identities and values are governed by the shift in perceptions of diversity in their behaviours, from national culture to national scientific culture.

In Chap. 8, **Kaishan Kong** introduces a case of transformative learning in China. Her study examines the intercultural experiences of three American undergraduate students during their short-term study abroad in Chengdu in southwestern China. The students participated in community service learning programme and taught English during a summer camp to a group of children from rural China. The study is based on ample data consisting of interviews, focus group discussions, observations, reflective journal articles, photos, and programme evaluation reports. The findings demonstrate that the dilemmas and challenges the students faced at the beginning of their stay presented an opportunity for them to learn to adapt their emotions, to seek solutions for problems across cultures, and to reexamine their previous perceptions of China. As a result, students were able to adjust to their new role as English language teachers. The gradual transformation of students' views also increased their flexibility towards the Chinese.

In Chap. 9, **Hsiu-Chih Sheu** examines both the kind of strategies students use for learning the Chinese language during their studies in

China and the kind of impact students' experiences have on their intercultural competence. The study is based on reports students from a university in the UK have written during their one-year sojourn in Beijing, Shanghai, and Yunnan in southwestern China. The findings show that students not only use cognitive strategies (such as attending lessons regularly and studying on their own) but also socio-cultural strategies (such as building up social networks for communicating in Chinese and making use of Chinese social media). The findings highlight the need to move from cognitive-based foreign-language instruction to a more socio-cultural interactive teaching methodology and also the need for closer liaison between the home university and the host university to help students to realize strategies which they can best make use of when they are abroad. The study also demonstrates that transforming intercultural experience into intercultural competence is a complicated process. Even though participants reported various intercultural experiences and stated they had gained intercultural competence during their stay in China, their level of intercultural competence varied.

In the last chapter **Mei Tian** and **John Lowe** explore the experiences of international students pursuing a medical degree in China in relation to the cultural soft-power agenda of the Chinese government. In their longitudinal study the authors examine to which extent students studying at a university in Central China develop knowledge of and affection for 'Chinese culture'. The study is based on data that was primarily gathered through interviews of 16 students from six different countries over a period of four years. The findings show that while many students did develop affection for China, this was always severely limited by negative educational experiences and the limited contact with Chinese students. Because of this, the authors suggest that the effectiveness of the soft-power campaign for universities must be worked on rather than left to chance or to depend on the possible 'alumnus effect', a positive nostalgia towards the place of study after students' graduation.

What emerges from this volume is that the intercultural experiences of international students in China are many and varied, and cannot be limited to one model. The volume also provides the reader with a broad overview of the latest advances in the field of interculturality and study abroad, which can serve as both a resource and an inspiration for future

research. Interculturality is central to the internationalization of higher education, especially as it is shifting from the 'West' to the 'East'. We hope that this volume will play a part in keeping that reminder alive.

* * *

We would like to thank the following colleagues for their assistance with blind peer reviewing of the chapters:

Julie Chen, University of Helsinki, Finland
Ulla Egidiussen Egekvist, Aalborg University, Denmark
Tinghe Jin, I. O. E. UCL London, UK
Zhao Ke, University of Finance and Economics, Shanghai, China
Hans Ladegaard, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Huichun Li, Aalborg University, Denmark
Gillian Skyrme, Massey University, New Zealand
Danping Dani Wang, Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong
Peidong Yang, National Institute of Education, Singapore
Karin Zotzman, University of Southampton, UK
Yihuan Zou, Central China Normal University, China

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2

An Analysis of Factors Influencing International Students' Choice of Education in China

Genshu Lu and Mei Tian

Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed a significant trend towards enhanced internationalization of higher education across the world, partly as a response to wider economic globalization. Probably the most visible evidence of such a trend is an expansion of internationally mobile students. Data from UNESCO (2007, 2012) shows that roughly 2.72 million students studied outside their country of citizenship in 2005, and this number had increased to more than to 4.6 million in 2015 (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2017).

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F. Dervin et al. (eds.), *International Students in China*, Palgrave Studies on Chinese Education in a Global Perspective, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78120-4_2

In China international education has developed rapidly. According to the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2015), 377,054 international students studied in China in 2014. The figure increased by 17.43% to 442,773 in 2016 (MoE, 2017). In 2016, China hosted international students from 205 countries and regions (*ibid*). These students were studying in 829 Chinese universities, research institutes, and other educational institutions in 31 Chinese provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities[1] (*ibid*). Table 2.1 presents the breakdown of international student statistics in 2016. It should be noted that compared with the more economically developed cities (e.g. Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin) and coastal provinces (e.g. Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Guangdong), international education in China's inland regions (e.g. Shaanxi) languishes behind.

In September 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed to co-build "Silk Road Economic Belt" during his visit to Kazakhstan (xinhuanet.com, 2013a). One month later, President Xi proposed to build "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" in his speech to the Indonesian Parliament (xinhuanet.com, 2013b). In 2014, the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) released the "Decision on Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening Reforms", in which the Central Committee required to:

> further open up inland and border areas. Key ports, border cities and economic cooperation zones are allowed to adopt special policies to promote personnel exchanges, logistics and tourism. Financial organizations focusing on development are to be established to accelerate infrastructural construction and the connection between China and its neighboring countries and regions. Efforts are to be made to promote the building of a Silk Road Economic Belt and a Maritime Silk Road, so as to form a new pattern of omni-directional opening to the outside world. (CPC Central Committee, 2013)

Since then, One Belt One Road (OBOR), that is, a Silk Road Economic Belt and a Maritime Silk Road, has become an important opening-up initiative in China.[2] Promoting and strengthening higher education

[1] These figures exclude numbers of students from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan studying in Chinese educational institutes (MoE, 2015).

[2] OBOR runs though the continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa. The Silk Road Economic Belt is linking China with central Asia, Russia, and Europe; linking China with the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea through Central and West Asia; and linking China with Southeast Asia, South

Table 2.1 Statistics of international students in China in 2016

Classification of international students	Number	Percentage of total	Differences between 2016 and 2014	Year-on-year percentage
Regions of home countries				
Asia	264,976	59.84	+39,486	14.90
Europe	71,319	16.11	+3844	5.39
Africa	61,594	13.91	+19,917	32.33
America	38,077	8.60	+1937	5.08
Oceania	6807	1.54	+535	7.98
Total	442,773	100.00	+65,719	14.84
Funding sources				
Chinese Government Scholarships	49,022	11.07	12,079	24.64
Self-funded	393,751	88.93	53,640	13.62
Total	442,773	100	65,719	14.84
Types of educational programmes				
Degree programmes	209,966	47.42	+45,572	21.70
Masters' degrees	45,816	10.35	+9940	21.70
Doctoral degrees	18,051	4.08	+5937	32.89
Non-degree programmes	232,807	52.58	+20,147	8.65
Total	442,773	100.00	+65,719	14.84
Top 15 countries of origin				
South Korea	70,540	15.93		
The United States	23,838	5.38		
Thailand	23,044	5.20		
Pakistan	18,626	4.21		
India	18,717	4.23		
Russia	17,971	4.06		
Indonesia	14,714	3.32		
Kazakhstan	13,996	3.16		
Japan	13,595	3.07		
Vietnam	10,639	2.40		
France	10,414	2.35		
Laos	9907	2.24		
Mongolia	8508	1.92		
Germany	8145	1.84		
Malaysia	6880	1.55		
Top 10 host cities and provinces				
Beijing	77,234	17.44		
Shanghai	59,887	13.53		
Jiangsu province	32,228	7.28		
Zhejiang province	30,108	6.80		

(*continued*)

Table 2.1 (continued)

Classification of international students	Number	Percentage of total	Differences between 2016 and 2014	Year-on-year percentage
Tianjin	26,564	6.00		
Liaoning province	25,273	5.71		
Guangdong province	24,605	5.56		
Shandong province	19,829	4.48		
Hubei province	19,263	4.35		
Yunnan Province	14,925	3.37		

Source: Adapted from MoE (2015, 2017)

cooperation and exchanges with OBOR countries are important aspects in this initiative (MoE, 2016). Exchanges in higher education help to create positive images of China in OBOR countries, which in turn become social foundation for regional cooperation between China and OBOR countries, and eventually help to stimulate economic development in China and in OBOR countries (Zhang, 2016). International students have played and will continue playing an important role in China's academic exchanges with OBOR countries (Wang, 2015). These students act as ambassadors linking their home countries with China (Lu, 2015).

Given the significance of international education in China's OBOR initiative, there is inadequate research on international students in China. The study reported in this chapter focused on students from OBOR countries and aimed to explore the factors influencing these students' choice of Chinese international education. Data came from a survey performed at two universities in Shaanxi province. The national OBOR initiative has opened up new opportunities for this Chinese inland province, which used to be the start of the ancient Silk Road and has been positioned as a starting point of the new Silk Road Economic Belt. Based on the discussion of research findings, suggestions are given for China to further develop its international education.

Asia, and the Indian Sea (National Development and Reform Commission, 2015). The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road is connecting China's coast with Europe through the Indian Sea, and connecting China's coasts to the South Pacific Sea (*ibid*). The OBOR initiative is open and welcomes participation of all countries, and international and regional organizations (*ibid*).

Factors Influencing Students' Choice of Higher Education

Salisbury, Paulsen, and Pascarella (2010) once commented on the similarities between students' domestic college choice and their choice of foreign education. Following Salisbury et al. (*ibid*), in this section we review the studies on the factors influencing students' college choice in their home countries. We then review the research on the factors influencing international students' decision to pursue education abroad.

Factors Influencing Domestic College Choice

The factors influencing individuals' choice of domestic higher education can be roughly categorized into four groups, that is, social/family-related factors, personal/psychological factors, economic/career factors, and institutional/structural factors. Specifically, studies have revealed a significant correlation between family socioeconomic status and students' choice of higher education (Guppy & Pendakur, 1989; Hayden & Carpenter, 1990). It was reported that parents showed different levels of willingness to pay for education for their children with different academic abilities (Becker & Tomes, 1976). Family structure, such as number of siblings and gender of a child, was also reported to affect parents' investment on their children's education (Blake, 1986; Parish & Willis, 1993). Since Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) proposed the concept of "social capital", research has been exploring the influences of social capital variables, including parents' social networks, on students' success in schools (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995; Yan, 1999). Other studies have found that teachers, friends, and career mentors were likely to influence students' demand for higher education (Menon, 1998).

Secondly, personal/psychological factors can influence individual choice of domestic higher education. For example, studies found that students' academic abilities had significant influences on their decision to pursue higher education (Chung & Lu, 1999; Kodde & Ritzen, 1988; Psacharopoulos & Soumelis, 1979). Gender, motivations, expectations, and self-efficacy were also reported to motivate them to pursue further education (Harris & Halpin, 2002; Menon, 1998; Williams & Gordon, 1981).

Since the proposal of human capital theory in early 1960s, it has been widely recognized that economic factors can significantly affect domestic demand for higher education. Human capital theory assumes that people choose the levels and types of higher education according to its labour market returns; that is, students and their families make their educational investment decisions based on a comparison of educational costs and expected incomes, as well as a comparison of rates of return to education and rates of return on other investments (Becker, 1964). Human capital theory also uses future employment prospects to explain individuals' decision to pursue higher education (Jimenez & Salas-Velasco, 2000).

Fourthly, studies have investigated institutional/structural factors, such as early separation of more promising students from less able ones (Yuchtman & Samuel, 1975; Tsang, 1991), course types (Borus & Carpenter, 1984), and availability of crucial information, on students' choice of higher education. The influences of institutions, however, have been considered less significant than the influences of individual/psychological factors, family involvement, or economic variables on students' college choice (Borus & Carpenter, 1984).

Factors Influencing Choice of Foreign Education

Research has referred to "push" and "pull" factors to explain international students' decision to study abroad. According to Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), push factors functioned in students' home countries that motivate them to undertake international study, whilst pull factors were dimensions within specific study destinations that draw students into particular destination countries. Genetic push factors identified by early studies included the lack of higher education opportunities, limited academic freedom, less favourable economic conditions, unattainable job security, and stability of home countries, while pull factors related to the educational, political, social and financial advancement of host countries that attracted students worldwide (Altbach, 2004a; McMahon, 1992). Later research extended the push-pull model to cover a wider range of factors, including parental influence, costs, geographic proximity, attractiveness of natural environments, climate, lifestyle, security, racial dis-

crimination, employment prospects, and availability of scholarships (e.g. Bodycott, 2009). Internal factors, such as family background, academic characteristics, and perceptions, were also proposed (Li & Bray, 2007).

Previous studies also demonstrated the connection between students' interpretation of quality of domestic and foreign education and their decision to seek education abroad. For example, Park (2009) reported that Korean students' perceptions on the images of universities in the United States, China, the United Kingdom, and Australia influenced their choices of destination countries for outward mobility. Liu and Fang (2011) pointed out that Chinese students expected that they would receive better education, have access to richer educational resources, and acquire more practical skills and professional knowledge in foreign universities. Liu and Fang's (2011) research reflected a lack of confidence in the quality of domestic higher education which tended to push students to choose foreign education.

It should be noted that the above-reviewed studies are on international students from "peripheral" countries to study either in developed, English-speaking, "central" Western countries, such as Austria, Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, or in emerging economies, such as Hong Kong and Macau. Little has been known about the factors influencing the recent flows of international students to China and other "newly emerging educational hubs" (Ahmad & Hussain, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

Drawing on the "three-phase" model proposed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and the "push-pull" model proposed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), this research presents a comprehensive model to explain students' choice of higher education outside their home countries and factors influencing such choice (see Fig. 2.1).

This model suggests three stages of the process in which students choose international education: that is, making the decision to continue their education abroad (Stage 1), choosing specific destination countries (Stage 2), and choosing specific institutions (Stage 3). In most cases, a student who is willing to continue her/his education would first decide

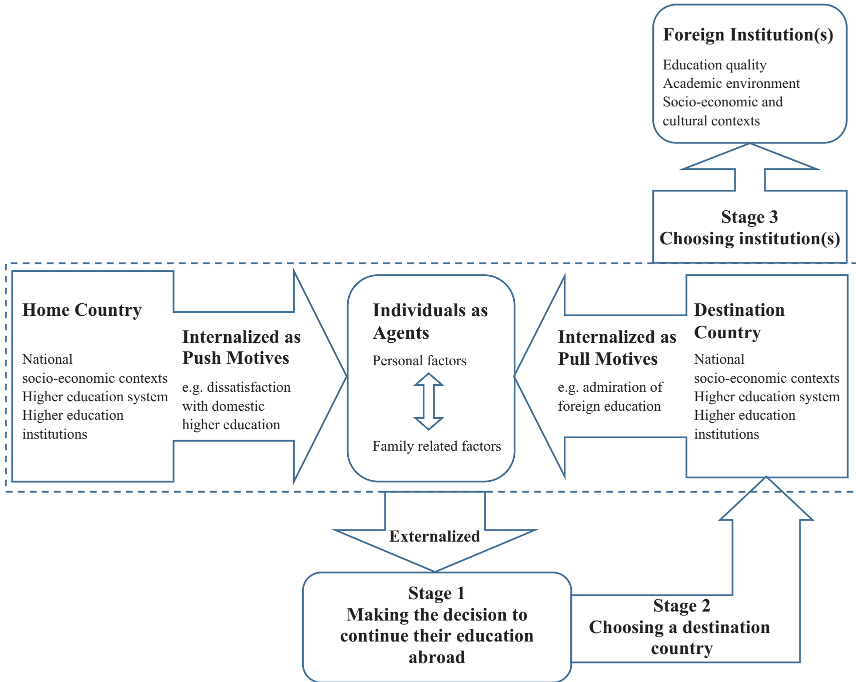

Fig. 2.1 Students' choice of foreign education

whether to stay in the home country. Upon deciding to study abroad, she/he would then choose one or several preferred destination country/countries. Following this, she/he would choose one or several educational institution(s) in the desirable destination country/countries. It is also possible that she/he, after deciding to study abroad, directly selects a preferred foreign educational institution. The research reported in this chapter explores possible factors influencing students' choice at Stage 2.

At Stage 2, we propose that an individual student's selection of a destination country is a result of "engagement" between personal and contextual factors. Based on the literature reviewed in the previous section, we propose that personal factors include perceived academic abilities and proficiency in target foreign language(s). Contextual factors include those from both adjacent contexts, including family background, parental support and expectations, and broader institutional/national contexts, such as

political, economic, and sociocultural situations of their home and destination countries, reputation and quality of education provided by their home and destination countries and costs and potential gains of foreign education. We perceive that individual students are not passive but capable agents, who can reflectively make their choice based on their interpretation of personal abilities, and on their internalization and interpretation of contextual resources and constraints. For example, students' dissatisfaction with domestic education or better impression of a foreign education system can lead to their choice of pursuing education in that country.

Research Design

Research Focus and Research Setting

This chapter reports findings from a survey study, which aimed to analyse the factors influencing OBOR students' choice of Chinese international education. Two full-time higher education institutions in Shaanxi province, that is, Shaanxi Normal University and Chang'an University, participated in this study. Both universities are research-centred, comprehensive, national Project 211[3] universities. The two universities provide international students with non-degree programmes of the Chinese language and English-medium degree programmes in various disciplines at under- and postgraduate levels. The two universities have no strict, standard Chinese proficiency requirements for students applying for non-degree Chinese programmes. Applicants for undergraduate degree programmes are required to reach the official Chinese proficiency test (HSK) Level III, and students applying for postgraduate programmes have to reach HSK Level V[4] (see hanban.org, 2016).

[3] Project 211 is a project initiated in 1995 by the Chinese Ministry of Education. So far 116 universities have been designated as Project 211 institutions. National funding is distributed to these universities to promote their research quality.

[4] Students who successfully achieve HSK Level III are expected to know 600 Chinese words and to manage everyday life in Chinese (hanban.org, 2016). Students achieving HSK Level V are expected

At Shaanxi Normal University, the annual tuition fees for non-degree language students are RMB16,500; tuition fees for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes range from RMB16,500 to RMB28,000 (iscs.snnu.edu.cn, 2014). At Chang'an University, the annual tuition fees for language students are RMB14,000; tuition fees for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes range from RMB20,000 to RMB30,000 (ies.chd.edu.cn, 2016). The average accommodation fees charged by both universities are around RMB10,000 per year. Accommodation costs vary depending on the facilities and room sizes. Both universities support prospective students' application for Chinese government scholarships (csc.edu.cn, 2015). The Chinese government scholarships, that is, bilateral programme and Chinese university programme, cover tuition fees and accommodation costs. Scholarship recipients also receive medical insurance and a monthly stipend ranging from RMB2500 to RMB3500 (*ibid*).

Sampling

At both universities, all first-year international students, regardless of the programmes they register in, are required to take Chinese lessons. In January 2016, the authors randomly selected five Chinese classes for the first-year international students at the two participating universities and invited the students in the classes who came from OBOR countries, loosely defined as countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa, to fill in a questionnaire. A total of 109 questionnaires were distributed, and all copies were returned. Table 2.2 presents main characteristics of the research participants.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire that the participants filled in was named as "Questionnaire of International Students' Experiences in China".

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to know 2500 words and are able to "read Chinese newspapers and magazines, enjoy Chinese films and plays, and give a full-length speech in Chinese" (*ibid*).

Table 2.2 Characteristics of participants

Category	Number	Percentage	Category	Number	Percentage
Universities			*Nationalities*		
Shaanxi Normal University	15	13.8	Congo	40	36.7
Chang' an University	94	86.2	Kazakhstan	34	31.2
Gender			South Korea	6	5.5
Male	78	71.6	Yemen	6	5.5
Female	28	25.7	Uzbekistan	3	2.8
Missing	3	2.8	Pakistan	1	0.9
Majors			Kyrgyzstan	1	0.9
Engineering	58	53.2	Laos	1	0.9
Economy/ Management/ Law	22	20.2	Rwanda	1	0.9
Chinese/English	10	9.2	Mongolia	1	0.9
Missing	19	17.4	Namibia	1	0.9
Types of courses			Sudan	1	0.9
Non-degree Chinese	14	12.8	Thailand	1	0.9
Undergraduate degree	63	57.8	Italy	1	0.9
Masters' degree	13	11.9	Missing	11	10.1
Doctoral degree	2	1.8	Total	109	100.0
Missing	17	15.6			

Questions in the questionnaire were drafted based on the following instruments, that is, a self-designed questionnaire investigating Chinese students' learning experiences in Chinese higher education institutions (see Lu, 2013; Lu, Hu, Peng, & Kang, 2013; Lu, Hu, & Yan, 2013; Lu, Peng, & Hu, 2014), a self-designed questionnaire investigating the factors influencing Chinese students' choice of domestic higher education (Chung & Lu, 2005; Chung, Lu, & Wen, 2005; Chung & Lu, 2006a, 2006b; Lu, Liu, & Chung, 2009), and a self-designed questionnaire investigating the factors influencing Chinese university students' choice of foreign postgraduate education (Lu, Tian, & Lai, 2014). Other studies on the factors influencing students' choice of domestic and foreign education (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) and on international students' experiences in China (Li, 2015; Tian & Lowe,

2014) were drawn on to revise the drafted questions so as to better investigate characteristics of the students choosing Chinese education, factors influencing their choice of Chinese education, and their experiences in China. The questionnaire consists of five parts, as shown in Table 2.3. It took around 45 minutes to complete a questionnaire. This chapter focuses on the participants' responses to questions in the first four sections. Descriptive statistics and factor analysis were used to analyse the influences of personal factors, family-related factors, and broader institutional and national factors on the participants' choice of Chinese education.

Table 2.3 Questionnaire contents

Sections	Contents
Part one: Background information	Participants were invited to indicate his/her nationality, gender, university, and programmes registered in China, perceived levels of Chinese proficiency, family socioeconomic status, and parents' educational experiences outside their home countries
Part two: Family influences on students' choice of Chinese education	Nine items were designed to explore the influences of family financial support, information provided by family, and family expectations on students' choice of Chinese education
Part three: Dissatisfaction with domestic education and its influences on students' choice of Chinese education	Seventeen items were designed to explore students' perceived dissatisfaction with domestic education and its influences on their choice of Chinese education. The 17 items relate to the perceived educational opportunities, educational quality, and career prospects in their home countries
Part four: Other factors influencing participants' choice of Chinese education	Thirty-three items were designed to explore other factors influencing participants' choice of Chinese education. The 33 items relate to students' knowledge and awareness of Chinese society and Chinese culture, physical environment, costs and returns of Chinese education, information sources, academic environment, quality of education and admission requirements of Chinese universities
Part five: Expectations towards Chinese education and learning experiences in China	Twenty items were designed to explore students' expectations towards Chinese education. Seventy items were designed to explore students' learning experiences in China

Research Results

Chinese Proficiency

The survey invited the participants to indicate their perceived levels of proficiency in Chinese. The results showed that less than half of the students perceived their oral or written Chinese as very good or good (see Table 2.4). That is, more than half of the participants reported their oral or written Chinese as average, poor, or very poor. Prior research on non-English-speaking international students in English-speaking countries has indicated that language problems could result in learning difficulties and lack of confidence in participating in class activities (e.g. Erlenawati, 2005; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). In this research, inadequate Chinese proficiency might not have affected the participants' academic studies, as the degree programmes offered to them were instructed in English. The lack of Chinese proficiency, however, was likely to cause problems in the students' daily interactions with teachers and school administrators, discourage them to communicate and socialize with local people, and increase stress levels in their adaptation to the host culture and the host society (see also Yeh & Inose, 2003; Li, 2015).

Family Influences on Students' Choice of Chinese Education

In the questionnaire, we invited the participants to indicate their parents' education experiences outside their home countries. The results showed

Table 2.4 Self-reported Chinese proficiency levels

	Oral Chinese		Written Chinese	
Proficiency levels	Number	%	Number	%
Very fluently	10	9.2	9	8.3
Fluently	26	23.9	33	30.3
Average	46	42.2	53	48.6
Poor	12	11.0	4	3.7
Very poor	7	6.4	5	4.6
Missing value	8	7.3	5	4.6
Total	109	100.0	109	100.0

that fathers of 71 participants had overseas education experiences, accounting for 65.1%; mothers of 56 students had overseas education experiences, accounting for 51.4%. In other words, over half of the participants reported that their mother or father had received education abroad. The results were consistent with those of Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) study; that is, parents who had received education outside their home countries and had benefited from such experiences were likely to support their children to pursue education abroad.

Furthermore, the questionnaire included a list of statements to investigate how three family-related factors, that is, family financial support, information provided by family, and family expectations, had influenced the participants' decision of studying in China. Each of the factors was investigated with respect to their choice of the host city, the host universities, and the educational programmes they registered in. The participants were asked to indicate the levels of agreement from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" with the given statements. As shown in Table 2.5, respectively 23.9%, 28.4%, and 20.2% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that family financial support, information provided by their family, and family expectations had significantly influenced their choice of the host city; respectively 29.4%, 27.5%, 34.9% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that family financial support, information provided by family, and family expectations had significantly influenced their choice of the host universities; and respectively 32.1%, 34.0%, 33.0% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that family financial support, information provided by family, and family expectations had significantly influenced their choice of the educational programmes. Hence, family was an important factor influencing the participants' choice of Chinese education. The result echoed the findings of the studies on family involvement and students' choice of domestic colleges (e.g. McDonough, 1997; Perna & Titus, 2005) and those on parental influences and international students' choice of foreign education (e.g. Bodycott, 2009; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Table 2.5 Family influences on students' choice of Chinese education (%)

Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Missing
(1) Family financial support has significant influence on my choice of the host city	4.6	19.3	15.6	27.5	4.6	22.0	6.4
(2) Family financial support has significant influence on my choice of the host university	9.2	20.2	21.1	21.1	5.5	16.5	6.4
(3) Family financial support has significant influence on my choice of the educational programme	13.8	18.3	21.1	16.5	4.6	18.3	7.3
(4) Information provided by my family has significant influence on my choice of the host city	10.1	18.3	17.4	19.3	5.5	20.2	9.2
(5) Information provided by my family has significant influence on my choice of the host university	5.5	22.0	23.9	12.8	7.3	18.3	10.1

(*continued*)

Table 2.5 (continued)

Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Missing
(6) Information provided by my family has significant influence on my choice of the educational programme	14.7	19.3	15.6	17.4	6.4	14.7	11.9
(7) Family expectations have significant influence on my choice of the host city	10.1	10.1	27.5	19.3	4.6	19.3	9.2
(8) Family expectations have significant influence on my choice of the host university	11.0	23.9	12.8	19.3	5.5	19.3	8.3
(9) Family expectations have significant influence on my choice of the educational programme	17.4	15.6	21.1	12.8	7.3	16.5	9.2

Dissatisfaction with Domestic Education and Its Influences on the Choice of Chinese Education

The study investigated whether there was a relationship between students' perceived dissatisfaction with domestic education and their choice of Chinese international education. In the questionnaire the degree to which the participants felt dissatisfied with the given aspects of their

domestic education were measured by their indicated levels of agreement with a list of statements, with 1 indicating strongly agree and 6 indicating strongly disagree. The lower point a student gave to a statement, the more dissatisfied this student felt with the given aspect of her/his domestic education. The results are presented in Table 2.6.

In Table 2.6, the given statements were sorted in an ascending order according to the mean values of the participants' indicated levels of dissatisfaction. As shown in Table 2.6, although the participants had concerns over their domestic education in terms of fewer chances for personal development, fewer opportunities to receive further education, and fewer opportunities to find challenging or creative jobs at home (mean < 3.5, indicating "slightly agree"), they tended to slightly disagree with all other listed statements (3.5 < mean < 4.5, indicating "slightly disagree"). Therefore, different from the prior research on Asian students' intent to study abroad (e.g. Liu & Fang, 2011; Park, 2009), the current research did not reveal strong relationship between participants' dissatisfaction with their domestic education and their decision to study in China. The participants may have decided to study in China to gain better opportunities for personal development, to get further education, which they otherwise could not have received at home, and to obtain challenging and creative jobs upon graduation. However, they were satisfied with other aspects of their domestic education, such as long-term financial returns, diversity of educational programmes, degrees of innovation, opportunities for international exchanges, chances to obtain scholarships, career prospects, recognition of higher education qualifications, teaching methods, research facilities, and faculty expertise.

Analysis of Other Factors Influencing Participants' Choice of Chinese Education

Were there other factors attracting these international students to China? In the questionnaire we designed 33 items to identify and analyse other possible factors that could have influenced their decision. Those 33 items are related to the participants' knowledge and awareness of Chinese society and Chinese culture, physical environment, costs and returns of

Table 2.6 Dissatisfaction with domestic education

Statements	Mean	Levels of agreement (%)						
		Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Missing
(1) There are fewer chances for personal development in my home country	3.23	8.3	22.0	29.4	11.9	15.6	5.5	7.3
(2) There are fewer opportunities to receive further education in my home country	3.38	10.1	16.5	29.4	14.7	11.0	11.9	6.4
(3) There are fewer opportunities to find challenging or creative jobs in my home country	3.48	8.3	15.6	28.4	13.8	17.4	9.2	7.3
(4) Long-term financial returns to domestic education are low	3.56	2.8	21.1	21.1	20.2	17.4	7.3	10.1
(5) I cannot find educational programmes that I want to pursue at universities in my home country	3.56	6.4	11.9	30.3	19.3	12.8	10.1	9.2
(6) Innovation is inadequately stressed in my home country	3.63	0.9	13.8	33.9	20.2	17.4	6.4	7.3
(7) There are fewer opportunities for international exchanges and interactions in my home country	3.64	10.1	16.5	21.1	12.8	12.8	19.3	7.3
(8) There are fewer chances for me to obtain a scholarship in my home country	3.81	12.8	10.1	13.8	18.3	18.3	18.3	8.3
(9) University graduates in my home country are faced with uncertain employment prospects	3.82	4.6	11.0	27.5	12.8	26.6	10.1	7.3

(10) Domestic degree certificates are not highly recognized	3.82	4.6	22.9	11.9	12.8	32.1	11.0	4.6
(11) Book knowledge transmission is overstressed	3.89	5.5	11.9	15.6	23.9	18.3	13.8	11.0
(12) Examinations are so difficult that I cannot be admitted by my desired programmes in my home country	3.93	11.0	11.9	19.3	9.2	16.5	26.6	5.5
(13) I would bear greater pressure in subject study and be faced with fierce peer competition if studying in my home country	3.96	9.2	10.1	21.1	12.8	15.6	24.8	6.4
(14) International reputation of universities in my home country is low	4.01	4.6	13.8	15.6	17.4	26.6	15.6	6.4
(15) Overall quality of domestic education is low	4.13	4.6	5.5	20.2	21.1	29.4	13.8	5.5
(16) There is the lack of adequate research facilities or resources in my home country	4.18	0.9	7.3	22.9	15.6	29.4	13.8	10.1
(17) It is less possible to be supervised by internationally renowned tutors in my home country	4.41	4.6	8.3	11.0	21.1	19.3	30.3	5.5

Chinese education, information sources, academic environment, quality of education, and admission requirements of the Chinese universities. Table 2.7 presents the results of factor analysis (FA). FA followed the principle that only the factors, of which eigenvalues were greater than 1, would be extracted. The principal components method (PCA) and varimax criterion were used to apply rotation and extract factors. If loadings of an item on any two factors were greater than 0.55, the item would be deleted. As shown in Table 2.7, the remaining 18 items were clustered into five factors, respectively named as "information sources", "quality of education", "opportunities to gain admission", "possibilities of living in China upon graduation", and "opportunities for intercultural communication". Cumulatively, these five factors accounted for 78.842% of the variance.

Results of reliability analysis showed that, except for the third factor, "opportunities to gain admission", of which Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach) was slightly lower than 0.500, the internal consistency of other factors were higher than 0.640, which indicated good internal consistency of the factors. The five factors, which had influenced the participants' choice of Chinese international education, matched the factors influencing other groups of international students' selection of their study destinations (e.g. Bodycott, 2009; Li & Bray, 2007).

However, it is worth noting that, different from the previous studies on international student mobility (e.g. Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), in this research knowledge and awareness of the host country were not found to be an important factor influencing the participants' decision to study in China. The result echoed the findings of Tian and Lowe (2014), which revealed that a group of American exchange students embarked on their study in China were largely ignorant of Chinese society and Chinese culture. It also matched our participants' emphasis on the sources of information about the destination country. Given the lack of understanding of China, teachers, family, and friends' recommendations had been the most convenient source of referral for the participants. Websites and university marketing activities also had provided valuable and reliable information of China, prior to making their final decision.

In addition, in the questionnaire we designed four items, that is, "low tuition fees and living costs", "opportunities to gain scholarships",

Table 2.7 Other factors influencing participants' choice of Chinese education

Items	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Information sources	Quality of education	Opportunities to gain admission	Possibilities of living in China upon graduation	Opportunities of intercultural communication
(1) Teachers' recommendations	0.877				
(2) Family members' recommendations	0.860				
(3) Websites	0.796				
(4) Friends' recommendations	0.783				
(5) Chinese universities' marketing activities	0.738				
(6) Chinese universities' commercial advertisements	0.693				
(7) Diversity of teaching methods		0.894			
(8) Teachers' teaching and research abilities		0.878			
(9) Quality and reputation of Chinese education		0.834			
(10) Richness of teaching contents		0.801			
(11) Cutting-edge research		0.614			
(12) Admission requirements on Chinese proficiency			0.880		
(13) Other admission requirements			0.636		

(*continued*)

Table 2.7 (continued)

Items	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Information sources	Quality of education	Opportunities to gain admission	Possibilities of living in China upon graduation	Opportunities of intercultural communication
(14) Levels of internalization of Chinese educational institutions			0.567		
(15) Immigration opportunities				0.850	
(16) Relatives and friends in China				0.782	
(17) Opportunities to exchange and cooperate with universities in home countries					0.839
(18) Easiness to obtain a Chinese visa					0.793
Eigenvalue	4.276	3.810	2.227	2.076	1.802
Variance %	23.757	21.167	12.373	11.533	10.013
Accumulated variance %	23.757	44.924	57.296	68.829	78.842
Cronbach's alpha	0.877	0.889	0.495	0.724	0.649

"university financial aids", and "recognition of Chinese university qualifications in the job market", to explore influences of economic/career considerations on the students' choice. The loadings of these four items were all smaller than 0.55. Hence, economic/career factors had no significant influence on our participants' decision to study in China. This result was different from the previous studies, which had reported educational costs as the biggest "repel" factors (e.g. Foster, 2014), and the previous studies that had identified scholarships and financial assistance as important pull factors influencing international students' selection of their destination countries (e.g. McMahon, 1992).

Conclusion and Suggestions

China has launched the One Belt One Road initiative to boost the opening-up of its inland regions. Higher education plays an important role in this initiative. By hosting and educating students from OBOR countries, higher education institutions contribute to the building of positive images of China in these countries, which in turn help to enhance the cooperation and exchanges between China and OBOR countries. The study reported in this chapter involved 109 OBOR students who were studying in Shaanxi, China. The research offers insights into the factors influencing these students' choices of Chinese higher education. It provides understanding into international students in China who have been largely unstudied, and has implications for China to further enhance quality of its international education.

In this research, over 50% of the participants were second-generation international students whose parents had received education outside their home countries. The significant influences of parents' educational experiences on children's outward mobility have been reported earlier. Weenink (2008), for example, pointed out that parents who had experienced foreign cultures themselves were inclined to transfer such "cosmopolitan capital" to their children through supporting their international education. Other studies showed that students studying abroad were likely to have well-educated parents and have widely travelled overseas as a child (e.g. King, Findlay, Ahrens, & Dunne, 2011).

The current research also revealed that family financial support, information provided by family, and family expectations were important factors influencing the participants' choice of the host city, the host universities, and the academic programmes they registered in. The findings were in line with findings of studies regarding family influences on domestic college choice (e.g. McDonough, 1997; Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2009) and studies on parental involvement and students' choices of foreign education (e.g. Bodycott, 2009; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Moreover, the research did not reveal overall dissatisfaction among the participants with their domestic education. However, the participants did complain about "fewer chances for personal development", "fewer opportunities to receive further education", and "fewer opportunities to find challenging or creative jobs" in their home countries. Such concerns may have pushed the participants to seek educational opportunities in China. Other influencing factors included "information sources", "quality of education", "opportunities to gain admission", "possibilities of living in China upon graduation", and "opportunities for intercultural communication". These findings were consistent with the findings of other studies on students' choices to study in Australia (e.g. Chen & Zimitat, 2006), Canada (e.g. Chen, 2007), the United States (e.g. Altbach, 2004b) and the United Kingdom (e.g. Maringe & Carter, 2007), which highlighted the significance of parental involvement, family and relatives' recommendations, students' abilities to gain entry to desired universities, and their perceptions of the quality of higher education system of the host countries in the decisions (see also Brooks & Waters, 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Park, 2009).

It is worth noting that knowledge of the host country and economic factors did not have significant influences on our respondents' decision-making to study in China. This finding was not in accordance with the findings of previous research (e.g. González, Mesanza, & Mariel, 2011), which indicated that costs of study were a significant determinant of student mobility, while a country's size, climate, and local language could influence its attractiveness to international students. Future research is needed to explore the relationship between international students'

understanding of China, their perceived economic costs of studying in China, and their choice of Chinese higher education.

Theoretically, the research proposed a comprehensive model to explain international students' choice of foreign education. We suggest that it is not the separate "push" or "pull" motives, which are identifiably "out there" but, rather, the synthesized "push-pull" pairs that influence students' destination selection. Such push-pull pairs are exemplified by the students' perceptions of host education systems in comparison with those of domestic education. Second, despite the dramatic increase of international students in China, little empirical research has been conducted on the factors why students choose to undertake their education in higher education institutions in China. The current research redresses the imbalance by focusing on a group of OBOR students in Shaanxi. The findings of the research can assist higher education institutions in other parts of China and in other emerging international students' destination countries to evaluate and further improve their international education.

Practically, it is of importance for Chinese higher education institutions to understand the preferences and concerns of students from OBOR countries and factors motivating them to travel to China for education. The deepened understandings of the choice of international students enable Chinese universities to better design their recruitment strategies. For example, since "information sources", "quality of education", "opportunity to gain admission", "possibility of living in China upon graduation", and "opportunity for intercultural communication" were identified as important factors influencing the participants' choice of Chinese education, in order to attract more students from OBOR countries, Chinese universities need to further enhance the quality of education they provide, make use of various information channels in recruitment, and design various activities to support international students' intercultural interactions. It is worth noting that knowledge of the host country was not found important in the students' decision-making to study in China. We suggest Chinese universities to highlight the country's history, dynamic culture, security, foreign policies, and immigrant opportunities in their future recruitment of international students. Moreover, in this research economic factors did not have significant influence on the

participants' decision to study in China. In the future, we suggest that Chinese universities continue to monitor the costs of its international education and provide more generous scholarships and financial aid. More importantly, China should be aware of the significance of the quality of education for its sustainable development of international education. It is a country's academic achievement and academic reputation that will eventually determine its competitiveness in the global education market in general and its attractiveness for students in OBOR countries in particular.

Methodologically, this research has its limitations. First, this research involved a comparatively small group of international students studying at two universities in one province in China. To further our understandings of the choice of international students, we call for large-scale surveys, which should involve students of different age groups, with different academic backgrounds, at different types of institutions, and in different regions of China. Second, the data were generated from international students across OBOR regions. Future research could focus on the students from specific countries, which would help to identify and prioritize the factors influencing the decision of the students from the specific countries. For example, geographical proximity was not found significant in the current study; it, however, may be an important factor attracting Korean or Japanese students to China. Moreover, the study reported in this chapter was an explorative quantitative research. No qualitative data were collected. The research produced a description of the "landscape" in which decision-making about studying in China took place. The factor analysis reported in Table 2.7, for example, may provide some points at which in-depth qualitative and interpretive research is needed in order to unpack and understand the clustering of these various factors.

Acknowledgements Research reported in this article was supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (grant number: 71573203) and Humanities and Social Sciences Project Chinese Ministry of Education (grant number: 15YJC880078).

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3

Journey to the East: Intercultural Adaptation of International Students in China

Ping Yang

Introduction

The number of international students studying in Mainland China was comparatively small three decades ago. However, more international students have chosen to study Chinese language and culture in Mainland China due to its booming economy and flourishing employment opportunities in the last ten years. Bevis (2014) informs that the number of American students choosing to study in colleges and universities across Mainland China is quickly rising. Many international students have become interested in studying and living in Mainland China especially after the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The worldwide athletic event during which the Chinese athletes scored greater achievements than those from any other countries helped put Mainland China in a spotlight, attracting great media attention (Kellner & Zhang, 2013), increasing positive

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F. Dervin et al. (eds.), *International Students in China*, Palgrave Studies on Chinese Education in a Global Perspective, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78120-4_3

stereotype impact on China and its people via various public media (Wang, Guo, & Shen, 2011; Zhang, 2011). Furthermore, the Shanghai World Expo 2010 has far-reaching significance in presenting Red China a brand-new image on the world stage, showcasing its economic, technological, cultural, and social achievements to the rest of the world once again through public media (Callahan, 2012; Nordin, 2012). Along with these achievements, the overseas promotion of Chinese language and culture has been successful. Up to December 2015, the total number of Confucius Institutes has reached 500 across the world (see Table 3.1) (http://www.hanban.org/confuciousinstitutes/node_10961.htm). In the past six years, 178 new Confucius Institutes have been founded in 34 countries across 7 continents. Apparently, this success has impressed the world, particularly international students, who are longing to see the country and unlock the myth how a Red China with a not-so-democratic label has done such an amazing job in the past three decades.

Many international students have commenced their journey to explore the East, particularly Mainland China. The number of international students studying and working in the rising nation has been increasing at a fast pace, up to nearly 380,000 in 2014 (see Table 3.2). It was a net increase of almost 67% more than 2013. There were 32.24% more of

Table 3.1 Increased number of Confucius Institutes worldwide (Nov. 2009–Dec. 2015)

Continents	No. of countries		No. of Confucius Institutes	
	Nov. 2009[a]	Dec. 2015[b]	Nov. 2009	Dec. 2015
Europe	31	40	105	169
North/South Americas	12	18	103	157
Asia	30	32	81	110
Africa	16	32	21	46
Oceania	2	3	12	18
Total	91	125	322	500

[a]See Yang, P. (2013). Asymmetrical style of communication in Mandarin Chinese talk-in-interaction: Pedagogical implications for TCSOL professionals. In I. Kecskes (Ed.), *Research in Chinese as a second language* (pp. 33–64). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter

[b]Accessed 11 Feb 2016 http://www.hanban.org/confuciousinstitutes/node_10961.htm

Table 3.2 Number of international students in China (2014)

Continents	Subtotal	% of total (%)	No. vs. 2013	% vs. 2013 (%)
Asia	225,490	59.80	5682	2.58
Europe	67,475	17.90	5933	9.64
Africa	41,677	11.05	8318	24.93
North/South Americas	36,140	9.58	−907	−2.45
Oceania	6272	1.33	1529	32.24
Total	377,054	100	Net increase 20,555	Net increase 66.94

Accessed 11 Feb 2016 http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/s5987/201503/184959.html

international students from Oceania in 2014 than the year before. Its increase was more than any other continent and its total was 6272. There are currently 14 Confucius Institutes in Australia. They provide university students opportunities to learn the Chinese language and culture in their home countries, including those in Australia. Meanwhile they also help attract international students to study in universities and colleges across China, and the Chinese government has supplied scholarships to support intending international students. Similarly, the Australian government launched the New Colombo Plan, "a signature initiative of the Australian Government which aims to life knowledge of the Indo-Pacific in Australia by supporting Australian undergraduates to study and undertake internships in the region" (http://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/new-colombo-plan/about/Pages/about.aspx). International study opportunities to Australian students include student exchange, internship, short programmes, clinical placements, and study tours.

However, compared with the research publications about international students studying in English-speaking countries (Ata & Kostogriz, 2015; Azmat et al., 2013; Lillyman & Bennett, 2014; Loomes & Croft, 2013; Mak, Brown, & Wadey, 2014; Malczewska-Webb, 2014; McDonald, 2014; Phakiti, Hirsh, & Woodrow, 2013; Rui & Wang, 2015; Yang, 2015; Yates & Wahid, 2013; Yu, 2013; Zevallos, 2012), much research needs to be done concerning international students, particularly Australian counterparts, studying in Mainland China despite current publications (see Boncori & Höpfl, 2013; Chiang, 2014; Li, 2015; Yu et al., 2014).

This chapter aims to examine international students' study and living experiences in Mainland China. The researcher first reviewed relevant theoretical frameworks, then raised research questions, next described research methodology, discussed three emerging themes citing relevant data, and concluded the chapter by discussing the three implications.

Literature Review

In this section the researcher reviewed two theoretical frameworks. One is a lingua-cultural communication model with emphasis on the interrelationship between language, culture, and communication. The other is intercultural adaptation theory with focus on what sojourners may experience and cope with while living in a new linguistic and cultural environment.

Language, Culture, and Communication

There is a triangle interlocking relationship between language, culture, and communication, representing and symbolising one another. Exploration of their deeply permeated relationship is traditionally called cultural linguistics (Sharifian, 2015) or lingua-culture (Risager, 2015). As language and culture are mutually constructed, their enhanced relationship is spread and conveyed via various forms (e.g. songs, dancing, dramas) and media (e.g. face-to-face communication, radio talk, TV shows, and Internet-based interactions). Thus communication has become the third component to form a tricycle, making it an interdisciplinary and dynamic field of research which the researcher called a lingua-cultural communication model (see Fig. 3.1).

The lingua-cultural communication model integrates language, culture, and communication components into one paradigm with each component having a pair of dimensions. The language component focuses on spoken and written forms, two major modes of conveying the language contents (Ingham, 2016). The culture component comprises in invisible perspectives (e.g. philosophy, attitude, and thinking) and visible

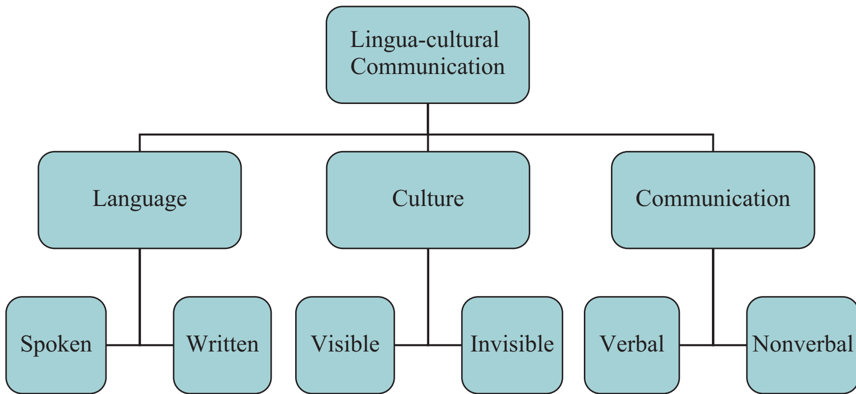


Fig. 3.1 A Model of Lingua-cultural Communication

perspectives (e.g. food, clothes, and colour) (Oberg, 1960). The communication component reflects verbal utterances (e.g. words, phrases, and sentences) and nonverbal cues (e.g. speech volume, body language, and interpersonal space).

Such a triangle relationship can be culture-symbolic. When people talk and write in English as an international language, they use linguistic codes in either spoken or written forms. "The lexicon of a language holds as it were a mirror to the rest of culture, and the accuracy of this mirror image sets a series of problems in principles capable of empirical solution" (Greenberg, 1971, p. 3). When we look at Australian English vocabulary, many words Australian English speakers use are connected to Australian culture and lifestyle. For example, "barbie" stands for "barbeque" or simply BBQ. "G'day, mate!" is preferred as a typically casual Australian way of greeting, symbolising a spirit of mateship. Additionally, some of Aboriginal Australian words have entered Australian English and are widely used in Australia. For instance, Indigenous Australians have historically used "boomerangs" for hunting, sport, and entertainment, and they are now regarded as an Australian icon (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boomerang), and "didgeridoo" is an Indigenous Australian music instrument associated with their everyday life (Leitner & Sieloff, 1998). The way in which they communicate verbally or nonverbally (e.g. paralinguistic, kinesic and proxemic cues, etc.) is closely related to the cultural backgrounds they

come from. Many Indigenous Australians prefer to talk less and keep silent in conversation. This is socially accepted in their communities because silence has specific cultural meaning and keeping silent is an important social skill for them (Mushin & Gardner, 2009). However, Anglo-Saxon Australians prioritise verbal communication skills and seldom allow silence to emerge, but fill pauses and gaps in social interaction.

Applying the lingual-cultural communication model to the Chinese context, we can see that the Chinese language, culture, and communication style are connected. The Chinese language is influenced by its culture and in turn guides Chinese speakers' communication styles and patterns. The Chinese character "福" (happiness or fortune) is posted upside down on the door of the unit or house as a wish to every family member to have a happy life (see Fig. 3.2). According to cultural linguistic theory (Sharifian, 2014), such a culture-specific and specially designed and presented written Chinese language symbol conceptualises Chinese speakers' strong wish to have a merry and healthy year ahead. It is also noted that there are variations with the Cantonese and Mandarin or *Putonghua*. While Cantonese has nine tones with soft and melodic contour, Mandarin has four tones only, making itself phonetically flat and straightforward. As Mandarin is a standard common language used in China, more Cantonese speakers can understand Mandarin counterparts than vice versa due to the two enormously different phonetic systems. Whereas they share similar invisible cultural dimensions (e.g., family cohesion, the old and young care for one another), some of visible cultural features (e.g. food, community practices, and rituals) are distinct.

Fig. 3.2 A culture-specific wish for happiness embedded in a Chinese character

China is generally collectivistic and has been classified as a high-context culture where messages usually remain unspecified and embedded in context (Hall, 1976). There are signs that show the young Chinese generations are becoming more direct in verbal communication than the elderly ones in China due to more openness to cultural diversity and a wider spread of social media (e.g., wechat) although most of them prefer nonverbal communication in many situations (Yang, 2011, 2013).

Intercultural Adaptation: Issues and Solutions

Intercultural adaptation refers to "the process whereby individuals from one cultural context move to a different cultural context and strive to learn the societal norms, customs and language of the host culture in order to function in the new environment" (Jackson, 2014, p. 361). In intercultural adaptation process, it is often taken for granted that sojourners, such as international students, are expected to adapt themselves to the host culture as their purpose of living in a host country is to learn the target language and culture. Sojourner adjustment means the groups residing in foreign environments need to understand the acculturation concept and take actions (Pedersen, Neighbors, Larimer, & Lee, 2011). Despite sojourners' pre-departure preparations, living in a new destination soon gives rise to culture shock, a term referring to the sojourners' disoriented physical, psychological, emotional, and socio-cultural response to the new linguistic and cultural environments (Oberg, 1960; Pyvis & Chapman, 2005; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Culture shock has been focused on in many researchers' projects. At least 19 of them have used different four sets of words to describe a U-shaped adaptation cycle (Zapf, 1991). It is noted that the U-shaped adaptation cycle is likely to repeat itself, thus projecting a series of W-curve adjustments depending on specific circumstances prior to cultural adaptation at a higher level (Jackson, 2014; Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998). This is the case with international students studying in the United States (Cigularova, 2005) and with Western expatriate business managers working in China (Boncori & Höpfl, 2013; Selmer, 1999; Selmer & Shiu, 1999).

Apart from learning a new language of the different family tree (e.g. Sino-Tibetan vs. Indo-European), sojourners face the challenges in adapting to the host culture psychologically, emotionally, and socio-culturally. First, international students find their initial psychological adaptation to the host culture challenging because of cultural dynamics and cultural differences. Kim (2001) observes that "many researchers have focused on 'culture shock', or the psychological (and sometimes physical) responses of sojourners to an unfamiliar culture" (p. 16). The psychological impact of culture shock on sojourners can be seen in the display of the symptoms of distress, unease, confusion, anxiety, disorientation, and the feelings of impotence or loss of identity. Chinese international students studying in the United States are faced with acculturation and psychosocial adjustment to different campus life (Zhang & Goodson, 2011a, 2011b). Various cross-cultural training methods have been integrated to develop an effective treatment for the sojourners suffering from psychological stress due to repeated attempts to cross-cultural adaptation (Befus, 1988). Tananuraksakul and Hall (2011) are concerned with the psychological well-being of international students' "emotional security and dignity" (p. 189) while they study in Australia. Second, international students undergo emotional adaptation to a new country where they experience intercultural differences in emotional display (Gullekson & Vancouver, 2010). Although it is important to form friendships with host country nationals for a successful experience, international students find it challenging and rare to do so with the American students according to Williams and Johnson's (2011) research results. It is found that "students with and without international friendships differed on multicultural personality characteristics, intercultural attitudes, and multicultural experiences, such as participation in study abroad" (Williams & Johnson, 2011, p. 41). Third, socio-cultural adaptation is a major challenge to international students living overseas for the first time. They are burdened with intercultural adaptation stress and higher expectations from their parents, relatives, neighbours, and peers (Pitts, 2009). There is also much evidence about how well the international students adjust to socio-cultural environment is related to the role the host university structures play in the adaptation process (Coles & Swami, 2012). These include provision of a wide range of services (e.g. ESL learning support, food varieties,

organised university or school-based recreational activities, etc.) specially designed for international students so that they have something to share with family members or friends far way and gossip about their in-progress adaptation. It is likely that these activities keep them engaged with participation and interaction which creates memory of interesting days and times and they feel affiliated with the university or school where they study.

Despite various challenges in psychological, emotional, and socio-cultural adaptation to a target culture, there are many potential advantages and positive learning outcomes that sojourners can have as a result of their strong willingness to work towards successful intercultural adaptation. They can take opportunities to expand their intercultural knowledge base and develop intercultural management and interaction skills (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). Compared with students who study on home campus, those who participate in study abroad programmes develop better intercultural communication skills and intercultural sensitivity (Williams, 2005). Apart from a plenty of opportunities to improve and enhance their intercultural verbal and nonverbal communication strategies, they understand various linguistic and cultural differences, appreciate cultural diversity, and become more open and willing to interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds through their overseas studies and outbound mobility (Yang, 2016). In their difficult times, they survive hardship and loneliness, and have developed skills and strategies to manage their life and study successfully. Both lingua-cultural communication model proposed and intercultural adaptation theory reviewed above will be drawn on to explain the personal and group experiences of the international students studying in Mainland China.

Research Questions

Since this chapter focuses on international students studying in Mainland China, an overarching research question centres round international students' intercultural learning and adaptation experience in three major Chinese cities. Three specific research questions are stated as follows:

1. How did international students learn Mandarin Chinese in Mainland China?
2. How did international students come to understand Chinese culture in Mainland China?
3. How did international students achieve intercultural adaptation in Mainland China?

The above three research questions are discussed and answered with reference to the data collected and analysed below.

Research Methodology

A qualitative method is used in this research project. In this section the researcher provided some details about the data sources, described the participants, and analysed their personal experience in learning Chinese as a second language (CSL) through informal learning and cross-cultural experience interacting with others in Mainland China. Finally, the researcher explained how data analysis was conducted.

Data Collection

The data collected for this project are freely available on the Internet. They are YouTube video clips of high-quality image and sound effect, some of which are short videos produced by the students or their friends who learned Mandarin in Mainland China and were posted on the Internet. They are true-to-life stories and their own personal experiences of what they saw and did while interacting with other international students and/or Chinese friends living in the three first-tier cities (i.e. Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou) in China. Whether a city is grouped into first tier or second tier in China largely depends on its economic strength (e.g., GDP) and cultural (e.g., infrastructure) status, population size, logistical (e.g., utilities) and geographic location (e.g., transport) (http://www.maxxelli-consulting.com/china-second-tier-cities-economy-fdi/). These data were selected from three sources. The first source comes from a YouTube "Foreigners in China". The second source

of video materials is TV show programmes produced by China Guangdong TV. Ten episodes were selected with each about 55 minutes long. The third data source is an Australian university student's blog entries recounting his study and life experiences in Shanghai.

Participant Information

To have focused discussion, the researcher selected three cases and their details are listed in Table 3.3.

The language and cultural backgrounds of the participants were well mixed. In scenario one Charlie completed his undergraduate degree in the UK and knew little Chinese when he first arrived in Beijing a few years ago. He participated in a homestay (with an average Chinese family with experience hosting international students on homestay) programme which kick-started his Chinese language learning and cultural exploration journey. In scenario two the student group participated in a Chinese language learning TV show "Hello China" in Guangzhou. The major participants included 功必扬, a male postgraduate student from Argentina, 奥斯丁, a male English teacher from Texas, United States, 元钦, a male singer and music teacher from South Korea, and 李帝雅, a female student from South Korea with ten-year experience living in China. 功必扬 and 奥斯丁 formed group one led by a female team leader 小鱼 from the United States and 元钦 and 李帝雅 formed group 2 led by 江南 from Australia. The two teams participated in the Chinese language-culture competition as part of informal learning through participation and interaction in the TV show. Two international students 蔡明凯, an American, and 季夏荣, a Korean, played the roles of marriage proposers. In scenario three Daniel was an Australian student with half Chinese background and was on his first immersion trip to learning Chinese in Shanghai.

Table 3.3 Participants' details

No.	Name	Male/ female	Age	Education level	Destination city	Home country
1	Charlie	M	24	Bachelor	Beijing	UK
2	Student group	M and F	20–21	Bachelors	Guangzhou	Varied
3	Daniel	M	21	Bachelor	Shanghai	Australia

Data Analysis

The theoretical underpinning of data analysis points to grounded theory proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and further expounded by Clarke (2005) and Charmaz (2006). This provides an analytical method leading to an exhaustive analysis of data and allows initial concepts and codes to be amalgamated and refined as more data are collected and analysed. Using this framework, the researcher critically analysed contents with all video data selected through viewing, reviewing, selecting, and transcribing the data. Then the transcribed data were uploaded onto NVivo 10 which could help effectively categorise these data and put them under key points, thus providing emerging major themes. This software helps researchers manage their qualitative project through putting all data in one programme, "working with multimedia sources" such as "audio, video, images and web pages as materials in your project", "captur(ing), import(ing), cod(ing) and link(ing)" all these materials, building logical connection among them (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013, p. xvii). The computer-assisted data analysis guided by the grounded theory has allowed the following major themes to emerge under the three subheadings.

From Intercultural Interaction to Intercultural Communication and Understanding

In this section the researcher examined how international students studying in Mainland China made efforts to engage themselves in language learning and intercultural interaction, thus achieving intercultural communication and understanding after trials and errors. Meanwhile, the following discussion of this major theme also answers the three specific research questions raised earlier with reference to the data about the relevant participants.

Informal and Experiential Learning

One of the most important learning tasks for international students studying in Mainland China is to overcome the target language barriers.

Australian English speakers find it difficult to learn Mandarin Chinese because English (Proto-Indo-European) and Chinese (Sino-Tibetan) do not come from the same family tree (McGregor, 2015). The two languages have different linguistic (speech and writing) systems with phonetic, morphological, lexical, and syntactic differences. So do their writing systems. While English uses alphabetic scripts ideally to represent words by their sounds, Chinese employs a logographic writing system with each symbol or character representing a word or meaningful unit (McGregor, 2015). However, *hanyu pinyin* (a vowel and consonant system of Chinese alphabetic scripts) is also used in Chinese classrooms for pedagogical purpose. Apparently, this can facilitate other language speakers in learning spoken Chinese although writing in Chinese characters remains a challenge. Positively, some of Chinese characters are logographic, with their writing bearing similarity to their images of real objects seen in everyday life, for example, sun (日), moon (月), water (水), and fire (火).

This suggests that it is useful and effective for English speakers to learn Chinese in social interaction and real-life contexts where they learn to speak a functional language through informal learning. Singh (2015) cites the definition of informal learning as "learning that occurs in daily life, in the family, in the workplace, in communities and through the interests and activities of individuals" (p. 20). Apparently, practical learning can be undertaken outside the classroom with flexibility and inclusion of diverse knowledge. With the Internet-based audio-visual technologies, many people are taking online informal learning of English (Poole, 2016; Sockett, 2014). Similarly, international students can learn everyday Chinese through informal online learning. This makes it possible for people living in the remote areas to gain access to equal learning opportunities and resources, learning living knowledge and interpersonal skills through online connection with others.

Despite their initial knowledge and contact with the Chinese language and Chinese speakers in their home countries, international students' real interactions have just commenced after starting their life in the populated but vigorous China with glorious history and culture. They have had fantastic and unforgettable language and cultural immersion experience in major Chinese cities. They are amazingly attracted by Chinese language and

culture and are learning them through immersion and intercultural interaction (Yang, 2018). They pick up real language use in context through informal learning settings (e.g., everyday family chatting, supermarket shopping, sightseeing, participating in TV shows, role play, homestay, etc.).

Homestay is an effective way of having everyday language immersion as informal learning for international students (Di Silvio, Donovan, & Malone, 2014). Living in an average Chinese family environment, they learn how to communicate with Chinese speakers and practice daily survival skills. Even though they run into language and communication difficulty, particularly when are new in China, it adds to their personal experience how and why things go wrong and helps them reflect on the language and cultural differences. Most international students studying in China focus on practising speaking and listening at the beginning, which makes sense in second language acquisition as listening and speaking are most often used in everyday life, and capacity in the two skills provides international students opportunity to interact with others. "It requires meaningful interaction in the target language—natural communication—in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances, but with the messages they are conveying and understanding" (Krashen, 1981, p. 1).

Charlie was a British university student studying Chinese in Beijing. Apart from classroom lessons, he was advised to take a homestay programme as a good way of experiential and informal learning. Staying at a Chinese-speaking family, he had to learn to use chopsticks. Although he found it a bit hard to manage them, he was amused by the new family environment. Madam Dong, the family hostess, prepared seven dishes and taught Charlie how to say them in Chinese one by one. While practising, he tasted and liked them very much and said that they tasted so good. The host family was happy to hear his compliments. Later on Charlie recalled, "I was a bit nervous at the beginning. I didn't know how a Chinese family lived. But in reality it's the same as any others. It's a great family. Everyone gets on very well and very happy. I feel welcome."

Bargain shopping at a market is a quite useful and practical language learning experience in a different but authentic cultural setting for international students. Because it is relevant to their everyday needs and is an interesting way to learn Chinese through interaction with the average

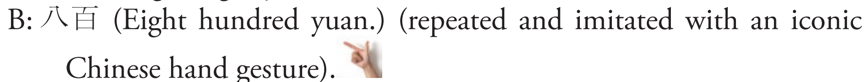
Chinese speakers, they are more likely to engage themselves in the task-based learning activities and develop their authentic speaking skills (Brown, 2015; Harmer, 2015). As a planned learning activity, Charlie and his group were clear about their learning goal (practising speaking skills) and objectives (buying two items related to his animal symbol or zodiac sign with a budget of not more than 50 RMB or yuan, asking about the price, negotiating for a better deal) and then started their adventurous bargaining trip in the flea market located in Panjiayuan (潘家园). Bargaining-in-shopping is a common everyday transaction between a seller and a buyer in a Chinese market and is characterised by a spoken genre in negotiating price and quantity (Orr, 2007). Understanding that his animal symbol was a goat, Charlie's was repeating to himself that it was a meek animal with two horns. Not being used to bargaining shopping in his home country, Charlie apparently appeared a bit nervous and shy when asking the vendor about the prices; however, his confidence grew as he was accompanied by his kind-hearted hostess Madam Dong. Below are some conversational turns showing his learning curves in second language listening and speaking in transaction:

A: 多少钱? (How much?)
B: 八百. (Eight hundred yuan.)

A: 啊, 八磅? (Ah, eight pounds?)
B: 八百. (Eight hundred yuan.)

A: 什么? (Pardon?)
B: 八百 (Eight hundred yuan.) (replied with a Chinese hand gesture for eight).

A: 八八. (Eight eight yuan.)
B: 八百 (Eight hundred yuan.) (repeated and imitated with an iconic Chinese hand gesture).



A: 噢, 八百 (Oh, eight hundred yuan.) (imitating the same hand gesture for eight).

B: 你喜欢吗? (Like it?)

A: 我喜欢, 没有八百. (Yes. I do, but I don't have eight hundred yuan.)

Charlie was able to initiate price-enquiry conversation with the vendors though he was only one week into the Chinese language programme in Beijing. His English language interference on listening to Chinese was obvious as he mistook the pronunciation of 八百 for 八磅 due to their sound similarity. With the aid of repetition and an iconic hand gesture (Lüke & Ritterfeld, 2014; McNeill, 2005), he not only succeeded in pronouncing 八百 but also imitated the iconic Chinese hand gesture for it and repeated the words through successful recalling and extended speaking practice. It was a good opportunity for international language students to experience the real bargaining at the market because the authentic learning was engaging and interactional, and they could call upon their language knowledge, skills, and resources to meet the socialisation needs (Pang, Sterling, & Long, 2015). This could be seen in Charlie's continued efforts to get a bargain through using some complimentary wordings (e.g., 你好, 我的朋友, 我喜欢你, 很好, 很漂亮) to establish and maintain rapport. At last, he successfully completed the bargaining shopping task by buying a sheep-like marble stamp for 30 yuan and a small teapot for the remaining 20 yuan. Charlie was happy and satisfied with his learning experience in the authentic setting.

Cultural Immersion Through Participation

The more challenging and exciting stage of international students' learning experience in Mainland China is how they respond to and act on Chinese diverse culture and social life which are apparently and totally different from their own. Apart from six cultural dimensions[1] (e.g., collectivism vs. individualism, high power distance vs. low power distance, feminine vs. masculine, restraint vs. indulgence, long-term orientation vs. short-term orientation) (Hofstede, 2001), the striking cultural differences include communication styles (indirect, implicit, and nonverbal vs. direct, explicit, and verbal) and invisible perspectives (polychromic vs. monochromic) (Lustig & Koester, 2013). As these cultural dimensions

[1] Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions is used with an understanding that in the same culture there are diverse cultures with differences. For example, there are cultural differences between North and South China in Han nationality, let alone 56 nationalities in China.

are hidden, they work efficiently to make international students feel confused and frustrated before they come to understand diverse Chinese culture through cultural immersion and participation.

Direct and indirect styles of communication are one of these intercultural differences observed in interaction between international students and the homestay hostess. While direct communication is preferred by English speakers, indirect communication is used by Chinese speakers (Fong, 1998; Wang, 2004). Indirectness implies the message in the context in the form of nonverbal communication, and Chinese speakers consider it too blunt or conflicting to spell it out (Yang, 2013). The homestay hostess thought it inappropriate to approach the student directly and consulted the homestay programme coordinator who advised that it would be more appropriate for her to communicate with Charlie directly about the issues than using a mediating person to convey the message. Following this advice, she talked to Charlie directly and it worked. Both parties were happy when they understood each other through direct communication.

Compared with verbal communication, nonverbal communication is a much more effective and less face-threatening means in which people select coded contents to convey the intended meaning without using any words. International students came to understand the unique Chinese nonverbal message through role playing a communication-based informal language and cultural learning experience. As was acted out in one of the popular Chinese TV show episodes "Hello, China" (20150602/42′31″) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsIZq4EF6zU&spfreload=10) by a mix of two Chinese speakers and two international students, 蔡明凯, an American, and 季夏荣, a Korean, studying in Mainland China. Here came the role play. Two bowls of snacks were used to indicate whether the father would agree to marry his daughter to the courtiers in Guangdong (Canton) as a local traditional practice. One was a bowl of poached egg in sweet water and the other was a bowl of cooked sticky rice balls coated with brown sugar. It was called 糖不甩 (*tangbushuai*). If the father was happy to accept the wedding proposal on his daughter's behalf, he would advise that the future son-in-law be treated to 糖不甩 (*tangbushuai*). This implied that his wedding proposal was successful. On the other hand, a bowl of whipped egg with sweet water would be served instead to signify that the proposal was rejected.

From Intercultural Interaction to Intercultural Understanding

Coming from sparsely populated English-speaking countries, international students tend to feel cultural shock when they first arrived in Mainland China. As expected they realise their Chinese language and cultural competences have become much better than before after finishing the 6–12-month language-culture immersion programme in China. Although they may experience frustrations and anxieties in intercultural adaptation process, their lingua-cultural communication growth has been amazingly encouraging and aspiring.

Daniel was a university student from South Australia and he spent 10 months (28 August 2013–July 2014) studying Mandarin Chinese at Shanghai Teachers University with a New Colombo Plan scholarship, an Australian government's initiative for supporting Australians on Study Abroad programmes. During his stay there, he kept his Internet bloggings which recorded all the true-to-life stories he wanted to tell about his exciting and interesting experiences in Shanghai and nearby places. Although several things happened out of his expectation, he was much relieved at being greeted with hospitality and meeting with his new friends upon arrival. Here was what he blogged on 8 September 2013:

> When I landed in Shanghai the first thing I was struck by was the heat and humidity. I managed to arrive in the middle of a heat wave and as my luggage was mislabelled and lost by China Southern Airlines I was stuck in jeans and a very sweaty tee-shirt for another day. Wu Fei (Scott) kindly met me at the airport, helped sort out my missing luggage issue and accompanied me on the drive to my lodgings. I had no idea what the student lodgings would be like, but I was placed into a room that I believe has been fairly recently redone with a new refrigerator, furnishings and television. I also met my roommate on the day I arrived, a Vietnamese student named Cong.

We can see that the university semester system in Mainland China is different from and opposite to that in Australia. The first (Autumn) semester of an academic year starts in early September and the second

(Spring) in late February in Shanghai. As Shanghai is a coastal city located in the mid-eastern part of China, it is usually warm and humid in September. Despite the different climate, he was happy when greeted at the airport, taken to a student dormitory shared with another international student. He continued as follows:

> After being treated to dinner on Thursday night by Wu Fei's colleagues I arrived back at the hotel to discover my luggage returned at last! The next few days were spent meeting new people, talking with family and friends over Skype whenever I could get internet, trying new food and exploring the area around the campus with my roommate. On Saturday I went on a trip to the Bund with Cong's and his Vietnamese friends. Photos from the trip will follow!

Apparently, he enjoyed having the varieties of food available, meeting new friends, and going out seeing a new world of life. He also talked about how fantastic it was to see many international students "from literally all around the world have given up 6-12 months of their lives just to study Chinese!". In the first few weeks, apart from preparing for the classes, he was fully engaged in meeting more new friends and seeing many new places in Shanghai, such as the Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Centre, the Oriental Pearl Tower, the Shanghai Ocean Aquarium, the Shanghai Circus World, and the 2010 Shanghai World Expo site. He was not only seeing the new look of Shanghai and later nearby cities Wuxi, Suzhou, and Hangzhou but also practising his spoken Chinese as informal learning in context.

Daniel's proficiency level of Chinese took off after he mingled with many African, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Vietnamese, and Western European friends, celebrating Chinese Mid-Autumn festival. He studied diligently and scored over 90% in three exams out of five. He exchanged lessons with Chinese teachers and also tutored some Chinese children English. He and other international students participated in playing costumed roles in Beijing opera and enjoyed Christmas celebrations and New Year's party where an international student group was singing in Chinese and the crowd was cheering. "It was an absolute blast!" and "It's definitely an experience I won't forget!!!!!!!!".

Three weeks before returning to Australia, Daniel blogged that "I've gone from speaking a few sentences in Chinese to somehow passing the HSK Level 4 and 5 exam and have been able to travel around to a few different places outside of and within Shanghai. To be honest, I surprised even myself when I passed the HSK5 exam (…ranging from HSK1 to HSK6) and I feel like that highlights what I've spent most of my time doing-studying and practicing Chinese!" He summarised that despite his half Chinese background he experienced quite a lot of culture shock and his real experience in Shanghai has definitely been an eye opener for him. He has become more open-minded and "willing to see things from many different perspectives" and encourages all international students to "challenge their way of thinking" and take on a different and dynamic viewpoint of China. On the other hand, as "'Small things' like the clean air, high quality food, friendly smiles from shop owners and even the freedom to access any website we like that are things I've realised I've missed", he hoped Australians should appreciate the quality life and rich resources they have in their own country.

International students like Charlie, international student group, and Daniel mentioned in the discussion have appreciated opportunities to learn Mandarin Chinese and (local) culture through taking classes, exchanging lessons and engaging in informal learning, and participating in a range of university and self-planned activities. Having taken on the initial cross-linguistic and cross-cultural learning tasks and challenges, they have at last made great progress and achieved planned learning outcomes in language learning and cultural understanding. More importantly, they successfully developed lingua-cultural communication competence across language and cultural boundaries (Yang, 2018). However, international students have also provided feedback on how their complaints (when Daniel asked about the student gym used as a storeroom he was advised to use the one outside the university if not turned away) were inappropriately dealt with. To meet international students' needs, Chinese university staff members need to undertake relevant intercultural communication training to upgrade their intercultural communication competence (Shaklee & Merz, 2012). Furthermore, Chinese universities should endeavour to understand the socio-cultural adjustment trajectory of international students and respond to their learning

and well-being with reference to the role of university structures (Coles & Swami, 2012) and student services (e.g., student access to Internet and communication with their home country and outside world).

If chapter space permitted, this chapter would touch upon learning and teaching issues common to other international universities. Some of them include university and staff members' attitudes towards English as a lingua franca (ELF), the implementation of teacher-led or learner-centred teaching methodologies, form-based learning or task-based learning strategies, home-culture-related or multiculture-related learning contents (Jenkins, 2011; Knapp, 2011). As the Chinese Government has invested to internationalise Chinese universities and hopes to raise Chinese university ranking to the top tier, Chinese universities have a lot to do to improve the governance, teaching quality, academic research performance, and international engagement.

Conclusion

This chapter examined international students' language learning and cultural immersion experiences in Mainland China. Their general experience has been positive and great with Chinese language level lifted and cultural understanding much enhanced through see-and-do activities. International students studying in China tended to mention little about their classroom experience in the YouTube clips or bloggings, but they did show enthusiasm in participating in task-based learning and role plays, particularly through informal learning outside of classroom. They love to communicate with people from multicultural backgrounds and from any countries, practising Chinese language in real situations and use, gaining maximum benefits from homestay as part of study abroad and outbound mobility (Jackson, 2015). Despite the traditional learning style influenced by the Confucian heritage, international students have experienced that teaching and learning styles in the leading Chinese university classrooms are changing as a result of Sino-Western academic exchanges (e.g., overseas-trained Chinese returnees, employment of English-speaking teachers, professional development of Chinese teachers of English and Chinese teachers of CSL) (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). These

changes are also contributed by the younger generations of Chinese learners of English and other languages who are developing new concepts of learning knowledge and skills through experiments and adventures. It is expected greater innovations will take place in the near future.

Although this chapter looked at three cases only, they provided a window through which to see how international students were engaged in learning Chinese language and culture using learner autonomy and self-directed participation, becoming willing to communicate and mingling with all around them, and understanding how they came to succeed in intercultural adaptation in Mainland China. It is reported that such in-country informal learning style makes their study fun, interesting, and life-changing and it is a totally different way of gaining knowledge and skills from rote learning.

International students' experience and testimony in language learning and cultural understanding success in Mainland China have multiple implications. First, it has evidently shown that students participating in outbound mobility programme gain more benefits from study abroad activities than they do from classroom lectures, tutorials, and role plays (Lumkes Jr., Hallett, & Vallade, 2012). As more international students are motivated to join the international cohorts, they find it useful to make full preparations before departure, including doing some functional language course and using the language other than English (LOTE) resources available in their home country. In the long run, it is in the interest of the English-speaking countries that LOTE is delivered as a compulsory unit in the secondary and post-secondary education years. Second, international students should take on the challenges arising from study abroad due to various cultural differences between their home country and host country, and they become cross-linguistically and cross-culturally successful when they are able to adapt to the host language and culture (Yang, 2016). Along with the government funding and scholarship, the home universities should also develop and offer intercultural communication units or training sessions, and encourage all students to take them because they live in a multilingual and multicultural society where they interact with people from diverse language and cultural backgrounds (Ladegaard & Jenks, 2015; Yang, 2015; Yates, 2015). Third, equipped with intercultural communication competence (e.g., knowl-

edge, skills, and attitude) and successful intercultural adaptation experience, international students play a model and leadership role in approaching LOTEs and other cultures objectively and fairly, and using intercultural communication to find peaceful solutions to current international and intercultural issues around the world.

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4

British University Students Studying Abroad in China: Issues of Interculturality

Jiayi Wang

Introduction

Study abroad experiences have spawned a wealth of research in second language acquisition and intercultural communication (e.g., Engle & Engle, 2004; Freed, 1995; Lewin, 2010; Williams, 2005). Although China has become one of the top study abroad destinations, the voices of Chinese-as-a-foreign-language (CFL) students are largely absent from this literature, with a few recent exceptions (Diao, 2014; Du, 2013, 2015; Jin, 2014; Tan & Kinginger, 2013), most of which focus on American college students and language learning.

According to statistics from the Chinese Ministry of Education, China hosted around 380,000 international students in 2014, and the UK ranked among the top 15 countries sending students to study abroad in China. Furthermore, around 54% of international students in China

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F. Dervin et al. (eds.), *International Students in China*, Palgrave Studies on Chinese Education in a Global Perspective, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78120-4_4

were non-degree students. Most British university students studying abroad in China likely fall into this category because most do not pursue full degrees in Chinese universities; instead, most of these students are exchange students or are spending a period abroad, usually a year, as part of their UK degrees.

A growing number of universities in the UK are offering Chinese language degree programmes, and many of them require their students of Chinese to study abroad in China as part of their degrees. However, the teaching and learning of CFL outside China has been largely under-researched (Du & Kirkebæk, 2012), and British CFL learners' experiences and perceptions with regard to study abroad in China remain relatively an uncharted terrain.

The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to address this gap in the study abroad literature by launching an empirical investigation into CFL learners' use of discourses of culture in their reflections on their study abroad experiences. Particularly, it explores *what CFL students do with culture* and *how they use it to justify and explain their thoughts and actions*. More than 70 reports collected over the past three years were analysed in NVivo. This chapter reports on and discusses these findings in the light of recent theorizing on the concept of interculturality (e.g., Dervin, 2009, 2012; Zhu, 2014).

The concept of culture has been widely problematized in various disciplines. There is, however, an emerging call to move beyond culturalism, which tends to deem culture as a blanket explanation for almost everything (e.g., Dervin, 2011, 2012). Dervin (2012), for example, proposes a need for scholarly concentration on *interculturality* instead, which probes "how culture is used in discourse and actions to explain and justify" people's "actions and thoughts" (Dervin, 2012, p. 187). In a similar vein, Sarangi (1994, p. 145) proposes a move from examining "What is culture?" to "What we do with culture?" and notes the importance of adopting a discursive approach to analyses of intercultural interactions because it can challenge the "cultural" emphasis that has been falsely placed on intercultural encounters in many discursive constructions. This chapter supports this research shift by examining the use of discourse of culture among study abroad students.

Research Data and Methods

Grounded in the theory of interculturality, this chapter aims to address the following questions: *What do CFL students do with culture? How is culture used in discourse to justify and explain CFL students' thoughts and actions?* In order to answer the questions, I discursively analysed 71 study abroad reports from CFL degree students collected at a British university over the past three years. These students were degree students of Chinese, either majoring in Chinese or studying Chinese as part of a joint degree (e.g., Spanish and Chinese). As at many other British universities, study abroad was compulsory for foreign language degree students at this university; all the participants resided in China for a one-year or six-month (if doing a joint degree) study placement at a Chinese university during their third year of undergraduate study. At the end of their time abroad, they were asked to write a reflective report in Chinese on their study abroad experience and personal development over that period. Students were encouraged to *freely* reflect on their experience of studying and living in China without restraint. This allowed the students to focus on the issues relevant to them. All names in this chapter are pseudonyms, and none of the institutions are named for confidentiality reasons. Please note that I did not correct any grammatical or character errors made by these CFL learners. Rather, I have presented the Chinese quotations as the learners wrote them and provided my own English translation.

In order to ascertain the patterns of the students' discourses on culture, I carried out word frequency analyses of the study abroad reports. Unsurprisingly, *zhongguo* 中国 (China/Chinese), *yingguo* 英国 (Britain/British), and *wenhua* 文化 (culture) were among the most frequently used words. Sixty-nine of the 71 reflective reports mentioned *zhongguo* (China/Chinese) (763 times in total), 45 reports mentioned *yingguo* (Britain/British) (131 times in total), and 37 reports mentioned *wenhua* (culture) (93 times in total).

I examined all instances with explicit mention of these markers and analysed them in NVivo. I used discursive analysis to understand what these reports reflected about their authors' views of culture. These instances offer interesting insights into the CFL students' perspectives and interpretations of culture, Chineseness, and Britishness. Overall, the

participants' discourses on culture focused on three aspects: a paradox in relation to their own identity as Chinese university students, the teaching of culture, and intercultural learning outside classroom settings.

Identity Paradox: Selective Association and Disassociation

An important aspect of the use of discourses of culture that emerged from the data centres on a paradox relating to the participants' *identity as Chinese university students*. It is worth mentioning that the English word "Chinese" can mean *zhongguo de* 中国的 (lit. China's) or *hanyu* 汉语 (lit. Chinese language). The participants were degree students of Chinese studying abroad in China, and only a handful of them were students of Chinese heritage. All the students of Chinese usually identified themselves and were identified by others as "Chinese university students."

This identity, however, was often challenged and negotiated. Quite a few participants reported not being recognized as "Chinese university students" in China and feeling marginalized. For example, Lisa narrated her experience at a top university in Beijing where she was awarded a full-year scholarship to study. Although she perceived herself as a Chinese university student because she was studying in China, she was always reminded that she was not "a real Chinese university student": "Sometimes X University has some celebration events, competitions and so on, but they don't tell their foreign students. I don't like this part. For example, last week, it was the 104th anniversary of X University so they organised a celebration, but nobody wanted to tell foreign students. There were many advertisements [posters] about this event in the Chinese student halls but nothing in the foreign student halls. Sometimes my feeling is X University doesn't think we are their students, [and they think we] are just foreign students. (有的时候X大学会有什么晚会, 比赛等等。但是他们不会告诉他们的外国学生，我不喜欢这个部分。比如上个星期是X的一百零四年的周年, 所以他们组织一个晚会, 但是没有人想告诉外国学生。中国学生的宿舍多有这个晚会的广告，但是外国人的宿舍都没有。有的时候我的感觉是X认为我们不是X的学生, 就是外国学生)."

This feeling was echoed by many other participants, and most of them indicated that they could not change the status quo and negotiate their position within their host university. The students struggled not least because of the limited vocabulary available to define their identity as university students of Chinese and the multiple layers of Chineseness. The participants' expectations about being integrated as "Chinese university students" on campus during their study abroad often fell short; some institutions even had a separate campus for international students.

To an extent, this is not surprising. It reminds us of the widespread observation of problems that international students face when trying to integrate on their campuses (Byram & Feng, 2006). What is more interesting is the CFL learners' *selective association and dissociation*, that is, how they *strategically* negotiated their identity as Chinese or China's university students. Amy, for example, described how she and her British classmate Harry successfully associated themselves with this identity to get discounted tickets. Amy and Harry were classmates in the UK, and both of them were studying at Y University in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, for a year abroad on full scholarships. When they wanted to buy discounted student tickets to visit a famous local temple, they encountered a bald-on-record challenge to their identity as "Chinese university students" on the basis of nationality and appearance.

> 我们从来没去过有名的灵隐寺，这个地方其实很漂亮。顺便说，在灵隐寺我们有一点儿麻烦: 在售票处写着"中国大学生: 半价", 所以我们问: "两个学生票", 可是服务员说: "你是外国人"。我们当然不同意, 我们在中国的大学学习, 我们不是中国大学生吗? 把学生证也给了她，她还不想卖票。我们决定了给她们的老板打电话，最后服务员把半价票卖给我们。
>
> We had never been to the famous Lingyin Temple, and this place is actually very beautiful. By the way, we had some trouble at this temple: It says "Chinese university students: Half price" at the ticket office, so we said, "Two student tickets", but the ticket seller said, "You're foreigners". Of course, we didn't agree. We were studying at a Chinese university. Weren't we Chinese university students? And we gave her our [Chinese] student identification cards. She still didn't want to sell the tickets. We decided to call their boss. Eventually, the ticket seller sold us the half-price tickets.

Indeed, the word "Chinese" contains a myriad of meanings, and one of them is related to nationality. Nevertheless, Amy and Harry did not interpret it this way. This is also indicative of the dilemma that a lot of international students face. If a foreign student is studying at a British university, can she/he claim herself/himself to be a British university student? The answer is rather ambiguous, but in the UK, this seems to be obscured by the intentional identification of international students versus home/EU students. The CFL students' experience in China seems to suggest a similar situation, that is, the identification of "Chinese students from China" versus "international students," In this particular case, Amy and Harry directly refuted the latter identification and successfully claimed their identity as Chinese university students. Their efforts of association paid off.

Like selective association, selective dissociation is common among CFL learners. For example, Amy, Harry, and their classmates wanted to create a Chinese students' society for CFL students when they returned to England. They discovered there was already a Chinese students' society at the university, and it was dedicated to international students from Chinese-speaking countries and regions. In order to disassociate themselves from this group, they decided to use the name "Chinese Society" instead when they submitted their application to the Students' Union. This reflected the view "We are Chinese students, but we are *not those* Chinese students" (Amy), which demonstrates the multiple layers of their "Chinese" identity and challenges a static and simplistic understanding of Chineseness in relation to student identity.

Teaching Chinese Culture in a Classroom Setting

Another major aspect of the participants' discourses of culture pertained to the teaching of culture. The majority of Chinese universities explicitly offer at least one module about "Chinese culture" to international students (Hou, 2015). Many participants took such modules as study abroad students with an aim to better understand Chinese culture.

Let us examine the teaching materials they encountered first. Several host universities use the same series of textbooks: *Stories of the Chinese – Intensive Audiovisual and Reading Course of Intermediate Chinese* (Yu, 2009). Adapted from a China Central Television (CCTV) documentary programme of the same name, this series is published by a key CFL publisher, Beijing Language and Culture University Press. It includes stories of 20 Chinese people from various backgrounds such as a taxi driver, retiree, fashion designer, and archaeologist. The series claims to integrate Chinese language learning with an understanding of China's national conditions and culture by presenting authentic lives of modern Chinese people; the publisher labels these textbooks unequivocally as *intensive culture teaching materials* (Yu, 2009). In addition to this popular series, there are a growing number of "culture textbooks" on the market (Zhou, Luo, & Zhang, 2010). They tend to present cultural archetypes rather than complex individuals and have received mixed evaluations from students (Li, 2006). Many participants in this study blatantly stated their dislike of this type of learning material. Katie's description is one example.

> 我觉得我们的中国文化课老师很好,但是我不太喜欢我们学习的课本: "中国人的故事"。这本课本里面有十六个课, 这个学期我们学习了第九到第十五。每一个课有一个中国人的生活, 工作, 爱好等等的故事, 每一课都有大概八十个新词语。我喜欢这样的故事因为是普通的中国人的生活故事, 比如第一课是一个出租车司机的故事。这个故事介绍他和他的生活故事, 为什么成为了司机。学了以后, 我对出租车司机的生活很感兴趣,现在乘出租车的时候想跟司机聊天,问他们为什么是司机等等。总是有很多有意思的回答……但是课本也有很多不太有意思的课, 有一些讨论衣服的, 也有一些运动的。我觉得这样的课不太好。我觉得有多一点多样性的话, 那就好了。
>
> I think the teacher of our Chinese culture module is very good, but I don't like the textbook that we learn very much: *Stories of the Chinese*. This textbook has 16 lessons, and this semester we've learned from Lesson 9 to Lesson 15. Every lesson has a story about a Chinese person's life, work, hobbies, etc., and every lesson has around 80 new words. I like this kind of stories because they are the life stories of ordinary Chinese people. For example, the first lesson is a story about a taxi driver, which introduces him and his life and why he became a driver. After learning it, I became very

> interested in the life of taxi drivers. Now when I take taxi, I want to chat with the drivers and ask them why they became drivers, so on and so forth. There are always many interesting answers … But the textbook also has many lessons that are not very interesting. Some talk about clothes, some about sports. I think such lessons are not very good. I think it would be good if it can have more diversity.

Like Katie, several students reported their dislike of their "culture textbooks," which seem to focus mainly on surface knowledge such as customs and habits, without clearly stated teaching goals.

What the participants tended to like about such "culture modules," however, were the supplementary materials compiled by their culture tutors and in-class exercises, such as giving a presentation on traditional Chinese festivals compared to those in their home country (e.g., David, Katie, Robin, Richard, and William). Robin, for example, expressed the "epiphany (顿悟)" he experienced when his cultural tutor in China talked about national festivals and holidays during the lesson on Christmas Day. Before that lesson, he and his CFL classmates had been complaining to each other about why they had lessons on this holiday: "我的老师说中国圣诞节不放假, 和在西方国家中国春节也不放假是一样的, 两个节日在各自国家都很重要, 我们要学会真正的理解彼此。 (My teacher said that in China, Christmas is not a national holiday. Similarly, Chinese New Year is not a national holiday in Western countries. Both festivals are very important in their respective countries. We need to learn to truly understand each other)." Teaching like this did indeed help the participants to develop their intercultural understanding.

However, the supplementary teaching was not without problems. David, for instance, felt that his tutor of Chinese culture provided useful supplementary information in class.

> 我认为学习汉语要先理解中国历史和文化渊源才会了解现代中国的社会和中国人的思想。比如说: 外国人把中国人等同于大声, 但是为什么中国人一般说话很大声呢? 老师教我们, 那要从古代历史说起。中国一直以来是个农业国家, 所以在耕田的时候想让一个人听到你的话一定要大声喊出来。在北京说话最大声的是劳动者, 从他们农村来到大城市工作, 我能理解到他们粗手粗脚和大声地说话。所以这节课值得所有学汉语的人去先理解。

> I think in order to learn Chinese language, we first need to understand Chinese history and cultural origins. Then we can understand modern Chinese society and Chinese people's thoughts. For example, foreigners equated Chinese people with loudness, but why do Chinese people always speak so loudly? The teacher taught us that this had to be traced back to ancient history. China has been an agricultural country, so whilst working in the farm fields, one must shout loudly if he wants to let the other person hear him. In Beijing, those who speak the most loudly are migrant workers. They came from the countryside to work in big cities. I can understand why they talk so loudly. So all CFL leaners should learn this lesson to understand it first.

Although David appreciated the information provided by his tutor, the material presented actually served to justify David's "cultural" assumptions about Chinese people speaking loudly in public. The extract itself is clearly loaded with prejudice and judgement. The tutor attributed the phenomenon to the practical needs of peasants working on farm fields, implying a prejudice against the bad manners of migrant workers. It seems the tutor did nothing to stem the student's assumptions and cultural overgeneralizations (Bennett, 2009; Byram, Nicolas, & Stevens, 2001; Deardorff, 2006) or to encourage the student to understand the depth and nuance of culture (Shaules, 2010). In fact, the tutor hindered the development of the student's critical analysis skills, which are a key component of intercultural competence (e.g., Byram et al., 2001). The teaching materials and culture module tutor discussed above seem to underpin and be underpinned by an uncritical use of the concept of culture; this is a serious problem and requires an urgent resolution.

Now let us shift the focus to the participants' perceptions of *who can teach culture*. Take Jessica, for example. In her year abroad reflection, Jessica expressed her conviction that only a national of a country can teach that country's culture. During her year abroad in China, she worked as an English language assistant in a secondary school in a small town. Although it was a small town, there were over 1000 students and around 90 teachers all together. Her main responsibilities were assisting local English teachers in class and "teaching lessons about Britain and English culture because Chinese teachers of English

cannot teach this topic" (我教课关于英国和英国文化, 因为中国的英文老师不可以教这个课题). Furthermore, she states, "I can teach it because I'm British and I know about this topic (我可以教这个课题因为我是英国人和我知道关于这个课题)." This narrative illustrates a prevalent belief that emerged from the data, that is, only a *native* teacher can teach a particular culture and possess "correct" cultural knowledge.

On the whole, the CFL learners tended to perceive knowledge about culture acquired through classroom teaching as "correct" cultural knowledge, preventing a critical and broader understanding of the concept of culture and Chinese culture in particular. The findings support prior research on the teaching of Japanese culture to learners of Japanese as a foreign language in the United States, which indicated that learners' knowledge about culture is "viewed in terms of a binary opposition, 'correct versus incorrect'" (Kubota, 2003, pp. 70–71), revealing the "cultural correctness" expectations of foreign language learners and educators.

Intercultural Learning Beyond the Classroom

The third main aspect of the participants' cultural discourses focused on intercultural learning beyond the classroom walls. It is worth noting here that although the students' close examination of their own culture was not salient in the data, apart from passing mentions in cultural comparisons such as William's example discussed later in this section, interculturality generally refers to the process of looking at one's own personal experiences with an understanding of intercultural encounters, which can potentially lead to new insights about how one lives and sees the world.

For instance, during her study placement in Shanghai, Lucy went to visit a local temple with fellow CFL students from her host institution. As she described it, "That day was the first time that we saw a Buddhist temple. The monks in the temple introduced us to some Buddhist knowledge. I think this experience helped us to better understand Chinese culture (那天都是我们第一次看佛教徒的寺庙。里面的僧人介绍了与佛教有关的知识。我认为这个经验帮助我们更了解中国的文化)." Intercultural encounters outside of classroom walls, such as this one, proved to be valuable windows into Chinese culture.

In some instances, the participants' reflections demonstrated an improved understanding of the ideas behind language learning and intercultural communication. For example, after an experience in a local market, Chris shared, "Now I have a better understanding of what intercultural communication really means. (现在我更加了解跨文化交际是什么意思了)."

> 我来北京留学快一年了。中文有了很大的进步。例如，我第一次看到可以买活的鸡，但是那时候虽然觉得活的鸡很新鲜，但是我却不知道买了之后他们会帮我杀了它并去掉羽毛。所以我还是希望买到一个回家可以直接吃的鸡。所以我直接走上去问老板，请给我一只没有穿衣服的鸡，谢谢。当时老板看着我，然后大声得笑。最后我才知道，不穿衣服的鸡叫做白条鸡。……跨文化交际不要求完全知道中国文化知识和母语水平中文，但是要求你交际成功。
>
> I have been in Beijing as a study abroad student for almost a year now. I've made huge progress in my Chinese language. For example, I saw for the very first time that one can buy a live chicken, and though [I] understood that live chickens are very fresh, I didn't know they would help me to kill the chicken and remove its feathers after I bought it; I hoped to buy a chicken that could be cooked as soon as I got home, so I went right to the boss and said, "Please give me a chicken without any clothes on. Thanks." At that moment, the boss looked at me and laughed loudly. In the end, I learned that a chicken without any clothes on is called *baitiaoji* [a fresh, whole chicken with its feathers removed]… Intercultural communication doesn't require a complete knowledge of Chinese culture and native-speaker-level Chinese, but it requires you to communicate successfully.

This is a cheerful anecdote, but it also brought home for the student what language learners should strive for and what intercultural communication is all about. The model for language learning is the fluent L2 user, not a native speaker (Cook, 1999). Intercultural communication is not about knowing everything about the other culture and "striving after the unattainable ideal" of becoming a "native speaker" (Byram, 1989, p. 17). Rather, it is about communicating across cultures effectively.

However, the tendency to make sweeping conclusions about culture was evident in the participants' cultural comparisons beyond the classroom walls. For example, during his New Year break, William travelled to southern China and stayed with a friend's family, where he had an interesting experience with his friend's Chinese parents.

接着下一站旅程是长沙——湖南的省会。我的一个长沙朋友接待了我们去她家玩儿，她的妈妈出奇地友善和热情，并和我们成为了好朋友。她亲手为我们做了一桌丰盛的美味佳肴，还坚持邀请我们住下，另我惊讶的是，她的妈妈竟然为我们盖好被子，对待我们就像自己的亲生孩子一样，然而英国的家长从孩子长大之后就不会再这样做了。虽然只是一个简单的小举动，但却成为了我21年以来的一次不寻常并且难以忘记的经历。

The next stop was Changsha, the capital of Hunan Province. One of my friends took us to her home in Changsha. Her mom was extraordinarily friendly and warm and became our good friend. She made a table of delicious dishes and insisted that we stay. In addition, something that surprised me was that her mom even tucked us into bed, treating us like her own children. British parents don't do that anymore once their kids have grown up. Although this was a simple act, it is one of the more unusual and unforgettable experiences of my 21 years of life.

In this excerpt, William described a direct experience of "cultural difference." In his view, the Chinese mother differs from "British parents" who "do not tuck in their children once they have grown up." The group that is essentialized here is British parents; William globalized his personal experience of parental care in the UK to all British parents. In order to prevent students from overgeneralizing, we need to advocate "teaching methods and techniques that de-emphasize 'norms'" and draw students' attention to diversity and change within culture (Zhu, 2014, p. 7). Equally, if not more importantly, the data collected in this study reveals the need to *draw students' attention to their own and others' discursive construction of culture*. I further address this point in the discussion below. Nevertheless, this episode illustrates how William made a discovery through one intercultural encounter.

According to the data, students also made intercultural discoveries following a series of related encounters. For example, Laura discovered a need to be insistent in China based on two major problems she encountered.

自从来到上海我的经验很顺利，不过遇到两个问题。其一，我不高兴我们的 Wi-Fi 非常慢……我在前台抱怨，这是第一次用更高级的汉语。接待员反复说"没办法"，这个很泄气……我们直到前台还钱每天抱怨。我发现有时中国人不好对付， 如果我想我必须很一贯，不然他们说"没办法"。其二是关于孔子学院奖学金。注册的时候领导告诉我们每月第二个星期一收到钱。9月我们按时收到现金，

但是10月他们告诉我们必须开中国账户，为了我们不要再排队等我们的现金。这个主意很好, 不过有一个问题,因为他们说我们在10月25号才能收到钱。因此,很多人非常生气, 因为他们不道歉。我跟我的朋友决定去办公室用跟流畅的汉语提意见。在办公室他们说"没办法"，但是我们就是需要答案。终于……他们说如果你没有钱，他们就提前给我们一半现金。因此，我们帮很多奖学金学生收到钱。所以我觉得有时候必须"狠"一点，不然中国人不提供答案。我觉这是我收获到的最有用的知识。虽然我在英国学习关于中国文化和礼节, 但是自己遇到问题并解决是学习中国文化最好的方式。

Since my arrival in Shanghai, my experience has been very smooth, but I've encountered two problems. First, I was not happy that our Wi-Fi speed was very slow…I complained to the front desk. This was the first time that I used more advanced Chinese. The receptionist repeatedly said, "Nothing can be done," which was frustrating…I complained again every day until the front desk refunded the money. I've found that sometimes Chinese people are hard to deal with. If I want [something], I must be insistent; otherwise, they will just say, "Nothing can be done." The second problem was related to Confucius Institute Scholarships. When we registered, [the university] leaders told us we would receive the money [living stipend] on the second Monday of every month. In September, we received the cash on time, but in October, they told us we must open a Chinese bank account to avoid queueing to collect [the monthly payment] in cash. This was a very good idea, but there was a problem because they said we could not receive our money until October 25th. So many people were very annoyed because they didn't apologize. My friend and I decided to go to the office to make a complaint in fluent Chinese. In the office, they said, "Nothing can be done," but we insisted that we needed an answer. Finally, they said that if we didn't have money, they could advance us half of the amount in cash. Therefore, we helped many scholarship students get their money. So I think sometimes [I] need to be a little bit more "harsh;" otherwise, Chinese people won't give an answer. I think this is the most useful knowledge I have acquired. Although I've learned about Chinese culture and etiquette in the UK, encountering problems myself and solving them by myself has been the best way to learn Chinese culture.

In the excerpt above, Laura vividly depicts her intercultural learning experience, that is, how she has learned to be tough in order to get what she wants and how her sense-making was built on a myriad of encounters. Her experience clearly shows the accumulative process of intercultural learning.

Additionally, the affective aspects of study abroad experiences, which have been relatively less researched in the literature, can have a lasting impact on intercultural learning. For example, many participants showed tolerance to behaviours and phenomena they could not understand and attributed this acceptance, either explicitly or implicitly, to their curiosity and love of China and Chinese culture (e.g., Stephanie, Hannah, Michael, Harry, Richard, and David). On the other hand, some participants admitted that their negative experiences also had a negative impact on their intercultural learning. For example, Lucy studied Mandarin for more than eight years in England but had never been to China before her year abroad. She was very excited, but when she arrived in Shanghai, she had a very bad experience finding a hotel (e.g., She tried multiple hotels. None of them had English-speaking staff that evening, and her hotel room was expensive and of a poor quality); she noted that this was her first important experience in China. She later confessed that even though she enjoyed her time abroad and got to know many very good Chinese friends, "I think my experience upon my arrival in Shanghai has had a very big impact on my relevant views of China (我认为抵达上海的经验对我中国有关的看法有很大的影响)." This illustrates the significance of attending to the affective aspects of study abroad experiences, which may have a lasting impact on the cognitive aspects of intercultural understanding.

Discussion and Conclusion

As seen from the examples above, while the participants widely used the word "culture" in their reflections, and while their cultural discourses have shown their development of intercultural understanding, their conceptions of culture were not without problems. First, the students and teachers tended to view cultural knowledge in binary opposition: correct versus incorrect. They seemed to hold expectations about cultural correctness, which prevented a broader and dynamic understanding of culture (Kubota, 2003). Second, the "cultural" emphasis in the participants' interpretations of their intercultural encounters and cultural comparisons contain some essentialist views of culture.

Regarding the teaching of culture, in a book-length review of CFL culture teaching research, Li (2006) identified the inadequacy of existing

CFL culture teaching; the topics covered by culture teaching materials are very diverse and wide-ranging yet are not systematic or coherent, and the goals of teaching culture are not very clear (pp. 413–415). Furthermore, the tutors lack consistent training (Li, 2006, pp. 345–349). The students' experiences seem to support Li's observations to a large extent.

The question then arises: How can the problems noted above be solved? Fostering a more critical use of the concept of culture is crucial. Recent theorizing on interculturality may offer some insights into possible solutions. For example, Zhu (2014) proposes an intercultural approach to teaching which de-emphasizes norms and draws students' attention to heterogeneity and dynamism within culture. It is, therefore, important to caution against the widespread uncritical use of the notion of culture, not only among students but also among *educators*. It would be beneficial to incorporate this into the teaching goals of culture modules.

Both learners and teachers should be guided to shift away from regarding culture as a blanket explanation for almost everything to examining what people do with it (Sarangi, 1994) and how it is used in discourse to explain and justify people's actions and thoughts (Dervin, 2012). In doing so, critical language awareness (Fairclough, 1992) can be raised, contributing to the move beyond the "culturalist impasse" (Dervin, 2009) towards interculturality (Dervin, 2012; Zhu, 2014). I argue that such a shift entails promoting a *descriptive* rather than prescriptive understanding of culture, the *dynamic* and *diverse* rather than static and monolithic nature of culture, and the *discursive* (Dervin, 2016; Kubota, 2003; Sarangi, 1994) rather than material construction of culture.

Additionally, rethinking culture both as an analytic concept and an object of analysis also involves an understanding of its affective aspects. Because perspectives and interpretations of culture are subjective in nature, affective aspects should never be neglected. While it is almost impossible to be emotionless when encountering difficulties abroad, he or she may mitigate the impact of affect on his or her perception of culture by consciously taking a more tolerant and open-minded attitude (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002). Although Lucy realized the problem in the final excerpt above, she did not intentionally regulate her negative attitudes, admitting that her first bad experience upon arrival in Shanghai affected her views of Chinese culture in the longer term.

This chapter has examined CFL learners' use of discourses of culture in their study abroad reflections. Three main aspects of these discourses arose in the data collected: the learners' identity paradox, including their use of selective association and disassociation, the teaching of culture in a classroom setting, and intercultural learning beyond the classroom. This study has explored shared problems in the use of discourses of culture and provides possible solutions by drawing inspiration from recent theorizing on interculturality. A critical analysis of the use of culture is vital to shift from culturalism to interculturality in foreign language education. Discussing multiplicity within culture and the changing and constructed nature of culture can show how culture is perceived and constructed in a variety of ways and contribute to the development of a more sophisticated intercultural understanding in this increasingly complex world.

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5

(Re-)Conceptualising and Teaching 'Culture' in a Short-Term Stay Abroad Programme in China: Students from a Danish University Abroad

Niels Erik Lyngdorf and Xiangyun Du

Introduction

Within the field of education, internationalisation is commonly understood as a direct response to globalisation. At a student learning level, a key question has been how educational institutions can prepare students to understand and navigate a global world (Deardorff & Jones, 2012). The development of students' foreign language proficiency and intercultural competence has emerged as the answer to this question, and in the current sociocultural learning paradigm, studying language and cultures in situ, most often meaning abroad, is considered as a natural part of this

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F. Dervin et al. (eds.), *International Students in China*, Palgrave Studies on Chinese Education in a Global Perspective, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78120-4_5

process. Consequently, studying abroad has become an increasingly central part of internationalisation strategies. This is also true in Denmark, where the Ministry of Education intends to improve 'international competences'[1] through an increase in short-term studies abroad (STSA). Specific aims have been defined for institutions of higher education, for example, reaching a level of student mobility in which 50% of all graduates in the year 2020 will have experienced either a stay or an internship abroad lasting a minimum of 14 days during their education (Danish Government, 2013). This is a passive response to the aims of developing intercultural competence, which seems to assume that the act of staying abroad will itself spontaneously lead to the development of intercultural competences. However, the outcome of stays abroad in general remains up for debate, and more research on this is needed (Byram & Dervin, 2008; Coleman, 2013; Deardorff, 2009, Dervin, 2009; Jackson, 2016). While the connection between studying abroad and higher language proficiency seems to be relatively well established, the outcome in relation to the development of intercultural competence is less certain. Kumaravadivelu (2008, p. 23) points out that it has been assumed that cultural understanding is developed as a by-product of language learning, but such an assumption lacks empirical support. For instance, Dervin (2009) notes that people who travel often and spend extensive time abroad are not necessarily more open-minded than others. Some quantitative studies of short-term stays abroad point to a correlation between students' level of intercultural competence and time spent abroad. However, these studies show general inconsistencies and rarely explain what experiences or activities during the stay abroad led to the development of intercultural competence (Coleman, 2013). Furthermore, the underlying conceptualisation of culture for measuring intercultural competences is often too static (Härkönen & Dervin, 2015). Thus, it is challenging to identify effective learning processes and to design and facilitate the kind of learning that directly corresponds and relates to the ultimate goal of developing intercultural competence. According to Byram (2014, 216–217), there is a lack of knowledge among teachers and designers (practitioners) of how to implement

[1] The term *international competences* is not precisely defined in the report but is repeatedly used in connection to skills related to navigating international environments and does not substantially differ from the more commonly used concept of intercultural competence, which will be used in the rest of the chapter.

development of intercultural competence in teaching. Considering that the Chinese educational system has shown interest in internationalisation relatively late, this problem is probably just as prevalent in China as in Europe. However, micro-level qualitative studies of teaching practice and design in relation to teaching culture in the context of short-term study abroad in China are relatively few.

A closer analysis of the planned learning activities in a study abroad programme and students' experiences may give a more detailed picture of the use and outcome of the different concepts of learning applied in relation to learning about culture and developing intercultural competences.

First, how practitioners (teachers and programme designers) conceptualise and facilitate learning about 'culture' and how students from a Danish university make sense of culture through their learning experiences will be examined. Secondly, how these experiences either help students or create barriers to them reaching their ultimate goal of developing international/intercultural competence will also be explored.

Literature Review: Use and Definition of Concepts

In reviewing the research which informs this study, we first discuss the different conceptualisations of the concepts of culture and intercultural competence and how they are connected. Next, this will be related to learning concepts that are identified in this study.

The Interconnected Concepts of Culture and Intercultural Competence

Learning designs must be assessed in relation to their specific learning goal. In this case, the goal is learning about culture and intercultural competence. First, it is necessary to define these concepts. Two distinct understandings are dominant, upon which learning designs can be based. Researchers have described them slightly differently, using different terminology. In this chapter, we use the terms *descriptive* and *complex*

culture from the Danish researcher Iben Jensen (2007). In short, the descriptive concept of culture reflects a more traditional understanding, in which culture is a well-defined entity that is confined to a nation's borders; is stable and changes slowly; and explains why people act as they do and moulds entire populations to share the same values, ideas, rules and norms. In the complex concept of culture, culture is created between individuals, is dynamic and always changing, is shared between some but not all individuals in a society, and finally, cannot be limited to entities, which also means that the significance of culture can never be predicted (Jensen, 2007). Most culture theories do not pertain fully to one or the other understanding and sometimes even include elements from both. Therefore, it could be more useful to understand the two terms to form a fluid continuum, where culture theories can be described as being more or less descriptive or complex.

Intercultural competence is understood differently depending on whether it is based on the former or the latter concept of culture. The general definition of 'competence' puts emphasis on the ability to cope with new and unknown situations based on what one has previously learned (Illeris, 2014). If culture is fixed and easily delimited, intercultural competence would similarly include fixed knowledge about national cultures that could be used to predict an individual's behaviour. Conversely, intercultural competence based on a complex concept of culture focuses on personal analytical skills, since the use and meaning of culture can never be predicted.

More recent research has found that descriptive understandings often dominate syllabi 'by narrowing the perspective towards factual knowledge' (Byram, 2014, p. 221), and researchers' and students' discourses in stays abroad resulting in stereotyping and simplistic learning about 'others' (Dervin, 2009, 2011). To avoid, or reduce, this, the educational goal of studying abroad should be to move students from descriptive to more complex understandings of culture. This general movement towards a more complex understanding of culture as a key in developing and assessing intercultural competence was commented on by Fantini (2009, p. 464) who noted a rise in qualitative strategies. Many contemporary understandings of intercultural competence base on, or emphasise the importance of, a reconceptualisation of culture for the learner to

a more complex understanding. See, for example, Byram's model of the intercultural speaker (Byram, 2009), Dervin's suggestion of proteophilic competences (Dervin, 2009), Holliday's book on intercultural communication (Holliday, 2013) and Jensen's own model suggests having a complex point of departure for intercultural communication (Jensen, 2007). Thus, a very important step in all of these suggestions involves a reconceptualisation of culture for the learner from a descriptive to a more complex understanding, which will be the main focus of the analysis in this study.

In practice, this means that we use this broad understanding of intercultural competences and analyse whether an experience has created a move from a descriptive to a more complex or a complex to a more descriptive understanding of culture as a general indication of development of intercultural competences.

Approaches to Intercultural Learning

Earlier studies in the field has mainly conceptualised study abroad as an entirely experiential learning space which has led to a better understanding of the study abroad experience and outcome as a whole (Hopkins, 1999; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; Passarelli & Kolb, 2012). However, at a micro-level, a stay abroad is based on several learning concepts. Stays abroad include various learning spaces—for example, formal and informal (Byram & Feng, 2006)—and activities informed by different eras, traditions and concepts of learning and culture. In the following section, we will present three main concepts of learning identified in the STSA studied in this chapter, which are also commonly used in STSAs overall. These will be explored more thoroughly in relation to culture throughout the analysis.

First, in a very general sense, stays abroad are based on an understanding that learning comes through experience and practice. Instead of reading about cultures and intercultural meetings in a classroom disconnected from the normal contexts of these phenomena, it is understood that a stay abroad offers experience and practice in situ. This is what distinguishes a stay abroad from in-class learning, and this approach is based

on constructivist concepts of learning, such as Dewey's (1938), in which learning content is closely connected to real daily life contexts, and students learn through meaningful experience and practice. As a continuation of Dewey's thoughts, Kolb (1984) coined the concept of experiential learning theory (ELT), in which he emphasised the importance of reflecting on experiences. Experiences do not themselves lead to learning, but it is experiences and the subsequent reflection and reconceptualisation process that lead to learning. As such, the learner must be able to reflect on the experience, possess and use analytical skills to conceptualise the experience and possess decision-making and problem-solving skills in order to use the new ideas gained from the experience (Kolb, 1984). Because culture is an abstract and idealising notion that does not exist by itself, a person's experience of culture is related to his or her conceptualisation of it (Holliday, 2010). As such, it will be of interest to identify experiences that the students themselves categorise as cultural and to analyse their subsequent reflections to see whether or not their experiences have led to learning or reconceptualisation. As in other short-term stays abroad, a student logbook was given to the students by the authors to provide a reflection tool in which they could record their reflections. From a learning perspective, a logbook is based on an understanding of learning as a process of experience followed by reflection, as in Kolb's model (Ellmin, 1999; Lund, 2008). However, there are different types of reflection ranging from descriptions and comparisons to interpretation, justification, evaluation and critical discussion (Cowan, 2014). In relation to reflecting on learning experiences about culture and intercultural competences, the latter type is important, as it will typically lead to a more complex understanding of culture.

Second, there is a significant element of sociocultural learning in stays abroad. Dewey's understanding of learning includes a social dimension, but learning theorists like Lev Vygotsky and Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger build on this and develop a more complete social dimension. For them, learning takes place through participation and interaction in activities with others, through which people are socialised and become members of cultures (Vygotsky, 1987) or communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In this line of thought, it is the creation and sharing of knowledge between individuals and

groups that is important. Furthermore, it is stressed that learners are not passive receivers of information but co-creators of their own learning (Wenger, 1998). Most often, this type of learning is related to learning activities outside the formal curriculum and traditional classroom teaching activities, where the social interaction and practising aspects are important.

Finally, traditional classroom teaching remains a significant part of many STSAs' learning design, including the one studied in this chapter. Classroom teaching can be inspired and carried out based on different understandings of learning, but in this case, it is manifested most often in the form of the transmission of static ready knowledge in a teacher-centred approach. This kind of teaching builds on an understanding that learning is primarily a cognitive affair, taking place in a more or less decontextualised context in which the teacher is considered all-knowing (Illeris, 2012, p. 67). This also means that the teacher's job is, first and foremost, to transmit static and factual knowledge to students.

Stays abroad do not rely on just one concept of learning. In fact, in most cases, a single learning activity draws on and includes ideas from several different learning concepts. However, most activities are inspired by one concept more than others. In this chapter, we will draw on the different types of learning found in the programme through our own observations and the logbooks in order to understand the interplay between learning design and students' experiences of culture.

Studying Contexts and Learning Processes

The Context

This study explores STSAs of three different groups, comprising a total of 70 students (mainly Danish), at a Chinese university in Beijing from 2012 to 2014. After a pilot project in 2011, the 2012 STSA was the first of three that were carried out. Every year a group varying in size from 20 to 25 students obtained scholarships from Hanban, the Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, to enrol in the STSA. The only requirements were that the applicant at the time of application

was enrolled at the Danish partner university, had received at least 40 hours of Chinese language teaching at the local Confucius Institute and was between 16 and 30 years old. Students from all study programmes could apply and participate as long as these requirements were met. The duration of the STSA in 2012 was four weeks, while it was only two weeks in 2013 and 2014. The students lived and studied on the university campus during their stay. The schedule from the 2014 STSA is presented in Table 5.1.

Although the programme varied in length, the content across the years was very similar. The main difference was the number of language teaching hours and the inclusion of a trip to Xi'an in Shaanxi province in 2014. On a normal weekday, the students would take Chinese language

Table 5.1 Schedule

Date	Activities
June 29 (Sun)	Arrive in Beijing, check-in, campus tour
June 30 (Mon)	Opening ceremony, placement test, Chinese language class Lecture: An introduction to Chinese culture
July 1 (Tue)	Chinese language class Cultural class: Traditional Chinese painting
July 2 (Wed)	Chinese language class Cultural class: Shadowboxing (Tai chi) Acrobatics performance
July 3 (Thurs)	Chinese language class Communication with students from BNU
July 4 (Fri)	Chinese language class Cultural class: Shadowboxing (Tai chi)
July 5 (Sat)	Visit to Great Wall, Bird's Nest, Water Cube
July 6 (Sun)	Visit to Tiananmen Square, Forbidden City
July 7 (Mon)	Chinese language class Visit to Confucius Institute Headquarters/Hanban Beijing opera
July 8 (Tue)	Chinese language class Tour of Beijing Hutong and Siheyuan
July 9 (Wed)	From Beijing to Xi'an, visit to Shaanxi Museum
July 10 (Thurs)	Visit to Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum Performance: 'A Poem of Tang Dynasty: To pay tribute to a time of peace and prosperity with music and dancing'
July 11 (Fri)	Visit Small Wild Goose Pagoda and ancient city wall of Xi'an; Travel back to Beijing
July 12 (Sat)	Departure from Beijing

courses from 8.00 am to 12.00 pm and then have a lunch break. In the afternoon, they took culture classes or participated in cultural activities. There were also cultural activities some evenings during the week, while longer daytrips were reserved for the weekends.

Methods

Studies of students abroad have often relied on interviews taking place after the stay abroad and often from the host perspective, observing the guest/'other' in the foreign environment, explaining 'their' behaviour solely from a cultural perspective. Examples of this approach can often be found in the literature on Chinese students abroad. However, this method of exclusively studying and describing one part of an encounter in purely cultural terms and relying solely and uncritically on interviews has shown its perils by unintendedly contributing to culturalist discourses that are simplistic and reductionist (Dervin, 2011; Holliday, 2010). While we focus on the Danish students' experiences abroad, our goal is not to give them or the Chinese people they met a cultural description. Instead, we take a socio-constructivist approach to shift the focus to the context and creation of learning during intercultural encounters. For this, we study contexts and participants, Danish *and* Chinese, in relation to how the students experienced their time abroad.

The Data

Data was collected using participant observation, student logbooks and interviews with programme coordinators. We experienced and observed first-hand what the students experienced by having one of the authors of this study participate in the study abroad programme each year. In agreement with the students and the Chinese university, the author participated in planned activities and was also often invited to join in activities organised by the students themselves outside of the official programme. A key to good participation observation data is the natural legitimacy of the observer (Wadel, 1991). In our case, the author collecting data had two roles in relationship to the students: first as a representative,

co-organiser and contact person from the home university/Confucius Institute and second as a researcher. These roles legitimatised the presence of the researcher in all situations and meant that he could be a natural part of the activities. This intense and time-consuming approach was deemed necessary in order to avoid the above-mentioned perils, to look past research participants' immediate statements that should not always be taken as fact and to identify the discourses that lie behind them (Dervin, 2011; Holliday, 2013).

The second part of the data was collected using student logbooks. The logbook is a reflection tool that allows the students to note and reflect upon interesting, puzzling, irritating or otherwise significant events that they experience (Whalley, 1997). At the end of every week, the students were asked to revisit the experiences they had written about earlier. This was a voluntary exercise, but most students chose to participate. The richness of descriptions and reflections in the logbooks differed from student to student. In a recent study, Moloney and Xu (2015) examined to what extent a teaching intervention facilitated development of intercultural competences in students, as evidenced in student reflective writing and in focus group interview. In this case, the researchers themselves were responsible for the intervention, involving training of reflexive thinking among others, which supported a development of intercultural competence. Similarly, this study makes use of student logbooks to gain insight in student's learning processes in relation to specific learning experiences. However, the context of this study is different, as the activities studied are part of a study abroad programme. Furthermore, we try not to intervene in the existing teaching design as this is partly the object of our study. Consequently, we do not use the student logbooks as a learning tool per se, but rather a journal that can reflect student experiences and reflections.

Finally, semi-structured interviews with two programme coordinators, Coordinators A and B, were conducted to understand participants' experiences, thoughts and feelings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) by providing opportunities for them to express their understanding of the STSA and to explain their choices of the different activities in the programme. The interviews lasted for around half an hour each and were audio recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

An integrated approach was employed to analyse the multiple sources of data. Student logbooks, observation notes and the interview transcripts were coded. Then a theory-driven approach was employed to relate the data to the framework of programme design to guide the analysis. A content analysis technique (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) was used to identify patterns and categorise meanings in their context (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and to provide an abridged portrayal of the phenomenon (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Finally, we integrated the thematic analysis and framework to ensure they match the aims of the study. In the analysis process, the authors firstly read the texts a number of times individually to identify patterns and then discussed and revised collaboratively through several rounds of comparing and merging multiple sources of data.

In the following analysis, we begin with the STSA programme and the experiences described by the students in their logbooks but also draw on the different sources of data mentioned above in order to gain a more nuanced and complete picture of the students' experiences.

Analysis and Findings of Teaching Design and Student Experiences

The basis of the analysis is learning experiences from the programme activities and interviews with the programme coordinators from the Chinese university. These will be analysed from a learning and culture theory perspective. The first part of the analysis will concentrate on the learning design of the STSA programme and will mainly be based on interviews and observations. Then, observations from the STSA programmes and analysis of student logbooks will shed light on how the students experienced the learning activities and if their experiences helped them to develop their understanding of the concept of culture and intercultural competence in general.

The Programme

Identifying Underlying Understandings of Learning and Culture

In interviews with both STSA programme coordinators, both confirmed that learning about culture was a main goal of the programmes. Coordinator A even considered it more important than the language component, as expressed in the following: 'I think it is a very good opportunity to them to have a deeper understanding about Chinese culture. Of course, language is a part of it, but more important is Culture.' Coordinator B described experiencing China and Chinese life as equally important to the language component. As designers of the programme, they were responsible for planning how to include instruction about culture in the programme. When asked how they had chosen to do this, they emphasised the inclusion of culture classes and performances, excursions to historical and cultural sites and free time for the students to go out and explore on their own, as spaces for the students to learn about culture. For example, Coordinator A expressed: 'We, like, Chinese painting, martial arts, these classes, because we think they are culture heritage of China, so we want students to know about it. We also offer them opportunities to go sightseeing, like visiting the Great Wall or grand palaces. These can be seen as symbols of China.' Below, we will analyse the learning design and content of these activities to identify the underlying understandings of learning and culture.

Teaching Methods in Relation to Culture

As seen in Table 5.1, the afternoon culture classes were mainly centred on a variety of Chinese arts. Typically, the teacher started the class with a short presentation of the particular art and its Chinese origin, followed by a hands-on experience. For example, in the Chinese painting class, the teacher first presented the historical background and basic components, including the tools and materials used, after which the students received brushes and paper. They were then instructed to follow the teacher stroke

by stroke to paint a picture of, for example, bamboo, a panda or other objects that can be considered specifically Chinese. This teaching pattern was typical for all the culture classes.

There was also a lecture titled 'Introduction to Chinese culture', which was in fact an introduction to Chinese history. After a short introduction to Confucianism and Daoism, the students were taken through all the dynasties, from the first up to the end of the last dynasty, complemented by a Tang dynasty musical interlude, performed by the teacher on a Chinese zither, a traditional Chinese musical instrument.

The day trips included excursions to different, mainly historical, scenic spots and performances of Chinese arts. These were conducted in a rather touristy fashion by local tour guides. Normally, they used the transportation time to present the scenic spots or art while standing at the front of the bus speaking into a microphone, without allowing the students to interact or ask questions. Depending on the specific destination, after arriving, the students either went directly to watch the performance or had a certain amount of time to explore the scenic spot on their own before the excursion continued to the next scenic spot/performance or back to the university campus.

The programme also included a meeting with students from the host university. The meeting was arranged by the programme coordinators, but the actual facilitation was left to the students themselves, and in practice, the Chinese students had prepared some activities and topics for discussion. After the initial formal presentation, the students were divided into mixed groups, with one Chinese student for every four to five students from the Danish university. After going through the prepared topics, some of the students discussed different topics about everyday life, politics, travelling and more. It was an open opportunity for both sides to satisfy their curiosity.

In Table 5.2 below, each activity has been analysed and categorised according to the underlying understanding of the concepts of learning and culture.

From Table 5.2 it can be seen that there was an overwhelming weight placed on presenting culture as something 'pure': something that originated from ancient time that was static, homogeneous and national. 'High culture', in the form of different kinds of art, also made up a considerable part

Table 5.2 Understandings of learning and culture in programme activities

Underlying concepts of learning and culture	Social learning	Experiential learning	Cognitive learning (transmission of knowledge)
Descriptive		Calligraphy Tai chi Chinese painting Performances: Chinese acrobatics, Peking opera, tea culture in China Excursions: The Great Wall, The Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, Olympic Park, Tour of Beijing hutongs, Xi'an	Calligraphy Tai chi Chinese painting Tea ceremony Introduction to Chinese culture Language classes
Complex	Meeting with local students		

of the schedule and was most often presented as representing something particularly Chinese. This choice of cultural representation is very much in line with a descriptive understanding of culture and was especially present in the traditional teacher-centred, classroom-based teaching, characterised by an understanding of learning as a process of transmitting static knowledge, which was the preferred teaching method together with a kind of experiential learning. In the classroom, teaching was very focused on presenting static, factual-like knowledge, rather than on developing competences like analytical skills. From a learning point of view, this is related to the teacher-centred style, in which the teacher has traditionally been considered an all-knowing source of 'true' knowledge. This understanding of knowledge is also consistent with the descriptive understanding of culture. If culture is believed to be something fixed, and therefore easily defined and delimited, then it makes sense to teach in a lecture-based way, thus transmitting static knowledge to the students (Du, Kirkebæk & Aarup, 2013). However, in teaching and representing culture only in the form of static knowledge, there are political choices to be made about how to present said culture. For example, in this case, the culture/history lecture conveniently

only covered the golden age of China but avoided the downfall in the early twentieth century and the following politically sensitive topics related to contemporary China.

This approach to education has been problematised by many a scholar. Most famously by Freire (1970), who called attention to the oppressive nature and lack of critical thinking in 'banking education', as he termed it.

In the informal learning spaces placed outside of the daily teaching schedule, we found a somewhat different approach to learning seemingly inspired by ELT. This type of learning activity included trips to historical sites as well as watching performances of Chinese arts. A hasty conclusion based on looking at this kind of activity would be to say that it is clearly based on ELT, and indeed, some elements of ELT can be found. In practice, however, the activities were still carried out based on a static understanding of culture, and the excursions in many ways served as an extension of the classroom teaching, transmitting static knowledge of Chinese high culture and ancient China. Therefore, one of the basic ideas of ELT needed to focus on developing students' processes of learning, instead of only on fixing learning outcomes such as a cognitive knowledge of facts, has not been prioritised (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012). This is particularly reflected in the framing of the excursions, since they were presented as expressions of, or facts about, Chinese national culture as a whole, giving the impression that all Chinese people shared the interests, values and ideas expressed therein. In relation to learning about culture and developing intercultural competences, this approach does not help students to reconceptualise their understanding of culture based on their experiences but instead feeds and reinforces pre-existing, stereotypical understandings of Chinese people and culture, thereby adding to a descriptive understanding of culture.

Some might argue that the experience of the learning design is itself an expression of 'Chinese culture', from which the students can learn by experiencing and reflecting on it. However, in analysing the learning activities of the programme, this aspect cannot be included, since there was no active attempt to emphasise this in the learning design, for example, through reflection tasks. However, we, the authors, as researchers, handed out reflection logbooks to the students, and from this perspective

the STSA did provide a significant element of ELT by situating the learning in meaningful real-life contexts and offering a tool for reflection. However, whether or not this aspect of learning was accessible to the students or led to a reconceptualisation of culture greatly relied on their ability to reflect critically and the weight the students put on their own experiences, which will be discussed in the following.

Student Experiences: Observations and Logbooks

As emphasised earlier, learning is not a one-way process according to constructivist understandings. Learners are not passive receivers of fixed knowledge. As complex human beings, students not only contextualise and interpret transmitted knowledge but also, more importantly, they are co-creators of their own learning. No matter the intended learning outcome, different learners rarely gain the exact same learning from the same experiences. Therefore, the rest of the analysis will be devoted to understand how the students actually experienced and learned about culture in the planned activities, regardless of the intended learning in the programme. In the logbooks, we can find descriptions of the students' experiences and reflections on culture according to their own understanding. Three main issues were used to process and categorise the students' experiences into type of activity and reflection on activity.

1. How did they experience culture in the planned activities?
   (a) Does the reflection on the activity reflect a descriptive or complex outcome?
      (i) Did students experience similar or different outcomes from similar experiences?

Through the content analysis, the data from 70 student logbooks was coded and synthesised resulting in different categories related to the experience and learning of culture emerged. The findings are presented in this synthesized format in the following section.

Planned Activities

In the planned activities, most of the students describe experiencing culture in several learning spaces and activities. The categories that emerged through analysis and for the purpose of structuring the data for analysis are as follows: culture activities and excursions, lecture on Chinese culture, meeting with Chinese students and teachers and teaching method. The student logbooks show that these are the spaces and experiences that prompted the students to reflect on culture. Below, we present the student reflections on these experiences.

Culture Activities and Excursions

In this category we have collected the students' experiences of the more touristy excursions to historical monuments and performances of Chinese arts and also their experiences of the classes in which they were taught about and performed various Chinese arts.

In the logbooks, we find that the vast majority of students described the cultural activities and excursions as 'exciting', 'fun', 'great experience' and 'interesting'. Many of the students did not reflect further on these experiences in relation to culture. Thus, a substantial portion of the students, despite the programme designers' intention, did not connect the 'cultural' experiences with learning about culture but rather assessed them as a form of recreation. A few students mentioned that they regarded most of these places and arts as important parts of Chinese culture and thought that they 'reflected' Chinese culture, and in some cases the 'Chinese psyche', and that they helped them understand Chinese culture in general. However, most of these students had a hard time describing their learning and kept to general statements about the value and importance of the performing art or place they had seen showing the descriptive nature of their reflections. A few students noted in a more critical type of reflection that they were aware that what had been presented was a specific part of Chinese culture and history and as such did not say or explain much about the everyday lives of Chinese people, but rather about the specific art or place. This set of students pointed out that the

presentation of traditional versus modern culture was disproportional and felt the programme lacked representation of modern and everyday Chinese culture. One student proposed that instead of only visiting the 'pompous surface as the official China likes to present itself', trips to art districts, a company, news stations or political parties would have offered more and different learning. Often the students who had similar reflections describe having a difficult time connecting what they had seen in these activities to the life they observed outside. This group often felt they had missed out on an opportunity or had been denied the opportunity to learn about lived modern culture and therefore had a difficult time seeing the educational value of the activities.

All in all, the students' reflections do not suggest that much, if any, learning about culture occurred as a result of the cultural activities and excursions. A few students concluded in a rather descriptive tone that these arts and places can reflect the 'Chinese psyche', while others take a more complex, analytical approach, only to conclude that they missed out on learning. This indicates that the experiences as a whole have not helped the students in reconceptualising their understanding of culture. Instead, experiences were interpreted within the students' existing frame of understanding. Most surprising, though, is that a significant number of the students did not reflect on the excursions in relation to learning about culture at all.

Lecture on Chinese Culture

There were only a few comments about this activity, and they mainly state that the lecture focused on 'ancient', 'traditional', 'historical' Chinese culture. Some students appreciated the philosophical and historical knowledge and found it useful when observing historical Chinese arts or places. Two of these students added, however, that the lecture was biased and did not help them in understanding the modern China they observed on a daily basis outside the classroom. On the other hand, a couple of students found the philosophical sayings and traditional culture 'important to fully understand' … and 'offered an insight into Chinese culture', or that they 'explain[ed] why [Chinese] people and businesses act as they do'.

Most notable, again, is how few students chose to comment on this in relation to learning about culture. The few who did comment are split in descriptive and complex understandings. From the reflections, however, it is clear that the lecture only offered a descriptive understanding of Chinese culture as a learning outcome. Some had critical reflections about this, while others commented in general terms about its utility.

Meeting with Chinese Students

The students' description of this activity ranged from 'disappointment', to 'great' and 'informative'. In this case, one portion of the students used the logbook more as a tool for evaluation rather than for reflection. They agreed that the meeting had seemed superficial and that it had been difficult to get into a deeper conversation. This was explained by shyness and the choice of less interesting topics for conversation. Other students had different experiences, which included conversations about schooling, views on education and everyday life. Some of these students kept in contact and met privately in their free time afterwards. Based on observations, it was also apparent that some groups had very lively talks, while other groups finished discussing the proposed topics in a short amount of time.

Students' reflections on the meeting show that the conversations in most cases focused on comparing national differences, which did not lead to deeper critical reflections about possible reasons. As a result, the learning outcome was also characterised by this. Several students described the hard life of a Chinese student, and it seemed that the stories of the individual Chinese students became representative of all Chinese students. It was thus concluded in the reflections that 'they' spent much more time on schooling, respected their parents' wishes, were under pressure to perform and so on. This generalisation of Chinese students at large based on a few students must be contextualised. The Chinese students participating in the meeting were a small, select group from one of China's top-tier universities, where the STSA took place. These Chinese students had volunteered to participate in this activity in the midst of their summer vacation. It is safe to say that they probably belong to a more universal, international category of 'hard-working and ambitious students' than the

very general category of ‘Chinese students’. None of the students seemed to critically reflect on the context of the meeting, but took the Chinese students as general representatives of Chinese culture. Meeting with more and different students might have added some nuances to this one-sided perception of the ‘Chinese student’.

Teachers and Teaching Methods

Up until now, the student reflections have been related directly to the content in the individual activities. However, a different kind of meta-reflection was also found in most of the logbooks. These reflections considered not only the teaching content but also the teachers and their teaching methods as expressions of culture. As such, this aspect of learning transcended the learning design of the individual activities and became a more general reflection on experiences.

Overall, the experiences of the teachers and the teaching methods can be divided into two categories. One group of the students found that there was a specific ‘Chinese way of teaching’, which differed from the ‘Western/Danish’ style by being more ‘traditional’, ‘disciplinary’, ‘authoritarian’, ‘controlling’, ‘repetitive’ and ‘structured’. The other group largely found that the teaching was ‘modern’, ‘flexible’, ‘effective’, ‘pedagogical’, ‘better than in Denmark’, ‘patient’, ‘not so strict as expected’ and ‘good’.

The reflections following the descriptions above were naturally different depending on the individual students’ experiences. The first group of students had rather comparative and descriptive reflections following their experience of the teaching. In this group there was a general understanding that there is a specific ‘Chinese’ way of teaching and that all Chinese teachers follow this ideal. Some students modified this understanding later in the logbook as they noted differences between the different Chinese teachers. While most comments reflected a negative experience, a few students evaluated the teaching to be different but better than ‘Western’ methods. However, their overall conclusion that Chinese education is traditional, repetitive, authoritarian and so forth remained consistent, as most tended to base their overall conclusion mainly on the teachers who had confirmed their preconceptions. An alternative conclusion,

which a few students in this group also came to, could have been that, as in other places, there are good and bad and experienced and inexperienced teachers in China.

For the second group of students, the positive reflections on the teaching were very often accompanied by a sense of surprise. Several students commented that the teaching was not as they had imagined or as it was portrayed in the media back home. This suggests that the students' understanding of Chinese teachers and teaching culture has become slightly more complex. They have learned that Chinese teachers *can* be pedagogical, modern, patient and so forth. For most of these students, however, a negative stereotype was debunked only to be replaced with a positive one, as the new positive experiences were often generalised to Chinese education as a whole. A few students commented that they suspected that the teachers had changed their 'normal' teaching style to adapt to the students' Western mindsets or that these teachers were not representative, or typical, of the 'normal' Chinese teacher. This suggests that these students still believe that their Chinese teachers have a more real 'Chinese' essence, which they tried to hide while they were with them. The students could instead have drawn the conclusion that skilful Chinese teachers, like any other skilful teachers, can be flexible and know how to teach depending on the context of learners with different learning styles and that this method is also part of modern Chinese education. Despite their experiences that helped to debunk some myths and stereotypes of Chinese education, the basic understanding of culture being descriptive remained and was not reconceptualised based on their new experiences.

Discussion and Conclusion

The students' varying reflections on the same activities show the co-constructional aspect of learning. The students were not passive receivers of information, but rather active co-creators of their learning. Overall, it was found that the activities in the programme mainly offered a descriptive understanding of culture. Lundgren (2005) showed that when there is a lack of guidelines, practitioners with limited theoretical knowledge about culture tend to sort to layman understandings of culture and stick

to old practices for the basis of designing teaching. However, the way that students reflected on the presented information differed. Some of the students' reflections only related to the presented information in an uncritical descriptive and evaluative sense. Consequently, this group of students adopted the rather descriptive understanding of culture present in the teaching, which led to generalising conclusions about Chinese culture and people. This risk of actually increasing stereotype understandings during study abroad has also been described by other scholars (Castro, Woodin, Lundgren, & Byram, 2016; Jackson, 2016; Yang, 2016). A smaller portion of the students showed a more complex understanding of culture, which was reflected in critical reflections on the descriptive presentation in the programme. Some of these students expressed some appreciation of the often static and historical knowledge presented but also longed for more contemporary representations of Chinese culture. For this group, the teaching design did not offer ways of expanding their complex understanding of culture and left them critical and wanting more nuanced and modern experiences.

As such, the analysis of the data did not show any examples where the teaching design, or the reflections in the logbooks, led to a reconceptualisation of a student's notion of the concept of culture. Instead, the students' preconceptions of culture defined how they experienced the culture activities and reaffirmed their understanding of culture. As previously discussed, culture is an abstract and idealising notion that does not exist by itself (Holliday, 2010). Therefore, whether or not the descriptive content, present in most of the activities, actually led to more descriptive learning about culture relied heavily on how an individual student already understood culture. Some students showed an ability to reflect critically on the representation of culture in the different activities, while others regarded the content as 'true' and representative of Chinese culture. Therefore, the learning outcome about culture varied to an extreme degree, and depending on which concept of culture one subscribes to, this STSA can both be said to have offered relevant experiences of culture or to have mainly offered experiences that stereotyped and simplified Chinese culture and people. Dervin (2009) has suggested that students learn basic culture theory as part of preparation for studying abroad. However, this is not to be mistaken with the common cultural training

preparing learners for encounters with a specific national culture. Instead, what Dervin suggests is that students acquire self-reflective and analytical skills for deconstructing cultural discourses. This kind of learning would enable students to critically negotiate simplistic and selective representations of culture.

The STSA provided a multitude of activities conveying descriptive learning about Chinese culture but offered next to no activities with a more complex approach to culture. It is our belief that this lifeless and static representation of culture cannot stand alone. The different arts and historical sites can hardly be said to represent modern China. In fact, the places the students visited and activities the students participated in cannot be said to represent much more than the old cultural elite of the Han Chinese, at least in the 'pure' form in which it was presented. Presenting these as a national and homogenous part of Chinese culture without explaining their cultural and historical background might give an incorrect, stereotypical picture of the modern Chinese as traditional and old fashioned. Similarly, the destinations of the excursions were all, except one—the Olympic Park—historical places from ancient imperial times. To give a more complex understanding of China, the programme could have included visits to more varied places like the 798 Art District, Guomao CCTV headquarters, Hohai's modern music and night life, a company visit, a visit to the parliament and so forth. Thus, representations of culture as something contemporary, dynamic, inconsistent and conflicting which are found in everyday life were largely left out of the programme or left to the students to explore on their own, which cannot be credited to the programme design. In a review on the state of internationalisation of higher education, Byram (2012) commented that new(er) ideas of culture, such as the complex concept of culture, has not been integrated well in education still as of today, which the study abroad programme in the present study also has illustrated.

Returning to the question asked at the beginning of this chapter—that is, whether or not the experiences in the STSA in China helped the students in developing intercultural competence—the answer would partly be that it depends on the understanding of the concept of culture that lay the groundwork for assessing the learning outcome. This conclusion reflects the need for clearer definitions and aims in terms of intercultural

competency (Dervin, 2009). Until then, most STSAs, regardless of the actual teaching content, qualify as international experiences that will help higher education institutions in Denmark reach the 2020 goal of reaching a level of student mobility where 50% of all graduates will have experienced either a stay or an internship abroad. That being said, there is less certainty about the actual learning outcome in terms of intercultural competence, as was the case in this STSA.

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6

Australian Students in China: Making the Foreign Familiar

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Introduction

Australian students are choosing to study in China in growing numbers, with strong support from their educational institutions and the Australian Government. All parties involved anticipate the experience will be transformative, but the diversity of individual study abroad experiences is

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F. Dervin et al. (eds.), *International Students in China*, Palgrave Studies on Chinese Education in a Global Perspective, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78120-4_6

not well understood (Tian & Lowe, 2014). The different parties involved in Australian student mobility to China, and elsewhere, anticipate some form of return on their international outbound investment. Students aim for a learning experience and improved employment prospects, institutions seek to enrich and internationalise their services, and governments pursue long-term economic prosperity through gaining a globally competent workforce.

Australia is heavily invested in an educational partnership with China, with study abroad and exchange activities occurring at all levels from secondary school to postgraduate research. This chapter investigates how effectively the expectations of students, institutions, and governments are being met with respect to the realities of Australian students' experiences in China. This was achieved through applying a qualitative research methodology to the content of in-depth interview data derived from a group of 11 university students while they were in Beijing. These interviews explored how these students' expectations compared with their experiences after arriving in China. This study examined how they interacted with their Chinese host society and any impact this had on an awareness of their socio-ethnic and political context.

Investigations such as presented here forth provide insights into how studying abroad can be a transformative and perspective-changing experience. Further, identifying where students' experiences do *not* match programme objectives may highlight opportunities for pedagogical interventions to better harness the opportunities of studying in China. The findings are analysed and discussed with these outcomes in mind. A number of recommended directions for further research are also offered.

Background and Literature Review

Australia's Education Engagement with China

While the global volume of internationally mobile students is currently dominated by students from Asia—with Chinese students representing the largest group from a single country (OECD, 2014)—a new pattern of greater two-way flows is emerging as developing nations from Asia

and elsewhere are increasingly attracting students in their own right and away from the West (Wei, 2013).

For years, Australia and China have shared a strong education partnership. At the time of writing, a vast number of Australian high schools have formed partnerships with schools in China, facilitating the annual exchange of hundreds of students (e.g., Caulfield Grammar School, 2016). China is the most popular destination for internationally mobile Australian vocational students with several hundred travelling to China each year to ground their technical training in an intercultural environment (Charlton Brown, 2016). In recent years, Australia has been Chinese tertiary students' second most popular study destination after the United States (USA) (OECD, 2017), and China has been Australia's largest source of incoming international students for more than a decade (Department of Education and Training, 2016). In 2014, China was Australian university students' second most popular international study destination in the world (AUIDF, 2014).

Today, the number of Australian university students choosing to study in China is in the thousands, supported by university partnerships and by the Australian Government through interventions such as the New Colombo Plan (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2016). This Plan supports scholarships for full degree study, mobility programmes for shorter-term study, and internships in response to growing opportunities the Chinese Government is making available for international students (Custer, 2016). China is also one of the most popular destinations for Australian postgraduate research students, with over 250 Australians undertaking doctoral-level studies in China in 2014 (Ministry of Education, 2016), either studying towards a doctorate awarded by a Chinese university or via cotutelle programmes established under partnership agreements between Australian and Chinese universities. Hence, Australia is making a small, but enthusiastic, contribution to China's goal of hosting over 500,000 international students by 2020 (Zong, 2011).

The Objectives of Australian Student Mobility to China

There is significant financial investment for governments and educational institutions to encourage students to undertake study outside their home country, as well as significant financial and opportunity costs for students

choosing to participate (Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut, & Klute, 2012). Rationales for the strong support offered to encourage Australian students to study in China generally focus on (a) the importance of China as a trading and business partner, (b) the growing economic standing of China, and (c) China's position in the wider Asian region (Thakur, 2013). Hence, Australian politicians and business leaders, as well as educators, have become strong advocates for Australian students to study there (Pan, 2012).

While China is a substantial importer of Australian mineral resources, it is seen as a growing force in science, research, and innovation and fertile ground for Australian start-up businesses (Hutchings & Murray, 2003). The key policy objectives for encouraging student mobility to China are to build language fluency, but also to gain cultural literacy that may foster heightened engagement and collaboration between Australia and China (Salter, 2013). It is anticipated by Australian parties investing in student mobility to China that their return on investment will bolster a future generation of international business entrepreneurs, capable of building *partnerships with* and *enterprises in* China (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2016).

Previously Published Literature on the Experience of Australian Students

Literature on the experience of Australian students in China is largely limited to descriptions of programmes and participant numbers (Nerlich, 2015). Said (1978) has described the West's traditional perceptions of its racial and cultural 'other'—the East—as definitively *foreign* and *exotic*, but also as *unsophisticated* and *inferior*. Wang and Liu (2006) reported on interviews undertaken after Australian university students returned from China. The students communicated how their experience was educationally valuable, although it involved onerous bureaucracy, unsophisticated teaching practices, and segregation of accommodation arrangements. The students portrayed these arrangements in mostly negative terms, comparing them with their perceptions of how Chinese students were hosted in Australia, which they perceived as operating from a (more) reasonable and rational basis. The Australian students identified their segregated accommodation in China as a significant barrier to making friends with Chinese domestic students.

Difficulty in making friends with domestic students, however, is likewise a commonly identified area of dissatisfaction for Chinese students in Australia who perceive Australian students as having little interest in engaging in campus activities and/or ordinarily socialise with friends off-campus (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008). Hence, the possibility exists that students of both nationalities seek to identify external factors, rather than acknowledge their own discomfort and reluctance to deal with the unfamiliar, which may contribute to their lack of success in engaging with students in their host country. Assuming that making friends with host country peers is a useful indicator of success in transcending negative preconceptions of the foreign 'other', Wang and Liu (2006) recorded that on a *second* sojourn to China, Australian students expressed significantly more success in making Chinese friends, suggesting that the duration of immersion in China and the opportunity to pause and reflect on their past experience may have contributed to the success of study abroad to engender genuine intercultural competence and global citizenship.

Interestingly, it has been suggested that Australian students may be more susceptible to the perception-changing impact of studying abroad due to a relatively weak sense of national identity (Dolby, 2008), as well as being well-travelled members of a multicultural society (Szelényi & Rhoads, 2007). Moreover, Australian university students routinely study alongside international students at home, where 20 per cent of the student population onshore in Australian universities are international students and nearly 40 per cent of those international students are Chinese. This domestic study experience may represent a form of 'internationalisation at home' (Soria & Troisi, 2014) and engender an initial awareness of global citizenship before students embark on their first study abroad experience (Nussbaum, 2002).

Internationalisation of Education as an Imperative

Rizvi and Lingard (2009) critiqued neoliberal ideologies, which subsume the internationalisation of education as an economic imperative, and commodify education and knowledge as marketable goods. It is not likely that participating students are motivated by the same long-term macro-economic goals of governments (Forsey, Broomhall, & Davis, 2011), although most do consider that study and work experience in

China may lead to better employment outcomes after graduation (Kinash & Crane, 2015). This market demand for improved graduate employment outcomes also underlies the current growing trend towards making internships in China part of select Australian degree programmes (Gribble, Blackmore, & Rahimi, 2015). Further, while student mobility advocates encourage the essentially humanitarian objective of building intercultural awareness (Deardorff, 2006), the individual student may be encouraged to adopt a 'utilitarian and egoistic' rationality (Harrison, 2010, p. 2) when partaking in a student mobility experience.

Educational engagement between/among Western countries and China carries overtones of postcolonial hierarchies which 'values ideas emanating from New York above those from New Delhi' (Stanley, 2013, p. 43). From this perspective, students have traditionally travelled from *developing* economies to a *developed* economy like Australia to access the valuable knowledge that is perceived to be held within Westernised economies. In recent years, however, China has been actively leveraging its increasing global economic significance to diversify the global student market, which now includes those who wish to learn the Chinese language and culture as an emerging new form of global capital. Hence, China is increasingly able to compete educationally with the West, not only to retain its own students, but to also attract elite students from the West and other parts of the world (Pan, 2013).

From this perspective, Australia's education engagement with China can be seen as having steadily shifted from the role of a sophisticated Western education provider to becoming a tentative recipient of an exotic Asian partner's educational offerings. Nonetheless, a key issue in investigating the relative success of Australian student mobility to China is to determine whether cultural differences and postcolonial prejudices are being effectively challenged and overcome.

Methodology and Method

In 2014 and early 2015, a qualitative study was undertaken in Beijing involving in-depth interviews with Australian students (n = 11): females (n = 5) and males (n = 6). These interviews explored how these students'

expectations compared with their lived experience after arriving and residing in Beijing. This study examined *how* the students made sense of, and negotiated their interactions with, their Chinese host society. The student-participants were (a) Australian nationals, (b) currently studying Chinese language at a university in Beijing, and (c) had been in China for at least six months prior to being interviewed. None of the 11 interviewees were Chinese-born and all were likely to be identified as *laowai*, that is, 'foreigner' by local Chinese.

At the time this research was undertaken, Beijing was the most popular study destination for international students, hosting 20 per cent of all international students within China, that is, more than any municipal city or province (Ministry of Education, 2016). Selecting students who had been in China for at least six months ensured that the research participants had been markedly immersed in the Chinese society, had sufficient time to assimilate, and were able to make sense of their lived experience there. The students' level of Chinese language proficiency varied, with some having only basic Chinese, although three participants had enough proficiency to undertake undergraduate university courses in Chinese alongside local students.

An effective investigation of Australian students' engagement with the foreign 'other' of China requires 'conceptual and empirical attention to social contexts' in which their study abroad experiences take place (Kimmel & Volet, 2012, p. 228). We apply the notion that Australian study abroad students arrive in China with embedded postcolonial and neoliberal ideologies, which position Eastern culture(s) as a foreign and exotic resource for Westerners to exploit for their personal and economic gain, such that 'boundaries are temporarily crossed but ultimately reinforced' (Desmond, 1999, p. 15).

Qualitative In-Depth Interview Data

Data was collected through a semi-structured and open-ended interview with each participant following the approach recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2005) and lasted between one to two hours at a location of

each participant's own choosing. Allowing each interviewee to select their own interview location was considered conducive to them speaking openly about their experiences. A casual and relaxed atmosphere was deliberately encouraged and interviews adopted a 'conversational tone' as recommended by Kvale (1996, p. 27).

There were six primary interview questions as listed below, incorporating a number of scripted sub-questions and prompts that have not been included here (Tan, 2015):

1. Describe your background e.g., demographic details and educational history.
2. Why did you decide to come to study in China i.e., the decision-making process?
3. What are your day-to-day activities here i.e., general impressions of living in Beijing?
4. Talk about your encounters with people here, both Chinese and non-Chinese.
5. What have been your most memorable and challenging experiences?
6. What are your future plans i.e., on return to Australia and after graduation?

For the purpose of this study, it was considered that discovering which students had assimilated while still abroad was an important perspective to capture, notwithstanding that they may have constructed more meaning from their experiences after returning home (Tian & Lowe, 2014).

The participants acknowledged that they came from relatively privileged backgrounds, with over half having attended elite private schools in Australia and with 9 of the 11 student-participants having university-educated parents. All had previously travelled overseas several times and knew family and friends who had studied or worked abroad and thus had developed early expectations that study abroad would be a routine step in their lives. In many ways, this group exemplified how access to study abroad can be socially stratified and primarily accessible to students from higher socio-economic backgrounds (Marginson, 2008). In fact, study abroad has been argued to be a vehicle that perpetuates class privilege over generations (Waters & Brooks, 2010).

Interview data was analysed by drawing on a constructivist interpretation of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). As an inductive method, grounded

theory allows the pursuit of new directions discovered in the course of the research, which may not have been anticipated beforehand. As such, analysis of the data proceeded while still being gathered, in order to pursue possibilities that participants' stories would affect the conceptual development of the research. Time was also spent after interviews sharing the data collected with interviewees to ensure 'compatibility and dependability' (Poland, 1995, p. 297). Specifically, the interviewer clarified with each participant whether their responses to questions had been accurately captured and whether they broadly agreed with the researcher's interpretation of their responses.

In short, interviewees were partakers in co-authoring their transcript and the researcher's interpretations. They were welcome to make change(s), but needed to verify that the interview narrative was an accurate account of what they said or what they had intended to say, and to reaffirm that the transcripts were acceptable for continued inclusion in this research. This approach reduced the potential for the loss and distortion that can occur when transcribing (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Indeed, the intention was not to identify universal trends applicable to the wider population of interest, but rather to engage in a dialogue with participants and thereafter highlight an array of issues that would give insight into students' personal and specific experiences in China.

Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: Student Motivations

A common theme across the interviews was the 'opportunity of China' and the value of Chinese language skills, a narrative that emphasised the potential future employment opportunities that studying in China could create for Australian students. Around half of the participants talked extensively about the relationship between their career goals and their decision to study in China, believing that their exposure to China and Chinese language skills would advantage them in the job market. Different student-participants remarked that China was the *first, basically, only choice as a place to be studying right now*, that Chinese was *the language of the future*, and that having studied in China *looks real fancy on the resume.* One student gave the example:

> If I was interviewing two guys and one just went to England or like Denmark, and the other went to China, I know who I'd pick.

In this respect, the students placed China in the centre, not the periphery, of their strategic pursuit of global capital. Conversely, previous studies have suggested that the dominant flow of international students from Asia to Western English-speaking countries places the socio-political West as a symbolic and hegemonic power centre (Tsukada, 2013). The perspective of these Australian students differs from findings of alternative studies examining Western students, where those choosing China did so for cultural interest or 'voluntourism' (Stanley, 2013) rather than an educational sojourn to China for their career advancement (Wells, 2006).

The Australian students in this study chose to study in China in anticipation of a substantial return on their investment in time, money, and opportunity cost, and they chose China over and above equally accessible and traditionally popular study destinations in North America and Europe. Further, almost all the students sought to assign themselves a 'learner identity' (Kinginger, 2013), that is, part of an imagined community of committed language learners in Beijing who had rejected alternative tourist-focused study destinations such as Shanghai.

Theme 2: Initial Impressions of the Chinese Education System

Similar to the Australian student cohort interviewed by Wang and Liu (2006), every student in this study reported problems dealing with university administration and other student service providers. Such interactions were described as the 'most' frustrating part of their study abroad experience, with one student expressing interactions with Chinese bureaucracy as *hellish at best*. One student noted that the pre-departure advice received was:

> [L]ots of useless info, and not much practical help in actually dealing with the administrative nightmare that you arrive into.

The Australian students' initial response to such encounters of the foreign 'other' was to categorise Chinese bureaucracy as inferior to what they were familiar with back home, rather than recognise how their own naivety and inexperience may have contributed to the bewildering situation they found themselves in. After spending six months in China, one student reflected:

> I've like, stopped thinking of it as a 'Chinese culture' thing, and realised it's mostly just like, what happens to people in a big, tough and crowded city—it's like demographics, not culture.

These findings would indicate a need for better pre-departure information services, perhaps facilitated by Australian students' home universities/institutions and drawing on the insights of returned alumni who can offer detailed advice stemming from their own experiences (Wang & Liu, 2006).

Theme 3: Relations with Chinese Society

When studying the Chinese language—segregated to on-campus international student housing and with non-Chinese classmates—most participants reported an unanticipated isolation from domestic Chinese students, and thus, interaction usually occurred at a superficial level. As previously stated, these students did not possess a sufficiently advanced level of Chinese language to be able to engage in substantive conversations with local Chinese students. As such, they had to choose to either (a) use English, which many Chinese students were relatively proficient in, or (b) sacrifice some depth of conversational engagement in order to practice Chinese speaking.

Indeed, the same considerations applied to decisions over whether to attend cultural events and social activities that were conducted in Chinese or in English. The discomfort and effort involved in engaging with local Chinese students was amplified in the context of having completed four hours of daily Chinese language classes and the accompanying homework, which one participant described as *already tiring enough*. Further, the Australian students often found that there was less effort involved in

engaging with the other international students around them, with whom they could explore their diverse cultural backgrounds on an equal footing as foreigners in a foreign land. This discrete community was defined by their shared daily experiences as classmates and roommates within the cloistered international student community of the university. Thus, the students in this study experienced a sense of detachment from their Australian identity, although this largely arose from integration with a community that was *not* Chinese.

The 11 Australian students were not only physically separated from their Chinese peers, but continued to consider them as definitively foreign. Several participants elaborated that their difficulty in making friends with Chinese students was not just because local students were too busy or preoccupied with their studies, but were also *weirdly different* with respect to their extracurricular interests and social activities. For example, a participant who attended a student club's orientation event described it as:

> They had, like, a party thing which is, kind of, akin to an 8-year-old's birthday party, you know like, musical chairs, kind of miming, and childish stuff like that.

This student's foremost reaction to this behaviour of a foreign 'other' was to categorise it as immature and inferior. Relatedly, some students occasionally made generalised proclamations about *all Chinese people* or *everybody in China*, based on limited personal or anecdotal experiences. Others were prone to relying on an imaginary and romanticised 'real China' of the past, rather than the actual Chinese people they encountered in contemporary urban Beijing. Thus, students found themselves becoming comfortable with being in China while maintaining a social distance from Chinese students:

> As a foreigner, especially if your Chinese is poor, it's so easy for you just to hang out with foreigners... Chinese people can seem very passive, and it can end up so Chinese people don't play a big part in your life, despite the fact that you are in China… like they end up as just part of the scenery… extras in a movie.

The Australian students also noticed themselves as being assigned a constructed identity by their host society—*laowai* or foreigners—namely, 'white' people appearing to be of Anglo-Saxon descent (Tan, 2015).

Stereotyping or 'assigning individuals or social groups to closed and clearly bounded cultural frameworks' (Scherr, 2007, p. 308) may affect the psychological well-being and adaptation of the individuals being so categorised (Dervin & Layne, 2013). It can be distressing to find one's personal identity being limited to, for example, ethnic and linguistic markers, or to gender, religious, or professional signs (Luke, 2003). This was exemplified by one participant's comment:

> there's no acknowledgement that there are various cultures, that I'm Australian. Your identity is subsumed by perceptions of 'white' people.

By far the most common downside of being identified as *laowai* was being considered *both* naïve and wealthy, and thus subject to exploitation. The concern and displeasure of this was more with respect to being 'played for a fool' than any financial impact, and these perceptions were constructed based on suspicion as much as evidence. Interviewees reported that this discomfort and fear *did* limit their willingness to engage in language practice and in mixing with the wider Beijing community. At the same, however, being stereotyped as a *laowai* also carried some privileges of increased social status in Beijing, particularly in comparison to fellow 'non-white' foreigners (Tan, 2015). The stereotype of a well-educated and worldly foreigner conflicts with common stereotypes of foreigners being dull and imperceptive of sophisticated nuance.

Beyond perceived racial stereotypes, another factor that shaped Australian student experiences within Chinese society was 'gender'. Interviewees revealed that Western men were generally seen as adventurous, sexually available, and hence 'valued' companions. Yet, these same qualities had the opposite effect when attributed to Western women, where there was a discomforting tension between Western women's relative gender empowerment and the more traditionally patriarchal gender relations prevalent within Chinese society. Such issues were captured in the following scenario described by a female participant:

> I went travelling with another Australian guy and we were sitting in a train and then all these people were asking us questions… but they were always asking him the questions and I couldn't say anything… they were only interested in talking to him.

This anecdote illustrates how there were contradictory assumptions contained in the perceived identity of *laowai*.

Theme 4: Growing in Self-Awareness and Engagement with China

Previous investigations of studying abroad have raised doubts about its ability to develop intercultural awareness and sensitivity (Forsey et al., 2011; Yang, 2012). There are concerns that studying abroad could work to reinforce pre-existing assumptions about foreign cultures (Stanley, 2013; Waters & Brooks, 2010). Interviewees in this study reported the development of a growing self-awareness over time that both they and their local Chinese counterparts were often looking at each other through a lens of cultural difference (Said, 1993), rather than recognising their commonalities and shared humanity. Some respondents had initially anticipated their familiarisation with a foreign culture as a 'task to be completed' during their sojourn. One student remarked:

> When I came here, I thought I get could this China stuff done-and-dusted within 12-months, easy. But after the end of my first few months, being like, OK… a year is not gonna be nearly enough time.

Another stated:

> It just reinforces the ignorance that we have about Asian countries… everything about a country can be mastered within a year, and you realise how ridiculous that is once you arrive.

Almost all the student-participants felt that their study experience in China had distinguished them from their domestic counterparts at home. For example, several noted that reporting of China by Australian mainstream media created a somewhat misleadingly perception of the reality of life in China and of Chinese people (Tan, 2015). In this way, they recognised that their own perceptions had shifted because of their study experience. Perhaps most significantly, students began to reflect upon their own privilege in comparison with their Chinese counterparts, as elucidated in the following response:

> I've certainly become more appreciative of what I have, especially when you are confronted with how hard so many people's lives are on a daily basis.

Another student commented:

> It's really made me appreciate how lucky and privileged I am to have grown up in Australia, particularly when you talk to Chinese kids our age about their lives, such brutal pressure.

And, another said:

> People always talk about how Western graduates are more creative or whatever, but that's not a reason for why a Western expat deserves five times more pay than a Chinese guy doing the same graduate-level job, working twice as hard, and who actually speaks both English and Chinese.

Theme 5: Student Learning Outcomes

As described earlier, participants' motivations towards study in China were strongly influenced by a vision of China as the 'land of opportunity' and of the future, believing that their experience in China would gain them a competitive advantage in the labour market. While they anticipated becoming dedicated language learners in Beijing, however, the majority ended up deprioritising language learning in favour of accruing wider social and cultural competencies. They self-identified as members of a community of international students from varied countries, who were defined by their shared context as globally mobile foreigners/exchange students studying in Beijing. That is, their international study experience was more often defined by interaction with student peers from other countries than by interaction with domestic Chinese students or members of the wider Chinese community.

There were indications that members of this Australian cohort found that being perceived as a foreign curiosity provided a level of constructive interaction:

> Bit by bit, I noticed how I actually talk more when I speak Chinese than English, like I'd talk to random people in Chinese more than I'd ever talk to random persons in English. Because even if I mess up and sound like an idiot, at least I'm this entertainingly exotic idiot. Like I used to be unnerved by that kind of attention, but now it can be freeing.

Also, despite some initially disparaging impressions of Chinese education institutions and the learning behaviours of Chinese students, at least one student reported a slow realisation that a perceived foreign 'other' was not necessarily bizarre or inferior:

> Like often the way that the Chinese people I know will approach problems, like reasoning out solutions to things, it is very different to the way that I would do it and people from other Western cultures would do it, just in terms of their assumptions or priorities.

As similarly identified in other studies of international students in Asian countries (Tsukada, 2013), the Australian students' experience of being marginalised as foreign within Chinese society—finding themselves with stereotyped identities—was cause for self-reflection on their own perceptions of a foreign 'other'. One student reflected:

> I've realised how people are so quick to jump to conclusions about a whole country based on their interactions with one person. So, if a Chinese friend doesn't know many Australians other than you, they will tell their friends things like 'All Australians do this… My Australian friend did this…' And, I've also realised I should probably be careful of doing the same thing myself.

Most of the 11 students acknowledged that their initial perceptions of China and Chinese people as a foreign 'other' were both socially constructed and largely imaginary. They came to appreciate that a substantial diversity and complexity existed across contemporary Chinese culture that defied any attempt to encapsulate them/it within simple definitions (Dervin, 2009). Thus, their study abroad experience did raise their awareness of difference and diversity, but did not reinforce initial perceptions of the foreign 'other' of China as inscrutable, unsophisticated, and inferior.

Summary

The purpose of the research was to investigate the experience of Australian students in China in the context of current dialogue regarding the perceived economic importance of building engagement with China through

study abroad activities. Study abroad has been critiqued as giving rise to largely instrumental notions of global citizenship (Waters & Brooks, 2011), where students study abroad with little concern for developing an understanding of the social context of local people or of social justice and equity issues (Rizvi, 2005). Thus, the key research questions were designed to better understand whether 'study abroad' delivered the expected transformative learning espoused in programme objectives with respect to achieving intercultural competence and a sense of global citizenship. Investigation of Australian students' experience(s) while they resided in Beijing, therefore, offered the unique opportunity to explore their engagement with a foreign 'other' in 'real time'. This research probed Australian students' perception of their Chinese counterparts and the wider Chinese culture, but also explored what impact being foreigners in a foreign land may have had upon them.

The Australian student-participants reported limited success in making close friendships with Chinese students, as has been found in alternate investigations of Australian students studying in China (Wang & Liu, 2006). The 11 students did, however, unexpectedly find themselves becoming members of a close community of international/foreign exchange students in Beijing. This enabled them to compare their own perceptions of China with students from diverse countries. This engendered a great(er) appreciation of the common humanity existing between/among them and people they had initially perceived as foreign, or even 'weirdly different'. Otherwise, the participants in this study developed an appreciably greater sense of global citizenship and self-awareness in becoming part of a global community of students from various nations, all sharing the common experience of studying and living in China, a country and culture that was equally foreign to them. Indeed, this is likely to be a common experience for concentrated groups of international students in popular global study destinations (Wang, Peyvandi, & Coffey, 2014).

Overall, the findings highlighted the success of 11 students in seeking to gain a better understanding of contemporary and historical China and to enhance their Chinese language fluency. These outcomes seem an appropriate fulfilment of the broad objectives espoused by governments and other funding bodies who promote study in China for the purposes of

building intercultural competence and developing a global perspective. For these Australian tertiary students, studying in China combined the experience of living immersed in a foreign country and culture, as well as the parallel experience of being perceived as a foreigner. This brought recognition that their own cultural and national identity is socially constructed. Additionally, their first-hand experience of being perceived as a foreign 'other' by people in China gave them pause to appreciate how easily foreigners can become categorised into crude stereotypes and how equally culpable they were of doing this to the Chinese people around them.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

The overall objective of this study was to illustrate the impact of study in China on 11 Australian student-participants' self-awareness of their own socio-ethnic and political context, as well as any modifications to their preconceived views of Chinese society and Chinese people.

Indeed, we are tentative in our findings as we acknowledge the limitations of the size and breadth of this study, and have identified several areas where further research may usefully enlarge the themes that arose from this investigation. Recommendations include, but should not be limited to:

- The Australian students did, over time, develop a critically conscious awareness that their initial perceptions of the foreign 'other' were biased and flawed. However, for most, this evolved from an extended period of immersion in China, that is, at least six months. Claims that short-term study abroad episodes (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004) can have an equivalent transformative impact deserve further testing and evaluation to substantiate.
- The assumption that exposing an individual to the foreign culture of China results in an automatic achievement of learning outcomes lacks educational rigour (Twombly et al., 2012). Students in this study were undertaking Chinese language studies where the purpose of studying in China was immediately clear. To pursue evaluative research of the

benefits of studying abroad, there is a need, therefore, to more rigorously define the objectives and anticipated learning outcomes of different study abroad programmes that do not have language fluency as their primary objective.

- Many study abroad programmes claim that the achievement of intercultural competence is a primary objective. Hence, the efficacy of pedagogical interventions claiming to help students see past constructed stereotypes and more fully engage with the contexts and people they encounter abroad should be tested across the diverse range of programmes now in operation. More intensive interventions may be required to achieve equivalent outcomes with short-term study abroad programmes.
- For the most part, the students enthusiastically embraced studying in China with hopeful optimism that it may contribute to their future career success. Governments and other funding bodies seeking to further expand outbound participation in China should aim to establish more robust evaluation procedures—with a focus on graduate employment outcomes—to provide compelling evidence of the career benefits of studying there.

Conclusion

Over the last decade, the rapid growth in numbers of mobile Australian students has been partly facilitated by government funding, as well as by a trend towards larger number of students studying abroad for shorter periods. These factors combined have enabled heightened participation in study abroad opportunities, including study in China. However, while a proportion of the student population may enthusiastically embrace studying in China for its own sake, others may be swayed by evidence that a genuine return on investment is achievable. Hence, rather than pursuing a loosely defined objective of 'cultural engagement', the benefits of studying in China should be defined within the context of each student's degree programme and curriculum. As argued by Edelstein (2014), it cannot be assumed that studying abroad in any foreign location will

deliver an automatic benefit to all who undertake it, nor can it be assumed to deliver the same generic value, irrespective of students' diverse backgrounds, study disciplines, and/or career ambitions.

International mobility is expected to provide students with an educational experience that is experiential in nature and transformative in outcome (Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002). While only looking at a small sample of students, the research study outlined in this chapter demonstrates that there *is* potential for study abroad and student exchange programmes to operate as mechanisms to promote genuine cultural engagement and dialogue between China and Australia. Just as significantly, the comradeship developed among multinational students—sharing the common experience of studying together in a foreign land—may have had as much transformative effect as their engagement with China itself.

Australia is heavily invested in learning *in* and *from* China. A relationship of mutual trust and partnership is exemplified through each country encouraging its school-aged children to experience the other country's culture and environment. Australian universities have helped their students study abroad for decades, through scholarships, student exchange, and study abroad programmes. Recent years have seen the Australian Government expand its provision of funding programmes to encourage more students to study in Asia and in China particularly. The purpose and value of this activity is broadly stated in terms of expanding graduate employment opportunities in a world where engagement with Asia is progressively considered vital to achieving long-term economic prosperity (Thakur, 2013).

Australia is looking for advanced evaluative methodologies to measure the quality of study abroad experiences with respect to how well they achieved specific learning objectives. For any country, there is a pervasive risk that poorly planned student mobility experiences could just reinforce existing misconceptions and sustain a perception of foreign inscrutability (Wolcott 2010). However, in the long term, as studying abroad becomes increasingly routine, continuing to pursue the outcome of 'making the foreign familiar' risks trivialising the potential value of studying in China, as China becomes both a major economic power and a global powerhouse of science, research, and innovation.

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7

Transformations of Chinese and Danish Students' Perceptions of the Significance of Culture in Transnational Education in China

Jin Hui Li

Introduction

During the last three decades, the political interest of Western universities and nation-states in transnational higher education projects in the Asian region has increased significantly (Chen, 2015). Asia is the region with the strongest involvement in transnational higher education, and China is viewed as the most promising market for importing education (Caruana, 2016). In China, transnational higher education cooperation has been growing rapidly since the government allowed the establishment of transnational higher education programs in the mid-1980s (Chen, 2015). A new era was inaugurated in 1995, as the Chinese government now permits collaborative ventures, known as transnational education institutions (He, 2016). The Nordic countries have created new collaborative

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F. Dervin et al. (eds.), *International Students in China*, Palgrave Studies on Chinese Education in a Global Perspective, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78120-4_7

ventures and programs with China. In 2016, several higher education institutions in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark operated jointly with Chinese universities to provide undergraduate and graduate programs in China. Also two jointly led university centers have been established as collaboration between Chinese universities and universities from Finland and Denmark (Ministry of Education in China, 2016a, 2016b). This chapter focuses on the case of Denmark and a newly opened university center in Beijing: the Sino-Danish Center for Education and Research (SDC),[1] where students and faculty are primarily Danes and Chinese. The SDC's raison d'être can be viewed as a set of ideas linked to the need to strengthen the nation-state through transnational education collaboration: the university promotes itself and is promoted by the Danish Ministry for Science, Innovation and Higher Education as *a form of education in innovative solutions to global challenges* for the nation-states of Denmark and China (www.sinodanishcenter.com).

Before discussing whether and how this kind of education can address global challenges, we have to raise a fundamental question about institutions like the SDC as an educational institution: How are student subjectivities shaped through the ways cultural meaning is transformed and created in the establishment of educational practices, given that the institutions' context is composed of students and faculty with different national education experiences and practices? Regarding subjectivity, this chapter relies on a Foucauldian concept of the subject as one possible position among others, dynamic and negotiable, instead of a static and essential entity (Foucault, 2002, 2008). Subjectivity is understood as differentiated possibilities for subject positions and identities (Buchardt, 2014); it is the individual's self-knowledge and identities, and thus the possibility for action and participation (Popkewitz, 2000). The concept will be expanded later in the chapter.

[1] The SDC is a partnership between all eight Danish universities and the Chinese Academy of Sciences, located in Beijing, where the students take their courses. The SDC offers seven master's programs: two in Social Science, four in the Natural Sciences and one in Engineering. The enrolled students are from either China or Denmark (with a few students being from another European Union country, enrolled through the Danish side). The language of instruction at the SDC is English.

Contextualization of the role of the university in China and Denmark is needed before focusing on the shaping of student subjectivity in new institutions like the SDC to grasp how these nation-states address state-building challenges through higher education. I will illuminate the historical and current function of higher education in (ongoing) nation-state building. The purpose of this article is to discuss how higher education has moved from being merely a national matter toward transcending the boundaries, thus becoming transnational cooperation, forming citizenry in order to comply with the political ideas of global challenges. I will first compare the historical and current role of higher education in the two nation-states in question, namely China and Denmark. Second, I will explore how Danish and Chinese student subjectivities are shaped through the ways cultural meaning is transformed and created by focusing on how students struggle to achieve acknowledgment in such a transnational education program. The degrees of change in the students' perceptions of the significance of culture bound to nationality in education will be elucidated. The students' narratives about their educational achievement at the SDC and their interactions with each other are guided by their descriptions of their changing perceptions of nationalized cultural diversity in education. I will present a theoretical framework for discussing the subjectivities formed in transnational educational practice and the methods before I analyze the students' narratives.

The Historical Relationship Between the Nation-State and Higher Education

The relation between higher education and the state in the nation-state building process in China and Denmark has differed in many ways, and yet the role of the university in both cases has been important in the formation of citizenry. In the Nordic countries, the close links that became formative for the university and nation-building grew as the need for education and expert training in several fields of society increased with the emergence of nation-states and the rise of bureaucratic governance.

For the Nordic countries in the twentieth century, universities gained significance by training civil servants and other experts on the needs of constructing the welfare state (Buchardt, Markkola, & Valtonen, 2013). The knowledge that experts acquired through education ensured them a role in building the welfare state as they became social engineers of the nation at all levels. The educational institutions are thus seen as part of the formation of the welfare policy (Antikainen, 2006; Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2006). In Valtonen's examination of the role of educators as professionals in the Finnish welfare state from the 1860s to the 1960s, she argues that the new educational institutions were not merely created to fulfill the requirements of educational policies by educating educators and "laypeople"; the new experts also won much societal influence and responsibility in civil society through shaping the new welfare policies (Valtonen, 2013). In the Nordic countries, the State expanded its role in education and welfare in general. In the case of Denmark, Hansen (2015) argues that the welfare state was a project based on scientific knowledge. The scientific knowledge applied by the social engineers in building the new institutions in the welfare state was gained from new university institutions and disciplines established in the 1960s and 1970s. Social engineers were also interested in creating a new cohesion in the whole society. Thus, education programs were developed to handle the needs of the gradually emerging welfare state and modern welfare expertise.

For the "modern" Chinese state (after the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949), the significance of higher education in building the nation-state is not as unambiguous as for the Nordic countries. However, as Hayhoe (2012) states, Chinese universities have always had a close interactive relation with the state. This arises from the strong tradition of civil service examinations and scholars' social responsibility. However, in a historical comparison of the role of the university in Canada and China for creating civil society, Hayboe points out that Chinese universities had obtained limited autonomy and participated in China's modern development after 1949, as academic freedom was seen as a threat to Chinese socialism (Hayhoe, 1992). She offers a more distinct interpretation of (the Western concept of) autonomy and academic freedom in later work (2012) in which she suggests a redefinition of Western interpretations of the terms "academic freedom" and

"autonomy" in a Chinese context. The term for autonomy in Chinese is "self-mastery" rather than "self-governance," referring to legal or political independence. Similarly, the notion of academic freedom must be revised. She argues that Chinese scholars have a broader notion of the term. It differs from the academic freedom of the medieval European university that was articulated in debates over theoretical issues in particular disciplinary fields. Zha (2012) emphasizes that the notion embraces action, as well as theory, but also points to an intellectual authority closely affiliated with structures of state power. One of Zha's findings in his study of policy processes in contemporary China is that scholars play a significant role, as individuals and through major state-funded research projects. This insight points to the persistence of a pattern long rooted in Chinese society of "establishment scholars" offering their expertise in direct service to the state, paralleling the role of scholar officials in "traditional" China. Hayhoe (2012) argues that Chinese universities have achieved a growing measure of autonomy in some areas, such as student enrollment, curricular development, research, international partnerships, mergers and property development after the 1998 Higher Education Law, the first law since 1949, was promulgated. However, certain political constraints are still clearly evident. They are linked to the role of the Communist Party Committee in each university, as the role of the chairman of council and the President who is responsible for all major academic decisions is almost always operated by the Party secretary.

The comparison of the historical role of the university in the Nordic countries and China shows that in both cases the university has been important in forming the citizenry. Popkewitz argues that in modern state-building education is about governing subjectivities to form desirable citizenry (Popkewitz, 2000). In the Nordic countries, scholars (e.g. Antikainen, 2006; Telhaug et al., 2006) draw upon a very significant bond between nation-state building and the need for (welfare) experts to cater to the needs of a growing bureaucracy. Scholars (Hayhoe, 2012; Zha, 2012) investigating the relationship between Chinese universities and the state do not directly attach to the relation a discussion concerning nation-state building. However, a discussion exists about the role of the university in society, such as the university as a player in cultural

identity-shaping, the role of intellectuals participating in policy-making and the university as an institution contributing to the formation of civil society. Thus, in China the university was educating “elite” scholars who could offer expertise to the state and—since the economic reforms (the late 1970s)—training skilled workers to enable economic development (Chan, Ngok, & Phillips, 2008).

Trends in Higher Education in China and in Denmark Since the 1990s

Since the latest expansion (from the mid-1990s to the present) in higher education in China and Denmark, the trends have a high level of similarity in terms of globalization and marketization, although at varied scales. Mok (2012) argues that the field of higher education in China has been affected by the growing influence of privatization and marketization, particularly as the State has reduced its role in providing and funding education. Mok (2005) notes that the latest university mergers in the field were effectuated to improve citizens’ “global competence” and make the higher education system more efficient economically and academically. However, the investigations of the social consequences of privatization have shown the expansion of educational inequality, as university fees and tuition have increased so much that higher education is no longer affordable for low- and even middle-income families. Recent higher education policies suggest that the State intends to return to a more central role in order to tackle the issues of the growing social equality gap developed by the excessive privatization and marketization of social services in the last few decades, although questions about how the government will accomplish this remain unanswered (Mok, 2012).

The global focus has been maintained in Chinese universities since the mid-1980s when transnational higher education programs were allowed. In addition, in recent years the government has restated its pledge to the goal of bringing Chinese higher education up to international standards by allowing the establishment of jointly run universities such as the SDC (Mok, 2012).

Parallel tendencies can be observed in Denmark, as current higher education policies are presented as a globalization strategy that emphasizes educating citizens with a "global outlook" as a way to prepare them for the imagined global economic competition (Danish Government, 2006, 2013). In the strategy, internationalization appears to be unwavering faith in higher education, and no one seems to be against it. The launch of the Danish government's strategy for internationalization of higher education (Danish Government, 2013) did not generate much debate or many reactions from the public or education professionals. The current policies were analyzed by Andersen and Jacobsen (2012) as a paradigm shift, in which Danish universities have changed from being "free" and independent research and education institutions to becoming competitive international enterprises that obtain their main goal and legitimacy from the economic growth they generate in society. The shift of the universities from autonomous and "free" to dependent can be questioned as not entirely new, as the internal regulation reforms in university (e.g. in light of the demand for student participation on study boards) and the expansion of the disciplines in the 1960s had already put the university's autonomy in creating the curricula under pressure (Hansen, 2015). However, academic freedom understood as the university's liberty to choose research subjects remained intact during these reforms (Hansen, 2015). Thus, it would be more precise to reframe Andersen and Jacobsen's argument about the paradigm shift in autonomy as the autonomy of research now under pressure to dissolve. However, the transformation of universities into more competitive international enterprises (owned by the state) is currently very noticeable as these were not expressed in regulation policies for universities in previous decades. Competitiveness has become a driving force in the internationalization of higher education. Thus, higher education and research have been reoriented from being discipline-based to market-driven by policies motivated by the ideology of global markets (Langberg & Schmidt, 2010).

How do two nation-states embedding their state-building efforts in their universities in similar yet different ways merge educational practices in institutions such as the SDC? What consequences will this merger have for the universities' role in state-building? Will the practices in institutions like the SDC be under pressure to be determined by the current

ideology of a global market, where the main rationalities are to prepare students with imagined global competencies in the nation-states' fight for economic survival? The overall question is under which social circumstances the type of expertise that will be offered to the state is formed if—and only if—the university continues to be involved in state-building. These questions, raised through the historical contextualization of the role of the university in state-building, will be discussed in the analysis of how students experience the educational practices of institutions such as the SDC, where the educational practices are understood as the merging of the efforts of two nation-states' state-building through education.

Conceptualizing the New Emerging Transnational Educational Space

SDC can be conceptualized as a new and emerging *transnational educational space*, where national ideas of education are being transformed as the education programs at the SDC are no longer controlled by only one nation-state institution. Faist, Fauser and Reisenauer (2013) argue that the transnational space consists of new connections, and combinations can be made across national borders. Along with the emergence of transnational space, the relation between civil society and the state has changed, as the solid ties that used to connect civil society with the state are detached and redirected to cross national boundaries and create a global public sphere. New transnational universities like the SDC can be viewed as a transnational space of what Ong and Collier (2005) term "global assemblages," as these situations can be assumed to be ever-changing and not attached to the terrain of a nation-state.

Nevertheless, Burawoy (2000) emphasizes that the role of the nation-state has not been completely retracted, as the connections and flows are not autonomous but fashioned by a strong, attractive field of nation-states. Although nation-state performances continue, they now take place in a transnational arena with other performers where the plays/productions of the co-performances are new and yet unknown. Elucidating this process of the performances, Ong (1999) describes it as the idea of transnationalism

as it refers to the "cultural specificities of the global process, tracing the multiplicity of the uses and the conceptions of culture" (p. 4). Ong argues that new modalities in these global assemblages are emerging. She calls them *translocal governmentality* (Ong, 1999). The translocal governmentality in the global assemblages is viewed as "ideas and techniques for acting on the self and for reforming/reengineering the self in order to confront globalized insecurities and challenges" (Ong & Collier, 2005). These cultural specificities of the global process can thus be located through the political, economic and cultural rationalities that create (education) migration, relocation, business networks and state capital relations in all the transnational processes that are conceived through and governed by cultural meanings. Searching for the cultural specificities through the effects of translocal governmentalities in schooling is, in Popkewitz's sense, a search for how "reason" and "the reasonable person" are produced, as power operates through the circulation of knowledge, which is tied to political rationalities of the governing structures of our individuality (Popkewitz, 2000). The Foucauldian notion of power is refined in Popkewitz's approach to the study of schooling. To Popkewitz (2000), the notion of power "looks to the effects of knowledge in governing social practices, subjectivities, and possibilities" (p. 16). Power is located in the way social practices, subjectivities and possibilities are governed by the interactions and circulation of different instances of knowledge. In this, the concept of the subject becomes dynamic and negotiable, instead of a stable and essential entity, as one potential position among others (Foucault, 2002, 2008).

The educational space is thus seen as a socio-academic environment in which curriculum understood as different instances of knowledge is chosen and organized as an educational object in forming the subjectivities of future citizens as schooling is about governing subjectivities to create the desired citizenry (Popkewitz, 2000). Popkewitz argues that the "educated subject" in the modern world is also one that is subjugated by the political rationalities to govern the self (Popkewitz, 2000). Thus, through analyzing the ways in which schooling as governing practices produces truth (rules of reason) about the world, we are able to map how our relationship with the world and "our" selves is constructed.

Leaving the Dichotomy Between East and West Behind

Engaging in the study of subjectivity processes that occur in a transnational learning context goes beyond previous studies of subjectivity conceptualized within the boundaries of the nation-state (including Dale, 2003; Yan, 2010). The present study seeks to add new aspects to the research field inspired by the situated approach (e.g. Clark & Gieve, 2006). The approach does not look for differences and similarities between students based on an essentializing concept of nationality but rather seeks to understand how their meetings with different educational practices disturb and moderate the students' values and identities. To understand the complexities in the curricular requirements that occur in this new context, one must examine the education processes in the institutional setting instead of the "traditional" comparisons of differences in national state systems and cultures of education based on dichotomies (e.g. studies such as Bereday, 1964; Green, Preston, & Janmaat, 2006). In other words, this study seeks to move the focus from explanations of transnational issues that preserve the dichotomy between the West and East (as in Biggs, 1996; Singh & Sproats, 2005; Tan, McInerney, & Liem, 2008) to seeing the transnational learning context as a space that provides different possibilities for subject positions among the students on a micro-level.

In this perspective, the SDC's educational space forms subjectivities by allowing novel socio-academic negotiations between students and educators and between the students themselves through different instances of knowledge of cultural diversity (Staunæs, 2004). At the same time, the SDC becomes a space constituted by varied governance practices, as the negotiations express different possibilities of subjectivities—produced in the social process (Popkewitz, 2000). By way of this theoretical framework, then, the analytical question becomes the following: How does the SDC as governing practices produce and articulate truth about the world and thus the relationship between students' selves and the world, through the disruptions and moderations of students' values and identities in their meeting with different educational practices?

Thus, concrete analysis of the empirical materials, the strategy for analyzing the data, is guided by the following questions: What transformations of values and identities do students experience in their meeting with different educational practices when they strive for recognition at the SDC? In other words, how are reason and the reasonable student produced through the transformations? Which social categories become significant in the transformations of the students' personal and collective developments? How do negotiations of the contents ascribed to certain social categories take place?

Method

This analysis is based on qualitative interviews with 15 students[2] from Denmark and China. The interviews were conducted in Beijing (summer 2013) and in Copenhagen (summer 2014) and in the language preferred by the students. The Danish students preferred Danish. Most Chinese students preferred Mandarin, but two students (Lei and Ning) wanted to speak English for the sake of practice. At the time the students were completing their first or second year at the SDC. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour. The students' study experiences at the SDC were the primary focus of the open interviews. This interview type explores the multi-faceted and often contrasting enunciations of experiences and frames of orientation and interpretation. The interview is seen as a kind of social meeting and conversation between the interviewer and the informant. The goal is to create narratives about the informant's reality and the means by which she or he assigns significance to it. However, the power relation between the interviewer and the informant is asymmetric, as the theme for the conversation is prearranged by the interviewer. During the conversation, the interviewer also points at the themes to be followed and elaborated (Kvale, 2006). The interviews provided insights into how specific subject positions and identities are constructed in the SDC master's programs, as the storyline of a narrative is part of the construction, and as the narratives contain suggestions of subject positions, plots and imaginations

[2] To protect the anonymity of the informants, I have used pseudonyms.

of the normal and abnormal that one can pick up and make one's own (Staunæs, 2004). I interviewed three of the students twice, in their first and second year, as I was lucky that they agreed to talk to me one year later when they were doing their thesis work. These students were Ning, Lei and Eline. I use their experiences to foreground the analytical ideas. The way the empirical material has been analyzed is through readings of the interview transcripts led by concrete analytical questions stated in the above section. The first step of the analysis has focus on what students seem to have in common in their experiences. The second step is exploring how the students articulate these experiences differently and connect them to different social categories in which they explain their own transformations of values and identities. The examples in the following analysis show the variety of the students' experiences.

Decoding a New Educational Culture

The students' negotiations of their subject positions are depicted through student narratives about how their interactions at the SDC are led by their changing perceptions of nationalized culture diversity. "Prejudices" and "differences" connected to having a certain national and academic background were brought up by all the students in the interviews, whether the students talked about their experiences in the SDC learning environment in general, teamwork-based project assignments or after-class social activities. The students believe that their initial perceptions of differences between students with different national and academic backgrounds changed over time. The change in perspective leaned toward a more differentiated understanding of culture, social interactions and study skills in relation to nationality. The students take a retrospective approach to the subject, using terms such as "in the beginning" and "now after one year" or "after a while," creating a timeline that underscores how their ideas have developed.

Like many of the students I interviewed, Anna from Denmark does not frame the classroom as either Danish or Chinese but as something new. For example, she says that people are moving away from being competition-minded to being more into solidarity, as they encourage each

other to speak up and deliver arguments in the lectures as a way to help each other. This idea of the SDC as a hybrid institution and a different university frames how the students conceptualize the context of their education and the challenges of studying in an environment with profound national and academic diversity. They point out the emergence of a new educational culture through this hybridity, differing from the educational setting they are used to. The formation of the new educational culture develops concurrently with the students changing their ways of thinking and acting. The students see themselves in a process of enlightenment through being part of the new and hybrid culture. The need to change their understandings of cultural behavior bound to nationality in the context of transnational education is, in the students' experiences, connected to how the teamwork assignments function. The students emphasize the decreasing difficulties of working across nationalities in teamwork by contrasting the present with the beginning. Lei from China pointed out that in the beginning the study challenges contained many misunderstandings and prejudices because of the language barriers, as the Chinese students' English was not sufficient and the students assumed that they could continue with their old study habits in the new setting. The challenges the students experienced with communication between nationalities forced them to find novel strategies. In Lei's and Anna's experiences, we can capture a description of the need to learn a new system and a way of decoding the new "culture," as the SDC context is a place where "the old national skills" of communicating and working together no longer function optimally.

The students' study and communication skills from their national education experiences seem to be under dissolution, while a new culture for how to say things, how to discuss things in order to be (ac)knowledgeable, arises. Therefore, the techniques for reengineering the self in order to confront globalized challenges in this transnational academic context are to readjust beliefs in the significance of a nationalized cultural behavior, by which student behavior from respective countries can be explained. This seems to be the SDC's curricular requirements. The need to develop new strategies for communication and ways to form a common understanding in group work and during the lectures was described by second-year students as stabilized into a familiar everyday routine. What was necessary to create the stable and

familiar everyday routine and how and which common understandings of the needed skills are created to decode this new form of curriculum will be explored in the following section.

Creating a Common Understanding of the Needed Skills

Although the interaction challenges in the SDC classroom were connected to the perceived academic and national background differences, the students are more willing to and engaged in talking about the critical moments that created the needed common understanding in relation to the nationality categories than academic diversity. In the following examples from the student narratives about situations defined as "the turning point" or "the critical moment" for the interactions in their group work and in the classroom, the ways that common understandings are shaped become obvious. The examples demonstrate understandings regarding reasonable and recognizable skills in this educational institution and how the understandings are connected to certain embodied nationalities at stake. Thus, it is possible to illuminate the necessary ways of reasoning in the curricular requirements of the SDC and the ways these requirements are linked to certain embodied nationalities. The different degrees of tension in the struggles among the students to reach consensus can be viewed as three exemplary processes.

The first example features Ning, a student from China. She explains that the first year at the SDC taught her a different way to practice education than what she had expected. Her narrative displays a "peaceful" transformation in the "natural" process of becoming a reasonable SDC student:

> Ning: At least for me in my undergraduate school, if the teacher said something or wrote something on the blackboard that I thought was not correct, I'd go to her or him after the class, and then if there was something wrong with a formula, he'd say, oh yes. And then at SDC, in our class, the Danish guys'll raise their hand, and say, oh there's something wrong in the formula, and they'll point it out directly then. After this time at SDC, I

> now think that I'll point it out directly. In the very beginning, I'd think that it'd be embarrassing, but what I think now is that it's okay. I think that, okay, what *you* think is maybe different from the professors or other students. (Ning, first-year student in the Water and Environment program, from China)

In Ning's comparison of current and prior requirements, she finds that the ability to be direct (and have your own opinion) and non-hierarchal thinking of positioning are demanded in a SDC classroom. Further, she asserts that she has been acquiring these skills as the year progressed. She perceives it to be a positive dimension of the SDC which is derived from the way the Danish students act in the SDC classroom. Ning interprets these skills as attached to a specific Danish education practice, as the Danish students perform it naturally. Although the abilities are attached to the imagined Danish-ness, they do not seem to be fixed and available only to the Danish students in the SDC classroom. The abilities are also available to Chinese students who are willing to adapt to obtain scientific knowledge. In Ning's narratives of her development toward becoming a more recognized student by performing the valued skills of the SDC, the national categories are very strong. In that way, Ning experiences that her own resources from her Chinese education are not acknowledged as useful.

The second example plays out in Eline's narrative about the group work process, where settling for social order requires challenging struggles. Eline from Denmark describes her experiences of working with students with varying national backgrounds as SDC challenges to overcome.

> Eline: Last time we were doing a project, I was together with two Chinese by myself, and when we came to the discussion part, where one could clearly feel that they wanted facts on the table, I was more, like, that we have to discuss what is good and bad, what we have to change, but in that sense, it seemed to me that they learn and adapt quickly. When we first begin to discuss, or rather try to explain that it's necessary to discuss it this way, we pose these questions: What if something happened, what can one do? Then they are also able to get started and try to discuss, but they are not naturally like this: That we have to discuss or come up with a critical opinion. (Eline, first-year student in the Water and Environment program, from Denmark, my translation from Danish)

This quotation illustrates a situation in which the group is forming and making agreements about how the work should be done, which procedure their process should follow. Here, Eline sees herself as having the ability to discuss, an important skill in the group project assignment. In group work with Chinese students, she interpreted the ability to discuss as unnatural to Chinese students but natural to Danish students. The turning point for forming the basis of the cooperation in the team was when Eline explained the need for discussion during group work. She finds herself persuading the group to integrate the discussion culture, which she describes as a successful process of their work with the assignment. In the narrative, a distinct dichotomy is created between them and us, based on national study skills (e.g. the ability to discuss). Eline thinks that this ability along with critical thinking is a feature of Danish education, but she also thinks that Chinese students can adopt them quickly. The students are pictured as flexible and able to pick up abilities that are imagined as tied to a certain nationality that is not "their own." The category of nationality functions dynamically in the student interactions.

However, as the third example featuring the student Niels illustrates, some interactions across the nationalities took place under a very tense atmosphere. Niels' narrative is about a process the students have undergone in their discussions about criticizing national policies. According to Niels, the turning point for creating a common understanding of the importance of using critique in the learning context and for the learning output was the meta-discussion they had half a year after they started at the SDC. Before the meta-debate he had some controversies with Chinese students, as the critique he raised against Chinese policies in Niels' view was perceived by Chinese students as a personal attack on China that the Chinese students felt they had to defend.

> JHL: We talked about a critical culture or critical discussion culture before, you said you had a 'meta-talk' about it, how did it work after that?
>
> Niels: I think in the beginning, we didn't have so much of a meta-talk. We kind of had the expectation that the Danes will raise their hands in class and discuss with the teachers, and the Chinese won't say anything. This was raised as a point during class in plenum. However, nothing was done about why we had the approaches that we had. It is important to have

> a discussion like that in the beginning of the process, to enable them to understand why we are doing this in this way. We didn't have that discussion in the beginning, but later on, because they were a bit surprised that we kept criticizing Chinese policies. And along the way, they became better at engaging in the discussions but still not as good as the Danish students. I think that discussing with and explaining to them, and maybe provoking them a bit and telling them that these are ours (methods, ed.), and we think that it is important because it is something which promotes dialogue about some of the things, and that is exactly in my point of view the intersection where different opinions meet, where you become challenged on your own opinions. And against that background, you maybe will get another view of things and society. (Niels, second-year student in the Public Management and Social Development Program, from Denmark, my translation from Danish)

This illustration depicts how consensus was reached during sensitive negotiations which required provocation and conviction. As a result of the struggles, critical thinking practices are staged as the basis of gaining scientific knowledge regardless of nationality. In Niels' narrative, the Danish students were already educated in that way, whereas the Chinese students had to catch up, which they seem to do gradually after the meta-discussion. The sensitivity of the discussions of national policies among the students illustrates that the "critical sense" is articulated not only as a practical skill or an instrumental tool for studying but also as a skill for personal development. Personal development is seen as the way one's personal opinion becomes challenged through the discussion made possible by "critical sense." "Critical sense" here is produced as a national marker, with Danish-ness encoded in it. The acquisition of scientific knowledge involving national policies at the SDC seems to demand a detachment from assumed (Chinese) nationality. However, at the same time, the acquisition of scientific knowledge is constructed as a Danish method for solving social issues in civil society, in which Chinese students will have to catch up. In a sense, the SDC curricular requirements denationalize scientific knowledge and, at the same time, nationalize it. This requires Chinese students (only) to dispense with their assumed national pride and participate in critiques of Chinese and Danish policies in order to obtain a degree from the SDC.

Discussion

The analysis shows some of the same tendencies as the studies based on the essentializing concept of "Chinese learners" (Grimshaw, 2007) in the perceptions of Chinese students. The term "Chinese learners" is applied to problematize the group of Asian international students with roots in a Chinese-speaking country at English-speaking universities as these students exhibit "Chinese behaviors in [a] Western classroom," which is seen as a clash between the pedagogy of Western universities and the Chinese tradition of learning. The group is often constructed as being obedient to authority, passive in class, lacking in critical thinking and inadequate in adopting learning strategies (Saravanamuthu & Yap, 2014; Tan et al., 2008). However, at the SDC, the educational space is dynamic, and the subject positions for the student are not fixed by nationality or language. Instead, they are flexible, and Chinese students are not seen as lacking the ability to adopt new learning strategies. However, although the SDC curriculum attempts to denationalize the requirements, it nationalizes them in other ways, as the curriculum requirements are linked to the imagined Danish scientific practices rather than Chinese ones. Therefore, Danish students are one step ahead in becoming more reasonable students. In that sense, a non-intentional competition occurs among students as they are equipped with a certain knowledgeable body marked by their nationality. Therefore, at the SDC some of the perceptions of education practices divided into the West and East categories are also reproduced. The shift in the governing principle of the students' subjectivity is one of the consequences of the merging of the two nation-states' similar yet different ways of embedding state-building in their universities. The governing principle of students' subjectivity is led by the shifted focus on interpreting diversity in behavior through national scientific culture instead of national culture. This may imply that the main rationalities from higher education policies at the SDC as a global assemblage are concretely translated into a struggle about hierarchization of forms of scientific knowledge bound to different nation-states. Hence, the main rationalities from higher education policies as a central part of nation-states' fight for economic survival become a struggle about becoming the most scientific nation-state. The described hierarchization can be seen as an expression

of how competition between the nation-states is taking place through the transnational educational practices. In that way, the site of the SDC becomes a site for a competition to nationalize scientific knowledge and practices. Thus, the role of the university in state-building continues in institutions such as the SDC. The intention of constructing the SDC as an institution that can produce a workforce and citizens with a global outlook and competencies seems to be translated and practiced at the SDC as ways to invest certain national students with the strongest argumentation of what scientific knowledge is with implicit connotations of national imaginaries. Thus, the expertise offered to the state formed under these circumstances will also carry the identity marker of nationalized scientific knowledge. Through the translocal governmentality at the SDC, the students can be viewed as future citizens not only fighting for their own personal acknowledgment and development but also struggling with representing a national interest in these processes of nationalizing the educational and scientific practices.

Concluding Remarks

In analyzing the process of the critical moments of students' socio-academic developments, I identified various struggles in transnational education, which visibly illuminate how the students' educational practices in this transnational context change as perceptions of the significance of nationalized culture in education are modified. These examples offer a pattern of the ways the students are making reason in their performance of transnational education. By locating the rationalities in transnational education practices, the analysis has, in Ong's (1999) sense, dealt with the cultural specificities of the global process. The examples do not represent one individual's whole educational process; nevertheless, they illuminate political rationalities tied to the governing principles of their individuality linked to the certainty of Danish-ness as among the ways power is exercised and produced in the transnational context of the SDC. Popkewitz (2000) argues that national schooling is about constructing "the national imaginaries that give cohesion to the idea of the national citizenry." In addition, this analysis displays some aspects of what transnational

schooling is constructing. The transnational subjectivities are shaped by the ideal of the student at the SDC as scientific and non-national, while in the social process the negotiations express possible subject positions that are produced differently depending on the nationality that marks the bodies of the students. The possible subject positions produced through the transnational educational practices at the SDC are therefore still nationalized, as being more or less scientific is strongly attached to national categories. Therefore, transnational schooling is also producing a cohesion that will reinforce the idea of national citizenry. Exploring the transnational processes at the SDC illustrates that the establishment of institutions destabilizes the bond in some ways by having an ideology of an achievement of scientific knowledge that is stated as non-national. However, it may not be breaking the strong historical bond between nation-state building and educational regimes, as student negotiations for acknowledgment are still attached—and their professional identities are still renewed in relation—to an imagined nationality.

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8

Experiential and Transformative Learning Through Community Service in China

Kaishan Kong

I went to China with the attitude that I wanted to make a positive difference in these students' lives, and I did, but they changed my life more than I could have ever expected. You never know what things you will learn from someone, so always keep yourself open to the possibilities.
Tori, a participant

Introduction

According to the statistics from the Institute of International Education (2015), from 2003/04 to 2013/14, of the total US students studying abroad, the percentage of those in semester-long programs decreased from 38.1% to 31.9%, and participants in year-long programs also dropped from 6% to 2.9%. By contrast, the number of students in various short-term programs increased. For instance, participants in summer

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F. Dervin et al. (eds.), *International Students in China*, Palgrave Studies on Chinese Education in a Global Perspective, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78120-4_8

term programs grew from 37% to 38.1%; more sub-divided models were offered for students to experience learning abroad.

In addition to the ubiquitous linguistic benefits of study abroad (i.e. Freed, 1998; Kinginger, 2008; Milstein, 2005), researchers expressed the necessity of considering study abroad as a haven of creative, engaging, and transformative learning through real-world experience and critical reflection (Foronda & Belknap, 2012; Perry, Stoner, & Tarrant, 2012). Kong (2016) called for more light to be shed on programs that involve critical reflective process, continuous identity negotiation, challenging prior beliefs, and critiquing predominant thought.

In the same light, community service or service-learning programs are receiving more attention from researchers and practitioners, who advocate that service learning abroad allows students to "recognize existing power structures of the dominant culture and the deleterious effects" (Smith, Jennings, & Lakhan, 2014, p. 1192); such programs expand "students' capacity to care for individuals who have a different world view" (Kohlbry & Daugherty, 2015, p. 245). Last but not least, these programs enable students to grow personal connection with people and groups beyond their peer group or nation (Kiely, 2005; Parker & Dautoff, 2007), so as to enhance students' self-awareness and achieve personal growth.

Experiential learning (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2008) and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991, 1997, 2000) are two valuable theories in study abroad research because they place *reflection* as an essential pathway to learning. Working with/for a disadvantaged population abroad has the potential to push participants to reflect more critically on their intercultural interactions. To achieve this, both experience and reflection are necessary (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011).

This chapter examined the intercultural experiences of three American undergraduate students who taught English to low-income children from rural China, during a short-term faculty-led study abroad project in China. Differing from many other cultural-exploration-based projects, this study abroad opportunity was a community service-oriented program, and the challenges they encountered presented an array of transformative moments where they experienced and experimented with ideas.

Literature Review

Experiential Learning

According to Dewey (1933), the two principles of learning include *continuity* and *interaction*. By continuity, he argued that education is a *process* rather than an end during which the past, present, and future experiences play an important role and serve as means of learning. Equally importantly, through interaction with others and the environment, individuals "develop the skills to critically analyze and reflect upon the bigger questions" (Perry et al., 2012, p. 680) that can be discovered in various capacities of learning such as study abroad, problem-based learning, and community service. Perry and colleagues further elaborated that problems may be found in "a typical, different, or disorienting experiences had by learners" (Perry et al., 2012, p. 680). For instance, study abroad is an environment that is not familiar to learners which constitutes an environment where learners are exposed to perspectives different from what they are normally offered by their families or mainstream media in their familiar contexts.

Kolb developed the experiential learning theory in the realm of management education. Experiential learning theory describes learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). There are four distinct phases in the learning cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The stages of this cycle allow for participants to alternate between periods of reflection and active learning.

Kolb and Kolb (2008) integrate various perspectives of experiential learning scholars and offered six major tenets: (1) Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes. (2) All learning is relearning. (3) Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world. (4) Learning is a holistic process of adaptation. (5) Learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment. (6) Learning is the process of creating knowledge.

Vande Berg, Paige, and Lou (2012) provided a vivid metaphor to help audiences visualize the significance of experiencing across disciplines in study abroad contexts.

> The appropriate emblem for learning abroad is not a yard light equipped with a motion sensor that is tripped when a student enters the yard, so that he or she is suddenly bathed in the light of new knowledge. Learning is more like a dimmer switch. As a student enters a dark room, he or she needs to find the switch and begin to experiment with the efforts of moving it up or down. (2012, p. 18)

The goal of study abroad is not simply to acquire knowledge, but to develop students' ability to "shift cultural perspective and to adapt their behavior to other cultural contexts" (Vande Berg et al., 2012, p. 18). Thus, it is essential to consider the experiential, holistic, reflective, experimental, and developmental circle of study abroad.

Transformative Learning

Mezirow's transformative learning theory is closely related to and often discussed along with experiential learning. Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) perceives learning as a constructive and reflective process wherein a learner's knowledge flows forth from critically reflecting on their experience. In order to achieve transformative perspectives, learning should extend beyond traditional classrooms (Moore, 2005; Smith & McKitrick, 2010).

Built on his own research where 83 women adults were studied on their reenrollment in a university, Mezirow (1991) investigated how this experience transformed the learners. As a result, he summarized ten steps that led to a learner's transformation:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change

5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning of a course of action
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective

These steps underscore the essentiality of critical reflection in transformative learning. Mezirow (1991) proposed that an individual's disorienting dilemma be considered as a catalyst to stimulate critical reflection. During the learning process, when learners start to examine their emotions, question their pre-existing beliefs, identify problems, seek solutions, and experiment with their ideas, learning occurs in more meaningful ways. Transformative learning values not only learners' experience but also their interpretation of the experience. Experience and interpretation mutually influence each other in a virtuous cycle. Meaningful hands-on learning allows learners to reflect on their experience, and the reflection itself, in turn, determines learners' "actions, their hopes, their contentment and emotional well-being, and their performance" (Mezirow, 1991, p. xiii). Critical reflection enables learners to seek solutions for a problem and experiment in reality.

Experiential learning and transformative learning complement each other and accentuate four common themes: learning through interaction, learning through experience, learning through reflection, and learning as a process. These frameworks pushed learners to "become conscious of and explicit about their teaching and learning assumptions". Echoing the aforementioned metaphor raised by Vande Berg et al. (2012), this framework empowers learners to construct meanings by moving the dimmer switch up and down. They make sense of experience through reflection and experiments.

Community Service in Study Abroad

One of the study abroad models is through service learning. Definitions of service learning may vary in disciplines, but the International Partnership for Service-Learning and Leadership underscores its essential

aspect as to address "simultaneously two important needs of our societies: the education and development of people and the provision of increased resources to serve individuals and communities" (IPSL, 2007). Service learning is embraced as an effective tool to cultivate students' awareness of social justice and to enhance students' cultural competency (Burnett, Hamel, & Long, 2004; Toporek, Kwan, & Williams, 2012). Service learning is considered as a subset of experiential learning and offers unique educational benefits over other types of experiential learning with its integration of course work and its emphasis on community service (Ball, 2008; Burnett et al., 2004; Delve, Mintz, & Stewart, 1990).

International service learning, in particular, is argued to be more effective in influencing and transforming students' worldviews by immersing the learners in a country and culture different from their own, which would push them to gain insights into their own and others' cultural perspectives (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008). While domestic service learning has positive value in promoting cultural competency, its major limitation may be that learners' reflection is limited "within the sociopolitical context of the dominant society" (Smith et al., 2014, p. 1192). In other words, "it is challenging to recognize dominant culture power structures when an individual, particularly an individual from the dominant culture, is still swimming in the dominant culture fishbowl" (Smith et al., 2014, p. 1192). On the contrary, *international* service learning addresses the limitations of domestic service learning by limiting the influence of the dominant cultural contexts for learners to recognize and reflect on issues related to social justice. Smith and other scholars aptly stated, "service learning embedded within an intensive study abroad experience may provide the requisite cultural contact without the limitations inherent in living and working within one's own 'cultural fishbowl'" (Smith et al., 2014, p. 1192).

In the current study, by serving the underprivileged children, participants encountered disorienting dilemmas to make sense of, problems to solve, emotions to manage, identities to negotiate, all of which were transformative moments to inspire them to reflect on their prior perceptions of China and on their own sociocultural environment. Thus, Kolb's

(1984) experiential learning theory and Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory are well suited for such a study to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. What were the transformative moments during the community service experience that fostered participants' learning?
2. How did participants make sense of these transformative moments to develop understanding during this community service experience?

Research Design

Setting and Participants

This study is set in a three-week faculty-led international community service-learning project in China. The study participants were three undergraduate students from an American college who served as English language teachers in a summer camp for 23 underserved children from rural China. The Chinese campers were selected from multiple middle schools in four rural provinces, including Yunnan, Ningxia, Guizhou, and Sichuan. The campers were from 12 to 15 years old, and all came from low-income families that faced a variety of challenges. Some of their parents were migrant workers in China, who left home to work in faraway cities and only came home to see the children once or twice a year. Some of the students had to take care of the ill parents and younger siblings.

This summer camp occurred in Chengdu, a second-tier city in the southwest part of China. The theme was English learning; therefore, the three participants, because of their advantage of speaking English as their first language, assisted the Chinese volunteers to teach a variety of English classes such as reading, speaking, and grammar. Additionally, they offered other English learning activities, including making English posters, singing English songs, and acting in English language role-plays.

The three participants included Dee, Tori, and Kate. They were all students in a small university in the Midwestern United States, and they took Chinese language classes for a year prior to the trip, which led to

their interest in learning more about Chinese culture. It was the first time for all three of them to visit China. The participants arrived in Beijing where they adjusted to jetlag and explored the city for two days, before flying to Chengdu where the summer camp took place. After the camp, they flew to Shanghai and stayed for two days prior to their trip back to the United States.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data sources included semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion, observations, reflective journal articles, photos, and program evaluation reports. Interviews were one of the most important sources of data in this study. Yin (2013) believes that interviewees could help a researcher to identify other relevant sources of evidence through interviews. Further, Patton (2001) writes that the purpose of interview is "to capture how those being interviewed view their world, to learn *their* terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of *their* individual perceptions and experience" (p. 348). The researcher was the leading professor of the trip so she was the major data collector for this project. She had two individual interviews with each participant, one in Beijing at the beginning of the trip and the other one in Chengdu on the day before the end of the summer camp. During the program, the researcher had five focus group interviews with all of the three participants. The purpose of the focus group was to engage the participants to share experiences, recognize problems, seek resolutions, and foster critical reflections, which were identified as meaningful steps toward perspective transformation (Mezirow, 2000).

Each participant also provided five journal articles throughout the experience. They were encouraged to add photos and captions to document some critical learning moments. At the end of the program, as required by the university, participants also submitted a five-page exit report on this service-learning experience. Moreover, direct observation was an important means to collect first-hand accounts of a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009).

The data analysis started along with the data collection process, as scholars argue that data collection, analysis, and report writing are interrelated and occur simultaneously (Patton, 2001; Yin, 2013). The researcher employed other strategies including memos, categorizing, and connecting to make sense of the diverse types of data and discover themes.

Findings

This section will describe each of the three participants' experiences in three aspects: teaching, perceptions of China, and personal impact. The next section will draw on similarities and differences for further discussion.

Tori's Experience

Tori was a freshman majored in English and minored in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). She was an extrovert and adventurous person who would try new things, despite any possible embarrassment. For instance, she would approach a Chinese stranger to compliment on her beautiful dress because she thought that would be a good first step to communicate with local people; she would try more exotic food such as cow's stomach, mini squid, and duck tongue. In the classroom, she was most comfortable using body language to teach her students with low English proficiency. She would lie on the floor, cling to the wall, and stand on chairs to convey her meaning and make her students laugh. Tori was also a critical thinker and provided the most information in interviews and lengthy journals.

Teaching

Tori was not shy to use body language and made fun of herself to help campers understand English, but her first class did not go as well as she had expected.

> another thing that I learned from my first day of teaching was that I have to talk very slow, and break up the sentences into shorter pieces when I am reading aloud. If I do not do this, the students have difficulty remembering all the words and how to say them…. Miranda helped me by saying that she thought it would be better for them if I said it in smaller pieces. Now I know to do this in the future, and I will not make this mistake again. (Reflection journal #2)

> After my lesson was over, I felt completely energized. I knew it had gone well, but all I could think about after was how to make my lessons more challenging for the students in the future. I really want to push these students, because I think they are capable of much more, and they deserve this sort of respect. I am going to do my best to do this for these students. (Reflective journal #3)

For Tori, she experimented co-teaching with a local Chinese volunteer named Bing. After some emotional struggles and adjustment of communications, it turned out to be a successful and memorable experience for Tori. As she wrote in her final reflective report,

> I enjoy working with Bing; I just wish I had the experience and understanding of cultural customs in China so that I could better navigate the rules of behavior between colleagues. (Reflective journal #5)

Tori actively reviewed her teaching performance and consulted her Chinese partners for suggestions and feedback. These challenging experiences and her thought-provoking discussions made perspective transformation possible in teaching (Mezirow, 1991).

Perceptions of China

When the three participants toured in Beijing prior to the summer camp, they encountered many urban students who were dressed in brand name outfits, communicated fluently in English, and easily drew on popular cultural topics in conversations. By contrast, two days later they met the campers of the same age with those Beijing students; however, these students had no access to even basic educational resources. Tori had a hard time grappling with the contrasting picture of poverty and wealth.

> I originally thought that the Chinese educational system was really good. And I think that in some areas it is really good, but I am growing to understand that in a lot of areas where these students come from, there really aren't any resources. So I guess I am really growing to understand the distance between the rich and the poor, and everything that follows with it. I was aware of the gap between the rich and the poor in China, but I didn't realize what else went with that, like that educational resources and their home life resources. (Interview #2)

Tori then quoted a story from one of the campers called Henry. This 12-year-old boy had to take care of his younger siblings and sick mother because his father passed away when he was little. The resources were scarce in his area and he could only eat a meal of corn porridge each day. Tori found it disheartening and perplexing: the China that she knew prior to this trip—developed, globally influential; the students that she met in Beijing—well-informed and globally minded, were drastically different from the people she interacted with in the summer camp. Tori said her understanding of China became more sophisticated as she was trying to make sense of all her observations. Moreover, she developed a more profound comparison across cultures. In one of the journals, she showed a photo that she took with Chinese volunteers and wrote,

> Reflecting on my time in China, I think the biggest thing that I have learned is that the people here and the people in America at their core are the same…We took this picture at the restaurant on our first day in Chengdu. This was when we first met our partners, and the other volunteers. This picture reminds me of the excitement of that first day, and how open and welcoming these people were to us. I think that Chinese people are very welcoming to foreigners, and that they are very kind and can be very silly people. I think that Americans and Chinese have more in common than many Americans think. (Reflective Journal #5)

Tori's reflection showed that when individuals discover discrepancies in their pre-existing knowledge and what they actually experience, a culturally disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 2000) may arise and, like a catalyst, compel individuals to confront their cultural paradigms. In this process, individuals' ethnocentric lenses are problematized and their learning may be transformed through acquiring a new lens to perceive the world.

Personal Impact

This community service experience allowed Tori to see how students appreciated and valued the opportunity of having an American teacher; her confidence as a teacher grew and she was inspired to return to teach more.

> I want to go back to China someday… I truly loved teaching English as a foreign language to my students at the summer camp, and I think that this is something that I would enjoy doing as a career…For the first time in my life, I feel like I have some idea of where I am heading in life, and I could not have had this revelation without this incredible experience abroad. (Exit report)

Tori displayed compelling insights on her growth as a person, as an American, as a privileged class with access to resources. For instance, by connecting language learning and global mind-set, she problematized the ignorance of some Americans and stated a stronger desire to learn other languages.

> English is not as globalized as I previous believed. I would never be able to settle in and connect with people in rural areas without learning more Chinese… Learning a language fluently is a powerful tool for people to use. It opens up so many different possibilities for travel, careers, and relationships. Many people in the United States are not fully utilizing this tool…A global effect of this is that many Americans are ignorant of other cultures, and since we do not make much of an effort to learn foreign languages, we are wasting this valuable resource that so many other people around the globe are capitalizing on. This distortion in the effort of foreign language learning could be potentially damaging to America's relationships with other nations. The best way to remedy this situation is to change America's stigma for foreign language learning; it is not just another liberal education requirement, but a valuable tool to become self-sufficient. (Exit report)

Additionally, her direct interaction with the underprivileged community led her to reflect on her contribution and compassion toward others. Interaction with the campers made poverty feel personal for Tori, rather than something outside her world, which was considered essential in transformative learning theories (Foronda & Belknap, 2012).

> One thing that I think differently now about my own culture is that we take so much more for granted. The stories of these students at this camp are incredible. Many of them have lost parents, live in poverty, and are extremely underserved people. Never in my life have I had to walk more than a mile to get to school. Never in my life have I ever had to carry water for an entire week to school with me. Never in my life have I ever not had enough to eat, or not felt safe at home. It is difficult for me to even comprehend these students' stories, and when I compare their lives to my own, I feel very frustrated…In the future I want to be more conscious of this. I want to be more conscious of my privilege and do more nationally and internationally to give back. (Exit report)

Tori developed knowledge of her own country not only from comparing both cultures, but also from Chinese campers' explicitly expressed views of the United States. Tori gathered a stereotype from the campers that American people are overly independent and even selfish. While Tori was reshaping her own perception of China, she also took efforts to correct this misconception to reshape others' perception of America.

> I also learned a lot about myself, and how people from other countries view me and see me… I understand now that many people may have negative ideas about America and Americans, but they may not express this… Because I had the chance to spend time with these students for three weeks, and be their teacher I feel like I had more opportunities to make a good impression on these students about America. One lesson that in particular that I thought did a good job of this was Bing and I taught a lesson about love. In this lesson I was able to explain to students that in America we often express our feelings more explicitly than they might in China. Another way that I feel like I was able to make a good impression on these students was just by being there. I was myself around these students, and I don't think that I am an overly selfish or negative person, so the students saw the way I acted and could make up their own minds. (Reflective journal #5)

She was being helped to learn more about China and helping others to learn more about the United States. She found others' stereotypes of the United States not offensive but rather a transformative moment for her to clarify, to explain, and to openly reflect on her own culture and her own identity.

Kate's Experience

Kate was also a freshman majored in Spanish and was considering whether to enter the education field. She was fluent in Spanish, and during the summer camp, she taught other volunteers and students some simple Spanish vocabulary and songs, which helped her bond with others. Kate was eager to apply her language skills, brave to try new food, but she could be a little quiet at the beginning when surrounded by new people.

Teaching

Kate also had no teaching experience, but she did incredible preparations prior to her teaching, from collecting photos to writing down her script in class. The first class did not go well though.

> My first time teaching was difficult and I was very nervous. Even with a lesson plan things did not go as well as I wanted them to…I also thought it was difficult to know if the students actually understood what I was teaching and I didn't really know how to check their understanding, but after a group meeting with the other volunteers I gained a better understanding of what they would do and how I could implement that into my teaching…. One of the main things that I learned is that I need to over prepare for my lessons because I won't know what they know. I also learned from talking with Dee that they would have fun if they could move around and interact with each other. (Reflective journal #2)

Afterward, she sought feedback from those who observed her class, including the professor, her fellow American students, and other Chinese volunteer teachers. Gradually, seeing Tori's body language and other teachers' strategies, Kate stepped out of her comfort zone and delivered incredible classes. She wrote in her later journal,

> Since my last journal I taught more speaking lessons and I feel that with each class I'm learning new information about the students and also about their level, but I'm also learning more about how I can change to become a better teacher. For example in one of my classes I was teaching the seasons

> and I was able to act out a lot of the activities related to the season which was very fun in my opinion and I think that the students enjoyed the fact that I was acting silly. (Reflective journal #4)

Exploring new sources of knowledge and becoming more self-directed are indicators of perspective transformation (Perry et al., 2012). Kate demonstrated those traits by reaching out to other peers and making adjustments.

Perception of China

Similar to Tori, Kate had an initial perception of Chinese people. She thought Chinese people were more reserved and hesitant to meet new people, but her experience in China showed otherwise. When she received a lot of stares from strangers in China, she felt like a celebrity. Her openness to photo requests and stares was surprising to the researcher considering her quiet personality shown in the United States. When asked how she felt about the stares, she was understanding of Chinese people's curiosity and was amazed at their hospitality. In her last reflective journal, she wrote,

> Now that the trip is over and I'm on my way home I think of China differently from my own culture in many ways. For example I think that Chinese culture is very open about meeting new people. There were many people in China that asked to take pictures with us and also who began conversing with us even though they did not know if we spoke Chinese. I mention this because at the beginning of the trip I felt that people in China wanted to keep more to themselves but now I know that that idea does not apply to everyone. (Reflective journal #5)

Personal Impact

Kate experienced language barriers while interacting with local communities. For instance, her failed attempt to buy breakfast made her realize the inconvenience of lacking a language skill. She could have stopped trying or had other Chinese to translate for her; nevertheless, data showed that her strong desire to learn Chinese became a driving force for her to

overcome shyness to communicate with others. Furthermore, from the campers' desire to learn English despite considerable difficulties, she was inspired to learn Chinese well and in the future to use this language for her career.

> One disorientating dilemma that I experienced while abroad was that I was not able to understand what others were saying in Chinese; this made me feel frustrated and at the same time motivated me to keep learning the language….One of the main things that I learned from these experiences is you cannot continue to develop your knowledge of language unless you are willing to communicate with other people because that is a main part of a language…My experience abroad impacted my career goals because I was able to gain a deeper motivation to learn fluent Chinese and possibly even get a career where I might work in China. (Exit report)

Kate's reflection was more than language motivation. In one of her journals, she wrote,

> I think that this camp has helped me appreciate what I have back home and how easy of a life I have compared to some of the students at the camp. For example prior to the party many of them had not had pizza or sushi or desserts. (Reflective journal #3)

She bonded with the campers very well; she was invited to various activities by the campers; she remained engaged during the entire three weeks. When asked how she maintained her energy, she said the experience and campers' stories were compelling for her to realize how much she had to learn, so she did not want to miss any moment of learning. Her knowledge of self and appreciation of life developed as she learned more from her students.

Dee's Experience

Dee was a sophomore majored in English Linguistics and minored in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). She was kind, easygoing, gentle and got along well with the other two participants. She was also quieter than the other two participants, and she did not talk much in the interviews.

Teaching

With no prior teaching experience, she ran out of things to teach within the first 20 minutes of her first class. The leading professor helped her facilitate the rest of the 30 minutes in the class. She immediately sought help from her fellow American students and the local volunteer teachers. In her later reflection of teaching, she wrote,

> I would have to say, after my first lesson I was a little bit discouraged. I got some feedback and thought about ways to change the way I approached teaching lessons. I also had to calm my nerves a little I think. Outside of the classroom I mostly lesson plan and talk to the other volunteers or some of the students…When I actually taught the second class it was actually pretty fun.… The students were very engaged in the class they repeated after me all the time and seemed pretty excited. I had a lot of fun teaching this class. After the class ended I felt really good. Compared to my first class this one went much better and I felt five million times better. (Reflective journal #2)

Dee was observant of not only her own teaching but also students' response and engagement. It echoes that knowledge gain reflects a "combination of individual disposition and characteristics of the learning environment" (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p. 50).

Strangers Staring

Coming from a family of six, Dee did not like to be the center of attention; neither did she like to be in pictures. While traveling in China, she received a lot of staring and photo requests from strangers, which made her feel uncomfortable and overwhelmed. She said, "The staring was also disorienting because I was not used to it, and when we would make eye contact with people they would continue to stare at us" (Interview #2). Seeing her anxiety toward strangers' stares, the faculty intentionally asked her to consult other Chinese colleagues and to analyze the behavior in a constructive way. Such discussions are considered constructive methods to challenge students' personal framework about cultural diversity and develop cultural empathy (Smith et al., 2014).

In a later interview, Dee said she felt much less anxious and more understanding of why Chinese people stared at her. Especially after traveling to Shanghai, the international city, where she was rarely stared at, she noticed that she could blend in much easier as a foreigner than in a smaller city like Chengdu. Chinese people's different attitude toward her revealed the nuanced cultural and social diversity even within China. Interestingly enough, the lack of staring in Shanghai made her feel less anxious, but at the same time she missed her uniqueness in a smaller city like Chengdu. Dee's emotional journey comprised of shock, frustration, reflection, surprise, and sympathy (Foronda & Belknap, 2012), but ultimately she found this experience fascinating and constructive.

Personal Impact

Like the other two participants, she encountered constant language barriers in China,

> I think that in the last few days I have really had a mixture of feelings. I have been really happy and excited to see new things, but I have also been surprised and slightly frustrated that things I could easily do at home are a little more difficult here since I do not speak the language very well. It definitely makes me want to learn more so I can understand more, and talk to more people. (Reflective journal #1)

Experiential learning gives "primary emphasis to praxis, the transformative dialectic between reflection and action—reflection informed by action and action informed by reflection" (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p. 52). Upon return, she finished all Chinese language classes and studied abroad in Korea to learn more Asian languages.

Besides learning goals, this community service experience also allowed her to reflect on her privilege and cultivated her cultural empathy, through working with underserved students. When asked to pick a favorite photo of the trip, she chose a group photo of her with the campers and wrote,

> This picture really shows one of the most important things I experienced on my trip. The children I was able to teach were really amazing. They were

> all wonderful students and extremely respectful. These children came from homes that didn't have much money. They all came from poor villages but they were bright and happy. I will never forget having the opportunity to teach these children and connect with them. (Exit report)

Discussion

Data reflect a learning curve for each participant and their active exploration of information to test their current belief, solve a practical problem, develop skills, and nurture cultural empathy. In this process, disorienting dilemmas served as a catalyst to challenge critical reflection and foster learning.

Identifying a Problem and Seeking Solutions

The three participants had direct experience with local communities, in particular, a disadvantaged group of people, which enabled them to see a less common side of Chinese society. Putting on a new hat as a teacher and learning to work with local communities gave the participants a roller-coaster kind of emotion. As Kolb and Kolb (2008) suggested, learning is a holistic process of adaptation where conflicts and differences may occur and serve as a positive learning moment. As shown in the data, all three participants shared their frustration and disappointment at teaching at the beginning, but as they learned from each other and from other Chinese peers, they were exploring options for their new roles, relationships, and actions (Mezirow, 1991). Participant's constant reflections on their teaching performance were prevalent in all sources of data. The participants reported their appreciation of the faculty's role "as a cultural mediator", from being a tour guide to mediating students' interaction with the local community (Kong, Kocen, & Cooley, 2015, p. 29). From the faculty perspective, it was the purpose of this experience, to not only give them opportunities to experience, but also guide them to process the experience. This was essential in creating experiential learning because experience is most valuable when combined with learners' critical analysis, reflection, and interpretation (Peterson, 2002).

Perspective Change with Knowledge Growth

Their observations of Chinese cities and Chinese people also reshaped their perspectives of China, such as Tori's more profound knowledge of China's severe income gap and Kate's reflection on Chinese people's openness to others. These disorienting dilemmas may not feel comfortable initially, but they transformed participants' views toward others and even toward themselves. Moore (2005) emphasized that learning is "altering frames of reference through critical reflection of both habits of mind and points of view" (p. 82). Scholars accentuate the essentiality of reflecting on your previous views and being open to make sense of new experience. This is what the participants did in the trip.

Another disorienting dilemma was their complex emotions toward Chinese people. One major culture shock for the participants is being stared at by the Chinese people on the street. All three participants reported discomfort in some way but Dee was more so due to her personality. Data showed that the participants underwent a curve of complex emotions: from feeling like a celebrity to being annoyed to growing perplexity to developing understanding. As Dewey (1933) aptly pointed out, emotions such as perplexity and hesitation are normal and serve as a catalyst that stimulates learners to actively explore more information to confirm or contradict their belief. Through talking with local people, observing, documenting their reflections, they understood that the staring was a sense of friendly curiosity, so they became more empathetic and accepting.

Developing Knowledge of Self and Future Goals

One of the most discussed disorienting dilemmas was their realization of communication barriers due to their language limitation. Although the three participants took one year of Chinese language class prior to the trip, their proficiency limitation was salient during the trip. Rather than avoiding talking about the frustrations, the leading faculty had participants to share their frustrations, to negotiate their roles as an English teacher and a Chinese learner, and to brainstorm approaches to overcome the disappointment and to improve their confidence. Transformative

learning theoretical tenets include acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans and building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships (Mezirow, 1991). Although realizing the language limitation was not a pleasant feeling for the participants, it helped them identify the gap between their current proficiency and their ideal proficiency level (Dörnyei, 1990), which thus motivated them to set future goals. All learning is relearning (Kolb & Kolb, 2008). This process was relearning about themselves, their strengths and weakness, and it helped learners make goals for future development.

Lifelong Impact

Experiential learning perspectives stress that learning is like a map of territories and learning can flourish and interrelate in many ways (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p. 50). Some interrelations may be more salient than others, but connections across disciplines and settings are built through experience, which in turn may create an enduring and transformative impact on the participants.

In this particular project, even though the goal of this project was not to directly address issues of social injustice in Chinese society, students witnessed the impact of social injustice through teaching the low-income campers. At the teacher orientation, the Chinese director shared the campers' underprivileged family profiles with the participants but reminded them not to express pity for the students. Instead, volunteer teachers should demonstrate empathy and respect to the students. That could explain why social justice was not explicitly discussed in the reflective journals. However, the participants' reflection on privilege and global empathy were clearly detectable in their writings as they openly expressed their guilt about their lack of empathy for others prior to the trip. They reflected that being in the target culture broadened their perspectives in a way that being in a home culture could not achieve.

This was consistent with the findings in a research project on service learning in Singapore where "participant feedback described the impact of engaging in international education and international service learning as a mechanism for addressing the inherent limitation to domestic

cultural contact. That is, domestic cultural contact occurs within the sociopolitical context of the dominant society and often is limited in its ability to promote social justice and cultural competency" (Smith et al., 2014, p. 1205). Participants in this study shared that this service learning gave them the opportunity to witness social injustice and expanded their knowledge base within the target cultural context.

Conclusion

This study, through three undergraduate students' lenses, examined the transformative learning experience during short-term study abroad service learning. During a three-week summer camp for underserved children in China, these three participants encountered multiple disorienting dilemmas, including prior views on China, language barriers, and witnessing financial discrepancies. With constant reflection, they explored solutions and improved problem-solving skills; they learned to work with local communities and deepened knowledge of self and achieved personal growth.

Sufficient data reflected the analytical abilities and critical skills growing within the participants through some disorienting yet transformative learning moments. The three participants acquired more profound skills to make sense of cultural practice in relation to cultural perspectives. Perspective transformation does not happen instantly; it is rather a process. The participants' gradual transformation of views fundamentally depicts their increased flexibility toward cultural differences and openness to embrace ambiguity.

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9

Language Learning Strategies and Intercultural Competence in the Year Abroad Study in China

Hsiu-Chih Sheu

Introduction

With increasing globalization and internationalization, institutions of higher education around the world are becoming obliged to address the following question: How can we best prepare our students to become global citizens and professionals in today's diverse world (Jackson, 2010)? To respond to the need for internationalization, many universities around the world provide year abroad (YA) courses for their students to work or study in a host country. In the UK, most degree-level Modern Language programs incorporate a period of YA which ranges from six months to a full year with the aims of enabling the students to develop advanced language skills, increase their intercultural competence and build up generic skills such as personal maturity and self-reliance. From my own teaching experience, after completing the 'rite of passage' from their YA study, students often have increased confidence in their language proficiency and their intercultural competence at various levels. In a YA meeting for

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F. Dervin et al. (eds.), *International Students in China*, Palgrave Studies on Chinese Education in a Global Perspective, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78120-4_9

returnee students to share their life and study experiences in China, one student confidently commented 'you learn more in two months in China than you have learned in two years in the UK'. After that speaker had discussed how the YA program had allowed him to increase his language proficiency dramatically, he then shared his more 'exotic' experiences with squat toilets and dormitory life in China with his course mates. His intercultural experiences generated much disbelief and amusement among his fellow students. What this student said echoed the findings of some studies which have identified the benefits of study abroad (DuFon & Churchill, 2006; Yu, 2010) and how a YA program plays an important role in helping students to learn a new language and in activating dormant knowledge which was learned previously (Pellegrino, 1998) and increasing students' cultural understanding (Jin, 2014; Jackson, 2015). Even so, it is wise not to assume that YA program can perform wonders and boost every student's language proficiency (Meier & Daniels, 2013; Wilkinson, 1998) and increase their intercultural competence (Jackson, 2015). After teaching returnee students from China for years in the UK higher education system, I have been intrigued to see that some students did make much more progress in terms of language gains and intercultural competence in comparison with others. The particular interest of this current study is to see what language learning strategies are used by students in their YA study in China to increase their language proficiency and what intercultural experiences they have in relation to their intercultural competence.

Language Learning Strategies

Learning strategies were defined by Oxford (1990) as 'specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations' (p. 8). Griffiths (2008) also offered a viable definition of language learning strategies as 'activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning' (p. 87). As language learning strategies rely on learners consciously choosing the activities, it requires that the learners monitor their own learning and develop executive skills (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Oxford (2013) examined learning strategies in three dimensions: cognitive strategies, affective strategies and socio-cultural interactive strategies. Cognitive strategies help learners to manage their cognitive dimension, which include using the senses to understand and remember, activating knowledge, compensation strategies and metacognitive strategies. Affective strategies help learners to create positive emotions and stay motivated, which include strategies such as activating supportive emotions, beliefs and attitudes and generating and maintaining motivation. Socio-cultural interactive strategies help learners to deal with issues of context, communication and culture in L2 learning, and include interacting to learn and communicate, overcoming knowledge gaps in communicating and dealing with the socio-cultural context and identities (p. 88). It was also pointed out that affective dimensions and socio-cultural/interactive dimensions are two areas that have received inadequate attention from strategy researchers (Oxford, 2013).

A number of studies have shown that higher-level students have reported using more learning strategies than lower-level students (Griffiths, 2008), but it is also necessary to be aware that some studies have discovered that poor language learners might use many strategies unsuccessfully (Vann & Abraham, 1990). In cognitive strategies, some researchers have shown that students who show self-regulation by monitoring their progress, persevering at tasks and setting realistic goals are more successful (Wang, Spencer, & Xing, 2009). Some researchers have investigated affective strategies and discovered that integrative motivation plays a very positive role in socio-cultural adaptation and academic adaptation whereas language anxiety plays a very negative role (Yu, 2010). For socio-cultural strategies, findings have suggested that learners who tried to integrate themselves into a new social network progressed more in their language learning abroad (Isabelli, 2006). In the UK, Meier and Daniels (2013) explored a group of British students' social interactions during their YA study in the Europe and discovered that some students found it difficult to make meaningful contact with local people, which prompted the researchers to suggest that the YA should emphasize participation in and contribution to the local community as a key objective.

The Development of Intercultural Competence in the YA Context

In considering intercultural communication, Holliday (2011) reminds us to move away from the essentialist view which considers people's individual behavior as entirely defined by the national culture and to move toward a non-essentialist view of culture which acknowledges a fluid complexity with blurred boundaries (p. 14). An example of an essentialist view of China can be found on the Hofstede center website (http://geert-hofstede.com/china.html), and in one click, readers are presented with a picture of what Chinese society is like. It is a society which scores low on individualism and high on long-term orientation. This view provides a broad picture for an outsider to get a brief glimpse of Chinese society, but it should not be used to label all Chinese into these categories and to make the stereotype become the essence of who they are (Holliday, 2011, p. 4).

A number of YA studies have indicated that YA is an efficient way of increasing students' intercultural competence, but the process of 'being intercultural' does not come from merely having contact with the target culture. Alred, Byram and Fleming (2003) stated that whilst intercultural experiences create a potential for questioning the taken-for-granted in one's own self and environment, 'being intercultural' requires a person to be aware of experiencing otherness and to develop the ability to analyze the experience and act upon the insights into self and other which the analysis brings (p. 4). Bredella (2003) commented that being intercultural means 'acknowledging that we belong to a culture and exploring how we are shaped by our culture just as others are shaped by theirs' (p. 226). Within this framework, by just having experience of the target culture but lacking the willingness to overcome ethnocentrism and the capacity to reflect on how culture is shaped, one could exaggerate the cultural stereotype rather than increase intercultural competence.

Some researchers have pointed out that YA study could have different impacts on students' intercultural competence. For example, Jackson (2015) used IDC (the Intercultural Development Continuum) questionnaires and interviews to investigate students' intercultural experiences when they moved abroad from Hong Kong. The result showed that the semester abroad had a positive impact on students' intercultural competence, but it

also showed some variations: those who attained a higher level of IDC became more willing to interact with individuals from a different linguistic and cultural background and more interested in global affairs generally. Some returnees, however, did not show any plans for further international involvement, nor any interest in having more intercultural contact. Some of the participants had experienced intercultural misunderstandings and sometimes found it difficult to adjust to an unfamiliar way of life in a new culture, especially in the first few weeks. Intercultural experiences are not always comfortable for some students who then come to the conclusion that 'there is no place like home'.

In YA study, the classroom is another social context in which YA students are likely to encounter cultural challenges. No matter where classrooms are situated in the world, there is usually a contrast between teachers and learners in comparison with the home culture. Once learners migrate to a new culture and move from one educational setting into another, they not only encounter different classroom settings but also the underlying rules, values and beliefs by which they operate. As most YA curriculums are arranged in an intensive teaching schedule, whether students can adapt to the target classroom culture is closely linked with their academic performance. Burnett and Gardner (2006) investigated a group of Chinese students at Queen's University, Belfast, and found that some of the students saw their British lecturers as unhelpful as they only gave source materials to the students and expected them to undertake independent study, which was very different from the teaching styles that they had experienced in China. When a second interview was conducted a year later, some of the students had started to recognize the value of independent study. This study highlighted the importance of guiding international students to consider different cultural values and beliefs in the classroom setting as they play a crucial role in shaping how learning takes place.

The Study

In order to further understand how YA students improve their language proficiency and increase their intercultural competence, the purpose of this study is to explore the two following questions:

Research Questions

1. What are the language learning strategies used by the participants in their YA study in China?
2. How do the participants' intercultural experiences relate to their intercultural competence?

The first question will identify the strategies used by the participants in China. The author is aware that there is a distinction between conscious and unconscious learning strategies (Dörnyei, 2001). The focus of this study is on strategies reported by the participants, so I shall focus here only on conscious learning strategies. The second question will examine the intercultural experiences reported by the participants in order to understand how their experience impacts on their intercultural competence.

Participants

The subjects of this study were 48 third-year students from an East Midland university in the UK who had participated in the YA program in China between 2012 and 2015. All of the participants were undertaking joint honors courses of which one of the subjects was Chinese. The majority of the participants in this study had spent a year in China, but some had only gone for six months. The age of the majority of the students ranged from 19 to 23 with a few mature students aged from 25 to 35. In this study, the term 'competent learners' refers to students whose overall marks were 2.1 or above in the UK marking matrix and 'less competent learners' are those whose marks were 2.2 or below in the final year.

Three partner universities located in Beijing, Shanghai and Yunnan were available for students to choose. The partner universities provided Mandarin Chinese courses for an average of 20 hours a week, 4 hours in the morning from Monday to Friday for these exchange students. The majority of the students were at high elementary and intermediate levels although a few had reached advanced level.

Data

The main data of this study were 48 copies of dossiers compiled by the students. These dossiers are one of the two elements required by the participants' home university in order for them to achieve the YA certificate. The format of a dossier includes (1) setting learning targets and goals in the areas of language acquisition, cultural competence, knowledge and understanding and work-related skills, (2) identifying strategies, (3) evaluating progress and (4) a final appraisal. When analyzing the dossiers, the researcher first read through the contents and highlighted significant issues related to the research questions, which she then broke down into two main categories: language strategies and intercultural communication. In each main category, small units which constituted the same elements of themes were classified together, translated into English and analyzed.

Findings and Discussions

Language Learning Strategies

When the participants first arrived in China, the majority of them had perceived how to improve their speaking and listening abilities to be their primary learning targets and had set up different strategies to improve both of these skills (Table 9.1).

With regard to improving their listening, cognitive strategies such as using the senses to understand and remember the language were commonly used by the participants. The majority of them reported using the Chinese media (television, movies, radio and music) to practice their listening. Chinese media such as Yuku which provide subtitles were especially welcomed by the learners who used the subtitles as a compensation strategy to increase their listening comprehension. Strategies for speaking practice involved more social interaction with speakers of Chinese in a real situation. The interlocutors could be native speakers of Chinese (language exchange partners, Chinese friends, teachers, cleaning ladies and coaches in the gym were commonly reported) and their classmates from all over the world. Interestingly, a number of the participants reported

Table 9.1 Strategies used to improve listening and speaking ability

Watching Chinese TV/Chinese movies/animation with Chinese subtitles
Watching Chinese films with English subtitles/English films with Chinese subtitles
Listening to the radio in Chinese /Chinese music
Making friends with the classmates (international students) and attending social events such as going to a restaurant, café, cinema or pub or traveling
Chatting with local people: shop owners/cleaning ladies/personal trainers in the gym and so on
Making friends with native speakers of Chinese through the language exchange program
Finding a part-time job or becoming a volunteer

how they had benefited from making friends with international students who had a good command of Chinese but limited English proficiency. In a corpora study, Crossley and McNamara (2010) discovered that interlanguage talk, a conversation between two non-native speakers (NNSs) received similar lexical input to a conversation between NSs (native speakers) and that interlanguage talk consisted of a greater variety of more common words. Advanced NNSs are likely to use the foreigner's talk which involves 'simplifications within the grammatical rule structure of the language' (Ellis, 1985, p. 133) and thus increase the participants' communication competence. As the participants were only involved in the intensive Mandarin language program, the international students had become their first group of friends and an important source for their second-language acquisition.

The student data also showed that competent language learners made more use of socio-cultural/interactive strategies to improve their speaking, and saw communicating as a way of learning. They tended to have several native speakers as conversation partners (four or five native speakers for some) to help them to learn Chinese, or they made friends with international students with a good command of Chinese. As Participant 10 succinctly put it: 'I don't have any strategy, I just leave my room'. To leave one's room for a new world can be a daunting experience, but it does a good job in improving speaking ability. Participant 24 echoed this idea by saying 'Learning a language needs discipline, you need to make yourself leave your comfort zone'. She further assessed how socio-cultural/interactive strategies suited her learning style better than cognitive learning strategies:

> When I first arrived in China, I tried to use a vocabulary list and did more reading, but this strategy was not useful to me, because I had a lot of homework to do. I know I am a shy person, so I decided to apply a different strategy. After the lesson, I talked to people in the campus and outside campus. I went to Qinghua and Beijing University to listen to lectures … I am surrounded by Chinese people. (Participant 24)

Participant 24 raised in this comment an important issue on using a different learning style. After realizing that cognitive learning strategies such as using memory and practicing from the vocabulary list did not give her a satisfactory result, she decided to adopt more social strategies, such as talking to people and attending talks. Because her other joint major was in International Relations, she reported attending the lectures related to her major not only to increase her language proficiency but also her professional development. When learning a foreign language in the learner's home country, cognitive strategies which involve memorizing materials in order to repeat them is prevalent; however, this study has shown that learning a language in the target culture provides more opportunities for learners to adopt more social strategies by communicating with local people and making use of other available resources from the target culture to motivate their learning. The strategies proved to be successful as Participant 24 was one of the few who were able to upgrade her overall mark from a low 2.2 in Year 2 to a high 2.1 in her final year.

Another common social strategy used by the students was to have a part-time job, mainly teaching English. This strategy helped the participants to understand the society and provided a venue for practicing Chinese (Participant 9). Around one third of the participants who had had experiences of either working (mainly as an English tutor at school or in a family) or volunteer work reported that the job environment helped them to greatly improve their Chinese proficiency. The result also echoes the finding of a previous study that participation in and contribution to the local community greatly helped the YA students with social interaction (Meier & Daniels, 2013). The data showed that some participants made use of the opportunity to participate in the local community for various reasons, although not all of the part-time jobs led to language gains. A few participants did not gain much in their language proficiency as they had mainly worked in an environment where English was a medium of communication (Table 9.2).

Table 9.2 Strategies used to improve reading and writing

Strategies
Making a vocabulary list to practice vocabulary and revising grammar
Reading the environment, such as road signs, advertisements and brochures
Reading articles on Chinese websites and in newspapers and magazines
Using Chinese social media and exchanging text messages with friends

With regard to the reading and writing strategies, some cognitive strategies such as making a vocabulary list and reading articles on websites and in magazines were reported. Competent learners reported using more cognitive strategies for improving their reading ability and were pleased with the progress that they had made. Participant 11 is a good example:

> I don't think my reading and writing were good last semester. Then I bought a lot of books and read every night. I think my reading has improved a lot, so has my writing because I have made a vocabulary list and I practice new words and grammar every day. Now I can recognize a lot of Chinese characters. Learning new words and new grammar are similar. I think I am ten times better than when I first came here. (Participant 11)

After class, Participant 11 applied cognitive strategies such as memorizing the vocabulary and grammar points in order to revise and reinforce what he had learned from the class and from his own reading materials. He considered this method to be effective for him because he had made dramatic progress. Some learners described how they had found hands-on reading materials from the environment:

> When I am outside, I can read the characters on the ads and know the message … Sometimes I buy Chinese fashion magazines because it is easier than reading newspapers and I also can learn some new words. When I am cooking or cleaning my room, I watch TV with subtitles so I can practice listening and reading characters. (Participant 17)

Immersing herself in the target language, Participant 17 had made use of the reading materials available and accessible to her, such as advertisements, fashion magazines and subtitles on the television. Other participants mentioned that road signs and brochures are also practical reading materials. With the increased use of technology, some participants reported

that Chinese social media became a very effective learning tool for them to practice their reading and writing skills. The students used social media to send texts (writing) and to receive texts (reading). The use of technology also provided more opportunities for networking.

> My Chinese friend introduced QQ, Kugou (酷狗), Renren (人人网), Wechat (微信) and Weblog (微博) to me and even helped me to upload all the apps on the computer and mobile phone. It is very convenient and easy to use these Chinese social media. It is also a good way to learn a language. I use it every day and find it very interesting. (Participant 22)

> I use QQ and Renren to communicate with my Chinese friends. Surfing the web helps me a lot, for example, if I have any questions, I can ask my friends immediately, I have a good connection on the web. (Participant 5)

Popular Chinese applications such as Wechat and QQ played a very important role in the participants' language learning and social life. These free apps offer both instant voice and text messaging and are very popular social networking tools in China, and by using them the participants could build networks, share conversations and meet new people online. Learning writing by sending text messages is also another interesting issue. Sending text messages only requires the users to key in pinyin (the Latin alphabet) and choose the appropriate Chinese characters from the list, which lifts the burden of character writing and dramatically speeds up the communication. From the aspect of language learning, the social media increase the speed of communication and help to build up a dynamic social network.

Attending Lessons as an Effective Strategy

It was interesting to find that none of the participants explicitly mentioned attending lessons as part of their learning strategy. The reason for this might be that the participants considered that their teachers were in charge of the formal instruction and that they themselves were responsible

for their after-class study, which, to some extent, reveals a teacher-centered teaching approach in the class. The data from the dossiers revealed that competent learners had more discussions on the value of the lessons and saw them as a platform for improving their language proficiency and intercultural competence, in comparison with the less competent learners. Advanced learners such as Participant 35 made use of the language learning strategies suggested by the teachers and found learning Chinese in China a productive process.

> The teacher taught us that the best strategy to learn Chinese is to make use of 'four more': speak more, listen more, read more and visit more (多说,多听,多看,多玩儿.) I think she is right. When I study Chinese on my own, I watch TV, read textbooks, practise writing and learn new characters, which are all useful methods. When you revise what you have learned on that day, you understand the lesson better. If you come across a new word, just write it for a few times and then you know it. For me, watching Chinese TV was a good learning method: I could learn Chinese and enjoy the programme at the same time. (Participant 35)

Participant 35 reported she had benefited a great deal from the 'four more' learning strategies suggested by her teacher. After the lessons, she implemented cognitive strategies (revising the lessons, practicing new words, watching television) and used social strategies (organizing class events with other international students and traveling with them) to improve her language. Her statement highlights both how formal instruction can serve to structure students' language learning and the role of teachers as mediators to help students to adapt to a new learning culture. Participant 46 also echoed the value of formal instruction in the area of cultural understanding:

> I feel that I am increasing my cultural knowledge every day. I live in a community where I have plenty of opportunities to meet with the locals …. When I attend lessons, our teachers are a very useful cultural tool. They are teaching us new words and grammar and cultural points at the same time. (Participant 46)

Participant 46 highlighted the role of the teacher as a cultural mediator with whom she could discuss cultural issues from the textbook or things which she had learned outside the classroom. The data from the dossiers showed that competent learners tended to think highly of the formal classroom instruction and reported its value for their language gain and intercultural competence. On the other hand, less competent learners rarely referred to the value of the classroom instruction, nor the interaction with the teachers, in their dossiers. If they did, they expressed more frustration over the pressure of the workload and the different learning cultures.

> I don't that think I coped with the academic environment at all well. I disliked most things about the teaching methodologies put in practice at [this host] university and I felt that it didn't cater for the way I learnt at all. Also, I never felt like I was valued or treated as an individual. The teachers did not make you feel they wanted you to succeed. (Participant 8)

> To be honest, I think I found it pretty hard to adapt to the workload, the work effort expected and the timetable. In Britain, everything is a lot more laid back and because I was so used to that way of life and coming to China, where you have to work hard to stay on top, was hard for me to adjust and adapt to. (Participant 25)

Both Participants 8 and 25 found it difficult to adapt to the formal classroom learning in China due to different teaching cultures and the heavy workload. This might be partially due to some personal time-management skills; however, their language anxiety and frustration could not be ignored. Some studies have pointed out that poor academic adaptation might contribute to language anxiety as learners are likely to lose the confidence to use the target language and fail to develop more advanced communication skills (Yu, 2010; DeKeyser, 2014). The lack of confidence that these two students displayed in the classroom was, most likely, the reason for their unsatisfactory social interaction with the native speakers outside classroom. There was no surprise when Participant 8 further reported that he had a few Chinese friends but could never develop into any great depth due to his limited Chinese proficiency.

The responses from the competent students and the less competent ones highlighted the role that formal classroom played for YA students in China and how interaction in the classroom could be used as an indicator of successful language learners. Cook (2008) points out the language interaction that occurs in the classroom in most cases involves three moves: initiation, response and feedback. 'IRF as it is known as - starts with teachers taking the initiative by asking questions or making a request which students respond to, and then provide feedback to the students to help them improve.' Students who were more competent often reported how much they benefited from classroom feedback from the teachers. However, the less competent students rarely reported any classroom interactions, and if they did, they tended to focus on the negative side and did not see the feedback in a positive light.

Two of the students above also raised the issue that they experienced classroom anxiety concerning the different teaching methods in the target culture. Student's data showed the intensive language program was more beneficial for learners who were more willing to adjust to the new learning environment. DeKeyser (2014) in his study abroad project pointed out that YA study program can be very beneficial "if the students are willing to engage in the right learning behaviors while overseas." (p. 314) To know the right learning behaviors and endeavor to meet the learning expectation of the target culture are two important qualities if students want to achieve good learning outcome.

The Development of Intercultural Competence

In this section, I shall discuss how intercultural encounters help some participants to shape their intercultural competence and some to reinforce their cultural stereotypes. The data showed that most of the participants used the essentialist view (Holliday, 2011) to interpret their intercultural experiences. The following section contains a number of salient cultural experiences reported by the participants.

Bad Manners Versus Rich Westerners

It has been pointed out that intercultural encounters always involve 'the disquieting tension of the other' (Bredella, 2003). In this study, some of the disquieting tension comes from the so called bad manners. The majority of the participants reported how they were shocked by some 'bad manners' which they encountered in China. The following example demonstrates how a snapshot in a public place in China could challenge the participants' norms of life and bring tension to their intercultural experience.

> After living here for one year, I understand the Beijing way of living. Things are very different from England. Certain things that Beijing people do here were a little surprising to me, for example the spitting, crouching and the hitting of trees; however I could understand after someone explained them to me and I quickly became accustomed to the difference in the way of life … What I consider to be a major cultural difference is that certain things that are done in public in China would never be done in public in Britain. (Participant 25)

When encountering bad manners, Participant 25 treated such behavior as an established national culture which has to be tolerated in order to live in China. The participant used the essentialist view to make sense of the unfamiliar way of life and to see these people's individual behaviors as entirely defined by their culture (Holliday, 2011). After spending a year in China, Participant 25 concluded that Chinese people have a blurred distinction between the private domain and public domain. This observation shows that she had engaged in some reflections on this intercultural experience but was not able to see these manifestations of apparent bad manners as individual behavior and not representative of Chinese culture. Bredella (2003) stated that it is common for us to believe that our own cultural system is natural and rational and superior to others, so to be 'intercultural' requires the participants to explore how they are shaped by their culture and how other cultures are shaped by theirs. The example given above shows that intercultural experience does not necessarily lead to intercultural competence. In some cases, it can reinforce stereotyping

or prejudice. A similar experience was mentioned by Participant 29 who was annoyed by the bad manners she encountered in China, but at the same time, was not comfortable with the stereotypes of rich westerners.

> Chinese men often make a lot of disgusting noises, which annoys me a lot. Sometimes I could not hide my annoyance and showed it on my face. Life in China is so different, but I am getting used to it … Now I am in China, I want to understand more about China and to chat without using a dictionary all the time. I want to integrate into the culture and not to live like a rich westerner. (Participant 29)

Participant 29 was not aware that she was giving labels to the people she met in China, but was aware that some Chinese people stereotype westerners as 'rich westerners'. She was determined to move from her co-nation circle to the local circle in order to change the stereotype. Based on year abroad study data, Coleman (2013) developed a concentric circle model to map out students' progression in the social network. It comprises co-nations (socialize with friends from your own county), to a wider context with other out-group members (often other international students) and move toward native speakers of the target culture. The findings of this study shows that most of the students' social circle fit into Colman's concentric model. However, it has to be pointed out in the context of studying abroad in China that the local circle can be divided into at least two: A Chinese-speaking circle and an English-speaking circle. As discussed earlier about having a part-time job as a learning strategy, while some students reported that the part-time job helped them enhance their Chinese proficiency and cultural awareness, others, despite working alongside the locals, did not make much progress in language learning because they mainly worked in an English-speaking circle.

English as a lingua franca across the globe has made English the most popular foreign language in China. For a rapidly developing country like China, the use of English as a medium can be seen in the workplace and education system in China. Henry (2016) in his paper 'the local purpose of a Global language: English as an intracultural communicative medium in China' raised our awareness that speaking English in China was not just for intercultural communication, but also for intracultural communication as it

allowed its speakers to construct a modern and cosmopolitan identity. The new identity acquired by the English speakers of Chinese matches the image of the rich westerners mentioned by participant 29. The stereotypical view of westerners being associated with wealth and modernity is still prevalent in Asia. For example, Ladegaard and Cheng (2014) in their study revealed that Hong Kong university students naturally placed the American and European students at the top of the social hierarchy and felt inferior to them, while at the same time placed themselves above fellow students from China. Holliday (2011) pointed out that 'ideological imaginations of culture very often lead to the demonization of a particular foreign Other' (p. 1), whereas the image of westerners in Asia often leads to the 'divine' image of a particular foreign 'Other'. The influence of the western imperialism may be dying in the twenty-first century, but some of its legacy is still there. How westerners are constructed in Asia is an interesting issue and deserves further study in the future.

Contrary to the essentialist view discussed above, a few students from families with a Chinese heritage were able to view the perceived bad manners within a wider social and historical context and developed a sense of empathy:

> I used to criticise China for being so uncivilized, but now I have changed my attitude. I know I have opportunities which they don't have. I believe Chinese people will be more and more civilized. I think I have no problem working in China. (Participant 5)

> I noticed that my feelings were definitely different from (those of) my English classmates who were also studying in Shanghai, and when we discussed matters like this, they would always complain. They simply didn't understand why Chinese people would do such things, but I on the other hand would actually feel very sad and sympathetic towards them. As soon as I think about the fact that that generation was my mum's generation, my heart would ache tremendously. (Participant 45)

Both of these participants showed the capacity to reflect on the complexity behind the perceived bad manners from a different timescale and developed a sense of empathy. Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of other people, is essential to successful communication,

but it can be difficult to achieve. By realizing that 'I have something which they don't have', Participant 5 was able to move from being ethnocentric to being sensitive to a different culture, and a few of the participants had developed a sense of connection to the history and space of the target culture, which are important aspects of a learner's construction of a sense of self (Kramsch, 2008).

Cultural Traits Versus Cultural Social Interaction

When they encountered something different from their own values or beliefs, the participants had a tendency to label it as 'Chinese culture'. The term 'culture' seemed to give the participants a way to develop their imagination about what Chinese culture is like and to find an easy answer to cultural conflicts. Dervin and Machart (2015) observed that the term 'culture' tends to prescribe how individuals should be seen, met and understood, rather than recognizing who they are as an individual Self. The following comment is a good example:

> I found that Chinese people do not like confrontation, but they like to gossip in their own group, which I don't quite understand. (Participant 40)

Participant 40 grouped all Chinese into the category of gossiping and avoiding confrontation. There is a clear line between 'us' and 'other' in this comment. One might ask, 'Are all Chinese the same?' The data from the dossiers show that when they first arrived in China, the participants generally assessed their knowledge of Chinese culture loosely based on Fan's 'set of core values that underlines social interaction among the ordinary Chinese people' (Fan, 2000, p. 4). They were aware of the importance of guanxi (personal connection or networking) and kinship, obligation to one's family, hospitality to guests and so on. Over time, those who had limited contact with Chinese people did not change their perception of Chinese culture. In contrast, those who

reported having several Chinese friends and meeting them regularly showed a deepening understanding of the variation and dynamic in the target culture.

> I think the culture in China and in my country is different. Although Chinese people are still very traditional, young people in Beijing are different. I think they are very positive and open-minded. (Participant 24)

The ability to see the differences among young people in China shows that Participant 24 had made an effort to understand the individuals in the society and is able to see culture in the plural. Some participants who appreciated the cultural diversity showed more orientation toward integrating into the local cultures. A good example is Participant 22, who made the effort to learn Chinese pastimes such as drinking tea and playing *Mahjong* (a Chinese board game) in order to be able to socialize with his Chinese friends and with local people.

> I am learning how to have the same hobbies as the Chinese such as chatting, using social media and shopping on Chinese websites. I am drinking Chinese tea and have also purchased a Chinese tea set. I would also like to learn Chinese chess and *Mahjong* because a lot of Chinese people love them. (Participant 22)

Developing the same hobbies as the Chinese gave Participant 22 sufficient contact with native speakers. His hard work paid off at the end of his YA study as he was one of those who showed a tremendous improvement in his Chinese proficiency and his cultural competence. Similarly, Participant 15 was aware that in daily life some appellations can play an important part in smoothing interpersonal relationships, such as the use of *Shifu* ('master') in Chinese.

> I have noticed a lot of people like to be called *Shifu* such as taxi drivers, waiters, pharmacists and so on. When I call them *Shifu*, they are very pleased, especially taxi drivers. It works very well in Beijing and it helps me to improve interpersonal relationships. (Participant 15)

Shifu is an appellation that the students had learned in their first-year textbook for addressing a taxi driver. It is a term that originally referred to Kung Fu masters but now is commonly used as a polite form to address skilled workers. In contrast to the bad manners discussed earlier, Participant 15 was aware that good manners are valued in Chinese society and can serve to lubricate social interaction. Through their proactive socio-cultural strategies, Participants 22 and 15 had learned how to connect with the locals and build up a good relationship with them. Their proactive attitude helped them to gain a greater understanding of the Chinese people around them, and their reflection on the cultural interaction demonstrated that they had acquired this flexible capacity to read people and situations through their own experience. Kramsch (2008) commented that there is a need to develop in our students 'a more flexible capacity to read people, situations and events based on a deep understanding of the historical and subjective dimensions of human experience' (p. 391).

Chinese Teachers Versus British Teachers

The participants generally reported that Chinese teachers were good at delivering knowledge and structuring the teaching, but that they were stricter than their teachers in the UK and they were not good at giving compliments. For example, Participant 22 pointed out that his teachers did not sell a 'praise sandwich':

> Chinese education is different from British. Sometimes I feel that although I tried hard, I still did not succeed. This is not true, but I feel more pressured here. Teachers here always said, "You are wrong" or "Try and you will be better next time". They don't say: "You are very good, almost there". This is very different from the western style of a 'praise sandwich' (praise, suggestions for improvement and positive feedback). (Participant 22)

As a competent learner, Participant 22 sometimes found it frustrating to face the Chinese praising culture. The role of a teacher in China is traditionally regarded as that of a father, the head of a family, a respected and authoritarian figure who has the paramount duty of giving rightful

guidelines and correcting students' mistakes. The intention is good but the practice may be frustrating to students from other cultures. Even so, it has to be pointed out that the image of a Chinese teacher can appear in various styles. Some participants mentioned a very caring, friendly image of the teachers outside the classroom, more like a friend or a family member, which is different from the formal student/teacher relationship in the UK.

> The relationship between students and teachers is different here. In [this host] university, after the lesson, I often see students and teachers chatting together, or even going for a meal or coffee together. We don't do that in the UK, so I like the Chinese style better. (Participant 17)

Apart from the different student/teacher relationship, some participants were aware that teachers in China have different teaching styles.

> In the UK, the teacher would encourage students to have an open-minded view, but in China, I think the teacher likes to teach students how to think, "you should do this, and do that". Students practise a lot, study a lot, revise new words and so on. Chinese students work harder than the British students, but they are not so sure about what they want in their life. Because they spend so much time studying, they don't have time to understand the outside world. (Participant 36)

As the relationship between students and teachers in China is more like that of a father and son, naturally, teachers feel obligated to tell the students 'the right way' in order to keep them on the right track. The hierarchical system is different from the western style of education where the emphasis is more on a student-centered approach and students and teachers are seen as equal partners, in particular in higher education. In China, due to the pressure of the entrance exam system and the competitive job market, students are expected to work hard and perform well in the exam. These pressures and expectations from teachers and parents certainly have a big impact on the students' world view and social life.

From inside the classroom to outside the classroom, students' accounts on their cultural experiences in China showed that some have developed a positive view of the target culture and increased their awareness of the diversity of Chinese culture, but some have reinforced their stereotypical attitudes of the target culture. The findings of this study recognized the benefits of studying abroad in helping to raise a learner's intercultural awareness but would also like to point out that acquiring intercultural competence takes more than just living abroad. Some studies have acknowledged that the development of intercultural competence cannot occur merely by osmosis in the target culture (Jackson, 2015; Schartner, 2015). For example, Jackson further suggests that 'more interest in international affairs, advanced second language proficiency and more readiness for the global workplace'. (p. 88) The findings of this study echoed the studies by Jackson and Schartner and would like to suggest that the willingness of the participants to speak the target language with the local and having an open-minded attitude to engage in social interactions with the local are both important qualities to gain intercultural competence.

Conclusion

This study has identified the learning strategies used by participants in their YA study period in China and their intercultural experience. The findings show that the competent learners reported using more cognitive strategies (attending lessons and studying on their own) and socio-cultural strategies (networking via the Chinese social media and communicating with speakers of Chinese) than the less competent learners. Almost all of the participants who reported using various cognitive strategies for language gain in the host university were the same group who had achieved good academic results in the home university. A surprising finding was that some participants who had not progressed well in the home university gained a great deal of language confidence and intercultural competence from using various socio-cultural interaction strategies in China. The findings of this study highlight how a YA program can provide learners with more resources to cater for their different needs, in particular for those who achieve better through socio-cultural interaction. It also

informs practitioners in the home university of the need to move from cognitive-based foreign-language instruction to a more socio-cultural interactive teaching methodology. Finally, there was a small group of students who appeared to benefit the least from the YA study in terms of their language gains, and they were the students who used fewer cognitive strategies and showed less contact with native speakers of Chinese.

This study has also highlighted the importance of formal instruction in the YA context. The students' views regarding formal instruction appear to be a good indicator of their language proficiency: competent learners reported more interaction with the teachers and wrote more about how much they had benefited from the program. On the other hand, less competent learners tended to show more frustration toward the different teaching style and the pressure from the intensive teaching. These findings suggest there is a need for closer liaison between the home university and the host university to ensure that the less competent learners receive the appropriate support which they need, and to guide the learners to realize strategies which they can best make use of when they are abroad.

Various intercultural experiences were reported by the participants, who demonstrated different levels of intercultural competence. Some held the essentialist view and saw Chinese culture as a set of fixed traits and rules; others gained more understanding from having social interaction with local people and had strong desire to integrate into the local community. To transform intercultural experience into intercultural competence is a complicated process. It is interesting to see that one group of similar people could show such contrasting views on the same issues. The participants' attitude toward bad manners and good manners in China demonstrates their degree of intercultural competence as some had learned to understand and tolerate perceived bad manners, but others had gone further by showing the capacity and willingness to use good manners to integrate themselves into the local culture. Being intercultural requires the ability to explore how we are shaped by our own culture and how others are shaped by theirs. Some participants who had a Chinese heritage family background or who had more active social interaction with their Chinese friends showed more reflection on their intercultural experiences. Throughout the dossier reports, it was very common for the participants to view their knowledge of Chinese cultural traits

(hardworking, hospitable, gossipy, etc.) as their intercultural competence and to use the essentialist view to label their individual intercultural experiences into national traits. National traits might be a first and easier step toward understanding a new culture, but more steps are necessary to go across the national traits to the individual self in order to achieve intercultural competence.

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10

International Student Recruitment as an Exercise in Soft Power: A Case Study of Undergraduate Medical Students at a Chinese University

Mei Tian and John Lowe

Introduction

While Altbach (2004, p. 24) rightly warns us of the inequality which globalization can bring to the academic world, others have noted that non-Western countries can actively adopt—rather than passively follow—the Anglo-American model in their development of higher education (Lo, 2011). China in particular, with its growing economic and political power, has been using the internationalization of higher education to enhance its soft power (Lo & Pan, 2016). Most recently,

The research is funded by the Ministry of Education China (MoE, 15YJC880078).

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F. Dervin et al. (eds.), *International Students in China*, Palgrave Studies on Chinese Education in a Global Perspective, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78120-4_10

higher education has been declared as playing an important role in China's realization of 'the Asia-Pacific dream', which involves the revival of the ancient Silk Road and the development of a Maritime Silk Road (i.e. 'One Road One Belt', China.org.cn, 2015). A central strategy to achieve this is the recruitment of international students, particularly from developing countries and the countries along the Silk Road (Sebastian & Choudaha, 2015). It is expected that these international students will gain better knowledge of Chinese language, society, culture, and politics and will appreciate Chinese 'viewpoints and interests' (Yang, 2007).

The literature on international students and Asia is largely uni-directional in focus. Much has been written on Asian students moving into Anglophone education systems (e.g. Habu, 2000; Li & Campbell, 2008; Volet & Tan-Quigley, 1999; Yen & Stephens, 2004), and on Chinese students in particular (e.g. Skyrme, 2007; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Tian & Lowe, 2009, 2010, 2013). Recent significant increases in the number and diversity of international students studying in China have led to studies of student experiences beginning to appear in the academic literature, but these remain quite limited in number and scope (Akhtar, Pratt, & Shan, 2015; Haugen, 2013; Li, 2015; Tian & Lowe, 2014). This chapter is intended to add to this coverage but does not attempt to meet the growing need for a more generalized account and analysis of international student provision and experiences in China. It reports findings of our research into the academic and social experiences of a group of international students taking an undergraduate degree in medicine at a single university in China. We discuss the extent to which Chinese international education has matched its diplomatic mission in this particular case; that is, how successfully soft power goals are being achieved in terms of this group's experiences in China. We first describe the research context, followed by a brief review of the concept of soft power and its relevance to Chinese higher education before presenting our research methods and findings, and drawing some conclusions.

Context: Increasing Number of International Students in China

Although China has been a major supplier of international students across the world since the latter years of the twentieth century, more recently China has also become a leading host country to international students (Macready & Tucker, 2011). Between 2001 and 2011, the number of international students in China has increased by more than 10% annually (MoE, 2012), reaching 377,054 in 2014 (MoE, 2015). Table 10.1 gives a breakdown of the number of international students in China in 2014 in terms of their geographical regions of origin (*ibid.*). In recent years, China has become the third most popular country in the world for international tertiary education students, following the USA and UK (Institute of International Education, 2016), as shown in Table 10.2.

This expansion of international enrolment has been actively pursued as a Chinese government policy initiative and continues to be so, with the Ministry of Education proposing the 'Studying in China Scheme', the major task of which is to attract over 500,000 international students by

Table 10.1 Number of international students studying in China in 2014 (MoE, 2015)

Region of home country	Number	Percentage
Asia	225,490	59.80
Europe	67,475	17.90
Africa	41,677	11.05
America	36,140	9.58
Oceania	6272	1.33

Table 10.2 Top 5 host destinations worldwide in 2015 and 2016 (Institute of International Education, 2016)

Destination	2015 total	2016 total	Increase (%)
United States	974,926	1,043,839	+7.1
United Kingdom	493,570	496,690	+0.6
China	377,054	397,635	+5.5
France	298,902	309,642	+6.8
Australia	269,752	292,352	+8.4

2020 (MoE, 2010a; see also Central Government of the People's Republic of China, 2012). In addition, Chinese policy is to achieve a better balance of regional origins among these international students (MoE, 2010b). More recently, it is argued that China should try to attract students from neighboring countries, especially Southeast Asia and Central Asia, rather than targeting 'something beyond its grasp at the moment', students from developed countries (Wen, 2015). This viewpoint reflects President Xi's aim to use education as a tool in the 'One Belt One Road' initiative to enhance China's influence in the neighboring region (NewsChina, 2015; Sebastian & Choudaha, 2015).

The rationales behind China's determination to internationalize its higher education institutions (in which the attraction of international students is just one component, although a significant one) show elements of those identified for other systems, namely, the economic, academic, political, and cultural rationales, but the balance among these shows particular Chinese characteristics. In trying to understand these rationales, among the most significant recent policy documents are 'the National Outline for Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020)' (Central Government of the People's Republic of China, 2010), which sets overall aims for internationalization, and the Ministry of Education's 'Studying in China Scheme' (MoE, 2010b), which deals more specifically with the expansion of international student numbers and their origins. The former document emphasizes the contribution that internationalization can make to the modernization and quality enhancement of Chinese higher education (the academic rationale, at least as a first analysis), but also states that such internationalization will 'enhance the nation's global position, influence and competitiveness in the field of education' (Kuroda, 2014, p. 448), which brings in elements of a political rationale. The 'Studying in China Plan' is explicit in this respect in declaring one of the aims in attracting more international students to be 'to cultivate international personnel who are well-versed in Chinese and friendly toward China' (*ibid*., p. 448).

The economic rationale, which has often been more explicit in the policies of other major players in the international student market, appears to be less emphasized in China, although the contribution to the national economy made by the roughly 90% of international students in China who pay their own fees and living costs rather than relying on

scholarships (Haugen, 2013) cannot be ignored. This contribution is likely to be even more valued at the individual institution level in view of the reductions in public funding of higher education as part of the 'marketization' of Chinese higher education, particularly since its massive expansion in recent decades (Mok, 2000). Nonetheless, we tend to agree with Kuroda's (2014) analysis that, as a national if not institutional policy, international students are prized 'primarily for political reasons' (p. 447), with the economic benefits being seen as a valuable spin-off. In this chapter we approach this political rationale through the concept of 'soft power' and argue that in the Chinese context, the political and the cultural rationales are tightly interwoven.

Soft Power, China, and International Education

Widely recognized as the originator of the term, Joseph Nye (1990) uses 'soft power' to describe the 'third' source of power of a country, in addition to its economic and military strength. Distinct from these other forms of power, soft power is a power of attracting, rather than forcing or paying, to get what you want (Nye, 2004). Nye also notes the difference between soft power and influence: while influence can be a result of threat or payments, soft power is a power of attraction in world politics. A country can attract other nations to follow it by promoting its value system, prosperity, and degree of openness, in order to help it achieve its external political aims.

According to Nye, a country's soft power is based on three sources, culture, political values, and foreign policy. We suggest that this distinction is unlikely to be clear-cut for any country, but particularly so for contemporary China. National approaches to international issues and relationships must inevitably respond to the realities of global politics, but they also reveal distinctions influenced by national cultural values that in turn shape political perspectives. The claim made for and by China that it differs from the nation-state example presented by other countries in being instead a 'civilizational state' (Zhang, 2012), and one that has a uniquely long and continuous cultural history, is central to the way in which it seeks to be known and respected in the world. This leads

us to emphasize culture as being at the core of China's approach to soft power. Indeed, in Chinese documents it is usual to see 'soft power' expressed explicitly in terms of 'cultural soft power' (*wenhua ruanshili*) (Wang, 2011).

The significance of higher education in national soft power has attracted the attention of policy makers. Hu Jintao (Xinhuanet, 2010), former General Secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee, stressed at the National Education Working Conference that 'to vigorously develop education… is the only way to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation'. Similarly, the important guiding policy document for Chinese education in general, the National Medium- and Long-Term Education Plan (2010–2020), declares an aim 'to accelerate internationalization of education in China [so as] to enhance its international status, influence and competitiveness' (Central Government of the People's Republic of China, 2010). China's attempt to boost its soft power has been intensified since President Xi Jinping took office, with a series of relevant initiatives, including the 'China Dream' (November 2012; Xinhuanet, 2012), 'Asia-Pacific Dream' (November 2014; NewsChina, 2015), 'Silk Road Economic Belt' (September 2013; Xinhuanet, 2013a), and 'Twenty-First-Century Maritime Silk Road' (October 2013; Xinhuanet, 2013b). The Silk Road 'Belt' is intended to connect China with Central Asia and Europe, while the Maritime Silk Road links China with Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (China.org.cn, 2015). While China is investing, universities are expected to play an important role in supporting these efforts to consolidate its position in the region. To display 'the charm [of China] to the world', President Xi required that 'stories of China should be well told, voices of China well spread, and characteristics of China well explained' (*Chinadaily*, 2014).

Yang (2010) has suggested that the establishment and proliferation of Confucius Institutes across the world 'is arguably Chinese most systematically planned soft power policy' (p. 235). He points out that these Institutes massively implicate both Chinese and other countries' universities in this expression and promotion of soft power, since they are almost universally established on the campuses of partner overseas universities. The policy of increasing the number of international students at Chinese

universities is a qualitatively different approach to promoting national cultural soft power. The Confucius Institutes are designed to take Chinese culture to the 'outside' world in a managed format that allows considerable control over the message (Falk, 2015), although Zhou and Luk (2016) have shown that they have often failed in their primary purpose, being treated with suspicion as propaganda tools and a threat to academic freedom. Inviting 'outsiders' to come to China, to live and study there for a considerable length of time, however, is a high-risk approach, as the scope for control over individuals' experiences is severely limited—indeed, attempts to exert significant control over the experiences of those who take up such an invitation may be counter-productive to promoting a positive image of the country.

Articles in Chinese academic journals have also recognized the contribution of international education to China's soft power. Such literature tends, however, simply to take the growing number of international students in China as a measure of the 'attractiveness' of Chinese culture. Yan and Xu (2008), for example, made a quantitative comparison of soft power between the USA and China, using the number of international students as one of the two measures of the 'power of cultural transmission'. Such literature conflates the sources and effects of soft power. Nye (2004) warns us that only when international students make a positive evaluation of a host country's values and social system after returning to their own countries does the attractiveness that characterizes soft power actually manifest itself as the power to affect sympathetically opinions of the former host. An increased number of international students is not in itself a manifestation of soft power, but a potential source of such power which may or may not be realized successfully.

Furthermore, it is crucial to remember that, although the Chinese government may wish to attract students as a means to enhance its soft power, the vast majority of these students are themselves likely to be driven by other concerns, most notably the desire to gain valued educational experiences and credentials. This will be particularly true of those on degree-bearing rather than short, language programs. Thus, their primary interest will be different from that of any soft power agenda, and their level of satisfaction with the country will be largely determined

by the extent to which this primary interest is met, particularly among self-funded students. Thus the provision of a high-quality education is the first and most important consideration in any attempt to use higher education as a soft power tool. Many questions as to whether Chinese universities can help 'win hearts and minds' were raised by Shambaugh (2015) and generally evaluated negatively. His questioning and evaluation are backed up by the observations that Chinese universities lack capacity to innovate and are known for 'cronyism, false credentials, plagiarism, and intellectual property theft' and the universities' educational practices are marked by rote learning and traditional teaching (*ibid.*). Although Shambaugh's doubts over Chinese universities' academic capacities can themselves be questioned, his expression of these doubts does raise our concern over the relationship between Chinese international education and the realization of China's soft power in practice. Haugen (2013) also reports how many African students in her study were dissatisfied with their studies and actually abandoned them in favor of engaging in business.

Our focus in this study, therefore, is to seek evidence of the actual impact on international students' perceptions of and attitudes toward China of their experiences as visiting students. We were intrigued by a statement by the deputy director of the opening ceremony at the Beijing Olympic Games which we feel encapsulates the aims of soft power in a way that opens them up to the sort of investigation that we wished to engage in: 'I really hope that the people of the world can get to know the Chinese culture … to get to know China, to understand China, to love China, and to desire China' (Zhang Jigang 2008, cited in Callahan, 2010, p. 4). This statement points out that successful soft power strategies are intended to have both cognitive and affective impacts on the individuals, with knowledge leading to empathy and ultimately to 'love' and 'desire'. Somewhat more modestly, the Chinese Ministry of Education (2010b) has set the overall aim of the 'Studying in China Scheme' as cultivating 'international graduates who know China and are friendly to China'. Our research aim, therefore, is to explore what knowledge international students gain about China through their experiences in the country, how they gain it, and what affective responses this knowledge engenders.

Methodology

Focus

The research on which we draw explores the educational and social experiences of international students in China. Its scope extends beyond the specific focus of this chapter, but we use it here to address the following questions:

1. How do the participants interpret their educational and wider experiences during their time in China?
2. Do these experiences help them to know China, understand China, and love China?

Research Site

The fieldwork was conducted at a single, high-status university in Xi'an (henceforth referred to as CU). Xi'an has particular significance here as it was the starting point of the ancient Silk Road connecting China to Central Asia and to Rome from about 100 BC. It is now expected to play an important role in the country's new 'Silk Road Economic Belt' initiative by, among other things, attracting overseas tourists and building research collaboration between local and international universities (Mackay, 2015). The city, however, is economically less advanced than Beijing, Shanghai, and most Chinese coastal cities. International students studying in this city may have experiences that differ significantly from those of students in economically more developed areas (Li, 2015). CU started to enroll international students in the late 1950s and to take international students for the bachelor degree in medicine in the mid-1990s. In 2011, when our research started, CU hosted over 1400 foreign students from more than 70 countries, nearly 60% of whom were taking undergraduate degrees, particularly the medical degree. CU targets an enrollment of 3000 international students by 2020; on its webpage, CU reveals soft power enhancement to be one of its rationales for internationalization in stating that international student education helps to disseminate Chinese culture and 'expand friendly international influence'.

Participants

All first-year international students in a five-year medical degree at CU[1] were invited, in 2011, to complete a questionnaire (see below for details). From 118 respondents, 16 (8 male and 8 female) were invited for annual interviews based on principles of voluntary participation and maximal variation. Among them, seven were from Pakistan; this predominance was a deliberate choice because at that time Pakistani students were the largest national group, amounting to over half of the international students taking the degree. Other participants were from Malaysia, Canada, and three African countries.[2] Eight of these participants (fortunately, four female and four male and from six different countries) attended further interviews in 2012, 2013, and 2015, supplemented by four others who each participated in only in one or two of these years. The 'core' eight interviewees gave the research continuity in individual narratives as well as giving us a picture of general developments, which was supported or supplemented by the more 'occasional' interviewees. We also sometimes interviewed students outside the original group of 16. For example, two senior Pakistani students in their fourth year of the same degree were interviewed in 2011, in response to the core group's comments about the influence of these older students on the newer arrivals. In other cases, participants were asked to come for interviews together with their fellow students or friends, and such contributions were always welcomed. The narratives of these additional interviewees were used to provide a form of triangulation with the data from the core group, enhancing the validity of our interpretations. All data discussed in this chapter, however, came only from the original 16, largely because they gave us a clearer sense of a 'starting point' for the developments that we wished to follow, and thereby a clearer sense of a narrative for the cohort they represent. In what follows, we use prefix P1–P16 to refer to these participants.

[1] The degree was in 'Western medicine' as the students targeted for recruitment largely wished to practice in their home countries rather than in China; some 'Chinese medicine' was included in the curriculum however.

[2] There were few African students taking this degree at CU and identifying the specific home countries of those in our sample might compromise their anonymity.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire given to all first-year students taking the degree in 2011 comprised closed items only, to gather basic demographic information on gender, age, qualifications, family background, first language, and levels of competence in English and Chinese. Further items asked students' reasons for pursuing a higher degree in China, their previous knowledge of China, and their pre-arrival expectations about learning and living in China.

Following the questionnaire, the first round of semi-structured interviews was carried out in October 2011. The schedule for this initial interview was informed by our experience with an earlier study of a group of US students at CU (Tian & Lowe, 2014). These interviews allowed us to explore in greater depth the participants' reasons for studying in China, expectations about their study in China, and their initial experiences since their arrival. The subsequent interviews in 2012, 2013, and 2015 tended to become more unstructured to accommodate diversity in individuals' experiences but also as greater mutual familiarity developed and led to a more relaxed atmosphere. Interviews began with open questions that encouraged students to freely talk about their educational and social experiences. With little existing—particularly qualitative—research on international students in China to guide the interviews, we encouraged interviewees to identify and talk about any issues and concerns they felt were important and relevant to their study and lives. This avoided imposing any pre-conceived notions that we might have had about the possible nature of their experiences and helped us to access better the participants' interpretations of their experiences and construction of meanings. The flexibility in design enabled us to achieve our aim of the interviews being 'done in a situation of mutual trust, listening, and caring for the experience described by the other' (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 422), which in turn contributed to the quality of the data generated.

All interviews were carried out in a quiet coffee shop near CU, seen as a 'neutral' ground and providing a relaxed atmosphere. They were conducted in English, recorded, and then transcribed verbatim. Interview transcripts were coded through open, axial, and selective

coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For open coding, we used broad headings such as 'Reasons for studying in China', 'Academic experiences', 'Social experiences' that we generated from the original research questions. For axial coding, we extracted more descriptive data by forming sub-categories such as 'Difficulties in subject learning', 'Strategies to deal with difficulties in learning', and 'Learning outcomes'.

Spread over five years, our research produced a considerable volume of data. In this chapter we consider only those data which address the potential soft power effects of the participants' experiences; that is, we are interested in the developments in the participants' knowledge of and attitudes toward China and the Chinese and not, for example, on relationships among the participants and their fellow students themselves. Our familiarity with the data—from carrying out, transcribing, and subsequent reading and discussion of the interviews—made it clear that data meeting this broad purpose could come from a wide range of the reported experiences, many of which could not have been anticipated in advance. For the purpose of this chapter, therefore we have used further selective coding, applied across all our existing categories and sub-categories, by searching the data for comments that relate to the students' knowledge of China and their attitudes toward China. To make the reporting of these easier for ourselves and the reader, we have categorized the findings under different aspects of students' experiences—notable 'academic' and 'social' experiences—while also keeping a sense of their development over time.

Findings

Our study has generated a considerable volume of data, and in what follows, we are selective in terms of the categories (sub-headings) that we present from the data. In making selections, we have tried to avoid biased interpretations of either the 'larger picture' or students' responses within each category through a process of continuous reflection and critical discussion over our selection and interpretation.

Pre-arrival Perceptions

Pre-arrival Perceptions of China

Questionnaire data show that most of the students in 2011 had little pre-arrival knowledge about China. Respectively, 62%, 84%, 69%, and 53% of respondents reported that they knew 'nothing' or had 'very limited' knowledge of Chinese 'history', 'political system', 'geography', or 'culture'. Those who claimed they knew something about China before their arrival obtained their information from the internet (39%), traditional media (books, film, and television, 29%), friends and relatives (25%).

The first round of interviews showed that the students often arrived with views of Chinese society that were stereotypical, out-of-date, sinister, or just bizarre. The impact of popular public media in shaping their pre-arrival understanding of China was often declared.

> I've watched a lot of English movies. The image they give was very bad. (Laughs) They show China like it's not really. They show there are like … people on bicycles everywhere … very crowded areas. They show it's like a very old place. People are, like … their thought is very old. They are still living in the past. (P16, 2011)
>
> I saw this one documentary … as soon as people arrived at the airport they were followed by the secret service. So, my image was, I'm going to be followed by the secret service. (P5, 2011)
>
> My first expectation was that there will be people all over, in the streets, doing *kung fu* and jumping and all that. (P14, 2011)

Pre-arrival Perceptions of the Host University

In comparison, questionnaire data on the respondents' pre-arrival perceptions of the host university were much more positive: 52% believed they knew the university 'well' or 'very well', gaining their information mainly from the university's website (22%), friends and relatives (20%),

and an agency they used to help with the application (14%). Some students complained in the initial interviews, however, that information on the university website was inadequate and that some of the agencies they had used to help them obtain a place were simply profit-oriented and provided them with false information.

Reasons for Studying in China

In 2011 most students reported that they chose to study in China because of lower tuition fees and living costs compared with Europe or America, where some had initially aspired to study. Other reasons included the relative ease of obtaining a visa, the shorter duration of a medical degree program, the good reputation of Chinese higher education, and the opportunity to experience Chinese culture.

> I did my A-levels in Tanzania, and then went to Brazil. Now, I was planning to study in Brazil but then we found out it was too expensive, for a medical degree. The cheapest was eighteen thousand a year, US dollars. And the [cost] of living in Brazil was really high…. So, I thought, hey, why not come to China. And it's not like China's that bad at medicine either, so. (P3, 2011)

The primary reason for the survey respondents' choice of the host university was its international reputation and the international recognition of its degree, which was believed to increase their future employment opportunities (60%). Other reasons included recommendation by family and friends (18%) and being comparatively easier to get admission (14%). Very few (4%) were in receipt of a scholarship.

> Because it [the university] has got a very good reputation all over the globe. The main reason is this university is basically recognized by our country. So when we go back we don't have to [sit] all those medical tests. (P14, 2011)

> One of my relatives [is] studying here. I came through her. … She's doing third year. So, she said that it's kind of good. (P8, 2011)

Academic Experiences

Teaching and Learning

The first round of interviews in 2011 showed a mixed picture regarding the students' evaluation of their first learning experiences in China. Most interviewees believed lecturers had the expertise in the subject they taught and praised the professional attitudes they held.

> But most of them, they know their stuff. They are able to teach and we have … Like my chemistry teacher, this semester, he was really good. He was the kind of teacher that told you, 'If you ever have any problems, just come and find me in my office and I'll explain everything to you from beginning to end, if you need any help. Don't worry about it'. … So, there are teachers like that, that you feel are approachable and they actually really want to teach. (P13, 2011)

On the other hand, the majority of lecturers were described as lacking English oral presentation skills, and language barriers made interactive classroom teaching difficult, which led to frustration and boredom among some students, and a breakdown of discipline in extreme cases. Many lecturers delivered their lectures by reading their slides aloud one after the other.

> They are not explaining anything. They are just reading from the slides, reading and reading and reading. (P16, 2011)

> They have knowledge but they can't give it properly to us. (P2, 2011)

Where teachers did make efforts to overcome their English language deficiency and to show their willingness to help the students, this was appreciated:

> they do realize, they do actually tell out and say, 'I'm sorry, my English is not good.' And I do respect them in that, to give an understatement about themselves and say, I'm not allowed to do [the teaching] in my language, but if you could pay attention, I will help you out. And that is the part where we really feel, 'Thanks'. We have teachers who know their weakness and actually come to a point of trying to work out of it, try to work it out. (P7, 2011)

Over the duration of their degree, however, students observed positive changes initiated by the university to enhance the quality of teaching:

> The school, the administration, sent people to evaluate teachers while they are teaching us. They have been evaluating teaching for about half a month now. This is a new thing… So while the evaluation is going on, teachers tend to raise up their standards. That helps too. The evaluators also talk with us and ask us, what [are] you guys trying to learn, what will help you to enhance your ability of going home to be doctors? (P13, 2014)

University Facilities and University Support

Most of the students expressed overall satisfaction with living and learning facilities provided by the host university. Upon arrival in 2011, complaints concentrated on the 'unbearably' slow internet speed in their dormitory, for which they were charged a high fee. Reliable internet access was considered essential by the students, not only to support their studies but, perhaps more importantly at the beginning of the degree, for social networking and for contacting their families at home, in view of the high cost of international telephone calls.

> As far as accommodation is concerned, we have got just one complaint, that our internet is very slow. (P14, 2011)

> So, like, we have an internet facility in our dorm but it's really crappy, really, really crappy, to the extent that the possibility of loading Wikipedia would take … ten minutes.… A simple mail will go, like, for five seconds [if] you still have contact. (P7, 2011)

Unlike the students' views on teaching, however, complaints about accommodation increased over the years. Complaints about the problems of getting hot water and the low availability of single rooms in the dormitories recurred in each year's interviews. There were further complaints about financial matters such as confusing changes of fees CU charged for renting accommodation, for electricity, the internet, and other services, a source of complaints also recorded in Haugen's (2013,

p. 328) study of African students in China. To make the situation worse, some of the administrators to whom the students took their complaints were accused of procrastination or simply unwillingness in dealing with them, leading to severe frustration and dissatisfaction:

> So, … I was telling the *Laoshi* [teacher], could I get from the outside? Like get outside facility internet? And he said I can't because I'm with a … school [CU] contract. So we said, OK, and I asked him when are we getting [improved internet]. He said there's a new internet coming in. I went, OK, I'll wait for that. When will that be? Hmmm, end of October … actually November. And he gave me a deadline, November. November, I went up to him, it was like, Laoshi, when is the internet? End of November. And I did prepare myself for the third attempt … December. (P7, 2011)

We asked students whether they ever felt their treatment by the administration was 'racist', and most were quick to dismiss this possibility. Some did feel that the office staff operated with a hierarchy of nationalities in mind, however:

> You can't say racism. I don't know what do you call it, but, for example, if … they know you are not from Pakistan or India or Nepal, if they think you are from Europe or America, they really respect you and they listen to you really carefully. (P12, 2011)

Other comments suggested that this treatment was perceived less in racist terms and more in terms of perceived wealth of the individual's country of origin. By 2014, for example, large numbers of students from an oil-rich Middle-Eastern country were enrolling on the degree and were felt to be offered much better treatment and greater respect than many of our interviewees had received. This was firmly attributed to the perceived wealth of the newcomers.

A major source of student dissatisfaction, from the beginning of the degree, was the lack of activities available to them on campus:

> That's a thing that they're lacking here. We don't have any extra-curricular activities. (P13, 2011)

This situation seemed not to improve over the four years. The students were repeatedly disappointed by the administration's response, which apparently showed little interest in addressing their social needs, and decisions again seemed arbitrary or unexplained:

> I wish I have something at least interesting to do here. Okay we go to class, that is what brings us here, to study. But we don't have [anything] other than that. We don't have life. We need something else. (P2, 2014)

In particular, students were unhappy about the way in which this absence of activities deprived them of relatively easy ways of getting to know Chinese students, something which many had hoped to do before they arrived in China. Language was undoubtedly a hindrance to establishing any sort of friendships with Chinese students, but this was exacerbated by the strict separation of living spaces for Chinese and international students, the absence of shared classes that led to different timetables, and the general lack of organized shared activities.

> Even, we feel like we have been isolated from the Chinese students and community. We have no interaction between the foreign students and the Chinese students. … We should have some special activities, so we will get to know each other. (P10, 2011)

Learning from Experiences Beyond the University

Throughout their stay in China, almost all of the students declared that they found the Chinese people they encountered outside the university to be 'friendly', 'polite', 'helpful', or possessing other similarly positive traits. They were, however, irritated by certain habits in the local population, notably the persistent staring that they were subjected to and the taking of photographs without their permission. Most of them came to accept such behavior as being good-natured curiosity rather than hostility and gradually became more tolerant or found their own ways of dealing with it.

> We went to McDonald's at night for ice cream. And then while we were there, a couple of other students and our Indian friend from Malaysia, a lot of the Chinese people in McDonald's were staring. It's not like they stare

> and [imitates staring then quickly looking away], they go like this [stares intently and persistently]. … They don't walk and look and just keep walking. They stop and they stare. (P12, 2011)

> My other friend, the Sri Lanka friend … Whenever he sees someone trying to take his picture, he smiles, so the girl would get really embarrassed. He will purposely do this. (P12, 2013)

Similarly, almost all international students declared that they had no sense of racist attitudes toward them from the local people. One compared China with his experience of the USA in this respect and declared, 'I love this country for this reason'. One of the Africans and one other student who had African friends did suggest that black people might experience some racist treatment, but this was not widespread. One student did warn, however, that foreigners must be careful not to get into any sort of altercation with a Chinese person as other Chinese will always take their compatriot's side, but this comment was made with particular reference to 'places which have trouble', such as bars and nightclubs.

The large number of Muslim students in our sample generally agreed that they had not experienced discrimination on religious grounds, although an issue did arise with the university administration when they asked for a specific prayer space rather than being obliged to pray in dormitory corridors. One Muslim student was in fact influenced in his choice to study in China by his feeling that he would be better received there than in the UK or USA. Their reception was probably helped by the long historical presence of a Muslim community in the city, so that, for example, halal food is easily available. There were clearly official limits to this tolerant attitude, however, as some students pointed out. For example, praying in any public place is not allowed, and although some Chinese people did ask questions about Islam, the Muslim students were warned strictly against any action which might be interpreted as proselytizing. Their religion was tolerated as long as it remained a private affair.

The experience of staying in China prompted some Christian students to question images of attitudes to Christianity among Chinese people that they had held before arrival.

> Previously we heard a lot of stories that China is not that open-minded about Christianity. … Because of that, we try to keep it … down low and try not to tell anyone. But later I find that Xi'an is actually very open-minded in that sense. They are very OK with whoever you actually are. So if people ask me "Are you Christian?" I will say "Yeah, I'm a Christian." I don't feel scared to tell them now. Before I think I shouldn't say anything. If they ask, I will say I'm not. …. Now I don't care. (P13, 2013)

Despite dissatisfactions with the degree and university, over time we observed among participants an emotional attachment and in some cases even a sense of belonging, emerging from their growing personal knowledge of China, but also from a sense this was the place in which they themselves had 'grown up', become more independent and mature.

> But we feel like now we belong here. This is us, like China, we are comfortable here, we keep growing. It's comfortable being here. (P3, 2013)

> The surprising thing is I am happy I am here. I am happy that I take that chance [i.e. the scholarship to study in China]. I think this place teaches me a lot. … When I came here I was young. I did not know how to start. I used to call my dad I wished to go home. But now one month home is too much for me. I asked my dad why they booked the ticket for me. Could I just go back home for two weeks and go back China? (P2, 2014)

Conclusions and Implications

We have suggested that soft power has cognitive and affective components: 'knowledge about' and 'feelings for' a country. These are not entirely separable, of course, in that one has to be aware of an object to have feelings for it, but the distinction is helpful in looking for evidence of the effectiveness of soft power. To judge the soft power effectiveness of these students' experiences in China, we must evaluate the extent to which the students have come to 'know China' better and whether or not they admire or even 'desire' it as a result.

That they knew more about China after living and studying there for four or five years than they did when they arrived almost goes without saying, if only because most of them arrived with very limited information

about China or information that was so seriously distorted that even a short time there must correct it. We must also recognize, however, that some of these students did not choose to study in China in order to find out more about it and did little to seek knowledge of it much beyond that which they needed for their everyday living. Their interest in coming to China was primarily in gaining a qualification that would be recognized and therefore eventually help them to practice medicine in their own or another country. Significant attractions of China in helping them to achieve this goal included, for most, the relatively low cost and ease in obtaining admission to the degree. Nonetheless, there were many who were culturally or politically attracted by the country and hoped to learn more about it. Cultural attractions included anticipation of a public morality that was not so liberal as in 'the West' and of less discrimination against Muslims. 'Political' attraction, among the Pakistani students in particular, arose not because they admired or even knew much about China's political system, but because China and Pakistan were seen as strategic allies and they expected Chinese people to extend friendship to them as a consequence.

The knowledge that they gained from their experience was generally not the same as that which might be made available through Confucius Centers, the other arm of the 'soft power through education' approach. It tended not to be the 'high' cultural or historical knowledge that defines the long civilizational history that China sees as its global mark of distinction. Our students gained practical knowledge for contemporary everyday survival in a Chinese city: knowledge of shopping for daily needs and how to bargain, of how to get about, knowledge of where and what to eat (particularly important for the Muslim students). In a sense this is 'authentic' knowledge of China and contemporary Chinese life, largely free of any attempt by Chinese authorities to present only that which they see as desirable for the 'foreigners' to know. It was gained through experience and interpreted through the cultural and experiential filters that the students brought with them, rather than being pre-packaged in terms of a national cultural heritage. This culturally mediated interpretation meant that individuals might respond differently to similar observations and experiences, sometimes evaluating them against their own culture, and arrive at different affective conclusions. For example, individuals who

came with previous experience of materially more advanced countries and cities—Canada and the UAE were cited—tended to be less impressed with the degree of modernity of both infrastructure and human behavior that they encountered in Xi'an than those who came from materially less developed locales.

For some, life as a student in Xi'an was attractive because it presented opportunities for new experiences that were unavailable 'at home'. Among the Pakistani young men in particular—both from their own accounts and from those of others—opportunities were taken to go to nightclubs and other venues (which might or might not include drinking alcohol) and to mix with female company to the extent of having a local girlfriend. Perhaps just as important as the availability of such opportunities, however, was the absence of direct parental supervision and prohibitive social norms. This observation draws attention to the fact that it is not only the place that influenced the students' affective responses to their experience but also the time in their lives at which this experience occurred. For most students this was the first time they had lived away from home and been responsible for their own daily lives. It was a time for rapid 'growing up', something which was obvious to us as we interviewed them over the years and something which they themselves commented on. It is likely, therefore, that an 'alumnus effect' will figure in the years after they leave China: a positive nostalgia for a place and people that is linked to a significant time in their lives in which they had exciting new experiences and made new friends (even if few of these were Chinese). Unfortunately, for practical reasons alone, we shall be unable to follow our participants in their future lives beyond their Chinese university experience to examine whether this effect will be observed and will positively influence their attitudes to China. We anticipate occasional contact in the future with one or two of the students, but more systematic research than we can currently manage is certainly needed to explore the validity of the soft power rationale for recruiting international students, not only in China but more widely.

There is considerable interest in China as it has emerged onto the center stage of world politics and economics. This interest may offer fertile ground for soft power to work on, but it would be cultural arrogance to assume that 'success' is assured simply as a consequence of exposure to

Chinese society and culture. Nonetheless, government policy statements on recruiting international students (e.g. MoE, 2010b) and commentaries on these policies (e.g. Wen, 2015) that we have reviewed above focus exclusively on the numbers and origins of the recruited students and provide no guidance on or expectations of the nature of their experience in China. From an empirical perspective, our study suggests that this particular university showed very little concern until recently over the quality of the students' experiences within the university and offered little opportunity for cross-cultural contact, or even inhibited it. Similar findings have been reported by Ding (2016) from a study in Shanghai, suggesting that even in one of the most internationalized and cosmopolitan cities in China, the effectiveness of the soft power agenda for universities must be worked on rather than left to chance. Even Wen's opinion piece for the *Global Times*, which largely treats the recruitment of international students alone as leading to enhanced soft power, admits that 'China needs to do more to make this virtuous circle more constructive' (Wen, 2015).

The least positive responses among our participants were to the degree and the university itself, particularly in terms of poor teaching and the lack of contact with Chinese students. Oddly, therefore, it was aspects of the university itself—their very reason for coming to China—which were most likely to threaten the soft power impact of their experience in the country. Many students did appreciate the attention they received from some teachers—notably the teacher with particular responsibility for the welfare of the whole class, whose commitment and warmth were praised by many—and they recognized that some did their best for them despite the language barrier. The university administration—both those with whom the students came into direct contact when seeking practical help and those at higher levels making strategic decisions—must take much of the responsibility for the negative experiences these foreign students reported. We gained the impression that this degree program for foreign students, taught in English, had been introduced by the university without much thought for the students who were enrolled on it, at least until very recently. Perhaps it was a response to expectations from central government that Chinese universities should 'internationalize'; perhaps it was seen primarily as a source of additional funds and little more. We do

not know the rationale for the degree, but it is clear that better selection or training of staff is required: development of English language skills among teaching staff and 'customer service' skills among administration staff. Greater transparency in regulations and administrative procedures and consistency in their application would make a significant difference to the international student experience. Perhaps most of all, serious attempts should be made to develop a more inclusive campus in which Chinese and international students have opportunities to engage with and learn from each other; but the same could probably be said for many university campuses around the world which claim to be 'international'.

In the spirit of small-scale qualitative case studies such as this one, we must state emphatically that we do not make any attempt to generalize from our findings to other Chinese universities' internationalization programs. Indeed, we would not even propose that our findings necessarily apply to students taking other degrees in CU. We see our study as a critical exploration of the 'soft power effect' on the particular sample of students we studied. We hope that there are cautionary lessons to be learned from these findings for other Chinese universities which recognize similarities with their own provision for international students. We also hope that there are many universities that are already ahead of us and are aware of the need for providing a high-quality educational experience for their international students, whether or not they subscribe to a soft power agenda in attracting such students in the first place.

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11

Commentary: International Students in China—What We Know, What We Don't, and What Next

Peidong Yang

While China is often noted for being the world's largest source of international students, it has in fact in recent years also emerged as one of the top *destinations* for mobile students globally (Hvistendahl, 2008). As the editors point out in the introduction to this volume, in 2015, China hosted close to 400,000 international students from more than 200 world countries. This represented a remarkable growth from a modest number of 14,000 foreign students in the country in 1992 (Kuroda, 2014, p. 448). Furthermore, the Chinese Ministry of Education (2010) has set the target of hosting up to 500,000 international students by the year 2020—a target that seems well on its way of being realized. Thus, there is now an increasing need for more research attention to be paid to international student flows into China. Despite evidence of emerging scholarly efforts at this—to which this volume represents the newest addition—there is still a dearth of research on China-bound student mobilities when compared with the Anglophone literature on international student mobility (ISM) in general which remains largely focused on 'West'-bound forms of study

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F. Dervin et al. (eds.), *International Students in China*, Palgrave Studies on Chinese Education in a Global Perspective, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78120-4_11

abroad (see Brooks & Waters, 2011). In this brief commentary, thus, I hope to sketch out some general contours of this nascent research field of international students in China, focusing on what we already know, what we don't know yet, and what could be on the research agenda next.

What We Know

We know first of all that a majority of tertiary-level international students in China hail from Asia—in 2015 Asian students accounted for 60 per cent of the total (CAFSA, 2016). At the same time, slightly less than half, or 46.47 per cent (ibid.), of international students are on fully fledged diploma-awarding programs in China, whereas the rest are so-called non-diploma students (*fei xueli xuesheng*), such as students on short-term language/culture or exchange courses. Among the diploma students, an even higher percentage is made up of Asian students.[1] Understandably, because of China's status as an 'emerging' power not yet on par with the developed countries in the 'West', as a destination for obtaining full academic credentials, it tends to appeal more to students from countries that are of similar or lower global standing. Meanwhile, as a destination for immersion into the Chinese language and culture, the country continues to attract a significant number of students from all over the world who tend to stay for shorter stints, as a number of chapters (e.g. Chaps. 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9) in this volume illustrate.

We also know that for international students seeking or considering obtaining full academic credentials in China (e.g. Chaps. 2 and 10 in this volume), oftentimes the affordability of studying in the country is an important reason, as is the lack of higher education opportunities in the home country. In my own recent study on emerging/lower middle-class Indian youths pursing medical education (MBBS) in a provincial Chinese university (Yang, 2018), I found the significantly lower tuition costs in China and the lack of educational options at home to be,

[1] More than 70 per cent, according to *Statistics on International Students in China 2013*; http://www.zuihaodaxue.com/Article.jsp?id=A6vzX4arM79NeRovibC5UxSTLCWrS4 (webpage now defunct, last accessed 2015)

respectively, the chief 'pull' and 'push' factors underlying the Indian students' choice. On the other hand, regarding international students whose objectives for studying in China are more language-/culture-focused, existing research has mostly investigated their experiences of intercultural encounter, intercultural competence, cultural learning, language acquisition, and so forth. These lines of inquiry generally fall under the approach of interculturality and/or intercultural education—an approach that the present volume exemplifies.

From such existing scholarship on international students in China, we have also come to know about a number of problems and issues faced by both international students and their Chinese host. Firstly, superficiality of interaction, surface learning of culture (see Chap. 5), and persistent culturalism continue to be observed. While scholars like ourselves may have become increasingly mindful of the pitfall of culturalism and essentialism and are ready to implement what Dervin (2011) has termed the 'liquid' approach to culture, actors on the ground may not always be well equipped to do so. This means that intercultural contacts may also be potential occasions for further stereotyping and misunderstandings to develop. Secondly, the quality of the programs offered by Chinese institutions to international students is not always adequate and can vary greatly depending on location and institution. As illustrated in Chap. 10 in this volume and also evidenced in my own research, quality becomes a possible concern especially for English-medium diploma programs (such as medical degrees and/or business degrees) targeting developing-country students. Chinese institutions are sometimes attracted to the prestige and the rhetoric of 'internationalization', but may not necessarily have the level of commitment and resource to back up their programs. In some cases, poor management/coordination, inadequate infrastructure/resources, and un-/under-qualified teaching staff on the part of the Chinese host can leave international students with a negative educational and overall experience in China; sometimes they may even end up resentful. Obviously, this not only spells failure for both the students and the hosting institutions, but it also undermines the Chinese state's broader objective of projecting soft power and creating international good will. Finally, the readiness of Chinese institutions and society in general to play host to diverse types of international students must not be taken for

granted. While the Chinese often pride themselves on being a hospitable nation and culture, the reality is that international students of diverse ethnic/racial, national, cultural-linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds are likely to encounter differentiated treatments or reactions from the host society/people and institutions; issues such as discrimination and racism do occur.

What We Don't Know

Although we already know a certain amount about international students in China, so far this knowledge seems fragmented in terms of its substantive/empirical foci, and also limited in terms of the theoretical approach and conceptual tools used. Indeed, so far, studies about international students in China tend to be piecemeal works that do not amount to a programmatic effort or general theory building. Furthermore, as this volume itself illustrates well, most work in this field has thus far been couched in the intercultural education framework, carried out mostly by researchers who identify as educationalists and/or hosted in education departments/faculties. When compared with the broader Anglophone scholarship on international student mobility more generally, it is clear that there is still much that we don't know about international students in China because of the types of questions that have not been asked yet.

For example, one theoretical framework frequently used by geographers (and scholars of cognate disciplines) of student mobility is the Bourdieusian theory of social reproduction (e.g. Waters, 2012). In this analytical framework, study abroad is understood as a strategy to realize the conversion between different types of capital (chiefly economic, cultural, and social), to the ultimate effect of reproducing class advantage. This analytical framework has been powerfully applied to analyze, for instance, Asian students' quest for education in the English-speaking 'West'. However, when the direction of educational mobility is reversed, or at least altered to a much less common pattern to involve destinations such as China, what are the new dynamics or logics of capital conversion involved? Existing scholarship

seems to have little to say on this question regarding international students considering studying or currently studying in China.

Secondly, the recent Anglophone literature has also seen some advances in the theorization of student mobility beyond the individualistic and rationalistic 'push-pull' analysis rooted in neoclassic view of migration (Raghuram, 2013). For instance, recent work has investigated how, instead of a momentary decision seemingly made upon simply weighing pros and cons, one actually *becomes* a mobile student processually over time (Carlson, 2013); how wider social networks such as kin and friendly circles also play crucial roles in influencing the choices of studying abroad (Beech, 2015); and how, in addition to demand-side analysis, supply-side players (Findlay, 2010) such as educational providers and intermediaries should be given equal recognition in analyzing the assemblages of student mobility. Since existing studies on international students in China tend to focus narrowly on the *educational* and *intercultural* experiences for students who are already in the country, these other steps and processes leading to their mobility have been largely neglected.

Thirdly and relatedly, while the literature about international students in Western-/English-speaking contexts has for some time conceptualized study abroad as closely linked to, or indeed often the precursor to, migration (see Robertson, 2013, for the notion of 'education-migration nexus'), we know as yet very little about how studying in China intersects with migration objectives and/or trajectories for international students. This, of course, is to a large extent to do with the fact that China is not conventionally regarded as an immigration destination country, unlike destinations such as the USA, Europe, and Oceania. However, as China—now a middle-income nation—continues to emerge into the global 'core', it becomes ever more pertinent to ask what seeking education in China means for international students in terms of migration/mobility options and/or plans.

In short, when juxtaposed with a more extensive Anglophone literature on international students in other contexts—particularly with 'Western' countries as the destinations—the research on international students in China remains underdeveloped in both empirical breadth and theoretical and analytical depths.

What Next

Having outlined what we already know and what we don't know yet, what then could future research about international students in China possibly focus on?

In the broadest terms, while continuing with the important work along intercultural lines, future scholars could venture beyond this currently dominant perspective in the field and seek to develop a more multi-/inter-disciplinary agenda by incorporating theoretical frameworks and conceptual tools and vocabularies from a wider range of social science disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and geography. For this purpose, the existing Anglophone scholarship on ISM provides a wealth of theoretical and conceptual resources to tap on. Doing so would help render visible other important dimensions and facets to international student mobility to China as *sociological* and *geographical* phenomena, and not just an *educational* one.

Specifically, for example, future research could investigate the ways in which studying in China becomes a plausible idea or strategy for *what kinds* of international students, and what the underlying logics and rationalities are. It would equally be worth examining how studying in China is *made* possible, namely, what the enabling *infrastructural* actors and processes (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014) are and what specific roles educational intermediaries (Collins, 2012) and other social networks play therein. Furthermore, it is important to link education to *work* on the one hand and to *migration* on the other. I suggest that one potentially fruitful direction for future research would be to study the post-education trajectories of international students in China by asking questions such as: to what extent does studying in China lead to opportunities for work in the country or elsewhere in the world for the international students? To what extent does educational mobility to China influence the students' future mobility trajectories, and if so, how?

To sum up, the fact that China is fast emerging as a prominent destination for international students presents scholars with a fresh vista full of exciting research opportunities. An expansion of our analytical focus from *education* per se to the broader conceptualization of *educational mobility* would help us grasp these opportunities more fully.

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[1] Note: Page numbers followed by 'n' refer to notes.

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F. Dervin et al. (eds.), *International Students in China*, Palgrave Studies on Chinese Education in a Global Perspective, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78120-4

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