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**CROSS-CULTURAL  
EDUCATIONAL ADJUSTMENT:  
A SUBSTANTIVE THEORY  
BASED ON THE EXPERIENCES  
OF A GROUP OF  
MAINLAND CHINESE  
POSTGRADUATE BUSINESS STUDENTS**

**A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy  
in Education**

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New Zealand**

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## ABSTRACT

This project explored a basic social process experienced by ten Mainland Chinese postgraduate business students: cross-cultural educational adjustment. Over a two-year period, three interviews were held with each student in order to elicit his or her experience of this adaptation process. In addition, toward the end of this period an attestation group with the same student profile was recruited to review the emergent findings.

A qualitative approach termed grounded theory was used for the methodology. Emphasis was placed on: hearing the students' voices; being open to students' experiences; developing a deep understanding of the adaptation process; and determining its theoretical conceptualisation. The initial interview was an inductive enquiry that isolated many aspects of the students' journey; the second interview deductively bent back on the initial data to saturate categories and determine how they were linked; the third interview further saturated categories, if needed, and sought a core category that underpinned the students' adjustment.

In determining a theoretical conceptualisation of this process, a model was developed. This was shared with the original participants and the attestation group to assess their perspective of it. The model depicts that the homogeneity of the students' background produced an externally bounded and culturally harmonised learner identity. When they entered the New Zealand tertiary environment this identity was fractured. However, the resilient nature of the learner identity, the adoption of learning strategies, and the drawing on prime motivators meant a complete fracturing of the identity was prevented. Yet, as a consequence, the learner identity also absorbed new, more internalised elements. Overall, the core concept of a better future impelled students through all aspects of their journey.

The major contributions of this study are that it presents an integrated understanding of cross-cultural educational adjustment and a conceptual picture of that process. The findings of this study, while limited in generalisability, suggest that students would benefit from: pre-departure culture and English language preparation; focused orientation programmes; and study skill support based on the strategies they are likely to employ and build the skills required in the new setting.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ideally, I would be able to say that this is the story of ten Mainland Chinese students. Yet, while I acknowledge their much appreciated help, their story has also become, by way of negotiated meanings and educational purpose, my thesis. It is my prayer that their story shines through and that my attempt to theorise does justice to, and does not obscure, their experiences. Personally, it was a joy to relate to these inspiring students over a two year period and I am so grateful that they shared their *Journey to the West* so openly with me. Therefore, this study is dedicated to them.

Confucius famously said: “A journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step.” The desire to begin this project was driven by observing, from my viewpoint as an international student support worker, the struggles and triumphs of many students engaging in study in a foreign land. Now that this particular journey is complete all I can do is to be thankful for the companions who shared it with me. The group I worked for as the project began encouraged and allowed time for professional development. My subsequent employer, in quite a different field of education, also encouraged, provided time, and even some funds for the project’s continuance. For the support from these two groups I am very grateful.

As so often happens, starting a journey is easier than seeing it through to the end. It is very true to say that this dissertation would not have been completed without the contribution of my supervisors Dr. Penny Haworth and Professor Wayne Edwards. Penny’s careful and thoughtful observations on my text and process and Wayne’s wise experience have provided the necessary signposts, rest stops, and refuelling such a large task demands. As this journey ends I can only, once again, express my profound gratitude for all they have written, said, and done.

I am also greatly indebted to Ruth, my wife. As life and work companion she shared more closely than any other the joys and sorrows of this journey. In particular, Ruth helped as my interview recording assistant and in editing the first full draft. As always, she believed in me when I did not. Ruth was always full of faith, hope, and love even when circumstances seemed likely to overwhelm us. A journey shared is great; one shared in love is so much better.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	iii
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms .....	xii
List of Appendices .....	xii
List of Tables .....	xiii
List of Figures .....	xiv
Map .....	xiv
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Background to International Students in NZ</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>The Issue of Academic Care</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>The Academic Context of Mainland Chinese Postgraduate Students</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Providing a Theorisation of Students' Self-Understanding</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>CONFUCIANISM AND EDUCATION IN CHINA</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Historical Background</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Current Legacy</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<i>A Love of Learning</i> .....	14
<i>The Teacher</i> .....	14
<i>The Moral Dimension</i> .....	15
<i>The Efficacy of Effort</i> .....	16
<i>Societal Harmony</i> .....	18
<b>CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION AND THE CHINESE LEARNER</b> ..	<b>20</b>
<b>Synthesising Cross-Cultural Adaptation</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Affective Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Adaptation</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<i>Approach Description: Stress-Adaptation-Growth</i> .....	25
<i>Approach Evaluation</i> .....	28
<i>Implications for the Mainland Chinese Learner</i> .....	29
Home culture societal variables. ....	29
Host culture societal variables. ....	30
<b>Behavioural Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Adaptation</b> .....	<b>32</b>
<i>Approach Description: Culture Learning</i> .....	32
<i>Approach Evaluation</i> .....	34
<i>Implications for the Mainland Chinese Learner</i> .....	35
Social/communicative competence variables. ....	35
Situational variables. ....	37
<b>Cognitive Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Adaptation</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<i>Approach Description: Social Identification Theory</i> .....	38
<i>Approach Evaluation</i> .....	41
<i>Implications for the Mainland Chinese Learner</i> .....	43
Personal variables. ....	43

<b>THE CHINESE LEARNER OVERSEAS</b> .....	46
<b>Contextual Differences</b> .....	46
<b>The Learner</b> .....	47
<b>Knowledge</b> .....	49
<i>Attitudes to Knowledge</i> .....	49
<i>Purpose of Learning</i> .....	50
<i>Motivation</i> .....	51
<b>Learning</b> .....	52
<i>Academic Performance</i> .....	52
<i>Transferability of Learning Skills</i> .....	53
<i>Learning Styles</i> .....	54
<i>Language Issues</i> .....	55
<i>Process or Product and Deep or Surface Learning</i> .....	57
<i>Metacognition</i> .....	58
<b>Teaching and the Role of the Teacher</b> .....	59
<b>Role of Student</b> .....	60
<b>Role of Peers</b> .....	61
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	62
<b>CHAPTER 3: THE METHODOLOGICAL RATIONALE</b> .....	65
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	65
<b>THE BASIC SOCIAL PROCESS</b> .....	65
<b>THE RESEARCH PROBLEM</b> .....	66
<b>THE QUALITATIVE RATIONALE</b> .....	67
<b>Hearing the Students' Core Concerns</b> .....	67
<b>Being Open to the Whole Process</b> .....	68
<b>Developing Depth and Breadth of Understanding</b> .....	69
<b>Displaying both Complexity and Simplicity</b> .....	70
<b>GROUNDING THEORY</b> .....	71
<b>Background</b> .....	71
<b>The Methodological Basis and Stages</b> .....	73
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	74
<b>CHAPTER 4: IMPLEMENTING THE METHOD</b> .....	77
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	77
<b>THE TRIAL STUDY</b> .....	77
<b>RESEARCH STAGES: DETAILS AND TIMEFRAMES</b> .....	78
<b>DATA GATHERING</b> .....	79
<b>Field Trip to China</b> .....	79
<b>Participation Selection and Profile</b> .....	81
<b>Semi-Structured Interviews</b> .....	84
<i>Round One Interviews</i> .....	85
<i>Round Two Interviews</i> .....	86
<i>Round Three Interviews</i> .....	87
<i>Email Questionnaire</i> .....	88
<b>DATA CODING AND ANALYSIS</b> .....	89
<b>NVivo 7 Software</b> .....	89

<b>The Research Journal and Memoing</b> .....	91
<b>The Constant Comparative Method</b> .....	92
<i>Open Coding</i> .....	92
<i>Axial Coding and Theoretical Sampling</i> .....	94
<i>Selective Coding and the Core Category</i> .....	96
<b>Modelling</b> .....	98
<b>The Conditions/Interactions/Consequences (CIC) Paradigm</b> .....	98
<b>ANALYSIS VERIFICATION</b> .....	99
<b>The Role of the Literature Review</b> .....	100
<b>Attestation Group Feedback</b> .....	101
<b>Evaluation of the Basic Social Process</b> .....	102
<b>WRITING UP THE THEORY</b> .....	103
<b>ETHICAL AND ACCESS ISSUES</b> .....	104
<b>Institutional Approval</b> .....	105
<b>Gaining Access</b> .....	105
<b>Informed Consent</b> .....	106
<b>Confidentiality</b> .....	107
<b>Minimising Harm</b> .....	108
<b>RESEARCHER POSITIONING</b> .....	111
<b>Philosophical Paradigms</b> .....	112
<b>Personal Attributions</b> .....	113
<b>Reporting with Integrity</b> .....	115
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	116
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONDITIONS: ESTABLISHED IDENTITY</b> .....	<b>119</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	119
<b>MACRO CONDITIONS</b> .....	121
<b>MICRO CONDITIONS</b> .....	125
<b>The Family</b> .....	126
<i>The Value and Price of Education</i> .....	126
<i>Parental Desires and Expectations</i> .....	127
<i>The Children's Response</i> .....	129
<b>Education</b> .....	130
<i>The Benefits and Strengths of Education in China</i> .....	130
Classmate relationships. ....	131
Preparing for the future. ....	133
Knowledge and skill growth. ....	133
The national university entrance examination. ....	134
<i>Learning and Teaching Processes</i> .....	135
Learning processes. ....	136
<i>Student choice.</i> .....	136
<i>Assessment.</i> .....	137
<i>Memorisation.</i> .....	137
<i>Meta-cognitive awareness.</i> .....	139
Teaching processes. ....	140
<i>Teacher respect.</i> .....	140
<i>Teacher-centred education.</i> .....	141
<i>Teaching styles and effectiveness.</i> .....	143
<b>ELEMENTS OF LEARNER IDENTITY</b> .....	145

<b>Learner Identity</b> .....	147
<i>Identity Element One: Teacher Centred</i> .....	148
<i>Identity Element Two: Supported</i> .....	149
<i>Identity Element Three: Worked Hard</i> .....	151
<i>Identity Element Four: Pressured</i> .....	152
<i>Identity Element Five: Effective Skills</i> .....	154
<i>Identity Element Six: Successful</i> .....	155
<i>Identity Element Seven: Competitive</i> .....	157
<i>Identity Element Eight: Good Knowledge</i> .....	159
<b>Learner Identity Attestation</b> .....	160
<i>Learner Identity Element Values</i> .....	161
<i>Attestation Feedback</i> .....	165
<i>Literature Attestation</i> .....	167
<b>Externally Bounded and Culturally Harmonised</b> .....	169
<i>Society and Culture</i> .....	170
<i>Family</i> .....	171
<i>Education</i> .....	171
<b>Modelling the Conditions</b> .....	173
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	174
<b>CHAPTER 6: INTERACTIONS: FRACTURED HARMONY</b> .....	<b>177</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	177
<b>CONFLICTING CULTURES - COMPETING CONTEXTS</b> .....	178
<b>Preparedness for Change</b> .....	179
<b>Life in the New Community</b> .....	180
<b>CROSS-CULTURAL EDUCATIONAL ISSUES FACED</b> .....	182
<b>Student Vignettes</b> .....	182
<b>Issues Faced</b> .....	183
<i>Overarching Issues</i> .....	184
Different ways of learning. ....	184
Language. ....	187
Cultural differences. ....	189
<i>Particular Learning Issues</i> .....	191
Different teacher relationships. ....	191
Quantity of reading. ....	193
Assignment emphasis. ....	195
Writing assignments. ....	196
<i>More Personal Issues</i> .....	197
Lack of support. ....	198
Financial stress. ....	200
Looking after yourself. ....	201
<b>Fractured Harmony</b> .....	202
<b>SUPPORTING STRATEGIES</b> .....	206
<b>Accessing Support Structures</b> .....	206
<b>Relying on Self</b> .....	210
<b>Growing in Language Skills</b> .....	212
<b>Growing in Learning Skills</b> .....	214
<b>Drawing on Prior Learning</b> .....	217
<b>Benefitting from New Zealand Work Experience</b> .....	218

<b>Fractured Harmony Supported by Strategies</b> .....	218
<b>PRIME MOTIVATORS</b> .....	219
<b>Meeting Family and Societal Expectations</b> .....	221
<b>The Desire for Western Learnings</b> .....	222
<b>Safeguarding Cost Issues</b> .....	225
<b>The Desire for Self-Improvement</b> .....	228
<b>THE INTERACTIONS AND THE LITERATURE</b> .....	229
<b>MODELLING THE INTERACTIONS</b> .....	231
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	232
<b>CHAPTER 7: CONSEQUENCES: IMPACTED IDENTITY</b>	<b>235</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	235
<b>CONSEQUENCES: IMPACTED IDENTITY</b> .....	236
<b>Alterations: Impact on the Established Learner Identity</b> .....	237
<i>Much Less Teacher Centred</i> .....	238
<i>Still Supported</i> .....	239
<i>Working Harder</i> .....	241
<i>Still Pressured</i> .....	242
<i>More Effective Skills</i> .....	242
<i>Greater Success</i> .....	243
<i>Still Competitive</i> .....	244
<i>Better Knowledge</i> .....	245
<i>Alterations: Assessing the Impact</i> .....	246
<b>Accommodations: New Dimensions of Learner Identity</b> .....	247
<i>More Independent</i> .....	248
<i>More Practically Skilled</i> .....	249
<i>More Organized</i> .....	251
<i>More Cooperative</i> .....	251
<i>More Interested</i> .....	252
<i>Accommodations: Assessing the Impact</i> .....	253
<b>The Consequences and the Literature</b> .....	254
<b>Modelling the Consequences</b> .....	256
<b>THE CORE CATEGORY</b> .....	258
<b>A Better Future</b> .....	258
<i>A Better Future: Living with Education in China</i> .....	259
<i>A Better Future: Preparing to Leave China</i> .....	261
<i>A Better Future: Overcoming the Issues</i> .....	263
<i>A Better Future: Seeking New Horizons</i> .....	264
Higher qualifications and improved competitiveness. ....	264
Enhanced prosperity. ....	265
Wider horizons. ....	266
<b>Meeting the Core Category Criteria</b> .....	268
<b>MODELLING THE THEORY</b> .....	270
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	272

<b>CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION</b>	<b>275</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	275
<b>EVALUATING THE SUBSTANTIVE THEORY</b> .....	276
<b>A Theoretical Summation</b> .....	276
<i>General Assumptions: The Mainland Chinese Learners of this Study</i> .....	277
<i>Defining Axioms</i> .....	277
Conditions: An established learner identity. ....	277
Interactions: A fractured harmony. ....	278
Conditions: An impacted identity. ....	278
<b>Meeting the Grounded Theory Criteria</b> .....	280
<b>Review of the Research Problem and Questions</b> .....	280
<i>Core Category: a Better Future</i> .....	281
<i>The Conditions: Established Identity</i> .....	282
<i>The Interactions: Fractured Harmony</i> .....	283
<i>The Consequences: Impacted Identity</i> .....	284
<b>The Contribution of this Substantive Theory</b> .....	287
<b>IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY</b> .....	287
<b>Preparation</b> .....	287
<b>Orientation</b> .....	289
<b>Support</b> .....	290
<b>Limitations</b> .....	291
<b>Further Research</b> .....	292
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	294
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>295</b>

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABC	Affective Behavioural Cognitive
BAF	Business and Administration Faculty
BSP	Basic Social Problem
CHC	Confucian Heritage Culture
CIC	Conditions Interactions Consequences
EQ	Email Questionnaire
HOF	Head of Faculty
IRB	Institutional Review Boards
LAU	Learning Assistance Unit
MUHEC	Massey University Human Ethics Committee

## APPENDICES

<b>A</b>	Interview one guide .....	325
<b>B</b>	Interview two guide .....	328
<b>C</b>	Interview three guide .....	332
<b>D</b>	Email questionnaire .....	335
<b>E</b>	Attestation group interview guide .....	339
	<b>Ethic requirements forms:</b>	
<b>F</b>	Access letter to HOF BAF .....	342
<b>G</b>	Information sheet .....	343
<b>H</b>	Participant consent form .....	346
<b>I</b>	Participant consent form - attestation group .....	347
<b>J</b>	Confidentiality agreement - recording assistant .....	348
<b>K</b>	Authority for the release of tape transcripts .....	349
<b>L</b>	NVivo Transcript coding .....	350
<b>M</b>	NVivo 7 tree nodes section .....	351
<b>N</b>	NVivo documentation overview.....	352
<b>O</b>	Research journal .....	353
<b>P</b>	NVivo 7 memo .....	355
<b>Q</b>	Attestation group PowerPoint presentation .....	356
<b>R</b>	Summary of findings and analysis sent to participants .....	359
<b>S</b>	Statement of the theorisation of the BSP .....	363

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Potential outcomes of cross-cultural adaptation .....	22
Table 2.2	Affective, behavioural, & cognitive elements of cross-cultural adaptation .....	23
Table 2.3	Stages of cultural adaptation .....	27
Table 2.4	Dimensions of personal identity .....	39
Table 3.1	References to 'education' and 'grounded theory' in the ERIC database .....	73
Table 4.1	Description and duration periods for research stages .....	78
Table 4.2	Summary of participants .....	83
Table 4.3	Coding categories/headings & types of nodes for round one interviews .....	90
Table 5.1	Likert rating scale for identity elements .....	161
Table 5.2	Influences on student education and learning .....	173
Table 7.1	Comparison of 'Teacher Centred' ratings .....	239
Table 7.2	Comparison of 'Supported' ratings .....	240
Table 7.3	Comparison of 'Working Hard' ratings .....	241
Table 7.4	Comparison of 'Pressured' ratings .....	242
Table 7.5	Comparison of 'Effective Skills' ratings .....	243
Table 7.6	Comparison of 'Successful' ratings .....	244
Table 7.7	Comparison of 'Competitive' ratings .....	245
Table 7.8	Comparison of 'Good Knowledge' ratings .....	245
Table 7.9	Attestation group ratings of internal impacts on learner identity	254

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1	International and Mainland Chinese students in formal tertiary education 1999-2000 .....	2
Figure 2.1	Relationship of terms associated with adaptation .....	21
Figure 2.2:	The ABC approach of 'culture shock' .....	25
Figure 2.3	W-curve adjustment approach .....	27
Figure 4.1	Strauss and Corbin's process model .....	99
Figure 5.1	Conditions/interactions/consequences paradigm .....	120
Figure 5.2	Macro and micro influences on the formation of learner identity .....	146
Figure 5.3	Learner identity element ratings .....	162
Figure 5.4	Identity elements by participants .....	164
Figure 5.5	Participant by identity elements .....	164
Figure 5.6	Comparison of learner identity elements for participants and attestors .....	166
Figure 5.7	Conditions of cross-cultural educational adjustment .....	174
Figure 6.1	Issues faced as ordered by attestation group .....	202
Figure 6.2	Comparison in learner identity elements between China and NZ .....	203
Figure 6.3	Learner identity fractured by issues faced crossing educational cultures .....	205
Figure 6.4	Fractured learner identity supported by strategies .....	219
Figure 6.5	Interactions of cross-cultural educational adjustment .....	231
Figure 7.1	Comparisons of learner identity change .....	237
Figure 7.2	Consequences of cross-cultural educational adjustment .....	257
Figure 7.3	The conditions, interactions, consequences paradigm model for a substantive cross-cultural educational adjustment BSP .....	271

## MAP

Map 4.1	Route of Field Trip in China - December 2005/January 2006 ..	80
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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

This research investigated the cross-cultural educational adjustment of international students. However, for the purpose of having a definable study group, international students were limited to students from Mainland China. Whereas, ethnic Chinese from Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia and elsewhere, share many characteristics, their point of origin can also indicate specific differences. Therefore, caution must “be taken against forming fixed conceptualisations of cultural characteristics and considerable care be given in sample definition and selection in cross-cultural research” (Smith, 2001, p. 429). The decision to concentrate on graduate students was to draw on their perceived greater ability to reflect, compare and contrast, and analyse their experience in New Zealand with the tertiary study they had undertaken in China.

The study investigated the particular educational adaptation issues that confronted these students as they changed education systems and not on cross-cultural adjustment per se. Therefore, the chosen area of research was the basic social process (BSP) of cross-cultural educational adjustment. According to Glaser (1978), a BSP has a range of properties that include: movement through stages; pervasive patterns of behaviour; making sense of changes over time; and a core category that explains the participants’ view of what is happening. In investigating the BSP, the aim was to develop a substantive or localised understanding of how the change in educational milieu impacted on these students and how they responded to the change. To do this, the thesis developed a substantive theory derived from the understanding of the BSP provided by a group of Mainland Chinese postgraduate students as they studied in business studies postgraduate diploma programmes at Atherton University (pseudonym), New Zealand.

Four related areas are addressed in this introduction to set the stage for this study of cross-cultural educational adjustment. Each of these areas is primarily focused on Mainland Chinese students. They are: a brief background to international

students in New Zealand; the issue of academic care; the academic context of Mainland Chinese postgraduate students; and the necessity of providing a theorisation of the students' self-understanding of their educational journey.

### Background to International Students in New Zealand

The education of international students in tertiary settings has received considerable attention in the last two decades. This is largely due to dramatic change. From a point where international students were a very small minority and largely funded by aid (such as the Colombo Plan in New Zealand), this educational sector has undergone a dramatic international expansion. Today, the providing of overseas students with education has exploded into a global commodity market. In New Zealand, the statistics provided by Education Counts (2009) indicate that the number of international tertiary students studying in New Zealand peaked at 50,422 in 2004, for the 1999 to 2006 period (see Figure 1.1). Of these, Mainland Chinese students also peaked at 29,881 in 2004. Mainland Chinese students have been the hugely dominant source of New Zealand's international students since 2000. In 2006 this group of students represented 49% of all international tertiary students in New Zealand (down from a 2004 high of 59.2% for the 1999-2006 period), with the next most populous group (United States of America) only 5.7%.

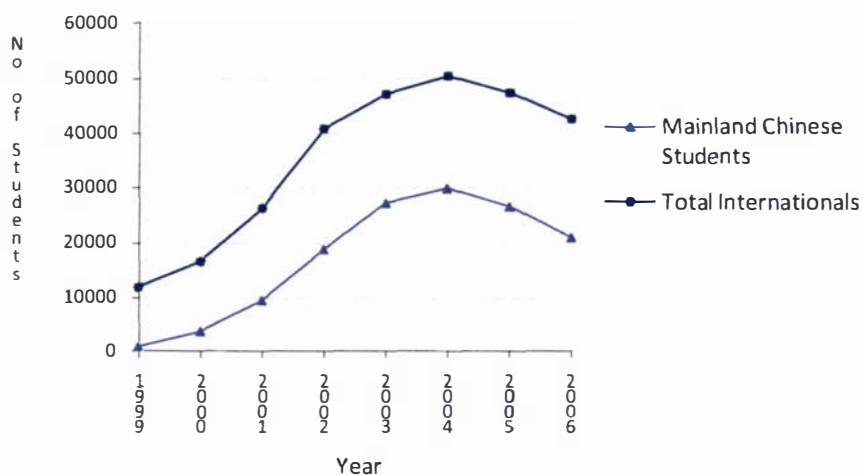


Figure 1.1: International and Mainland Chinese<sup>1</sup> students in formal tertiary education 1999-2006 (statistics sourced from Education Counts, 2009).

<sup>1</sup> Chinese as per country of citizenship.

However, after the 2004 peak, for a variety of reasons (see Chapter Four: ‘Participant Selection and Profile’), there was a significant fall in the number of international students and this was also reflected internationally (Smith, 2007). The percentage drop for Mainland Chinese students was twice the rate for all international students. The decline in new students affected all levels of educational provision in New Zealand. The New Zealand Government was concerned about maintaining the viability of what was termed “New Zealand’s fourth biggest export industry – education” (*Dominion Post*, 9 September 2003, A1). Its eagerness to do so was seen in the provision of up to \$500,000 to limit the damage caused by the collapse of a number of English language schools. A trade delegation, led by the then Education Minister, Trevor Mallard, to China highlighted the Government’s concern over New Zealand’s education reputation (*Dominion Post*, 15 September 2003, A2). The visit was, in part, designed to counteract comments by the People’s Daily, which is regarded as the Chinese government’s major voice. The paper apparently “...warned that students in New Zealand are involved in prostitution, gambling, drug abuse and gang activity” (*Dominion Post*, 13 August 2003).

Concerns about the impact of media commentary on student enrolments led the Ministry of Education to develop a policy document entitled ‘Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students’ (Ministry of Education, 2003). The 2006 review of this code (Education Counts, 2006) found that “the introduction of the mandatory code has had a positive effect on programmes for IS [International Students] in all sectors and throughout New Zealand.” And there were signs (Smith, 2007) that the enrolments, internationally and locally, of Chinese students had at least stabilised and possibly started to increase again in 2007/8. However, the effect of the October 2008 world ‘Credit Crunch’ and the impact on world economies of recessionary conditions could mean that this resurgence may lose momentum.

### **The Issue of Academic Care**

The issues of care for Mainland Chinese students are wide ranging and provide a variety of avenues for research. A pressing need among these is for the New Zealand university system, including Atherton University, to understand and learn to cope better with these students, and other internationals as well (*Dominion Post*, 19

August 2003, A6). On a purely pecuniary level, international students are a major financial lifeline to resource-constrained universities. However, these students are players in a global market. “Infometrics (2003) identified educational quality risks, including the standard of education and the international reputation of the provider, as one of the three major risk factors in sustaining the increasing demand for New Zealand education” (Ward & Masgoret, 2004, p. 42). Mainland Chinese students will only keep coming to New Zealand if they receive a competitively priced education that meets their needs and expectations. This study focuses on the academic dimensions of their study, although this does not deny that other issues, such as social adjustment, also significantly influence the quality of the students’ experiences.

It is not possible for this study to investigate the many possible avenues of research this area opens. However, by selecting some key issues underlying the BSP (see Chapter Three: ‘The Research Problem’), this research study hopes to provide a means of enhancing the education of Mainland Chinese students and provoking further research. It is hoped that detailed research into the educational environment provided for this group of Mainland Chinese postgraduate business students at an established New Zealand tertiary-level provider, Atherton University’s Business and Administration Faculty (BAF), will be of significance to all the stakeholders: the students (and their families/friends); academic staff and support service personnel; and tertiary institutions and governmental agencies.

The concentration on academic adaptation necessarily focused the study and highlighted a major issue for international students. Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001), in concluding their review of culture shock in relation to overseas students, state that the “most significant problems arise from the academic environment and that overseas students must engage in ‘culture-learning’ as well as intellectual endeavours to achieve academic success” (p. 166). Furnham (1997, p. 13) sees “academic problems associated with higher educational study” as a key problem for overseas students. These conclusions endorse this study centring on the academic aspects of cross-cultural adjustment.

Cross-cultural educational adjustment, like many learning/teaching processes, is little understood. One key to addressing this BSP is to move toward understanding

how students bridge the educational divide between their home countries and the new context. While there is research about the transitions international students face and their effects, there is a need for a more process-oriented and conceptualised understanding of educational cross-cultural adaptation. Additionally, there is a need to ‘hear’ in depth from the students themselves about their academic experiences. How do Mainland Chinese students understand the adaptation process; how do *they* see the problems *they* face and how do *they* cope with *their* problems? In regard to studies, particularly of Chinese students, Li writes: “Emic views [views of those being studied] of learning have rarely been studied directly” (2002).

Highlighting Mainland Chinese students in this study flows from a significant concern raised by Ward and Masgoret (2004). They found that these students were “...least satisfied with their academic progress despite reporting it better than students from other Asian countries” (p. 70). They also reported the:

... relatively poor integration of Chinese students into New Zealand educational institutions and into New Zealand society more broadly. Chinese students have less contact with their New Zealand peers and fewer New Zealand friends than students from other Asian and ESANA [European, South and North American] countries. They feel the least culturally included in the classroom. They report more discrimination than ESANA students and see New Zealanders have having [sic] more negative attitudes toward international students” (p. 70f).

### **The Academic Context of Mainland Chinese Postgraduate Students**

To understand the nature of this change it is necessary to realise the contrasting styles of education experienced by these students during their ‘journey’ to and in the West. This requires an appreciation of the legacy of Confucian educational ideals, which still hold considerable sway in today’s China despite globalisation and dramatic internal political, economic, and social change during the last 100 years. This study has described the implications of this legacy by asking students to define their identity as learners within their home cultural context. This personalisation of the general socialisation process provided a way to determine the type and scale of change the students experienced when changing learning ecologies.

Again, when considering the New Zealand academic context, rather than addressing it in terms of academic differences (e.g., learning and teaching methods/styles) it was considered more important to understand the Mainland Chinese students' perception of their experiences. The focus on their experiences enabled them to reflectively compare these experiences in terms they had framed and understood. Taking this viewpoint also enabled them to assess how their home country learning identity had changed and how they had adopted aspects of the host country ethos into this identity. As noted above, choosing students at postgraduate level who had experienced tertiary education in both countries and who may have had an increased cognitive readiness for reflection was an important consideration for this study.

### **Providing a Theorisation of Students' Self-Understanding**

Under the grounded theory methodology utilised in this study (see Chapters Three and Four), the substantive theorisation of cross-cultural adaptation will encourage a move away from descriptive analysis to one which has a greater ability to explain what is happening. The call for such an approach has come from Ward and Masgoret (2004) who conducted a large scale quantitative survey of international students in New Zealand across all educational sectors. One of the six recommendations for further research was: "In-depth research with international students from China, including qualitative approaches to understanding their experiences in New Zealand" (p. 72). Noteworthy here are the foci on Chinese students and the use of qualitative methods; both of these are key facets of this current study.

Therefore, this study sought to determine the problems international students' face in experiencing cross-cultural educational adjustment and what they do to attempt to overcome these problems. The research theorised on how the students themselves understood the adjustment process. In developing such a theory this study has addressed a significant gap when it comes to understanding the education of international students. In addition, the study has developed a process model to describe these students' experiences and determined a core concept that explains and links the processes within their journey. It is hoped that this will be a significant

contribution toward an understanding of the education of these students within New Zealand's education establishment.

In this introduction, the context and background to this research study have been outlined. It has also signalled the thesis' intent to focus on the issue of cross-cultural educational adjustment by hearing, understanding, analysing, categorising, and modelling the experiences of a group of Mainland Chinese postgraduate business students at a New Zealand university. Chapter Two provides a literary review of three areas that comprise an essential background to this study; that is, Confucianism and Chinese education, cross-cultural adaptation and the Chinese learner, and the Chinese learner overseas.

## CHAPTER TWO

# LITERATURE REVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

A two-stage approach to the development of this literature review was adopted. To use an analogy from the world of art, when an artist prepares to paint a picture he or she paints the background first. In order to 'colour' the canvas, as the first stage of the literature review, two major areas were investigated: first, a review of the historical background to Chinese education and the present implications of this background to Chinese education today; second, a general overview of learning theory, which is largely Western in origin and orientation. This provided an overview background to the study, raised awareness of the subject-specific vocabulary, and placed the research in a historical context (Hart, 1998). It also started to provide a theoretical awareness for the analysis and helped determine the specific area of investigation.

Having filled in the background, next the foreground is outlined and detailed through focusing on specific sets of literature. This is consistent best practice with grounded theory; the research methodology used for this study (see: Chapters Three and Four). At this stage an emerging theory is becoming apparent and looking at this theory the researcher is able to determine what literature needs to be specifically addressed. The reading helps to inform and further complete what had already been developed. As a consequence, theories of cross-cultural adjustment were examined and then the literature on learning theories was reviewed with an eye to the issues that could be expected to affect the Mainland Chinese learner in a significantly changed context. In addition, the literature on the experiences of overseas students learning in a cross-cultural context was examined.

In terms of the final structure of this chapter two steps were taken to give the review a journey motif that is endemic to the wider research process of this study.

The historical and ongoing legacy of Confucianism was added at the start of the first section followed by a review of cross-cultural adjustment, which focused on the implications for international students. Finally, an integrative synthesis of the experiences of international students, especially Chinese students, and learning theory was undertaken. Unlike other types of literature reviews, the aim was not to find the research problem and questions per se. In grounded theory, as is shown in Chapter Three, the key step in determining the research problem is the establishment of a basic social process (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; see Chapter Three: 'The Basic Social Process'). The selection of a BSP and the defining of the research problem then allow the research questions to arise from the study process itself (see Chapter Three: 'The Research Problem').

## **CONFUCIANISM AND EDUCATION IN CHINA**

To understand the changes that take place in the learning of overseas students it is important to appreciate where they have come from. Origins are particularly important for Mainland Chinese students because their sense of identity and efficacy as learners are profoundly formed, as is explained below, by the historical and contemporary factors within their society and culture. Therefore, understanding the influence of Confucianism on education highlights the major factors within the historical and cultural context that have significantly influenced learner identity. The students' understanding of the historical and cultural aspect of their identity provided a flexible frame for determining their self-understandings as learners and provided a means of evaluating the effect of cross-cultural educational adjustment. A brief historical background of education in China and its current legacy for today's Mainland Chinese students is discussed in this section.

### **Historical Background**

Although formal education is thought to have begun in China as early as 1800-1700 BC (Bartels & Eppley, 1995; Lee, 1985), most discussions of the history of education in China tend to begin with Confucius (551-479 BC). The man, his

teachings, and the revisions of his teachings were the dominant influence on Chinese education for over 2000 years. Smith believes: “The rich, and in many ways unique, civilisation of China, which developed through more than two thousand years of eventful history, owes more to the impress of Confucius’s personality and teaching than to any other single factor” (1973, Preface).

Little is known, with assurance, of Confucius himself (Dawson, 1981). Yet the nature of his teaching powerfully impacted on such a great nation. Confucius’ primary concern was the individual’s self-cultivation of his humanity. Although self-cultivation was the primary focus for moral change, the implications for such a change included the development of a ‘good’ society. By this Confucian scholars meant a society where there is harmony and order. The Confucian view was that education was the environmental factor best able to bring about moral and societal change (Lin, 1994).

The Confucian legacy led to the development of, what was at times, a hotly debated set of core writings that became the heart of what was taught in both government schools and private academies. These ‘canonical’ writings became the classics of China and formed the basis for China’s symbiotic relationship with both change and stability as it searched for balanced harmony. The focus of the schools became the imperial examination system, which had probably commenced in some form during the Sui Dynasty, 618-519 AD (Bartels & Eppley, 1995). This system, ideally at least, enabled the common man to rise through the ranks to positions of prominence and power. On the other hand, in its passive modality, the long backward look of Confucianism maintained an immovable anchor in traditional values.

Confucianism, while focused on a particular classical tradition, was still subject to significant revisions. Taoism, like Buddhism, flourished on the back of the general population’s fascination with legends and the supernatural (Smith, 1973). However, Confucianism, while imbibing from these two traditions (Rutherford, 1998), still retained its grip over societal power structures. The Neo-Confucian revival (Sung Dynasty, 960-1279 AD) saw Confucianism become the ‘officially accepted doctrine’ of the Chinese State and the Confucian Classics proved themselves more suited to the Chinese temperament, at least for the elite (Smith,

1973). The centrality of the Confucian Classics also reinforced the strategic place of the existing imperial examination system (Bartels & Eppley, 1995), which was "... the most important social institution in imperial China" (Lee, 1985, p. 13).

Despite its remarkable nature, the imperial examination system was also fraught with deficiencies. Cleverley (1985) describes some of these imperfections: some groups (e.g., women) were ineligible to participate; in times of political instability degrees were 'sold'; the inherent advantages gained by wealth still held; being open, in practice, to only an elite few; little formal instruction being provided; exams marred by cheating; the tunnel vision encouraged by its overwhelming literary emphasis; and the difficulties it led to in responding creatively to the subsequent challenges posed by engagement with the West.

Perhaps the peak of Confucianism's influence came with the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 AD). In a feudal Qing society, the Confucian scholars were the educated, competent, and reasonably moral administrators needed to control the vast, sprawling empire. These men and their emperors considered the Chinese empire, the Middle Kingdom, the height of human civilisation (Smith, 1973). However, in the nineteenth century, the Chinese leadership were accosted by representatives from civilisations with significantly superior technology and science. Suddenly, the equanimity of the centuries was broken and China found itself totally unprepared to face this unexpected challenge. By 1905 (1906, according to Bartells & Eppley, 1995) the imperial examination system, the mainstay of the Chinese education system and the prime vehicle of Chinese cultural transmission, had been discontinued (Shen, 2001).

The above briefly sketches the historical background to learning in China and the long shadow that the teachings and the disciples of Confucius have cast over two-and-a-half millennia. This is the legacy that still has currency today (Ho et al., 2001) and it is a legacy which the students who participated in this study were enculturated into. In fact, despite the combined forces of communism, a burgeoning market economy, and rampant globalisation, the changes to the education system since 1979 have tended to reinforce the traditional aspects of Chinese education (Dooley, 2001). That is, they have reinforced hierarchical educational relationships and structures, they have reinstated the comprehensive examination system, and this, in turn, has

ratified the place of traditional learning and assessment methodologies (Dooley, 2001; Biggs & Watkins, 1996). The next section investigates the ongoing influence of Confucian thought on Chinese education today in order to understand the cultural and philosophical context, which has had such a deep, formative power on the learner identity of this study's students.

### **Current Legacy**

In examining the legacy of the Confucian heritage in Chinese education several elements will be highlighted. These are: a love of learning, esteem for the teacher, the moral dimension of education, the efficacy of effort, and societal harmony. However, there is a Western tendency to stereotype the Chinese learner, largely based on a certain perception of Confucianism. Cleverley (1985) provides such a stereotypical profile of a 'typical' Chinese learner: diligent; docile; deferential; content focused; learning by memorising; driven by a need to succeed; and driven by family pressure. While there may be vestiges of 'reality' in Cleverley's description, it does not necessarily enable us to see the influence of Confucianism clearly. Dawson (1981, p. 86) believes that Confucian thought is evident in subtle, underpinning dimensions rather than "... an established and formally recognised doctrine," or a fixed profile of a modern Confucian learner. It is important to accept that, while there may be norms and averages, the uniqueness of the collective and individuals both shine through.

Some, such as Ho, Peng, and Chan (2001a, p. 40), argue that, "...Confucian educational values are becoming increasingly irrelevant in recent decades." Yet the Confucian educational culture and learner identity significantly impacts on Mainland Chinese students studying overseas. Li believes that: "So long as children are socialised in their own cultural contexts, their culture learning models are bound to exert a so-called directive force to their thinking, feeling, behaviour, and outcome of learning" (2002, p. 60). It was apparent that the cultural milieu significantly impacted on this study's participants beliefs about learning. The review now examines these closely interrelated and deeply imbedded forces. It is not the intention of this examination to imply that Chinese education is a deficit model but to

recognise its distinctiveness (Ward et al., 2001; Holmes, 2004) and its effect on these students.

### ***A Love of Learning***

First and foremost, the Confucian legacy has created within the Chinese people a deep desire for education. Confucius is celebrated for his love of learning and his example has been emulated by many Chinese people through the centuries (Dawson, 1981). A love of learning and the desire for its benefits are a powerful force on the learners of China today (Dawson, 1981). The personal, moral, and social advantages that education brings are a key basis for this appreciation of learning. Now, more than ever, education is creating pathways to personal and familial advancement.

The officially egalitarian nature of Chinese society today and the provision of universal education, has allowed many individuals and families to advance beyond their previous place in a traditionally hierarchical society. Positions of power and substance are no longer necessarily preserved for the socially privileged or the ideologically pure but increasingly for the 'expert' as well (Dawson, 1981; Gamberg, 1977). However, among the rural communities, particularly in western China, the poor and the girls still do not have equal access to these opportunities (Bartels & Eppley, 1995). The manner and extent to which the current study's students have drunk from this well may be revealed in their expressed learner identity.

### ***The Teacher***

A second principle of Confucianism is the high esteem held for those who are learned (Dawson, 1981). Historically, the school was centred not on the institution but on the teacher. "Students were always perfectly willing to travel great distances to seek acceptance by a renowned scholar. Stories are plentiful depicting the painful efforts made by disciples in order to be accepted by a distinguished teacher" (Lee, 1985, p. 14). The primary role of the teacher was to be a moral example (Dawson, 1981). Today, the teacher retains high status (Lee, 1996) within a hierarchical structure (Biggs & Watkins, 1996). He or she is seen as a storehouse of knowledge (Ho et al., 2001b) with an authority that is not to be questioned (Flowerdew, 1998).

Students, including those in this study, are taught to have great respect for their teachers (Wang & Mao, 1996).

While Confucianism has resulted in teachers being highly valued, Ho et al. believe the flipside of this respect is observed in authoritarianism. They see this particularly in the authoritarian moralism of the teachers (Ho et al., 2001b). Other issues potentially arise from power issues associated with authoritarianism. The claimed passivity or docility of the Chinese students' behaviour may result from the "... power distance some students expect between themselves and their instructor" (Tweed & Lehman, 2002). In the West, critical reflection and creative thinking are encouraged at all stages of learning; however, in Chinese education it may come only at the end of the education process. The emphasis tends to fall on receiving, understanding, and applying the body of knowledge as the teacher understands and delivers it. Ho et al., however, question the validity of the claim that all Chinese teachers are highly respected. They believe that the observable respect is often an external display that may be matched by an intense inner defiance (Ho et al., 2001b). How students in this research project negotiate around a distinctively different teacher profile in the West may be significant to their adjustment process.

### ***The Moral Dimension***

As a corollary to the opportunities of advancement provided by education and the status of the teacher, a third effect of Confucian education is its role as a moral change agent. Confucius strongly believed that education transforms lives. He famously said, regarding education's influence on a person's life: "By nature near together; by practice far apart" (*Analects* 17.2; as cited in Dawson, 1981, p. 43). Hu and Grove state that, "The objectives [of Chinese education] are moral and normative to transform the young into people with a highly developed social conscience and to inculcate in them the code for living already accepted by their elders" (1991, p. 78; also Ho et al., 2001). This emphasis on change within well-defined cultural and moral borders is reflected in the place given to behavioural reform in Chinese education (Tweed & Lehman, 2002).

However, the behavioural emphasis on moral change may also have unconstructive undertones. The pragmatism of Chinese education that requires and expects moral change can lead to instrumentalism. The Chinese love of learning may be more directed, as noted above, at the outcomes rather than the process. Shen (2001) raises concerns about the force of education not being education per se but a means to a 'way' or a predetermined philosophy to govern all life. He sees this instrumentalism as being a critical negative factor in Chinese education. It can be argued that, as in Confucian education, in China today: "The training of talent loyal to the government remains a fundamental principle of the official ... education" (Shen, 2001, p. 3). The students who participated in this study needed to react to a Western education largely separated from its moral underpinnings (if not its conventions). The students' firmly enucleated moral boundaries may affect the students' learning and their learning identities forged in China as they encounter the more laissez-faire morality of the West.

### ***The Efficacy of Effort***

A fourth element of Confucianism is the value and efficacy of effort. Philosophically, Confucianism is divided between human nature being inherently good, following Confucius and Mencius, or inherently bad, following Xunzi (Lee, 1996, p. 29). However, pragmatically, both camps firmly believe in the perfectibility and educatability of the person. It behoves the individual to make the effort that will lead to change. The ability to change is not based, as it often seems to be in the West, on 'fixed' traits such as a person's measure of intelligence or aptitude, but on controllable variables (Tweed & Lehman, 2002). Effort is even seen as a means by which ability itself can change (Tweed & Lehman; Biggs & Watkins, 1996).

The belief in the value of effort has practical outcomes in the Chinese learners' approach to learning. Effort factors such as level of focus, study and strategy skills, and motivation levels are seen as the primary determinants of achievement. If students believe that achievement and success are directly related to effort, then they will have greater focus in their efforts, believing that they can achieve if they want to (Lee, 1996). The use of study and strategy skills, such as cue seeking, will enhance abilities to prepare for assessments (Biggs, 1996). If effort is held as a significant

factor, then the student will motivationally benefit whether they succeed or fail. Failure will encourage further effort; success will tend to enhance achievement motivation further (McInerney, 1998). Leung (1995) says that the traditional Chinese attitude toward study is that it is a hardship and that diligence and perseverance lead to success. Hard work is the key. Lee comments (1996, p. 32):

... human perfectibility, learning, rationality, effort, and will power are discussed in the Confucian tradition in close relations. They are so closely related that they are sometimes inseparable. This discloses how Eastern learners view education, and explains why effort is seen to be so important in the process of human perfectibility.

Despite many virtues, the ethic of effort can also have a deleterious effect. Students may be encouraged to diligently apply effort when the task may be a mismatch for abilities and interests. In the light of failure a student may redouble his or her efforts but with no guarantee of any more success. There is enormous pressure to succeed and many students have to study very hard in order to do so (Ho et al., 2001a). The stress can create intellectual burnout and, in some cases, it can lead to self-harm (Ho et al., 2001a; see also Biggs, 1996). The Mainland Chinese students in this project may find their belief in effort's efficacy sorely tested, especially in the initial period.

One other aspect of valuing effort has been the differentiation between 'model' students at 'key' institutions versus disaffected students at non-key institutes (Dooley, 2001). By 2006 the Chinese government had selected 106 universities, which will, according to the People's Daily, "... take on the responsibility of training 4/5 of doctoral students, 2/3 of graduate students, 1/2 of students abroad and 1/3 of undergraduates. They offer 85 percent of the State's key subjects; hold 96 percent of the State's key laboratories; and utilize 70 percent of scientific research funding" (Online, 2009, September 4). Students who can perform to the specified level are placed in these key universities and this almost guarantees the students the desired rewards from education. For those students who only gain access to the lower level of the dual tertiary system their chance of educational, social, and familial advancement is significantly impaired (Dooley, 2001). Those students who need to pursue vocational education are even further disadvantaged (Gao, 2006).

### ***Societal Harmony***

A fifth principle of Confucianism is the role of education in creating a harmonious society. As already noted, education is seen as the prime means of self-cultivation or personal improvement. Yet, education is the major vehicle for the development of society (Lee, 1996). This enhancement is focused on two major aspects: first, the betterment of the family and, second, the harmony of society at large. Salili writes (1996, p. 99):

In the Chinese cultural context, achievement orientation is based firmly on collectivistic values rather than individualistic ones. This can have a highly motivating effect on Chinese students because success and failure in a collectivist culture affect not just oneself (as in Western cultures) but the whole family or group.

Success in education brings both honour and advancement to the family.

The collectivist nature of the Chinese society also leads to a strong link between education and wider societal harmony. The Confucian goal for society, the *Golden Mean*, "...is universal order and harmony under the rule of the perfect sage" (Smith, 1993, p. 60). Shen (2001, p. 3) writes:

... Confucius' purpose of education focused more on social rather than individual development. The moral values he advocated were ultimately related to governing and regulating social relationships. Confucius depicted a developmental path for his students – to achieve self-cultivation first, then family harmony, then good order in the state, and finally peace in the empire.

The strong desire for social harmony feeds back into the education of the individual. Flowerdew (1998) sees this played out in the strong desire for cooperation, the preservation of face, and the need for self-effacement. In response to these societal values, Chinese students tend to have a humble view of who they are and what they do. All aspects of Chinese society, including the classroom, are based on cooperative groups. Flowerdew (as cited in 1998, p. 324) notes Nelson's understanding that "... students learn through cooperation, by working for the common good, by supporting each other, and by not elevating themselves above others" (1995, p. 6). However, in the West diversity is valued much more highly than harmony and the students in this study may encounter situations where their perception of cooperation, view of identity, and understanding of role may be challenged.

There may also be unhelpful implications from education's goal of producing a harmonious society. Chinese education has traditionally emphasised the individual fitting into the broader way of society. Thus, the purpose of self-cultivation was not so much for the development of the individual but for society as a whole and the child can be directed along a developmental path that best suits society's demands (Wang & Mao, 1996). Ho et al. see that in Confucianism, "the teacher/student relationship is modelled after the father-son relationship ... [and that, thereby,] ... the definition of the teacher/student relationship is marked by its imperative nature: pervasive, stringent, and intolerant of deviation" (2001a, p. 41). Wang and Mao add: "In fact if the individual's needs, wills and benefits are always denied and the development of the individual personality is overlooked from early years, then individuals lose the initiative and creativity that is necessary for the future of the nation" (1996, p. 145).

The legacy of Confucianism to Chinese learning influences all aspects of individual, family, and social life. The value of this legacy is the subject of debate, as has been seen. Likewise, Western education philosophy and practice of education can be examined and shown to have a range of elements, processes, and outcomes which are subject to debate. The purpose of highlighting these points is not to derogate Chinese education as a deficit model in comparison to Western education contexts. However, this study does argue that there are fundamental differences between the education system within China and the system Mainland Chinese students encounter in the West.

An awareness of the Chinese educational context creates an understanding of how the learner identity of the students who participated in this study was shaped. It may also flag areas where tensions between culturally influenced academic paradigms may be expected to be found. The love of learning, the role of the teacher, the moral dimension, the efficacy of effort, and the need for societal harmony flow into who the students are as learners. These influences were used as a frame for understanding the different dimensions of identity held by these students in the study. The element of cultural difference, and the effect of that dissimilarity, is the focus of the next section of this literature review.

## CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION AND THE CHINESE LEARNER

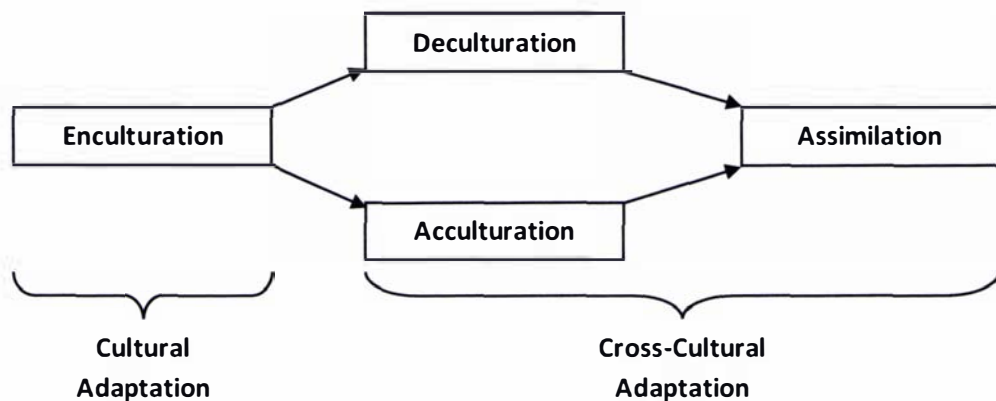
This second section of the literature review looks at three major theoretical approaches to the cross-cultural adaptation process (Ward et al, 2001). They are: stress, adaptation and growth; culture learning; and social identification, and these, respectively, relate primarily to the affective, behavioural, and cognitive dimensions. Each of these theories has been described and evaluated to determine the wide-ranging factors that come into play when students cross educational cultures. Within each of these approaches the implications for the Mainland Chinese student in New Zealand are drawn out.

This study draws on Lustig and Koester's definition of culture. They (2005, p. 25) have defined culture as, "a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, norms, and social practices, which affect the behaviours of a relatively large group of people." This definition highlights: first, that culture is learned; second, to be culture it must be something which is shared with a group of people; and third, it is holistic in nature as it impacts on every part of the individual's and group's life and lifestyle(s). The phrase "relatively large" is somewhat debatable. However, in the context of the largely Han Chinese population of Mainland China (92%) it is appropriate in this research's context.

This research investigated the cross-cultural contact between Mainland Chinese students and the New Zealand academic micro-culture. Ward et al. (2001) note that cross-cultural exchange can be of two types: intra-societal, that is contact between cultures within a multi-cultural society, and cross-cultural, that is contact between different societies that may take place for a number of reasons. This study focuses on the second of these. In beginning to look at the effect of cross-cultural adaptation it is helpful to consider Kim's (2001) diagram (see Figure 2.1). This provides a framework for various terms associated with this concept and for this project.

Enculturation is the learning of the 'home' culture. Kim (2001, p. 46), in reference to how culture is learned, says, "The unwritten task of every cultural environment is to organise, integrate, and maintain the psychological patterns of the individual primarily in the formative years of childhood. ... Enculturation forms the cognitive, affective and behavioural responses of the individual and society." She

goes on to add that initial cultural imprinting is largely unconscious (p. 48). The enculturation process is a key to understanding the challenges to, and shifts in, learning processes and identity that Mainland Chinese students face when crossing educational and cultural boundaries.



*Figure 2.1:* Relationship of terms associated with adaptation (Kim, 2001, p. 53)

When a person, for example a Mainland Chinese student, who has been socialised within their home culture has contact with another culture then, according to Kim, a twofold process occurs. The person not only learns about the ‘host’ culture, termed acculturation, but also needs to deconstruct aspects of his or her ‘home’ culture, termed deculturation. The disequilibrium caused by the deculturation and acculturation processes is resolved, again according to Kim, by assimilation. Kim believes, controversially, that assimilation, whereby the person is fully enculturated within the host culture, is the ‘ideal’ goal of cross-cultural adaptation.

However, Kim’s goal of assimilation is not universally agreed on and others (for example, Lustig & Koester, 2005; Ward et al., 2001) see a range of potential outcomes. These effects are largely determined by the response to two paradigmatic questions: How much do I want to retain of my home cultural identity? How much do I want to relate to the host culture? These key concepts come from Berry’s understanding of the primary components of acculturation (1974, 1984a; as cited in Ward et al., 2001). The following table (2.1) indicates the outcomes.

Table 2.1:

*Potential outcomes of cross-cultural adaptation (adapted from Lustig & Koester, 2005, p. 166)*

		Desire to retain cultural identity	
		Yes	No
Desire to relate to other groups	Yes	Integration	Assimilation
	No	Separation	Marginalisation

The meanings of these terms are defined by the responses to the two statements. For example, the difference between integration and assimilation is that, while in both cases a person wishes to relate to other cultural groups, with integration the person wishes to retain his or her 'home' culture identity while with assimilation the person may be prepared to lose part of his or her cultural identity in order to fit in. Those who desire integration as the outcome of cross-cultural adaptation wish to participate and relate in a multi-cultural context. As well as being able to distinguish categories of responses to adaptation it is also important to note that this implies that the experiences of individuals will also be variable, if not 'unique'. Cross-cultural contact is a multi-faceted experience with a wide variety of factors (see, for example, Neuliep, 2003; Kim, 2001; Ward et al., 2001) which impacts on individuals, even those from the same culture, in different ways (Lustig & Koester, 2005).

Having defined some of the relevant major terms, next various theoretical approaches are examined under the dimension that these approaches represent. Ward et al.'s (2001) view of the component elements has been summarised using the table below (2.2). These approaches are: the affective dimension with the stress, adaptation and growth approach; the behavioural dimension with the culture learning approach; and the cognitive dimension with social identification theory. First, these different approaches to cross-cultural adaptation are brought together in order to see how they relate and form the bigger picture of this complex process.

Table 2.2:

*Affective, behavioural, & cognitive elements of cross-cultural adaptation  
(summarised from Ward et al. 's, 2001, pp. 270ff)*

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Affective</b>	<b>Behavioural</b>	<b>Cognitive</b>
<b>Outcomes</b>	Psychological	Sociological	Impacts affective & behavioural outcomes
<b>Theory</b>	Stress, adaptation, & growth theories	Culture learning theory	Social identification theory
<b>Responses</b>	Confusion Anxiety Bewilderment Perplexity Disorientation Suspicion Desire to flee	Difficulty in initiating & maintaining relationships  Underachieve professionally & personally	Remain monocultural or Be assimilated or Become multicultural or Be marginalised
<b>Interventions</b>	Personal & interpersonal resources	Acquire basic social skills Learn about the society	Sensitivity training

### Synthesising Cross-Cultural Adaptation

The relationships between the affective, behavioural, and cognitive outcomes of cross-cultural adaptation are complex. They include multiple variables which may inter-relate with each other and some may change, dependent on the type of adaptee subgroup being investigated, for example, an immigrant compared to an international student. However, Cui, van den Berg, and Jiang (1998) propose that: "...it is the integration of cognitive, affective and behavioural sub-processes that enable sojourners to become fully engaged with the host people." They went on to empirically test this relationship using structural equations based on an approach proposed by Kim (1989, 1988; as cited in Cui et al., 1998). While they found that this produced a good 'fit' that enabled them to describe the cross-cultural change processes of the people in their sample, they also concluded that it needed to be more comprehensive and include a wider range of variables.

Ward et al. (2001), on a more theoretical level, proposed the ABC (Affective, Behavioural, Cognitive) approach to cross-cultural adaptation. However, they have continued to use 'culture shock', due to its popular cognisance, to name the wider area of cross-cultural adaptation. In this approach the effect represents what can be the disorientating change associated with adaptation. The person deals with these emotional shock waves by drawing on their personal character and experiential resources as well as drawing on the support of significant others. The degree to which they are successful in doing so will affect their psychological well-being.

Similarly, in the behavioural dimension the person is required to learn a set of behaviours that will allow a functional fit with the host culture. The heart to learning these behaviours is the degree of communication or social competence the adaptee attains to, both verbally and non-verbally, so that they have the requisite sociological skills to function in the new environment. The cognitive element is the most complex of all. Rather than having a set outcome of its own Ward et al. (2001, p. 273) see that the "... intrapersonal, interpersonal and intergroup cognitions may ultimately manifest themselves in affective and behavioural domains." That is, the cognition outcomes impact on the affect and behaviour processes. However, Kim (2001), coming from an assimilationist viewpoint, argues that an intercultural identity, which is understood to be a function of cognitive processes, is a separate and third outcome from the cross-cultural adaptation process.

Ward et al. (2001) have sought to describe this by way of a diagram shown below (Figure 2.2). The nexus of the diagram is the meeting point of the psychological adjustment and the sociological adaptation. Ward et al. do not state what this is termed but presumably it represents the degree of cross-cultural adaptation acquired by the adaptee. As these approaches are examined, the implications for Mainland Chinese international students of the variables of the cross-cultural adaptation processes that feed into the ABC elements are considered.

International students are normally treated as a distinct sub-category of cross-cultural adaptees termed sojourners, which according to Ward et al. (2001) also includes business people, members of the armed forces, aid workers, and missionaries. Usually their stay in the new context is voluntary in nature and lasts from six months to five years. As Mainland Chinese international students face

significant change, a wide variety of variables come into play and interplay. Due to this complexity they defy easy categorisation as directly attributable causal factors for the three ABC outcomes. However, the home culture societal variables and host culture societal variables have been discussed under the affective outcomes. The situational and social/communicative competence variables have been discussed under the behavioural outcomes and the personal variables have been discussed under the cognitive outcomes. This discussion will centre on the educational adjustment factors that are the focus of this research.

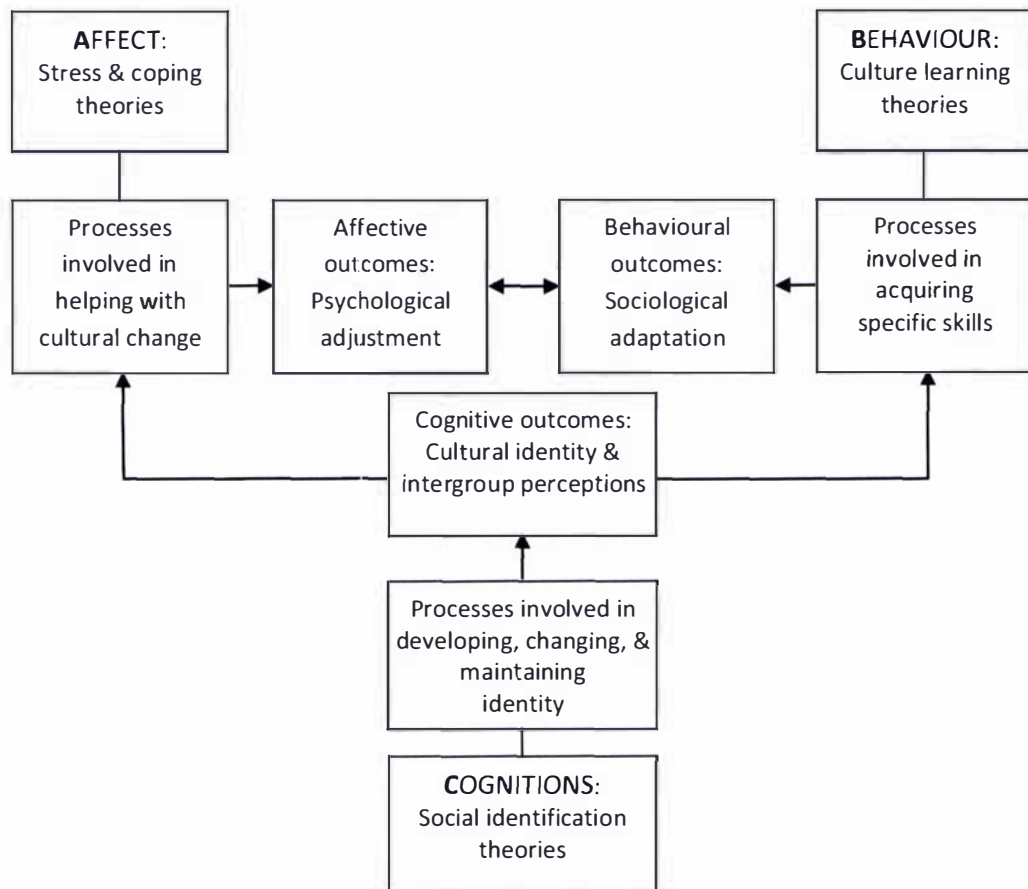


Figure 2.2: The ABC Approach of 'culture shock' (Ward et al., 2001, p. 275)

## Affective Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Adaptation

### *Approach Description: Stress-Adaptation-Growth*

The term most commonly associated with the affective outcomes of cross-cultural adaptation is 'culture shock.' Kalvero Oberg (1960; as cited in Lustig &

Koester, 2005) first coined this phrase to describe the negative consequences that may arise from cross-cultural contact. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005, p. 116) describe culture shock as "... a stressful transitional period when individuals move from a familiar environment into an unfamiliar one. In this unfamiliar environment, the individual's identity appears to be stripped of all protection. Previously familiar cues and scripts are suddenly inoperable in the new cultural setting." Its effect may last up to one year in length (Neuliep, 2003). It is also understood to impact on both short-term and long-term sojourners. Neuliep (2003, p. 434) says, "... one should accept the fact that virtually all atypical problems that occur during acculturation are caused by or exacerbated by culture shock."

This approach is associated with what has become popularly known as the U-curve. The 'U' describes the down-and-up process the individual goes through when adapting to another culture. There is initially stress, followed by a period of adaptation that can lead to growth; hence the stress-adaptation-growth approach. It is mostly described in terms of a four point curve. More recently, the U-curve has been extended to a W-curve (see Figure 2.3) to depict the re-entry of the person into their home culture. The focus of this research is on the 'U' portion of this graph. Others, such as Butcher (2002), have described the re-entry aspect of the adaptation process for Asian international students returning home. The first four stages (A to D) have been given a variety of terms by researchers. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005), for example, describe (see Table 2.3 below) each of these stages with their defining characteristics.

The notion of culture shock has popular appeal (Ward et al., 2001) because of its simplicity and ability to describe what does happen in the lives of some people. However, culture shock is only one part of the process. Figure 2.3 and Table 2.3 (below) portray the overall progression of the stress-adaptation-growth process (Kim, 2001). Ward et al. (2001) notes that the term 'culture shock' is increasingly being replaced by acculturation or adaptation to help incorporate the greater diversity of the process. The characteristics that Ting-Toomey and Chung list (Figure 2.3) highlight something of the variety of effects that adaptation may have on the individual.

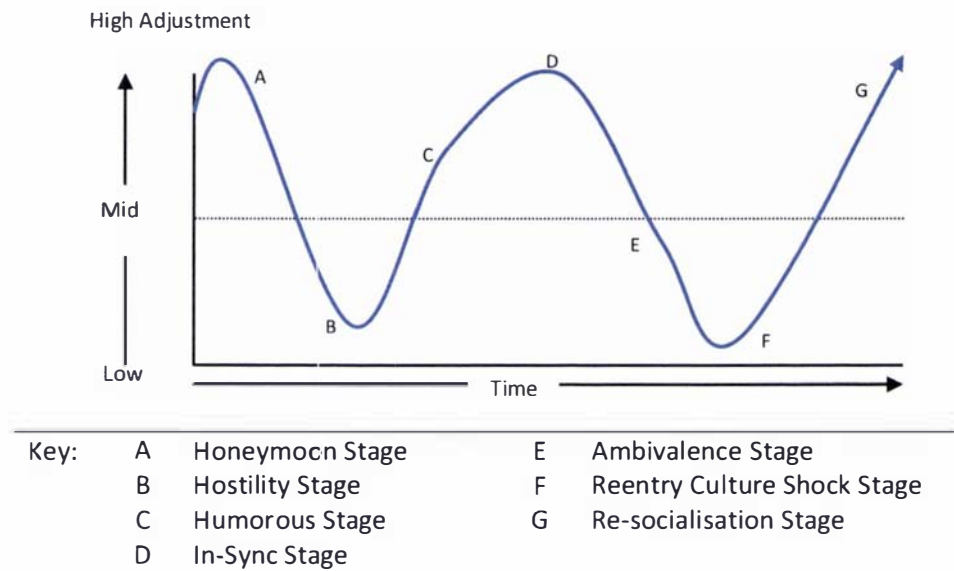


Figure 2.3: W-curve adjustment approach (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005, p. 127)

Seeing culture shock as part of the wider stress-adaptation-growth approach places it within a more holistic and “more dynamic and process-oriented” context (Ward et al., 2001, p. 97). Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005) note the overall emphasis on growth, focus on human adaptability, encouragement to be open and flexible, and the support it gives the individual to stretch his or her boundaries. The outcome of the approach, as seen in Figure 2.3 and Table 2.3, is that the person in the adjustment stage may be able to move to a new stage of personal growth. The individual feels more in-step with the host culture and is able to be bi-cultural in outlook, affect, and behaviour.

Table 2.3:

*Stages of cultural adaptation (Neuliep, 2003, pp. 431f)*

Stage 1: TOURIST PHASE	Stage 2: CULTURE SHOCK	Stage 3: ADJUSTMENT	Stage 4: ADAPTATION
Interest in culture	Confusion	Problem solving skills	Bicultural identity
Honeymoon	Frustration	Conflict resolution	Constructive responses
Positive reaction to stress	Preoccupied with cleanliness	Appreciation of host culture	Stable adaptations
Euphoria	Lack of control	Intercultural relationships	Personal growth
Photographs	Fatigue		
	Stress/anxiety		
	Depression		
	Paranoia		

### *Approach Evaluation*

Culture shock helps us to understand the affective dimension Mainland Chinese student experience when they cross cultures. It would be expected, from the above approach description, that these students for up to one year may face significant confusion, frustration, depression, lack of control and other symptoms of culture shock. Initial descriptions of this approach largely focused on culture shock's negative dimensions (Pedersen, 1995) and its psychological basis (Ward et al., 2001). However, the students may also, through the adaptation process, grow in terms of identity, cultural awareness, and broader relationships. Pedersen believes that until recently little prominence was given to the competencies and strengths gained from difficult culture shock experiences (1995).

Lustig and Koester (2005) claim that the U- and W-curves do not adequately describe the process. While they agree that it can describe the reactions of those adversely affected by culture shock, it presents an essentialist depiction of the cross-cultural adaptation process. Holliday, Hyde, and Kullman (2004, p. 2) define essentialist as "... presuming that there is a universal essence, homogeneity and unity in a particular culture." Similarly, this approach lends itself to being understood as a prescriptive process everyone experiences when undergoing this type of adjustment. However, it may be unhelpful to expect all Mainland Chinese students to experience the same process and degree of culture shock.

Lustig and Koester (2005, p. 164) argue that "... no single pattern can be said to characterise the typical adaptation process." Kealey (1989) indicated that the U-curve was only applicable for 10% of the people in his sample. The major groups within the project reported high satisfaction throughout (30%) or initial low satisfaction that steadily increased over time (35%). However, Kealey's study population was a group of over 250 Canadian technical advisers going to developing countries. While this may abrogate using these results to attribute to Mainland Chinese students, it does reinforce the awareness that there can be a diverse range of responses to entering and adjusting to a different culture.

The stress-adaptation-growth approach does not deal with two major issues. First, Ting-Toomey and Chung note (2003, p. 133) that it does not, because of the

general nature of the approach, do justice to the complexity of the factors and the range of outcomes associated with cross-cultural adaptation. Second, Ward et al. (2001) believe, that the evidential base for this approach is weak, particularly around its theoretical foundation. They would also argue that this approach only focuses on the emotional effect of cross-cultural adaptation, which needs balancing with the behavioural and cognitive dimensions of this process. To help understand the situation of Mainland Chinese students, the complexity of the operative variables need to be better and more completely understood and a theoretical understanding of their adaptation process needs to be developed that authentically depicts the adjustment in a holistic manner.

### ***Implications for the Mainland Chinese Learner***

The affective dimensions of cross-cultural adaptation are possibly the most evident response to the clash of cultures. The implications for the Mainland Chinese learner are addressed under two major headings: home culture societal variables and host culture societal variables. Due to the dynamic interaction of these variables the process is also impacted by behavioural and cognitive processes and outcomes.

#### **Home culture societal variables.**

Ward et al. (2001) suggest four home societal variables. They are social, political, economic, and cultural factors. These are extensive areas and cannot be elaborated on at length other than to highlight some issues that may cause difficulty for the Mainland Chinese student. These students arrive from a context which is significantly different from New Zealand. Most of them come from a highly homogenous social framework where 92% of all China's people are Han Chinese. Within this society there is a strong collectivist dimension meaning people wish to fit in and do not want to draw attention to themselves. This is related to a high power distance factor where people tend not to challenge authority and accept hierarchical authority patterns.

They also have a long history which is marked by significant cultural and scientific highpoints. Politically, they have had thousands of years of strong

authoritarian leadership. Economically, this has meant that the wealth has stayed in the hands of a few (Gamer, 2008). Despite the efforts of the Mao Zedong communist regime, the opening of the door to more capitalist forms of enterprise appears to be reinforcing this historical trend, although there are signs of a middle class emerging. Culturally, they have had a very long history of considered philosophical thought, aesthetic achievements, and scientific accomplishments.

### **Host culture societal variables.**

Despite 'globalisation,' when Mainland Chinese students come to New Zealand they may find marked differences in the host society. The differences found in the host culture may be a catalyst for the adjustment process these students face, which includes the academic adjustment that is the focus of this study. In relation to the host societal variables, New Zealand is 'young' in culture and history. Its Westminster parliamentary system fosters, to a large extent, free thinking and speech. While very much an economic minnow compared to China, New Zealand has the status of a developed country with large sections of its population living comfortably, albeit with some significant exceptions. In many respects, New Zealand is perceived by New Zealanders to be "... an egalitarian, fair and classless society" (Ip, Preface), which has fostered a multi-cultural environment and has achieved significant success at settling substantial and diverse groups of immigrants and refugees. Many more things could be said, but these brief comments underline some of the marked differences between the home and the host societies.

Alongside these social, political, economic, and social differences there are other variables within the host society (Kim, 2001). The first is host receptivity, which is the degree to which the host population welcomes the sojourner. Significant racial, cultural, and political differences between the Mainland Chinese student and the dominant group of European-Pakeha students would suggest hesitancy in terms of receptivity (see Butcher, Spoonley, & Trlin's 2006 paper on *Being accepted: The experience of discrimination and social exclusion by immigrants and refugees in New Zealand*). While personal status levels such as being a student may be more culturally equivalent, the Mainland Chinese students may have more of an elite status within their own society. A further disjuncture arises for the students as they seek

work because the types of jobs they would aspire to may not always be within their reach within the host culture.

While there are groups and organisations within New Zealand society who welcome these students, the overall tenor of that welcome within the wider society, according to these variables, may not be so warm. Neuliep (2003) suggests that where such resistance arises from the host community it may lead to stereotyping, discrimination, and racism. This is affirmed by King in his history of New Zealand. He said that "... the group which suffered most from prejudice and misunderstanding was the Chinese ..." (2003, p. 369; see also Ip, 2003). King adds that the increase of Asian immigrants in the 1990s to New Zealand has "... reactivated anti-Asian prejudice ..." (p. 506).

Host conformity, the second variable, places pressure on the student to adopt the patterns of the host culture. If this is resisted by the student, then it may lead to intolerance and prejudice from the host nationals (Kim, 2001; Ward et al., 2001). In a multi-cultural society such as New Zealand the pressure for a Chinese student to conform is weaker, although Kim argues it is never completely absent, even if it is not official. Kim claims, in her 21 theorems of cross-cultural adaptation, that host receptivity and host conformity can also create positive outcomes. When they are greater it increases the students' host communicative competence while lessening their reliance on the host community's co-ethnic group. However, this may have a conflicted relationship with the students' attachment to their ethnic group.

The third factor, ethnic group strength, refers to the degree to which the ethnic group of the sojourner in the host country either inhibits or fosters cross-cultural adaptation. The nature and influence of the reliance on co-ethnic groups may produce two contrasting standpoints (Cui et al., 1998). On one hand, due to initial language difficulties students may want to foster relationships within, and are subject to peer-pressure to remain with, their co-ethnic group (Ying, 2002). Networking in this manner has positive benefits for the student as these relationships "... nurture a continued sense of self, a feeling of belonging, and the continuation of cultural values" (Ying, p. 48). Reynolds and Constantine (2007) indicate that, in addition, it may enhance their longer term career aspirations by building their vocational identity thereby increasing their confidence and ambitions.

On the other hand, limited host country relationships may lead to adaptation problems (Campbell & Zheng, 2006). Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) reviewed a range of studies that indicated forming host relationships leads to fewer social difficulties, enhanced communication skills, and less psychological difficulties (also Ward & Masgoret, 2004). Research by Cui et al. (1998) suggested that ethnic group reliance has, at best, neutral or negative impacts on cross-cultural adaptation. Spencer-Oatey and Xiong conclude that students may be pragmatic about their relationships using "... local students for help with language and academic difficulties, but co-nationals for emotional support" (p. 39). In addition, this may change over time. As the students develop social/communicative competence they may become more confident and increasingly able to foster host country friendships.

## **Behavioural Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Adaptation**

### ***Approach Description: Culture Learning***

Whereas the stress-adaptation-growth approach emphasised the affective dimension, the culture learning approach underlines the behavioural dimensions associated with cross-cultural adaptation. Culture learning highlights the skills and resources that a person may need to adapt appropriately to a new cultural context. Kim terms this social competence or efficacy (2001). Its focus is communicative competence; that is, the ability to relate, verbally and non-verbally, in the host culture. With respect to communication effectiveness, Ward et al. (2001) see the importance of expectations and values. They elaborate by saying:

Accurate expectations may facilitate the development of culture-specific skills, promote more satisfying and effective intercultural encounters, and lead to successful sociocultural adaptation. Value differences, however, are indicative of cultural distance and are likely to be associated with more sociocultural difficulties (p. 49).

Kim (2001, p. 72) agrees that: "Communication lies at the heart of cross-cultural adaptation." The individual, on arriving in a cross-cultural context, needs to develop the social and communication skills that allow them to interact in that environment. Kim's approach highlights the interplay of factors that influence cross-cultural adaptation when communication is at the centre of the process. It focuses on

the core issue, that is, host communication competence. She describes this key term as comprising the "... capabilities by which individuals organise themselves in and with their sociocultural milieu." She equates this term with 'social competence' and together this fits the behavioural dimension of this approach.

Communication is either personal (intrapersonal) or social (interpersonal). As people come to a new context bringing their predispositional factors and interact with the new environment, they retain communication linkages with the ethnic (or home) culture and relate with the host culture. In each of these cultures the relative effect of host and ethnic interpersonal and mass (largely media) communications have a dynamic influence on the person's communicative capacity, that is, their ability to be socially competent within, or to 'fit' in, the host culture context. Overall, the higher the host social competence, then the greater the eventual intercultural transformation.

The inability to fit leads to adaptive stress. Ward et al. (2001, p. 69) believes that "the distress that many culture travelers experience is largely due to their lacking the social and behavioural skills of the new society. This creates barriers to effective communication between visitors and hosts and sows the seeds for a vicious circle of misunderstanding, friction and hostility." As the individual learns the necessary skills to function well in this society the degree of social difficulty arising from the adjustment is lessened. These skills include, according to Ward et al., culture-specific knowledge, language fluency, degree of contact with host nationals, and the length of time within the host culture.

In addition, the adaptation, like the previous approach, follows a learning curve, with the steepness of the curve leveling off toward the end of the first year. The purpose of the individual entering the country is also important, with those desiring to settle or planning a long-term stay apparently having less difficulty than those who will be resident in the culture for a shorter period. Lastly, research results suggest "... that cultural and ethnic similarity is generally associated with fewer sociocultural difficulties" (Ward et al., 2001, p. 67f; as with Kim, 2001).

### ***Approach Evaluation***

The culture learning approach is much more complex than stress-adaptation-growth. It seeks to name and determine the influence of a much wider range of variables. Therefore, it develops a closer approximation to the experience of, say, a Mainland Chinese student adapting to a new educational context. However, the increased complexity means it does not have the simplicity and clarity of the previous approach. Nevertheless, the complexity of this approach is more helpful as it moves away from the 'what happens' of the U- and W-curves and focuses on the 'why it happens.' That is, a movement from the descriptive to the explanatory. It is this type of analysis that this research has sought to emulate. The aim of this study is to determine a theory which enables a substantive understanding of the adjustment Chinese students make when changing education contexts. In doing so the theory needs to have an ability to explain the process and not simply to describe it.

Kim (2001) believes that the growth caused by the adaptation process leads to the individual's identity being linked to true humanity. She terms this the universalising influence on human identity that results from ever broadening cross-cultural awareness. Rather than the fractured and factionalised identity of a particular cultural identification she hopes for a greater awareness and understanding of our greater humanity. This is why she presents the goal of adaptation as assimilation. This movement to, what she terms, "intercultural personhood ... depicts personal characteristics that transcend any particular cultural group" (p. 196).

Kim's concept of intercultural personhood (2001, p. 193ff) focuses on an "...expanded psychological orientation beyond national and ethnic boundaries, but it does not emphasise numerous subcultural groups within society." Interestingly, she connects this conceptualisation to the "spiritual traditions of the Eastern cultures," making reference to Buddhism and Taoism. Not all advocates of intercultural adjustment theories would endorse Kim's philosophical approach or its corollary, the goal of assimilation. They could, by way of example, endorse a multi-cultural and integrative dimension of personal identity or an ontological one, where humanity is, ideally, revitalising an inherent but besmirched original universal identity.

It is questionable whether the Mainland Chinese student is engaged by this debate. These students may not have the length of stay within the host country, or the desire, to either assimilate or integrate into the culture. Their decision-making may be more pragmatically centred on surviving. Indeed, even if there is change, to what extent is this pragmatic and to what extent is it transformative, in the sense of causing significant and personal change? Therefore, changes in social competency that students develop during their time of study may be more a means to the end goal of academic success than a deep level change.

### ***Implications for the Mainland Chinese Learner***

In referencing culture learning to the implications this may have for Mainland Chinese students, the social/communicative competence and situational variables associated with cross-cultural adaptation have been considered at this point. These variables are also interlinked to other predispositional and environmental factors associated with the adjustment process.

### **Social/communicative competence variable.**

The social/communicative competence variable looked at in this section is arguably the most important for cross-cultural adaptation. Kim's version of the culture learning approach placed this competence at the heart of the adaptation process. Kim (2001) divides social/communicative competence into the effectiveness of personal and social communication skills. Mainland Chinese students, like some other groups, often face a significant language skill deficit. Certainly, many students believe that inadequate language skills are their biggest deficiency in adapting to the new context. Henderson, Milhouse, and Cao (1993; as cited in Ward et al., 2001, p. 154) in their research on Asian students in the United States "... found that the absence of adequate language skills, apparent in 97 per cent of their sample, was the most serious and frequently identified difficulty ...." The ability to grow these skills may be inhibited by the initial desire to shelter with co-ethnics to avoid culture shock.

The results of inadequate social fit caused by inadequate communication skills have been cited in many studies (e.g., Campbell & Zheng, 2006; Berry & Williams, 2004; Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003). The Chinese language is significantly different to English (Swagler & Ellis) with its tone base construction, compared to English with its stress base and irregularity (Berry & Williams), resulting in English being a difficult language to learn for the students. Berry and Williams noted in their research that listening and speaking were the greatest areas of difficulty. Poor language skills inhibit the students' desire and ability to make host culture contacts and friendships (Ward et al., 2001).

It also inhibits their academic performance (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Leung, 2001) as well as potentially restricting career opportunities (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007). Yeh and Inose note (p. 16) that the influence on academic performance "... may be especially distressing for students who cannot express their academic ability in English well, because many of them have had high academic achievement in their home countries." Ward et al. (2001) say that lack of English skills can lead to psychological difficulties as well. The social, academic, and psychological outcomes carry over into how the students perceive their identity within the new culture and limit how others 'know' them. Ward et al. write that "... some of the most significant problems arise from the academic environment and that overseas students must engage in 'culture learning' as well as intellectual endeavours to achieve academic success" (p. 166).

Ward et al. (2001, p. 156f) note that: "Although international students perceive their limited language skills as the most significant source of their academic problems, and language proficiency is related to academic performance, there are a number of other factors that impinge on academic success and satisfaction." They list the following issues: individual differences; relative importance of intrinsic and external motivation; field dependent/independent learning styles; cooperative, competitive, individualistic learning styles; and perceptions of intelligence. They also note that students from a collectivist culture who also have a high power distance factor can have a significant expectation gap with classroom participation and student-teacher relationships. Holmes (2005) explored the changes that ethnic Chinese students had to make as they moved from a dialectical to a dialogical

learning style. In particular, she noted how the students had to enhance their questioning, challenging, and interrupting skills.

### **Situational variables.**

The first of these variables is ethnic proximity, which is the similarity or dissimilarity a sojourner, in this case a Mainland Chinese international student, has to the dominant host country ethnic group. Similarity is based around many of the dimensions of personal identity noted by Fouad and Arredondo (2007; see next section) such as physical and racial similarity, language patterns, and historic cultural background, but it also includes values and religion. The more the student is ethnically dissimilar to the dominant host country group, the greater the potential difficulty in cross-cultural adaptation. Kim's theorems (2001) state that the greater the similarity between the host and home cultures then the greater the development of host social/communicative competence and the less need to rely on co-ethnic support. On the basis of these criteria, it would be generally expected that a Mainland Chinese student would face adaptation difficulties.

Other situational variables include the length of the cultural contact, the amount of life changes that will be required, and social support. As a sojourner, an international student usually has a limited time of one to five years in the host country. Therefore, the degree of pressure on the students to adopt the mores of the host country is less (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). In addition, the return home is often anticipated and planned (Ward et al., 2001). However, Ting-Toomey and Chung argue that international students may experience severe culture shock. Students may need to adopt, in some cases very quickly, the required behavioural skills which enable them to adjust academically. The focus on this limited set of skills may detrimentally affect their overall adjustment. The forced, rapid change may also significantly reduce the initial 'honeymoon' stage of cross-cultural adjustment and students may quickly begin to experience the negative symptoms of culture shock. This, plus language difficulties, may encourage them to go to co-ethnics for support. However, these "... stressors also motivate them to become more resourceful and resilient in their search for new knowledge and skills in managing the alien environment" (Ting-Toomey & Chung, p. 133).

## Cognitive Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Adaptation

### *Approach Description: Social Identification Theory*

Social identification theory, with its cognitive base, brings a holistic completion to the review of approaches to cross-cultural adaptation. Like learning theory, which has seen a significant move away from affective (humanistic) and behavioural approaches to learning, currently psychology has also been moved by a strong cognitive influence (Ward et al., 2001). Again, like learning theory, and the contemporary popularity of Vygotsky's social cognitive approach, there has been an attempt to link the internally driven cognitive processes to the social context. In describing this approach, the works of Ward et al. (2001) and Fouad and Arredondo (2007) have been drawn on.

Ward et al. note the foundational work of Tajfel (1978, 1981; as cited in 2001, p. 105) as being the "... most frequently used conceptual frameworks for exploring identity and intergroup relations in immigrants, refugees and sojourners." Tajfel sees three major defining features of social identity: (1) it is part of the self concept; (2) it requires awareness of group membership; and (3) it has evaluative and emotional significance. Each of these components will be looked at in turn. The first of these is self-concept or personal identity. Fouad and Arredondo draw on the prior work of Arredondo and Glauner (1992; as cited in Fouad & Arredondo, 2007). Here personal identity is seen as being derived from three dimensions, as set out in Table 2.4 (below).

**A** dimensions are seen as 'birthrights' and are generally of a stable nature and it is usually on the basis of these characteristics that stereotypes are created. **C** dimensions are "... historical, familial, and ecological factors that affect lifespan development and other life opportunities" (Fouad & Arredondo, 2007, p. 20). This dimension includes studying overseas. **B** dimensions are seen to be changeable as they are impacted on by both **A** and **C** dimensions. Again, "Education is perhaps the most catalytic variable among the **B** Dimensions, because of the possibilities that may result from educational attainment for work experience, geographical mobility, health care practices, or lack thereof" (p. 20). Fouad and Arredondo claim that a

sense of personal identity makes individuals "... unique cultural beings with some shared group identities" (p.21).

Table 2.4:

*Dimensions of Personal Identity (Fouad & Arredondo, 2007, p. 18f)*

<b>Dimensions of Personal Identity</b>	
<b>A Dimensions</b>	Age Culture Ethnicity Gender Language Physical/Mental Well-being Race Sexual Orientation Social Class
<b>B Dimensions</b>	Educational Background Geographical Location Hobbies/Recreational Health Care Practices/Beliefs Religion/Spirituality Military Experience Relationship Status Work Experience
<b>C Dimensions</b>	Historical Moments/Eras

The second aspect of Tajfel's conceptualisation of social identity is that it requires a sense of group membership. According to Ward et al. (2001, p. 104) "... social identification rests on social categorisation and social comparison." This involves being aware that in-groups and out-groups exist. Naturally, in-groups are weighted by a sense of favouritism that raises the esteem of the individual and the group, whereas out-groups are subject to derogation, such as negative stereotyping. Ward et al. note research that indicates that in-group positive self-perceptions are based on inner personality characteristics while positive behaviours of the out-group are linked, by the in-group, to external circumstances (p. 104). Hence, Mainland Chinese students may be applauded in the host society for their achievement in overcoming their difficulties but less credence and attention is given to the inner characteristics which may drive these students toward this success.

Fouad and Arredondo (2007) found that in reaching a sense of self identity, through self-categorisation, the individual is seeking a balance between being distinctive yet sharing social commonalities with a group of others. To see 'your' group, the in-group, as distinct and well-regarded enhances your individual sense of uniqueness and belonging. The ability to define self then provides the flexibility and social confidence to engage with others. However, "Power differentials are always in play, and this dynamic must be monitored even with well-intentioned group or category formation ... [as it] ... can lead to intergroup bias and ethnocentrism" (Fouad and Arredondo, p. 29f).

This leads to the third aspect of Tajfel's framework: the defining of social identity has evaluative and emotional significance. The forming of a personal and social identity allows for comparisons, positive and negative, to be made with other groups (Ward et al., 2001). While cognitive categorisation is a useful and necessary tool it can and does lead to negative stereotyping. Stereotypes are evaluative judgements that normally negatively portray others and may lead to discriminatory behaviour. These assessments are often difficult to shift and are often taken as facts or truths (Fouad & Arredondo, 2007). "Negative out-group stereotypes have significant implications for prejudice and discrimination in receiving societies" (Ward et al., p. 113). People make group- and self-serving judgements that favour members of the in-group, for example the dominant host student group at the expense of an out-group like Mainland Chinese students.

While most newcomers to a society are believed to favour integration (Ward et al., 2001) this only works, according to Berry's matrix for cross-cultural adaptation (1974, 1984a; as cited in Ward et al.), if they can retain their sense of cultural identity and be accepted into the host society. However, social identification theory indicates that this is unlikely because while they may behaviourally gain a measure of functional skills appropriate to the society their basic attitudinal pattern does not significantly change (Ward et al.). As a result, "...integrative efforts will not be welcomed and newcomers may be negatively affected by out-group stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination" (Ward et al., p. 112).

This can lead to strong dissonance within the person making a cross-cultural adaptation. The newcomers are caught in a dilemma: they gain greater self-esteem if

they become more accepted by the host community; but they also gain greater self-esteem from a robust sense of ethnic identity. This leads to a range of responses by people entering into a new society (Ward et al., 2001). First, they can change their sense of group identification to assimilate into the dominant group. This may be difficult if some of the A dimensions cannot be altered, for example, race, physical characteristics, or gender factors. Second, they can make cognitive changes to their social group criteria. Ward et al. suggest they could resort to "... selecting alternative groups for social comparison or re-evaluating the in-group stereotypes" (p. 116). Third, they could take some form of collective social action to improve their place and acceptance in society. This type of action is more likely for established minority groups or immigrants and refugees than international students.

The process of self- and group-identification also influences how students self-regulate their learning. Attribution theory, which describes an integral part of this self-regulatory process, seeks to determine what factors the students ascribe to the outcomes of their learning (Schunk, 2008). So, for example, Chinese students attribute success to unstable factors, such as hard work, rather than to stable factors such as intelligence and social circumstances. The Chinese students' belief in success being based on effort is, in part, derived vicariously through exposure to models (Schunk, 2008); however, it also reflects the macro cultural values/beliefs held by society and how these are implemented at the family level. McInerney believes that the Chinese culture places "exceptional importance on education and effort, parents set astringent achievement standards, and the continuing filial piety of children motivates them to fulfil their parents' ambitions for them" (2008, p. 378). Stipek concurs and sees the emphasis on effort as "... consistent with traditional Asian philosophy, which assumes malleability in humans and stresses the importance of striving for improvement" (2002, p. 65f).

### ***Approach Evaluation***

Like the previous approach of culture learning, social identification theory is complex. However, the variables are potentially incomplete and the weighting and situational force of each is somewhat problematic. Even with this degree of complexity it is worth noting Ward et al.'s caution: "None of the existing theories

has been able to offer a comprehensive account of the dimensions of identity, the complexities of identity change, and the processes and patterns of intergroup relations ...” (2001, p. 119). However, according to Ward et al., a range of new theories are in the wings and are currently being explored. They believe that “... these theories, along with others, will come to exert an increasing influence on the study of identity and intergroup relations in coming years.”

Social identity theory does not tend to predict the positive outcomes to cross-cultural adaptation that culture learning did. In essence, it paints a pessimistic picture of the ability of different groups to interrelate well. The forces of personal and social identity form a strong barrier to the acceptance of those from other cultures such as Mainland Chinese students. Fouad and Arredondo (2007), starting from the point of identifying personal identity, set out a variety of staged processes that those in the host country’s dominant group(s) can move through toward a greater level of racial or multicultural consciousness. These usually start at a point of denial of, or naiveté about, their in-group status, then move on to periods of self-reflection and personal reformation, until there is a greater sense of integration and autonomy of thought.

Ward et al. (2001) are much less optimistic about what they term multicultural ideologies. They state that: “Multicultural ideologies assume that the development and maintenance of a secure in-group identity can lead to a greater intergroup acceptance and tolerance” (p. 117). These ideologies require strong and directed efforts by policy makers to encourage both in-group identity and out-group positivity. However, they see that social identification theory predicts that conflict and prejudice are the inevitable outcomes of cross-cultural contact. If that were so it would not bode well for the Mainland Chinese students in New Zealand.

A good deal of the in-group and out-group mentality formed under social identification theory is predicated on the individualism-collectivism construct. Societies are said to have either a high or low rating for individualism and this rating is inversely related to their score for collectivism. This places individualism and collectivism on a continuum where groups can be assessed for their I-C scores. So, “... when individualists and collectivists meet, they bring to the encounter different social attitudes, moral values and behavioural inclinations” (Ward et al., 2001, p. 15).

Their thinking, communication, and behaviour will differ. As noted earlier, students from Mainland China are understood to come from a collectivist culture, so it may be expected that these students may be confronted by these differences in an individualistic society like New Zealand.

However, as Ward et al. note (2001), some researchers do not see individualism and collectivism on a continuum. Schwartz (1990; as cited in Gillard, 1998, p. 27) believes: “There is growing evidence that people can operate on different scales at the same time, that individualism-collectivism may not be on the same continuum but two separate, independent scales.” Therefore, an action can serve “... both individual and culture...” and that “Some collectivist values do not directly serve the majority in culture.” Therefore, while recognising the powerful formational effects of Chinese society and people’s desire to have a coherent set of beliefs, caution may need to be taken to safeguard against prescribing actions and motivations by Mainland Chinese students solely to collectivist views. These students, who have been influenced by the forces of the global village and the mixed manner in which the I-C construct works within their home culture, may respond in ways which reflect both individualistic and collectivist values.

### ***Implications for the Mainland Chinese Learner***

The last set of predispositional, communicative and environmental variables examined for their implications for Mainland Chinese students are the personal ones. Unlike the prior variables, the individuality of these personal variables makes it difficult to construct even guarded generalisations.

#### **Personal variables.**

The personal variables examined here include the degree of preparedness for change, expectations, and the effect of cross-cultural change on identity. Regarding preparedness for change, Pedersen (1995) is confident it is possible to prepare people for this, and is supported in this by researchers who see the need for and propose means of managing cultural stress (e.g., Berry & Williams, 2004; Holmes, 2004; Neuliep, 2003, p. 433ff). Kim (2001) believes that greater preparedness for change

increases host communicative ability and decreases the reliance on co-ethnic groups, thereby enhancing the cross-cultural adaptation process. Kim defines the elements of preparedness as: a range of cultural learning, including prior cross-cultural experience; a degree of being well-informed; and the voluntary nature of the journey.

Another of the personal variables is expectations. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005, p. 119) state: "Overall, realistic and positively oriented expectancy images of the new culture can help to facilitate intercultural adaptation for both business and student sojourners. ... A positively resilient mindset helps to balance the negative stressors that a newcomer may encounter in his or her adaptive efforts." Cross-cultural adjustment may also have a direct influence on identity. Furnham (1988; as cited in Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005, p. 117) focuses on how cross-cultural adaptation affects the identity of the individual. His findings indicate that this may involve:

(1) a sense of identity loss and identity deprivation with regard to values, status, profession, friends, and possessions; (2) identity strain as a result of the effort required to make necessary psychological adaptation; (3) identity rejection by members of the new culture; (4) identity confusion, especially regarding role ambiguity and unpredictability; (5) identity powerlessness as a result of not being able to cope with the new environment.

Sojourners, such as students, may experience this personally, socially, and academically. The change from the home cultural context may cause identity change and, for some, lead to identity loss. Social identity theory, therefore, may go some way to explaining what happens when students are faced with the demands of the academic context. It may lead to change in their identity as learners. The students may move from a relatively harmonised learner identity within their own culture to a context where that concept of self as a learner may not be sufficient for the task of learning in the new culture.

This section on cross-cultural adaptation and the Chinese learner has described and evaluated the affective, behavioural, and cognitive dimensions of cross-cultural adaptation by examining three major approaches to this adjustment process. These were the stress-adaptation-growth, culture learning, and social identity approaches. It became apparent that these dimensions and approaches form a complex set of variables that relate with each other interactively. These variables were used as a

means to consider implications for Mainland Chinese students who come to New Zealand to study. The effect of this change can be quite demanding on international students, especially when the variables predict a high degree of dissonance, both culturally and personally.

Many of these difficulties may be experienced by students from the host culture as well. However, the force of these life changes felt by a student coming from another culture is likely to be greater. Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006, p.38) note that: "Naturally everyone is subject to stressful events and circumstances; it is not unique to overseas students. ... However, the number of significant life changes that overseas students experience is typically higher than for home students" (also Ward et al., 2001). The problems faced by overseas students may vary from those who immigrate. For example, there is the need to rapidly adjust to academic requirements and, for some, the planned intention to return to their home country (Ward et al.).

Placing the burden of change on international students, while evidencing the pragmatic expediency adopted by some Western academic institutions, can be a means for institutions and society to blame the 'victim'. After all, if it was 'the students' choice to come,' then this reduces the responsibility of those who are able to help and their motivation to support. Fortunately, many international students come to our borders with a strong sense of task (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2003) and the "plasticity" of mind to overcome (Kim, 2001, p. 45). "As Ruben (1983) observes, 'Living systems act instinctively to meet the challenge or threat and to restore balance and harmony. Once regained, equilibrium continues until the system is controlled by new environmental demands'" (p. 137; as cited in Kim, p. 45).

This research study seeks to explain the basic social process underlying the academic adjustment required of Mainland Chinese students by highlighting its conditions, interactions, and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Therefore, this literature review now progresses to looking at how the Chinese educational context, in particular, is different from Western milieu and the implications this has for their academic adaptation in a cross-cultural context.

## THE CHINESE LEARNER OVERSEAS

The previous section of this review examined the general area of cross-cultural adaptation and highlighted implications for the Chinese learner. This section moves forward to examine in greater depth the area of the educational adjustment required when students cross cultures. More specifically, it focuses directly on Mainland Chinese students, especially postgraduate students, and it centres on the literature surrounding the academic adjustment these students make moving from a Confucian-Heritage context to a Western learning context.

To facilitate the examination of this topic, six areas which make up a view of learning were looked at: these are: (1) the learner; (2) knowledge; (3) learning; (4) teaching and the role of the teacher; (5) role of student; and (6) role of peers (Woolfolk, 2004). In addition to these, the discussion begins with 'Contextual Differences' to highlight, briefly, the divergences between the two educational contexts: Mainland China and a Western education system, as exemplified in New Zealand. Three areas of literature are drawn on: the studies on overseas/international/foreign students, Western learning theory, and, what has already been considered in the previous section of this review, the implications of general cross-cultural adaptation theories on the Mainland Chinese learner.

### Contextual Differences

Cultural background creates an immediate clash when international students from a Confucian-Heritage setting enter a Western educational system. Cortazzi and Jin (1997, p. 76ff) argue for the existence of academic cultures, which "... refer to the cultural norms and expectations involved in academic activity". These academic cultures form an underlying, largely unconscious understanding of what is meant to be felt, thought, and done in a particular context. Indeed, even different academic disciplines may have different academic cultures. However, as Cortazzi and Jin go on to say: "It is not simply that overseas students encounter different ways of teaching and different expectations about learning; rather such encounters are juxtaposed with the cultures of learning they bring with them" (p. 83).

When the student moves from a certain community of practice (Woolfolk, 2004; drawing on Lave & Wenger, 1991 and Wenger, 1998) in which they have been

well enculturated, they have only a small understanding of the values, norms, and expectations of the new and significantly different academic culture. On one hand, the student may be compelled to change, if they wish to be successful in the new context, but, on the other hand, it may prompt them to ‘shelter’ with fellow students who share a similar background. This reinforces the findings from the previous section, where it was noted that the tendency for Mainland Chinese students was to base themselves and their learning within their own ethnic group.

The degree of change experienced varies with the prior cultural context, the individual student, the passing of time, and the demands of the new context. The academic culture of the students’ origin may both facilitate and inhibit the ability to change. The student may be placed in a position where, pragmatically and urgently, they need to select what they can retain from their prior community of practice and take on board behaviours that may enable them to learn effectively in the new. However, Ballard and Clanchy (2001) remind us that the overseas student cannot be expected to change overnight. The burden of this change is placed almost entirely, in a Western context, on the learner and their ability, under stress, to be appropriately selective in this matter may be in doubt.

### **The Learner**

In both Western and Chinese conceptions of learning there is an important caveat to avoid stereotyping or generalising specific characteristics across a total group of people. For example, a common stereotype of Asian students as “quiet, hardworking and passive” (Woolfolk, 2004, p. 183) may actually inhibit a teacher’s development of such students and encourage conformity. Woolfolk goes on to say that “... there is heated debate today about whether identifying ethnic group differences in learning styles and preferences is a dangerous, racist, sexist exercise” (p. 183). The necessity of saying something that is general, and yet still significant, while avoiding the essentialism of stereotyping, is a difficult but necessary road to walk.

The Western response to the nature of the learner is dependent upon which educational school of thought you address it to. At least five major schools of

thought influence the Western understanding of the learner (Woolfolk, 2004; McInerney, 1998). Behaviourism may see the learner as a ‘machine’ and humanism as a ‘person.’ Cognitive models vary in their depiction of the learner. A more objectivist model such as information processing may see the learner as a ‘computer’, while more constructivist models, such as the Piagetian, may understand the learner as a ‘mind’ and in Vygotsky’s social cognitive model the learner could be termed a ‘member’ (Yount, 1996 for the first four of these depictions; Vygotsky’s ‘member’ is this writer’s addition).

A Confucian-Heritage depiction of the learner does not fit neatly with any one of these views of learning. Li (2002) states that despite the advances made in recognising and knowing about different cultures in recent years “... we know little about how members of cultures conceptualise learning.” Rather than fitting neatly into the five Western categories mentioned above the Chinese ‘learner’ seems to share sections of elements with many of them. Factors such as an, initially, transmission approach to the transfer of knowledge, fit within a behaviourist or information processing framework. Yet the high value placed on peer relationships has elements of humanism. Again, with strong relational and cooperative dimensions, it has commonalities with social cognition.

However, seeking ‘random’ commonalities is inappropriate as the two cultural models may have little equivalence when it comes to “shared meanings” as they focus on “entirely different aspects of learning” (Li, 2002). The power of socialisation within a culture shapes and moulds how the learner sees himself or herself. Li, based on her research, argues for defining the Chinese learner in terms of personal and relational connections. She (2002) states that:

Members of the Chinese culture may view learning as a personal relationship that the individual builds to knowledge. Individuals also seek learning in order to cultivate themselves as a whole toward self-perfection beyond the specifics of knowledge and utilitarian ends. Chinese beliefs about learning therefore seem to display a person orientation, which elaborates on personal causation of learning.

However, not all Chinese can be treated as a single entity either. Malaysian Chinese may have a better grasp of English as some receive a good deal of their education in English. Another necessary distinction may be between those Chinese students who have undertaken English language (and life) instruction within New

Zealand as opposed to those who directly enter the programme from overseas without this assistance. Beyond the level of English competency, it is important to recognise the differing learning approaches used by different Chinese national groups, such those in Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Smith (2001, p. 429) investigated the learning approaches of three such groups and found,

... based on the significant differences in learning approaches noted among the different Chinese subgroups, caution must ... be taken against forming fixed conceptualisations of cultural characteristics and considerable care be given in sample definition and selection in cross-cultural research.

The rationale for the choices made in this study of focusing on Mainland Chinese students who had experience of undergraduate education in China is provided in Chapter Four.

## **Knowledge**

### *Attitudes to Knowledge*

Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHCs) are often identified with a reproductive learning approach (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991). The dominance of this learning style originated with the civil service examinations in imperial China, which required unquestioned repetition of the classic works of scholars. Consequently, the learning strategies emphasised rote memorisation, passivity, lack of critical reflection, and a focus on examination content. The primary role of education was as a socialising agent. Its goal was to produce wisdom in the students and respect for the past. Teachers were respected authority figures, who were primarily seen as transmitters of knowledge who it was inappropriate to question. Barker (1997, p. 110; citing Hofstede, 1994, p. 63) writes that in a collectivist society:

... there is a stress on adaptation to the skills and virtues necessary to be an acceptable group member. This leads to a premium on the products of tradition. Learning is more often seen as a one-time process, reserved for the young only, who have to learn how to do things in order to participate in society.

Placing the Chinese learning process in a reproductive paradigm has been challenged. Tweed and Lehman (2002) want to distinguish between mere reproduction and knowledge acquisition. The Confucian learner must be able

... to demonstrate that they have acquired, have been changed by, and can work with essential knowledge. ... The Socratic learner must actively work to find knowledge within the self; the Confucian learner must actively work to acquire, understand, and apply essential concepts coming mainly from outside the self ... constructing within the self the knowledge that the collective considers essential.

Chinese education, due to the Confucian legacy, understands the sequencing of the learning process differently from that in the West. Tweed and Lehman, cite the work of Pratt and Wong (1999), who suggest that culturally Chinese learners tend to perceive learning as a four-stage process: (a) memorising, (b) understanding, (c) applying, and (d) questioning or modifying. These contrast with the Western approach, which tends to encourage critical and creative thinking throughout the learning process (Tweed & Lehman).

### ***Purpose of Learning***

Associated with attitudes of knowledge is the purpose for learning. Again, resorting to Western paradigms may not be helpful in addressing an issue which can be indigenous to specific cultural boundaries (Li, 2002). Western views of learning may wish to characterise learning within the Chinese context as instrumental. In a sense, with its learning focused on the learners' social advancement and for their contribution to society, this may have certain veracity (Li). Barker (1997, p. 112), writing in relation to overseas students states that "... it does appear that for many of them the purpose of study is 'advancement', whether this is economic or social, through acquiring specialist knowledge and skills, including language and gaining qualifications which are valued by employees."

However, Li highlights that the Confucian goal of self-perfection means that learning can be an end in itself even though it may not be valued for the process of learning, as current Western learning theory would emphasise. Lee also sees this higher purpose behind learning. It is "...to cultivate oneself as an intelligent, creative, independent, autonomous, and what is more, an authentic being, who is becoming more fully human in the process of learning" (1996, p. 34). So, while the Chinese system may have inherited an instrumental approach to education there are elements within it which honour the process of growth and the development of personhood as educational outcomes.

### ***Motivation***

Western theories of motivation tend to focus on the locus of control, that is, whether the motivation is sourced internally or externally. Behaviourism and information processing approaches to learning would see motivation being stimulated from outside. However, humanistic and constructivist models would argue that motivation needs to be internally sourced (Woolfolk, 2004). Bandura, a social behaviourist, argues that motivation moves from the external to the internal and he outlines the types of motivation that affect this shift in the locus of control (Biehler & Snowman, 1993). However, Western motivation theories may not be a good fit to describe motivation in the Chinese context or to understand the motivational orientation of a Mainland Chinese student crossing educational cultures (Biggs & Watkins, 1996). Barker (1997) believes that the cultural divide is too significant.

The CHC educational context encourages the student to understand that they have a high sense of control over their learning and that hard work will lead to success. The students are often depicted as positive and eager to learn. Volet and Renshaw (1996) cite Ho's claim (1986; 1996, p. 211) that the source of this motivation is "... more firmly rooted in the collectivist than the individualistic orientation." In addition, the performance of the student impacts on all of the wider family, the teacher, and the educational institute. For the negative edge of motivation, Barker (1997) claims that fear of failure, with its personal and social consequences, and loss of face are of great concern and this reinforces the desire to achieve. Lee (1996) notes that Chinese students, in many studies, show high achievement motivation. However, when faced with failure it can lead to feelings of shame (McInerney, 1998). Salili notes (1996) that parents and teachers set high standards of achievement and yet they seldom praise. When Barker asked overseas students about their predominant concern they put fear of failure on top.

However, Biggs and Watkins argue that the CHC conception of achievement motivation also has some individual aspects as well. The students may have a "mixed motivational stream" (p. 274). This includes: "personal ambition, family face, peer support, material reward, and, yes, even interest. Even more basic are those very Confucian 'internal dispositions' that create a sense of diligence and

receptiveness that certainly help make academic activities ‘meaningful and worthwhile’” (p. 274). As a consequence, the students are not dependent upon their internal state to be ‘right’ or ‘ready to learn;’ but instead they are prepared to activate their learning when and as required.

## **Learning**

To investigate how learning intersects with the Mainland Chinese student the following areas will be reviewed: academic performance, transferability of learning skills, learning styles, language issues, assessment, process or product and deep or surface learning, and metacognition.

### *Academic Performance*

It has long been recognised that Mainland Chinese students do perform well in the Western educational system, particularly where quantitative performance is assessed and in subject discipline areas such as sciences and mathematics (Sue & Zane, 1985). This level of performance is generally found to be true even when students have limited English skills and face the negative psychological effects of culture shock. Li (2003) offers five possible reasons why Asian students, in comparison with their Western classmates, achieve well. These are: a higher level of intelligence; a more adaptive view of intelligence; different socialisation goals and practices; being better organised to promote scientific reasoning; and an emphasis on effort.

Important, from a qualitative point of view, is the student’s own view of his or her performance. This raises the question of self-efficacy. Cadman (2000) notes that many overseas postgraduate research students come from a position of significant success and acclaim in their home countries. The students

... described how, in their home countries, acceptance, recognition and support came from family, friends and teachers, from successive good performances in examinations, and from intense competition for top results, all feeding a strong desire to achieve. They left their home countries with pride and confidence, with high expectations of future academic success.

The dramatic change of circumstances on entering a foreign learning environment caused these students to re-evaluate what they considered academic success. Cadman writes,

The students have voiced some of the deeper hopes and fears that they identify with success: the need for recognition of who they are and what they can do, for acceptance into their new academic community, and perhaps most strongly of all, their need to meet their obligations to family, colleagues, institutions and friends. It is a deeply held matter of pride and identity to maintain an image of success, a form of subjectification that makes it very difficult to negotiate the transition from one culture to another.

This study helps clarify how these students maintain self-belief or efficacy, which is critical to them achieving their educational goals, through a turbulent time of change.

### ***Transferability of Learning Skills***

When Mainland Chinese students come to an unfamiliar community of practice their prior learning methods may not transfer well (Biggs & Watkins, 1996). In China there was a societal, academic, and personal harmony between the values, norms, and expectations within their learning environment. Now, in making such a significant transition, this educational culture, their support structures, and their learning scaffolding are largely taken away.

Volet (1999) has classified the transferability of learning skills into four categories: appropriate, ambivalent, difficult, and inappropriate. Appropriate skills within a Western context are those that are effective within the new milieu. They include high achievement motivation, attribution of failure to lack of effort, a deep approach to learning, and informal peer support groups. Diligence at cue seeking, conforming to task requirements, and memorising study materials are examples of ambivalent transfer. This means that the learning skill may be helpful but perhaps misunderstood in the new context. For example, cue seeking for the student may be essential to academic survival; but to the lecturers it may be seen as undue emphasis on performance (grades) rather than learning.

Other learning skills may not cross the cultural divide as well. Those learning skills which could be considered difficult generally arise out of a clash of expectations. For example, expectations regarding learning and instruction, seeking

help from teachers, and low participation in tutorial discussions may need to be re-evaluated by both teachers and students in the new context. Inappropriate learning skills include reporting verbatim and copying down relevant extracts. These are not considered acceptable in the Western context. Adjusting to the variable transferability of their learning skills is often difficult for these students. However, recent studies looking at the role of agency in adaptation for international students indicate that they do respond by “actively negotiating” (Morita, 2004, p. 573) their learning stance. Kettle (2005, p. 60) found in her case study that the student was “... was aware of his situation and actively engaged in transforming it.”

### *Learning Styles*

One key area in understanding the learning praxis of Mainland Chinese students is that of learning styles. Irvine and York believe (2001, p. 484), “... learning styles research has significant possibilities for enhancing the achievement of culturally diverse students.” International students are often regarded as having a field-dependent learning style approach. This means high impulsivity, low reflectivity, reliance on authority, a desire to work with others, and a desire to conform to the context (Irvine & York). Impulsivity, which may seem out of place initially, means a tendency to “answer quickly and inaccurately” (p. 488); the field-independent learner adopts a more cautious and thoughtful approach.

When the students find their previously successful learning style or approach does not seem to be as effective in the new environment they may either mimic the domestic students’ approach(es) or redouble their efforts using their old methods (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991). Generally, neither attempt may be successful. Mimicking behaviour denies the student’s unique cultural identity and background thereby creating dissonance in his or her life. Increasing the effort and maintaining faith in the tried and true but culturally formed methods may mean the gap caused by entering the new educational environment remains just as wide.

However, the jury is still out on whether learning styles actually affect learning ability. On one hand, there is debate over the efficacy of the instruments used to determine learning styles. Irvine and York believe that the tools “... perform more

of a dialogical then a diagnostic function” (p. 489). By this they are suggesting that awareness of learning styles may well assist the teacher in developing their teaching and learning processes but knowledge of an individual student’s learning style cannot be taken as a predictor of academic success. Care also needs to be taken so that a focus on learning styles does not lead to stereotyping and that the cultural frame of many learning style assessment instruments is recognised.

### *Language Issues*

One of the prime instigators of the transfer of culture is language development and use. This learning, according to Vygotsky’s social-cognitive model (Woolfolk, 2004) and Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concept of ‘Communities of Practice,’ takes place within a situated learning environment. The change to a new, ‘alien’ environment tears apart the Mainland Chinese learner’s community of practice because the language is foreign to their previous ecology. The culture of learning is disrupted, because of the language difficulties, not only in terms of formal learning but also the informal nurturing process the family and wider community had provided (LeFrancois, 1997). The student has to select the learning strategies that he or she believes will provide the scaffolding for stepping up into the new community. This needs to be accomplished when second language difficulties pose continual problems in constructing a knowledge base and solving problems in the new context.

To be able to successfully learn in an English speaking Western context the Mainland Chinese student has to achieve a degree of competency in all four registers: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Usually the Chinese student has reasonable reading and some listening skills due to their English learning practice in China (Biggs & Watkins, 1996). However, their reading for comprehension may be perceived by international students to be “slow and clumsy” compared to their Western contemporaries (Cammish, 1997, p. 153). Listening is complicated by needing time to tune into the dominant accent as well as coping with a variety of accents in the classroom from both students and lecturers. Another major listening issue is the need to concentrate for extended periods. In group contexts everyone seems to be talking over everyone else, the language is less formal, and there is a high level of background noise (Cammish).

Speaking is termed a 'productive' skill and, as such, it is more publicly noticeable when it is deficient. Many Chinese students have had little, in some cases almost no, opportunity for speaking practice. When faced with the necessity of speaking, some are prepared to risk communicative mistakes in order to develop their ability; for others the potential loss of face makes this difficult. Mainland Chinese students often have trouble with writing (Biggs & Watkins). Their style of writing is less direct and less linear, and the writer excludes basic content because the reader is given credit for already knowing it (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997). The propensity for plagiarism and its causes are well-documented. The Chinese student does not feel the need to acknowledge directly a quote which is a well known or an established fact. Additionally, when coming to the task with weak English writing skills it seems better to stay with the original wording (Cammish).

Cammish sees the main writing skill problem as a "... a lack of control over sentence structure which really distorts or disguises meaning and impedes communication" (p. 154). While breaching grammatical rules and sentence structures hinders writing comprehension, recent research has also focused on the impact of discourse level errors (Hyland & Anan, 2006). A lack of shared understanding between teachers and the overseas students plus a lack of awareness of disciplinary practices, student attitudes to writing, and a range of personal factors make it difficult for the students to adapt to the new academic discourse community (Arkoudis & Tran, 2007). This difficulty in coming to terms with wider writing requirements is often exacerbated by the lack of a range of exemplars for the students to choose from (Paltridge, 2002).

The overseas student is removed from the 'comfort' of their indigenous learning environment. The prior support structures and reinforcers are disconnected and the learning patterns that used to work are not always effective. The student has to adopt, and become rapidly effective in, new ways of learning. However, Biggs and Watkins (p. 278) believe that the "... reorientation to Western task demands typically occurs surprisingly quickly." International students are observed to quickly overcome these problems and adopt strategies that enable them to succeed (Ward et al., 2001).

### ***Process or Product and Deep or Surface Learning***

Western education over the last 50 years has increasingly focused on the process of education while Chinese education tends to be “product or performance orientated” (Biggs, 1996, p. 50). In China, the emphasis falls on the transmission of a body of knowledge contained within a course textbook of usually modest dimensions, when compared with Western textbooks. However, Biggs and Watkins argue that transmission is not simply the replication of information in this context. They see the transmission being based on “...much interaction, in a complex and mutually accepting (if not warm) social context” (p. 274). Therefore, the debate about the product nature of Chinese education leads into the question of whether it stimulates surface learning or whether it can also lead to deep learning.

The conceptual divide between deep and surface approaches to learning was first developed in Marton and Saljo’s 1976 study. Surface learning is marked by the students attempting to memorise the words and phrases of the teacher, while deep learning manifests a desire to understand the main points and infer meaning from them (Tweed & Lehman, 2002). However, the difficulty in constructing cross-cultural measures of deep and surface learning makes the debate on these factors within the Chinese context fraught with difficulty (Tweed & Lehman; Ho et al., 2001a). Kember and Gow (1991), in their study on Asian students, believed the high pressure demands of the Chinese assessment system contribute to influencing students to adopt a surface approach to learning.

Biggs (1996) agrees that the adoption of repetitive learning strategies, such as memorisation, may be a consequence of the assessment regime. However, he argues that while students may use a surface learning strategy it does not necessarily lead to surface learning. Tang asserts that “... students react to that environment [of highly surface-oriented assessment] specifically and contextually, the cultural dispositions maintaining an orientation to deep learning, using strategies that help them meet examination requirements while learning deeply on the side” (1996, p. 178).

The debate on surface or deep learning is often centred on the role of memorisation. Ho et al., believe the continuing emphasis in China on an examination-based education system drives students to adopt memorisation and

repeated practice as survival strategies but it produces no real gains in academic achievement to the student beyond knowledge acquisition and recall (Ho et al., p. 29). Others see it as a pathway to understanding and value repetition as a deep learning strategy (Tweed & Lehman; Marton, Dall’Alba, & Tse, 1996).

Memorisation is seen as a precursor to understanding and the postponing of questioning as a sign of open mindedness (Lee, 1996). Generally, there has been some acceptance of memorisation, as the Chinese practice it, as, potentially, a deep learning strategy. To some extent this debate may rest with the individual student. Some students may adopt such techniques and, for them, it may never progress beyond surface learning dimensions. For others, it will allow for confidence in knowing the knowledge and being able to deeply reflect on it.

### ***Metacognition***

Metacognition is “... people’s awareness of their own cognitive machinery and how that machinery works” (Meichenbaum, as cited in Woolfolk, 2004, p. 256). Metacognition helps us to ‘watch ourselves’ as we think and learn. Ho et al. (2001a, p. 32) see this “... as the most meaningful measure of success or failure in learning.” There is some debate whether the cultural heritage of Chinese students allows them to develop these abilities. Ho et al. believe that Chinese students, due to deficient metacognitive development, lack quality thinking skills, are unable to develop proper argumentation, fail to use knowledge creatively in problem solving, and inadequately relate their learning to the realities of life (Ho et al.).

Biggs (1996) does not believe that this is so. He notes studies which indicate that Chinese students studying overseas often achieve more highly than the host country students and have an ability to be highly adaptive in developing effective modes of learning. Biggs argues (p. 61) that the ‘docility’ of students within a CHC environment helps them to acquire metacognitive skills, such as, “...scanning to seek cues that help the direction of effort, and that give assent to the direction of effort, towards repetitive and boring tasks, knowing that meaning and purpose will be ultimately found ...” However, some studies indicate that international students under-perform compared to local students, even though they may have the same success rate in terms of passing their courses (e.g., Arkoudis & Starfield, 2007).

Another challenge related to metacognitive awareness faced by the students is a lack of experience in developing critical thinking (Kinnell, 1990). The Mainland Chinese student often imagines that their supervisor in a Western context will have a major role in helping the student adopt this approach to the body of knowledge. However, the supervisor actually expects the student to investigate, analyse, and critically reflect on the information the student has to find for himself or herself. Being initially bound by prior cultural and educational experiences, the student struggles with the "...speculative and critical approach to learning which characterises the advanced research scholar" (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991, p. 73).

### **Teaching and the Role of the Teacher**

The teacher within the Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) frame has a strongly connected relationship with his or her students. Flaitz writes: "Given the Chinese culture's emphasis on community rather than individualism, Chinese students tend to expect a great deal of involvement and supervision from their teachers" (2003, p. 106). The student may view a teacher as a mentor; someone who can provide advice through all stages of learning (Chan & Drover, 1997). Even at postgraduate level, the teacher may be expected to be the source of knowledge and certain in his or her understanding of his or her field (Kinnell, 1990). If failure does come, then it may be seen not as the student's responsibility but that of the teacher (Ballard & Clanchy, 2001).

When entering the Western frame the student often finds what appears to be a more laissez-faire approach to teaching and learning. The Western educational system is a student-centred approach in which a teacher advises a student while respecting individuality and autonomy (Chan & Drover, 1997). Here the student is primarily responsible for the learning; the teacher is not the sole purveyor of information. The student may not initially understand the Western concept of the lecturer being a fellow learner or a more experienced colleague. The differences in the learning dialogue reflect cultural values, and both teachers and students need to understand each other's roles as well as be sensitive to the other's cultural milieu.

These differing views of the teaching and learning process and, hence, the differing roles of students and teachers, are reinforced by Cortazzi and Jin's study (1997). Here, the overseas student saw the teacher's role as: an authority, an expert in their field; a model of knowing and doing; a parent and friend; aware of the students' problems; and able to give answers and clear guidance. In contrast the Western teachers saw their role as: a facilitator and organiser; a model of how to find out; and a friendly critic. Such significant differences can only be expected to lead to a clash of expectations in teacher-student relations. Morita (2004) found that the teacher can have either an inhibiting or positive role in helping student adaptation. However, Morita adds that the help the student needs is not often available from the teacher in the new educational context.

One dimension of this is seen in the differing views on accessibility. In many cases the lecturer in China works and lives on campus. As a pseudo parent and a friend, and these two terms need to be understood within a hierarchical frame, the lecturer is expected to be very accessible to students. However, in a Western university Chinese students find that the teachers do not live on campus and they may not work there as they could have an off-site work station or be employed part-time. Another clash is the degree of formality or informality expected in the student/teacher relationship. Rogerian educational humanism may consider the students' view of the teacher as very formal and lacking in the personal dimension. Certainly, within China, teachers and students interact within a hierarchical environment, in accordance with the CHC milieu. However, Biggs and Watkins (1996, p. 279) believe that: "Hierarchy need not destroy warmth, but on the other hand neither does warmth necessarily create a comfortable working relationship." They argue that the hierarchical CHC relationship is: "... marked by its own positive interpersonal affect: respect and acceptance" (p. 280).

### **Role of Student**

Just as teachers and students saw the role of the teacher in different ways, the reverse is also true. Cortazzi and Jin (1997) noted that differences also existed about how Chinese students and Western (British) teachers saw the role of the student. Students saw their roles as developing receptivity, keeping the collective harmony,

an apprentice, and a deductive learner. They were also to respect the teacher by taking care to listen well and reflect carefully. They were to learn the methods and obtain the correct results.

However, the Western teachers in the study saw the role of the students to be one where they are developing independence, individuality, and creativity. They were to be inductive learners who engaged in dialogue during their learning. Cortazzi and Jin write: “British tutors may expect group discussion, with some argument and challenge of viewpoints in an effort to seek alternative interpretations or evaluate approaches critically” (p. 78). In addition, the student is expected to become an information gatherer not only an information receiver. This signals a mind shift for the student from being what might be termed a passive learner to being an active one. Once again, there is a significant clash of expectations.

### **Role of Peers**

Mainland Chinese students, coming from what is termed a collectivist culture, may be understood as cooperative learners. According to Biggs and Watkins (1996, p. 275): “Generally, [Chinese] students spontaneously collaborate outside the classroom more than Western students.” Tang also notes the spontaneous nature of these groups and suggests that it arises from a culture which “... emphasises social relationships and collectivism” (1996, pp. 183-204). Flowerdew (1998) believes the Confucian values of humanism, faithfulness, and propriety foster the desire for cooperation. Hu and Grove (1991, p. 75) argue that the cooperative nature of the Chinese learner means that: “Cutthroat competition is not often a feature of Chinese student life.” In fact, Biggs argues that the intensity of the assessment process drives “... students to work collaboratively, to seek each others’ cue-perceptions and views on how, in particular, to handle an unfamiliar situation” (1996, p. 61).

When Mainland Chinese students move to a Western context perceptions of cooperativeness and relationship are tested. There are differences between spontaneously organised informal support experienced in China and the more formalised study groups used in the West. Winters (1996) found that while organised peer tutoring groups in the West can lead to better performance and

attitudes they are often difficult to organise and sustain. These groups, which would often be mixed ethnically, have difficulties with language, expectations, and accountability. Relationally, in China, the students stay within a predominately same-sex, same-age peer group throughout their term of study. Barker (1991) notes that these relationships often become the basis of life-long friendships. When students do mix in the Western context across the ethnic divides then they can learn much from one another (Ackers, 1997). Yet Mainland Chinese face many difficulties in making the necessary relational adjustments in the new context. Biggs and Watkins (p. 277) say these "... difficulties naturally impel already collectivistically-inclined international students to work and live in their own ethnic groups."

This section has examined the literature on how the Chinese learner copes with the significantly changed academic environment when they study overseas. The contextual differences between a CHC and Western learning environment were considered first. Then it has focused on six major areas that construct a view of learning and has highlighted the challenges of learning in a new ecology. Two major impressions flow from this review. First, that, again, there is huge complexity and interactivity with and among the variables. Second, there is a need to conceptualise this information in a way that expresses the wholeness of the cross-cultural educational process. This research project is an attempt to construct a substantive theory that has the explanatory power to integrate and account for the complexity of the cross-cultural academic adaptation of Mainland Chinese students.

## **SUMMARY**

This literature review has examined three major areas. First, the historical and current educational context of Chinese students was briefly examined and this highlighted the ongoing legacy of the Confucian approach to education. Second, three approaches to cross-cultural adjustment and their implications for Mainland Chinese students were reviewed. Third, six elements of the learning process, as defined in the West, were scrutinised and compared and contrasted to the Mainland

Chinese context to determine what applications could be considered relevant to a Chinese student.

While there has been extensive coverage of the issues overseas students face in crossing academic and cultural boundaries in the literature much of this research has been focused on the adjustment process that the students must make when adapting to such change. However, what the literature appears to lack is a coherent, broad-ranging conceptualisation of the adaptation process that incorporates the previous context, the dynamics of the adjustment, and the resulting effects of that adjustment. In addition, while the literature highlights many of the variables and complexities of this process, there is a need to portray these, and how they interact and link together, in the light of the overall process.

The purpose of this study is learning from the subjects themselves, Mainland Chinese students, how they understand this process of cross-educational adjustment. The challenge is to see if a substantive, data-based theory can be developed which helps both the learners and those directly and organisationally involved in their learning gain greater perspective on this issue. It is hoped that this study may depict this process in a way which moves away from just description and toward an integrative explanation. Unlike most other research methods, the method applied in this study requires that the research problem is a product of the basic social process being investigated. That is, the research problem does not necessarily and directly come out of the literature review. Therefore, these two elements (process and problem) and the methodological approach, grounded theory, are detailed in Chapter Three.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

# **THE METHODOLOGICAL RATIONALE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a rationale for the methodological design for this research. This was approached in four ways. First, the nature of the basic social process was explained, which led, second, to the expression of the research problem. Third, from the foundation of the basic social process and the research problem, the reason for adopting a qualitative design was justified. Then, lastly, the reasons for choosing grounded theory as an appropriate method to conduct the study were specified. This also included some background material on grounded theory that places the current study's approach in the overall context of the method. Chapter Four goes further and more specifically looks at the details of the research procedures and tools used in the investigation.

### **THE BASIC SOCIAL PROCESS**

This study has investigated the basic social process (BSP) of cross-cultural educational adjustment. In the adjustment process, for it to be a BSP, a movement through a number of stages is required to take place over a period of time. The BSP for this study was defined as follows: the process of adjusting to the effects of cross-cultural educational change at tertiary level. The study allowed overseas students to inform the researcher about the cross-cultural educational adjustments they made in order to manage their transition into and through the New Zealand tertiary education system. The research determined how the students themselves understood this process, elicited from them what they did to resolve the dilemmas it posed, and sought to describe the effect of these changes on the students. The researcher was initially drawn to this BSP because of his previous employment as a support worker

for international post-graduate students. The desire was to not only observe but to be able to have an informed understanding of the experiences of these students.

## THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), it is through the researcher becoming involved in the research context and listening to the respondent's concerns that the research problem emerges. They say: "The original question in a qualitative study often is broad and open-ended. It tends to become more refined and specific as the research progresses and as the issues and problems of the area under investigation emerge" (1998, p. 53). In this study the research began with an outline of the BSP; that is, the cross-cultural educational adjustment of Mainland Chinese postgraduate business students studying within a New Zealand university. The key research problem was to determine the conceptual or theoretical dimensions of the process the Mainland Chinese postgraduate business students used in adjusting to this distinctly different education system. The research problem was linked to a core set of research questions that became evident as the study developed and that reflected the time dimensions of a process.

1. In what way can the nature of the learner be described that enables an understanding of the initial context as well as gives a basis for evaluating the effects of change?
2. What reasons can be determined for the students desiring to study in New Zealand at tertiary level?
3. What are the issues that overseas students face when undertaking such a major change in learning ecology?
4. In what ways do the students respond to the significant changes they face when they enter the tertiary education system in New Zealand?
5. How do these international postgraduate students overcome or resolve the basic problems that confront them in this new educational setting?
6. What are the effects of such a change in learning ecology on the overseas students in terms of who they are as learners and their learning?

These questions reflect the process nature of the research problem. In addressing these individual research questions, which form subsets of the process, a major purpose was to form an integrated conceptualisation of the process as the literature review (see Chapter Two) noted this was a significant gap in the body of knowledge. Therefore, the findings should be able to offer a 'big picture' of the process but also reflect the rich on-the-ground experience of the students going through the BSP. This is a difficult balance and there is always the danger of over-generalising to the extent that the conceptualisation of the findings loses touch with the experiences of the students or the experiences of the students dominate with the result that the 'forest' is no longer in sight because of the 'trees'. The research methodology needs to be able to provide the framework and the means to ensure that the overall result depicts the BSP under consideration in a balanced yet effective manner. However, in order to hear the students' voices well the process was conducted with a limited sample of students making the resulting conceptualisation, in grounded theory terms, a substantive (or localised) one.

## **THE QUALITATIVE RATIONALE**

The determination of the BSP and research problem for this investigation opened the way for the selection of the methodological approach and the particular research method. The need to hear and do justice to the voices of the students and yet conceptualise that data is integral to many qualitative approaches. These qualities, which were so germane to the research problem, meant that the selection of a qualitative framework for the research design was a natural and fitting choice. Four key aspects of the qualitative approach that underline this choice are discussed below. These are: hearing the students' core concerns; being open to the whole process; developing depth and breadth of understanding; and displaying both complexity and simplicity.

### **Hearing the Students' Core Concerns**

There has been, perhaps, a tendency by governments and institutions to treat overseas students as a commodity or at least a common entity, thereby denying them

a voice. This study seeks to raise the profile of the voices of these students so their core concerns are heard. To do so is strongly aligned with the heart of qualitative research. Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p. 7) say: “Researchers who use [the qualitative] approach are interested in how different people make sense of their lives. In other words, qualitative researchers are concerned with what are called participant perspectives.” In providing a way that overseas students’ voices can be heard, at one level, helps the students make sense of their own experience (Merriam & Assoc., 2002) and, at another level, brings those voices into the auditory orbit of those who wish to understand their perceptions and interpretations (Morse & Richards, 2002).

Ward and Masgoret (2004) in their wide-ranging survey of the experiences of international students in New Zealand provided valuable material for understanding the dynamics the students face in crossing educational cultures. However, the accepted limits of quantitative measures means that while “It may be an area in which patterns of behaviour are statistically clear ... [the] researcher can only guess at reasons for these patterns without an understanding of people’s own accounts of their behaviour” (Morse & Richard, p. 25). Indeed, Ward and Masgoret’s (p. 72) call for “... in-depth research with international students from China, including qualitative approaches to understanding their experiences in New Zealand ...” was a prime motivator for this research study. It is the aim of this study to pass the “... acid test of paying attention to respondents’ concerns ...” which is a hallmark of the qualitative approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 47).

### **Being Open to the Whole Process**

Qualitative research tends to be process orientated: seeking to understand what is happening in the lives of those participating in the research over time. Often, as in the case of cross cultural educational adjustment, the breadth of the process may not be well known and the findings from the research can provide new ways of seeing and understanding the experiences of the participants (Morse & Richard, 2002). For this to be effective: “Qualitative researchers go to the particular setting under study because they are concerned with context. They feel that action can best be understood when it is observed in the setting in which it occurs” (Bogdan & Biklen (2007, p. 4). With the context being so critical, the qualitative researcher does not

focus only on process but sees its wider dimensions in the precedents and outcomes in order to provide a view of the whole process.

One of the needs within the research focus of this study is to address the range of the students' experiences as they cross educational cultures. Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 16) believe:

Though we are interested in how persons experience events, and the meanings they give to those experiences, at the same time we consider that any explanation of experience would be incomplete without (a) locating experience within the larger conditional frame or context in which it is embedded; and (b) describing the process or the ongoing and changing forms of action/interactions/emotions that are taken in responses to events and the problems that arise to inhibit action/interaction. We also look for consequences because these come back to be part of the next sequence of action.

This study has purposefully sought to capture such a wide view of the process.

### **Developing Depth and Breadth of Understanding**

Another characteristic of qualitative research is that the results are "richly descriptive" (Merriam et al., 2002, p. 5). The purpose of securing this thick description is for the researcher "to obtain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, an individual, a situation" (Merriam et al., p. 19). However, this does not mean the findings are strings of quasi-related quotes from the participants. Within an interpretive paradigm the richness of the data is held close to its original form so the voices are still clearly heard and yet, in its analysis, the interpretation presents an image of the whole, including even what the participants may take for granted (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), and opening the door to discovery (Morse & Richard, 2002). This builds both depth and breadth into the findings.

However, it is possible to so flavour the analysis with the *in vivo* nature of the data that the interpretation of that data becomes hindered by its own sheer weight. Heavy description can be, in Glaser's words, "incident tripping" (1998, p. 96). He favours "more concepts at the expense of illustrations, since space is limited and concepts carry the overall theory and have *in vivo* imagery which virtually illustrates them in any case" (p. 190). In this study, one of the major reasons for choosing the BSP was to conceptualise the dimensions of cross-cultural educational adjustment

and yet to still clearly hear the voices of the students. Good qualitative research is able to maintain the balance between the richness of the data and the effectiveness of the interpretation to provide a deep and comprehensive understanding of the process.

### **Displaying both Complexity and Simplicity**

The literature review (see Chapter Two) highlighted the complexity of cross-cultural adjustment generally and its educational dimensions in particular. This complexity is further complicated by the interactivity among the many variables associated with the adjustment process. The outcome from this study is an attempt to find simplicity without, in a reductionist manner, destroying the complexity (Morse & Richard, 2002). There is a need to conceptualise but to do so in a way that does not deny the richness of the data (as noted above) and also does justice to the complexity of the BSP. The inductive nature of qualitative research lends itself to the gathering of many particular instances and seeks to group them or interpret them in ways which adequately explain the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam et al., 2002). Bogdan and Biklen believe that: “Theory developed this way emerges from the bottom up (rather than the top down), from many disparate pieces of collected evidence that are interconnected. The theory is grounded in the data” (2007, p. 6). Again, a key motivator for this study is predicated on the basis that there is currently a lack of theory that is grounded in the data and provides a compelling explanation of the ecology of cross-cultural educational adjustment.

This section has sought to justify why a qualitative approach provided an acceptable and helpful means of examining this study’s BSP by highlighting four key reasons for adopting such a research design. By hearing the students’ core concerns, being open to the whole process, developing both depth and breadth of understanding, and displaying both complexity and simplicity, it is hoped that the findings of this study open up this area of research to better understanding and to ways of approaching further research. Next, the choice of a particular qualitative research method, grounded theory, is explained and justified.

## GROUNDING THEORY

An important aspect of choosing a method to analyse data in qualitative studies is that the approach selected needs to have congruence with the data itself. Morse and Richards (2002, p. 1) argue that: “The strength of qualitative research inquiry is in the integration of the research question, the data, and data analysis.” Grounding theory was chosen because of its ability to hear the students’ voices, treat the full process, develop insightful understandings, and conceptualise as well as describe. However, grounding theory has, despite its heritage as the frontrunner in the development of qualitative approaches to social science (Charmaz, 2003), come under significant critique especially from those supporting a more constructivist approach. Therefore, grounding theory has been backgrounded in order to help understand the basis of the debate before the particular methodological basis and stages of the research for this study are outlined.

### Background

It is helpful to understand something of the historical development of grounding theory. Out of their clinical work, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss developed the initial conceptualisation of grounding research. They described this in *The discovery of grounding theory* (1967) at a time when qualitative research was very much the underdog to quantitative research. Strauss had received his training in the creative ethnographical traditions of the University of Chicago while Glaser trained in quantitative research methods at Columbia University (Cresswell, 2002). The ‘grounding theory’ that developed from their work had the hallmarks of both men: Glaser’s concern for inductive theory development and Strauss’ emphasis on fieldwork.

Over the next decades Glaser stayed very much with the initial formulation of the theory, strongly defending its integrity in the 1990s (Glaser, 1992). Glaser felt Strauss, and his new collaborator, Juliet Corbin, tried to too narrowly define the analytical and procedural phases of the approach. Glaser insisted on the need for the theory to emerge from the data rather than what he saw as Strauss’ forcing of the data, using preconceived strategies. Strauss and Corbin on the other hand, wanted to

clarify the procedural steps used in grounded theory to make the method more accessible, understandable, and defensible. Therefore, they systematised the design with a more rigorous and detailed procedural base (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; 1990).

However, the philosophical base of grounded theory, as propounded by Glaser and Strauss and Corbin, has been questioned. Kathy Charmaz (2002) strongly criticised the approach of both parties. Her critique centred on what she saw as the residual legacy of realist ontology and positivist epistemology in their work. Guba and Lincoln (2004) also placed grounded theory within the post-positivist paradigm; nevertheless they still saw a legitimate place for this approach as a logical methodological expression within qualitative research. Charmaz, however, advocated a constructivist revision of the methodology. This stressed, amongst a number of things, the need to understand both the participants and the researcher(s) as interpreters of meaning and to allow a more flexible and descriptive approach (Cresswell).

These three forms of grounded theory have been characterised by Cresswell as the emerging design (Glaser), the systematic design (Strauss & Corbin), and the constructivist design (Charmaz). It is his opinion, however, that grounded theory can incorporate all three aspects. That is, "...a systematic approach, a flexible emerging design, and the use of active codes to capture the experiences of participants" (p. 447). This somewhat pragmatic approach has been adopted for this research study in the belief that it will result in an exploration of the BSP of cross-cultural educational adjustment in both a systematic and a descriptive manner while still being open to the element of discovery.

Since the publishing of Glaser and Strauss' foundational work in 1967, grounded theory has become increasingly used in a number of fields, especially in the social sciences. This is particularly evident in sociology, psychology, and education. It is interesting to profile the increased use, over time, on an international basis, of the grounded theory methodology across the wider education arena. The following table shows the result of a search utilising the ERIC (via EBSCO Host) database.

Table 3.1:

*References to 'education' and 'grounded theory' in the ERIC database*

Number of articles including key words, 'education' AND 'grounded theory,' in ERIC using 'Default Fields'.		
Period	Number of 'hits'	Percentage increase
1971 - 1975	3	-
1976 - 1980	16	433%
1981 - 1985	27	56%
1986 - 1990	38	41%
1991 - 1995	51	34%
1996 - 2000	74	45%
2001 - 2005	146	97%
2006 - 3/2009	197	35%

After humble beginnings, there have been significant increases, in terms of the percentage change in number of references, over the five-year periods. The percentage increase in references has, since 1981, increased by a range of 34% to 97% for the five-year periods. The latest period, from January 2006 to March 2009 already has 197 references. An extrapolation for the full five-year period to December 2010, based on the period to March 2009 and assuming an even occurrence of further citings over time, would indicate an estimated 300 hits for the terms 'education' and 'grounded theory'. If this proved to be the case, then this could represent a 105% increase for the period to December, 2010.

### **The Methodological Basis and Stages**

Before the stages of the grounded theory research process are explained it is helpful to have an overview of the methodology's key characteristics. Charmaz (2004, p. 497) sees these as:

- (1) simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis phases of research,
- (2) creation of analytic codes and categories developed from the data, not from preconceived hypotheses,
- (3) the development of middle-range theories to explain behaviour and processes,
- (4) memo-making, that is, writing analytic notes to explicate and fill out categories, the crucial intermediate step between coding data and writing first drafts or papers,
- (5) theoretical sampling, that is, sampling for theory construction, not for

representativeness of a given population, to check and refine the analyst's emerging conceptual categories, and (6) delay of the literature review.

The grounded theory methodology can provide a systematic and yet flexible means of determining, from the participants' points of view, what is happening within the BSP. Moreover, it enables the development of a data-driven substantive theory, which may help illuminate what is happening in a 'dark' area of educational understanding. According to Cresswell (2002, p. 447), this is an important characteristic of grounded theory; that is, the ability to develop theory where "...theories are inadequate or non-existent."

This research study developed a staged approach to implementing the methodology. Babchuk (1996) recommends, due to the variety of approaches within grounded theory, that it is important to state whose guidelines have been followed. Following Cresswell and as noted above, the implemented methodology has pragmatically integrated the three strands of grounded theory and developed a staged and systematic approach, which also does justice to the elements of discovery and thick description, thereby honouring the best features of Glaser, Strauss and Corbin, and Charmaz. The outline of the five stages used is as follows: Stage I - Determine the methodological fit; Stage II - Start the investigation; Stage III - Deepen the categories; Stage IV - Select the core category; and Stage V - Confirm and write up the theory. An overview and a detailed review of the research tools and techniques as they relate to these stages are undertaken in Chapter Four.

## **SUMMARY**

Chapter Three established the nature of the BSP (Basic Social Process) under investigation in this study. The BSP was: the cross-cultural educational adjustment of Mainland Chinese postgraduate business students to study within a New Zealand university. On the basis of this BSP the research problem was to determine the conceptual or theoretical dimensions of the process the Mainland Chinese postgraduate business students used in adjusting to a distinctly different education system. With the study being focused in this way the dimensions of the research and its research questions have a processional basis. To study this process effectively it was argued that a qualitative approach would be most effective. This would enable

the voices of the students to be heard, allow the whole process to be examined, develop a conceptualisation that would have depth and breadth, and retain both the elements of complexity and simplicity in presenting the findings.

Following this, the choice of grounded theory as the methodology for this study was justified. The background of grounded theory revealed a diversity of approaches that included both post-positivistic and constructivist dimensions. Following Cresswell (2002), a pragmatic melding of these approaches was chosen so that the implemented research method utilised the openness to discovery of Glaser (1992), the systematic rigour of Strauss and Corbin (1998), and the thick description of Charmaz (2003). The international use of grounded theory as a research method was also shown to be growing over the last four decades, indicating that it is a well-utilised and significant qualitative research method. Chapter Four moves the journey forward from the grounded theory methodology to the implementation of the research process itself.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

# **IMPLEMENTING THE METHOD**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter moves forward from the establishment and justification of the methodology chosen for this research project and describes the application of this method during the course of the study. In particular, the means by which the data was gathered, coded, analysed, and verified are detailed. Included within how the data was gathered are the procedures followed in the selection of the students. This is prefaced by some brief comments on the trial study and the data collection timetable. The last two sections of the chapter deal with ethics and access issues, and researcher positioning.

### **THE TRIAL STUDY**

To ensure that the research protocols, instruments, and researcher were ready for fieldwork, permission was obtained from the Chair of the Graduate School of Education's Ethics Committee, Massey University to trial the guide for interview one with two students. Both of these students fitted the research population in that they were Mainland Chinese postgraduate business students (see below: 'Participant Selection and Profile'). These interviews were helpful in terms of determining if the right questions were being asked, reflecting on the quality of responses and how to enhance the level of feedback, and trying out the practical components of the research, especially the recording equipment and the timing of the interview session. The first trial was on 8 September, 2005 and the second on 15 September, 2005.

The trial was based on an early draft of the first semi-structured interview. It covered a wide range of issues that were thought may elicit the type of information

needed from the students. In particular, it was hoped that the students would be able to express their perceptions concerning education in China, why they had made the decision to study in New Zealand, how this study process was going for them, and what kind and scale of change had impacted on them as students as a result of the adjustment. It was found that while the two students were helpfully forthcoming, the interview guide was a little too unstructured and needed to have a more focused and segmented approach. The interview time was also too long; taking almost two hours to complete. This feedback helped the initial interview guide (Appendix A) to be reframed and refined. Another helpful area of adjustment was the need to set the questions in more concrete terms. Asking the students to rank and order their responses was particularly helpful in the third round interviews.

## RESEARCH STAGES: DETAILS AND TIMEFRAMES

The table below (4.1) describes the five-stage process outlined in Chapter Three and provides dates for the periods when these stages were completed. Details are summarised for the tasks involved alongside the description of the stages.

Table 4.1:

*Description and duration periods for research stages*

Stage	Description	Details	Duration
I	Determine the methodological fit	Identify a process (BSP) to study Define the research problem/questions Decide on qualitative approach and select grounded theory as the research methodology Seek approval and access Conduct trial study	February 2004 – March 2006
II	Start the investigation	Participant selection Conduct the first two rounds of interviews Open code, analyse, categorise, and memo the initial data using the constant comparative process	April 2006 – October 2006
III	Deepen the categories	Conduct the third round of interviews (theoretical sampling) Create depth of meaning within categories through axial coding Saturate categories until there is no added value	July 2006 – September 2007

IV	Select the core category	Select the core category that best explains the process (selective coding) Integrate and refine the theory around the core category	October 2007 – December 2007
V	Confirm and write up the theory	Determine how literature and respondent feedback modify the process Evaluate the identified basic social process against established criteria Write up the grounded theory research report	January 2008 – April 2009

Initially, the length of time it took to establish contact with the students and gain their consent to participate in the project took longer than expected (see below: ‘Gaining Access’). The timeframes had to be flexible as they needed to be adjusted for the researcher being a part-time student (until February 2008), the need to conduct most of the interviews over 500 kilometres away at the northern campus of Atherton University, scheduling interviews as much as possible during student ‘down’ times such as holidays, and a significant change of employment by the researcher. As a result, there was some crossover of dates with Stages II, III, and IV in terms of timing and functions. This also extended, in a minor way, into Stage V.

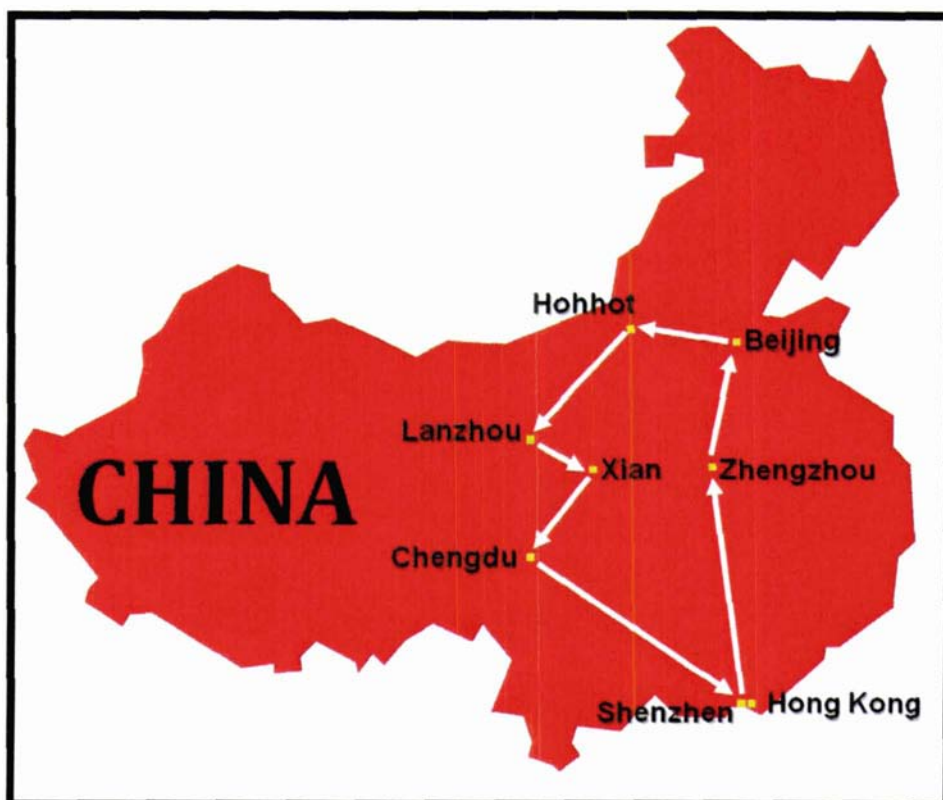
## **DATA GATHERING**

Data was gathered for this research project mainly through the use of a series of semi-structured interviews with a group of participants. In addition, a field trip to China was invaluable in terms of providing insights into the tertiary institutions, education practices, and student life within China. These two areas are discussed below, as is the means by which participants were selected. A summary profile of the participants is also provided.

### **Field Trip to China**

The researcher had the privilege of being able to visit China, along with his wife and youngest son, for six weeks from late November 2005. The trip was as part

of a group of mainly Chinese students from Atherton University who were returning home to visit their parents. It was not a tour group and we were able to travel with considerable freedom across a broad swath, from south to north, of central China. The major cities visited were, in order: Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Zhengzhou, Beijing, Hohhot (Inner Mongolia), Lanzhou, Xi'an, and Chengdu. The map below (4.1) shows the route. Most of the journey was by train; 92 hours in total.



*Map 4.1: Route of field trip in China - November 2005/January 2006*

During this time, amongst other activities, six universities were visited, which included meeting with university staff, both formally and informally. We also met and developed friendships with Chinese postgraduate students, observed the dormitories and social services provided by the universities, and even had the opportunity to attend and participate in both an undergraduate class at one of the universities and several classes at a high school. This allowed some limited observation of class dynamics, class sizes, teaching resources, and teaching/learning approaches. We were often hosted by the parents of the Chinese students who accompanied us on the trip as well as by some of the universities' staff. The timing

of this visit, just before the commencement of the interviews was very helpful in having some degree of commonality with the research participants and this aided developing initial rapport in the first round interviews.

### **Participant Selection and Profile**

In this study, the Mainland Chinese students studying in postgraduate programmes within the Business and Administration Faculty (BAF) at Atherton University were chosen as the social unit. The BAF was chosen because at the time of formulating the research design there were a significant number of Mainland Chinese students within the faculty studying at postgraduate level. Postgraduate students were chosen for two reasons. First, they had already experienced in their home country tertiary-level education, thereby enlarging their capacity for reflective comparison between different education systems. Second, they were expected to have a greater maturity and, as a result, perhaps, a greater capacity for self-reflection.

Sampling within grounded theory is significantly different from that used in quantitative methodologies. A fixed sample number, 'n', cannot be predetermined (Glaser, 1998, p. 158). Glaser quoted Phyllis Stern as saying: "A concrete number cannot be offered in advance of the study, for one can never know beforehand the size and shape of the theoretical sample, how long an interview will last, or when the analysis will be complete" (p. 159). In this study, 29 interviews in total were completed. This fits with Cresswell's (2002, p. 457) pragmatic suggestion that: "One rule of thumb in graduate student research and interviewing is to collect at least 20 to 30 interviews during data collection."

Between 2005 and 2006 there was a significant drop in students who fitted the criteria for the research population. In one of Atherton University's centres, where the researcher had hoped to conduct all the research interviews, the number of potential student participants in the BAF dropped from about 30 to three. The reasons for the drop were varied but collectively powerful: increased competition from other Western countries; a shift in the home countries of international students at Atherton University away from Asia to students from Europe, South America, and North America; the collapse of a number of English language learning centres during

2004 and 2005; bad press from within China regarding the level of institutional care received by Chinese students in New Zealand; further bad press in New Zealand regarding a series of high profile serious crimes involving Asian students; and articles in the Chinese media about the costs and benefits of studying overseas that indicated the benefits were uncertain (*“Enthusiasm for Overseas Study Rationalized”*, 2005). The fall in student numbers was also reflected in the university’s other centres and nationally in other universities and tertiary institutions.

The fall in student numbers meant that it was necessary to enquire about possible participants at the university’s other centres. At the beginning of the fieldwork in early 2006 the total participant population at Atherton on all campuses was 18. All of this number were approached by the BAF and asked if they would consider participating in this research project. Of these, ten agreed to be interviewed three times each over an eighteen month period. The process of how the students were initially approached is detailed below in ‘Gaining Access.’ To protect their identity in reporting their views only initials have been used to identify individual participants and these initials do not correspond to their real names or initials. Table 4.2, which records student details as at February 2006, highlights both the homogeneity and the diversity within that homogeneity of the participants.

All the participants were Mainland Chinese, all had a prior degree/diploma (all in business related areas; all but one granted in China), and all were studying business at Atherton University. Almost all were full-time students (8:2). There was an even split between male and female (5:5) and the majority were postgraduate students compared to graduate diploma level students (8:2). Six students were single and four married, two of whom had children (one child each). One of the single students married during the course of the study making the split even (5:5). The majority of the students (7:3) were in the younger category (20-29). The oldest participant was aged 40. There was significant variety in terms of work experience within China. One student had none while the oldest student had 16 years with the average amount of work experience being 5.4 years. Three students had one or less years work experience. The average time the students had spent in New Zealand up to the commencement of their study programmes was 1.7 years. One male student came to New Zealand with no prior adjustment time and with no New Zealand based

language learning. One older female student had only one month of language learning.

Table 4.2:

*Summary of participants (as at the start of fieldwork in February 2006)*

PROFILE	FU	GT	HS	IR	JQ	AZ	BY	CX	DW	EV
Studying at Atherton	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Mainland Chinese	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Female / Male	F	F	F	F	F	M	M	M	M	M
Marital Status	S	Ma	S	S	Ma	Ma	S	Ma	S	S
Children	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N
Age (yrs)	20-29	20-29	20-29	20-29	30-39	20-29	20-29	40-49	30-39	20-29
China Degree/Diploma	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
China Work Experience	5	1	2	0	10	4	6	16	9	1
Permanent Resident	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
Time in NZ (yrs)	3	1.5	3	2	0	0.5	0	1	3	3
Language study (mnths)	0	3 m	6 m	uk	1 m	3 m	0	3 m	6 m	3 m
Studying Business	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Fulltime / Part-time	F	F	P	F	F	F	F	P	F	F
NZ Postgraduate Study	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
NZ Graduate Diploma	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y
NZ Bachelor Degree	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
Staying in NZ (yrs)	dnk	dnk	dnk	N	N	5 yrs	N	Y	N	2 <sup>+</sup> yrs
Returning to China	dnk	dnk	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y

Key:	Y: Yes	N: No
	F: Female	M: Male
	Ma: Married	S: Single
	uk: Unknown to researcher	dnk: Participant does not know
	yrs: Years	m: Months

One somewhat surprising aspect was the high number of students who had permanent residency (6:4). Presumably, this was due to the New Zealand Government wanting to attract young, well-educated people with relevant experience to work within the finance/business sector within New Zealand. Some students had worked in New Zealand for the required two year period to achieve permanent residency and to be eligible for Study Link assistance. Nonetheless, seven students believed their long term future lay in China and were planning to return. Two other students were uncertain about their future plans. The timeframe for a return to China was usually subject to whether they could find appropriate work experience in New Zealand for a number of years. One student, the oldest male, had immigrated to New

Zealand and saw his family's future, especially that of his school-aged son, to be in this country.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

The data gathering interviews were comprised of three rounds during which the aim was to interview every participant three times over a period of about eighteen months or over three semesters. The first interview in round one took place on 25 April, 2006 and the final interview of round three was held on 7 October, 2007. The interviews were conducted in a range of sites according to student preferences or by mutual agreement; including study/discussion rooms in libraries, motel rooms, cafeterias, a student's home, and at the researcher's home in three instances. Every interview started with a rapport building period, which was not recorded, followed by the interview. The interview was concluded by encouraging continued participation in the research and giving a guide as to when the next interview might take place.

Semi-structured interview guides were employed to guide the interview process (Appendices A-C). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p. 3) this: "... allows the informants to answer from their own frame of reference rather than from one structured by prearranged questions." This technique assisted in fulfilling one of the major platforms for this study in 'hearing the students' core concerns' (see Chapter Three). The semi-structured approach gave the participants the opportunity to express their views around general topic areas. The first interview guide was the most structured in order to give a comparable base of information across the participants; however, the round two guide was more general and flexible and the round three guide was more selective in nature. The variance in structure was guided by the requirements of the grounded theory approach, especially the constant comparative process (Cresswell, 2008; see below).

The interview was taped using a Sony TCM-200DV cassette recorder. It proved to be both reliable and effective. To enhance the recording, a lapel microphone was used by both the researcher and the participant. Permission was obtained from each participant before using the lapel microphone and all were

prepared to do so. The microphone and recording were tested with the student before the interview to ensure everything was functioning properly. On one occasion there was a loss of material due to the recorder battery running out. The interview transcript was, in this case, based partly on the tape and partly on interview field notes. When reviewing this transcript the student amended it to ensure it best reflected his views. In total, there were 30 hours of recorded tape time from 26 interviews plus three responses to the third round email questionnaire (see below). The round two and three interviews tended to be shorter (45-60 minutes) than the initial round one interviews (about 60-75 minutes).

Once an interview was completed the transcription process began. The tape recording in almost every case was of a superior quality and the recorder had a facility to slow down the tape pace, which helped considerably in transcribing. Once the typed transcript was prepared by the researcher, the file was protected by a password. In addition, the researcher's computer also had password only access. The transcript was printed and filed along with the tape, the field notes written on the interview guide, the consent form, and the longhand copy of the transcript. A copy of the transcript was sent to the participant to review and emend, if desired. The students were encouraged to use the Microsoft Word 'Track Changes' facility if they wanted to make any adjustments. A number did so. The students sent the manuscript back. The changes, if any, were noted and fully accepted, and new files were saved in a 'Confirmed Interview' folder. All files relating to this project were stored for back-up in two other places: on a USB flash memory device and another computer, which was also password protected.

### ***Round One Interviews***

Setting up the initial interviews was, at times, problematic. Once students had given consent to Atherton University via the Business and Administration Faculty (BAF) staff members (see below: 'Gaining Access') the students were contacted by email (telephone details were not provided by the BAF). This first e-mail contact included an attachment which contained the information sheet (Appendix G). The researcher asked if they would be prepared to meet with him, discuss the study, and, if agreeable, participate in the research project. In a few cases the email address was

not correct and no further contact was possible. Ten students, out of an original 18 contacts, agreed to participate. It took four separate occasions to fully complete the first interview round, due to the researcher's part-time status and the students being on two campuses that were significantly distant from each other. In total, the first interview was completed with ten students over a period of about five months.

The interview times were arranged in consultation with the participants. Each student, as noted above, had been sent an information sheet and, prior to beginning the interview, a consent form (Appendix H) was signed by the student. Informed consent focused on three areas: participating in the study under the conditions established on the information sheet; audio-taping the interview; and accessing enrolment and academic records held by Atherton University, if needed. Almost all the students agreed to these terms; two students did not allow access to their university records. In the end, it was decided that, in keeping with the study's desire to hear the students' voices, it was best to focus on their self-reporting of their experiences rather than using these external records for any of the participants.

### ***Round Two Interviews***

Grounded theory encourages the researcher to interview, transcribe, and code, then progress to another interview, transcribe, and code, and so on (Dick, 2002; Glaser, 1998, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This was the approach adopted throughout the interviews, except in round one, where timing factors and the need to build up an initial pool of data meant that it was best for the coding to wait until the first round was complete. The major reason for the interview and then code approach used in round two was to extend the emerging categories found in round one by expanding their dimensionality, that is, the categories breadth and depth of data. This meant that the interview structure for round two would not necessarily have the same structure as the first, and the structure needed to be flexible enough on an interview-by-interview basis to allow for emerging changes. This required the development of a guide for the interview (Appendix B). The same consent and recording process was used. The completed interviews were transcribed, submitted back to the participants for amendment/approval, and then loaded onto NVivo 7 (see below) for coding and analysis.

### ***Round Three Interviews***

One of the major functions of round three from a grounded theory perspective was to determine the core category (see below: 'The Constant Comparative Method'). To do so meant that another semi-structured interview guide was required (Appendix C). It was important to avoid 'leading' the students to disclose what the researcher felt should be uncovered. It was also important to keep in a conceptual mode, rather than move into a more detailed one, as the role of the grounded theorist is to develop a substantive theory (Glaser, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the development of the guide, the BSP, research problem, and research questions were reviewed to ensure the project was on track. The aim of the third interview was not to locate more data, unless some categories were deficient in breadth and depth.

To attain a conceptual framework the CIC (Conditions/Interactions/Consequences) model was used to integrate and refine the developing theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; see below: 'The CIC Paradigm'). This was necessary in order to reduce the number of categories and to determine how they were linked together. In addition, a comprehensive review of the memos that were written during the coding process was also undertaken. As a result of the comparative analysis and the memo review, a base core of questions was written into the round three interview guide. To ensure the completeness of data gathering, a review of the personal data obtained to date from the research participants was undertaken.

A key focus in round three was determining weighting, importance, and key relevance. For example, students were asked to rate, using a five-point Likert scale, 'how-true-for-them' statements were in regard to learner identity as they saw themselves in China (looking back) and, now, as they understood themselves in New Zealand. While the data cannot have statistical validity due to the sample size, the process encouraged the students to reflect on their major concerns and make comparisons between then (China) and now (New Zealand). It also helped to show the range of viewpoints the students had on any particular issue. The information is presented by way of tables and figures in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

Grounded theory, with an underpinning of a post-positivistic philosophy (Guba & Lincoln, 2004), is open to the utilisation of some more-quantitative techniques,

such as those noted in the preceding paragraph. However, grounded theory is a qualitative methodology and this always drives the use of any quantitative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1989). Strauss and Corbin (p. 34) describe this interaction between approaches as interplay:

Although most researchers tend to use qualitative and quantitative methods in supplementary or complementary forms, what we are advocating is a true interplay between the two. The qualitative should direct the quantitative in a circular, but at the same time evolving, process with each method contributing to the theory in ways that only each can.

### ***Email Questionnaire***

During the interview timeframe three students returned to China. One student returned home suddenly for family reasons. However, he completed an email questionnaire version of the round three interview guide (Appendix D). While an email questionnaire was sent to the other two students, they did not send back a response, despite follow up. Another student, without the researcher's knowledge, shifted from the local Atherton University centre to the northern campus. As a result he was 'missed' during the interview trip to the northern centre; however, he completed the email questionnaire. One other student could not be contacted while conducting interviews at the northern campus but she also completed the questionnaire. The email questionnaire, while not necessarily ideal, still provided a good information gathering vehicle for this stage of the research.

Overall, the data gathering process for all the interview rounds, despite the difficulties caused by distance and student and researcher workload, went smoothly. The students participated willingly and appeared interested in the process. A number commented that the opportunity to reflect on their educational journey had been helpful to them. The students shared freely, within the constraints of language and culture, about their experiences in China, their difficulties with learning in New Zealand, and how they tried to become successful learners in the new context.

## DATA CODING AND ANALYSIS

In grounded theory coding, analysing, and categorising of the data takes place at the same time. This is what Charmaz terms the “simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis” (2004, p. 497), which means analysis is not delayed until all the data is collected. Analysis began once the round one interviews were completed and subsequently as interviews and their transcripts were completed. The coding and analysis of the data used the following techniques: a research journal and memos; the constant comparative method; modelling; and the conditions/interactions/consequences paradigm. These techniques were aided by the use of the NVivo 7 software for the coding and analysis of the data.

### NVivo 7 Software

While it was possible to do the coding analysis for this project by hand, literally, day-mares of floors covered with scrupulously arranged and cross-referenced paper notes being violently disturbed by humans, natural forces, and pets helped push the decision toward a computerised option. NVivo 7 was selected as, apparently, it was the most flexible and reliable software designed to deal with coding qualitative research information (see: [www.qsrinternational.com.au](http://www.qsrinternational.com.au)). Having all the snippets tucked away carefully, and thoroughly backed up inside the computer created a greater level of comfort and assurance. An in-house training session proved helpful in providing an overview of the program, how it worked, and what it could produce. When the software was installed on the dedicated personal computer, the tutorial and help options were thoroughly explored.

There is debate about the use of computer software programs in grounded theory research. Glaser feels they are “technological traps” as they lack “creative ideational skill” and they provide a safety net for those who cannot trust their own research abilities or the grounded theory process (1998, p. 185f). However, Rennie (1996), despite his own reservations about “software constraints,” “... now encourages students to use any of the better software programmes for qualitative research.” He believes the time saved offsets concerns about the limitations that may arise by computer processing the data. In the current study it was found that NVivo

7 facilitated the storing, indexing, coding, memoing, and analysing of interview, and other, research data. It also introduced rigour to the coding process with a thorough cross-referencing and record-keeping of the process.

The program allows the researcher to select text and to code it ‘in vivo’. This term means the name of the code was ‘live’ text used by the participant. The in vivo code or ‘free node’ could be a few words, a clause, a sentence, or a few sentences. See Appendix L for an example of the coding of a student’s transcript. Once coded, as a ‘free node’, it is possible to edit the selected text to make the code more self-explanatory and/or briefer. A free node could be related to any number of categories or sub-categories within the information pile and these were linked together through a ‘family tree’ process (see below for a diagram of the coding structure).

The coding, especially during open coding, was intensive to ensure that the analysis that followed would be data rich. Each category or sub-category heading was a ‘tree node’ in the NVivo 7 nomenclature. For each sub-category (for example, an interview question/section) the number of free nodes could vary significantly, depending on the quantity of transcript material or the category’s significance. When the free nodes for all students for a particular interview subheading were complete they were analysed by grouping them into sub-sub- ... headings of like ideas/ concepts. The table below (4.3) visualises the categorisation process (Appendix M contains a printout of a section of NVivo 7 tree nodes). By the end of the project over 13,000 tree and free nodes were categorised within the NVivo 7 data structure.

Table 4.3:

*Coding categories/headings & types of nodes for round one interviews*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Tree Nodes</b>	<b>In Vivo Free Nodes</b>
Interview Section	Study in China	
Sub-heading	T08 Lecturers	
Sub-sub-heading	Teacher effectiveness	
Sub-sub-sub-heading	Effectiveness student dependent	
Original in vivo codes	1	<i>“You have to conquer yourself”</i>
	2	<i>“It means when you feel something, you are just scared, then when you think about it you say, ‘I can do this’.”</i>
	3	<i>“I can say I studied very hard because I got a lot of knowledge and information from the China study.”</i>

The categorisation facility of NVivo 7 was very helpful, although, at times, the software was slow, especially when copying or moving data at the bottom of the data pile. Categories could be located easily and direct access to the original in vivo codes (or segments of the students' transcripts) was readily available. In the final write-up this was particularly helpful. As each round of interviews, including those of the feedback or attestation group, were completed, the analytical categories for that round were re-examined and re-defined and then rolled forward into a new analysis section within the NVivo documentation (Appendix N; see: 'NVivo Software'). This meant that some kind of 'audit' trail was kept of the development of the categories and the linkage of sub-categories. The researcher did not explore the full range of facilities within the NVivo 7 software; but what was used was very helpful to the data coding and analysis process.

### **The Research Journal and Memoing**

The research journal and memos recorded the development of the research process over the series of interviews and provided the initial framework for writing up the findings and analysis. The research journal, which covered the whole period of the research project, was largely comprised of notes from meetings with the study supervisors but also incorporated 'to do' lists, questions, and 'where-to-from-here' ponderings (Appendix O). As the research progressed, especially when NVivo 7 was being utilised for data coding and analysis, the role of the hand-written research journal diminished and the NVivo 7 memo-writing facility was used more.

Memo writing occurs throughout the grounded theory process (Cresswell, 2002; Glaser, 1998, 1978). Memos record the researcher's 'frontier thinking' about what is happening in the coding process and reflective observations on the data. Rather than descriptive, the memos sought to theoretically understand and link up the categories. The memo's presentation, length, grammar, and style of English were not important. The essential thing was to write down the impression, thought, or pattern that had been noted before it was forgotten. The use of NVivo 7 for memo writing enabled the memos to be cross-referenced back to the data (Appendix P for an example of a NVivo 7 memo). In total, over 60 memos were constructed during the data analysis period.

The memos also aided the development of the interview process. Many of the memos arising from round one were factored into the development of the round two interview guide. As a result of a memo review and the on-going analysis, a base core of questions was also written into the round three interview guide. In addition, a comprehensive review of the memos was undertaken, along with a range of other reviews, before the write up of the findings, analysis, and discussion chapters of this thesis. Overall, research journaling and memoing were useful techniques and provided substantial help in guiding this project. However, the final shape of what emerged from the data was largely based around the NVivo 7 categorisation process and the modelling of those categories.

### **The Constant Comparative Method**

Grounded theory is based around a constant comparative process. Cresswell (2002, p. 451) says, “Constant comparison is an inductive ... data analysis procedure ... of generating and connecting categories by comparing incidents in the data to other incidents, incidents to categories, and categories to other categories.” Data, from different participants gathered at different times, are weighed against each other. This process continues with in vivo data being categorised and the data within those categories being re-examined back against other data. Categories are compared with categories and the emerging core category is constantly evaluated to ensure that its explanatory power is true to its links from and with the categories (Cresswell). This process creates the deep richness of the data. It occurs throughout three phases of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Each of these phases, in relation to this study, is described below.

### ***Open Coding***

Open coding, sometimes known as substantive coding, in the grounded theory process was used in Stage II of this study (see above) for both round one and two interview transcripts. The emphasis was on the inductive discovery of codes within the data by means of line-by-line analysis of the text which ‘fractured’ the data,

usually, into in vivo codes. Glaser (1992, 1978) provided some guidelines for this initial open coding which proved helpful in this study.

1. Consider four basic questions:
  - a. What is the data a study of?
  - b. What category or what property of what category does this incident indicate?
  - c. What is actually happening in the data?
  - d. How is what is happening evidence of the BSP under investigation?
2. The analyst must do his or her own coding.
3. Always interrupt coding to write memos.
4. Stay within the confines of the substantive area.
5. Do not assume the analytic relevance of any face sheet variable [for example, gender or age] until it emerges.

At this early stage, the grounded theorist seeks, in analysing the data, not to prejudge or pre-configure the data but allow it to form emergent categories so that the data can speak for itself. Glaser (1998, p. 43) states that the categories "... must earn their way into the theory by working and relevance." The constant comparative process produces the categories and fills them with meaning/data. The comparing of incident to incident and incident to category provides a continuing self-corrective to the description of the category and its properties. The comparative investigation continues until, in a later stage, the category becomes saturated in terms of its meaning. This means that additional data and coding is adding no significant additional meaning to the category and its properties. The naming of the category during Stage II is usually in 'in vivo' terms and, as such, creates its own fit for the data it represents.

Unfamiliarity meant that it took quite a long time to set up the initial data on the NVivo 7 program. One of the major factors was the format of the interviews. The round one interview guide focused on the students' study in China, the transitions and problems they encountered in their New Zealand learning, and how they responded to those difficulties. However, not all questions had been asked in exactly the same order and particular areas were followed up with different participants as the interview developed. The software handbook strongly suggested the value of autocoding these interviews but, for this to work, the transcripts for all the round one interviews had to be formatted using standard headings and sub-headings. It took a considerable period of time to make the format consistent for all ten interviews. No changes to the text of the interviews were made.

At the end of coding the round one interviews the data was extensive. The NVivo 7 software was holding, after the free coding and the categorisation of those nodes within the interview categories, about 2,850 items. Approximately 25% to 30% of these were category headings (tree nodes) leaving approximately 2,000 free nodes, which were the base of the data pile. A tree node is like a Word document folder which can save within it all items that relate to that topic. To further show the depth of the data, in the first of the three major interview themes, 'Study in China', there were 11 major categories. Within these 11 headings there were 222 tree nodes (sub- and sub-sub-categories/headings, etc.) and, in total, saved under those tree nodes were 640 free nodes. While all the free nodes were categorised, at that point of the data analysis process the categories were still tentative. Both the categories and the free nodes were able, if necessary, to be relocated to more appropriate categories that were to emerge in later coding stages.

### ***Axial Coding and Theoretical Sampling***

Stage III deepens and widens the emergent categories through the process of axial coding. Axial coding, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998), has several basic tasks:

1. Laying out the properties of a category and its dimensions, a task that begins during open coding.
2. Identifying the variety of conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences associated with a phenomenon.
3. Relating a category to its subcategories through statements denoting how they are related to each other.
4. Looking for cues in the data that denote how major categories might relate to each other. (p. 126)

In axial coding, the 'dimensionality' of the categories, that is, the quantity and quality of data that describes that category, is given breadth, height, and depth through theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is a deductive process that bends back onto the initial, emerging inductive categories produced in Stage II by open coding (Glaser, 1998) and seeks to intentionally locate data (Cresswell, 2002) in a way that will strengthen the robustness and completeness of the categories and start to build toward substantive theory making. During coding, "The investigator looks for indicators (events or happenings) representative of theoretically relevant

concepts, then compares these events or happenings for their properties and dimensions, always looking for a dimensional range or variation” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 215). This sampling of new (and review of previous) data becomes more and more “purposeful and focused as the research progresses” (p. 215).

The role of a paradigm to guide the axial coding process has been the subject of debate among grounded theorists. Glaser does not accept that the researcher should be seeking to label the categories and sub-categories in terms of a paradigm, such as ‘conditions,’ ‘actions/interactions,’ and ‘consequences.’ He feels that the constant comparison process itself will reveal the true pattern in the data (1992, p. 49). Strauss and Corbin (p. 129) agree that the researcher is primarily coding for explanations and understanding, not a preconceived paradigm per se, however, they believe other factors need to be taken into account. They also say that,

... beginning analysts often need guidance and structure during the early phases of their research careers. We emphasise strongly that techniques and procedures, however necessary, are only a means to an end. They are not meant to be used rigidly in a step-by-step fashion. Rather, their intent is to provide researchers with a set of tools that enable them to approach analysis with confidence and to enhance the creativity that is innate, but often undeveloped, in all of us (p. 14).

At this stage of the study, all of the open coding data for all the participants from round one and round two were re-read thoroughly with an eye out for major data categories, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (p. 123; see below: ‘The CIC Paradigm’). Four major categories emerged: (1) learning in China; (2) problems faced by students in New Zealand; (3) solutions sought by students; and, (4) effect on the students of the changes. By the end of the axial coding process these areas became more specific and ended up as seven major categories: (1) learner identity in China; (2) context in China; (3) context in New Zealand; (4) problems faced; (5) motivators; (6) strategies; and, (7) learner identity in New Zealand. The somewhat problematic interview scheduling (see above: ‘Semi-Structured Interviews’) allowed for reflective thinking and for patterns and gaps in the data to become evident.

Theoretical sampling is a deductive process where: (1) new data is actively sought through the ongoing adaptation of the round two interview guide; and (2) the in vivo codes from the inductive open coding process are intentionally grouped into categories and groups of categories. According to Glaser (1998, p. 95), this contains

a verificational element because as the researcher goes back, “for other and more data previous data and conceptualisations are corrected (verified).” The theoretical sampling process continues until the categories become ‘saturated.’ According to Strauss and Corbin (p. 136): “A category is considered saturated when no new information seems to emerge during coding, that is, when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data.”

However, the decision determining saturation must be a relative one as it is unlikely that one piece of research can completely determine the properties of a category. At the same time, the researcher does not want to prematurely bring to a close the theoretical sampling process. Glaser (1998) points out that one of the problems facing grounded theory is what he calls logical drift. This occurs when the researcher is deductively searching for new data options (theoretical sampling). Instead of locating new data, he or she begins to drift off into deductive theory making before the inductive development of the data categories are complete or because the researcher is feeling threatened by the time and financial constraints associated with the research project.

As noted above, round two (and three) interviews were more variable in structure which reflected the demands of theoretical sampling. Therefore, it was not possible or helpful to autocode, as was done in round one. To do so would have resulted in forcing the data back into earlier category headings which would have inhibited the development of the analysis. Therefore, round two interviews were coded and categorised after each interview was completed. The result of the axial coding stage was both the filling out of the categories already developed (while alert for new ones) and defining the outlines of a paradigm that helped re-integrate the fractured data (Strauss & Corbin).

### ***Selective Coding and the Core Category***

The third coding stage is selective coding and this begins when the researcher believes he or she has found the core category. This core category will be the category which best accounts for most of the variation in the pattern of behaviour endemic to the BSP (Glaser, 1992, p. 75). This study followed the more structured

approach of Strauss and Corbin (1998) and their criteria for choosing a central category was used. A core category (Strauss & Corbin, p. 147):

1. Must be central; that is, all other major categories can be related to it.
2. Must appear frequently in the data. This means that with all or almost all cases, there are indicators pointing to that concept.
3. Must be logical and consistent explaining the relationship between categories. There is no forcing of data.
4. Must be named or phrased in such a way that it is sufficiently abstract so that it can be used to do research in other substantive areas, leading to the development of a more general theory.
5. Must be able to explain variation as well as the main point made by the data; that is, when conditions vary, the explanation still holds, although the way in which a phenomenon is expressed might look somewhat different. One should also be able to explain contradictory or alternative cases in terms of that central idea.

At this point of the study, a great deal of interesting information had been found but the need was to find, within the data, the core category. To accomplish this several steps were taken. First, an attempt was made to develop a more specific model of the BSP. This basic diagram of a systems model set out the bones of the findings of the research at this stage. The model's development is reported on in the following chapters. Second, care was taken to look in the data for aspects that linked the major categories that emerged from the axial coding process. It was also important to remain open to potentially dissimilar or conflicting data. Cresswell calls this "zigzag data collection and analysis" (2002, p. 450).

Once the core category was found, selective coding began. Strauss and Corbin define selective coding as "the process of integrating and refining the theory" (p. 143). Here the emerging grounded theory, as developed to date, was re-examined. Flaws of logic and inconsistencies were sought in order to refine the theory as it developed around the core category. The intention in selective coding was to seek and further clarify the linkages between categories, using the core category as the integrating point. The result was the development for this study of principles, assumptions, and axioms that make explicit the relationships between, in Strauss and Corbin's terms, conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences, within the BSP (Appendix S). These principles are only provisional, and within the grounded theory methodology it is not necessarily the researcher's role to test them for the adequacy of their explanatory power (Dick, 2002; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

## Modelling

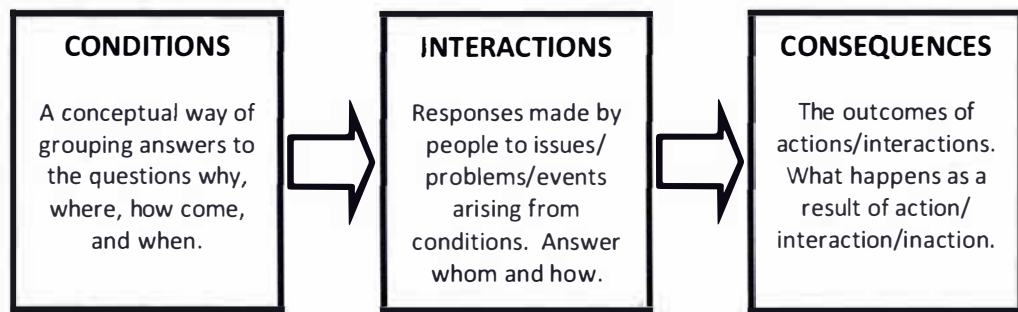
In reviewing data coding and analysis, the use of modelling has been already mentioned. The first models/diagrams were somewhat fanciful in nature using symbolism that reflected the researcher's background reading on China. While in some senses modelling was beyond where the conceptual reach of the study was at, in an early stage of the research it assisted reflecting on the data and its categories as they were emerging from the students' descriptions of their experiences. As the diagramming developed further it was based around Strauss and Corbin's (1998) three-stage systems model: the CIC paradigm (see below).

The ongoing development of the model, and the explanatory write ups of it, proved helpful in clarifying and simplifying ideas as well as providing a structure for, and within, each of the CIC stages. The constant reworking of these diagrams was an invaluable aid in terms of laying bare the central constructs of what was happening in the BSP. Particular care was taken to ensure that the models represented the data categories rather than the models dictating what the categories were. NVivo 7 has a facility for modelling but because the researcher was more familiar with Microsoft Word and PowerPoint these tools were used. As the BSP model emerged from the information the students had provided, it still needed to be further developed with them, affirmed by them, and critically examined with relevant literature to assure that it was an authentic way of describing their experience. This was a major task of Stage V, particularly in the feedback from the attestation group (see below: 'Attestation Group Feedback').

### The Conditions/Interactions/Consequences (CIC) Paradigm

A number of references have been made to the CIC paradigm. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest, within the axial coding process, that the CIC template may assist in linking a category to its subcategories and in looking for cues in the data that denote how major categories might link or relate to each other. While the process will always be variable due to the differing natures of BSPs (Glaser, 1998), the flow of conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences presented a sound starting point to explore the educational transition of the Mainland Chinese students in this study.

The adoption of the paradigm gives rigour and structure to the constant comparative method. Strauss and Corbin's template is shown in Figure 4.1.



*Figure 4.1:* Strauss and Corbin's process model (1998, p. 128)

A BSP for cross-cultural educational adjustment should be able to account for three connected areas. First, what were the conditions that affected the journey of transition, that is, those conditions or inputs that provoked the ups and downs associated with such a change? For example, what were the contexts, educational dispositions, and other factors that made this journey, at different times, difficult, tolerable, or enjoyable? Associated with the 'what' question, for each of these factors the 'when' and 'how much' questions also apply. Second, the interactions and processes that helped assure the completion of the journey. In other words, what caused the students to continue on with a daunting and, at times, overwhelming task: What kept them going? What strategic educational choices did they make? These are the motivators and strategies that allowed the students to see their journey in context, to 'conquer' the difficulties, and to cherish those factors which made the journey tolerable and, at times, enjoyable. Who did they turn to for help? Third, the consequences of the transition, that is, 'so what'. Here there is a need to ask: What ways has the previous state of learning of these students been changed by the current adjustment?

## **ANALYSIS VERIFICATION**

When the coding and analysis of the data from the participants was completed a series of steps were taken to test the validity of the emerging theory. One of these

was the second stage of the literature review process. In addition, another group of students with a similar profile, termed the attestation group, was formed to provide feedback on the analysis. The study participants were also given an opportunity to comment on the findings. Lastly, the analysis was evaluated against the grounded theory criteria for a BSP. The three verification steps of literature review, student feedback, and criteria evaluation are detailed below.

### **The Role of the Literature Review**

As briefly noted in Chapter Three, Charmaz (2004) believed that one of the marks of grounded theory is the delay of the literature review. In this study the literature was treated in a two-step manner. Initially there was a review of a more general nature which could help raise awareness for the researcher of appropriate, yet general, analytical categories that may be relevant to the study. Therefore, a review of the historical nature of Chinese education, with special regard to the influence and ongoing legacy of Confucianism, and a review of Western learning theory was completed before the fieldwork began. In line with grounded theory methodology it was important to delimit the amount of specific literature reading to reduce the natural human proclivity of pre-configuring the nature of the BSP under investigation (Glaser, 1998). Not focusing on this literature until the participant data was collected, coded, and analysed helped ensure the voices of the students were not overwhelmed. This helped provide assurance of both the richness of the data and that the findings were not predetermined.

Second, there was a delayed investigation, following Charmaz, of more specific literature that related to the elements of the emerging substantive theory. During Stage IV (see above), the theory around cross-cultural adjustment was investigated. The literature was also reviewed around the experiences of overseas students entering and learning within Western educational contexts, with a focus on Mainland Chinese students wherever possible. The data from this review was treated like all other data within the grounded theory constant comparative framework; that is, it was used to compare with the data from the interviews and the prior sections of the literature review. In Glaser's words, "It becomes important to start reviewing relevant literatures and constantly compare them to those related parts of the theory

being written so they can be woven in in a scholarly manner” (p. 206). By this point, the theory should be strong enough to withstand the scrutiny of other viewpoints in the relevant literature (Glaser, p. 76).

### **Attestation Group Feedback**

Listening to participant feedback is, along with the literature review, part of confirming the analysis in Stage V of the grounded theory process. This entailed holding feedback sessions with students, as was allowed for in the MUHEC information sheet (Appendix G). It was decided to approach students who had not been part of the original sample as it was felt that this would enhance the soundness of the study, provide a confirmatory (or otherwise) voice, and open it up to other perspectives. The Head of Faculty of the BAF of Atherton University was approached and asked if the researcher could meet with some students who fitted the participant profile of the study. He agreed to this and asked the researcher to contact a lecturer within the faculty.

The lecturer, who also happened to be Mainland Chinese, was pleased to assist and allocated time in one of his classes for the researcher to introduce the study to his Chinese students. He had earlier requested their permission to do this. The students were given a copy of the research information sheet, the project was briefly explained, and they were asked to supply their email addresses if they wanted to participate in what was termed the ‘Attestation Group’. Eventually only two of the students in the class made themselves available for the interviews, thereby highlighting the effectiveness of the informed consent process. Utilising a link with a Chinese professor at Atherton University, two further students offered to help. The professor had independently contacted these women and they rang to offer their availability.

The profile of the two student groups (the original participants and the new attestation group) were kept as similar as possible. That is, they were all Mainland Chinese, a 50:50 split of males and females, and were all studying at Atherton at postgraduate level. All members of the attestation group were single and were studying full-time. One of the females was a student in the sciences and, at first, it was thought it would not be advisable to include her as the rest of the sample, in both

groups, were business students. However, it also provided an interesting way of testing the emerging theory from a supplementary viewpoint. Variations must be able to fit within the framework of the theory and as these are incorporated into a substantive theory it enhances the theory's potential for developing, over time and with further research, into a more formal theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 160).

The first two students from the BAF class were male and they were interviewed together. The two female students, because of timing issues, were interviewed separately. The interviews took place on 13 November 2007, 6 December 2007, and 8 December 2007. For this feedback session, a PowerPoint slide presentation was prepared (Appendix Q), which showed aspects of the theory and its model, and an interview guide (Appendix E). The model was revealed piece-by-piece and responses to key questions were noted. Their feedback was also solicited on the validity, to them personally, of certain statements using a five-point Likert scale and, in one instance, they were asked to rate, in order, the degree of importance of certain issues.

The members of the attestation group were interviewed on one occasion each and this was after at least one year of full-time postgraduate study. In comparison, the original participant group members were interviewed three times over three semesters. The scrutiny of the emergent substantive theory was also extended to these original participants. They were emailed a summary of the findings and a copy of the model and asked for feedback (Appendix R). As Strauss and Corbin say, "A theory that is grounded in data should be recognisable to participants and although it might not fit every aspect of their cases, the larger concepts should apply" (p. 161).

### **Evaluation of the Basic Social Process**

Glaser (1998) set out four criteria for evaluating the soundness of a theory about a BSP. These are: workability, relevance, fitness, and modifiability. Workability evaluates the theory's explanatory power within the substantive area of the research. Relevance is an indicator of how the theory understands the people within the process and their needs. Fitness determines if the pattern of the data is well expressed by the conceptualisation of that data. Lastly, modifiability indicates

the degree to which the theory is 'open' to new insights and data. The ability of the theory that has emerged in this study to meet these criteria is set out in the subsequent chapters. A formal point of evaluation has been undertaken in Chapter Eight (see: 'Meeting the Grounded Theory Criteria').

Grounded theory only makes claims for the substantive or localised area of study, which in this case is the cross-cultural educational adjustment of Mainland Chinese postgraduate business students, as sampled, at Atherton University. Its aim is to present a coherent and compelling description and conceptualisation of this particular BSP that deeply reflects the data supplied by the participants. Externally, the researcher does not make claims for the theory beyond the BSP studied and beyond those experiences shared by the participants. Within an interpretive paradigm it is vital to present authentically the voiced experiences of the participants. The use of the range of tools and procedures used in this study to gather, code, analyse, and verify the data give credibility to having heard these voices and, through the analysis and discussion of the data, done so in a way that makes sense of their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Together these elements created a triangulation effect (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) and strength of process that provides confidence in the findings. These may be able to be linked to more formal or general theories of procedural social behaviour (Glaser; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The next section explains the way in which the data and its analysis was written up.

## **WRITING UP THE THEORY**

In a similar way to the simultaneous coding and analysis phases of grounded theory, the writing up of the research findings, analysis, and discussion was integrated together rather than compartmentalised. Therefore, for example, Chapter Five presents the findings, analysis, and discussion for the conditions stage of the process paradigm. The arrangement for Chapters Six and Seven present these three aspects for, respectively, the interactions and consequences dimensions of the CIC template. This was seen as the most effective way to elucidate the nature of the BSP and give it a 'journey' perspective.

Unlike some forms of qualitative research methods, the write up for grounded theory may not necessarily be highly descriptive. A more post-positivist approach to the methodology would present less of the participants' comments while a more constructivist approach would give these a significantly higher profile. In choosing grounded theory as the method of choice for this study (see Chapter Three: 'The Qualitative Rationale') the aim was to have both a major focus on developing a conceptually based theory and hearing the voices of the participants as they tried to understand the meaning of their experiences within the BSP. Therefore, in the write up of this research the students' words are quoted frequently. This allows the students to 'speak' but also enables the reader to 'hear'. It is hoped that the resulting write up gives an effective balance to these two demands: a clear conceptualisation and a voice for the participants.

The sources of the write up are the categorisation of the data, the memos written by the researcher, and the form of the emergent model. The categorisation of the data was held, as noted above, by the NVivo software and this was able to be accessed and used in a helpful manner. The memos contained the researcher's abstractions of, and reflections on, the data throughout the coding process and were, therefore, also a helpful basis for the report. The ever evolving design of the model which sought to depict the pattern of the data was an important frame of reference for structuring the final write up. To conclude this chapter on the implementation of the grounded theory research method the areas of ethics and researcher positioning are discussed.

## **ETHICAL AND ACCESS ISSUES**

Qualitative research, such as grounded theory, has a high ethical component because it often enquires into the social worlds of the participants (Berg, 2007). In addition, the ethical process is often problematic because of the unique way the research design emerges as it is conducted (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2006; Janesick, 2003). As a result, ethical questions can arise throughout the research process and clarifying potential ethical issues need to be well considered before the study is commenced (Creswell, 2008). Conducting ethical qualitative research "...

requires researchers to actively interpret these principles for their individual projects, tailoring these ethical guidelines to suit the unique contexts of their research” (Creswell, p. 13). The ethical issues addressed in this study included: institutional approval, gaining access, informed consent, confidentiality, and minimising harm.

### **Institutional Approval**

Since the 1950s, the onus of ethical responsibility has increasingly shifted from the individual researcher to the institution (Anderson with Arsenault, 1998). Most organisations which have people engaged in research have ‘Institutional Review Boards,’ or IRBs, that administrate the ethical clearance of research projects. In the case of this study, the ethical requirements of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) were met. These are set out in detail in MUHEC’s *Code of ethical conduct for research, teaching and evaluations involving human participation* (30 October, 2002). The requisite forms were completed and submitted to the MUHEC in July 2005. Some minor amendments were requested by the committee at their meeting of 9 August 2005. These were processed and the application, ‘Palmerston North Application 05/85’, was formally accepted on 14 October 2005. Appendices F to K contain the approved ethics documentation.

### **Gaining Access**

It was important at an early stage to ensure general site and research permission (Wellington, 2000) from the Business and Administration Faculty (BAF) of Atherton University. Gaining access can be “fraught with difficulties” (Berg, 2007, p. 184) and may require the researcher, in order to gain formal and informal access, “to consult with different gatekeepers at multiple levels in an organisation” (Creswell, 2008, p. 12). The following steps were taken: the Head of Faculty (HOF) of the BAF was approached; details of the research process were submitted; the researcher was to work within the department with the HOF’s permission; the nature and responsibilities of the research role were specified; and suitable types of (1) programmes (business), (2) level (postgraduate diploma), and (3) student population (Mainland Chinese students) were confirmed. The introductory letter to the HOF is

in Appendix F. The project was referred by the HOF to a senior BAF staff member who was responsible for international student matters.

The BAF took responsibility, in order to ensure due care for the students and to guarantee willing participation, for making the initial contact with the students. The faculty head administrator determined, from consulting enrolment records, the number of potential students (18). These students were written to by the administrator and asked to participate in the research. She also advised a fellow administrator at the northern campus of these students' details and asked that this person follow up the contacts on the list. The two administrators were important 'gatekeepers' and their role reflected the more informal dimensions of gaining access.

Meeting personally with these two people, especially the northern campus administrator, allayed any concerns they may have had about the researcher, the demands upon their time, and the worth of the project (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). It also encouraged them to be flexible in the ways they approached the students. Berg describes gatekeepers as being "... people or groups who are in positions to grant or deny access to a research setting" (p. 185). It is generally accepted that the researcher will have to work with the gatekeepers to ensure the research is able to proceed (Creswell; Bogdan & Biklen; Morse & Richards, 2002). For the steps taken by the researcher subsequent to approved access see above: Round One Interviews.

### **Informed Consent**

Potential participants in a research study must be clearly informed about the nature of the research and its implications (Anderson with Arsenault, 1998). Berg describes informed consent as "... the knowing consent of individuals to participate in an exercise of their choice, free from any element of fraud, deceit, duress, or similar unfair inducement or manipulation" (2007, p. 78). Others, such as Morse and Richards (2002, p. 205), set this out more comprehensively in terms of the rights of the participants:

Participants' rights include the following: the right to be fully informed about the study's purpose, about the involvement and time required for participation, the right to confidentiality and anonymity, the right to ask

any questions of the investigator, the right to refuse to participate without any negative ramifications, the right to refuse to answer any questions, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants also have the right to know what to expect during the research process, what information is being obtained about them, who will have access to that information, and what it will be used for.

In this study, because of language and cultural issues, the participants may have felt potentially susceptible, so care was taken to ensure the participants had a good understanding of their rights. Bogdan and Biklen stress the need to: “Be particularly sensitive and diligent in explaining yourself and getting consent when studying people who are vulnerable” (2007, p. 50). Standard practice centres on gaining written consent from participants before they enter the research process (Berg), even if the project poses minimal risk to the participants (Creswell, 2008). As described above (see: ‘Round One Interviews’) the study information sheet (Appendix G) was sent out to all participants and this was discussed and clarified before gaining consent.

In addition, due to the emergent nature of the research design in this study, which meant that it was not feasible to “provide full information” about the research process (Lodico et al., 2006), the nature of each particular series of interviews was explained before participants were asked to sign a consent form for that round (Appendix H). This reflected the concern to have a “process consent” (Ryen, 2004, p. 232) element in the research design. A fundamental bottom line is that in no way should participants feel they were coerced into joining the research project (Scott & Usher, 1999).

### **Confidentiality**

In this study, it was not possible to promise the students anonymity because of the need to follow up prior interviews and to relate data to student contexts; but assurances of interviewee confidentiality were given. The literature betrays a degree of confusion over the nature of confidentiality and anonymity. Anderson, for example, (with Arsenault, 1998, p. 20) states: “Confidential information implies that the identity of the individual will remain anonymous.” Strictly, anonymity means that there are no possible connections that exist between the participant and the

recorded data that the participant has provided. This is not usually possible with qualitative design (Berg, 2007); however, confidentiality regarding names remains vital. Creswell states: "Participant confidentiality is of utmost importance. The traditions of research in place today remind us that the lives and experiences of participants should be told, but the individuals from which the research was gleaned must be concealed" (2008, p. 240). This means that the researcher must make "an active attempt to remove from the research records any elements that may indicate the subjects' identities" (Berg, p. 79).

To assure participant confidentiality (see above: 'Participant Selection and Profile'), initials, which were systematically different from their real initials, were used to record their views (Creswell) and a pseudonym for the tertiary institute was used. This was designed to prevent readers of this thesis making connections between data, participants, and institutions (Ryen, 2004). However, this was somewhat problematic because, as Lodico et al. note, "the extensive detail [provided in a qualitative study] may make it difficult to keep confidential the persons or school being studied" (2006, p. 151). Ryen takes a realistic approach, stating that all due care must be taken to achieve best practice; however, some degree of risk may always be present.

For this project the reasonably small number of people in the participant population (18) and the high rate of involvement (10) meant that students may have been aware of others who were participating in the study and, therefore, potentially able to make data-participant linkages if they read the thesis. Similarly, despite the use of a pseudonym, the relative small number of tertiary institutions in New Zealand may mean that it could be possible for some persons to infer which institution was involved in the project. However, all possible steps and care have been taken to reduce this possibility to a level where confidentiality has been maximised.

### **Minimising Harm**

The students participating in this study were informed of, and provided with, safeguards to minimise harm through the use of the information sheet, consent forms, the amending of transcripts, and the review of the research findings. Harm, in the

context of a research project, can potentially arise in a number of ways but particularly through the disclosure of information or the violation of rights. Further safeguards built into the study included: affirming the participant's right to discontinue at any time; providing access to data and findings to the participants; and respecting the participant's time and space (Anderson with Arsenault, 1998). On all occasions, endeavours were made to ensure the least disruption to the students by holding the interviews during holiday breaks and giving them a choice of location and time. The timeframes for interview length were given and kept to (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Within the various constraints (see below: 'Researcher Positioning'), achieving relational trust in this study was always an aim. The development of this trust between the participants and the researcher was marked by honesty and up-front responses to the concerns of the participants. This was especially important because in qualitative research "Participants may be asked to discuss private details of their life experiences over a period of time. This process requires a sufficient level of trust based on a high level of participant disclosure" (Creswell, 2008, p. 239).

The trialling of the initial interview guide, the avoidance of leading questions, the affirmation of their cultural and educational heritage and experiences, and not implying any deficit connotations in comparison with the New Zealand education systems and practices, helped avoid the students providing information they believed the researcher wanted to hear. It is possible that the types of questions asked and the sort of assumptions implied may influence the students' behaviour and responses so that this effect is realised (the Hawthorne Effect – Berg, 2007; Lodico et al., 2006). However, and somewhat perversely, it could be claimed that the avoidance of such 'negatives' could result in a distortion in the participant responses as well.

One particular area of minimising harm, cultural sensitivity, requires special mention because of the nature of this research project. In some measure, even though language and cultural barriers must have existed, the fact that the students in this study were postgraduates with a higher IELTS requirement, were within an English speaking context where their language skills were growing, and had some awareness of research processes may have helped to mitigate these concerns. However, Anderson (1998, p. 22) makes it clear that: "When researching people of

different cultures both at home and abroad, informed consent can be difficult for two reasons: a) linguistic barriers, and b) people in other cultures often have difficulty understanding the nature of research and its uses.” The researcher’s positioning may also have created some barriers (see below: ‘Researcher Positioning’).

It may have been more ideal for the researcher to have been Mainland Chinese. This concern parallels the feminist assumption that homogeneity of identification would enhance the authenticity of the data (Scott & Usher, 1999). However, it may also have been difficult, to some extent, for a Mainland Chinese researcher to ‘see’ their own culture. The researcher’s awareness of this issue and a reasonable degree of experience relating cross-culturally, including to Mainland Chinese people, may once again have mitigated some of the effects of this barrier. The researcher also believes that his level of interviewing skills was enhanced by past experience, thorough preparation, and practice.

Realistically, O’Neil Green, Creswell, Shope, and Plano Clark (2007) believe that the researcher is prone to all types of cultural bias that can influence the quality of the research process and findings at every stage. They recommend that the researcher improve their cultural competency by: (1) growing self-awareness regarding cultural and diversity issues; (2) increasing knowledge of participants’ cultural view(s); and (3) developing interview skills to develop suitable/authentic interview techniques (O’Neil Green et al.).

It was also possible that different cultural bases may have resulted in a misunderstanding of the ethical processes surrounding research in the New Zealand context for these Mainland Chinese students. Ryen (2004) notes that cultural norms may make it difficult for participants to decline being involved in a research project or to not fully understand the implications of the research process. As described above, the students in this study did have some abilities in English, cross-cultural skills, and research awareness that may have helped avert this type of misunderstanding. The research ethics and protocols of this study, which included the use of written informed consent, also fostered cultural sensitivity. An area closely associated with cultural sensitivity is power distance and this has been discussed below under ‘Researcher Positioning’.

In this section on ethical and access issues, the functions of institutional approval, gaining access, informed consent, confidentiality, and minimising harm have been considered. Within this latter area an especially pertinent and related topic was addressed, that is, cultural sensitivity. Whereas it would be ideal to give an iron-clad guarantee of the effectiveness of the measures taken in this study, it is best, instead, to assure that best practice was adhered to at all times. In many respects these aspects of ethics and access, including power-distance issues, are indelibly related to the positioning of the researcher, which is the subject of the last section of this chapter.

## RESEARCHER POSITIONING

When engaging in any form of social interaction or attempts to know, the one seeking to know or interact brings with them all they have gone through before, all who they are in the present, and all their hopes and dreams for the future (Berg, 2007). This is also true for the researcher where claims of value-free and neutrally objective research, at least in the qualitative field, are no longer considered a tenable position (Berg; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b; Janesick, 2003; Scott & Usher, 1999). In this section, the researcher will attempt to define and describe his positioning; that is, his way of being and doing in regard to some essential elements of the research process. This is done, in Berg's words, because "subjective disclosures by researchers allow the reader to better understand why a research area has been selected, how it was studied, and by whom" (p. 181). To give this a more authentic voice the researcher will use the first person singular, where appropriate.

O'Neil Green et al. (2007, p. 489) state: "Before collecting data from diverse populations, the researcher is encouraged to take inventory of his/her positionality a step not often done with grounded theory researchers, but a necessary step to protect against the researcher's biases from overshadowing the respondents' voices." This awareness continues beyond the design stage and throughout the whole research process. However, it cannot be completely possible and, again, this study can only offer the best of attempts to achieve the best practice. Areas considered are philosophical paradigms, personal attributions, and reporting with integrity. The

issues of cultural sensitivity and power distance, which in this study interact intimately with researcher positioning, have already been discussed above under ‘Minimising Harm.’

### **Philosophical Paradigms**

Questions of research design tend to leap past the philosophical paradigms that underpin them. The advent of constructive epistemologies, in particular, has opened up new understandings of how a researcher can claim to know and much of qualitative research is now based on such approaches. As a researcher, one of my tasks is to identify my own position on such fundamental issues for my own sake, for the integrity of the research process, and for my readers. In this respect I probably stand to one side of a ‘pure’ constructivist position. Ontologically, I am a critical realist, I do believe there is ‘reality’ even if our knowledge of this reality is fraught with incomplete understandings and imperfect interpretations. Epistemologically, I am an objectivist yet at the same time a constructivist, seeking ever closer approximations to a knowledge of the real. As a consequence, my ontological and epistemological inclinations may place me closer to positivism than, say, feminist-post-structuralism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b).

According to Guba and Lincoln (2004), my philosophical positioning places me within the post-positivist paradigm. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996, p. 766) define post-positivism as “the epistemological doctrine that social reality is a construction, and that it is constructed differently by different individuals.” This being the case, my philosophical assumptions must coherently match the methodology of my research practice. In differentiating post-positivism from positivism, Guba and Lincoln agree that a post-positivist position encourages the use of qualitative research methods. They say:

The methodology aims to redress some of the problems [regarding positivism]... by doing inquiry in more natural settings, collecting more situational information, and reintroducing discovery as an element in inquiry, and, in the social sciences particularly, soliciting emic [insider] viewpoints to assist in determining the meanings and purposes that people ascribe to their actions (p. 25).

This description accords well with the tenets of grounded theory established in Chapter Three (see: 'Grounded Theory'). One of the subsidiary reasons I chose to conduct a qualitative study was to broaden my exposure to constructionism and to help me learn how to record in an authentic manner the experiences of those I research among. This has been a rewarding journey for an erstwhile 'numbers man'.

### **Personal Attributions**

As well as the philosophical frame I brought to the research and to my relationships with the participants, there were a range of identity characteristics or personal attributes that may also have influenced the study. These included my ethnicity (New Zealand European), gender (male), age (middle-aged), marital status (married), belief and values system (Christian), employment (various), and future plans (to live and work in China). Additionally, there were a range of cross-cultural experiences which have included personal and professional relationships with a wide, ethnically-diverse range of people and an extended period living overseas (Nigeria). The manner in which these attributes, directly or indirectly, influenced the research is difficult to quantify as the impress of these factors probably had a pervasive, underlying influence on every stage of the research process, as they do on me personally.

Many of these attributions are double-edged swords. On one hand they could provide a means of identification with the research participants but at the same time they could create either barriers or unhelpful assumptions. This uncertainty increases when you undertake interviews in a cross-cultural context. Fears about your level of cultural awareness, your cultural sensitivity, the language factor, the participants' reaction to you as a researcher and as a person, and others issues cloud the horizon. For example, some of these attributes could, and I felt did, assist in the important task of building rapport with the participants. My knowledge base of things Chinese, some rudiments of Mandarin, our visit to China, having many Chinese friends, and our future plans helped to build relationships.

Yet, it is possible that my identity may in some ways have lessened my ability to hear well. Potentially, there probably was a gender barrier as half of the

participants were females. It no doubt helped that I had a female recording assistant who was present at the interviews and that all interviews with female participants were conducted in semi-public (yet auditorially discrete) sites. As already noted above (see: 'Minimising Harm'), language, especially when the researcher is trying to hear well and authentically portray the voices of the participants, becomes an issue. This is compounded when I am seeking to elicit from my respondents, Mainland Chinese students, potentially strongly held and felt perceptions about their education process. At best, these personal attributes are offered to signify the researcher's awareness of them yet at the same time to acknowledge the existence of 'blind spots.'

Power distance, which can be exacerbated by cultural factors, may also influence the relational and data quality. As indicated in the literature review, the Mainland Chinese students came to New Zealand from a homogenised cultural context where high power distance relations exist within a hierarchically-framed social and educational structure (see Chapter Two: 'The Teacher'; 'Home Culture Societal Variables'; 'Implications for the Mainland Chinese Learner'). Power issues are often identified as being a significant barrier in researching cross-culturally (Scott & Usher, 1999; Anderson with Arsenault, 1998). It is possible that the identity of the researcher as an older, experienced person could induce a sense of acquiescence by the students.

The researcher tried to counteract this by being aware of the issue, downplaying his experience, identifying as a student, dressing appropriately (as a student), sharing common experiences, seeking to identify and affirm things and experiences Chinese, avoiding deficit connotations and potentially sensitive topics (for example, politics), and working hard at building trust and rapport. Relating in this way did not entail any degree of deception; these were authentic characteristics and desires of the researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In addition, the informed consent and confidentiality processes also reduced some of the power differentials at play. While these strategies could not fully resolve these power issues they represented the pragmatically available steps.

## Reporting with Integrity

This last issue is intimately related to the philosophical and personal positioning of the researcher. If knowledge is indeed constructed and the purpose of constructing this knowledge in this study is to represent the experiences of the participants, how can the researcher have confidence that what is presented in the research findings has integrity? Every decision made about the research process and the manner in which the report is written have epistemological consequences (Scott & Usher, 1999). On one hand the researcher is attempting to be intimately engaged with the participants as they share their experiences in order to construct that emic (insider) account. On the other hand, the researcher is also seeking to be outside of that experience and trying to construct the broader meanings and linkages that give meaning. This balancing of engagement with distance requires a constant adjustment of positioning.

When it comes to reporting findings the call is for honesty (Creswell, 2008). However, as Scott and Usher point out, there are problems associated with telling others' stories. They argue that: "Accounts by participants are always, in effect, presentations" and that it "... assumes unjustifiably that participants have full knowledge of the perspectives that underpin their everyday actions. In other words, social actors are not able to transcend the limitations of consciousness" (p. 132). As a result, they believe that there is no ideal way that data can be collected to avoid these issues. In line with constructivist thought, they consider they are not denying "... the potential rationality inherent in good research, but ... suggest that in real life only a limited form of rationality can exist" (p. 132).

This study has tried to be in step with the "potential rationality of good research" (Scott & Usher, p. 132). The research roles and techniques (see above) used in this research have helped to assure this. In particular, the constant comparative method, with its inductive/deductive movement, has a foundational part to play. In addition, the researcher has endeavoured to "solicit feedback from respondents by having them review and respond to transcripts" (O'Neill Green et al., 2007, p. 485; see also: Scott & Usher) and to a summary of the research findings. I have also tried to make "... a concerted effort to include research conducted by diverse scholars" through accessing writings by Chinese authors and Chinese

newspapers (O'Neill Green et al., p. 487; see: Bibliography). As noted above, I have tried not to portray aspects of Chinese education or learners as being in deficit and tried to balance positive and negative elements.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p. 50) claim that "... the most important trademark of a researcher should be his or her devotion to reporting what the data reveal." In faith with this premise, the findings and analysis in the following chapters try to present the voices of these Mainland Chinese students in a way that allows for 'thick description' yet also constructs a meaningful, even compelling, conceptualised explanation of the BSP of cross-cultural educational adjustment. In seeking to meet both these requirements I have tried to meet the yardstick set by O'Neil Green et al.: "When developing the written grounded theory report, the researcher should strive for a narrative style that presents the respondents' voices and exposes the cultural conditions under which they were created" (p. 489).

In this last section of this chapter, the researcher's positioning has been explored. Ultimately, whether the issues are philosophical, processual, or personal, these factors do affect the research. With the adoption of 'best practice' protocols and researcher awareness, the degree of influence can be minimalised but never completely removed. Researcher positioning is particularly important when dealing with research participants who come from different cultural contexts (O'Neal Green et al.).

## SUMMARY

This chapter has described the implementation of grounded theory methodology into the specific requirements of this study. The lessons of the trial study were noted and the schedule for data collection, analysis, and writing up was also given. Next consideration was given to how the data for the study was gathered, coded, analysed, and verified. The role of a field trip to China, the process of participation selection and the profiles of the participants, and the use of semi-structured interviews for data gathering were described. Under data coding and analysis the use of NVivo 7 software was explained along with research journaling and memoing, the constant comparative method, model construction, and the CIC

paradigm. In relation to analysis verification the following matters were discussed: the specialised role of the literature review in grounded theory; the engagement of an attestation feedback group; and the evaluatory process applicable for a BSP under grounded theory. A section was included on how the data and its analysis was written up.

The last two sections of the chapter examined the ethical and access issues that affected the study and researcher positioning. The researcher has attempted to the best of his ability to meet the 'best practice' requirements that qualitative research requires (see Chapter Three: 'The Qualitative Rationale') so that the voices of the students can be heard within an openness to the whole BSP so that something of its full breadth can be observed. By doing so it is hoped that the resulting report authentically displays the complexity and 'reality' of the cross-cultural educational adjustment these students have had to make and yet do so in a way that is both simple and clear without being reductionist.

The next three chapters are a full, within the bounds of this thesis' presentation requirements, description of the data, findings, analysis, and discussion that emerged from this research process. The breakdown of the chapters follows the basic CIC model. Chapter Five looks at the conditions that affected the journey of transition. Chapter Six investigates the actions/interactions within the new environment, which caused the students to adopt learning strategies and develop motivators that saw them through a difficult time of transition. Lastly, Chapter Seven looks at the educational consequences of this transition, that is, the effect that it had on the students as learners. This tripartite format is held together and illustrated by the progressive and pictorial disclosure of the BSP model.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONDITIONS

#### *Journey to the West: ESTABLISHED IDENTITY*

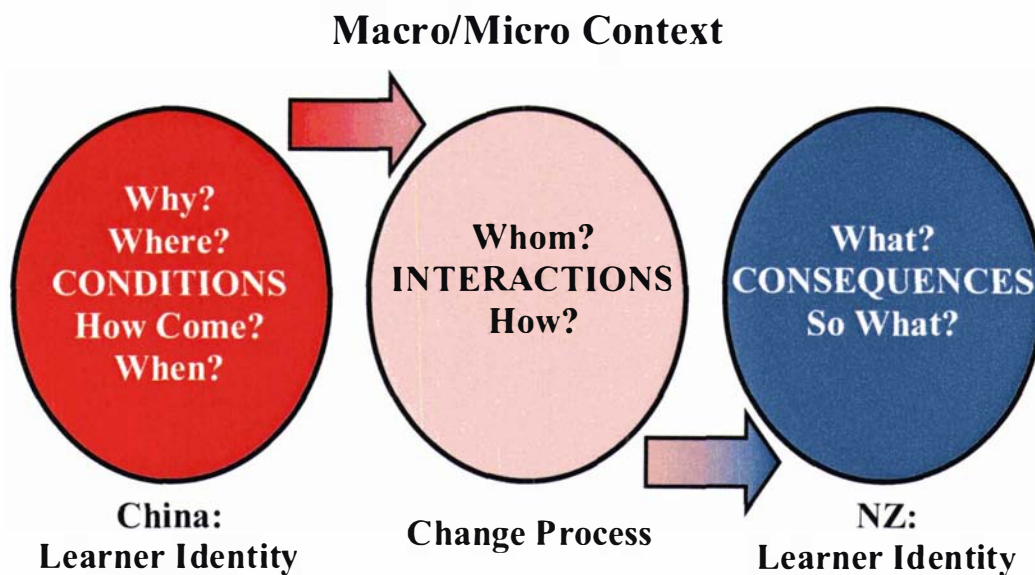
#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins a trilogy. Like the three volumes of Wu's *Journey to the West*, which record the travels of a Buddhist monk from China to India to fetch the holy sutras, these three chapters reflect the journey of today's Mainland Chinese students as they seek the 'wisdom' of the 'West'. Within these chapters the findings, analysis, and discussion are combined, reflecting the nature of grounded theory methodology, and they are sequenced to highlight the movement of these students from their home educational context to their experiences of Western education, as represented in a New Zealand university. The purpose is to produce a theorisation of the evidences that these students have provided of the basic social process (BSP) of cross-cultural educational adjustment.

Befitting the journey motif the outcomes of this study are progressively discussed. The outline follows the conditions/interactions/consequences paradigm suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and this is pictured below in Figure 5.1. Chapter Five deals with the conditions that existed in the context and educational experience of these students before they came to study in New Zealand. Chapter Six discusses the interactions that caused the cross-cultural educational adjustments to take place and how the students responded to the challenges they faced. Chapter Seven sums up the nature of the change that has taken place and names the central concept which links almost all the significant aspects of their journeys together in a compelling way.

The findings and analysis are presented within this motif of journey. This is done in a variety of ways. First, the aim is to theorise, so the conceptualisation of the data is used as the basic structure of these chapters. Therefore, the major headings

used represent the basis of the emerging theory. To assist in highlighting this structure a diagram is built up progressively through each chapter to keep this to the fore. The keeping of the primacy of the theory is a reflection of and coherent integrator of the grounded theory methodology. Another primary task of this methodology is to highlight the theory's ingrained reliance on the data. Therefore, hearing the voice of the participants is highly valued and this is reflected in the use of italicised quotes from these students.



*Figure 5.1: Conditions/interactions/consequences paradigm (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)*

The findings of this study come from the transcripts of a series of interviews with ten Mainland Chinese students over an 18 month period. As such the findings and their analyses are based on the accounts of these particular students. Therefore, the views expressed on culture, society, family, education, change, coping with change, and many more elements reflect the students' perspectives. This gives the study a powerful emic, or insider, view of these larger issues and this is a significant response to Ward and Masgoret's call (2004) for qualitative research with Chinese students that seeks to understand their experiences in New Zealand.

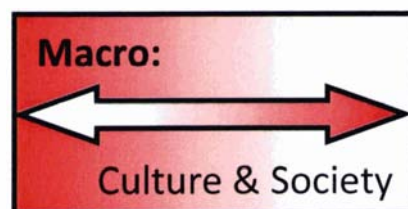
However, the theorisation has limited generalisability as accepted within grounded theory methodology (see Chapter Three); therefore, it is called a substantive theory. This theory is valid for the students involved in this project and further testing of the theory, which is outside the scope of this study, may affirm, extend, and indeed correct this depiction of cross-cultural educational adjustment.

Despite this, as the students' voices are listened to and understood, a picture emerges of learner identity under the influence of significant change factors.

Contextual issues in China have been dealt with in this chapter, which is subtitled 'Established Identity.' In particular, it has sought to understand who the Mainland Chinese students were as learners in China before they came to New Zealand. The macro and the more micro influences, bearing in mind that such distinctions are somewhat "artificial" (Strauss & Corbin, p. 185), have been looked at in terms of how they have formed and informed these students as learners. The social and cultural background, particularly as it relates to the students' educational context, has been investigated within the macro dimension. Two more micro influences have been examined: the family background and the educational context. It could be argued that education fits within the wider or macro influences. However, for this study, which directly connects context to the learning ecologies of these students, it has been taken to be of more immediate influence than the cultural and social factors. A number of learner identity dimensions emerged from the data that portray how the macro and more micro influences in China affected these students.

## MACRO CONDITIONS

As the students talked about their background in China certain influences became apparent. This section looks at the macro influence of culture and society.



The students' view is focused, as a result of this study's agenda, through the lens of education and how culture and society has influenced the students as learners. While culture and society are not the foci of this study, and consequently not the heart of the interviews with these students, their comments highlights some aspects, albeit in a fragmentary way, of the cultural and social macro dimension which have influenced them and those around them. Not many comments were made about culture and society per se, except in terms of the influences they experienced on their educational endeavours from the largely homogeneous Chinese worldview.

The primacy of culture in relation to education is reflected by DW who said “*I think Chinese culture is quite different from Western culture. The Chinese learn their own culture first. After you study in China you can learn the Chinese culture and customs. This is very important for a Chinese person*” (1-0606)<sup>2</sup>. EV’s views concurred with this. He said, “*I think it is a kind of traditional opinion in Chinese people’s minds that forces people to get a higher education. That’s what I think*” (2-0407). While there is little doubt that culture had and has a pervasive influence on these students their perception of it was at times intriguingly juxtaposed with a strong sense of self. In her second interview GT, in relation to the societal pressure to succeed educationally, said “*... because everyone doesn’t want to be behind and everyone has self-value, they always want to choose their own values from other people*” (2-0906). Here there is a mix of both collectivist and individualist thought, although the collective tends to be dominant.

The students’ feeling of pressure to study, and to study well, arising from their culture was apparently linked to different influences. First, there was a sense of expectation to conform, not only from parents but also from extended family and friends. FU noted, when asked about the impact of the one child family on family life: “*The child will still respect the parents even though they are the ‘emperor’ in the family. Even if they don’t want to, their neighbours or their friends, some people around them, all do it this way. So they think: I should do it this way*” (2-0706).

Second, there seemed to be a very strong desire to pursue a better future through educational achievement. When asked why he felt pushed to study hard, DW focused on the role of culture. He said, “*I think it is Chinese culture. In Chinese culture the young boy or girl they have to study. This is their first job*” (2-0906). Once this journey has been started it is hard to get off the road. GT commented, “*For the people themselves it is a very hard thing because they already have a good start. The only way is to go ahead and achieve another higher step ... If you stand on the first step and you get a good result it is very hard for you to go back because everyone is looking at you and are saying, ‘You already achieved the first step with a good or an excellent start’*” (2-0906).

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<sup>2</sup> Student interview referencing has the following format: student ‘initials’, e.g., AZ; interview number, e.g., ‘1’, ‘2’, or ‘3’, or, for the attestation group, ‘A1’, ‘A2’, or ‘A3’; date (-monthyear), e.g., -0607. Hence, AZ2-0906 is AZ’s second interview held in September 2006.

Educational attainment may provide a way of social positioning as EV explains: *“China has a large population and, from their point of view, [education] gives them a way to judge people’s knowledge. It gives them the standard”* (2-0407). The pressure to perform does not stop when the study ends. *“At school you have to work hard to get a good job. When you get a good job you have to work hard to try to get promoted”* (EV3-0907). The mode of study also has social ramifications. Part-time study may be seen as a smirch on the family. *“If you are just a part-time student other people will think, ‘Hey, what’s wrong with your child? Why is that child part-time? Are they lazy or something?’ If you are working in a part-time job when you are doing your study they will be thinking, ‘What is the problem with your family?’”* (HS2-0906).

The students were also very clear about the consequences of ‘failure’ to achieve. BY said: *“They feel [life] would be finished because it is a social problem of China. If you don’t get a higher education then you lose most of the opportunities for a career”* (2-0906). This was also reinforced by EV who commented that, *“... you may fail and your family may not be able to help you do it all again. Then you can’t keep doing your study so your life will become very hard”* (2-0407). Life spirals downwards leading to socially undesirable work roles such as labouring (DW2-0906). The consequences of failure are discussed in more detail below when the micro influence of education is examined.

Frequently, the students mentioned luck and good fortune. There is no doubt that the students in this study worked very hard to achieve their level of academic success in China, yet various constraints within society meant that they felt hard work alone could not guarantee the desired outcome. Therefore, the students often saw good luck as being integral to their success as well. This good luck may be a result of the parents having enough wealth to provide the education the family desires for the child (FU2-0706). Or, it could be that despite an inauspicious level of educational achievement the student had somehow managed to get past the hurdle of the national university entrance exam (FU2-0706). Or, it may be that the competition levels within China, caused by a huge population and limited opportunities, makes a student’s progress, in comparison to others who do not succeed (CX2-0706), seem like fortune is on his or her side (BY2-0906).

Since the advent in China of communism, the job a person had was seen as an ‘iron rice bowl,’ where everything the person needed from money to food to healthcare was taken care of in the employment context. However, since the opening of China to market forces in the late 1970s the certainty and security of work have been eroded significantly. Even when the government may provide work, graduates may prefer to look elsewhere for other opportunities with less strings attached (BY1-0506). The level of study is also becoming increasingly an issue as more students study at tertiary level and employers become more selective: “... *in China, if you apply for a job and you only have a bachelors degree then it will not be enough*” (EV3-0907).

The students recognised that China was changing. Alternative routes, other than a university education, to gaining social respect were now possible. This may be through small business enterprises or through alternative (e.g., vocational) schooling opportunities (CX2-0706). As FU put it, “... *now they might have more opportunities to continue their study or to find a job or whatever. But in the old times it meant ‘finished’*” (FU2-0706). Due to job market constraints the old attitudes to part-time work is also changing. EV noted on a recent trip back to China that “*I read lots of newspapers and there are lots of students who didn’t go back to their home towns for New Year. Instead they tried to get a part-time job during the study break*” (2-0407). Work experience is becoming more valued by employers.

Two other major change factors appear to have a symbiotic relationship. The opening of the economy to market influences and the official restriction of families to one-child, mean families have more wealth to pursue educational objectives. AZ stated: “*More and more families can earn more money than our generation and my parents’ generation. Because they have more money, they can provide a better environment for their children. They want their children to grow better than the other children. So they provide everything their children want*” (2-0906). This impacts on the accessibility and location of university education. DW believed, “*In some families, where the parents are rich, the children will not study very hard because, maybe, they think if they don’t pass the test, the national examination, their parents can pay more to buy a place in a university or send them overseas*” (2-0906).

The desire for English language competencies was a primary motivator for these students to study overseas. Within China there is a growing demand for people with English skills. *“That’s why there is a big education market for English language schools. They hire lots of Western teachers and teach them reading, speaking and this kind of stuff”* (EV2-0407). On one hand, the demand causes them to seek English learning opportunities within China. The families *“... spend a lot of money on that as the tuition fee is quite high in the private English language schools. But the result is not the same as they hope for. So lots of students can’t pass their IELTS exam in China”* (EV2-0407). For many, the opportunities to learn English are limited in the school environment where the emphasis is largely on reading and writing (FU2-0706) and life is too busy already (CX2-0706). On the other hand, the desire for English is also a catalyst for students to study overseas.

This brief summary of the students’ occasional comments on the wider or macro social and cultural influences on education has highlighted a number of factors. First, the societal demand for education is still very high within China. Second, this demand is largely based on the belief that education will provide a better future for the student and the family, both socially and financially. While attitudes to a lack of success and the degree of acceptability of alternative pathways are changing, the passion for education is still a strong societal driver. Next, the more micro influences of the family and education, already inextricably linked in with culture and society, are discussed in more detail.

## MICRO CONDITIONS

Like the macro influences, family and education have a strong traditional basis but a continuing legacy into the future. The traditions of the past, and its ongoing legacy, help form the identity of the individual Chinese learner.



## The Family

Historically, the family has held a high place within Chinese society. As with culture and society, the role of family was looked at in relation to education. In doing so, the high value families place on education and the sacrifices made to obtain it became evident. This brings into focus the desires that parents have for their children's education and the pressures that this places upon them as students. The family has always valued education, but not so much for the sake of knowledge as the advancement of the individual, the family itself, and society as a whole.

### *The Value and Price of Education*

Traditional cultural values and the immediacy of change within China today combine to make education highly valued. The students' comments support the literature review's finding concerning the "Love of Learning" as a continuing legacy of Confucianism (see Chapter Three). GT said, "*The genuine Chinese family puts education in a very important place for their whole family*" (2-0906). The high esteem of education means that families see this as the greatest treasure and a treasure that they are prepared to pay the greatest price for. In the words of CX: "*The families' biggest investment is in their children's study. ... That's one reason many parents spend a lot of money to send their children overseas so they can become better educated*" (2-0706). This requires very significant levels of sacrifice which the families are prepared to accept. GT believed that: "*In China, you know, especially today, parents are always thinking to have their child to study and to study at a high level. ... If you have this opportunity they will encourage you even to use all the family fortune to support you to study*" (1-0606).

This focused concentration on education is sharpened by the one-child policy. "*It's just one child in today's Chinese family. [The family] may give you what they have, all they have, including time and money to support you*" (GT1-0606). However, it is not only the parents. The one child policy has reconstructed the basic family structure into an inverted pyramid with the maternal and paternal grandparents on top (four people), the parents below them (two), and the one child at the upended apex of the triangle (CX2-0706). Six people's social support and

wealth resource is focused on the one. Often this financial and personal commitment is granted with no expectation that the money will be repaid: *"They don't expect you to pay the money back to them. They provide money for you so you can have a better education. Most of them don't expect you to pay them back"* (EV2-0407). However, this does not mean the resources come without expectations.

### ***Parental Desires and Expectations***

The parents' ability and desire to educate their children were based, in part, on increased wealth and the parents having been deprived of educational opportunities. EV said, *"... a lot of Chinese people become rich. So they want to spend more money on the children's education because they didn't have good education so they want the child to get a good education"* (2-0407). However, the spotlight is on the welfare of the child and the benefits that education can bring to the child and through them the family. *"In China, children's enrolment as university students is a great thing to Chinese families. It always does great help to this family. I think it is great and happy for us to be a student at university as well. ... It could change your future. Parents always hope you study hard and be a top student"* (GT1-0606).

To achieve the aim of a quality education the parents do place expectations on the child. The chief of these is that the child works hard. In GT's case, because she came from a poorer area, this was particularly true. Her parents said to her, *" 'If you want to go outside [your 'poor' province to study], work very hard; if you want to try another style of life and get a higher level of life, just work hard, study hard.' I don't know how to translate this traditional saying: 'If you can eat what other people won't try, then you could be the top person.' "* (2-0906). The aim is always to go higher: obtaining a higher degree (BY1-0506); getting a better job (GT1-0606); moving to a higher social position (DW1-0606). This pressure is exerted until it seems that no more progress can be made. One of the study's participants said, when asked about those children who may not have the ability to excel academically: *"We can't force them to do anything if they really don't like study. But at first parents and children still try and if there is really no hope then they will change their ways"* (GT2-0906).

The expectation of families for their children to succeed is intensified by the concentrated focus of the one-child family. In China, this is known as the ‘little emperor’ syndrome. The child is looked after by the grandparents while the parents both work full-time. *“The young people get whatever they want, if their grandparents can get it for them. Even if it is a bad thing, if they can get it they will get it, even if it is not good for them”* (DW2-0906). While the immediate desire is for the child to be happy it still comes with the expectation that it will also encourage them to learn. *“So the child in the family is like a king or queen. All the family focus on the child. They are likely to spend more money on the child to buy lots of good things for them and just wanting them to be happy and learn more”* (EV2-0407). In some cases such indulgence may lead to unhelpful consequences (EV2-0407), however, the little emperor syndrome is possibly limited to a minority of children (EV2-0407) born after 1990 (AZ2-0906).

To achieve the required level of education there was a constant pressure on students to achieve high marks. From BY’s perspective: *“If I did well it was OK. If I made a mistake, of course I was [punished]. I remember that the great concern was the marks”* (2-0906; see also DW2-0906). Parents worked in tandem with teachers to supervise (GT1-0606) and to achieve the goal. *“The family sets a goal for the child: ‘What do you want to do in the future?’ The parents encourage the child to do that and encourage the teacher to educate their child”* (CX2-0706). Failure carries with it social stigma within a populous and tightly grouped community. *“If they fail in the test, the national examination, someone will be thinking they are a regret to their parents”* (DW2-0906). In AZ’s words: *“... their parents may think their children are useless, or something”* (2-0906).

One level of payback for the parents is the social prestige that comes from a child excelling at school and university. In HS’s words, *“Their success is the parents’ honour, I think”* (2-0906). DW said: *“I had to study hard, to get a higher score to make my parents satisfied. Otherwise, they would feel I lost their faces”* (3-EQ). This is especially true when a child goes overseas to study. To EV, *“... when the child goes to study overseas this is big news around the family. The family’s friends and all the relatives know it”* (2-0407). Even though the geographical distance is great when they are studying overseas the parents’ message is consistent:

*“They just say, ‘If you want to stay there you have to arrange your time well. You can’t just let yourself relax because you can’t just waste your time.’ They are always talking to me like this” (HS1-0906).*

### ***The Children’s Response***

In one sense the children’s reaction was determined by the socialisation processes within the culture and more particularly within the family. In responding to why Chinese children accept this degree of pressure, FU said, *“Because they are not so independent. So they will follow their parents’ or teacher’s instructions”* (2-0706). There were a variety of other reasons expressed for why children responded in an accepting way to these pressures. EV felt some just did what their parents wanted (2-0407); DW agreed (2-0906) but added it was also at times for their teachers or to prevent their parents losing face (3-EQ); FU thought they did it to please their parents (2-0706) and GT thought it was a way to make them happy (2-0906); AZ believed it was a function of economic dependence (2-0906); and CX thought it was a way the children had of rewarding their parents for the sacrifices they were making (2-0706).

The socialisation process led to an internalisation of the expectations for the children. As GT put it: *“As for me, I think that is my duty. Not because my parents have this hope, as this really gives me pressure, but because I want to be a good student”* (2-0906). HS saw this pressure as something to be expected and felt little pressure because of that. She commented: *“No pressure. I think [the parents] should think like this”* (1-0606). HS felt that she had set her mind to what she needed to do, although she admitted that her parents may have had a decisive early influence on this mindset, and her parents did not need to pressurise her: *“My parents did not do this very much because I had my own ideas. My idea was not wrong so they thought, ‘OK, you have this idea. It is OK for you; for your life’ ”* (2-0906).

However, there was some recognition, and this may have been partly facilitated by exposure to another culture, that following parental expectations was not always and necessarily ideal. DW felt that: *“It is from the parent goals and wishes. This is not a good thing”* (2-0906). HS felt some relief now she was

overseas as she was able to take care of her own study situation without her parents' financial assistance due to her part-time work and that this lessened the pressure. She said: "*Now I do everything by myself. I do not ask for my parents' help*" (2-0906).

In this first micro influence of family the high value and sacrificial price of education were highlighted. The students considered the strong desire their parents had for education had traditional origins, but was also a function of the new wealth and opportunities in China. The family, including the extended unit, was focused on ensuring the necessary social and economic support was there for the child. With this commitment came a strong expectation of performance and success and the cost of failure was measured in social as well as financial terms. Generally, because of socialisation processes, the child accepted this as a given, however the one-child phenomenon of the 'little emperor' may cause some to reject these pressures and, for others, the chance to go overseas allowed them to see this situation in a new perspective. Next, the more micro influence of education is considered.

## **Education**

The prominent place of education in understanding the adaptation process that these students experience, and the direct effect of education on the students, has led to its inclusion as a 'more' micro influence. It has been considered, through the voices of the students, under the following headings: the benefits and strengths of education in China; the national university entrance examination; the teaching and learning processes; and the changes in education in China. The major aim of this examination, like the review of society, culture, and family, was to prepare the foundation for conceptually determining their learner identity, first, through listening to the students and, second, beginning to frame what these identity elements were.

### ***The Benefits and Strengths of Education in China***

Education in China is esteemed very highly and one of the most highly prized benefits that the students mentioned about their study in China were the relationships

they formed. In one sense this is surprising if the educational pathway is largely an instrumental one aimed at achieving objectives beyond knowledge and learning (see Chapter Two). In another, it helps explain the value the students placed on relationships, because if learning was just a means to an end, then this may enhance the likelihood that they will value the companions they share the journey with. This stance is also likely to be reinforced by the more collectivist nature of Chinese society and may also reflect the desire for friendship that arises when so many students may come from one child families. Other benefits mentioned by the students included preparation for the future and growth in knowledge and skills.

### **Classmate relationships.**

One distinctive feature of the Chinese university system is that it has largely retained the high school class system. *“Chinese university students are still in a class – like a team. In this team, everyone is familiar with each other. So, you can get a good community and make good friends and good relationships. That is a good way.”* (GT1-0606). Moreover, students were almost always in the same class, with the same group of students, for all their subjects. This fostered a deep closeness in relationships (BY2-0906). As DW expressed it, *“We know your character and your temperament and everything. We help each other. This relationship, this friendship is very deep”* (2-0906).

The closeness was also fostered by most students within the same class groups living in university-supplied dormitories on campus. This meant there was constant access to one another at the same class level and also to senior students. This had spinoffs not only in terms of relationships but also academically (DW2-0906). During the writer’s visit to China in December 2005/January 2006 some of the dorm rooms were visited and it became apparent why the rooms could create this level of closeness among the students. In one university visited there was a ‘graduated’ accommodation system. Undergraduates were usually in a room with six or seven other students, master’s students had four per room, and doctoral students two. This is, apparently, a common pattern across China. One other benefit of this system is that these relationships continued into the future. AZ noted: *“I think the really important thing for us is the relationship during the future careers”* (1-0506). EV

agreed, saying, “*The student relationships was one of the things as, maybe, they were very helpful for your future*” (1-0906).

While, overall, the classmate structure established extremely strong and much valued friendship bonds CX noted (1-0406) that it did have some aspects of being a “*closed society*”. HS explained this further by saying, “*When you study, if you just study like the Chinese do in China, and you study, everyday you just study, and you don't think about where the money comes from and you don't know the effort you need to put in, then this is not good*” (2-0906). These ‘close-ness’ and ‘closed-ness’ aspects of university life in China are a continuing feature of its educational environment (EV2-0407). However, the students noted what they perceived to be a change in the type of student studying in today’s universities in China. Due to greater access and students coming to bigger cities from less prosperous centres, EV believes (2-0407):

*... their mind is different. So they are more likely to join social activities and see more outside and to know what society looks like, especially the people who come from the countryside. When they study in Beijing, in the big city, they are likely to go outside and explore the city. ... The coin has two ways. Some students, to take a very simple example, have not known about the internet games before they come to the university or the big city. Some of the city students have the internet games or other new things for them. They became become very interested and addicted to that. That's a bad influence on them. [However, w]hen they see the changes in the big cities they will be impressed about everything so they will want to stay in these cities. They want to change their lives and they don't want to go back to the small city or the countryside so they study hard and try to get a good result and try to have a good future.*

One finding related to the classmate structure was the degree of cooperation between students. Chinese students have in this well-developed classmate system the provision of many opportunities to discuss their learning with others. Yet when asked, the students felt that, in China, they studied separately and independently (JQ1-1006; DW1-0606). The solution to this seeming paradox may lie in the nature of the assessment system, which was, and still is, almost entirely examination based. A student was responsible for preparing for the exam and the level of cooperation that did take place did not change significantly where the work was focused: individual performance in the examination. This is an interesting perception challenge, as most Westerners see Chinese students, and Asian students generally, as ‘collective’ learners. However, the type of cooperation found in Western

universities, for example, assessed group project work, was outside of the students' range of learning experiences.

### **Preparing for the future.**

Education is seen as preparation for a better future. JQ said, "*I think many of the students think that the study is a good thing for people to do than work. That doesn't mean we don't want to work. I think good study is a good opportunity to find a good job in the future*" (1-1006). A better future usually is framed in terms of a good job and more than sufficient money (DW1-0606; FU1-0406; GT1-0606;). Normally, the students select their major with a specific career focus in mind (AZ1-0506). Hence, education is a pathway and, therefore, may have more of an instrumental value than an intrinsic one.

The pragmatism (Dawson, 1981) and instrumentalism (Shen, 2001) that shaped the love for learning was a commonality between the findings of this study and the literature. FU believed that this may be too narrow but "*... after university you have to go to the society. So, just like in high school, your thinking is quite narrow, not so mature. But after university you can connect with more people*" (1-0506). There was a sense of confidence that after graduation any restrictions study may have imposed would be compensated for by wider prospects. EV said, as he considered the future: "*I think every student after they graduate from university want more opportunities. That was what I was feeling when I graduated from university*" (1-0906).

### **Knowledge and skill growth.**

Despite the largely instrumental nature of education in China, the students did affirm the pursuit of knowledge in their education in China. CX enjoyed the prospect of exploring knowledge. He said: "*When you learn something in the subject, you will be interested in that subject. You want to read more. Knowledge is just like the ocean. You get just one drop of water but there are so many things to learn. I enjoyed this*" (3-0907). JQ agreed: "*I like to study. To learn some things about what I do not know*" (1-1006). GT felt that the teachers encouraged the

students to use their ability to grow in knowledge and prepare for the future. She reflected, *“That is strength. They encourage the students to learn by themselves, use their own ability to stretch their knowledge. That gives us our first step toward the society before we go into society”* (1-0906).

In addition CX appreciated the greater time, in comparison to the pressured high school years, that he had to learn. He noted, *“Once you enter the higher-level education, you can have a longer process to learn more knowledge”* (3-0907).

While FU thought gaining the knowledge and skills was almost subconscious she said *“Maybe I didn’t notice at that moment, but I still got them”* (1-0406). They also felt that the resources for study within the university, while less than in New Zealand, were much better than high school and a positive aspect of their learning (HS1-0606; BY1-0506; CX1-0406).

### **The national university entrance examination.**

There can be little doubt that the national university entrance examination was and is foundational to and formational for almost every high school student in China (People’s Daily Online, 2008, June 8). The ability to change one’s life, and importantly the family’s life, was centred on getting to university. However, in one sense the students did not dare to think about the future because the fate of their future was so dependent upon their present. Getting to university was everything. As GT put it (1-0606), *“In China, we say, you study for ten years and all you want is to pass this national examination.”* Entrance to university was seen by EV and CX in life and death terms. EV said (1-0906), *“If they can’t pass the exam they will almost lose their lives”* while CX, the oldest participant, put it even more strongly (1-0406), *“[It] is fatal for them if they cannot get into university. They cannot have a different life.”* Not passing the examination meant life was *“finished”* (FU1-0406) and *“you don’t have any more chance”* (DW1-0606).

As noted earlier, entrance to university is becoming more accessible. There is greater flexibility with entrance requirements (CX3-0907), increasing government spending on building universities and on growing their resources (DW1-0606), and rising levels of family wealth which can open previously closed doors (GT1-0606).

However, for almost all, a good result is still required (GT1-0606). The level of competition is “*furious*” (HS1-0906) and the number of students sitting the exam massive (approximately 10,500,000 students in 2008: People’s Daily Online, 2008, 8 June). The level of marks also determines which universities the students were eligible for. You may become locked into a lower level, regional university rather than one with a high national rating and prospects of a much improved learning environment (AZ1-0506) with better quality teachers (HS1-0606). This competition for quality placement, and the intense competition to find work once students leave study, means a change in evaluation has taken place. Previously success was seen to be a direct consequence of the amount of hard work put in rather than ability. HS believes that now: “*If you are just able to work hard without enough ability then the competition is still there. You can’t just skip it all together. I think it is a trend in all the country*” (1-0906).

While the competition is ‘furious’ and the consequences of failure ‘fatal’ the rewards for success are worth the pain. The achievement of making the cut, after a very intense and long academic journey that began in the early primary years, means the students have a sense of being successful (3-EQ). Entrance into university allows the student to not only have the desired future but allows them to begin to plan this future. However, this in itself remains stressful and competitive. EV said: “*The students have to think all the time while they are studying about what other kind of degrees they need, like a computer degree and all these kind of degrees. These will develop me and give me more advantages. People have that kind of stress*” (3-0907). HS believed that, “*... competition in China is so much more furious than other countries you have to have a higher education so that you can get the job you want*” (1-0906).

### ***Learning and Teaching Processes***

To understand the identity of the students in this study as learners it is essential to understand their perception of the learning and teaching process. This is the third focus point in this review of the students’ comments on education in China. These findings enable a picture to emerge of who they are as learners, particularly when the other macro and micro factors are weighted in as well.

## **Learning processes.**

This section will look firstly at the process of learning, which includes consideration of the degree of student choice, the level of difficulty of university study in China, reflections on assessment practices, the role of memorisation, and levels of meta-cognitive awareness. These reflections on education in China take place from a standpoint within the New Zealand milieu, where it would be expected that the students' viewpoints have been affected by this change.

## ***Student choice.***

The students noted that there was little personal choice in China when it came to subject selection once a university major had been chosen (FU1-0406). BY said: *"All the papers were arranged by university. You had to follow these"* (1-0506). FU called it *"standardised"* and *"narrow"* resulting in a limited growth in ability and skills (3-0907) and HS termed it *"restricted"* (3-EQ). This, at times, impacted on the level of interest and enjoyment the students had in their learning (BY1-0506). DW and FU both thought that the lack of interest affected the motivation to learn (DW3-EQ; FU3-0907). However, FU felt that having the programme fixed for you did mean that there was more certainty and less confusion (FU2-0706; 3-0907). This difference in perspective may partially reflect the different viewpoints of students coming out of a very restrictive school syllabus: some yearned for more freedom; others appreciated the security of the known. GT thought limited subject choice was not a problem if you had the freedom to choose the major. But, she also indicated that sometimes the choice of major was more dictated by the popular demand of society than by personal interest (1-0606).

On entering the university in China the students found study to be much more relaxed than the pressure-cooker intensity of high school with its focus on the national examination (AZ3-1007; HS3-EQ). EV considered that the time of studying at university was not stressful. He commented: *"When I was studying in China and finished my degree I didn't need to find a job and I already knew what I was doing. I just had to prepare the way. I don't think I had too much stress"* (3-0907). FU did not find the assessment difficult and you only needed to follow

instructions and the texts to succeed (1-0406), and JQ believed that almost all who started studying at university completed their degrees (1-1006). BY summed up this aspect by saying: “*So, university is a very happy time*” (1-0506). However, he, AZ and HS felt that it could be too relaxed, leading to time being wasted (BY1-0506; AZ1-0506; HS1-0606). For students who were still in competitive mode, at a higher level of university, seeking scholarships, or all of these the workload could still be very demanding (FU3-0907). The work level required could also be dependent on the subject area (BY1-0506; CX3-0907).

### ***Assessment.***

In terms of assessment, some subjects had regular homework and, while this had to be completed, it did not contribute significantly toward the final subject grade (FU2-0706; DW1-0606; CX2-0706). However, almost all, and in some cases all, the grade contribution came from the exam (AZ3-1007). The examinations were based on a mix of question styles which required having a strong understanding of the theoretical background (HS1-0906). The students needed to provide the correct answers that would satisfy the examiner (CX3-0907).

The exams were sometimes considered very difficult (BY-EQ); however, IR did not think they were hard (1-0907). The aim was not just to pass, but to achieve well. HS said: “*There they just give you one big exam and you have to get a high score in this exam and then you hope you are the top student*” (1-0906). This meant that over a period of one to three weeks before the exams, time was set aside by the students to focus on exam study (HS1-0606). The quantity to be recalled for the exam depended on the paper (DW1-0606), but the teacher provided instructions (AZ1-0506) and guidelines on the information to be learnt (BY1-0506). Usually, there were two exams a semester: one at the middle and one at the end (BY1-0506; HS1-0606).

### ***Memorisation.***

The emphasis on examination, and hence the need to memorise, began in the early days of the students’ education. The memorisation of the large quantity of

Chinese characters alone was an ongoing and considerable feat. The ultimate test was the national university entrance examination. Regarding the setting of the mind toward memorisation as a learning process, BY said, “... *in China students were always taught how to memorise, how to fill their brain with knowledge ...*” (2-0906). One student, FU, when asked to describe education in China in one word said “*Memorising*” (3-0907). IR agreed. Her feeling was that: “*Usually in China you spend most time memorising, memorising, memorising*” (1-0907).

The assessment style demands that students can recall accurately and fully what they have learnt. CX noted that: “*In China, there are the facts you need to memorise. They give you multi-choice – date, year, people’s names, or something like that*” (CX2-0706). With the pressure of examinations the need to memorise intensely was commented on by EV. He said, “*When you are trying to memorise something like an exam for the paper two weeks later and the teacher gives you some hints you focus yourself to memorise everything the teacher gives you*” (2-0407). This can lead to saturation or as FU put it: “*It’s also because too much comes at the same time and makes me feel very full. I get sick from that!*” (3-0907). Although, as noted below (see: Learner Identity Element Eight – Good Knowledge), this knowledge storehouse was able to be appreciated.

However, students’ comments suggested that memorisation was not simply at a surface level. BY and GT both suggested that memorisation by itself was insufficient; it needed to be supported by understanding (FU2-0706; GT2-0906). This helps the knowledge to be “*digested*” (EV2-0407), belong to the student, and be recalled at a later time (GT2-0906). The students commented that the use of memory may be helpful in gaining a base knowledge (HS1-0906) when you are younger (EV2-0407; DW2-0906) but that it should not be so necessary at university level (DW2-0906). When memorisation was not accompanied by an intentional desire to understand, the result was likely to be temporary (EV2-0407; GT2-0906). BY perceived another limitation of memorisation: “*You always tried to memorise it and that means your ideas were structured. So you could not be creative*” (2-0906).

The literature review noted the debate about the role of memorisation in Chinese learning. Some see it as symptomatic of surface learning (Ho et al., 2001a) while others see it as being an integral part of a deep learning approach (Tweed &

Lehman, 2002). Biggs believes (1996) that the adoption of memorisation may reflect the assessment regime. The views of the students seem to echo these viewpoints. Certainly, where memorisation was accompanied by understanding, the efficacy of the knowledge learnt was regarded as superior. Therefore, the solving of the conundrum may lie with the individual student and how they process the knowledge they have learnt and how they use this knowledge in the future. For some students the knowledge may be simply facts; for others the knowledge may be building blocks for future learning.

***Meta-cognitive awareness.***

The assessment process and the need to memorise may skew the use and development of the meta-communication learning skills (Yount, 1996): reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Listening to the teacher and to some extent note-taking (DW1-0606) were valued by participants as was the need to learn through reading, even if the reading tended to be limited to the textbook. However, the output skills were not usually as well used and, as a consequence, not as well developed. The students reported very little group/classroom based discussion (HS1-0606) and very little academic writing, even in examinations (DW1-0606). As a result FU felt that she had little confidence in her writing skills (1-0406).

The students' comments on the educational processes do not necessarily always show a meta-cognitive awareness of the learning processes and their own learning. Being mostly in their twenties, and still being very much embroiled within the educational system, meant that there was not always a measure of perspective and reflection. Also, they, as business students, do not communicate using educational concepts and terminology. One student, FU, did mention that she preferred to learn by herself (1-0406). GT's comments evidence that she, at the time of her study in China, did not reflect deeply on learning. *"I didn't think about why I was learning. If you don't think about why you do it then your thinking will always be narrow. So that's why I was thinking it was hard. In study you should learn why you should learn it and then you get to know how to learn it. But I only just study; not think too much"* (2-0906). She also felt that her age at that time [late-teens to early twenties] was also a factor. *"I think now, at that age I haven't got a clear idea*

*of why I am learning this subject. I just learn and do what the teacher asks me to do” (GT2-0906).*

### **Teaching processes.**

Having considered the learning process by reviewing the students’ comments on the low level of student choice, the relatively relaxed atmosphere of university study, the focus on assessment by way of examination, the role of memorisation, and the degree of meta-awareness this section investigates the teaching processes. In considering the influence of this process three areas were evident from the students’ responses: the respect teachers are held in, the teacher-centred approach, and teaching styles and effectiveness.

### ***Teacher respect.***

The students believed that teachers were highly regarded. Students commented that this reflected traditional cultural values (DW2-0906; EV2-0407), the high value of education (GT2-0906), and the respect for superior knowledge (FU2-0706). This concurs with the findings of the literature review. As GT put it: *“... in China with the environment, like I said, the teacher is always put in a place where he or she is respected. That means you should look at them with your eyes up. In that case you will treat them very seriously” (2-0906).* Indeed the teacher could come to have a prior authority over the parent (GT2-0906). Students very rarely publicly correct the teacher in the classroom and there is, especially at early ages, a tendency to simply accept whatever the teacher says as true (EV2-0407). This is consistent with face-saving strategies employed in high power distance cultures. However, questioning may take place in the teacher’s office (FU2-0706). To do so in a more public manner may risk the possibilities of sanctions against the students (FU2-0706).

The degree of teacher traditional respect is changing (CX2-0706). AZ raised a dissenting voice against the traditional profile of the teacher, as did Ho et al. in the literature review (2001b). Due, as he saw it, to his university’s lowly status and, therefore, lower quality staff, he did not respect his teachers too much (2-0906). A

lack of respect can lead to punishment or the student being perceived as a “*not very good one*” (GT2-0906). To some extent, the respect shown is an external display which does not always match the inward feelings (FU2-0706). There was some indecision about whether a high level of respect inhibits effective learning. Views ranged from “*No*” (FU2-0706) to lack of awareness (“*I have no idea about this*”; EV2-0407) to “*It’s not very good*” (DW2-0906). BY thought the respect and non-questioning aspect associated with it “*... restricts the student’s ideas*” (2-0906). DW summed it up by saying:

*It is not bad or good. It depends on two sides. On one side, the teacher teaches the knowledge and the students should respect that. In Chinese culture it is a good thing. But, on the other side, if the students all respect the teacher they will not be brave enough to refuse the teacher’s opinion. Day-after-day, step-by-step the students just follow the teacher’s knowledge so you will not get up to the teacher’s level. The teacher is high, the student is low. Then the student becomes the teacher to the next generation. So, it is not very good (2-0906).*

The qualifications of teachers vary. The older students (CX, JQ) recall teachers at university having only bachelor level qualifications. These students would have experienced some of the educational difficulties which followed from the persecution of intellectuals, including teachers, during the Cultural Revolution in China (1966-76). However, nowadays teachers are better qualified, with most university lecturers holding a PhD (AZ1-0506), and better selected (CX1-0406). However, the level of qualification is of a lower standard in regional areas and in lower status universities (AZ1-0506). The current climate of competition in China is “*very vehement*” even for teachers and this has improved the quality of teachers (HS1-0606). When asked about the quality of teachers, EV said, “*I don’t know much about this. I only just heard some news about Chinese teachers when they become successful and have a high reputation in the areas they are focused on. They will make a speech around China and make some money out of that*” (2-0407).

### ***Teacher-centred education.***

With the high value accorded education and the traditional respect for the teacher it is not surprising that the tendency is toward a teacher-centred approach to education. This may lead to the teacher having a dominant role and the students may

not have to take a high degree of responsibility for, or active involvement in, their learning. GT commented: *"In China because students always just follow the teacher, they will tell you what you need to do now, what you need to do next, so the student may not have their own whole plan"* (2-0906). BY affirmed this by saying, *"... in China the students' schedule was made by the teachers – when you should do the homework, or the exam and what you should read, from page to page"* (2-0906). Systems, formal and informal, were in place to help ensure this work was completed. Student study was closely supervised (CX1-0406), by both teachers and parents (GT1-0606), class groups were peer monitored (CX1-0406), and incomplete work could result in punishment (EV1-0907).

A teacher-centred approach meant teaching methodology was largely class-based lectures based on the textbook. Most of the learning happened inside class (AZ2-0906) as opposed to student-directed learning outside class. Talk and chalk were the major form of instruction (GT1-0606) and this required some note-taking by the students (BY1-0506). Textbooks were the major information source for the participants in their study in China (HS1-0906). Normally, there would be one standard textbook for each subject. One of this project's cultural advisors showed the writer some texts used in China and during the writer's visit to a university classroom in China the textbook type used was noted. In comparison to New Zealand textbooks, they tended to be smaller, with about a 200 page maximum. However, students covered more courses per semester than in New Zealand. As CX put it, *"In China, the student can rely on the textbook that has been compiled by experts. The teacher prepares the lessons based on the textbook"* (2-0706). The textbook was the students' reading requirement although optional reading was sometimes supplied (GT1-0606).

It could be argued that this reliance on the teacher and textbook resulted in a degree of passivity in learning. EV's comments give support to this impression: *"When you get used to the way the Chinese teacher teaches you then you don't need to worry about it. You believe the teacher will give you everything you need to help you pass the exam"* (2-0407). GT said: *"Maybe in China it is a teacher-centred style which is more popular. The teacher tells you what to read. You don't need to think too much by yourself"* (3-0907). This level of passivity should not be equated with a

lack of work effort or a lack of knowledge gained. IR felt that she “... *can say I studied very hard because I got a lot of knowledge and information from the China study. So, that’s why I am very happy and thankful for the China study. It gave you a good background*” (1-0907). However, there was a feeling that this knowledge was sometimes restricted (JQ1-1006) and outdated (EV1-0907).

### ***Teaching styles and effectiveness.***

When asked about the teaching style the most common response was ‘traditional’ (e.g., GT1-0606; BY1-0506; JQ1-1006). As noted above, this meant a teacher-directed delivery of the required information to the accepting students. The demeanour of the teachers tended to be “... *very formal and then very serious*” (FU1-0406). The students in this study reported appreciation for their teachers (FU1-0406; IR1-0907). The teachers were usually willing to assist students who needed help (GT1-0606). Teachers were appreciated when they communicated well with the students (GT1-0606) and gave examples (IR1-0907). GT commented that some teachers had been influenced by Western styles of teaching. “*They would like to introduce some very modern skills like using computers and introduce some Western countries’ skills and academic reports. They teach us new information*” (1-0606). However, CX felt that the use of such methods could have a detrimental side effect. “*After the introduction of modern Western teaching methods, like TVs and computer slides, the students’ relationship with teachers is less*” (2-0706).

The classroom teaching context varied. Overall, even at university, class sizes were about 40 (AZ2-0906) except where groups of classes met to study a common subject (BY1-0506). Students, generally, sat at the same desk each day (CX1-0406) and did not speak unless spoken to by the teacher. The teacher usually asked the questions and a student was called upon to answer. HS relates her experience: “*They talked in front and then asked a question. They don’t mind if you like it or not, but they will ask you. If you don’t answer you feel so embarrassed. ... In China, the teacher doesn’t like you to just talk. When she asks you, then you can talk*” (1-0606). The teachers were usually readily accessible: “*In the Chinese university after the teacher has finished the class time they have to stay at the office for eight hours in total*” (HS1-0906).

While the participants felt that, overall, a significant body of knowledge was transmitted to them they did have a number of concerns. The major concern was the focus on theoretical understanding. The students, with an instrumental view of education and a constant concern for employment after graduation, would have appreciated a better balance with the practical (HS3-EQ; FU1-0406; GT3-0907). As AZ proverbially expressed it: “*The knowledge doesn't follow the road*” (3-1007). In his first interview he said: “*I found it's hard to say what I have learnt that is very useful for the future career*” (1-0506). EV commented: “*The students are afraid that they haven't learnt something at the university after they graduate and get a job*” (1-0907). As a result, some students prefer to attend vocational training institutes rather than universities (EV1-0907). However, CX, the oldest student who had also studied at Masters level, shared a contrary view: “*I feel the knowledge I learned is enough for me to use in practical work*” (3-0907). In addition, workplaces within China may have an expectation and desire to train the graduates in their own work-related practices.

In this section on learning and teaching processes the students highlighted issues that were relevant to them. Under learning processes this included student choice, workload intensity, assessment approaches, and memorisation. The area of meta-cognitive awareness was also reviewed. In teaching processes, the level of respect awarded teachers was debated, the central role of the teacher as the driver of the education process was evaluated, and the style and effectiveness of the teachers was commented upon. From this point, by way of analysis of these findings, eight identity elements of a learner in China are considered. These are linked to the findings, related to the literature review, where appropriate, and supported by the comments from the attestation group. The establishment of these identity characteristics is a key to understanding the effect of cross-cultural educational adjustment on these students.

To this point, the findings of this study relating to the macro and micro influences on the conditions that comprise the BSP have been presented. Under macro influences the societal and cultural factors were discussed. Although the students' comments may be somewhat fragmentary they still gave significant insight into how these two big picture influences impacted on the students and their

learning. Among the factors mentioned by the students were the collective values of the society, the pressure to conform to those expectations, the striving for enhanced social positioning, the consequences of failing to achieve such enhancement, and the need, at the end of all personal efforts, to have good fortune. In addition, the demand for English within society and the way society was changing were noted. The changes included alternative ways of achieving success (rather than through the traditional means of higher education), increased wealth as China's middle-class expands, and the influence of the one-child policy.

Under the micro influences two areas emerged from the students' reflections on life and learning in China: family and education. These two areas, due to the overarching influence of society and culture, had some degree of overlap with the macro influences and with each other yet the micro influences more directly impacted on them as students. Under family, the high value of and sacrificial price paid for education, the strong level of intensity in the parents' desires and expectations, and how, as a consequence of socialisation processes, the children in these families responded, were noted as significant factors. Education, the second micro area, was treated at greater length as it related specifically to the focus of this study. The students noted the strengths of education in China, while also feeling free to give some critique. They expressed appreciation for the relationships they formed with their classmates, the way they grew in knowledge and skills, and the extent to which their education equipped them for a better future. The central and pivotal role of the national university entrance examination was also examined. Lastly, the teaching and learning processes were reflected on by the students. The findings and analysis now moves to considering, more directly, the effect of these factors on this particular group of students' learning identities.

## **ELEMENTS OF LEARNER IDENTITY**

A key to understanding the change experienced by these students was to elicit from them how they understood themselves as learners in the light of the Chinese context. Between the second and third interview rounds the findings to that point were re-examined by way of review and modelling to help determine what learner

identity elements were emerging from the data. From the crucible of the macro and micro influences, and their additional comments in regard to their personal experience of education in China, it was expected that these identity elements would become apparent from the interview data, the categorisation of that data, and the shape of the emerging model.

Once these categories, eight in all, had been tentatively selected, they were taken back to the students in the third round of interviews and they were asked to, first, define by themselves what they thought their learner identity might be. Second, they were asked to reflect on the elements that had emerged from the findings to date. They were also asked to rate how 'true' these identity elements were for them. This section of analysis places these elements within the macro and micro contextual influences. They are seen visually in the model depiction below (Figure 5.2). This representation is the first component of the overall grounded theory model that will be further developed in Chapters Five to Seven.

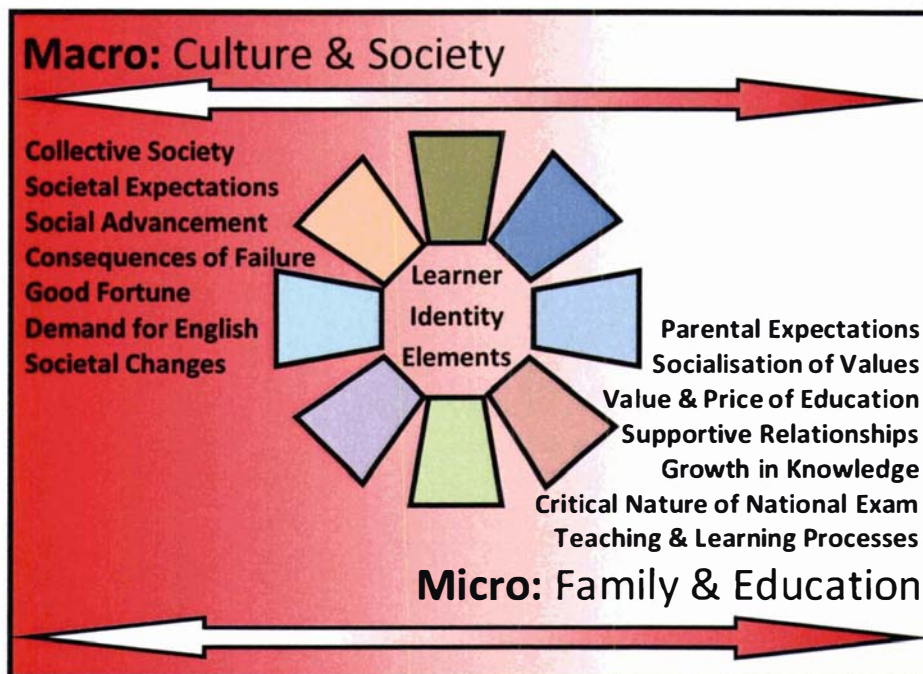


Figure 5.2: Macro and micro influences on the formation of learner identity

This diagram of the influences in China on the formation of learner identity of the participants of this study (Figure 5.2) illustrates the wider effect of the macro influences of ‘Society and Culture’ by headlining them beyond the top arrow. Some of the major factors associated by the students with these macro influences are listed below this arrow. The micro influences of ‘Family and Education’ are headlined within the arrows to show their more direct impact on the participants as children and students. Each arrow forms an open-ended continuum depicting the traditional nature, ongoing legacy, and elements of change represented by both the macro and micro influences. The learner identity elements formed by the combined effect of the macro and micro influences are represented by the eight trapezoids. Each of these eight elements of learner identity will now be considered.

### **Learner Identity**

The students’ recollections of their social, cultural, and family experiences indicate that a strong sense of social identity was formed in China. The literature indicated that this may be the case due to the strong traditional base of society, its hierarchical nature, and its inherent homogeneity. Generally, it is assumed that cultural socialisation forms initial social and individual identity frames. Tajfel (1978, 1981; as cited in Ward et al., 2001, p. 105) has indicated that the three defining characteristics of a social identity, which may be assumed to be powerfully formative in a collectivist culture, are self-conceptualisation, awareness of belonging to a group, and evaluative and emotional significance. The interplay of Tajfel’s features is evident in the students’ understanding of who they are as learners. Furnham (1988; as cited in Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005, p. 117), in the literature review, noted the effect cross-cultural adjustment may have on identity and this is taken up in Chapters Six and Seven.

The following section seeks to make explicit some of the major elements of the students’ learner identity. It is based on eight elements which signify who the students were as learners in China. As indicated above, these eight elements were chosen as a result of the ongoing, comparative analysis of the grounded theory methodology. The task is to conceptualise the data in such a way that it explains that data and integrates it into the substantive theory making. This does not deny that

there may be other elements to the learner identity but it makes the claim that these eight are logical deductions from the categorisation of the data. The interview data from the original participants, the feedback from the attestation group, and the findings of the literature review are used in describing these elements. However, these elements should be seen more as trends than stereotypical features of their identity as learners. The students' depiction of learner identity showed individuality but their responses also indicated a tendency to converge into the identity elements described below. The elements identified were: teacher centred; supported; worked hard; pressured; effective skills; successful; competitive; and good knowledge. Again, there is a progressive modelling of these elements in this section.

### ***Identity Element One: Teacher Centred***

A major dimension of the educational system in China, although there are some signs of change, is that it is teacher-driven. This significantly affected the students in the way they approached learning and met the requirements of the system.



Data reflecting the students' perception of the teacher's role has been provided above, under the teaching processes, so only a brief summary is given at this point. The teachers were usually granted a high degree of respect and this reflected the value that society placed on education and the roles of teachers (DW2-0906; EV2-0407). In addition, the students generally appreciated their teachers for the knowledge they imparted and the care they displayed (FU1-0406; IR1-0907). While there was some debate as to the integrity of this respect, especially with regard to whether it was internalised (AZ2-0906), the students felt respect had the potential to both help and hinder learning (DW2-0906). Teachers were generally and increasingly appropriately qualified (AZ1-0506; CX1-0406) although there may be some regional variations (AZ1-0506).

The respect given to the teacher and the consequential dominant role this created may have led to a degree of passivity in learning (EV2-0407; GT3-0907). This was possibly exacerbated by the use of lecture style approach (GT1-0606; BY1-0506; JQ1-1006) with limited class interaction (I-0606). The teachers were the

source, via the textbooks, and transmitters of all the knowledge that was required (AZ2-0906; HS1-0906; GT1-0606; BY1-0506). The instruction was characterised by its theoretical nature that lacked sufficient practical elucidation (HS3-EQ; FU1-0406; GT3-0907).

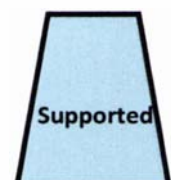
The comments of the attestation group endorsed 'teacher-centred' as a significant aspect of Chinese learner identity. The central role of the teacher in the teaching/learning process was indicated by: provision of all learning required to be learnt (WSA1-1107; YUA2-1207); respectful obedience to the teacher (YUA2-1207); one-way classroom dynamic (WSA1-1107); consistent attendance at lectures and diligent note-taking (ZVA3-1207); learning being textbook focused (WSA1-1107; YUA2-1207); and, regurgitation of learning within an exam-based assessment regime (ZVA3-1207).

Teacher centredness was noted in the literature review as being a characteristic of Chinese education (Lee, 1996; Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Ho et al., 2001; Flowerdew, 1998; Wang & Mao, 1996). Traditional Confucianism esteemed the teacher morally and as a source of knowledge. This had a tendency to lead to authoritarian educational practices and a certain level of passivity in learning. The review also noted that while respect for the teacher was almost always externally displayed, there were students and occasions when it may not have been matched internally. This may reflect some tension between the collectivist and individualistic dimension; however, the dominance of the collective in a homogenous and hierarchical society would possibly mean external expressions of dis-ease would be held back.

The dominant role of the teacher within the classroom, their use of traditional classroom instruction methodologies, and their role as the transmitter of knowledge had a profound influence on the students. Therefore, the teacher centred aspect of learning in China was chosen as a learner identity element.

### ***Identity Element Two: Supported***

The students were sustained with significant levels of social and familial support. The intense level of pressure these students



were under to succeed meant that this resource was critical in sustaining a coherent sense of learner identity.

The students commented frequently upon the quality of support they received. Their expectations of a better future through the means of education were also what culture and society expected. Hence there was a sustaining degree of harmony. While it could be difficult to leave home it created a greater sense of independence (GT1-0606; EV1-0907) even though the close network of family was exchanged for the closed society of the university (CX1-0406). Although the new university environment was very focused on study (HS1-0906) and lacked potentially helpful engagement with the 'outside' (AZ2-0906) it brought the students into a new and powerfully formative set of relationships (BY1-0506) as they lived, ate, and studied together. As noted above, the quality of these new friendships was highly valued by the students at a personal level (JQ1-1006) and as a catalyst for the future (EV1-0907). While aspects of this environment may be changing it is still largely intact.

The support was not only based around the classmate structure. The ongoing support of parents, the assistance of the teachers, and the learning environment all worked together to sustain the students. Financially, the parents usually met the costs of university education, at times with help from the extended family (AZ2-0906). The students were not required to work part-time and their parents constantly exhorted them to study hard and succeed. The support supplied and the availability/access offered by the teachers was also a feature of Chinese education. Teachers usually maintained good relationships with students (CX1-0406), were pleased to be able to teach them (AZ1-0506), and were generally quite accessible (IR1-0907). However, some students felt that relationships with the teachers could have been better (BY1-0506; EV1-0907). The learning environment meant that the students always had classmates they could discuss their study with (FU1-0406; DW1-0606; IR1-0907). While this helped as students prepared for their exams (DW1-0606) the end result was a function of their independent study (JQ1-1006). The small sized classes for bachelor level programmes may have helped support learning (HS1-0606); however, in China there were no institutional facilities such as campus-based learning assistance centres (FU1-0406).

The attestation group also felt supported by their social, familial, and educational context. The ongoing classroom contact between students who stayed within the same course groups for almost all classes and its positive effect on how well they knew each other was noted (WSA1-1107). However, ZV offered a number of provisos. She noticed a lessening in the level of student support between high school and university (A3-1207). Her comments extended also to the support role of the family and the variability of support offered. She noted that:

*I feel very supported by my family. For friends and classmates it was sometimes true and sometimes not. Some good friends and classmates supported very much. But sometimes it wasn't like that. They would say, 'No, I don't want to help you.' This is true for lecturers also, if they are busy or don't have time then they won't help you. Some lecturers are very helpful as well.*

The literature review noted the strong support structures available to the students. The more immediate of these were the support that came through family, peers, and teachers. Moreover, this was reinforced by the cultural ethos. The strong desire for societal harmony, which amongst other things encouraged self-effacement and humility, also fostered a climate where cooperative learning could flourish, despite the competitive nature of the overall educational context.

The students, while they were under significant pressures, had similarly significant levels of support. Being and feeling supported was an element of their learner identity.

### ***Identity Element Three: Worked Hard***

The third element of the learner identity was that they worked hard. Like the other elements there was a degree of interaction between all of the elements and the macro and micro influences. For example, the elements of pressure and competition, with their basis in the macro and micro influences, were partial causes of the need to work hard.



The effect of the school years with their pressure-cooker focus from the beginning helped form the key learning habit of hard work. The demands from primary school to high school were very intense (JQ1-1006) and the only acceptable

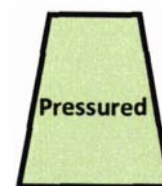
response was to work hard (HS1-0606; FU1-0406; GT1-0606; DW1-0606). CX commented: *“The working time is for the study – homework. The students have to work until late at night and get up very early in the morning”* (2-0706). On breaking through the narrow gate and arriving at their university in China some students felt relaxed (AZ1-0506; BY1-0506; JQ1-1006) and believed it was relatively easy to gain success (CX1-0406).

However, that did not mean that the work rate dropped dramatically. GT said, *“In a Chinese university you should still work hard because even if you’ve entered the university it doesn’t mean it is the end”* (2-0906). In some cases the need to continue working hard was a function of the students’ backgrounds. Those who came from a more economically challenged context particularly felt the pressure (AZ2-0906; CX1-0406; CX2-0706). These students were often those from rural areas such as AZ and CX. Others worked hard because they wanted a higher degree or to receive a scholarship (FU1-0406). Those students who went to *“famous”* universities where competition levels remained intense were unable to relax their work ethic (AZ1-0506).

The need to work hard at university was affirmed by the students in the attestation interviews. They commented that it was focused around exam time and that the exams were difficult (XTA1-1107); that if you worked hard then the benefit that accrued to you was commensurate (XTA1-1107); that working hard was a key indicator of who a good learner was (ZVA3-1207; XTA1-1107); and the work rate needed to be very consistent (XTA1-1107). The ingrained habit of hard work appears to have enabled these students to succeed. In the literature review Leung (1995) commented that diligence and perseverance, as traditional Chinese attitudes, meant that students were prepared to accept hardship in the belief that it would lead to success. The key seems to be hard work and it forms an essential element in the learner identity of these students.

#### ***Identity Element Four: Pressured***

A fourth learner identity element that emerged from the findings was that the students felt pressured. The complex factors



within the macro and micro influences led to significant levels of stress and academic performance anxiety which was partly counteracted by the socialisation processes.

This pressure has been documented above; however, a brief summary to support the claim that this is a foundational element in the learner identity of these students is necessary here. The social and family pressures to succeed educationally, especially at high school, were intense. DW said: *“For most students they will be nervous. The only thing they can do is study, study, study. They don’t know the social life; they don’t know the communication with others. They only know the study”* (2-0906). BY felt, in relation to high school, that: *“I can’t believe how hard. I can’t bear it, I think”* (1-0506). While university was more relaxed it also carried stressors related to general learning competition levels (BY2-0906; GT2-0906) and getting the right job (HS1-0906). As noted above, the prospect of failure was a major concern for the future (AZ2-0906), although this perspective may be changing (FU2-0706).

Generally, due to population and lack of privacy, the stress levels were consistently high. As FU expressed it: *“I guess studying in China is more stress because the competitors are too many. They always publish the results on the website or publication.”* In addition, as documented above, the sole attention given to the ‘one child’ within the family compounded the level of pressure (CX2-0706). These pressures were mitigated by the socialisation processes that led the students to think this was normal or expected (AZ2-0906; CX2-0706; DW2-0906; DW3-EQ; EV2-0407; FU2-0706; FU3-0907; GT2-0906). The influence of being in the big city and having access to, for example, the internet and, for some, the rebelliousness that may come from being the little emperor, could cause some students to reject the pressure and the social conditioning (EV2-0407).

The attestation students also felt the pressure keenly. As well as the broader social and familial pressures the teaching/learning process was also a factor. WS felt especially *“stretched out”* by the *“big pressure”* his family gave him (A1-1107). ZV expressed how she felt about the ongoing-ness of the examination-based system and how it affected her enthusiasm for learning and the quality of the learning:

*We have been training for exams for the last years at high school. We*

*have an exam everyday for different subjects. We kind of get used to that kind of atmosphere and know what the exams will look like. That's the way of learning in China. I do agree that I learnt something from that kind of learning in China. But I feel that I lost my enthusiasm. Push, push, push – to go for that kind of learning. (ZVA3-1207).*

The literature confirms that the immense pressure to succeed could lead to intellectual burnout and may even lead to self-harm.

The social, cultural, familial, and educational milieu created a high pressure environment for these students. This impacted on them as people and especially as students hence it is an element of their learner identity.

### ***Identity Element Five: Effective Skills***

The Mainland Chinese students in this study had effective learning skills for the educational context they were participating in. These skills had brought them to high levels in their education attainment in China but in some ways these skills also created limitations, especially when engaged in learning in the New Zealand context.



A range of findings have already been reported that relate to the learning skills required and possessed by the students. The examination-based assessment system, with little by way of grade-contributing assignment work (AZ1-0506), required excellent memory skills (FU1-0406). This tended to encourage working alone (FU1-0406) and emphasised reading and listening input skills (DW1-0606; HS1-0606). It also encouraged sustained bursts of focused attention before the examination (HS1-0606). However, it would seem that the learning processes would suit students who were theorists and, to some extent, reflectors (Kolb, 1982). Like most schooling systems there would be less chance for the pragmatists or experimenters to succeed. Similarly, the style of learning may suit a field-dependent style of learner (Irvine & York, 2001).

The students were aware, especially as they reflected back from their New Zealand experience, that while these learning skills were effective in and sufficient for their context, their skill set was limited. The emphasis on memory may have limited the students' need to think critically about what they were learning. FU

commented that she did not do, “...lots of thinking but we needed to do lots of practical exercises.” However, this needs to be related to the ongoing debate about the influence of memorisation on deep and surface learning (Biggs, 1996; Ho et al., 2001a; Tweed & Lehman, 2002). While they generally felt confident in China about reading and listening their writing and speaking output skills were less developed (DW1-0606; HS1-0606). Again, this emphasis would suit a reflective and theoretical style of learning and it also resonates with the traditional ethos of Confucian education. They also felt limited, perhaps due to the teacher-centred approach, in organising themselves and their learning and locating learning resources. As CX noted: “No way can I know how to collect information, how to organise them. This is the weak point for the education” (1-0406).

These sentiments regarding effective skills were also noted by the attestation group. Within the dynamics of the teaching/learning context, especially the assessment system which relied almost totally on examinations (XTA1-1107; ZVA3-1207), the students felt that they had appropriate skills. The examination usually counted for 100% of the grade (WSA1-1107) and this meant proficiency at exams was of major importance (ZVA3-1207). This was the “way of learning in China” and students just had to get used to it (ZVA3-1207). The pragmatic aim was to “ace the exam” (WSA1-1107) even though it may not mean you are a good student just good at exams (ZVA3-1207). Particularly relevant skills were: cue alertness; ensuring, even if it meant borrowing, access to quality lecture notes; and, of course, a good memory (ZVA3-1207).

Whether these skills were appropriate or sufficient to aid the students in crossing educational cultures will be discussed in Chapter Six. However, a level of confidence in having an effective skill set for learning in China seems to comprise an element of their learner identity.

### ***Identity Element Six: Successful***

The students said surprisingly little about their level of academic success. This may be a function of their cultural conditioning that does not necessarily encourage assertive self-



assessment and where humility may be valued more. Flowerdew believes humility is a social requirement stemming from “the Confucian principle of propriety, which requires that individuals maintain a certain level of humility in accordance with their rank, and do not elevate themselves above others” (1998, p. 236).

However, there is little doubt that success was the aim. Success was not only for the individual but also for the family. CX commented that: “*In nowadays China, the traditional family structure is still dominant. One’s success is the pride of his family members. This pride is also one’s incentive to succeed*” (2-0706). The students in this study had all been successful. They had risen above the level of the competition through the use of effective learning skills and had entered university. In all but one case they had completed an undergraduate qualification in China. One student had finished a Masters programme. As a result they had a certain confidence in their level of ability to succeed academically.

The aim of each student was to get high grades. The pre-eminence given to being successful was paramount, even if it meant that personal weaknesses were ignored, and this is well expressed by YU (A2-1207), during one of the attestation interviews:

*I suppose a successful learner should be totally familiar with the book and then get a very high grade. I got very high grades at [the Chinese] university so I was a good learner in the opinion of the teachers and in the opinion of my classmates. Even, if, maybe, I am not very good at my life or not very good at other things, no matter what, if my study is very good then I am very good.*

The review of the literature in Chapter Two highlighted many of these aspects as well. The achievement of success and maintaining the image of success were deemed to be socially critical for not just the individual but the family as well. Success was deemed to be a function of hard work, plus some good luck, and the literature affirms this and argues that more success led to a greater sense of achievement motivation. The review also noted that students came to a new host country for overseas education with a significant level of confidence based on their home country success. The extent to which this perception of being successful becomes, at least initially, a double-edged sword when entering a foreign educational context will be discussed in the next chapter.

So, while this element of learner identity was not often mentioned by the students it was selected as a characteristic that helped to define them as learners. It underlined who they felt they had to be: successful; and what they had to achieve: success.

### ***Identity Element Seven: Competitive***

The Chinese students in this study were competitive in the sense that they were obliged by the nature of the macro and micro influences upon them to compete.



This element is seen in a variety of the social, cultural, family, and educational factors comprising these influences. HS commented: “*The important thing is still the society: the competition for their life*” (1-0906). China has a huge population and large numbers of these students sit the national examination every year. The ten-year goal of education and the nature of the competitiveness it engendered was ultimately represented by passing this examination (GT1-0606) and moving through the “*narrow gate*” (CX1-0406). One of the older students can remember when the chance of success was only four in every 100 candidates (JQ1-1006). Admittedly, the entry criteria have eased and means of access have widened but the narrowness of opportunity is still there.

Within the classroom, be it primary, secondary or tertiary, the level of competition was intense. The impression given is that China is “*crowded*” (AZ1-0506) and “*Most of the students cannot get the chance*” (CX1-0406). BY confessed: “*I was not always the best as the competition was very hot. Most of the students wanted the first position*” (2-0906). The comparative nature of the competition was also attested by GT, who said: “*If I see all the other people around me all working hard and they are getting a very good exam results or excellent school performances I always try to learn from them and try to be one of them*” (2-0906).

Not being comparatively competitive, especially in regard to the national exam, had significant ongoing life consequences. Not going to university usually meant the lack of a well paying job (AZ2-0906), a lack of social advancement, and probably family shame (DW3-EQ). GT considered that: “... *everyone wants to get a*

*good or excellent examination mark, but for this kind of student if they could not pass then they will change their ways. Maybe they will not think about the national test. Their parents will arrange for them to learn other things – some skills or even have their own business, if their family has enough money to support them” (2-0906).*

The level of performance in the exam was critical in achieving entry into the right university (HS1-0906; EV1-0907). This increased your chance in being competitive on the job market as being in the right place may ensure you have learnt the right skills (HS1-0906). However, competition did not end at schooling as millions graduate each year (EV1-0907). Regardless of, or because of, the economic reforms, not every graduate is guaranteed a job, as was the case ten to fifteen years ago. HS went on to say, “... *more students have the same high quality and the same certificate, so the company needs to know which student has enough ability to do their work” (1-0906).*

The competitive environment was described by one participant as “*vehement*” and “*furious*” (HS1-0606). This was endorsed in the attestation interviews. WS, while noting that the level of competition was different in the countryside where life was more a matter of survival, felt that the pressure in the “*big city*” was “*cutthroat*” (A1-1107). XT put this down to the job market in China which was “*really, really extremely competitive*” and which forced people to “*go for higher education*” (A1-1107). And once within the university system, which as the participants noted was more relaxed than high school, the pressure to get the “*higher grades*” (YUA2-1207) was still intense as it could influence the prospects for quality future work options.

However, it was featured in the literature review that education in China is more marked by relational and cooperative dimensions than competition. (Flowerdew, 1998; Tang, 1996). Hu and Grove (1991) suggested that competition is not cutthroat amongst students and Biggs argues that the competitive assessment regime actually drives the students to work cooperatively (1996). On face value this does not accord with the information given by the participants in this study. However, it should be noted that the learner identity determined by this project included both cooperation, as indicated in the ‘supported’ element, and competition.

This may indicate that these two aspects may not be held as opposite ends of a continuum within the learner mindset of these students.

The students in this study have all faced and actively participated in this environment of competition. As a consequence, to survive and succeed in the pressured Chinese educational context the students would probably have ingrained in their educational psyche the need to compete. This is a part of their learner identity.

### ***Identity Element Eight: Good Knowledge***

On one hand the students felt confident about what they had learnt and the solid foundation of knowledge that this had created for them. On the other hand there were also reservations about the adequacy of this knowledge.



The primary source of learning in China was the textbook that was prepared by experts and could be relied on (CX2-0706). This textbook was the basis for the course learning and little, if any, extra reading was required (HS1-0606; DW1-0606; CX1-0406; IR1-0907) but taking this option depended on the students' interest level (IR1-0907). For most homework assignments the textbook was the chief resource (FU1-0406) and the textbook and guidelines from the teacher provided the basis for the examinations. The knowledge gained did give “*a good background*” (IR1-0907). DW believed that: “*Education is useful and has high value in China, especially the basic education. I think the basic education in China is better than other countries in primary school and secondary school*” (2-0906). However, as noted in the current study, this knowledge was sometimes restricted (HS1-0606; JQ1-1006) and outdated (GT1-0606; EV1-0907). There were additional concerns, also noted above, about the lack of balance between the emphasis on theoretical knowledge learnt to the detriment of the practical skills gained (HS3-EQ; FU1-0406; GT3-0907).

Like the participants, there were discordant views about the quality of knowledge the students in the attestation interviews felt they received at university in China. WS also felt that the restricted course choices in the prescribed academic programmes, and the focus on the teacher-supplied material for the examination, did

place some degree of restriction on the quality and range of knowledge that could be gained (WSA1-1107). However, ZV, the science student, felt she gained a good level of satisfaction about core or base knowledge levels:

*I do learn a good fundamental knowledge from China from high school to university in terms of mathematics, chemistry, and physics. We have quite broad papers on these areas. Even when I am doing a horticulture degree we have to do physics and chemistry or organic chemistry or that type of knowledge. At that time I didn't realise it was useful for my future study but now I realise that part of knowledge is useful for my study. It is a good foundation. It develops a good base knowledge. I think that's a way we value Chinese education. We don't say we are not good. We are still doing good because we have a broad range of knowledge. It is just less focused on certain areas (A3-1207).*

Overall, the students felt confident that they had, in their context, learnt quality and broad-based knowledge in their subject areas. While this came with reservations it formed an integral element of who they were as learners. Overall, this section of the analysis has highlighted eight elements of learner identity: teacher-centred, supported, worked hard, pressured, successful, competitive, effective skills, and good knowledge.

### **Learner Identity Attestation**

Grounded theory in its methodological approach has a continual process of coding and analysis. That, is, the analysis does not wait until the end but occurs throughout the process. Therefore, it was thought helpful, as the eight elements were being considered by the original study participants that two things occur. One, the elements could be affirmed as relevant by the students. This included seeking any further elements that may be more appropriate. The participants were asked, before being made aware of the eight elements, how they viewed themselves as learners. They were also asked, after assessing the elements, whether they felt any further aspects were relevant. Two, the relative strengths of these identity elements could provide a useful guide to the changes in learner identity as the students underwent cross-cultural educational adjustment. Therefore, the students were asked to assess each of the eight elements, and any other aspects they had mentioned, on a five-point Likert scale of how true each element was for them (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1:

*Likert rating scale for identity elements*

<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
very true	mostly true	sometimes true; sometimes not true	seldom true	rarely true

*Learner Identity Element Values*

The students' learner identity ratings on Figure 5.3 show a range of attestation for the eight elements. The element with the highest average rating was 'teacher-centred' (4.250) followed by 'supported' (4.000). This suggests the students felt that these were key elements of who they were as learners in China. The next two highest ratings were for 'worked hard' (3.750) and 'pressured' (3.625). The other four categories rated at or just above the 'sometimes true; sometimes not true' rating: 'effective skills' (3.250); 'successful' (3.125); 'competitive' (3.000); and 'good knowledge' (3.000). The ratings are not critical to this study as it does not aim to show statistical significance. However, the ordering of the elements can be a helpful guide to determining change in the students as learners. The students rated these elements again in the New Zealand educational context, as detailed in Chapter Six.

The results of the rating analysis do not highlight any major surprises. Traditional educational values and the continuing importance placed upon education (Dawson, 1981) and teachers (Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Lee, 1996) makes the high rating of 'teacher-centred' understandable. It may be considered unusual that 'pressured' did not equate or even surpass 'supported'. However, it has been noted through the analysis of the findings that the pressures were subject to strong socialisation processes. They were expected, in the light of the goals before the students, to be necessary; whereas the support that the students received from society, family, teachers, and peers was more highly valued. The students had a pattern of working hard and its high rating is little surprise, especially as it is in line with traditional educational values.

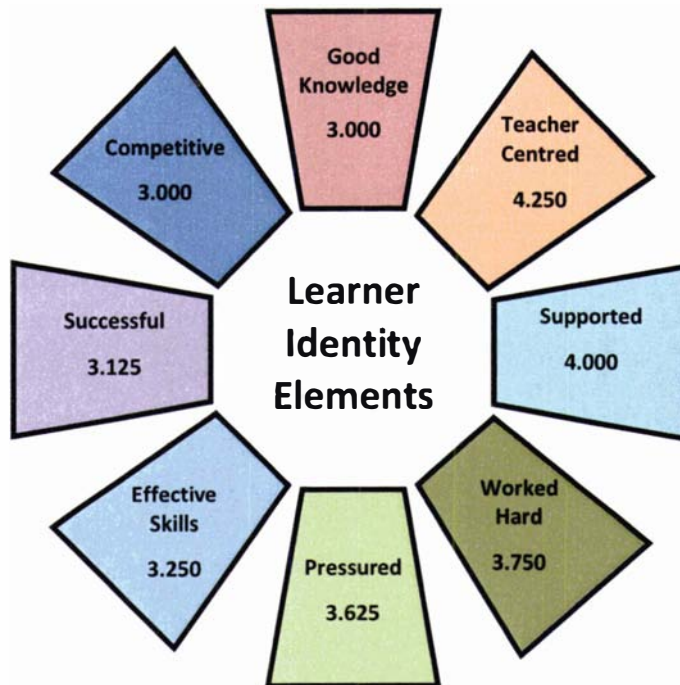


Figure 5.3: Learner identity element ratings

The students rated their skill set as appropriate to the educational context. The ratings for ‘successful’ and ‘competitive’, in the light of their achievements as students, are a minor surprise. Even though they were successful, and worked extremely hard in a furiously competitive environment to be so, the dictates of a collective culture and cultural humility may lead to a downplaying of their success and competitiveness. The lowest rating given to ‘good knowledge’ is probably a factor of both their experience in China and in New Zealand. In China, there were concerns about the relevance of what they were learning in relation to how effectively it was equipping them for their future work. After experiencing at least one full-time equivalent year of study in New Zealand, they had firsthand experience of a, perhaps, more balanced focus on both academics and good practice and there was some awareness of a greater breadth and freedom of access to knowledge.

The students also made some additional suggestions about their identities as learners. As part of the third round interview they were asked: “If you could choose one word to describe yourself as a learner what would it be?” (Interview Guide Three; Email Questionnaire Version 2). They found this task challenging and could

not always express this in one word. Two responses show a direct affinity to the eight elements: “*stressful*” (EV3-0907) and “*hardworking*” (GT3-0907). Two others may be related to ‘effective skills’ and ‘successful’: “*smart*” (HS3-EQ); and “*quick*” (AZ3-1007). Three other students reflected that cultural humility noted above: “*common*” and “*not bad*” (BY3-EQ); “*middle of the road*” (FU3-0907); and “*loser*” (DW3-EQ). The last of the remaining eight students said “*job focused*” (CX3-0907), which can be related to the category ‘competitiveness’ identified in this study.

In associated comments and discussion surrounding these ratings, CX said he was ‘confident’ but disputed whether he would call himself a learner. He said: “*A learner? I don’t think I am a learner. Learning is a process to get skills – so I am not really a learner. A learner is a scholar doing special research*” (3-0907). GT commented: “*Serious. Earnest. I concentrated on everything I did. Focused. I always had an objective set before me so I should follow it. Goal oriented*” (3-0907). EV (3-0907), when asked about how he felt about himself as a learner in China, expressed his feelings by saying:

*It was quite stressful and quite unhappy. Because I didn’t really like some of my lecturers but you have to study the course, like it is a compulsory course. Then I just go to class, force myself to memorise all the stuff, pass, and then forget everything. That makes me unhappy. For stressful, the students find it more and more difficult to find a job after they graduate. So everyone is trying to get higher grades. So they study hard so you force yourself to study hard as well. So the study isn’t fun.*

These additional comments do not change the veracity of the identity elements that were chosen. The views expressed are either parallel to, or subsets of, the elements, or underpin (e.g., humility) the cultural attitudes underlying these categories.

It is also important to note that the above figures were addressed as averages. When the individual students’ ratings are considered, there is a variety of responses for each of the elements. The following two graphs help to give some idea of the response ranges. Figure 5.4 shows a breakdown by participant of each learner identity element. Overall, the first two elements, ‘teacher centred’ and ‘supported’, were advocated consistently by the participants. The elements that showed the most variation in range were: ‘worked hard’ (from 5 to 2); ‘pressured’ (from 5 to 2); ‘successful’ (from 5 to 2); ‘good knowledge’ (from 4 to 1); and ‘competitive’ (from 4 to 1).

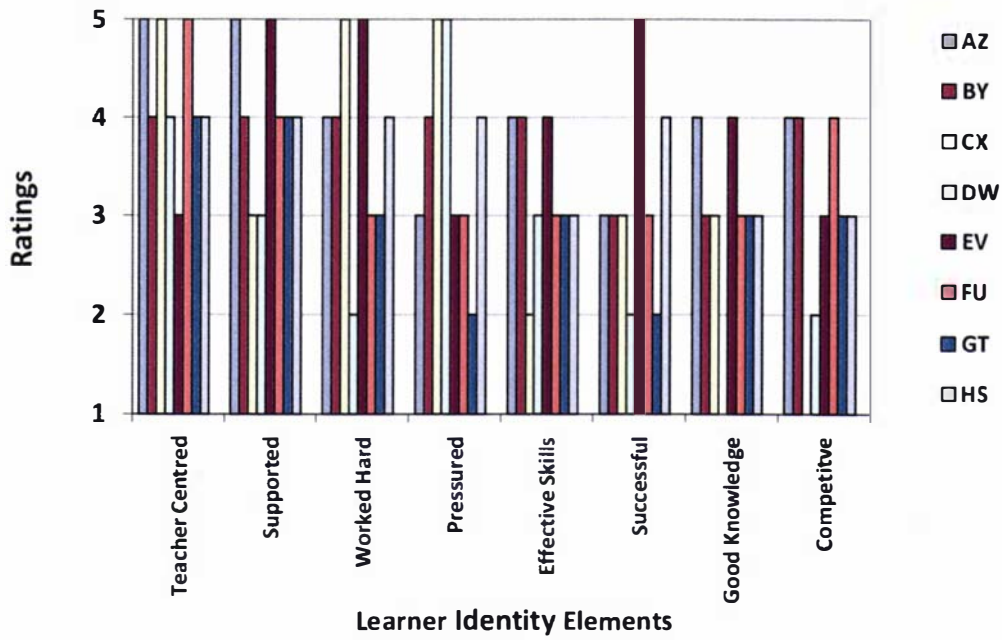


Figure 5.4: Identity elements by participants

Figure 5.5 shows a different perspective by analysing the information from the participant’s view. However, the ratings still show a variety of responses: some students rated the elements reasonably consistently; others showed marked variation. This should indicate the necessary tentativeness of proposing any broad generalisation beyond this study group and indicates that, in line with grounded theory, that the findings from this study can best offer a localised picture of the cross-educational adjustment BSP.

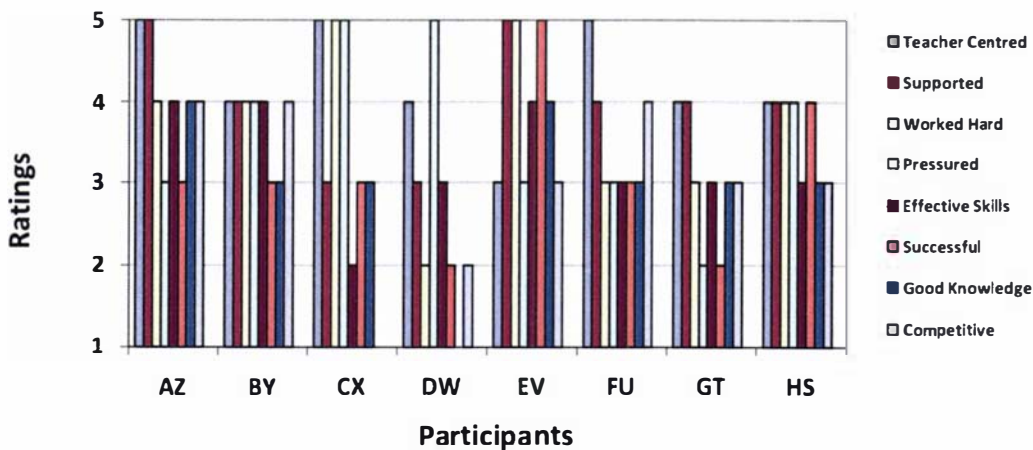


Figure 5.5: Participant by identity elements

### ***Attestation Feedback***

As well as gathering reflections from the original ‘participants,’ the attestation group were asked to consider the learner identity elements. These students were also Mainland Chinese, postgraduate students studying at Atherton. Most were studying business, with the exception of ZV who was a PhD student in the sciences. On one hand the inclusion of this student takes a step outside the norm group profile but it also added an interesting scenario of how a student outside the norm group may respond. These differences were noted in Chapter Six as they became more apparent in the New Zealand context. Under grounded theory it is good to seek different perspectives as it may challenge and/or affirm the emerging theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In most respects the comments of the students in the attestation interviews followed the same pattern of the study participants. Their interview comments have been incorporated into the above discussion on the eight learner identity elements.

The attestation group was asked to rate on the same Likert scale their responses to the identity elements. A comparison of average responses (see Figure 5.6) as to the ‘truth for them’ between the participants and the attestors of each of these elements show that, generally, the attestors rated a little lower than the participants except for ‘pressured’ and ‘competitive.’ This may have been because the participants were asked to rate these elements during their third interview and their level of comfort with the interview process may have allowed them to rate more freely. The attestors may have rated ‘pressured’ and ‘competitive’ more highly because the interviews were conducted soon after their final exams had finished. For both groups ‘teacher centred’, ‘supported’, and ‘pressured’ were in the top four ranking. Again, any attempt to show whether the validity and reliability of these elements is more generalisable beyond the participants and attestors is outside the scope of this study.

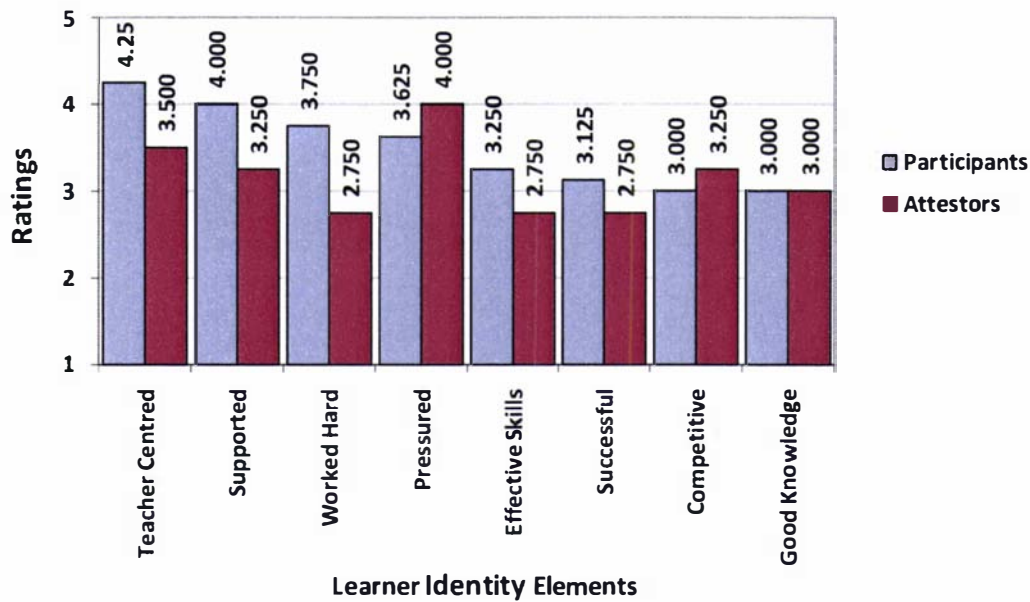


Figure 5.6: Comparison of learner identity elements for participants and attestors

Two additional areas were mentioned by the attestation group. In some respects they have been caught up in the eight elements but it is worthwhile mentioning them at this juncture. The first was that differences in context and individual perspectives need to be respected. This was related to acknowledging the differences between rural and city dwellers and the need to respect individual “*problems and characteristics*” (WSA1-1107). The second area was the manner in which their learning in China lowered the levels of personal interest in learning generally and certain subjects in particular. Personal desires were set aside for future prospects, such as socially desirable and demand-driven employment, which meant that certain academic programmes were considered more helpful to meet that end. WS said: “*Another thing is that the Chinese education system has some problems. It is kind of like they try to kill your own interests. In the future you want to get a good job, so you have to study these kinds of materials. Everyone studies them*” (A1-1107). ZV also commented in a similar way, when discussing the pressure she felt under, about how the process of learning blunted her passion to learn (A3-1207).

### *Literature Attestation*

The literature review highlighted a range of philosophical debates concerning the concept of knowledge in Chinese education. From a Western view Ballard and Clanchy (1991) branded the Chinese attitude to knowledge to be reproductive; however, Tweed and Lehman (2002) argued that to analyse Chinese education within a Socratic paradigm was unhelpful. They believed that it is better to understand 'knowledge' in its Confucian context. This highlights the value of knowledge to the individual in his or her pursuit of 'self-perfection' and the wider ripple effect this has on harmonising society.

It also impacts on the way that the pursuit of knowledge and the learning process is understood. At a more pragmatic level the review also noted the 'bounded-ness' of knowledge resulting from the teacher being seen as the authentic possessor of knowledge and the educational consequences of the high respect with which that teacher is held. Furthermore, the instrumentalism of Mainland Chinese education found expression in various elements of the learner identity. Pragmatism may mean content was more valued than the process of learning (see: 'Identity Element Eight: Good Knowledge') and competitiveness was fostered (see: 'Identity Element Seven: Competitive'). The love of learning, as noted in the literature review, also may mean that achievement was highly commended and support, at sacrificial levels, was given to those who may succeed (see: 'Identity Element Six: Successful'; 'Identity Element Two: Supported').

While Confucianism stressed the need for moral transformation, with time, this became shaded by external conformity and a stress on behavioural, as opposed to attitudinal, change (Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Ho et al., 2001; Grove, 1991). Once again, pragmatism may have turned this into a focus on outcomes rather than processes. One consequence may be that the learning skill set is largely shaped by achieving these desired outcomes (e.g., the role of memorisation) hence the emphasis in the learner identity on effectiveness in learning (see: 'Identity Element Five: Effective Skills') rather than more wide-ranging knowledge gathering skills and less development of metacognitive learning awareness. Demand for cultural and social harmony, a traditional Confucian end-goal of moral transformation, may reinforce

the importance of self-denial and reduce the desire for self-expression (Wang & Mao, 1996).

The desire for harmony may also lead to cooperativeness, face saving, and self-effacement in the learning environment (Flowerdew, 1998). The literature reinforced the view that the nature of learning in China tended to be marked by relational and cooperative dimensions (Flowerdew, 1998; Biggs, 1996; Tang, 1996; Hu & Grove, 1991). While this was documented in the student data (see: 'Identity Element Two: Supported') the element of needing to compete in a highly competitive context was also emphasised (see: 'Identity Element Seven: Competitive'). The level of competitiveness in China attested to by the students in this study appears to be higher than the literature would indicate. However, in the students' experience it was balanced by support levels that were rated even higher than competitiveness by the students (see: 'Feedback Attestation'). It is also possible that the students participating in this study or, more generally, students who go overseas to study have a more competitive nature. It may also be a product of the need to succeed created by the dual tertiary education system within China (Dooley, 2001; see also Chapter Two: The Efficacy of Effort), which fuels intense competitiveness in students such as those who participated in this study.

Another major legacy of Confucianism was the role and status of the teacher (see Chapter Two: 'The Teacher'). This was very much endorsed by the participant students who rated this element of the learner identity as being most true for them compared to the other eight (see: 'Identity Element Five: Teacher Centred'; 'Learner Identity Element Value'). In China, the teacher had high status and played the central role in both teaching and learning processes. The literature expressed concerns, as did some of the students (see: 'Identity Element Five: Teacher Centred'), about what the high level of respect meant in relation to the possible effect of authoritarianism in terms of transmissiveness, 'passivity', and dependency. The review also mentioned a possible reduction in the ability to develop critical reflection and creativity (Ho et al., 2001; Flowerdew, 1998; Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Lee, 1996; Wang & Mao, 1996; Lee, 1985; Dawson, 1981). However, the teacher also played a significant support role for the students (see: 'Identity Element Two: Supported').

The efficacy of effort was a major part of the Confucian heritage ('see Chapter Two: 'Efficacy of Effort'). The cultural frame encouraged students to believe that they had a high degree of control over what made a successful learner (Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Biggs & Watkins, 1996). Cultural attributes such as hard work and perseverance were highly regarded by the students as the pathway to success (see: 'Identity Element Three: Works Hard'). The belief that the learning variables are largely controlled by the learner meant students have a strong sense of achievement motivation (McInerney, 1998; Lee, 1996). On one hand, this may mean they would be encouraged by success and, on the other hand, they may re-double efforts if faced with failure (see: 'Identity Element Six: Successful'). This belief system, as a result, tended to create significant performance pressures on the students (see: 'Identity Element Four: Pressured'; 'Identity Element Six: Successful').

To this point, the analysis in this chapter has initially placed the students' cross-cultural educational experiences within the Chinese context in order to form a base for determining the nature of the change. This was developed further by specifying eight learner identity elements that the students suggested comprised who they were as learners in China. In the next section, the Chinese context is returned to and two claims are made about the students' Chinese educational context.

### **Externally Bounded and Culturally Harmonised**

The analysis of findings has highlighted the way that a certain learner identity was formed in the students by the influence of the macro and micro factors. As a further conceptualisation of this data it is proposed that this eight element learner identity is both externally bounded and culturally harmonised by the effect of these influences. By 'externally bounded' it is meant that the formation of these learner identity characteristics is almost completely shaped by the macro and micro external pressures on the individual. This does not negate that the formation process has been to a variable extent internalised by the individual. But where this has occurred it tends to be directly assimilated into the learner identity rather than being consciously reflected on.

By 'culturally harmonised' it is meant that the learner identity characteristics are largely uniform in nature due to the strong homogeneous cultural dynamic within

Mainland China. The literature review noted that a highly homogenous social framework is a function of the dominance of the Han Chinese as a proportion of the population base (92%), the society's collectivist nature, and the tendency for such cultures to have high power distance factors that lead people to accepting, and not challenging, societal norms. This is also a function of the strong traditional desire, which still has ongoing currency within China, for societal harmony as explained in Chapter Two (Shen, 2001; Wang & Mao, 1996; Smith, 1993).

The attestation interview guide asked the students to respond to this concept of learner identity being externally bounded and culturally harmonised. Their responses were grouped under society and culture, family, and education. In these three areas the focus was the effect on the students as learners.

### ***Society and Culture***

In regard to society and culture, ZV perceived that: *“We kind of have gone one way towards the parents and society rather than what we want. We lose our independence and individualism. We lose our own interests about what we would like to do and what kind of person we would like to do”* (A3-1207). She went on to comment that: *“In China parents, society, and people around me show me what to do. I need to be educated and I need to succeed. What they want is for me to do well instead of what I want to do.”*

When asked about learner identity being externally bounded and culturally harmonised YU (A2-1207) responded:

*Yeah, I agree with you because I can feel the pressure outside my heart: the pressure from family, from my school, and the outside society. They expect me to get a degree, get a good job, have a good future, and have a good family. If you have a higher education they always respect you. They expect you to get high grades and to be an expert. And then you are required to be an intelligent, advanced person in society. So sometimes, I feel a very high pressure.*

WS (A1-1107) concurred about the pressure from society to succeed and conform.

*I agree that society and our culture expects us to go to the tertiary education, get your degree, then use what you learn to serve the society and try to find a place to fit into society. If you don't get to high school and university they think you are maybe rebelling or something. You are useless or rubbish or something like that.*

Despite these social and cultural pressures on them as learners it was evident that these influences were on one hand internalised and on the other confronted with more individualistic patterns of behaviour. Regarding the internalising of these pressures YU (A2-1207), after referring to these external pressures, said: *“But in the other part of my heart, I also agree. You could say I am harmonised by the culture. I grew up with this culture and I know it’s my fate. So that’s why I agree to get a higher degree.”*

### **Family**

In regard to family, there was a deep awareness of needing to respect and follow the values and goals set by the family unit. XT (A1-1107), after commenting on the influence of society generally, said: *“On the other side is the family. I think you should understand what the parents are thinking. They think they also want their kids to have a good future and a good life. So they want you to have a good education.”* This sense of benevolent concern for the best future for their children was reinforced by active involvement. XT went on to say, that in his experience, *“... your parents are watching you. They are always behind you. That’s another problem.”*

Not all participants felt quite the same degree of pressure from parental engagement and one of the variables was the extent to which the student had internalised these expectations as their own. Remember HS’s comment earlier in this chapter: *“My parents did not do this very much because I had my own ideas. My idea was not wrong so they thought, ‘OK, you have this idea. It is OK for you; for your life’ ”* (1-0906). There were also elements of performance display aimed at satisfying the parents. WS spelt out his strategy: *“When I was in high school I worked hard but mentally I wasn’t working hard. I tried to show the hard working part to my parents”* (A1-1107).

### **Education**

The influence of and demands for education also establish this sense of learner identity being externally bounded and culturally harmonised. The level of education achieved was critical to job prospects and the future generally (WS & XT, A1-1107).

This connection between society and education was felt by XT who expressed it in terms of the ‘good’: *“I think for society, because of history of over 1000 years, if you can work for the government and get a good job and have a good life you have to take the exams to get a good future, a good life, and a good job. It’s still true now. I don’t mean exactly true. If you can’t get a degree or higher education you probably can’t get a job”* (A1-1107).

The demand for education was not only to do with personal prospects it also affected social positioning. YU believed that: *“If you have a higher education they always respect you. They expect you to get high grades and to be an expert. And then you are required to be an intelligent, advanced person in society”* (A2-1207).

WS (A1-1107) expressed feelings about the influence of society on his learning, his place within that context, and the need to be accepted by the right people.

*Another thing is that society pushes you out to study more. When you get a job and you are trying to socialise with these other people, sometimes they ask, ‘What university did you go to? Have you got a masters degree or a PhD, or what?’ If you are only a graduate from high school, then it is ‘Who are you supposed to be?’ Sometimes this happens, not all the time, but sometimes. This, plus the family, gives me a big stress so I have to work hard. Study more and learn more because I want to socialise with these people.*

The students, during the attestation interviews, were asked to rate the connection between society/culture and education and family and education on the same Likert scale used previously. The results are shown in Table 5.2 below. In response to the first statement (“In China, my culture and society values education”) the level of support was high. Two students scored the maximum, one student opted for ‘mostly true,’ while the other student rated this item as ‘sometimes true; sometimes not true.’ These results give a clear guide as to the strength of societal and cultural influences upon the value of education for these students. The responses to the second statement (“In China, my family encouraged my learning”) were even stronger. Three out of four students gave this the maximum level of verification with the other student rating the item as ‘mostly true.’ This may indicate that while both of these areas, society/culture and family, exerted a strong influence on these students and their education/learning, the primary factor may be the more immediate demands of their particular family. However, these familial demands, as has been shown, are largely shaped by the broader macro influence of society and culture.

Table 5.2:

*Influences on student education and learning*

<b>STUDENT</b>	<b><i>“In China, my culture and society values education”</i></b>	<b><i>“In China, my family encouraged my learning”</i></b>
<b>WS</b>	4: (Mostly true)	5: (Very true)
<b>XT</b>	3: (Sometimes true)	4: (Mostly true)
<b>YU</b>	5: (Very true)	5: (Very true)
<b>ZV</b>	5: (Very true)	5: (Very true)

**Modelling the Conditions**

A major function of this study was to conceptualise the data into a substantive theory which expressed the basic social process (BSP) involved in cross-cultural educational adaptation. A helpful way of doing this was to model this conceptualisation in a way that is able to ‘see’ what is happening for these students as they undergo this change. The conditions/interactions/consequences paradigm suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998), as noted at the beginning of this chapter, was used to format this model. Chapter Five has addressed the first section of this process: the conditions. The model in Figure 5.7 seeks to establish the findings so far in a manner that captures this beginning phase of the BSP. It integrates the various influences, dynamics, and elements present that may have established the learner identity, as expressed by the students within this study.

The basic condition affecting the adjustment of the Mainland Chinese students in this study is the establishment of a learner identity within their original home context. It has been shown, by reliance on the data, that the major influences on this identity are the macro societal and cultural variables (beyond the arrow) and the more micro variables of family and education (within the arrow). In both cases the double-ended arrows seek to indicate that these influences have both a strong traditional basis in Chinese society and a continuing contemporary currency whilst acknowledging the influence of cultural change. Eight learner identity elements were supported from the interviews with the original participants and affirmed by the attestation interviews. While limited by the quantity of participants in this study, the

overall assessment of the relative strengths of these elements is reflected in their clockwise ordering, highest to least, from 'Teacher Centred' to 'Good Knowledge.' It has also been argued, in seeking a conceptual frame for these identity elements, that they are externally bounded and culturally harmonised.

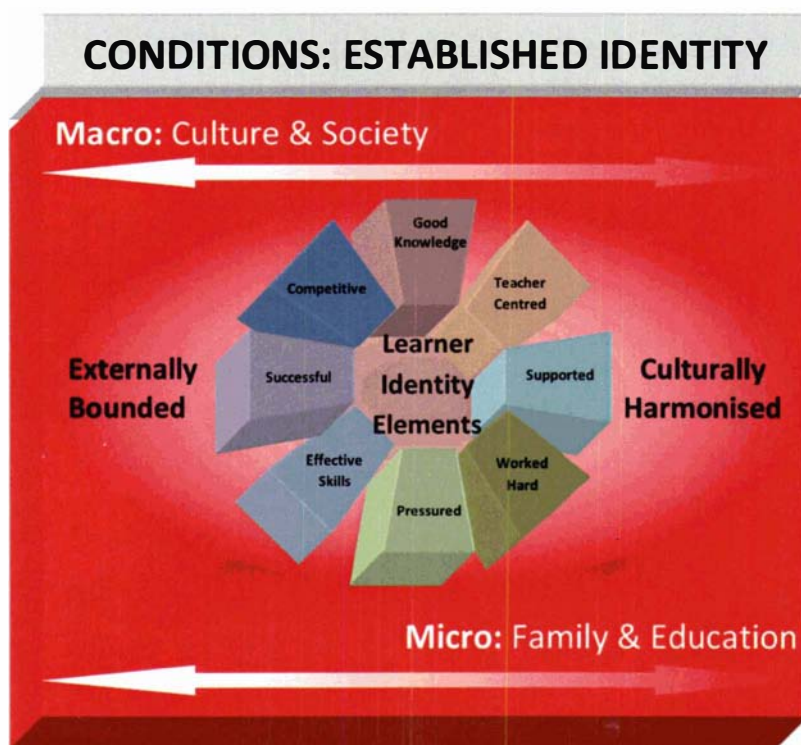


Figure 5.7: Conditions of cross-cultural educational adjustment

## SUMMARY

This chapter has depicted, from the data collected in the interviews with the study participants and a feedback group of attestors, the conditions that existed for these students prior to experiencing cross-cultural educational adjustment. First it has established that wider influences in China were active in the formation of these conditions. The macro influences were categorised under culture and society and the pervasiveness and formative power of these factors were strongly influenced by the highly homogenous nature of Chinese society. Family and education were considered to be more directly connected to the experience of the students as learners

and were therefore considered 'more' micro influences. These two factors also had a significant effect on these students as learners.

In the constant comparison mode of grounded theory, as the data was examined, reviewed, and modelled it allowed eight learner identity elements to emerge. These elements were reviewed with both the original study participants in the third round of interviews and the students in the attestation interviews. There was an intentional effort to elicit from the students other aspects of learner identity. It was found that the eight elements satisfactorily incorporated the dimensions suggested by the students. These identity characteristics were also rated by the two groups of students and, while the original students affirmed them more strongly than the attestors, they were found to be appropriate expressions of who they were as learners. These elements form a basis to examine the change that occurs during the cross-cultural educational process.

The various influences and elements that arose from the categorisation of the data were placed within a model that sought to depict a conceptualisation or theorisation of the conditions related to the basic social process of cross-cultural educational adjustment (see Figure 5.7). In essence, this first section of the overall model states that societal, cultural, familial, and educational influences have shaped a discernible learner identity. Due to the strength of the traditional power and ongoing currency of these influences the identity elements can be said to be both externally bounded and culturally harmonised. The next chapter looks at the issues these students faced as they crossed educational boundaries and how they responded in terms of adopting learning strategies and maintaining motivation. This change would be expected to seriously challenge the efficacy of the learner identity formed by their educational milieu in China.

## CHAPTER SIX




### INTERACTIONS

#### *Journey to the West: FRACTURED HARMONY*

#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter goes on to address the next stage of Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory CIC (Conditions/Interactions/Consequences) model. It describes the ongoing movement of the BSP (Basic Social Process) by determining the interactions that these students experienced as they crossed educational cultures. Strauss and Corbin define interactions (or actions) as the tactics taken "by which persons handle situations, problems and issues that they encounter" (1998, p. 133). These interactions can be strategic (i.e., intentional) or routine (i.e., "more habituated ways of responding to occurrences in everyday life" (1998, p. 133)).

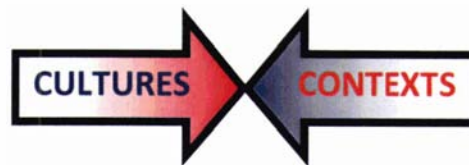
The continuing '*Journey to the West*' described in this chapter illustrates that the harmonious and established learner identity formed in China is fractured by a range of issues. Therefore, the task of this chapter was to draw out what issues may have caused the fracturing of the learner identity and what actions (interactions) the students took in response to these issues. In regard to both issues and actions, the examination of these factors was focused on discussing the educational aspects of the students' cross-cultural adjustment.

The findings and analysis of the interactions discussed in this chapter are interwoven due to the grounded theory methodology, as was seen in Chapter Five with the development of the conditions. Within this discussion, it also reintroduces relevant material from the literature review where appropriate. As in Chapter Five, the interactions phase was progressively modelled to highlight the theorisation of the data. The 'distortion' symbol () represents the disruptive force of the issues the students faced and arrows represent the actions of the students in implementing strategies () and drawing on motivators ().

This chapter has four major sections. First, it begins with some comments about the transition to the new culture and context the students found themselves in. Second, the focus moves to the interactive heart of the BSP by considering the educational issues that the students had to face. These issues could be placed within the conditions of the BSP; however, the process nature of the BSP better groups the issues with the responses of the students within the New Zealand tertiary context rather than with the established learner identity that was formed in China. Next, the two action categories were described and analysed as the third and fourth sections. The actions were the strategies the students used to counteract these challenges and the motivational strengths they drew on to help them overcome.

### CONFLICTING CULTURES - COMPETING CONTEXTS

The participants in this study needed to respond to the complexity and interactivity of the variables that competing cultures and conflicting contexts placed them among.



These differences are exacerbated by the way in which academic cultures (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997) are held largely unconsciously and the dramatic switch in the students' learning ecology from one community of practice to another. While the effect of these changes varies with each student, they are all faced with the urgent need to survive academically and the burden to do so is placed largely on the students' shoulders. The literature review highlighted these variables in discussing the educational cross-cultural adaptation implications for the Chinese learner. The literature review also emphasised the need to conceptualise this information.

The students in this study did not always display a heightened meta-awareness of issues such as learning processes, culture in general, and academic cultures in particular. As noted in the last chapter, this was to be expected due to their age, area of study, and current engagement within the educational system. However, they were aware of how certain aspects within these areas had impacted on who they were as learners and their learning at Atherton University. In addition, the wider and general cultural forces were not as much the focus of this study as the more specific

changes that students were aware of as these impacted on their cross-cultural educational adjustment. This section of the chapter draws attention to two such areas: their preparedness for change, including comments on expectations; and how they found life in the new community. More specific issues surrounding culture and education are dealt with in the sections that follow.

### **Preparedness for Change**

It would be expected that changing cultures and contexts would be a significant, possibly overwhelming, change for the students. CX described the change as a “*big leap*” (3-0907). While the logistics of coming were catered for, except for one student who did not bring the original of their IELTS certification (CX3-0907), about half the students suggested they had given insufficient thought to, or they were not prepared for, the process of changing cultures. FU (3-0907) described her experience. “*I was very excited about coming. I didn't think about it being stressful. ... I didn't even think about [preparing to study in New Zealand]. I just came.*” BY thought he was “*... well prepared. But I was wrong*” (3-EQ). DW had considered the change but it was not as he thought it would be. “*Before I went abroad, I knew studying overseas is not easy. But I didn't realise the stress sometimes is stronger than before*” (3-EQ). HS came with a different expectation but a similar finding: “*For me, I thought it was going to be very easy when I came here but it was totally different*” (2-0906). JQ felt she did not have the knowledge to prepare. She commented: “*... we have no preparation before because we don't know the study style in [this city]*” (1-1006).

One of the students, EV, who by his own admission tended to plan well, had come to New Zealand to learn about the country for a few years before he decided to commit himself to study (3-0907). His major concern was not for the more mature postgraduate students but for the younger ones (2-0407) and he mentioned a specific example. “*I also had a cousin who tried to study here but she couldn't get to university. She has been here the same time as me. She did a diploma course this year but I don't know if she passed or not. She wastes her time here and her parents' money. So I am very worried about this*” (2-0407). He saw that these students were

often at risk of failure due to not being ready to come and that this may also put their future in jeopardy. In this respect, he felt:

*I would not encourage all the students to study overseas, especially the younger students, because if you are not ready don't come overseas. Not only is it a waste of your money it may also destroy your life. There are lots of students who come here and they couldn't pass their IELTS so they couldn't go to university. They are very afraid to tell their parents and they don't want them to come back because they didn't get anything like a qualification, they don't have any achievements and the family says you need to keep doing it like that and we will give you more money. So the children are just lost themselves. They don't know what they are going to do in the future.*

When asked how they could have prepared better some of the students looked back and emphasised the need for better language skills (FU3-0907; GT3-0907). However, the opportunities in China to grow these skills were limited in the school context (FU2-0706) and both difficult and costly to fit into the lifestyle (EV2-0407; CX2-0706). GT felt that *"In China we don't have an environment to practice"* (3-0907). She also thought that sitting an IELTS test was not an adequate means of determining their English language ability. *"Tests are only a test but how to use English is another thing. So I will not feel so confident"* (3-0907). Paradoxically, they came to New Zealand with the expectation that study here would improve their English (CX3-0907; FU3-0907) and did not sufficiently factor into their considerations that their language deficit on arrival could cause such stress. Other initial expectations surrounded seeking new knowledge and gaining a Western qualification (CX3-0907; DW3-EQ; FU3-0907).

### **Life in the New Community**

In adjusting to the wider aspects of competing cultures and conflicting contexts, not being well prepared for the cultural changes also meant that adjustment to life in New Zealand was always going to be somewhat fraught. Positively, students spoke of their appreciation for the people they met (AZ1-0506; FU1-0406; EV1-0906), the pleasantness of the general and study environments (AZ1-0506; JQ1-1006), the development of their English skills (DW1-0606; FU1-0406), and the ability to know differently and learn new things (FU1-0406; IR1-0906; JQ1-1006). However, on other issues, such as the need to work part-time, they were more

ambivalent. EV saw the value of this opportunity (1-0906) while HS also saw the way this further restricted their time and social resources (1-0606). AZ caught an additional element of this dilemma in his comments: *“It depends on different students. Some of them are happy because they make money and support themselves. But some of them are not very happy because the job is at a low level, not a high level. And they mention that they study at university but they can’t get a better job. So they are not very satisfied”* (1-0506).

The students’ life situations further complicated an already complex situation. CX was an older student who was married with one child and had immigrated to New Zealand after a lengthy period of study and work experience in China. He chose to work in New Zealand and wait for permanent residency status so he could have access to tertiary education at local rates. However, he found the initial settling in period very difficult financially. *“From the economic point, the first year my partner studied education. That year I worked full-time. The hourly rate was quite low. I just managed the weekly expense. Just enough for living. Just managed – no more left”* (1-0406). AZ’s spouse had almost completed her Masters study before he came to New Zealand to join her. The relationship was a significant social and study resource for him but it also meant he had less need to relate with others and he felt this negatively impacted on his English growth (1-0506).

The students also missed the social context experienced at university in China. The study pressure (IR1-0906), the need to look after themselves to a greater degree than before (AZ1-0506), and the scattering of the students accommodation-wise (EV1-0906) meant social interaction was reduced. Social activities in China had been more readily available and accessible and this impacted on their study as well. EV felt, in relation to the social network, that: *“The students [in China] can easily find and enrol in these social activities – not like in NZ. In NZ the students live everywhere and when the university has social activities the students don’t have time to come. So it’s very hard. The students do better at university in China than they do here. This is my personal view”* (1-0906). Despite a reasonable length of time in New Zealand CX felt that he had not really engaged with New Zealand culture. *“Within the three years I have tried to keep contact with society but most of the time was spent at school ... But my contact with the society is still limited ”* (1-0406).

The focus of this study is on the educational aspects of cross-cultural adjustment. However, the students' lack of preparedness for crossing cultures and the particular ways the 'differentness' of the New Zealand culture and society confronted them were seen to underlie many of the educational issues these students had to face.

## CROSS-CULTURAL EDUCATIONAL ISSUES FACED

This section investigates the issues that the students faced as they crossed educational boundaries. It appears that they significantly impacted on the learners as they studied in New Zealand and that the issues reflect those raised in the literature review. Before they are examined more fully it is worthwhile to hear some of the anecdotal stories of these students as they described the challenges they faced. The coding process can break apart these stories and while they are reassembled through categorisation the pathos of the individual facing difficult times should not be missed. Therefore, a number of vignettes from two members of the attestation group have been placed at this point so that the immediacy and power of the students' testimonies can be understood.

### Student Vignettes

YU (A2-1207):

*I always live on campus and this is my first time to live with international and Kiwi students and you don't know anything about them. Even your English is not very good and you do not know how to communicate. I think sometimes I offended them. I have to use strange words to describe how I feel.*

ZV (A3-1207):

*I have had to work hard for the whole semester. When I was in China I didn't need to work hard during the semester. You only had to work really hard in the last couple of weeks or months before the exam. But here, I have to, probably, be very busy every week, every day. The next assignment due is always waiting. Because it is 25% of the final mark I have to do well. It is very busy for the whole year, the whole semester.*

YU (A2-1207):

*I remember when I came here to NZ, in the first semester I took a paper on management. Actually, it's a very basic paper. I had to answer questions which required a certain type of answer. I didn't know how as I had no experience so I just relied on my previous experience and did short answers. These answers were two or three sentences. I thought it was enough and I thought I would get a very good mark. And then I got a fail. It is a shock. But the shock is very good. I cannot believe why. I had never failed before. Probably 95% of the class got a very, very high grade. I went to the paper coordinator and she talked to me about why. It is very different for an essay and a short answer and I didn't know how to answer.*

YU (A2-1207):

*I remember the time I took a law paper. But my English was bad and in the law classes they were always talking about the cases. They have very specific terminology. Even though I am interested in the cases I don't know what they are talking about. Even when the classmates were laughing I didn't know what was so funny. At that time I didn't feel good; not very comfortable. When the final exam was coming I felt I was going to fail. But I didn't care.*

ZV (A3-1207):

*I do know a friend of mine who came over here because her parents wanted her to come. She didn't like what she was majoring in and so she also lost interest. Because she had no parents around there was more freedoms and she ended up after two years failing most of the papers and she had to go home.*

YU (A2-1207):

*This year I am doing my Masters and then in the middle of the year I felt so stressful because I didn't need to go to the class. The time is totally controlled by myself. I had done three years of study here and I didn't want to study anymore. I felt like this for one or two months. I felt so stressful. The attitude became very negative. I really wanted to get rid of everything and then after two months I suddenly realised this is not what I expect to do. If I don't continue I will fail to finish my Masters. Then the things I want to do I can't do them.*

### **Issues Faced**

These stories lead into the categorisation of the issues faced. Ten 'saturated' categories emerged from the coding and analysis processes. This meant that no significantly 'new' data was being disclosed, after the sequence of interviews, that warranted the formation of new categories, the categories themselves were well-developed, and the connections between categories seemed in accord (Strauss &

Corbin, 1990). These connections meant that there was a small degree of shared data among the categories. Where this was the case these have been briefly highlighted to depict the full dimensionality of the categories. Three major categories of issues emerged from the data: overarching issues; particular learning issues; and more personal issues.

### ***Overarching Issues***

Three overarching issues became evident from analysing the student data. These were different ways of learning, language, and cultural differences. It is not surprising that these surfaced, as the literature noted that a change in learning ecology can be a significant hurdle in cross-cultural adjustment (Francois, 1997). This may be particularly true for postgraduate students, who, as relatively short-term sojourners often have to fight for academic survival right from the start.

### **Different ways of learning.**

The change of learning context meant rapid adjustments to the constantly 'new' or 'different' as these students' comments suggest: *"You have to think about more things and solve more problems, and there is information you don't understand"* (HS2-0906); *"I was feeling so strange about everything"* (GT2-0906); *"I am always scared of making the wrong choice. Always learn the new thing, 'Oh, my God.' Just from the beginning. From zero"* (FU1-0406). Being overwhelmed caused adverse consequences such as information overload (HS1-0606), wrong course choices (BY3-EQ), confusion about expectations and standards (EV3-0907), anxiety (GT1-0606), and the prospect of failure (HS2-0906). IR felt these pressures negatively affected her understanding and caused withdrawal.



*My first study at university I couldn't follow the lecturer. I felt very, very disappointed. I don't like to go to school ... I can't understand a tiny thing. So sometimes I think, 'OK, I can stay at home and just read the textbook.' Even though I can attend the class it does nothing for me. When I finished my first semester I not often attended the class (1-0906).*

Facing these challenges the students believed learning in China had not equipped them for learning in New Zealand. To be fair, this is not an appropriate expectation to place upon the Chinese education system; however, it did mean that the efficacy of their learning experience, skills, and knowledge in the new context was an issue. The students' responses to this problem can be understood in relation to attribution theory (McInerney, 2008; Schunk, 2008; Oettingen, 1995). Certain aspects of their learning could not be changed; for example, what and how they had learnt in China and how much, initially, they understood in the New Zealand classroom. So, the focus, as in IR's case above, was to place effort where it would make a difference, that is, reading and trying to understand the textbook. While this may have been necessary, if classroom learning had remained in the 'not useful' aspect and withdrawal had continued, then this may have led to significant issues for IR. Fortunately, IR's lack of understanding did not prove to be a stable attributional factor, that is, improvement in English skills enabled her to re-engage.

However, the knowledge and learning processes that had significantly formed the established learner identity (see Chapter Five) were possibly more difficult to change. In particular, their English had been reading and writing focused and, as noted above, had not developed their speaking and listening skills (AZ1-0506; CX1-0406; FU1-0406). Three students wistfully reflected that language was not a problem with learning in China (AZ1-0506; DW1-0606; FU1-0406). Prior knowledge from China was sometimes helpful but at times, for BY, it did not mesh well with the new (2-0906). Some students also mentioned the change in the teacher's role (GT1-0606; HS1-0606; IR1-0906) and these issues are discussed under 'Different Teacher Relationships.'

The students were also overwhelmed by the pace and quantity of learning. The speed of learning was too fast and over too short a timeframe (BY1-0506; HS1-0606; JQ1-1006), although this perception could be partly due to the nature of the change (AZ1-0506). Compared to China, the textbook size and additional reading requirements meant more information had to be processed over a shorter semester length (JQ1-1006). This meant that workload levels were ramped up (EV1-0906) leading to increased pressure (CX3-0907) and reduced enjoyment in study (JQ1-1006). FU estimated that: "... *in a two hour class you have to learn by yourself after*

*class about ten times to learn it*" (1-0406). She did not think that the learning itself was too hard but not having the vocabulary and the structure of the knowledge made it difficult (FU1-0406). This situation may have been compounded by the more intensive assessment regime (JQ1-1006). There was some disappointment that the learning quality and depth was limited by their English skills (AZ2-0906) and that it was not always possible to gain an overview of the subject (HS2-0906). YU, one of the attestation students, had her sense of self-confidence and identity shaken by this experience:

*At that time I totally doubted my study skills and I doubted myself. It caused me to change but at the time I didn't know how to change. I was very confused. I thought to myself: 'Am I still the same sort of person I was in China?' Because I was always a very good student but now I was becoming a student not at that level* (A2-1207).

Class study and assignment groups were seen as important in New Zealand (JQ1-1006) but something of a mixed blessing to the students. Group work could be interesting and create contacts with Kiwi students (FU1-0406) and give experience of teamwork and leadership (EV2-0407; JQ1-1006). However, in China, as discussed in Chapter Five, some students had a preference for working alone (JQ1-1006; DW1-0606) and making this transition was not always easy. EV made his feelings on this issue quite clear:

*Chinese students, and other Asia students, don't like to do the group assignment. When they have like group presentations it's very hard to get all the students working together. ... It's difficult too when the group is all Chinese students. The Kiwi students will say, 'Tomorrow we will have to discuss everything.' They will all come on time. But with the Chinese students we will find an excuse, 'Sorry, I have another thing to do so I don't want to come.' So they don't have, how do you say, the cooperation knowledge. ... I don't want to do presentations with the other Chinese students. I find it very unreal, with many difficulties, because we divide up the assignment into different parts but when we finish and some students haven't finished you can't put it all together. If one student doesn't do the job it will make all students become very difficult* (2-0407).

Chinese students, as indicated in the literature review, do desire to cooperate (Flowerdew, 1998) but it happens at a more informal level (Flowerdew, 1998; Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Tang, 1996; Hu & Grove, 1991) which does not impinge on the students being solely responsible for their own work and results. The discussion in these less formal groups is based around the nature of the assessment

task, information sources, and how different students are approaching the topic (AZ2-0906, DW1-0606, EV1-0906; HS2-0906).

The students also reflected on the structural and conceptual differences between the learning ecologies. CX noted that: *“In China, to get a certificate you have to pass many, many subjects. In NZ, the programme is more focused, for example, banking”* (1-0406). Students also felt that learning in New Zealand required them to be more active (DW2-0906; EV2-0407), more independent (FU1-0406; HS2-0906), and more uncertain. CX commented: *“Here, the tutors or supervisors tell the students there are no definite answers. Each assignment that I submit to my supervisor I am afraid I will get it wrong. I may not catch the meaning; catch the contents.”* The shift in learning also required a change in thinking which was not only about adopting critical thinking patterns (FU3-0907) but coming to terms with the ideas/concepts of a foreign culture (BY2-0906; EV1-0906).

### **Language.**

A number of students in the participant group were certain that the most significant issue they faced in crossing educational cultures was language, which was the second overarching difference (AZ3-1007; CX1-0406; DW2-0906; EV2-0407; FU3-0907; GT1-0606). This was particularly true in the initial stages but it became more manageable with time (AZ1-0507; CX1-0406). For CX, a student who had studied English to a high level in China, the shock was considerable: *“When I came here I found myself hard to understand people speaking. I thought, ‘Is this English?’”* (1-0406).



The language issue surfaced in a number of areas affecting the students' study. AZ noted that it significantly complicated and, to an extent, compromised his thinking and speaking skills because he continually needed to switch languages to determine meaning (2-0906). BY also noted that he had to memorise in English what could not be adequately defined in Mandarin, be comprehended well in English, or both (1-0506) and EV jumbled and intermixed the languages and their forms while trying to both think and speak (1-0906). However, one student usually

tried to cope with English without back-translating it into Mandarin wherever possible as he felt this limited problems with understanding and, later on, examination recall (AZ2-0906).

Language issues also created study issues with class participation (GT3-0907), poor grammar (EV2-0407), and communicating with the teacher (BY2-0906). In addition, it led to time pressures (GT1-0606), confusion with course requirements (HS1-0606), disconnection of the knowledge from life and experience (IR1-0906), and lower levels of reflection on, and grasp of, the knowledge taught (BY2-0906). A poor understanding of English fundamentals could also threaten failure. EV recalled a conversation with one of his lecturers:

*... my postgraduate teacher said, 'Once you choose to study in the Western countries I have to treat you the same as the native speakers because that is your decision. I have no choice. If your English is not good enough that's your problem. I can't give you some benefit because you are not a native English speaker. If you have lots of grammar mistakes on your assignment I am going to fail you even though you are not a native English speaker' (2-0407).*

The disconnections caused by these language issues resulted in limited opportunities to relate to Kiwi students (FU1-0406) or grasp the elements of the New Zealand culture (GT1-0606). GT commented:

*I still can't use English very well. Sometimes it will cause me to lack confidence and discourage me from doing something you really want to do. Even in your studies that's a very important reason. If your language is not good enough, you will not really understand the Kiwi culture. If you can't understand this culture then you cannot get very close relationships with other people. That will stop your way to go on. Many Chinese students always want to go back to China when they first come to NZ. Sometimes I still feel I am lacking of confidence. Then I feel so upset and lost just because of the language problem (1-0606).*

These issues were caused by factors such as low listening and speaking skill levels (CX2-0706), the challenge of different accents (BY2-0906) and Kiwi slang (IR1-0906), low comprehension proficiency (DW1-0606), and struggling with vocabulary including academic jargon (IR1-0906). IR talked about her confusion both at university and in her work situation:

*And when I found my part-time job and the Kiwis use the local language I can't understand a thing. So, my God, I feel like I am in another world. ... Sometimes, even though I talk with them I can't understand them. Oh my God, what did that mean? It's not because they are Kiwi or not. But*

*when I go back to the school my lecturer often uses a different kind of English, such as now. For one paper, my lecturer is from Malaysia and she often says, 'I know a lot of Malaysian English.' But I can't understand much. I still feel it is very hard for the listening (1-0906).*

The opportunities to improve English language skills were also limited. The students tended to associate largely with other Chinese students (DW1-0606) and some work situations were also limited in the level of contact with native English speakers (BY2-0906).

Overall, the students in this study had significant issues in the speaking and listening registers and these disrupted effective communication (Holmes, 2005, 2004). Language difficulties also created cognitive dissonance which hindered learning. The place of language as a highly prominent issue faced by overseas students was also affirmed by the literature review (Henderson, Milhouse, & Cao, 1993; as cited in Ward et al., 2001). The review noted the significant differences in the language constructs between Mandarin and English (Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Berry & Williams, 2004), which resulted in English being difficult to learn, especially within the listening and speaking registers (Berry & Williams (2004). Ward et al. (2001) noted that while this issue is perceived by the students as their major problem other issues also influence the students' learning. However, these other issues are often compounded by language difficulties, as is evident in the following discussion.

### **Cultural differences.**

The third overarching divergence was the significant differences between the home and host cultures that were identified by the study participants. Along with language and different ways of learning, the rapid cultural adjustment required of the students meant that the 'tourist' or 'honeymoon' phase of relishing the differences in a new culture can be significantly reduced resulting in increased severity of culture shock (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). Neuliep (2003, p. 434) claimed that "... *all atypical problems that occur during acculturation are caused by or exacerbated by culture shock.*"



The nature of the cultural differences was seen by the students to arise from a foundational level. BY said: *“I think the difference between Chinese universities and NZ universities is not the fundamentals it is because of different ideas”* (2-0906).

The challenges for different students included: moving from an educational culture which was attitudinally *“serious”* in China to a *“take it easy”* approach in New Zealand (GT2-0906); accessing New Zealand cultural factors relevant to their courses, for example, marketing (JQ1-1006); different understandings when communicating concepts (IR1-0906); and the value placed on education (EV2-0407). EV felt his already formed ways of thinking inhibited learning. *“When I come to NZ my age was already more than 20. So my mind is already in a certain order. I have very strong traditional Chinese thinking. ... This thinking stopped me developing my English skills”* (1-0906).

Dealing with daily life situations was a constant part of living and learning in New Zealand. DW noted the need to pay tax and drive a car (1-0606) and EV did not have the resources to solve problems and felt unable to form quality friendships with Kiwis (1-0906). EV was bemused by a story he related that illustrated cultural difference:

*I have another interesting story of my friend who is working in the bank. One of the Kiwi office mates quit their job and wanted to be a builder: ‘I like the fresh air. I don’t want to stay in the office all the time.’ I don’t know why? In China, if you have a good job in the office that means you have a high social position. If you don’t have this job you will lose your face* (2-0407).

However, the cultural differences were not necessarily overwhelming (BY2-0906) and they could be points of interest and enjoyment (DW2-0906).

Coming from China’s largely homogenous ethnic context (GT1-0606) the students encountered a multi-cultural environment for the first time. IR explained the difference as she saw it: *“Because I have stayed in NZ, now I feel that NZ as a country is different from others. It is an immigration country. Here there are a lot of people from different countries”* (1-0906). Students from other cultures were more likely to question the teacher (GT1-0606) and Kiwis were seen as more motivated and active in their learning (GT3-0907). Teachers and students from various nations made it *“hard for the listening”* (IR1-0906). But GT saw both sides of this situation:

*... in NZ people come from different parts of the world, your class has different kinds of people and the teacher can come from another culture.*

*Maybe it will have some cultural conflicts. That means sometimes you may not understand each other very well. But it is still good. Through the conflict or misunderstanding, you will know the world better than before and open your minds and your thinking. That's very good for my study in NZ (GT1-0606).*

Also in accord with the literature review was how the three big-picture issues of language, learning, and culture forced students to rely on co-ethnics. This is a natural cross-cultural reflex where there is a significant home-host cultural differential and the participants' comments on these are detailed below under "Lack of Support". Co-ethnic reliance provides support for both social and study dimensions and Reynolds and Constantine (2007) and Ying (2002) have enumerated some of these. However, Campbell and Zheng (2006) and Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) noted that it also leads to adaptation difficulties over a broad range of areas. The inability to build friendships across the cultural divide was seen by EV as a significant issue for Chinese students. He commented: *"This is why a lot of Chinese students are living together and speak Chinese. This is no different for them so they don't improve their English. A lot of Chinese students fail"* (1-0906).

### ***Particular Learning Issues***

After the three overarching issues of language, learning, and culture, four particular study issues are addressed: quantity of reading, different teacher relationships, assignment emphasis, and writing assignments. There was a high degree of interactivity and connectivity between the three general issues and the four particular learning challenges. Therefore, they have all been touched on above but will now be further developed. While these issues also affect host country students as they move into tertiary learning it is the relative strength of these factors and the way the issues are undergirded by unspoken "cultures of learning" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997, p. 83) that make them especially challenging for Mainland Chinese students.

### **Different teacher relationships.**

Chapter Five noted that the teacher-centred nature of learning in China was one of the strongest aspects of the



students' established learner identity. Therefore, it is not surprising that the difference in teacher relationships was among the specific learning issues faced by the students. These differences were particularly evident in the change in the type of relationship and the style of teaching. However, there was some debate over the level of difference. AZ and IR thought that Chinese and New Zealand teachers were similar (respectively: 1-0506; 1-0906) while DW, HS, and JQ thought they were quite different (respectively: 1-0606; 2-0906; 1-1006).

The nature of the teacher-student relationship was affected by the origin of teachers. In some semesters, like in HS's experience, they could have no Kiwi lecturers at all: "*For me, for my papers, they are other nationalities. They are from Scotland, India, and South America. There are no Kiwis*" (2-0906). While she accepted this because New Zealand was an "*immigration country*" (2-0906) it did create language issues (IR1-0906). The differences were also evident in the dynamics, expectations, and stressors within the relationship. GT expressed her understanding of the situation:

*When we come here, the teacher he always wants us to give a response. But, no, the students sit, listen, and write down the notes. But the teacher will be very angry with our response. I think there is little confidence between students and teachers. I think that is because of cultural differences. The teacher asks, 'Any questions?' But no responses. Maybe it's not because we do not have any questions it's just because we are used to sitting and listening to what the teacher says in China. We always want to write down the notes and come back.* (1-0606).

GT's experience leads into the second major difference: the style of teaching. The change was evident in the class not being textbook driven. In China, the textbook is the source of the learning transmitted via the teacher to the student (HS1-0606). BY commented: "*In NZ the textbook is very important also but the teacher just never uses the textbook. But you must still read the textbook*" (2-0906). JQ was not quite so certain about their value. She said: "*I haven't studied one page of three text books because I have no time to study and the professors said the textbook is no use for you*" (1-1006). In terms of approach, BY thought the teacher in New Zealand taught differently (2-0906), DW believed they highlighted the key areas as opposed to teaching all the knowledge (2-0906), AZ felt they expected the students to study and learn by themselves (2-0906), and IR thought they wanted to verify that the students had understood properly (IR1-0906). Having to take responsibility for

finding as well as learning the information was a surprise. This approach to teaching was also commented on by XT, a student in the attestation group: *“In China if you ask the teacher what does ‘1+1’ equal, they will tell you it is ‘2’. But here, if you ask the teacher what does ‘1+1’ equal, they will probably give you some hint and you have to find out by yourself”* (A1-1107).

The students found that gaining access to the lecturers was sometimes difficult. HS noted a comparison: *“In China, we can just talk to the teacher. It’s very easy to find them. But, in NZ, no. The teacher may be just working one or two hours”* (1-0606). Some students enjoyed the convenience of, and perhaps felt less threatened by, being able to email their questions to the lecturer (AZ1-0506; FU1-0406) while IR, as time passed, felt more confident to ask questions directly even within the class (1-0906). Communication, as indicated above, could be an issue as JQ believed it created confused expectations (1-1006), EV found the jokes incomprehensible (2-0407), and BY felt it caused lecture content to not always be well understood (1-0506).

### **Quantity of reading.**

While the students reading skills were one of their better learning competencies they still had particular issues that made reading a challenge. As well as vocabulary and comprehension, these included the sheer quantity of reading and the time it took, especially when having to search for that information was also factored in.



Generally, the students rated reading as their best meta-communication skill (e.g., AZ1-0506; FU1-0406; GT1-0606). English learning in China was seen as being dominated by reading (AZ1-0506); however, comprehension barriers arise when cultures are crossed (JQ1-1006). These are usually founded on vocabulary and subject-specific terminology (CX1-0406; GT1-0606; HS1-0606) but also include the way ideas are expressed (BY2-0906). Comprehension is aided if they are able to catch the key points (GT1-0606) but the desire *“to understand 100%”* (HS1-0606) makes the task exacting as it often requires the student to *“look up every word for its meaning”* (GT1-0606). Even then, as noted above in “Language”, equivalence of

meaning and parallel definitions in Mandarin may not be available. Comprehension also varies with the type of reading material. Heavily academic articles can be overwhelming (IR1-0906) while reading outside a students' major may be less fluent (FU3-0907).

Two other closely associated issues were the quantity of reading and a lack of time to read. Three students mentioned that course reading requirements were greater than in China (BY1-0506; DW1-0606; HS1-0606) and required going beyond the set textbook. The extra-mural student found the readings to be particularly demanding (CX3-0907). The pressure of needing to complete assignments put students in a dilemma: on one hand, it was felt it was necessary to read the textbook to complete the assignment (AZ1-0506); on the other hand, there was not enough time to read the textbook (JQ1-1006). This burden was made heavier by 'slow' reading skills in English. DW compared his reading speed with how he felt New Zealand students performed: *"For the Kiwi, they spend half an hour; the Chinese students, if they want a good mark, I have to spend two, three, four hours"* (1-0606). FU felt similarly: *"... if a Kiwi student reads a book maybe for ten chapters he might need two days. But maybe I have to spend 10 days because you have to learn the language and learn the knowledge at the same time"* (3-0907).

The last reading issue raised by the students was finding the right information to read. The difficulty was perhaps not finding information (AZ2-0906) but determining its relevance and this, again, took more time (FU1-0406). HS expressed her frustrations about finding the right information and placing it within the subject's broad streams of thought: *"... for me this reading selection and knowing which one is the right one is difficult. ... I think every Chinese student has this problem. They don't know what is most important. The teacher just says you need to understand that this idea comes from different sources"* (2-0906). As a result, HS felt she was struggling to come to terms with the subject:

*Like the tutor tells you that this article is from this author. Then there is still another article and it is totally different. And you have to find more and more but you don't have the time to do that. So, I think at times, you are just doing this assignment and you are reading this paper but it is just looking at some basic things. Sometimes you feel you have neglected the important things* (2-0906).

This lack of confidence may reflect the change from the certainty about what needed to be learnt in China. In that context the field of knowledge was limited and the teacher was the expert. As a result, the Mainland Chinese students in New Zealand may not have felt that what they produced was of equivalent worth. This issue also leads into the next: the emphasis on assessment by assignment.

### **Assignment emphasis.**

In China the learning and the assessment of the learning were almost entirely focused on examinations. At Atherton they encountered an assessment regime that expected the completion of substantial assignments and the weighting of the exam was considerably reduced. This change resulted in a new set of study issues and required a different set of skills.



Some of the differences in the nature of the New Zealand assessment process from China have been noted above (see “Different Ways of Learning”), such as the role and quantity of assignments and the constancy this brought to the study process. Due to language, students occasionally had difficulty understanding what they were required to do (JQ1-1006) and this could result in needing to clarify with classmates or lecturers (AZ2-0906), either directly or through informal representatives, which JQ believed was sometimes helpful and sometimes not (1-1006). Then they needed to prepare the assignment in the requested style, which could require the mastery of a range of presentations (BY1-0506). The frequency could also mean tight deadlines (CX1-0406) with little time to prepare the assignment (HS1-0606) which caused stress (FU3-0907). The change of assessment processes also created uncertainty for CX (1-0406) and concern about poor results for HS (1-0606).

The initial skills needed were usually acquired courtesy of other students (BY1-0506) although some accessed university learning assistance (GT1-0606). The structuring and formatting rules required detailed care as did the sentence structure and grammar but HS thought these issues were not insurmountable (1-0606). The issues recounted under “Quantity of Reading” applied here: the amount of research and reading required; a lack of time to complete this reading; and the confusion that

could accompany inadequate comprehension. These were capped by the need to make the information their own (DW2-0906) and then apply it practically in a context that was foreign to them (GT1-0606).

These issues may seem familiar to many students starting university study. But, as suggested earlier, it is the intensity of the issues that caused these students to have to work so hard. The extra hours of reading were mentioned (DW1-0606), as were the confusion around instructions and expectations (JQ1-1006), not comprehending all that was taught in class (AZ1-0506), unrelenting time pressures (HS1-0606), insufficient time for editing (HS1-0606), and no time for leisure (JQ1-1006). It may be a cultural norm for the students to play the huge work effort down (“*I am very lazy*”: FU1-0406) but the reality was different. EV reflects on this:

*The Kiwi people may only spend 40% of their time on their study. They also have part-time jobs and they also do a lot of things they are interested in. But for Chinese students they spend 80% of their time on their studies. For the student who comes to study from overseas, because they have the large difficulties and problems, they have to spend more time than Kiwis (2-0407).*

BY tells about his stress and how effort was his only possible response: “*I am worried and nervous. But, I don’t know, I just do the work, do the work. I have no other way to do it*” (2-0906).

### **Writing assignments.**

A fourth specific learning issue area was writing. Despite writing also being a mainstay of English learning in China the students were not usually confident about their writing ability. They struggled to adapt to a different style of writing and this created a number of writing difficulties.



AZ (1-0506), FU (1-0406), and HS (1-0606) felt their writing skills were their worst area and EV felt it hindered him “*getting very high marks*” for his essays (1-0906). Coming from an examination-based system the students were not used to writing essays, especially not in the New Zealand-style (EV1-0906), and IELTS, with its 250-word limit, hardly prepared them for writing 2000-3000<sup>plus</sup> word assignments (EV2-0407). Issues with language, researching, structuring, and

referencing, already noted above, increased the difficulty. Underdeveloped skills could lead to an inability to express ideas clearly (GT1-0606; DW1-0606) and a lack of social and work experience to draw on (EV2-0407). They sought writing assistance by talking with lecturers (AZ2-0906), using proofreaders (EV1-0906), if time and availability allowed, and accessing university-supplied learning assistance (GT1-0606). Despite feeling writing was his worst skill AZ was comforted by being better than other Chinese students (1-0506) as was BY, who noted he had not failed a paper unlike other students “*because of their weaker writing skills*” (2-0906). Understandably, courses with less writing requirements were regarded favourably by some students (AZ2-0906; GT1-0606).

However, the way of thinking about writing was as much an issue as the practicalities. The style required in China was different from New Zealand expectations, as HS suggests:

*I think it is related to the culture. Every time we think, maybe, we think in a very concrete ways to do this. Maybe for the assignment, it's a big area to think about. Maybe, the teachers she wants you to write just this. But for us, maybe we think, 'I have another good way to write it down.' But, it isn't good enough. So, it is a problem. I talked with my tutor, academic writing tutor, and she said, 'You have many, many good ideas you want to put down. But we don't need them. Just write one sentence and concentrate on this topic. Therefore, you don't need to write everything.' In China, we don't do this. In China, if we got more, we just write it down. Because every sentence, every idea you can get a mark (1-0606).*

The difference in style also extended to different attitudes to referencing sources. According to CX (1-0406), in China: “*The lecturer when marking an exam doesn't care about who wrote the original article.*” There was a similar indifference to how much you copy (CX1-0406), making the ideas your own (FU2-0706), and applying the knowledge (JQ1-1006). Following the particular learning issues addressed above (different teacher relationships, quantity of reading, assignments emphasis, and writing assignments) the next major category was more personal.

### ***More Personal Issues***

After the overarching and particular learning issues, the third major category of issues was those of a more personal nature. However, these still affected the

students' learning. These were: lack of support; financial stress; and looking after yourself.

### **Lack of support.**

Family and teacher support along with the classmate system in China, as described in Chapter Five, provided an effective social and academic support system. Some students sorely missed this support (EV1-0906; FU1-0406; GT3-0907) and GT desired cross-cultural contact with Kiwis and other cultures for improving English, helping with study issues, and understanding other cultures (1-0606). AZ also had a desire for more of this to occur (1-0506); however it appears that significant barriers prevented this, such as dispersed student accommodation (BY2-0906; EV1-0906; FU1-0406; GT1-0606), student numbers and class sizes being smaller than China (AZ2-0906; GT1-0606), and difficulty in contacting people (BY2-0906; FU1-0406; GT1-0606). These isolating factors were applicable to forming relationships with both Chinese (DW1-0606) and Kiwi students; but it was more dominant with Kiwi relationships (FU2-0706). Other barriers were language (AZ2-0906; DW1-0606), cultural differences (HS1-0606; JQ1-1006), workload (BY1-0506; JQ1-1006), and level of trust (BY1-0506).



The students commented upon the large numbers of Chinese students attending Atherton University, especially at the northern campus. There were often few Kiwis in their classes as BY indicated: *“There is no Kiwis in my class. 13 students. One from Africa, two from Thailand and the rest is from China”* (1-0506; also: AZ3-1007). This could diminish the contact between Chinese and Kiwi students (BY2-0906), unless they were placed in class study/assignment groups. As DW said:

*There is some disappointment about this – not so many Kiwis. If you have some questions or you want to discuss, my language is not clear and I don't express clearly what I mean. This is a problem. If I discuss with those who have the same language then there is no problem. At first, I had some disappointment about this but after studying I think this is a good place. A coin has two sides* (1-0606).

Contact barriers between students had a range of consequences. There was loneliness especially when family/cultural occasions back in China were missed and

there were admissions of feeling depressed (FU2-0706), sleeplessness, and anxiety (BY2-0906) but these were caused more by work demands than estrangement.

Attitudes to university support were somewhat uncertain. Many students felt there was insufficient help available (EV1-0906; FU1-0406; HS1-0606; JQ1-1006). BY was one student who because of a lack of information made some unwise course selections (1-0506). Some students were happy to occasionally contact the lecturers (DW1-0606) about content or assessment issues that needed clarification (HS1-0606). But this was a guarded approach as a student may prefer to talk to classmates (FU1-0406) perhaps because he or she was concerned about communication issues arising with the lecturers (GT3-0907; WSA1-1107). One student said that he preferred to sort things out by himself (CX1-0406). Another student queried, "*What kind of help should I ask from them?*" (AZ1-0506).

There was a similar ambiguity about the students' approach to Atherton's Learning Assistance Unit (LAU). GT, the only student who frequently used the LAU, especially its workshops (1-0606), believed the cultural strength of self-reliance was a barrier:

*I think the biggest problem for most of them in using the [LAU] is the cultural difference. I think in the Chinese education system you complete everything by yourself. We don't realise we can ask for more help from others. I think a lot of Chinese people didn't have this perspective. We will not think about whether we could ask others to help us. We just do it by ourselves (2-0906).*

Other barriers to accessing LAU mentioned were: FU felt reluctant to go by herself (1-0406), JQ found it difficult to do so if she had to show something to the LAU tutor when she was under severe time pressure (1-1006), BY found it difficult to make appointments when under duress (2-0906), and AZ felt he was doing okay and did not really need help (AZ1-0506). HS believed there was a mismatch of expectations about what services were needed (1-0606) and GT suggested a possible lack of information about what services the LAU offered was an issue (2-0906). There were also accounts of 'unfortunate' experiences: "*I heard from one of my friends when she finished an essay and wanted to ask for help from the [LAU] they said, "It was your business." Or something like that*" (FU1-0406); "*... this semester I have been there once for modifying my first assignment but I didn't get a good result. It's so interesting. Because I didn't write the assignment well*" (AZ2-0906).

It is evident that there were significant uncertainties expressed by the students about the academic support they were receiving. This may be partly due to comparisons with the effective networks they experienced in China and what was available to them when they came to New Zealand. However, as mentioned initially, the perceived level of support for their Atherton study was still rated highly. This was the one major area where the science student in the attestation group differed from the business students. She had been allocated a personal academic supervisor from the early days of her Masters and was continuing to work with this person as her Doctor of Philosophy supervisor. She valued this quality and quantity of personalised support and did not feel a lack in this area at all (ZVA3-1207). The reasons for the apparent anomaly among the business students concerning their level of support are discussed below under 'Accessing Support Structures' when the strategies used by the students to overcome these issues are considered.

### **Financial stress.**

Despite protests over the level of international student fees (AZ1-0506; BY2-0906; EV2-0407) financial stress was not usually mentioned as a major issue. Almost all the students in the participation group had part-time jobs (JQ being the exception) and some students had permanent residency (e.g., CX1-0406; HS2-0906) which meant fees at local rates. One of the older students had immigrated to NZ and found money issues were initially difficult and prevented him from studying full-time (CX1-0406). A number of students had worked for a considerable period in China and were largely personally financing their study in New Zealand (BY, CX, DW, FU, & JQ). Others were supported by spouses either in New Zealand (AZ) or China (JQ) or by a period of work in New Zealand before study began (AZ, EV, FU, & HS).



However, there were cases where parents' resources had also been relied on (BY, EV, GT, & IR). This meant that the economic pressure on parents back in China (CX2-0706), higher fees (IR1-0906), the potential costs associated with failing a course or the programme (BY3-EQ; EV3-0907; WSA1-1107), and the desire not to waste money (FU2-0706) were pressure factors for these students. The

parents tried to release this burden but BY still felt its weight: “*They told me not to take into account the money. But I can’t do that. It’s hard for me to ignore this problem. I want to do everything I can to deal with this problem*” (2-0906). EV and FU felt this sort of pressure should make the students want to “*study hard*” (EV2-0407) and “*do well*” (FU2-0706). There was also an awareness of time being a cost factor (CX2-0706; GT3-0907, HS1-0606).

### **Looking after yourself.**

The students said little about how looking after themselves in a strange land impacted on their study. This may be because the focus of this research was academic adjustment, not social. Interestingly, the two males of the attestation group rated this issue ‘9’ and ‘6’ while the two females scored it ‘1’ and ‘3’ (10 being the highest score for issue rating), which is a large gender differential. This may reflect something of the social/cultural patterning in Chinese society with females perhaps being better prepared in basic life skills by their families. With the ‘little emperor’ syndrome within the one-child family becoming more prevalent these deficits in life skills within a Western context may become more apparent. All of the students participating in this study were born before 1990 so, even though some were from one-child families, they may not have been so privileged. While the students wanted to look after themselves financially, the students found that jobs in New Zealand were not always easy to get and, as noted earlier, the time spent at work reduced available study hours. Positive aspects of looking after yourself were mentioned: an increased sense of independence (AZ2-0906); being able to reduce financial pressure through part-time work (CX1-0406); and the ability to readily access Chinese food supplies (DW1-0606).



The question of how the issues faced by these students impacted on the established learning identity they had developed in China is discussed in the next section. These issues were the overarching ones (language, culture, and different ways of learning), the particular learning issues (different teacher relationships, quantity of reading, assignment emphasis, and writing assignments), and the more personal areas (lack of support, financial stress, and looking after yourself).

## Fractured Harmony

Chapter Five concluded that the eight elements of the learner identity were established due to being externally bounded and culturally harmonised by the largely homogenous cultural, social, familial, and educational context in China. However, this harmony was sorely tested by the range and intensity of the issues that they had to face crossing educational cultures into a new learning context. The previous section surveyed from the student interviews the three major issue categories that may have caused this disequilibrium. During the attestation interviews this group of students were asked to rank these issues in order of their effect on them as students. Once they had listed the issues the highest ranked issue was given a score of '10' and so on through to the lowest which was given a score of '1' and then the ratings were averaged for each issue. Having a low rating did not mean that the issue was insignificant but implied that it was less dominant than others. A wider sampling of students may, or may not, alter the ordering these students gave. Figure 6.1, below, displays the result of that ordering and rating process.

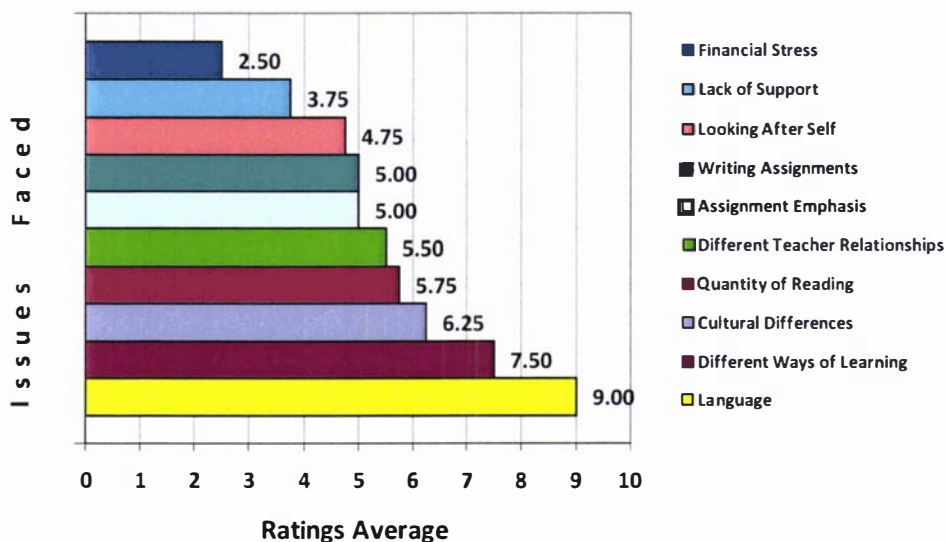


Figure 6.1: Issues faced as ordered by attestation group

Interestingly, the three overarching issues rated highest: language issues (scoring 9.00 out of a possible 10.00) emerged as the most pressing issue, followed by different ways of learning (7.50) and cultural differences (6.25). The second

major issue category was particular learning issues: quantity of reading (5.75); different teacher relationships (5.50); assignments emphasis (5.00); and writing assignments (5.00). The three more personal issues rated lowest: looking after self (4.75), lack of support (3.75) and financial stress (2.50). The low scoring of these more personal issues may reflect the emphasis of this study with its focus on educational aspects as well as the prominence given by the students to their academic endeavours.

The question remained as to what extent these issues had fractured the harmonious and established learner identity. The original participants and the attestation students were asked to rate the learner identity elements now that they had studied in New Zealand for, in most cases, at least three semesters. Figure 6.2 (below) has the comparison of the rating for the identity elements in China and after at least three semesters of study in New Zealand for both the combined participant and attestation groups. This comparison is returned to in more detail in Chapter Seven. Again, these figures need to be understood in the context of the small sample of students which means they are not necessarily generalisable beyond this group.

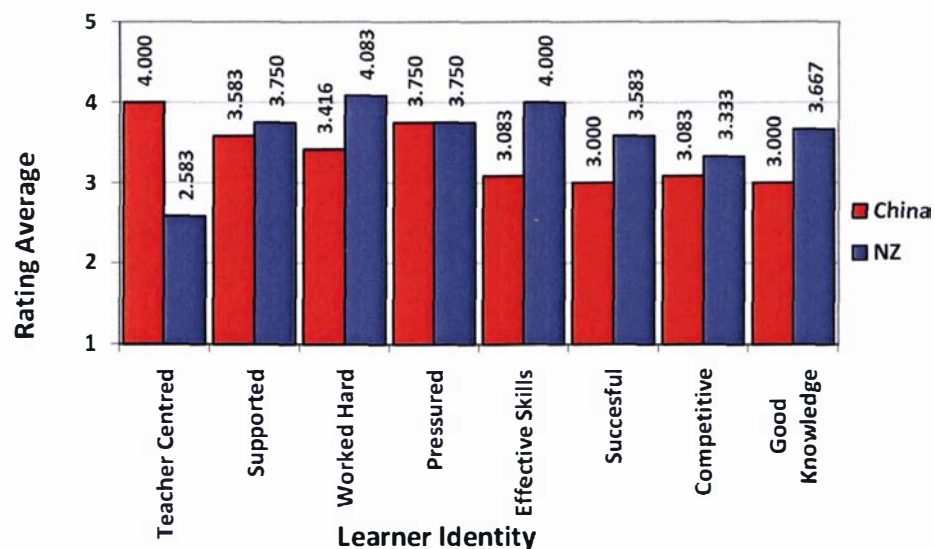


Figure 6.2: Comparison in learner identity elements between China and NZ

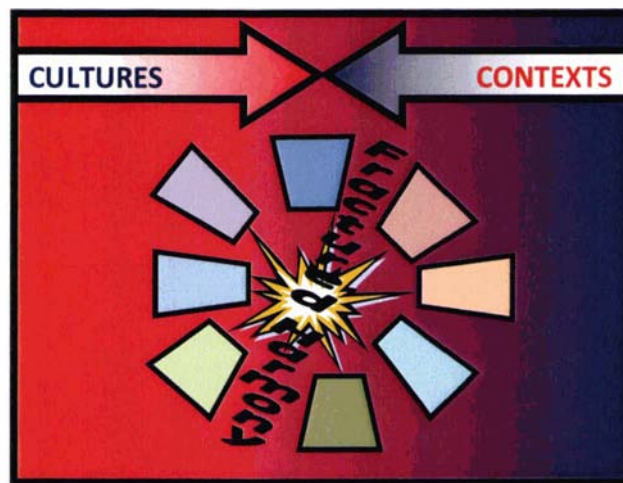
This comparison indicates that the overall learner identity was significantly affected. However, the degree of severity of the impact was mitigated so that the

learner identity was not so shattered as to be dysfunctional. This limiting of the fracturing process could be due to a number of factors. These include: the high level of strength of the original identity matrix; the students' responses to the issues moderating the fracturing of the identity; and the worst effects of the issues had subsided because the ratings were taken after this time. The most probable explanation is a combination of all three factors. The strength of the identity profile should not be a surprise as the externally bounded and culturally harmonised nature of it meant that this pattern had been a settled part of who they were as learners for a considerable period of time in China. However, the issues the students faced were not insignificant, as the data indicates, so their responses to these issues may also have had a stabilising influence on identity change. If indeed the learner identity is quite settled, then it may also be resilient and this could explain the more settled scoring given after three semesters. A similar rating after the first semester, which was not possible due to the logistics and methodological approach of this study, may have shown a more disrupted profile for the learner identity elements.

A closer inspection of these identity elements shows that five of the elements showed signs of noteworthy change. The most significant change noted by these students was the change to a less teacher-centred approach to learning in New Zealand. The nature of this change has been discussed above under 'Different Teacher Relationships.' Interestingly, the students felt that they were marginally more supported than when they were in China and this will be discussed below under 'Accessing Support Structures.' The upward change in their need to work hard was not surprising in the light of the circumstances they were required to overcome. The students also felt that their learning skills were now more effective and their knowledge learnt was better than had been the case in China. This may indicate that despite the issues faced they felt successful because they had to a degree mastered these issues and now felt able to learn and learn well in the Atherton context. It may also indicate that, while the established learner identity was strongly formed due to the home culture context, it still retained an ability to react to and be flexible in new contexts.

The resilience of the learner identity may reflect the pragmatic instrumentalism that helped form the students' learner identity in China. Masten, Best, and Garmezy's

(1991) define resilience as referring: "... to the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances." This resonates well with the experiences of the students. However, it should not be implied that success is guaranteed or, as Hamilton, Anderson, Frater-Mathieson, Loewen, and Moore (2005) warn, that the students are perceived to be invulnerable. It is also possible that the students' resilience could be related to age as most of the participants were in their twenties; however, there are not sufficient linkages from the data collected to be able to presume this.



*Figure 6.3:* Learner identity fractured by issues faced crossing educational cultures

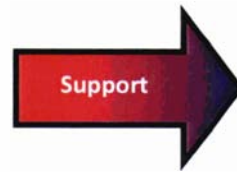
This section has examined the students' comments about the issues they faced under the categories that emerged from the data. These indicated that the issues were a significant barrier to cross-cultural educational adjustment. The fracturing of the harmony of the learner identity elements is depicted above in Figure 6.3. While the learner identity elements were fractured in the face of this dramatic change in their learning ecology, it was also evident that they had not been as severely impacted as could have been expected. One of the possible reasons noted for the relative stability is that the students' responses to these issues were able to constrain the fracturing of the identity elements. The next two sections of this chapter look at these responses under two broad headings: the strategies adopted to overcome the issues and the motivations relied on to keep them going in the face of adversity.

## SUPPORTING STRATEGIES

The issues faced by the students represented a significant assault on the elements of their China-formed learner identity. In response to these issues and in order to restrict the fracturing of their learner identity the students adopted a range of stratagems. These fit under the rubric of the interactions within their learning ecology that enabled them to cope with the situations they faced. Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 133) described interactions as how people “handle situations, problems and issues” and these actions can be intentional or instinctive. The strategies that emerged from the data were: accessing support structures; relying on self; growing in language skills; growing in learning skills; drawing on prior learning; and benefiting from work experience within New Zealand.

### Accessing Support Structures

The abrupt disruption to normal support networks (family, friends, and educational) did not create the level of difficulty for this group of students that could be expected when they crossed educational cultures. The comparison between China and New Zealand for the learner identity element ‘Supported’ actually indicated that they felt more supported in New Zealand. While there may be a cultural reluctance to decry a situation or institution as lacking in support or to acknowledge that a lack of support was felt personally, the students did access a variety of support structures. These were: family and friends in China; student and teacher support in New Zealand; and the LAU and other university resources.



The students felt that they continued to have the support of their families. This was valued by several students. YU said (A2-1207): “*The old people, even though they are in China, can help*” (see also: FU1-0406) and this help was focused toward encouraging them to study well (DW2-0906; EV1-0906; GT1-0606), which included for some students financial assistance (see ‘Financial Stress’ above). Parental concern was expressed for their health and happiness (FU1-0406). Parents also affirmed their love for the child (GT1-0606). At times they did feel lonely (e.g., FU1-0406) but it was greeted with a strong spirit. For example, GT, in admitting

loneliness, said: "... *people always get homesick. Maybe you are in a very low mood so it can be hard for you to do something very well. Cheer up and have better feelings*" (1-0606). While there were communication problems it was possible through internet and phone to maintain good quality links to China (AZ2-0906; BY2-0906). This networking also included connecting with friends in China, sometimes before going to their parents with concerns, because, as FU felt, "*maybe they don't understand*" (1-0406). One of the students, AZ, who joined his wife who had already been in New Zealand for a number of years, valued the support he received from her (1-0506; 3-1007).

The second, and perhaps most significant area of support, was from Chinese classmates at Atherton (WSA1-1107). While there was some disappointment about the prevalence of Mainland Chinese students this was largely accepted (HS2-0906; BY1-0506; DW1-0606) and it allowed a remnant of the cooperation experienced in China to remain (EV1-0906; see Chapter Five: 'Identity Element Two: Supported'). Students often relied on one another for study help and in New Zealand this source was their first port of call (DW1-0606; EV1-0906; FU1-0406; GT1-0606; HS1-0606). Usually this revolved around asking one another questions (BY2-0906; CX1-0406; GT1-0606; WSA1-1107) or discussing problems together (CX1-0406). Some also gained a sense of belief that they could be successful in their study by noting the example of senior and completed students around them (DW1-0606; DW3-EQ – "*You can, I can.*"; WSA1-1107). While EV made clear his aversion of class-based group work (2-0407) others, like GT, found it better than just learning by themselves (2-0906). More often they cooperated informally; often focusing on the course assignment together while still producing an individual product (AZ3-1007; BY1-0506; EV1-0906; GT2-0407; HS2-0906; JQ1-1006).

The reliance on peers as a source of help was fostered by the lack of language barriers (BY1-0506; DW2-0906; HS1-0606) and it also opened up a social network which provided both friendship and guidance (BY2-0906; EV2-0407; GT2-0906). However, this degree of support was not initially available as the students did not necessarily have the contacts (GT2-0906). Also, AZ felt some students were more unhelpful than others perhaps because "*they are more competitive. They want to do it by themselves*" (1-0506). WS, of the attestation group, saw the need to take care

in selecting friends who would encourage you (A1-1107) and JQ recognised that sometimes even the group did not understand what the lecturer expected them to do (JQ1-1006). DW lamented that: *“We haven’t got the deep relationship like we have in China because we just know each other. We don’t know your temperament, your habits”* (2-0906). Meanwhile, EV wanted to keep his classmates and social life separate (1-0906).

The students also desired links with non-Chinese students but the barriers to making such contacts were difficult to overcome. WS, of the attestation group, felt that a group called ‘Kiwi Friends’, now disbanded due to funding issues, had been of great help to him (A1-1107). The success of these connections depended to some degree on personality, confidence in English skills, and the commonality of being young (HS2-0906) but the focus of the relationship was still likely to be limited. FU expressed this by saying: *“If you want, you can contact with them and, maybe, if you mention friendship, maybe that’s a problem, but if it’s just learning something, it’s still OK.”* At times, AZ felt it was easier to make friends with other non-Chinese international students than the Kiwis, especially other Asian students due to the greater similarity in culture (3-1007). This produced enrichment through the sharing of ideas and cultures (GT3-0907) and encouraged patience with each other’s English capacities (DW1-0606; FU1-0406). However, AZ also felt that in some instances he could not understand them and *“could not get on well with them”* (1-0506).

For these students the greatest change in learner identity was the move to a much less teacher-centred approach to learning. The issues associated with this have been discussed above under ‘Different Teacher Relationships.’ HS expressed her concern: *“Maybe for Chinese students, they are thinking if they go to the tutor and ask them for more details then the tutor will think, ‘Hey, what’s your level here? If you come here to do this paper then you have to be at the right level to do it.’ ”* (2-0906). However, it was mentioned that the lecturers could be friendly and approachable (AZ3-1007; CX1-0406; EV1-0906), they often had work experience or a practical focus which helped ground the content (DW2-0906; FU3-0907; IR1-0906), they could provide some good feedback on how to improve (CX2-0706; DW2-0906; GT2-0906; HS2-0906), and they were able to advise on how to approach the assessment tasks (BY2-0906; FU2-0706). Although this support was appreciated

the primary support base remained other classmates and then, maybe, the lecturer. As BY indicated: “... *if I have got a problem finding the information I can ask my classmates. Sometimes I even ask the teacher*” (2-0906).

The students affirmed that, overall, they were pleased with the study resources offered by Atherton University (AZ1-0506; CX1-0406; EV2-0407; FU1-0406; GT1-0606; IR1-0906; JQ1-1006). As with approaching lecturers, the students had reservations about the use of the LAU. During the first semester, which was regarded as the most stressful, half of the students did not use the service (AZ; BY; CX; FU; JQ). A number of others had been there only once or twice (DW; EV). However, there was an awareness that the LAU could provide practical help with English challenges (AZ1-0506; IR1-0906; WSA1-1107; ZVA3-1207), help ease entry into the different ways of learning (GT1-0606; YUA2-1207), give guidance on how to approach an assignment (EV2-0407; JQ1-1007), and supply helpful resources (EV1-0907).

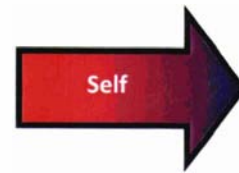
Library and internet access resources and support were much appreciated (CX1-0406; FU1-0406; HS1-0606). HS compared this with her experience in China: “*In China, it is hard. Every afternoon when you finish the class if you want to go to the library you have to hurry to go there. Otherwise the seats are all occupied. For the reading book, you just have to read it in the library. You can't take it out*” (1-0606; see also BY2-0906). This appreciation also extended to the helpfulness of the library staff (IR1-0906), classrooms (GT1-0606), computer services (CX1-0406), recreation facilities (HS2-0906), and the environment (HS1-0606). GT believed that: “*All these things give you a feeling that you should be successful in studies*” (1-0606).

While family and friends in China and the university-resourced assistance helped, the clear message is that the significant support came from fellow Chinese students. As noted above, the literature review indicated that strong host versus home country dissimilarities will encourage students to get support from their co-ethnic groups (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007; Ying, 2002; Kim, 2001). Therefore, accommodation, friendship, and study assistance were almost always linked with other Chinese students where issues of language and culture were not a problem (BY1-0506; DW1-0606; FU1-0406; JQ1-1006). However, Ting-Toomey and Chung

(2005, p. 33) noted that the stress of the new environment encouraged the students to be more “resourceful and resilient” and the students in this study were usually prepared to seek the necessary help to ensure academic survival. Also, and this leads to the next strategy used by the students, they accepted that their study was their issue and they needed to be responsible for it, which highlighted their self-reliance (CX2-0706; FU2-0706; GT2-0906; IR1-0906, WSA1-1107; ZVA3-1207).

### Relying on Self

This study has already noted in the literature review (Lee, 1996; Leung, 1995) and in defining the learner identity ‘Worked Hard’ (see Chapter Five) the ethos of Mainland Chinese students to diligently apply themselves to their study. Therefore, it is not surprising that these students drew heavily on their belief in the efficacy of hard work as they faced the challenges that threatened their learner identity.



Faced with what seemed like a mountain too high, the students believed that perseverance could see them over it. Whether it was adjusting to the new and, at times, “*boring*” (HS1-0606) social context, and/or having assignments due every week (AZ2-0906), and/or not liking the subject (GT2-0906; IR1-0906), and/or overcoming a failure (GT2-0906), and/or finding no chance to rest (JQ1-1006), and/or the seemingly endless reading (DW1-0606) an effort could be made “*to conquer it*” (HS2-0906). JQ, an older student who arrived at Atherton just days before classes began, expressed her angst yet determination: “*I don’t want to give up halfway. I think I have to keep on going. Sometimes I could not keep on going. But I think it is not very good to give up halfway through the term. Most of our classmates don’t want to give up although this is very hard for us to do*” (1-1006). GT felt her past achievements gave confidence that she would make it as did her conviction that she had to succeed else the past would be wasted (3-0907). HS believed it was not wise to give up (1-0606), FU felt she had to be strong (3-0907), and GT thought she had to accept the stress and “*just do it*” (2-0906). For JQ this meant that she had to: “*quit my job and, with the extra time I now have, I just study*” (1-1007).

The will to persevere actioned the capacity to keep on working. As seen in the literature review when discussing attribution theory, Chinese students perceive the amount of hard work as a significant determiner of academic success. Because effort is regarded as an unstable factor, that is, able to be changed with a resulting effect on performance, work rates were increased in the face of potential failure. This meant using “*every second and minute*” (GT1-0606), focusing and concentrating (FU1-0406; HS3-EQ; ZVA3-1207), and working harder than the Kiwi students (HS2-0906). This was especially the case in the first semester (EV3-0907). GT “*just knew hard work is the only way*” (1-0606) and DW accepted that it would be more stressful and require harder work in the new context (3-EQ). With hard work as a given, the belief in the efficacy of effort kicked in: “*After spending my effort on my study I don't worry about the assignment or the test. If I spend time on study and spend a lot of efforts on it, then I believe I will pass it*” (DW2-0906). Hard work gave birth to self-reliance: “*... here you have to do it by yourself*” (EV1-0906; see also DW3-EQ; IR1-0906). HS believed her personal character was sufficient to see her through: “*I think, because I am the person I am, if I am setting the goal I will try to complete it. So, I don't care how hard it is.*”

Perseverance and hard work led to a growing sense of self-confidence. This was also nourished by being better organised (BY2-0906), surviving over time (AZ2-0906; HS2-0906), benefiting from establishing relationships (GT2-0906; GT3-0907), overcoming the problems (EV2-0407), and achieving success in their studies (AZ3-1007; DW2-0906; GT3-0907). For AZ and BY there was a significant growth in confidence even between semester one and semester two (2-0906; 2-0906). FU also had self-belief based on her academic performance since the high school years (3-0907). DW, EV, and HS firmly believed in their ultimate success: “*I believe I am as same as most Chinese overseas student. I am not more foolish than them. Since they can graduate, I believe I can too.*” (DW3-EQ); “*When you are doing something you have to believe you can do it and be successful.*” (EV2-0407); “*I am an intelligent person, I can make everything*” (HS3-EQ).

With time, growth in confidence, and success came enhanced personal awareness. This was apparent in accepting the new environment (GT3-0907), choosing courses more suited to their abilities (AZ2-0906), not being afraid of the

problems (EV2-0407), understanding that the passage of time would help (GT1-0606), seeing education in the broader aspect of life (EV2-0407), and keeping positive (YUA2-1207). As time passed they were more likely to have more leisure activities (GT1-0606, JQ1-1006), manage the assignment workload better (DW1-0606; JQ1-1006), and worry less (DW2-0906). GT believed taking up the coffee habit also helped! *“Even before I would not drink coffee in the morning, but in this semester, if I have class in the morning, I get a cup of black coffee. This makes me refreshed and concentrate on the teacher’s words”* (1-0606). Two other areas that were identified as helping sustain the students were, for AZ, having a more effective grasp of the language (AZ2-0906) and knowing the education system better (BY2-0906; GT2-0906; HS2-0906; IR1-0906). These are the next two strategies employed by the students as they faced the challenge of cross-cultural educational adjustment.

### **Growing in Language Skills**

Language issues, especially those affecting the listening and speaking registers, were usually considered the most significant difficulty the students faced. One of their primary aims in coming to New Zealand was to learn English and they also had to perform at an advanced academic level in English so their language difficulties placed them in a conundrum. The thing they wanted and needed most proved to be a continual weak point which was only exacerbated by the academic and social necessity of having to shelter within their co-ethnic community. However, as has been noted under ‘Reliance on Self’ they had the perseverance to endeavour to improve their English language skills.



Being immersed in an English-speaking environment did lead to English language improvement. Some students (AZ, CX, EV, FU, HS) had taken time before commencing study to live and work in New Zealand and this had given them greater confidence in their language skills. (It also meant that they could potentially become eligible for permanent residency, local fees, and student study assistance.) Eight students mentioned that they had attended language school in New Zealand, usually for a three-month or six-month period. Two students (BY & JQ) both directly entered postgraduate study without any English language training in New

Zealand. Study commitment meant language ability improved (JQ1-1006) and that acquisition tended to be focused in the academic area. This focus resulted in a continued stress on reading and writing and meant there was little time for intentional, broader-based skill development in the listening and speaking registers.

When asked how they could improve their English abilities the students suggested a range of approaches that they had tried or had seen to be effective for their colleagues. Homestays were highly recommended by some (CX2-0706; DW2-0906; FU2-0706) but it was also noted that they could be a source of conflict: *“They need to be in a homestay situation to improve their English but they need to move out to save money and take the pressure off their parents financially”* (CX2-0706). Other practical considerations were also a factor. HS lived in a homestay for a *“short time”* but left because she *“couldn’t get enough food”* (HS2-0906). The students thought that having more Kiwi friends (AZ2-0906; HS2-0906; ZVA3-1207) or living with Kiwi flatmates (BY2-0906; DW2-0906) would help but the barriers to achieving this were significant (see ‘Accessing Support Structures’). In addition, both homestays and more Kiwi links could possibly undermine the level of support needed from their fellow Chinese students. Other suggestions students made included joining community groups (AZ2-0906), working for a Kiwi company (FU2-0706), taking everyday opportunities to use language skills (FU3-0907), watching TV and listening to the radio (CX2-0706; DW2-0906; FU1-0406), and even reading more (AZ2-0906).

Language progress was made but it was perceived to be slow (FU2-0706) and not satisfying (AZ2-0906; DW2-0906) but sufficient to increase confidence levels (BY2-0906; DW2-0906; GT2-0906). BY illustrated the perseverance shown by the students: *“Just like I always feel, my English is weak, so I try many different ways to improve it. If this method doesn’t work I will try another one. I know what I need, I know what target I want to get”* (2-0906). AZ saw English improvement as a key to success: *“Actually, I just feel if my English is better I don’t think the study is a very difficult thing. For study – just improve your English. No problem.”* And there was hope. FU, who had spent at least one year working in New Zealand before commencing study, said: *“But once when you arrive in NZ it becomes easy. You have to talk everyday and when you go to the shops everything is marked in English*

*so you can learn those kinds of things very easily and use it every day. But if you don't use it you never learn it"* (3-0907). The other area of growth students saw as necessary to succeed was enhancing their learning skills.

### **Growing in Learning Skills**

The second most significant issue faced by the students was coming to terms with the different ways of learning. This meant adapting to the different style of programming as well as adopting specific learning strategies appropriate to the new context.



The students had come from a learning ecology where study programmes were often prescribed with little choice for the students except the programme itself (BY1-0506; EV1-0906; WSA1-1107; ZVA3-1207). There was at times some choice of minor, non-core courses (HS1-0606) and some universities had a more open approach like Atherton's (GT2-0906). However, in New Zealand it was often noted that students were surprised and pleased at: the degree of choice (BY1-0506; DW2-0906; FU2-0706; HS1-0606); the possibility of designing the flow of subjects (EV1-0906); being able to select subjects that interested them (DW2-0906; FU2-0706; HS1-0606); and avoid things they did not like (BY2-0906). Despite information from the university and other students being available and helpful (FU2-0706; HS2-0906) they also felt choice resulted in less contact with a regular group of students (GT1-0606), not knowing enough about the course context to make an informed decision (HS1-0606), and some bad course selections (BY1-0506; FU2-0706).

In all but one case (JQ: who swapped banking for marketing), the original participants selected a course of study in a similar business area to what they had studied in China. Some felt this was driven by the extra time it would take to significantly change majors (DW2-0906; EV1-0906; GT1-0606; HS2-0906), by being able to draw on a certain base of knowledge even though it had been learnt in a different language and context (CX2-0706; DW2-0906), by their enjoyment of the subject area (DW2-0906), by increasing the possibility of obtaining a job in New Zealand (CX1-0406), or by enhancing their career on return to China (DW2-0906). GT contemplated making a significant change but felt that "... *at my age [24], as I*

*get older, I think it is not possible. I think this is a different way of cultural thinking. I will think I am already old so I should do something in my own career not just study.”* She went on to express this cultural difference in a way that contrasted markedly from the Western norm: *“I still didn't change because I think you, maybe, need to change your interest to your job. It is not a good thing getting your interest lost gradually”* (2-0906). FU would like to have made a change *“... if I was quite confident in my language...”* (2-0706).

Having to adapt to the different learning ways was accepted. AZ had a pragmatic approach: *“I just followed the directions in the different countries. When I was in China I had to do something focused on examinations and be teacher centred. But in NZ I have to search for whatever I want from the library or websites”* (3-1007). XT, an attestation group participant, testified: *“I think because of the education system in NZ, I mean the internal assessment, I have to complete these assessments. If I don't complete these well I can fail this paper. So, I have to fit into this system. I have no choice. So I study harder”* (A1-1107). However, they did not abandon the skills they had found to be effective for them in China (IR1-0906; WSA1-1107). The power of their dedicated consistency (XTA1-1107), well-oiled memorisation skills (EV2-0407; IR1-0906; YUA2-1207; ZVA3-1207), notemaking and cue-seeking strategies (EV2-0407; YUA2-1207), and exam techniques (IR1-0906) still came in handy. IR was definite that the time pressures meant she was forced to lean on the old skills: *“For my part, I haven't got any changes. I still use my Chinese ways for study because sometimes, you know it is very hard for me to study here. So, I don't want to spend most of my time just to do the learning like that. So, I just use my skills from Chinese study”* (1-0906).

The nature of the difference between the two learning environments was evidenced by the students in a number of ways. These have been catalogued above under ‘Different Ways of Learning.’ They had to think more deeply and more critically (YUA2-1207), adapt to the subject areas being less wide and more deep (ZVA3-1207), become more organised (WSA1-1107; YUA2-1207), take more initiative (WSA1-1107), express their own viewpoints (YUA2-1207), apply the learning practically (EV2-0407), and develop more independence in their learning processes (YUA2-1207; ZVA3-1207). In regard to independence YU, one of the

attestors, made a comparison between the situation in China and how she experienced learning in New Zealand. *“In China we kind of just need to learn what the lecturer wants us to learn. But I guess here lecturers just open the door for you and you go through it by yourself and choose what information you need for your assignments and research”* (A2-1207).

Coping with the change was helped by setting learning goals (AZ1-0506; EV1-0906; HS1-0606; WSA1-1107). BY reflected the long term objective by saying: *“I chose this diploma and I know what I want. I know what I will choose in the future. That encourages me to go on”* (1-0506). They also had to respond to particular learning difficulties and a major and immediate issue they faced was managing the extra reading requirements. In response they tried to develop more effective reading skills (DW2-0906; EV2-0407; FU2-0706; HS2-0906; XTA1-1107; ZVA3-1207), prepared for classes with pre-reading if time permitted (FU2-0706; HS2-0906), and sought help from successful models (EV2-0407; GT2-0906; HS2-0906; WSA1-1107; ZVA3-1207). In light of the sheer bulk of reading the students were pleased when the lecturer or tutor gave them some guidelines for their reading (AZ2-0906; GT1-0606). Some also appreciated the way that the readings supported and applied their learning (AZ2-0906, DW2-0906).

Once complete, the process could be satisfying. GT said: *“If I follow what the teacher gives us, I find it’s easy for me to learn something very profound. That means I know how to use what I learnt in the textbook, transfer it into practice. So, it’s very good”* (1-0606). AZ felt the hard work made the assignments worthwhile especially when they contributed so significantly to the final grade (2-0906) and EV felt it was a *“very good way”* to learn more (2-0407). Once over the demanding initial hurdles (EV2-0407) they appreciated that assignments took some stress off the final exam. CX commented: *“I feel less pressurised. I think it is quite easy for me to do this. The score is divided into different parts with different weightings. I prefer this. Better than just one final exam”* (2-0706).

The students mentioned areas about learning in New Zealand that they appreciated. FU valued the privacy that surrounded her learning in New Zealand. She commented: *“... here it is a private thing. Even if you don’t do very well this time it is fine. The lecturer tells you it is OK, don’t worry, things like that. But if*

*you were in China it's a big problem. You will feel very embarrassed"* (3-0907). FU was pleased she had learned to think in the "*Kiwi way*" and the increased confidence this brought (1-0406). Some students also felt they were able to survive the initial shockwaves of breaking into this new context after the first semester (GT1-0606; HS1-0606), leading to a reduction in stress (HS3-EQ) and, by the end of the programme, EV was able to describe his learning as "*easy*" (EV1-0906). GT said: "*I don't mean it is easy and not hard work – but you know how to do it. You arrange your time and you will complete it and be satisfied*" (3-0907).

### **Drawing on Prior Learning**

Another major strategy utilised by the students was the deposit of knowledge they had received from their studies in China. As noted above, most had chosen to study in a similar area of learning so, despite the pitfalls of language, they were able to use this knowledge to some extent to scaffold their learning in New Zealand.



The major advantage of prior learning in China was content connections. This was particularly true with the basics of the subjects (AZ1-0506; DW1-0606; EV1-0906; FU1-0406; HS2-0906; GT1-0606) and this was reinforced if the student had worked in that area before coming to New Zealand (CX1-0406; DW1-0606; JQ1-1006). Other associated benefits were that prior learning eased acceptance if a similar programme was chosen in New Zealand (BY1-0506) and it helped lessen the change burden (DW1-0606; GT1-0606). University in China had also helped shape and develop tertiary level thinking skills (EV1-0906; GT1-0606). However, this resource was also subject to limitations. A majority of the original participants had not studied for a while before coming to New Zealand (AZ, BY, CX, DW, FU, & JQ) and a number had had little work experience (EV, GT, & IR). The commonality of subject material suffered from disconnections caused by significantly different business and regulatory contexts and practices for some (CX1-0406, JQ1-1006) and different course content for others (EV1-0906; GT1-0606; JQ1-1006).

## Benefiting from New Zealand Work Experience

The last strategy reported by the students was the assistance they gained from working in New Zealand. As noted above a number had worked in New Zealand before commencing study (AZ, CX, EV, FU, & HS) and this helped some of them settle into the culture, build up resources and work experience, and become eligible for study benefits. Almost all (except JQ) had part-time work and a number were part-time students during at least some of the period covered by this study (CX, EV, & HS). HS attested to the value of this experience: *“So, I think the part-time job is very good. You can learn from the colleagues in the office. You can know more things than if you just stayed at the campus”* (2-0906). EV also appreciated the connections he could make between study and his work role: *“If you can find a part-time job related to your work, like me because I am studying business and I am also going a business job, then it is good. When you have some ideas during the study time you can practice them in the job. So it is very close between your study and your work”* (2-0407).



The twofold process of relying on the old and utilising the new was seen in the way that students adapted and adopted learning strategies in the new learning ecology. Despite their limitations, the students, as indicated in the literature (Chan & Drover, 1997), still tended to use the learning skills that had served them well in China. In addition, they took advantage of whatever content from their prior learning experiences related to their new learning, even if this was difficult due to context and language. Furthermore, they drew on the self-belief they had in their ability to adapt and perform. The students also adopted new strategies by accessing support structures, growing in language skills, growing in learning skills, and benefiting from work experience within New Zealand.

## Fractured Harmony Supported by Strategies

This section has examined the strategies this group of students used to prevent the issues they faced studying in New Zealand from radically breaking apart their learner identity and to facilitate their learning in a new context. Figure 6.4 shows

this diagrammatically. This study may indicate that the students did not abandon their educational heritage but were able to use the background and skills they brought from China by adapting them to the new context. However, this did mean that they tended to shelter in their ethnic group to sustain this adaptation. Nevertheless, the study also shows that the students were flexible enough to grow in the language and learning skills demanded by the new context. Therefore, some kind of balance existed in the strategies the students used to sustain their identity and succeed in their learning. The next section considers the motivational resources that the students drew on to keep going and keep achieving.



Figure 6.4: Fractured learner identity supported by strategies

## PRIME MOTIVATORS

To this point, it has been theorised that the established learner identity of this group of Chinese students was relatively resilient despite experiencing the disequilibrium caused by the fracturing of this identity. In addition to the enculturated factors within the identity itself and its resilience, the response to change in the learner identity was partially explained by the strategies employed by the students along with the use of prime motivators by the students. This does not imply that the changes in learner identity caused by the issues the students faced were insignificant. The fracturing nature of these changes has been determined in

the first part of this chapter. However, the prime motivators, which are the subject of this section, along with the use of strategies, have been able to place a hedge of protection or a constraining force around the learner identity which helped it not to disintegrate. This enabled the continuance of its enculturated and resilient nature while also allowing adaptation.

The literature review, in discussing motivation, suggested that Western conceptions or theorisations of motivation may not cross cultures well (Barker, 1997; Biggs & Watkins, 1996). It noted that the collectivist dimension and the CHC (Confucian Heritage Culture) context have to be considered in determining what may motivate Chinese students. Within this context a common motivational force is achievement motivation which springs from a strong sense that the students are in control of the essential learning factors (McInerney, 1998; Lee, 1996) and a fear of not performing to the satisfaction of others (Barker, 1997; Salili, 1996; Volet & Renshaw, 1996). It may well be that these motivators are externally sourced, for example the expectations of parents, although they are also internalised by the students because of the cultural context. However, Biggs and Watkins (1996, p. 274) argued that the students may have a “mixed motivational stream” that included “personal ambition, family face, peer support, material reward, and, yes, even interest.” This study, as identified below, would support the views of Biggs and Watkins.

Whereas the strategies applied by the students may be inclined to be more intentional in nature the motivators drawn on were probably more instinctual or embedded as they tended to be based on the students’ cultural reservoir. Five motivators emerged from the data. One of these comprised the ‘core category’ or ‘central concept’ that is foundational to grounded theory methodology. A core category will account for most of the variation in the pattern of behaviour endemic to the BSP (Glaser, 1992). This core category will be presented in Chapter Seven. The remaining four motivators, which were based around life responses, were: the need to meet the expectations of family and society; the desire for Western learning; the need to manage cost issues; and the desire for self-improvement. Each of these four will be discussed in turn.

## Meeting Family and Societal Expectations

In a collective society it may be expected that the demands of the 'group' would have a very significant influence on the members of the society. With the students in this study it was found that meeting expectations of family and society was a significant motivator urging them to succeed. This was seen in a strong desire for success and in a high level of concern about failure or poor performance and its consequences for their parents including the loss of face that may result, for the parents and themselves.



It has been noted in Chapter Five how study, especially at an advanced level, is seen within the Chinese culture as something that is highly esteemed (see: 'The Value and Price of Education'). It provides social prestige and a pathway to a better future. This remains true for when the children study overseas. For the parents, in GT's words, "*that means your child is a very good child*" (1-0606) and the success of your child is a means of gaining happiness (EV1-0906). EV was strongly of the opinion that he wanted to build on his family's current well-being and status. He said: "*I don't want to lose my family's face. I want to surpass my father. My father is a very good businessman. So, I want to make the family stronger than before*" (2-0407). A primary means of gaining society's respect and enhanced social standing is to have the monetary resources that can come if the pathway begins with successful study (FU2-0706). EV felt that successful students who return to China have more opportunities. "*The Chinese government gives them a big welcome. They have a very high reputation and very high social level. They become very successful*" (2-0407).

Alongside the positive pull of advancement there was a strong fear of failure and its consequences. It could mean increased levels of pressure for the students (EV2-0407), an even greater demand to work hard (EV1-0906), disappointment (DW1-0606) and embarrassment (FU2-0706) for the parents, and a reluctance, or even inability, to return to face the family if the students failed (AZ1-0506). WS, from the attestation group, summed up the predicament and the pressure: "*If I fail in the middle of studying I am going to be a loser. How can I face my parents? Maybe my friends will think I have failed everything? ... Sometimes I feel I don't want to be a loser. Some of the students are very, very good. Sometimes I feel like that. So that*

*encourages me to work harder and harder*” (A1-1107). This response to the possibility of failure, or failure itself, is much in line with the dynamics of achievement motivation where a lack of success will encourage further effort (McInerney, 1998). The students in this study felt that a key way to overcome the learning difficulties they faced was to respond with even more work (see above: ‘Relying on Self’).

### The Desire for Western Learnings

The second motivator was the attraction of Western education. The gaining of a quality Western certificate, the opportunity to develop sought after English skills, and to be better prepared, if they returned to China, to face the competition and improve future prospects were highlighted by these students. However, while usually appreciating the benefits of their study in New Zealand, they were cautious on a number of fronts about whether to recommend the Western experience.



The students in the participation group desired a quality Western certificate. Many felt a qualification gained in New Zealand could advance their level of education (AZ1-0506; BY-EQ; GT3-0907; HS1-0606), increase their knowledge (DW2-0906; FU3-0907; IR1-0906), improve their skills (FU3-0907), and help them understand contemporary Western business practice (GT3-0907; HS2-0906). It was also mentioned that the process of learning in New Zealand in itself was useful (BY2-0906; HS-EQ). As DW said, “*The study in NZ gives you another chance to know how to study that’s totally different from China*” (2-0906) and BY added that the students “... *can learn how to use, how to create – that is very helpful, very useful*” (2-0906). However, it was not just the students who felt strongly about overseas education. Many believed their parents believed that an overseas qualification would be advantageous for their child in the future (DW2-0906; GT2-0906) and, with parental economic capacity growing, grasping this opportunity was becoming more possible (BY2-0906; CX2-0706). BY also thought that parents used entry to overseas universities as a backup in case their child could not gain entry to a Chinese university (2-0906).

A major preoccupation for the students was how having a qualification could enhance their job prospects, either in New Zealand or in China. CX, the oldest student and an immigrant to New Zealand, was very clear about this utilitarian view of study: *“It is a base to broaden your job area. It is the same – the aim of education is to get a job”* (3-0907). A majority of the students wanted to work in New Zealand for at least a number of years (DW1-0606; FU1-0406; GT10606; HSI-0606; JQ1-1006; plus CX had an almost full-time job and EV was working part-time). However, they were aware that finding a good job within their degree major was a difficult task (DW1-0606; FU1-0406; JQ1-1006) especially in the regional centres (AZ1-0506). This placed them in a dilemma because while they could get basic entry-level work in New Zealand, they, like GT, wanted to *“... do something that uses what I have learnt. I don’t want to just learn it and leave it”* (1-0606). HS concurred and said that in New Zealand its *“your ability and experience that’s very important”* (1-0606) and prospective employers did not usually take into account their work record and achievements in China. This situation was further aggravated by language issues.

While wanting to break into the New Zealand job market, especially in the short to middle term, most felt that a Western qualification might be most helpful if and when they returned to China. FU said that the aim of getting a higher qualification was to, *“... improve the competition – compared with other people in China”* (3-0907). AZ agreed, especially when the qualification was backed by Western work experience: *“You know in China there are many multi-national companies. If we have an English qualification and work experience when we go back to China it should be good for us”* (3-1007; see also: BY2-0906; FU3-0907). FU added that good English skills were also beneficial (2-0706). However, not all the students were certain about the value of their overseas study in New Zealand. BY felt, because of contextual differences, that the knowledge learnt in New Zealand was not always relevant to the Chinese situation (2-0906) and EV and GT felt that the competitive advantage of a Western qualification might be overstated (respectively: 1-0906; 2-0906). This viewpoint was also argued by the Xinhua News Agency in their article on the *“Enthusiasm for Overseas Study Rationalized”* (2005).

These disparate views made the students somewhat cautious in their assessment of the value of Western education. EV was particularly analytical about who should go overseas to study (2-0407). This best suited: *“the students who are in the high school and they passed the university entrance examination but just didn't do well enough and can't go to a very good university in China, and their family is rich, then I would encourage them to study overseas, if they are very independent and very confident.”* DW felt that it was also an appropriate choice for postgraduate students (2-0906). However, EV felt that if postgraduates were coming for an easy life or considering immigrating that they needed to realise *“that life is hard everywhere”* (2-0407). Younger students should be discouraged from making the journey because of the potential harmful effects of failure (BY2-0906; EV2-0407) and the high level of financial commitment (CX2-0706). Where a student has similar opportunities in China then he or she should not risk overseas study (BY2-0906).

However, not all were so cautious. While FU considered that the predilection for overseas study was, in part, because *“it's the fashion”* (2-0706), BY felt there were real, if somewhat intangible, benefits because *“this is a different condition. It has many benefits. You can't see it but you can feel it. There are many benefits”* (BY2-0906). GT considered overseas study a *“good experience for a person's life”* and she was recommending New Zealand to her friends as a *“very quiet place and very easy to study and concentrate”* (2-0906). WS, of the attestation group, was more comparative in his analysis. In his opinion, *“Some things I wouldn't learn in China because here in NZ what I learn in NZ is quite useful compared to what I would learn in China. My friends are talking with me through the internet. They think they have learnt useless material. I can learn more useful stuff compared with what students learn in China”* (A1-1107).

Alongside the study issues, the students expressed an attraction to Western culture. CX admitted to a desire to learn about Western culture from his English learning days at University in China (1-0406) while FU had got *“bored”* in China (1-0406) and wanted to know the *“many things in a new environment and in Western culture”* (2-0706). In addition, globalisation and internationalisation meant knowing Western culture enhanced a person's competitive advantage (FU2-0706). Other

students appreciated being able to learn and think and explore knowledge in comparative freedom (AZ2-0906; HS2-0906) and learn about different ways of life and living (IR1-0906). HS felt that: *“If you just stay in the same place, like China, maybe the same city, then your mind will be very limited and won’t be able to go further. So it is a big step. You need to come out if you can afford your living”* (2-0906). GT also valued the experience: *“But when I come to NZ I think that it is a very good gift for me, this experience”* (1-0606).

Two other aspects of Western learning were mentioned by the students. These were a desire to gain effective English skills and the value they found in a more practically-focused learning context. When IR was asked what the best outcome from her study was, she said: *“The best thing, I think, the first one, is that I’ve got English. My English is good now”* (1-0906). GT said she *“came here to study because I wanted my English to improve and to communicate”* (3-0907). AZ and DW considered English acquisition was the most important thing (respectively: 2-0906; 1-0606). BY felt that: *“If I can’t upgrade my English skills it is almost equal to failure.”* In regard to the practical focus of their learning, DW appreciated that his study was connected with *“real life”* (DW2-0906). GT concurred, saying: *“I always think during your study times that putting your practical with your theory study is the best way. So, I like the practical education”* (2-0906). HS believed this benefit was enhanced because it built on the basic theoretical learning she had received in China (2-0906) and EV thought it was because in New Zealand, as students, they had to do more things by themselves (2-0407).

### **Safeguarding Cost Issues**

While many of the motivators were expressed positively, the effect of losing money (or time), along with the fear of failure and consequent loss of face, was couched in more negative terms. While this was especially true of those students who were still being financially helped by their parents, it was a prevailing attitude among them all. More positively they felt, perhaps as business students, that they looked forward to a good return on their investment in overseas education.



Failing to pass a paper, or much more seriously a programme of study, was a loss of status and a “waste” of money (FU2-0706), which became all the more serious if the parents had invested heavily in sponsoring the study programme (XTA1-1107). DW expressed this concern: “*My parents have spent a lot of money and I didn't get any degree. So, they will feel they lost face and the parents will lose face as well*” (2-0906). However, the parental burden lessened as the students found part-time work that covered living costs and helped defray the tuition bill (AZ2-0906). The concern about losing or wasting money was a more general concern even for those not supported monetarily by their parents. Tuition fees were high (between three to five times that for local students) and this made failing a course a serious matter (AZ1-0506; EV3-0907; IR1-0906, WSA1-1107). BY felt that the onus was on him to: “... *accomplish it with the least cost. If I fail, I would have pay more money*” (3-EQ). Even when faced with serious difficulties with a particular paper “*You have to overcome that because you paid money for that*” (EV2-0407).

Another cost factor mentioned by the students was that of time. Working hard and being successful mean that time was saved and loss avoided. HS, aged 28, felt the worth and passing of time keenly: “*I know the time is very valuable, especially with every year that passes you are getting older so you have to*” (1-0606). EV also felt the pressure to make the most of the time: “*I was already 26 or 27 so I wanted to finish as soon as I could. I am doing part-time but I may go back to full-time if there is any chance*” (3-0907). Finishing earlier, maybe by the use of summer school, also meant that you became a wage-earner sooner (AZ2-0906). Like the loss of money that accompanied failure the loss of time was also considered wasteful: “*If you don't work and you study something and you failed it all and you just go back, how much time have you already wasted?*” (HS1-0606).

The students and their parents felt that, in the light of the investment made, they needed to get a significant return. When asked if he considered his study overseas a good investment, AZ replied: “*My parents see it that way. They support me to study abroad. Although they spend a lot of money it is a good investment for the future*” (2-0906). GT expressed this somewhat more obliquely: “*Because we have hope for the future so we always want to at the end to get what we want after we pay a lot of money and time and energy*” (1-0606). FU felt that money was a

critical motivator: “*Most students expect to have more money, so they study. Money is the most important thing. ... Because if you have money it will show that you are a successful person. You will have a higher position and other people respect you*” (FU2-0706). CX, the oldest student at 40, saw it more from a generational point of view but with education still critical in achieving the desired objective: “*... young people have a lot of goals to reach – a luxury home, a luxury car, be a millionaire. Education is one way to reach this*” (2-0706).

However, gaining a return on the investment from study cannot be taken for granted. In China, with the ‘iron rice bowl’ fading, the number of graduates mushrooming, and the job market becoming ever more competitive, having an overseas qualification is no guaranteed entry ticket to wealth and status. The Xinhua News Agency (“*Enthusiasm for Overseas Study Rationalized*”, 2005) analysed the investment and the return in the following way:

According to Hu, [a senior staff member at Golden Orient, an intermediate company for overseas study services] the average annual income of a Chinese family in a medium-size city is around 80,000 yuan (around US\$9,700), while a single child studying in Britain will spend 200,000 to 250,000 yuan (around 24,000 to US\$30,000). And the expenditure for a child in Australia and the United States at the highest level is 130,000 yuan (US\$15,700) and 300,000 (US\$36,200), respectively.

However, it was reported early this year that an overseas returned student without working experience could expect a monthly income of 2,500 to 4,000 yuan (around US\$302 to US\$483) on average.

While the students in this study are postgraduates, some having China-based work experience, and they may return to China with appropriate New Zealand work experience the above figures are still daunting. The article claimed that this has been a major cause of the fall in the number of Chinese students studying overseas at that time. However, some of the students in this study benefited from being eligible for local tuition rates and only two (IR, JQ) intended at the time of interviewing to return to China on completion of their current programme of study. While uncertain of their future plans after graduation, it seems the others wanted to build on their qualification with related work experience after which five definitely and two possibly planned to return to China. Only one (CX) was a committed immigrant. This return rate seems higher than the figures quoted in the above article which stated: “Sources with the Chinese Ministry of Education said from 1978 to 2002,

more than 580,000 Chinese went overseas to study, of whom 150,000 have returned.” It could be that a sizable percentage of the difference could be students still in process with their studies.

### The Desire for Self-Improvement

The last motivator, alongside meeting family and social expectations, a desire for Western learnings, and a need to safeguard cost issues, was a desire for self-improvement. ‘Self-hood’ is somewhat problematic to define across the individualist/collectivist continuum, if indeed it is a continuum as discussed in the literature review (Schwartz, 1990; as cited in Gillard, 1998). The views expressed by the students show elements of individual response constrained by the collective while others, perhaps, begin to indicate influences of more individualistic tendencies.



A prime means of self-improvement was being a success. EV had the view that: *“I just want my life to be a success. A success for me means I don’t want to have any regrets when I become older. So, I just want to make my dreams become real”* (2-0407). For these students the immediate focus of being successful was to achieve well in their studies. Keeping the grade average up (FU3-0907) and overcoming the study problems built confidence and allowed the students to *“feel impressed with themselves”* (EV2-0407; WSA1-1107). But the road to success was often a comparative one. As AZ considered those around him he was of the opinion that *“... most of my friends can finish their studies. Not many students cannot finish their studies”* (2-0906). The success of others means that pathway was also open to you and failing was abhorrent: *“Because I don’t want to be a loser. Everybody else can so why can’t I? Sometimes you have to compare yourself with other people”* (FU3-0907; see also WSA1-1107).

However, self-improvement was not all about achievement as the students also expressed a passion for what they were learning. As IR expressed it: *“I just want to enjoy the education”*; and interest levels increased effort and enhanced learning effectiveness (IR1-0906). GT felt that studying in New Zealand was *“more fun”* because of the control she had over subject choice and less pressure from people (2-

0906). Likewise, FU believed that the level of interest in the subject made studying a happier experience (2-0706). However, for these students interest motivation was not necessarily tied to the subject as they were prepared to “*change ... interest*” (GT2-0906) to ensure that subject success was gained. Maybe for most New Zealand students, it is more likely that what they are interested in is sacrosanct and if anything changes it is more likely to be the subject than their interest levels.

As well as personal interest in the subject material the students also expressed a range of other attitudes to their learning and self-development which may indicate signs of Western influence. GT found that in New Zealand “*I want to do it better – no matter if it is big or small thing. I want to finish it and make myself satisfied and then I can start the next thing*” (2-0906). The auxiliary learning that took place around the learning was also appreciated. EV appreciated the development of his “*organisational skills and teamwork skills*” (2-0407) while BY valued how the study experience would make him a better worker because of “*the ideas, how to schedule, how to think*” (2-0906). However, life was not all about study benefits, direct or indirect, as, according to HS, there needed to be time for other objectives in life (2-0906).

This section has described how meeting family and social expectations, a desire for a Western learning, the need to safeguard cost issues, and a desire for self-improvement motivated the students. It is argued that these motivators, along with the strategies utilised by the students, helped contain the fallout from the fracturing of the learner identity. As indicated in the introduction to this section another major motivator which forms the core category of this study has been held over until the next chapter. This core category extends beyond being solely a motivator and becomes a means of explaining the pattern of behaviour observed in the conditions, interactions, and consequences (the CIC) of the BSP (Glaser, 1992).

## THE INTERACTIONS AND THE LITERATURE

The literature investigated the affective, behavioural, and cognitive dimension of cross-cultural adjustment. The degree of cultural difference between Mainland China and New Zealand predicted high levels of ethnic dissimilarity, hesitant host

society receptivity, strong co-ethnic group strength, low social and communicative competence, low degree of change preparedness, and some mismatches in expectations (see Chapter Two: 'Cross-Cultural Adaptation & The Chinese Learner'). These factors highlighted the significant nature of the cross-cultural adjustment faced by the students and the complexity of the variables and the manner in which they interact with each other. While it was acknowledged that all students face stressful challenges, it was the context, character, and quantity of the changes and the required speed of adaptation that made this adjustment so daunting (Ward et al., 2001). In addition, the responsibility for coping with this change was almost solely that of the overseas student.

Studying overseas results in a change in the students' community of practice and a clash of academic cultures (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997). In Vygotsky's social-cognitive model, language is integral to enculturation and entering a new learning ecology, especially one with a distinctly different language frame, tears apart the established community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), including the learning support scaffolding (Woolfolk, 2004). This prompts both the need to adapt to the new context and an understandable self-protective desire to shelter. The clash of cultures does not highlight a deficit model of learning in either the home or host context; however, the differences cannot be ignored. As the literature suggested, the students in this study did not generally find the skills which had been effective for them in China or the content of the knowledge they had learnt necessarily transferred well into a new context (Biggs & Watkins, 1996).

The literature indicated that even though the problems faced by the students were significant the students were usually able to overcome these problems and adopt the necessary strategies that led to success. Biggs and Watkins (1996, p. 278) found that the students' adaptation in their study happened "surprisingly quickly." Ting-Toomey and Chung (2003) suggested fast adaptation occurs because the students are task orientated and Kim (2001, p. 45) thought it showed a certain "plasticity" of mind. Kim cites Ruben's view that living systems have an inherent ability to "restore balance and harmony" (p. 137; as cited in Kim, 2001, p. 45). The findings of this study support this understanding. The combined action of reliance on the resilient and adaptable strength of the learner identity, the adoption of learning

strategies, and drawing on motivational desires enabled the students, as and after they weathered the initial storm, to move from disequilibrium to a new equilibrated position. The changes to the learner identity are discussed further in Chapter Seven.

## MODELLING THE INTERACTIONS

In similar fashion to the ‘Conditions’ established in Chapter Five the aim of modelling the ‘Interactions’ was to help visualise the conceptualisation or theorisation of the BSP. In depicting the interactions it has pictured the fracturing of the previously established learner identity by the conflict between the cultures and contexts faced by the Mainland Chinese students crossing educational borders. It also indicates the stabilising effect of the adoption of strategies by the students and the influence of the motivators on the students that, along with the cultural strength and resilience of the established learner identity, held together the fracturing elements of that identity. The result of this stage of the modelling is displayed in Figure 6.5.

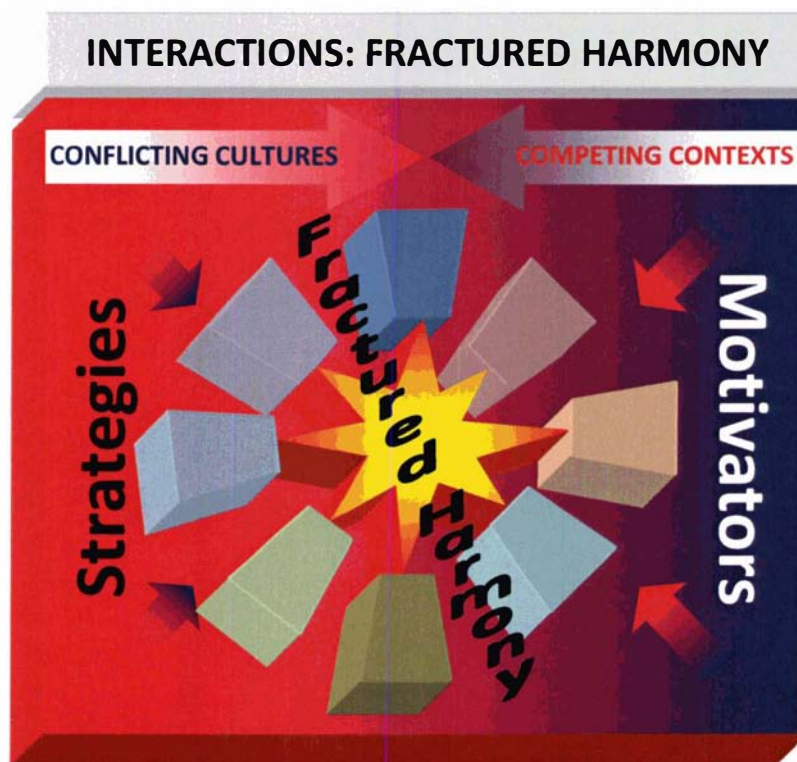


Figure 6.5: Interactions of cross-cultural educational adjustment

## SUMMARY

This chapter has described, based on the categories provided by the interview data from the participants and the attestors groups, the interactions that comprise the central process of the CIC paradigm (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The categorisation process involved the three stage constant comparative approach of grounded theory, that is, open, axial, and selective coding. As a result of this process, the categories presented within the CIC construct represent not only the findings of the study, but the ongoing analysis of it as well.

This chapter has addressed the interactions, which are the intentional and habituated responses to the conditions faced by the students in crossing educational cultures. While general cultural differences per se were not central to this study and while, understandably, the students did not necessarily have a strong meta-awareness of cultural issues, the impress of culture and cultural change was evident in their lives and study. The students felt they were not well prepared for the changes they experienced and they expressed concern for students who were not able to cope. The issue categories that emerged from the data fell into three major groups. There were three overarching factors: language, different ways of learning, and cultural differences; four specific learning issues: quantity of reading, different teacher relationships, assignment emphasis, and writing assignments; and three more personal issues: looking after self, lack of support, and financial stress.

It was theorised that these issues fractured the harmony of the students' established learner identity. However, a before and after snapshot of the learner identity profile saw, that while there were significant changes in the learner identity, that it was relatively resilient to the pressures acting upon it. This probably was a sign of the externally bounded and culturally harmonised strength of the identity, which was due to its being forged by the largely homogenous macro and micro influences within China. In addition, it was theorised, based on the emergent categories, that the intentional and habituated use of strategies and motivators applied by the students placed a protective force around the learner identity while it was in disequilibrium.

The strategies and motivators formed the students' key interactions/actions in response to cross-cultural educational adjustment. The key strategy categories applied by the students were: accessing support structures, relying on self, growing in language skills, growing in learning skills, drawing on prior learning, and benefiting from work experience within New Zealand. The prime motivators were: the need to meet family and social expectations, a desire for Western learnings, the need to safeguard cost issues, and a desire for self-improvement. However, credit also needs to be given to the enculturated nature and the resilience of the learner identity itself. Four elements of the students' interaction were included in the CIC model: conflicting cultures and competing contexts; the fracturing of the learner identity; and the use of strategies and motivators (Figure 6.5). This highlighted the interactivity of the elements and the way in which the learner identity was sustained through this period of significant change.

The next chapter, 'Consequences,' the third CIC stage, examines the effects of the changes on the students in regard to the elements of the learner identity. It also discusses the way in which living and learning within a new cultural context wove new elements into the fabric of the 'students-as-learners'. Significantly, it will also present the core category or central concept of the study which will explain the major behaviours observed over the breadth of the CIC process. This concept, while being a prime motivator for the students was also found to have the explanatory power that was needed to fulfil the requirements for a core category. The final result of this theorisation will be presented by way of the completed model.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# CONSEQUENCES

### *Journey to the West: IMPACTED IDENTITY*

#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter has two tasks. The first is to describe the third and last step of the CIC paradigm by presenting the ‘Consequences’. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 128), consequences are “the outcomes of the actions/interactions” or “what happens as a result of action/inaction.” They go on to add that: “Whenever there is action/interaction or a lack of it taken in response to an issue or a problem or to manage a certain situation, there are ranges of consequences, some of which might be intended and others not” (p. 134). In the context of this study, the consequences identified were the ways in which the students observed or understood their learner identity to change. This impact on the identity was a result of the disequilibrium created by the competing cultures and conflicting contexts, the fracture of the pre-existing harmony of the identity elements, the implementation of learning strategies, and the push-and-pull of prime motivators.

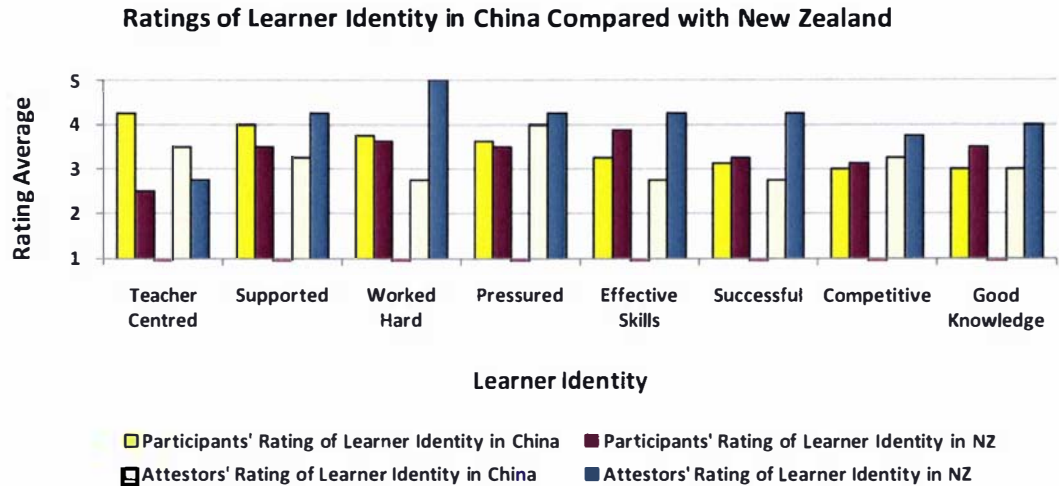
The second purpose of this chapter is to describe the core category. In grounded theory the core category or central concept must appear frequently in the data, explain the relationship between categories, be sufficiently conceptual, and be able to explain both variations and the main points (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In relation to this study, the core category of a better future was seen to be the driving force behind the BSP (Basic Social Process). Therefore, the core category explains: the forces that helped create the established learner identity; the impulse that caused the students to move beyond their cultural and educational comfort zone and venture overseas; the desire that helped them to withstand the fracturing of the harmonious learner identity; and the adaptiveness that brought about foundational changes to who they were as learners.

## CONSEQUENCES: IMPACTED IDENTITY

When considering the consequences of the interactions/actions on cross-cultural educational adjustment, the impact on the learner identity may be seen in two ways. One consequence may be where the learner identity elements undergo some degree of internal change or transformation. These types of changes may be termed alterations. Chapter Six (see: ‘Fractured Harmony’) noted this type of impact on the learner identity elements. This area of change will now be addressed in more depth. The second consequence may be the creation of new identity elements that may not previously have had a conscious profile or may not have existed. These may be termed accommodations. While these may not be ‘new,’ in the sense that they did not exist at all in the learner identity of the students before studying in New Zealand, these elements are significantly ‘more’ in terms of their role in the enlarged identity profile.

The consequential changes to the learner identity elements of cross-cultural adjustment were introduced in Chapter Six. Under ‘Fractured Harmony’ it was observed that the elements experienced significant change yet still retained a certain degree of stability. This change has been analysed by examining the students’ ratings of ‘how-true-for-them’ the eight learner identity elements were in China compared to their ratings of the elements in the New Zealand context. The ratings of the elements in China were taken while the students were in New Zealand and looking back to their experiences in China.

The change for each learner identity element has been shown for both participants and attestors in Figure 7.1. For example, the first learner identity element presented is ‘Teacher Centred.’ The figure compares the rating of being teacher centred as an element of their learner identity in China to how it was rated in New Zealand. A comparison is given for the participation group first and then the attestation group. This is repeated for all eight identity elements across the chart from left to right. The relatively small size of these groups means that care needs to be taken not to generalise these results beyond these participants. The ratings were based on a five-point Likert scale: 5 - very true; 4 - mostly true; 3 - sometimes true, sometimes not true; 2 - seldom true; 1 - rarely true. The changes in the ratings between China and New Zealand and between the two groups (participants and attestors) are discussed in the next section.



*Figure 7.1:* Comparisons of learner identity change

### **Alterations: Impact on the Established Learner Identity**

As described in Chapter Four, the profiles of the participation and attestation groups were similar in nature. That is, all members of both groups were Mainland Chinese, postgraduate students studying business at Atherton University. The one exception to this was one member of the attestation group (ZV) who was a student of the sciences. In terms of differences between the groups some factors may be relevant in understanding their responses. Whereas the participant group was largely drawn (80%) from the northern campus, the attestation group was comprised of students from the main campus of Atherton. This, for example, could help explain differences in how the two groups felt they were supported. Also, the participation group had at the time of making these comparisons undertaken three in-depth interviews on this area of cross-cultural educational change and may have had more time to reflect on and, therefore, had a greater awareness of the issues. The attestation group in comparison was making its assessments based on one interview.

Another difference could be timing. The participant group interviews were generally held during mid-semester holiday breaks; whereas some of the attestation group members had just finished their exams and had been possibly under more pressure recently. This for example, may help to explain the significant difference between the participant group and the attestation group in regard to 'Worked Hard'. In

addition, the smaller size of the attestation group (four students) may have resulted in the, generally, higher range in ratings for the results from this group. Each of the learner identity elements are analysed below. The analysis has taken into account these contextual factors in order to help understand the changes the students faced in their learner identity elements.

For each of the tables below (Table 7.1 to 7.8), a more in-depth look at the rating for each learner identity element is displayed. A comparison is made on each table between how the students rated each of the elements; first, in how they rated the element in China, as they looked back from New Zealand; second, how they rated that element in relation to their educational experience in New Zealand. This comparison is shown in two ways: first, as an average rating; second, showing each student's rating for that learner identity element. Comparing the data 'vertically' highlights the change in the learner identity between how it was perceived in China compared to New Zealand. In another form of comparison, the ratings of the participant group in relation to the attestation group are shown. Comparing the data 'horizontally' is a means of verifying the data, as discussed in Chapter Four, between the original participant group and the attestation group.

### ***Much Less Teacher Centred***

Both groups, participants and attestors, indicated that there was a very significant decrease in the degree to which their learning was teacher centred in New Zealand. This is evident in the Likert scale rating given by the groups (see Table 7.1). The participant group moved from a rating of more than 'mostly true' in China (4.250) to a rating moving towards 'seldom true' in New Zealand (2.500). The attestation group experienced this change less than the participants, but it was still significant. In fact, this is the only learner identity element which showed a decrease in being 'true' for both groups of students as they crossed cultures. Only one student, YU of the attestation group, rated her experience of learning in New Zealand as more teacher centred (4: 'mostly true') than what she had experienced in China (3: 'sometimes true; sometimes not true').



Table 7.1:

*Comparison of 'Teacher Centred' ratings*

<b>TEACHER CENTRED (TC)</b>		<b>Participants</b>								<b>Attestors</b>			
<b>Rating of TC in China</b>	Average	4.250								3.500			
	Student	AZ	BY	CX	DW	EV	FU	GT	HS	WS	XT	YU	ZV
	Rating	5	4	3	5	4	4	4	5	4	3	3	4
<b>Rating of TC in NZ</b>	Average	2.500								2.625			
	Student	AZ	BY	CX	DW	EV	FU	GT	HS	WS	XT	YU	ZV
	Rating	3	4	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	1

The reason for this potentially significant change may be found, in part, in the respect given to and the role of the teacher in Chinese society (see Chapter Five: 'Teaching Processes' and 'Identity Element One: Teacher Centred') and the 'Different Teacher Relationships' encountered at Atherton University (see Chapter Six). In essence, this change was one from information receivers to knowledge gatherers. This in turn led to the adoption of learning strategies to cope with this role change (see Chapter Six: 'Growing in Learning Skills') and transformations to new aspects of learner identity, as is discussed in the next section ('Accommodations'). That the change in being 'Teacher Centred' caused significant disorientation may be seen in the ranking of the issues the students faced. The attestation group rated different teacher relationships as the second most significant learning issue and different ways of learning as the second most significant overarching issue they faced (see Chapter Six: 'Fractured Harmony').

***Still Supported***

The participants and attestors showed opposing viewpoints on where they felt supported the most (see Table 7.2). The participants felt more supported in China while the attestation group felt more supported in New Zealand. The participant group rated 'supported' as 4.000 ('mostly true') in China compared to 3.500 in New Zealand. In comparison, the attestation group rated support in China at 3.250 (almost 'sometimes true; sometimes not true') but support in New Zealand at 4.250 (more than 'mostly true'). It would, perhaps following the participant group, be



expected that the loss of societal, familial, and collegial support networks would cause a dramatic drop in the degree to which the students felt supported in the new context at Atherton University. Being supported was the second strongest learner identity element for this group of students in China (see Chapter Five: ‘Identity Element Two: Supported’). The significant change in support structures would, it is assumed, most likely be indicated in ratings such as those of the participant group, or even a wider range in the countries comparison.

Table 7.2:

*Comparison of ‘Supported’ ratings*

<b>SUPPORTED</b>		<b>Participants</b>								<b>Attestors</b>			
<b>Rating of Supported in China</b>	Av.	4.000								3.250			
	Student	AZ	BY	CX	DW	EV	FU	GT	HS	WS	XT	YU	ZV
	Rating	5	4	5	3	3	4	4	4	3	2	5	3
<b>Rating of Supported in NZ</b>	Av.	3.500								4.250			
	Student	AZ	BY	CX	DW	EV	FU	GT	HS	WS	XT	YU	ZV
	Rating	5	3	5	2	3	3	4	3	4	4	4	5

The students responded to this change in feeling supported by the adoption of compensatory strategies. They tended to access support structures that were acceptable to them and to become more self-reliant (see Chapter Six: ‘Supporting Strategies’). The difference in ratings between the participants and attestors groups may be due to factors such as variations between the main and northern campuses of Atherton University in the level of co-ethnic contact and university support services available. A perceived lower level of support services and less ease of support access at the northern campus may have caused the participant group to have felt less supported. Most of the participant group (80%) attended the northern campus while the entire attestation group were enrolled at the main campus. Only one of the attestation group, YU, scored her experience of being supported as being less in New Zealand. However, no members of the participant group believed they were better supported in New Zealand; half of the group felt less supported in New Zealand than they had in China. There may be some cultural reluctance to decry the level of support offered within the new cultural context, and at Atherton in particular, but this would be expected to be evident for both groups.

***Working Harder***

The students came from a context that believed in the efficacy of hard work (see Chapter Five: ‘Identity Element Three: Working Hard’).

They attributed success in life and study to be in a functional relationship with the amount of effort expended. The participant group felt that they worked at about the same level as they had in China, whereas the attestation group felt that they were working markedly harder in New Zealand (see Table 7.3). While all four of the attestation group thought they were working harder in New Zealand, only two members of the participant group (EV, HS) felt the same. From an external view, it would be presumed that overcoming the overarching issues (language, culture, and learning) as well as specific learning issues would have triggered a response of needing to work harder in order to succeed.

Table 7.3:

*Comparison of ‘Working Hard’ ratings*

<b>WORKING HARD (WH)</b>		<b>Participants</b>								<b>Attestors</b>			
<b>Rating of WH in China</b>	Average	3.750								2.750			
	Student	AZ	BY	CX	DW	EV	FU	GT	HS	WS	XT	YU	ZV
	Rating	4	4	5	5	2	3	4	3	2	2	4	3
<b>Rating of WH in NZ</b>	Average	3.625								5.000			
	Student	AZ	BY	CX	DW	EV	FU	GT	HS	WS	XT	YU	ZV
	Rating	3	3	5	3	4	3	4	4	5	5	5	5

The reason the participation group felt they worked at about the same level in New Zealand as they had in China may possibly be explained by the nature and timing of their interview processes. During the in-depth interviews with the participant group the grinding hard work associated with gaining entry to university through the primary and, especially, the high school years was considered at length (see Chapter Five ‘The National University Entrance Examination’). This was in contrast with study at university which was generally considered to be ‘relaxed’. The attestation group may have ranked the level of work higher in New Zealand because they had less time, with only one interview, to consider this comparison. In addition, the timing of the interviews for the attestation group just after their exams may have influenced their

rating of this issue. The participant ratings, as noted earlier, were usually held during break periods. It may be fair to say that the amount of hard work required to be successful in the New Zealand context relates in a similar way to the work required to enter university in China; but it compares unfavourably with the work required in the university context in China.

**Still Pressured**

The learner identity element ‘Pressured’ showed little change between how stressed both groups of students felt in China and in New Zealand (see Table 7.4). Again, it may have been presumed that learning in a new culture and context may have increased the students’ sense of pressure. The stability of this element may be explained by the generally high level of pressure the students faced in China and the acceptance of this pressure as a necessary requirement of being a successful learner (see Chapter Five: ‘Identity Element Four: Pressured’; Chapter Six: ‘Meeting Family & Society Expectations’).

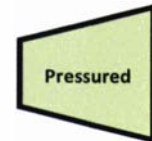


Table 7.4:

*Comparison of ‘Pressured’ ratings*

<b>PRESSURED</b>		<b>Participants</b>								<b>Attestors</b>			
<b>Rating of Pressured in China</b>	Av.	3.625								4.000			
Student		AZ	BY	CX	DW	EV	FU	GT	HS	WS	XT	YU	ZV
Rating		3	4	3	5	5	2	4	3	4	4	4	4
<b>Rating of Pressured in NZ</b>	Av.	3.500								4.250			
Student		AZ	BY	CX	DW	EV	FU	GT	HS	WS	XT	YU	ZV
Rating		2	3	5	4	3	4	3	4	5	5	5	2

**More Effective Skills**

Both groups of students felt that their level of learning skill effectiveness had been enhanced by the process of cross-cultural educational adjustment (see Table 7.5). The attestation group rated the effectiveness of their skills in China as only 2.750 (nearly ‘sometimes true; sometimes not true’



according to the Likert scale) while in New Zealand it was rated at 4.250 (more than ‘mostly true’). The participant ratings were similarly distinct but the difference between China and New Zealand was not so marked. All but one student (BY) felt their learning skills were as effective as or more effective than they had been in China. The lower rating of their learning skill effectiveness in China, may have been influenced by their experiences in New Zealand. The skills they had in China allowed them to be successful (as gauged by gaining entry to university) but they were felt to be less adequate for the new learning tasks in a different learning ecology (see Chapter Six: ‘Different Ways of Learning’). However, by the end of about three semesters of learning both groups appreciated being able to operate with an enlarged set of learning skills (see Chapter Six: ‘Growing in Learning Skills’; ‘A Desire for Western Learning’).

Table 7.5:

*Comparison of ‘Effective Skills’ rating*

<b>EFFECTIVE SKILLS (ES)</b>		<b>Participants</b>								<b>Attestors</b>			
<b>Rating of ES in China</b>	Average	3.250								2.750			
	Student	AZ	BY	CX	DW	EV	FU	GT	HS	WS	XT	YU	ZV
	Rating	4	4	4	2	3	3	3	3	1	3	4	3
<b>Rating of ES in NZ</b>	Average	3.875								4.250			
	Student	AZ	BY	CX	DW	EV	FU	GT	HS	WS	XT	YU	ZV
	Rating	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5

**Greater Success**

Overall, the students felt at least as successful as students at Atherton as they had in China; however, those from the attestation group felt particularly more successful (see Table 7.5). The attestation group rated their success as students in New Zealand at 4.250 (more than ‘mostly true’); in China it was rated at only 2.750 (nearly ‘sometimes true; sometimes not true’). Having overcome so many issues and challenges in New Zealand to reach the point that they were about to complete their graduate certification, feelings of success were not surprising. The participant group showed only a marginal increase in how successful they felt about themselves as students. However, only two students (CX, GT) felt less successful in New Zealand compared to their experience in China. It is difficult to say why the



attestation group was more sure of this change than the participation group. The motivation for success is intrinsic to the basic social process of cross-cultural educational adaptation. In Chapter Six ‘A Desire for Self-Improvement’ was fundamental to that drive for success, as were the other prime motivators (‘Meeting Family & Society Expectations’; ‘A Desire for Western Learnings’; ‘Safeguarding Cost Issues’). This is especially true of the core category, which will be discussed later in this chapter. As noted above, to achieve success the students were prepared to work hard, accept significant pressure, and adapt to the new context.

Table 7.6:

*Comparison of ‘Successful’ rating*

<b>SUCCESSFUL</b>		<b>Participants</b>								<b>Attestors</b>			
<b>Rating of Successful in China</b>	Av.	3.125								2.750			
	Student	AZ	BY	CX	DW	EV	FU	GT	HS	WS	XT	YU	ZV
	Rating	3	3	5	3	2	2	4	3	3	2	4	2
<b>Rating of Successful in NZ</b>	Av.	3.250								4.250			
	Student	AZ	BY	CX	DW	EV	FU	GT	HS	WS	XT	YU	ZV
	Rating	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	5

**Still Competitive**

The attestation group, as was generally the case, had a greater average rating range than the participant group (see above for possible explanations: ‘Alterations’). Overall, the students generally saw themselves as only a little more than ‘sometimes true; sometimes not true’ for being competitive in both contexts (see Table 7.7). The variety in the scores of the individual students, especially in the participant group, makes any kind of change in the rating of the identity element hard to determine. Marginally, the students saw themselves as more competitive in New Zealand than in China. A number of reasons could be suggested, including: the need to work harder; the desire to return to the previous level of success that they had achieved before coming to New Zealand; the loss of the more collaborative relationships the students had experienced in China; a possible lack of understanding of the less normative approach to assessment in New Zealand; and the potential comparison with Kiwi students who seemed more ‘relaxed’.



Table 7.7:

*Comparison of 'Competitive' rating*

<b>COMPETITIVE</b>		<b>Participants</b>								<b>Attestors</b>			
<b>Rating of Competitive in China</b>	Av.	3.000								3.250			
	Student	AZ	BY	CX	DW	EV	FU	GT	HS	WS	XT	YU	ZV
	Rating	4	4	3	1	2	3	3	4	2	2	5	4
<b>Rating of Competitive in NZ</b>	Av.	3.125								3.750			
	Student	AZ	BY	CX	DW	EV	FU	GT	HS	WS	XT	YU	ZV
	Rating	3	4	1	3	3	4	3	4	3	2	5	5

**Better Knowledge**

The students had, in hindsight, concerns about the different nature of the knowledge learnt in China. Their reasons for this are discussed in 'Language', 'Different Ways of Learning', and 'Drawing on Prior Learning' in Chapter Six. However, they also felt that their learning in China did provide a good base of knowledge (see Chapter Five: 'Knowledge and Skill Growth'; 'Identity Element Eight: Good Knowledge') and that this knowledge was of some help in the New Zealand context. Both the participation and attestation groups evaluated the quality of knowledge acquisition favourably. The attestation group again had a wider range than the participant group; moving from a rating of 'sometimes true; sometimes not true' for the quality of knowledge gained in China to a 'mostly true' in New Zealand (see Table 7.8). Only CX, a masters graduate in China, ranked 'good knowledge' higher in China.



Table 7.8:

*Comparison of 'Good Knowledge' rating*

<b>GOOD KNOWLEDGE (GK)</b>		<b>Participants</b>								<b>Attestors</b>			
<b>Rating of GK in China</b>	Average	3.000								3.000			
	Student	AZ	BY	CX	DW	EV	FU	GT	HS	WS	XT	YU	ZV
	Rating	4	3	4	3	1	3	3	3	NR	3	4	2
<b>Rating of GK in NZ</b>	Average	3.500								4.000			
	Student	AZ	BY	CX	DW	EV	FU	GT	HS	WS	XT	YU	ZV
	Rating	4	3	3	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4

### *Alterations: Assessing the Impact*

The last section, with reference to the data analysis and the comparative ratings of the learners, has shown that the learner identity elements were impacted by cross-cultural educational adjustment. For both participant and attestation groups, only one learner identity element, 'Teacher Centred', showed a marked and consistent drop in rating between China and New Zealand. Being 'Supported', 'Pressured', and 'Competitive' were at a similar level. However, 'Working Hard', 'Effective Skills', 'Successful', and 'Good Knowledge' showed increases in how the students perceived themselves as learners. It may be that the increase in these four elements was a compensatory adjustment for the learning being less teacher centred. The effect on learner identity caused by significant adjustment issues may have been expected to have a more negative influence on the students' view of themselves as learners and their learning. However, as the literature review noted, increases in competence and personal growth as a result of cross-cultural change tends to be minimalised (Pedersen, 1995).

In Chapter Six (see: 'Fractured Harmony') it was argued that the strength and resilience of the learner identity protected it from some of the shockwaves associated with changing educational cultures. It was also suggested that the adoption of learning strategies and drawing on prime motivators created a constraining force that prevented the learner identity from serious fracture. Therefore, a combination of factors was at play in the adjustment dynamic. However, the timing of the evaluation, at the end of approximately three semesters of learning, may depict a scenario where the worst of the destabilising effects may have been countered by the dynamic interplay of resilience, strategies, and motivators. As noted in Chapter Six, it was not possible, due to the logistics of the grounded theory methodology, to undertake this assessment at, say, the end of the first semester. This is usually regarded as the most difficult transition period.

Three other factors may explain why the overall change to the learner identity elements, for these groups of students, was relatively positive. First, as noted in the literature review, attribution theory argues that "... individuals are motivated to discover the underlying causes of their own performance and behaviour" (Santrock, 2008, p. 459). When students are under pressure they may examine the three dimensions of causal attributions (locus, stability, and controllability) and conclude that there are a mix of internal, unstable, and controllable reasons for a lack of performance. If that is

the case, then they may be prepared to make the changes that could lead to more positive outcomes. In this study's assessment of learner identity change the one factor that was beyond the students' ability to change was the difference in teacher role and relationship, which helps explain its drop. The second factor that may have ultimately reduced the negative influence of the changes is the value placed on education within the Mainland Chinese cultural context (see Chapter Five: 'The Value and Price of Education'). This high valuation for education helps create and maintain the drive to make the necessary changes to ensure the desired outcomes.

The third factor that may help to explain the positive impact on learner identity is that the stories of the students in this study were largely ones of success. The overall performance of Mainland Chinese postgraduate students beyond the students involved in this study may, or may not, also show a higher level of success than that for undergraduate students from Mainland China. Certainly, there was a concern among the students in this study for the stories associated with the perceived poor performance of some students (see Chapter Six: 'Conflicting Cultures - Competing Contexts'). In almost all cases, the students in this study had completed successfully some form of undergraduate education in China before coming to New Zealand. Two of the students in the participation group may not have had a totally successful study experience in New Zealand. However, identification of individual's academic results falls beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, while some students left before the intended completion of their studies, it is not possible to confirm whether this was related to academic issues or to other matters, such as changes in personal circumstances.

The change by way of alteration to the learner identity elements for the students in this study may be described, overall, as positive. Some of the reasons for this have been highlighted above. Having noted the type, and to some extent gained an indication of the scale and direction of change, the next section investigates whether any new elements were accommodated by the students into their learner identity profile.

### **Accommodations: New Dimensions of Learner Identity**

In addition to the students experiencing alterations to their established learner identity, it may be expected that the disequilibrium associated with this change could

lead to the accommodation of new elements into their learner profile. A number of such elements emerged from the data. The most significant of these are that the students became more independent, more practically skilled, more organised, more co-operative, and more interested. These five elements will be described and a number of other influences on the students as learners will be mentioned. Then the ‘true-for-me’ rating by the attestation group for the five elements will be reviewed.

### ***More Independent***

While some students believed they had studied independently in China, there was also a culturally influenced dimension to how they cooperated in their study (see Chapter Six: ‘Different Ways of Learning’). However, during the time the students studied in New Zealand there was a sense for many of them that they either were becoming or had become more independent (AZ3-1007; EV3-0907; FU1-0406; GT3-0907; HS1-0606). The student comments focused initially on how they became aware of, and the significance of the change in, the teacher’s role within the new learning context. The change of perception about the teacher’s role led to the students making adjustments to their learning identity in terms of becoming more independent.



Teacher expectation and the assessment requirements helped create the setting for this change (see Chapter Six: ‘Different Teacher Relationships’; ‘Assignment Emphasis’). BY noted that the New Zealand teacher expected more independence: “*The NZ teacher never tells you anything about [how to organise your study]. They just tell you this is your project. How to complete it is your business*” (2-0906). HS also saw this change being driven by the workload difference between university in China and New Zealand, where the greater workload in New Zealand meant there was “... *more work that we have to do by ourselves*” (1-0606). Another contextual reason for the change was that the freedom of choice the students had regarding programmes and subjects meant they were required to make decisions with greater independence (see Chapter Six: ‘Growing in Learning Skills’).

One of the causes, as well as a consequence, of becoming more independent was the development of a different set of thinking skills. FU believed that: “*In the New*

*Zealand way the professor always encourages you to have your own ideas. It helps you develop critical thinking skills” (3-0907). Some of the debated implications of CHCs are that they develop a present based on the past, do not foster a sense of independence and creativity in thinking, and, educationally, breed reliance on the teacher (see Chapter Two: ‘Current Legacy’). GT felt that in New Zealand, “... maybe, the education will encourage the students to think something by themselves” (3-0907). Others expressed ways in which they had experienced this thinking shift: “I can think deeper”; “I am more open minded. ... I also feel I’m able to express my ideas more easily. So, I can be unique - not only in study but in many things” (FU3-0907); “I have become a more logical person” (EV3-0907); “It has broadened my mind and my thinking” (CX3-0907); and “[I know] how to transform my knowledge in different contexts” (GT3-0907).*

Other consequences flowed from a greater sense of independence. Not only were they enabled to think in a different way, they also learnt how to become knowledge gatherers through research and self-study (CX3-0907; FU3-0907). Even though this was stressful, DW understood it as something more personal than the stress in China and, therefore, somehow better. He said: “*Compared to the stress I studied in China, this stress is from myself, my heart. I realised I should do it like that. In China, the pressure is from society*” (3-EQ). In becoming more independent AZ felt the Chinese students became more independent not only in their study but the wider circle of life: “*I think [Chinese] students in New Zealand are more independent. They can, when they study, earn some money and support themselves*” (2-0906). GT believed that developing independence had positive implications for the future as well. “*I think it is very good because as a natural person we need to be independent in our future jobs. If we learn how to deal with it now, then it will be easier to carry on from university*” (3-0907). AZ believed that returning to the more collectivist Chinese context with a more independent outlook was “*not a problem*” (2-0906). However, other studies, such as Butcher’s (2002), found that re-entry to the home culture can be fraught by a number of issues, including a change in positioning on an individualist-collectivist continuum.

### ***More Practically Skilled***

The learning at Atherton combined both the theoretical and the practical. In Chapter Five (‘Teaching Styles and Effectiveness’;

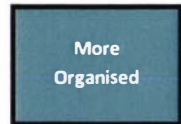


‘Identity Element Eight: Good Knowledge’) an emphasis on theory was seen to be the teaching/learning focus in China and in Chapter Six (‘The Desire for Western Learnings’) the students expressed their appreciation for the practical component of their studies on New Zealand. The emphasis on theory in China meant students felt they were not as able to develop practical skills (EV1-0906; FU1-0406; GT1-0606; GT3-0907) and were not often exposed to teachers who had practical experience (AZ1-0506; IR1-0906), which could lead to being less than prepared for their future careers (AZ1-0506; CX3-0907; GT1-0606). DW believed that the *“The main difference in New Zealand teachers is that they focus on the real questions. Not only the theoretical. I think this is very useful to examine the real questions”* (2-0906). AZ agreed and gave an example of the practical focus he appreciated: *“For one paper this semester, our lecturer asked us to download data from the internet and also used the approach to teach in class. So I think it is more practical to use [this] approach in class ...”* (2-0906).

This resulted in the development of a skill set that included both learning and job-related skills. BY appreciated learning how to research (3-EQ) and FU valued the *“... way to think, to structure, to schedule”* (2-0706). BY commented further by comparing the different learning contexts: *“It is very helpful to Chinese students, I think, because in China students were always taught how to memorise, how to fill their brain with knowledge and here they can learn how to use, how to create – that is very helpful, very useful”* (2-0906). The practical aspect of their education was described as *“useful”* (BY2-0906; DW2-0906; FU3-0907; HS-EQ), *“helpful”* (BY2-0906; FU2-0906), *“more concrete”* (GT3-0907), and *“connected”* (DW2-0906). This change in emphasis was seen by GT as a *“... good thing. I always think during your study times that putting your practical with your theory study is the best way. So, I like the practical education”* (2-0906). However, as noted in Chapter Six, CX, the oldest student, while having some reservations, believed that his education in China was sufficiently practical to prepare him for employment (3-0907) and ZV valued the theory base that she brought with her from China (A3-1207). Also, the emphasis on the practical caused learning issues for the students. Those issues surrounding culture, language, and constructing assignments that required practical application have been noted in Chapter Six (see: ‘Conflicting Cultures - Competing Contexts’; ‘Cultural Differences’; ‘Language’; ‘Assignment Emphasis’).

### ***More Organised***

In China, the students had noted that their parents (see Chapter Five: 'Parental Desires and Expectations'; 'The Children's Response') and their teachers (see Chapter Five: 'Identity Element One: Teacher Centred') took a significant role in planning, choosing, and organising the study processes. However, in the new learning milieu they were separated from their parents', and society's, more direct influence and the teachers in New Zealand did not see themselves as being in the centre of the learning processes. This change, as well as helping to create the need to be more independent, meant that the students had to take more responsibility for organising themselves and their study. BY believed that: "*To do well [at Atherton] you must know how to schedule, how to plan, how to do your assignment.*" This meant that the need to be more organised (GT3-0907), better time managers (EV3-0907), and more "*step-by-step*" (GT2-0906) were important in order to succeed. To some extent, it was not only the style of teaching but also the work output required by the continuous assessment process that demanded these disciplines (see Chapter Six: 'Assignment Emphasis').



### ***More Cooperative***

The change in relational networks between the two learning contexts has already been noted above (see above: 'Supported'; 'Competitive'). In Chapter Six (see: 'Different Ways of Learning') it was seen that the students continued to favour the less formal co-ethnic support groups that they had been used to in China (EV1-0906; FU1-0406), even though these were harder to form and maintain in New Zealand (EV2-0407). In China, the learning environment had a strong relational element as well as ready-made contacts for study issues, although the learning assessment was individualised through the examination emphasis (see: 'Supported'). Yet, the students felt that they cooperated more in New Zealand than they had in China.



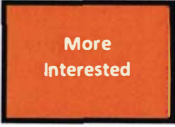
Perhaps one way of understanding this change in learning identity emphasis is to see a switch in the focus of cooperation: away from the relational and more focused on task. It may also signal a shift from a desire to cooperate to a need to cooperate. The need to be more task cooperative was reinforced by the culture, language, and content

difficulties that forced them to seek clarification and confirmation about what they were learning (AZ3-1007; GT1-0906; HS2-0906). JQ said (1-1006): *“Here you have to cooperate with other students to complete your study.”* This obligation or need to cooperate more was particularly evident during the early settling in period or when faced with a ‘difficult’ paper. This was GT’s experience: *“I remember during last semester when we got a paper it’s hard for us to understand at first. So, before this test, some of our classmates decide to discuss it together one day in the library to prepare for every question and put all the questions together. I found it is good”* (1-0606). HS also felt this need when uncertain about assessment requirements: *“But maybe you can get an idea from the student what the tutor really wants you to understand, what he really wants you to know”* (HS2-0906).

It was also noted in Chapter Six (see: ‘Different Ways of Learning’) that more formal class and assessment groups were not necessarily ‘enjoyed’ by some of the students. However, the more formal networks that were part of the Atherton learning environment could provide some relational benefits, particularly with Kiwis, (FU1-0406) and learning about team/group dynamics (EV2-0407; JQ1-1006), which they could see was helpful in their future workplaces. EV, who had stressed his dislike of working with fellow Chinese students in formal groups, also felt that: *“I think being in a study group you will find it more useful than studying by yourself. You have to talk to your group members. In NZ you must do presentations in your groups. When you become a group it’s good to have some people with the same interests. You are studying hard and always contacting one another”* (1-0906). Therefore, even though accessing support from other students was sometimes problematic, the dual forces of need and task demanded that the students cooperate more than they had in China.

### ***More Interested***

The last major added dimension to the students’ learner identity was that they became more interested in their learning. BY and DW struggled to find their learning interesting in China (respectively: 1-0506; 3-EQ) and GT commented that in China having good interest levels in your subject could depend on the degree of personal freedom that you had in choosing your major, which was sometimes quite limited (1-0606; see also HS3-EQ). Indeed, coming to study at



More  
Interested

Atherton, with its various dimensions of choice, often created a higher sense of interest in learning (CX3-0907; DW2-0906; FU2-0706; HS3-EQ) and the content being learnt (FU1-0406). The students' level of interest lifted their level of satisfaction, and performance in, learning (EV1-0906; FU2-0706; FU3-0907; IR1-0906). The new context, and its novelty (FU3-0907), also affected how the students approached their learning. GT said: "*But here I think it is more fun because I learn just because I like it. It's more about your interest and not about other things like the pressures coming from other people*" (2-0906).

The students also mentioned a range of other ways that they, as learners and people, had been affected by their study in New Zealand. Some felt a greater awareness of life balance issues (AZ3-1007; GT3-0907) while others felt culturally broadened by their life and study experience in New Zealand (FU3-0907; GT3-0907; IR1-0906). Some students felt both the need to be and to have become more confident and courageous people and learners (DW3-EQ; EV3-0907; FU3-0907; GT3-0907). There was also some satisfaction with having gained better English skills (AZ3-1007; CX3-0907). However, the most frequently mentioned changes were the five highlighted above: more independent, more practically skilled, more organised, more co-operative, and more interested.

### ***Accommodation: Assessing the Impact***

The five areas of accommodation were a matter of discussion with the attestation group and they were asked to rank, by means of the Likert scale used previously, how 'true-for-them' these changes in learner identity were. Table 7.9 (below) indicates that the students in the attestation group felt these changes were either 'very true' or 'mostly true' for them. Although the sample size is small, the ranking order for the changes were: more interested, more independent and more organised were equal rated, then more co-operative, and finally more practically skilled.

However, on being asked to comment generally on these changes, most talked about the greater need for independence and the changes this caused (see above: 'More Independent'). ZV, the science student, said: "*I brought [with me] that part of still being dependent on the lecturer but then I realised that I really can't do that. I can't*

*really rely on my lecturer and my supervisor to learn. I have to learn myself*" (A3-1207). The skills needed to be independent or "active" in their learning were also believed to be major factors in finding the right career path after study (WSA1-1107; XTA1-1107). Being interested in your learning was seen by YU as being a function of choice and being organised was essential to success (A2-1207). Another means of achieving success was to cooperate with others. WS said: "*It is pretty hard living by yourself in another country. You need somebody to help you and you need to work with somebody. Just like here in New Zealand or in the future you've got to be learning how to cooperate with other people*" (A1-1107).

Table 7.9:

*Attestation group ratings of internal impacts on learner identity*

<b>STUDENT</b>	<b>More Interested</b>	<b>More Independent</b>	<b>More Organised</b>	<b>More Cooperative</b>	<b>More Practically Skilled</b>
<b>WS</b>	4	5	4	4	4
<b>XT</b>	5	4	4	4	4
<b>YU</b>	5	4	5	4	4
<b>ZV</b>	5	5	5	5	4

## The Consequences and the Literature

The literature on the educational adjustment of Mainland Chinese students tends to major on the adaptation process and not necessarily the outcomes. According to Ward et al. (2001, p. 143):

... the literature on international students broadly appears to cover four areas: the problems of sojourners, the psychological reactions of sojourners to encountering a new cultural environment, the influence of social interaction and communication on sojourner adaptation, and the culture learning process apparent in the cross-cultural sojourn.

However, the more general literature of cross-cultural adjustment does provide some indicators of potential outcomes, which may relate to Mainland Chinese students entering a different learning ecology. The affective model, which focuses on stress-adaptation-growth (see Chapter Two: 'Affective Dimensions of Cross-Cultural

Adaptation'), predicts that bicultural identity, constructive responses, stable adaptations, and personal growth will mark its final stage (Neuliep, 2003). In relation to the grounded theory presented in this thesis, there is some accord with the latter three, while the first may require a longer period of stay than that of the students in this study. The theory suggests that the students do learn to make the necessary responses so they can succeed, that following disequilibrium there does come a new state of stability, and that the students do experience personal growth.

The behavioural model (see Chapter Two: 'Behavioural Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Adaptation') also majors on the longer term outcomes of the adjustment process. The key is the development of social and communicative competence that enables, ideally (but depending on one's stance), an integration of identity that seeks to retain the home country cultural identity but also desires to relate to other groups in the host environment (see Lustig and Koester, 2005). Kim (2001) understands that the development of this competence leads to functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity which, rather than static outcomes, are "developmental continua" (p. 61). Again, even though the outcomes are continua, the timeframe for the collection of the data in this study did not allow for these to be comprehensively determined. In addition, the students' areas of adjustment tended to address the needs imposed by the academic culture, as opposed to wider cultural dimensions. However, they were able to academically adjust to the point where their learner identity grew through alteration and accommodation.

Cognitively, the discussion in Chapter Two (see: 'Cognitive Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Adaptation') was based around Ward et al.'s discussion of social identification theory (2001). It was understood that cross-cultural adjustment would affect personal identity. Furnham (1988; as cited in Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005) suggested this may change identity by way of: loss; deprivation; strain; rejection; confusion; and powerlessness. These all indicate a potential source for the type of disequilibrium experienced by the students in this study. This identity crisis may be further exacerbated if the students were not well prepared for the change and/or they had a significant mismatch in expectations. This study affirms that there was significant change in learner identity by way of adjustment to existing learner identity elements and

the appearance of new aspects. It also indicates that, as a result of these changes, the worldview of these learners has grown through the experience of cultural difference.

### **Modelling the Consequences**

This chapter has investigated the consequences resulting from the interactions of the CIC paradigm (see Chapter Six). It has been argued that these consequences fall into two categories: alterations and accommodations. In regard to alterations, it was seen that half of the identity elements were enriched by the various factors associated with changing learning ecologies. Only one element ('Teacher Centred') was seen to have been diminished in capacity, largely because its effect was outside the control of the students. This may lead to the conclusion that the students made important personal gains as learners. This was despite the stress associated with this significant change as indicated by the raft of issues they faced (see Chapter Six: 'Issues Faced').

Accommodations, or creation of 'new' identity elements, arose from living and learning in new ways that resulted in a wider understanding of who the students were as learners. Probably, this understanding was still dominated by the strength of the culturally harmonised and externally bounded established learner identity. However, significant changes in how they viewed themselves as learners and how they understood learning did take place because of the cultural and contextual change. The emergent categories of identity accommodation change were described in the previous section.

As with the previous chapters on conditions and interactions the nature of the consequential changes were modelled to aid conceptualisation of the data. The diagram below (Figure 7.2) highlights the dimensions of change that impacted on the identity of the students. The arrows depicting conflicting cultures and competing contexts have merged to signify that over time there is a greater understanding by the students of the different cultures/contexts and their implications for them as learners and their learning. The outer oval, representing the learner identity, is larger and the mixing of colours represents the merging of cultures. This contrasts with the smaller and homogeneously coloured oval of the 'Conditions' identity in Figure 5.7 (see Chapter Five). This change represents how the learner-view of the students has enlarged and been 'coloured' by their experience of cross-cultural educational adjustment. The macro and micro factors

that established the learner identity in China are still evident but these are now ‘matched’ by the strategies and motivations the students used to overcome the learning issues they faced in New Zealand.

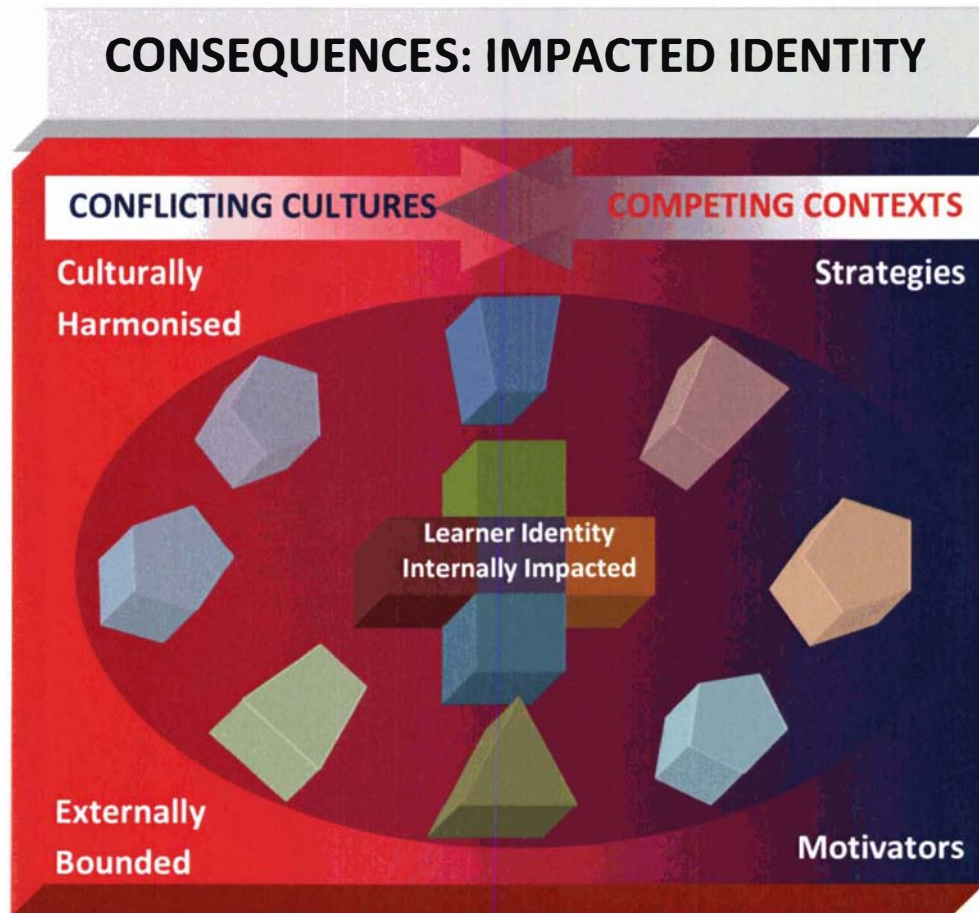


Figure 7.2: Consequences of cross-cultural educational adjustment

The alterations can be seen in the changes to the original learner identity shapes. One ('Teacher Centred') moves from the original four-sided trapezoid to a triangle to represent its diminished influence on the learners. Four other trapezoids become pentagons to signify their enlarged role in the students learner identity ('Working Hard', 'Effective Skills', 'Successful', and 'Good Knowledge') while three remained the same ('Supported', 'Pressured', and 'Competitive'). In addition, accommodations made to the students' self-understanding as learners have been represented by the five more darkly coloured rectangles in the centre of the diagram. These changes may be less caused by the type of external factors that formed their original identity than being more

caused by the students having to internally process the different educational circumstances that they faced.

This analysis has followed the Strauss and Corbin (1998) CIC (Conditions/Interactions/Consequences) paradigm in establishing the nature of the basic social process (BSP) of cross-cultural educational adjustment for a particular group of Mainland Chinese postgraduate business students. The one remaining element of the process is to determine if the data supports the existence of a core category or central concept. It was noted in the introduction to this chapter that this central concept did emerge from the data and that it was the impulse that drove the movement through the BSP. This is the topic of the second major section of this chapter.

## **THE CORE CATEGORY**

In applying the methodology and criteria for determining a core category, as established in Chapter Four, it was determined that a 'Better Future' was the core category that best explained the movement through the BSP. The positing of a better future required the use of what is termed 'selective coding' by way of further sampling and investigation (see Chapter Four: 'Selective Coding and the Core Category'). In the following sections a 'Better Future' will be explained and affirmed in respect to it being the driver of the BSP through the various situations the students faced during their educational transition to New Zealand. However, its salience went beyond the New Zealand context and met the wider criteria of explaining the movement of the BSP as a whole. Having argued for a better future as the core category on the basis of the data, it will also be assessed against the Strauss and Corbin (1998) criteria and then added into the conceptualisation of the theory by way of the completed model.

### **A Better Future**

The selective coding approach (see Chapter Four), indicated that a 'Better Future' had the best explanatory power to account for the experiences described in the data by the students and also accounted for most of the variation in the pattern of behaviour prevalent in the BSP (Glaser, 1992). A better future as a core category traced the BSP

in four distinct yet progressive movements: from living with education in China; to preparing to leave China; to overcoming the issues; and to seeing new horizons. In each of these different contexts the students expressed how this desire for a better future was the key driving force. In some instances there may seem to be elements of overlap or repetition as the students recount their engagement with this concept. This is especially so in the second and fourth movement (leaving China and seeing new horizons) as they reflect a similar circumstance. However, because each of the four movements is a distinct change in the BSP, it is important to hear the students' voices in each context as this affirms the role of a better future as a core category throughout the BSP.

### ***A Better Future: Living with Education in China***

Within the dynamics of the educational ecology in China, entrance to university was seen as the most likely path to a better future. As noted in Chapter Five, not entering this “*narrow gate*” was perceived as “*fatal*” to the aspiration of having a different life (CX1-0406). The future was so dependent upon it and the demand to achieve was so powerful that the long-term goals for the future were put on hold until this step could be taken (AZ1-0506). When university entrance was achieved the context continued to demand more and more (GT2-0906). This was true to the extent that a better future became something of an ongoing treadmill so that there was no opportunity to relax as only the pursuit of a better future counted. EV said: “*In China you may have this idea [of relaxing], but you have no time to think about it. At school you have to work hard to get a good job. When you get a good job you have to work hard to try to get promoted. The stresses come one-by-one. I don't have time or chance to relax*” (3-0907).

This demand for a better future was shaped by two very powerful forces: society and family. Society's history of a large poor underclass (GT2-0906), of a strong centrally-driven economy (XTA1-1107), its requirements for particular types of study programmes (GT1-0606), the subjugation of personal interest (WSA1-1107), the demand for certification (HS2-0906), and the low esteem of ‘blue collar’ work (DW2-0906) all drove the pursuit of higher education as a pathway to a better future.

Family was the second force behind this desire. Parents were prepared to sacrifice everything to secure the future of their children (see Chapter Five: ‘Parental Desires and Expectations’) and this was seen as the greatest gift the parents could pass on to them. The children understood their parents’ desire (HS2-0906). XT believed that: *“I think you should understand what the parents are thinking. They think they also want their kids to have a good future and a good life. So they want you to have a good education”* (XTA1-1107) and the children knew that the parents would only be satisfied with their success (CX2-0706; GT2-0906). This could lead to the internalisation of this demand by the children. FU said: *“Maybe when I was in high school my parents kept telling me, ‘You have to do it, because it is the only way to get through to university and make your future better.’ So, I just keep telling myself, ‘I have to do it’ ”* (2-0706).

So what was the nature of this future? Sometimes it was a simple and not well-defined sense of a *“brighter”*, *“better”*, and *“good”* future (respectively: GT1-0606; GT2-0906; EV2-0407). More specifically, a good future meant gaining knowledge through study (ZVA3-1207), developing a network of friends (AZ1-0506; EV1-0906), and finding the right type of job. Getting a good job meant having money to *“... do what you like”* (GT1-0606). FU expanded on this and linked it back to the need to study: *“Most students expect to have more money, so they study. Money is the most important thing. ... Because if you have money it will show that you are a successful person. You will have a higher position and other people respect you”* (2-0706). FU’s comments also add another dimension to a better future: societal respect. As was seen in Chapter Five (see: ‘Macro Conditions’) success or failure in study was foundational to and promotional for social standing. This caused GT, in regard to the desired future, to disagree with FU and to state that: *“Even now, I think it is about respect, not money”* (GT1-0606).

However, these descriptions of a better future were somewhat tenuous because it was felt that the future was always at risk. There was uncertainty over whether hard work would or could actually ensure such a future (GT1-0606). Other uncertainties included doubt about gaining an adequate return on the investment in education (EV3-0907), the price in stress that had to be paid in order to stay on the treadmill to secure it (EV3-0907), the need to keep achieving at higher levels (HS2-0906), and the continuing growth in competitors (EV3-0907). However, these uncertainties, along with the

reluctance to revert to potential poverty, propelled the students forward in their present search for a better future. In the case of the students in this study the desire for a better future compelled them to seek further education in New Zealand.

### ***A Better Future: Preparing to Leave China***

Much of what has been said above (see ‘A Better Future: Living with Education in China’) about education’s pathway to a better future in China is also valid in terms of explaining the desire to leave China and study in New Zealand. At this stage of their lives, the students’ learner identity had been shaped into a relatively harmonious and established form. Both society and the family continued to create a demand for further academic efforts, including overseas study, in a desire to attain the ‘better future’. XT believed that the strength of the family’s desires for overseas study went beyond just money: *“Behind the money is hope from my parents. They hope I will have a good future ...”* (A1-1107). When asked what the strongest motivation for him to come to New Zealand to study was BY simply said: *“To improve my future”* (2-0906). ZV said: *“I think it is the future. That’s the reason why I want to go overseas to experience something different and to learn a little more. It will be a better future for me rather than staying on in China at that time”* (A3-1207).

It was believed by the students that a period of study overseas could help them attain this future in a variety of ways that echo their beliefs about study in China. AZ believed the key was getting a *“... good education and qualification and ... a good job. Then you live a better life.”* (AZ3-1007). A good education would give them a competitive edge on the job market and help remove some of the more external risks associated with grasping the desired future. AZ saw this quite clearly: *“There are more and more international companies coming to China and if we want to just improve our life quality in the future we have to study English and get higher qualifications”* (1-0506). He underscored the value of English: studying in New Zealand *“... will improve my English”* (2-0906; see also Chapter Six: ‘Growing in Language Skills’).

However, studying in New Zealand was not all about gaining better positioning on the job market. Some students hoped that studying overseas would enhance their future by broadening their minds as well. They envisaged that this experience may

transform their identities in a positive way. ZV's opinion was: "*I believe if I go overseas I will find some more ideas on what I would want to do and the person I would like to be*" (A3-1207; see also AZ2-0906, CX1-0406, FU2-0706, GT1-0606, HS2-0906, IRI-0906; Chapter Six: 'A Desire for Western Learnings'). Fulfilling the hopes and dreams of the parents for their children was also a motivator in the parents helping send their children overseas (see Chapter Five: 'Parental Desires and Expectations'). However, in a parallel way, the substance of these desires was also for the future well-being of the child. DW said: "*The parents thought they would give their child a good studying circumstance and the child would have a good future. So this is the main reason the Chinese students go overseas*" (2-0906). The sacrificial expenditure of money was with this purpose in mind. "*They support me to study abroad. Although they spend a lot of money, it is a good investment for the future*" (AZ2-0906).

Studying overseas could be a catalyst for change. In BY's case (1-0506; 2-0906), the road to a better future in China was blocked and over the first two interviews this aspect of his story emerged.

*... I met a problem in my career, I couldn't get over it. ... To me it is a complicated problem. I have worked in a bank. Once I was a risk manager. Because of the office politics, I was very tired of it. ... I wanted to change my job but the company I wanted to join wanted me to get a higher degree. ... I thought I should spend two years getting a higher degree, a Masters degree. ... If I could get foreign experience it would be much better. ... I wanted to have foreign experience to get a better opportunity. ... So, I came here.*

CX, also in search of change, was the only student who had definitely committed himself, and his family, to be immigrants to New Zealand. He was well-educated and had a significant position of responsibility in China. It was unlikely that he would be able, because of language issues, to hold such a position in New Zealand. Yet he was prepared to pay the price for this change to a better future, not so much for himself as for his son. CX explained his situation by saying: "*... for my peers banking in China is a very good career. I was working in the provincial branch and my management is the whole province. I give up my career and have a new start. One reason is for my child's education*" (1-0406). The strong desire for a better future that helped create the established learner identity in China and propelled the students overseas to study further would also be needed when they faced the issues arising from cross-cultural educational adjustment.

### ***A Better Future: Overcoming the Issues***

In what manner did a better future provide the motivation that made it possible for them to overcome the educational issues in a strange land? The desire to overcome (CX2-0706; EV2-0407; GT1-0606; WSA1-1107; XTA1-1107; ZVA3-1207) and work hard (AZ2-0906; GT1-0606; ZVA3-1207) to gain a better future was evident in the strong connections the students made between this type of perseverance and the desired future. GT said: *“Because we have hope for the future so we always want, at the end, to get what we want after we pay a lot of money and time and energy”* (1-0606). She added: *“I think that’s because we always think that we are working hard now so we could get a beautiful future. That means we have hope for the future”* (1-0606). ZV believed: *“If we can overcome these problems and do well then we can get a better job. There is a good future waiting for us”* (A3-1207). EV felt a strong need to succeed in order to secure the best possible future: *“I want to be a success in the future. This belief forces me to study hard and forces me to try and develop myself”* (1-0906). WS felt the same drive: *“I know what I am going to do in the future. So I have to try to make this come true as soon as possible. So that means working hard”* (A1-1107).

However, the need to overcome the issues they faced was not just about accepting the need to work hard and persevere but also a belief that their study, despite the problems, was likely to make their future brighter. BY’s view was that: *“I choose this diploma and I know what I want. I know what I will choose in the future. That encourages me to go on”* (1-0506). Despite sitting two papers, which were proving to be quite difficult, BY still believed that: *“I think these two papers are very useful to my future. This is what I needed”* (1-0506). In terms of managing the educational adjustment, AZ saw the challenge as an opportunity: *“I think for ourselves, we should look for the opportunities to improve ourselves”* (1-0506).

EV and GT also saw a future benefit in the way these struggles forced them to become more independent.

*For your life you have to prepare everything for yourself. When your parents are not there with you then you have to be more self-independent. So you have to deal with the loss of relationship with friends and teachers and you have to think about your future: How can I have a good future? What should I do at university? You have to make a plan for your future.* (EV1-0906)

GT reflected much the same sentiment: *“I think it is very good because as a natural person we need to be independent in our future jobs. If we learn how to deal with it now, then it will be easier to carry on from university”* (3-0907).

Having seen how central the students’ desire for a better future was for living with education in China, preparing to leave China, and overcoming the learning issues they faced in New Zealand the next step was to see how the students envisioned the future after their time of study.

### ***A Better Future: Seeing New Horizons***

The students came to study in New Zealand because they saw its potential to create a better future for themselves and their families. In order to secure this future they displayed an ability to adapt by making foundational changes to who they were as learners (see above: ‘Alterations: Impact on the Established Learner Identity’; ‘Accommodations: New Dimensions of Learner Identity’) and to adopt strategies and motivators that enabled them to succeed educationally (see Chapter Six: ‘Supporting Strategies’; ‘Prime Motivators’). The students believed that they had probably enhanced their future, however, there was a continuing awareness that the future could not be guaranteed and that ‘luck’ still had its part to play.

As noted in introducing the core category, some of the comments of the participants sound similar in this context (‘New Horizons’) to the context of preparing to leave China as they both reflect a ‘leaving/envisaging’ dimension. Nevertheless, it is important to hear their voices in this new ‘leaving’ context as it reinforces the efficacy of a ‘Better Future’ as the core category for this BSP. The force of a better future after their current study is reviewed under three sections: higher qualifications and improved competitiveness; enhanced prosperity; and wider horizons.

#### **Higher qualifications and improved competitiveness.**

Obtaining a higher qualification, as has been noted above, may enhance the students’ competitiveness if they chose to return to China, which for the majority of the students was the most likely medium- to long-term outcome. GT was confident in her

summing up of the advantage gained: *“So, that means if you’ve got an overseas degree when you go back to China and they compare you with those who have a degree in China you may get a high level job easier and more income. So you will have a head start on other people”* (2-0906). Others agreed: JQ felt it would be *“very useful for me for finding good work later”* (1-1006); FU said *“of course, it is better”* (2-0706); BY believed it *“will be very good for those people when they go back to China to have better opportunities”* (2-0906).

However, there was an understanding that a qualification alone was not necessarily sufficient for a better future. FU, while accepting that study can give additional confidence, was of the opinion that having a better future *“... still depends on your personal skills and abilities – not just on qualifications”* (2-0706). BY believed that the reputation of returning graduates was not as high as it had been and was aware that each individual student would be judged on his or her merits (2-0906). Again, there was also a feeling that taking the time to study for a higher qualification could be putting the future at risk. While seeing his age as a motivator to finish his study quickly, XT was also concerned about how far ahead his peers in China were getting while he grew older (A1-1107). EV felt pressured by the time it was taking him to complete his study, then earn some valuable work experience, and then, maybe, apply for permanent residency (3-0907).

The need for experience, especially overseas experience, was also of fundamental importance to securing a better future. BY affirmed this by saying: *“... if a person is good and he can get experience from overseas then it will be much better”* (2-0906). XT (A1-1107) was more direct: *“If I go back to China or look for a job in NZ they will ask me what degree I’ve got. I’ve got a Masters in Finance. That’s all right, but I don’t have any work experience. Nothing. Totally blank.”* Having competent English skills was also a vital ingredient in order to take advantage of the globalisation of the economy in China (AZ 1-0506).

### **Enhanced prosperity.**

The future was also likely to be better, because of their overseas sojourn, in terms of a potential increase in prosperity. Prosperity was not defined solely in monetary or

wealth terms but also included a strong relational component that reflected the values of filial piety and social collectiveness that are such a part of Chinese culture (see Chapter Five: ‘The Children’s Response’; ‘Macro Conditions: Culture & Society’). While parents often freely sacrificed for their children’s advancement one of GT’s goals was to “*Have enough money to take care of my parents. I am the only child in my family so I will always think of my parents*” (3-0907). Her view was: “*If I improve my own career then I have this ability to help my parents to have a better life and for my children*” (2-0906). EV (1-0906) made it clear that the future and the family were not only about money but the enduring relationship he had with his parents: “*Yes, I think my future is back in China and my parents are back in China. I don’t want to be alone here.*”

However, monetary prosperity was seen as a foundational step towards a better future. The overseas qualification and work experience, the increased competitiveness, and good English skills were seen as the pathway to gain this reward. A good job and resulting high income was a way to become “*financially stable*” (GT3-0907), “*have lots of opportunities*” (DW3-EQ), and have a “*better life*” (AZ3-1007). Despite this not being guaranteed (see Chapter Six: ‘Safeguarding Cost Issues’), EV was expecting “*a return on my investment*” that would secure his future (1-0906). FU was clear that a returning graduate had a better chance of having “*a higher salary*” (2-0706). Remaining in New Zealand presented some significant difficulties in achieving this (EV3-0907; FU2-0706), largely due to language issues (see Chapter Six: ‘Language’; ‘Growing in Language Skills’). EV was also of the opinion that: “*... if I choose to stay here I can’t find a good way to make money. I can just work for a company and you don’t have wide business relationships to support you to be successful or to have a good start for your business*” (3-0907).

### **Wider horizons.**

The future, for this group of students, was also enriched by them gaining broader perspectives. This was discussed in Chapter Six (see: ‘A Desire for Western Learnings’). EV had learnt to relax (3-0907), HS found that life was not just about study or work (2-0906), and WS hoped that he may be able to write down his

experiences to help the new “young guys” (A1-1107). GT took hope and inspiration from a book her

*... husband borrowed from his university. It talks about Chinese immigrants from the first generation until now. That is different times and different kinds of people. I've read only the beginning so far. It talks about the first visit to the Western countries. The Chinese people are poor, dirty, and doing low-level work. Now, gradually, this is changing and they are changing their thinking and Chinese people, maybe Asian people, gradually get richer than before and do more professional jobs than before. Not just the low-level. Not just getting their money from their labour. (1-0606)*

The future was also associated with the goals and interests of the students. For some the goals set in China had remained constant through their time in New Zealand and had been a vital source of motivation (WSA1-1107). For BY the goal of a “successful career” was still a strong driving force (3-EQ) and AZ still retained, although with some doubts, the goal of becoming “more competitive” to secure the best possible job on return to China (3-1007). For other students, the experiences of living and studying in New Zealand had resulted in differing degrees of life goal change. Many of the goals still centred on jobs but some aspects had changed. FU’s job’s aspirations had become more focused (3-0907) and GT expressed the hope that if she returned to China she would not feel restricted to a lifetime of one job in one place: “... I don't need to limit myself to one career or to one workplace. If I feel it is good I will work there. If I like this city I will work there” (3-0907). CX, who felt he may struggle to get comparable work at the level he was employed at in China, was prepared to broaden his job area and perhaps try self-employment (3-0907).

Some students had experienced a more significant change in expectations and perspective about what a ‘better future’ may be. DW, who had returned to China, had such an epiphany: “My new life goal is to be happy every day, enjoy every day. I realised money is unlimited, but life is limited. I should not pay all my life on earning. I should learn how to enjoy my life and make people I love happy” (3-EQ). AZ, and his wife, had also experienced a major change:

*Before I came to NZ I just wanted to finish my study ASAP and then go back to China. But now, when I have stayed here, probably I like this country. Also my wife is here so we have probably decided to stay here long term. ... For example, we went back to China in June and we discussed a lot of things with my classmates and we found that they look forward to promotion and money. So as we stayed here longer we found the situation has changed. Our desire long term is to be relaxed; not competitive. ... We are*

*too relaxed! Probably too relaxed and I don't want to go back to China soon. (3-1007)*

GT was experiencing similar changes. *"I still have two months to go until finishing but I am already feeling I do not want to leave this environment. ... If I didn't come here maybe I would want to just get a high paid job and I would give up other things like wanting to travel. But now I would not do that"* (3-0907).

The literature, in addressing the cultural love of learning and the pragmatic instrumentalism of that learning (see Chapter Two), which demands achievement and success and longs for family and social advancement, fits well with the core category. Barker (1997) stated that "advancement" seems to be the purpose for study. As the core category and the prime motivator elicited from the student data, a better future becomes a compelling component in the equilibration process. Therefore, a better future has a significant say in the framing of the changed/changing learner identity. The adequacy of the adaptation to a suitably functional learner identity in the new context enabled them to be better prepared for the future (see above: 'A Better Future: Seeing New Horizons').

This section has looked at the manner in which the prime motivator of desiring a 'better future' profoundly affected the students in this study as they 'Journeyed to the West' in the BSP of cross-cultural educational adjustment. A better future was the core category in the formation of their learner identity, a powerful motivator to study as sojourners in a foreign land, a reason for their ability to overcome the issues they faced, and a means of opening the door to greater security and prosperity. In undergoing this process the students found the future continued to be uncertain and they also discovered wider perspectives of what a 'better future' might look like. However, this fragility of expectations did not necessarily diminish a desire for a better future. Instead the demand for a better future, however transformed by their experiences, remained an ongoing driver from the past, for the present, and into the future.

### **Meeting the Core Category Criteria**

Under Strauss and Corbin's treatment of grounded theory a core category must meet specific criteria (1989). In Chapter Four (see: 'Selective Coding and the Core

Category’) the core category criteria established by Strauss (1978) and then Strauss and Corbin (1998) were identified as: centrality; frequency; linking of categories; being sufficiently abstract, and an ability to explain both the main point and variations in conditions. On the basis of the above analysis and discussion it can be argued that a ‘Better Future’ is central to all the major categories within the BSP, that it appears frequently in the data in a manner that clearly links it to these major categories, and that it provides a way of understanding the shifts in the BSP as well as the nature of the changes within each of the CIC (Conditions/Interactions/Consequences) dimensions. A further criterion was that the core category be expressed in such a way that it is sufficiently abstract so that it can be linked with other substantive research investigating similar BSPs and may eventually help lead to a more generalisable theorisation of cross-cultural educational adjustment. The core category of a ‘better future’ fits this requirement in that it is both prospectively broad and relatively conceptual in nature.

The last criterion is that the core category must be able to explain variability in the data and relationships between the categories. For example, it explains how the desire for a better future influences what happens when overseas study does not turn out as expected. This can be illustrated through the experience of JQ. She was an older student whose husband and child remained in China while she studied for a Masters. She commenced study with little New Zealand based language preparation and also changed majors from her prior study in China. These factors led to significant study and adjustment difficulties which caused her to return to China at the end of the first year of her Masters programme. She explained that she missed her family greatly and the work was overwhelming (JQ1-1006). On face value it would seem, at best, a cautionary tale and for JQ herself a disappointment and potentially shame-inducing experience (see Chapter Five: ‘Macro Conditions’).

The core category of a better future, if it is effective, should still have the ability to explain what happened in JQ’s experience of study at Atherton University. The fracturing of her harmony as a learner was so significant that her life situation may have come to the point that neither the stability of her learner identity or her adaptiveness to the new learning ecology was sufficient for her to describe the outcome as constructing a better future for her. However, if the ideal of a better future, that is one obtained by gaining a Western qualification and work experience, becomes compromised she may

reframe the expression of that core category. This conjecture suggests that the core category is abstract enough to be redefined. Maybe, for JQ, the 'Better Future' was reframed in a way that it could be better achieved back home in China among her family. Therefore, her situation does not deny the efficacy of a better future but indicates its potential ability to morph according to the individual's context. Arguably, following Strauss and Corbin, "the way in which [the] phenomenon is expressed might look somewhat different" but "the explanation still holds" (1998, p. 147).

The efficacy of a better future as a core category, due to the constraints of the study, means that it has a localised nature. Further substantive studies of other similar BSPs may well reshape or redefine or even reword this core category. However, a better future meets the criteria established by Strauss and Corbin (1998). That is, it is central, appears frequently, explains the relationships between categories, is sufficiently abstract, and is able to explain potentially contradictory variations.

## **MODELLING THE THEORY**

The model, in summary (see Figure 7.3), depicts the conditions of a BSP where the learner identity of the Chinese students in this study was formed by the macro and micro forces within their social and cultural context. Due to these forces and the high level of homogeneity within the context, the learner identity can be described as externally bounded and culturally harmonised. The interactions of the BSP indicate that the harmonised and established learner identity is fractured by the conflicting cultures and competing contexts. However, the inherent resilience of the identity and the adoption by the students of learning strategies and prime motivators means that the learning identity, and, therefore, the capacity to learn, is protected and not broken apart.

The consequences of the BSP show that the students generally become, with time, more familiar with the different cultural contexts, and their competing paradigms. The students' sense of identity was enlarged and enriched by their experiences. However, the original learner identity elements were subject to alteration with some being diminished, others enhanced, and still others remaining the same. In addition, new elements were accommodated into their learning identity to indicate the expansion of the students' concept of who they were as learners.

## THE JOURNEY TO THE WEST

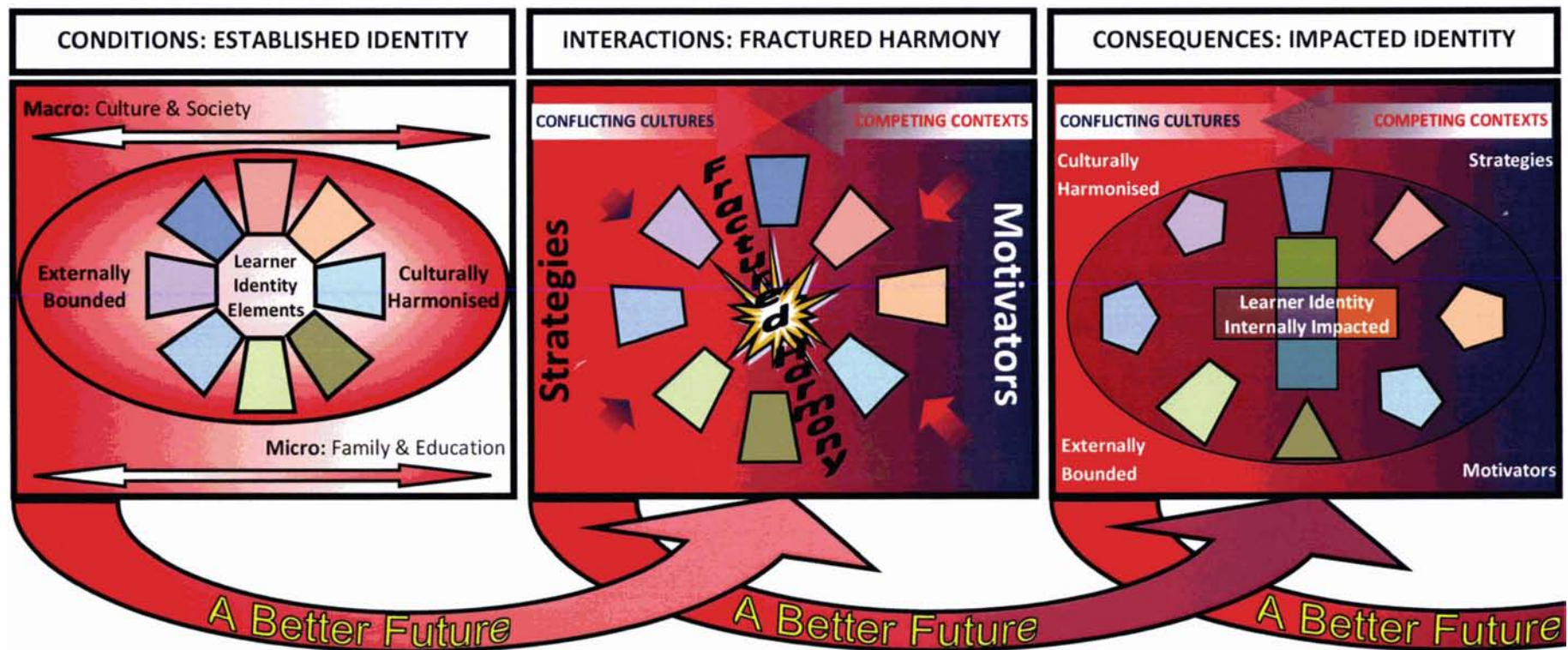


Figure 7.3: The conditions, interactions, and consequences paradigm model for a substantive cross-cultural educational adjustment BSP.

Lastly, the model was further developed for the presence of the core category as the prime driver of the BSP. Sweeping arrows, moving from left to right, and named 'A Better Future', purport to indicate the movement and the nature of this core category. This central concept helped explain the formation of the original learner identity in China, why the students were prepared to leave China in pursuit of an overseas education, how they dealt with the disequilibrium caused by the learning issues they faced and how they assimilated and accommodated changes to their learner identity, and what they now considered to be a better future in the light of all they had experienced.

It is impossible for any two-dimensional diagram to do justice to the intricacy and interaction of the experiences of the students in this study. The diagram in Figure 7.3 hopes to portray the broad outline of what emerged from the data using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) CIC paradigm as a base. The role of grounded theory is to develop an inductive theorisation or conceptualisation from a limited data set. The resulting findings can, therefore, only be substantive in nature.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter had two major tasks. First, it described the third stage of the CIC paradigm, the 'Consequences'. The effect of cross-cultural educational adjustment was comprised of alterations within the established learner identity and the accommodation of new learner identity elements. The alterations showed that the effect was varied, based, perhaps, on the degree to which the student had control over particular elements and to what extent the new context required change. The accommodations indicated that the learner identity may be internally impacted by the adjustment to the different academic culture. The consequences were modelled to highlight the conceptualisation of the data.

Next, this chapter established, defined, and evaluated the core category or central concept of this BSP: a better future. This category was examined within the three stages of the CIC paradigm and found to have wide ranging explanatory power in explaining the movement and the variability within that movement. Then the core category was examined against the grounded theory criteria and found to meet these.

The model of the substantive cross-cultural educational adjustment theory, as it pertained to this particular group of students, was produced drawing on the development of the model throughout the thesis (see Figure 7.3).

In the next chapter, the conclusion of the thesis, the findings of the research are evaluated with four different measures. Then possible implications of the theory are considered in relation to the preparation, orientation, and support required by Mainland Chinese postgraduate business students. This relates both to the students' own requirements and the manner in which tertiary institutions, particularly those engaged in academic support for international students, can assist in the adaptation process. In addition, it will consider the limitations of this study and suggest further areas of potential research.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

## CONCLUSION

### INTRODUCTION

This study closely followed the cross-cultural educational adjustment of ten Mainland Chinese postgraduate business students as they studied at a New Zealand university. The vital purpose of doing so was to hear the students' core concerns, be open to the whole process of adaptation, develop a depth and breadth of understanding of this process, and display both complexity and simplicity in theory building. Using grounded theory, and within that the CIC paradigm, a theorisation of the BSP emerged which helps explain this critical process in a conceptual yet compelling way. In addition, an integrated model of the substantive theory of cross-cultural adjustment was developed. To conclude, this chapter has several tasks: to evaluate the substantive theory; consider the implications of this project's findings; and note the study's limitations and suggest further avenues for research.

### EVALUATING THE SUBSTANTIVE THEORY

Evaluating the emergent theory took place in four ways. First, the key principles of the substantive theory were established, as these make explicit the relationships between the conditions, interactions, and consequences. Second, grounded theory specifies set criteria for evaluating the conceptualising of the data. These are that the theory is workable, relevant, fitting, and modifiable (Glaser, 1998). Third, the original research problem and questions of this study were returned to in order to determine the manner in which this study has been able to respond to them. Fourth, the significance of the contribution of this research was also established.

## A Theoretical Summation

While the theory arising from this study has a localised and non-generalisable nature, it is hoped that it may fit into the jigsaw of the wider understanding of cross-cultural educational adjustment and provide useful connections to other such substantive theories and for other researchers. Therefore, the key principles for this theory can only be provisional and it is not the role of the grounded theorist, in developing the theory, to also test it (Dick, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Glaser, 1992). The principles fall into two categories. These are general assumptions and defining axioms; however, a third category of specific theorems, which details further potential considerations, is included in Appendix S. The assumptions and axioms are grouped for each of the CIC paradigmatic categories: conditions, interactions, and consequences. The formulation and conceptualisation of these principles was based on the movement of the students through the CIC paradigm and the effect of this process on the students, as detailed in the data and its analysis in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

The key principles are limited to the data provided by the students yet they sufficiently convey the nature of, and the linkages in, the BSP as these students experienced it. An examination of the ‘Conditions, interactions, consequences paradigm model for a substantive cross-cultural educational adjustment BSP’ (Figure 7.3) provides a framework for the depiction of the principles and how the principles interact with each other. It is important to read these principles in the context of the students in this study and the data that was gathered from them.

### *General Assumptions: The Mainland Chinese Learners of this Study*

<b>G1</b>	Conditions: The macro and micro context of Mainland China may have a formative effect on the learner identity
<b>G2</b>	Interactions: Cross-cultural educational adjustment may elicit a variety of actions and interactions
<b>G3</b>	Consequences: The learner identity may be impacted by changes to elements of the learner identity
<b>G4</b>	Core Category: The central concept may drive movement through the cross-cultural educational adjustment BSP

*Defining Axioms***Conditions: An established learner identity.**

<b>A1</b>	The influence of traditional cultural patterns of societal structure in Mainland China may currently be greater than other global, political, and economic influences that may diminish the effect of these traditional influences
<b>A2</b>	The homogeneity and collectivity of the macro and micro influences in Mainland Chinese culture and society may form learner identity
<b>A3</b>	Educational and family conditions may form learner identity
<b>A4</b>	The homogeneity and collectivity of macro and micro influences may lead to an established learner identity
<b>A5</b>	The established learner identity may still allow the learner identity to display individual characteristics
<b>A6</b>	The formation of the learner identity may be related to the core category of desiring a better future

**Interactions: A fractured harmony.**

<b>A7</b>	The change to a different learning ecology may be significantly distinct and unfamiliar to the learners' prior learning experience
<b>A8</b>	The significant change in learning ecology may produce disequilibrium in the learners' established learner identity
<b>A9</b>	The disequilibrium in the established learner identity may cause the learners to rely on the strengths of the established learner identity
<b>A10</b>	The degree of reliance on individual elements of the learner identity may be related to the validity of the elements in the new context
<b>A11</b>	The disequilibrium in the established learner identity may provoke and promote adaptation in the learner identity
<b>A12</b>	The ability of the learner to overcome the learning issues in the new learning ecology may be related to the core category of desiring a better future

### Consequences: An impacted identity.

A13	The degree of conflict and competition between the different contexts and cultures within the new learning ecology may decrease with time
A14	The learner identity may be changed by cross-cultural educational adjustment
A15	The dimensions of the core category of a better future may be changed by the fracturing of the learner identity

The substantive theory for this study of cross-cultural educational adjustment can be stated as:

**The harmony of the established learner identity of these Mainland Chinese students is fractured by the many issues caused by cross-cultural educational adjustment. However, the learner identity's cultural resilience and the use of strategies and motivators preserve it from complete breakup. Nevertheless, it does cause significant changes to the elemental structure of the learner identity. The desire for a better future provides the driving force behind the movement through the adjustment process.**

### Meeting the Grounded Theory Criteria

The second step in evaluating the grounded theory is to determine how well it has been able to identify the basic social process on the basis of established criteria. As noted in Chapter Four, Glaser (1998) sets out four such criteria: workability; relevance; fitness; and modifiability. In relation to workability, the substantive theory and model has been sourced from the data using the constant comparative coding and analysis approach of grounded theory methodology. As such the theory, and the model, represent the categorisation and category inter-relationships that emerged from the experiences of the participant students (and the attestation group).

A major role of the attestation group was to affirm the bases of the model in terms of how well it reflected their behaviour in the cross-cultural educational BSP. The original participant group also had the opportunity to respond to the efficacy of the theory and model. They were sent a summation of the theory along with the diagram of

the model for comment (Appendix R). Those who responded affirmed the framework of both the theory and the model. Therefore, the theory can be said to explain, for this group of students, their behaviour within the BSP and account for the manner in which they journeyed through the BSP.

Throughout the data gathering process and within the constant comparative rubric consistent attempts were made to determine the relevancy of findings for the students. In addition, the students were asked to respond to key elements of the substantive theory in relation to its 'truthfulness-for-them' and/or rank aspects of the theory for order of importance. This occurred in relation to: the determination of the initial learner identity elements; the weighting of the initial learner identity elements; the ranking of problems faced in order of importance; the comparative change in the learner identity elements between the initial assessment and after a length of time studying in New Zealand (usually three semesters); and the relevance of new learner identity elements. Therefore, the theory has relevance to the students and it reflects the students' main concerns.

The workability and relevance of the theory and model also assist the theory in fitting the BSP. The data collection process and the affirmations of the students give assurance that the principles present in the theory adequately reflect the cross-cultural educational adjustment process. In addition, a core category has been found to meet the criteria of a central concept. A core category has the explanatory power to describe the process and also understand the degrees of variability within the process. Therefore, the theory fits the nature of the BSP.

The theory, and associated model, seeks to describe the cross-cultural educational adjustment BSP of these particular students. However, the theory, as it stands, is probably incomplete due to this particularity. As a result, the theory is open to modification as other researchers investigate similar BSPs. The nature of the core category, for example, by its evaluation criteria, is required to be flexible and the case for this has been argued in Chapter Seven ('Meeting the Core Category Criteria'). The theory also connects with, and is subject to modification by, the wider literature on cross-cultural adjustment and the adjustment of overseas students (particularly those from Mainland China). Glaser, in *Doing grounded theory* (1998, p. 19), makes the following applicable comments: "The theory is not being verified as in verification

studies, and thus is never right or wrong ... it just gets modified by new data to compare it to. ... New data never provides a disproof, just an analytic challenge.” Therefore, the theory is always open to modification.

The substantive theory presented for cross-cultural educational adjustment has the ability to explain this BSP. The attempt to conceptualise the process through categorisation and category interconnectivity does some justice to the complexity of the process, as can be seen by the development of the key principles associated with the theory. The theory is not simplistic or reductionist in nature but has complexity while retaining comprehensible explanatory power. The theory is workable, relevant, fit, and modifiable.

### **Review of the Research Problem and Questions**

In the grounded theory process, the research problem arises out of a consideration of the BSP, rather than the literature review per se as is usually the case. The BSP was defined as the process of adjusting to the effects of cross-cultural educational change at tertiary level. As a result, in Chapter Three, the key research problem was to determine the theoretical dimensions of the process the Mainland Chinese postgraduate business students used in adjusting to this distinctly different education system. The research problem was linked to a core set of research questions that reflect the time dimensions of a process. The research questions restated here have been placed within the CIC paradigm categories. Relevant findings are reviewed here under each heading in response to the research questions.

#### ***Core Category: a Better Future***

In theorising a process, one of the things that are looked for in grounded theory is a core category that explains why things happened as they did. In this case, based on the interview material, it has been suggested that this core category was a deep desire to have a better future. The desire for a better future is the key element in the conditions of the process (i.e., why the students overcame the difficulties of education in China and why they wanted to leave China and further their education in New Zealand), the interactions of the process (i.e., how they responded to the learning issues they faced in

New Zealand), and the consequences of the process (i.e., how this helped facilitate the changes that occurred in them as learners and what they were looking forward to in the future). The better future could mean gaining higher qualifications and being more competitive, getting the desired job, increasing their wealth for the benefit of their family and themselves, and being able to see and understand more of the world. The desire for a better future was the driving force behind the BSP and adequately explains the variations within that process.

### ***The Conditions: Established Identity***

The research questions related to the conditions of the BSP are:

Research Question 1: In what way can the nature of the learner be described that enables an understanding of the initial context as well as give a basis for evaluating the effects of change?

Research Question 2: What reasons can be determined for the students desiring to study in New Zealand at tertiary level?

The conditions describe the influences on the students in China that made them the type of learners they are today. This has been termed learner identity. From the interview data it was found that macro and more-micro variables had a major influence on this identity. In China, the macro variables of society and culture had an indirect yet still powerful effect on the students. They include, for example: being part of a society where people are often seen as part of a wider group rather than as an individual; where society places quite strong and clear expectations about what a person should be like and do; where gaining social advancement is very important; and where failure can lead to significant disadvantages. The more-micro variables of family and education were, for example: where parents have strong expectations; where there are supportive relationships; where education is highly valued; where the educational experiences are quite similar; and where growth in knowledge is strongly desired. Both the macro and micro influences have a strong traditional basis in Chinese society and a continuing contemporary influence, even though many things are changing culturally and socially in China today.

From the interview data, eight learner identity elements, which described how the students viewed themselves as learners, were found. In order of being ‘true-for-them’ these were: teacher centred; supported; worked hard; pressured; effective skills; successful; competitive; and good knowledge. Because of the strength of the macro and micro influences in Chinese society these learner identity elements were found to be externally bounded, which means they were formed more by outward pressure from society than from being internally driven, and culturally harmonised, which means because Chinese society, compared to some other societies, is quite homogeneous the learner identity could be expected to be widespread. Therefore, the conditions of the model were called ‘Established Identity.’

### ***The Interactions: Fractured Harmony***

The research questions related to the interactions of the BSP are:

Research Question 3: What are the issues that overseas students face when undertaking such a major change in learning ecology?

Research Question 4: In what ways do the students respond to the significant changes they face when they enter the tertiary education system in New Zealand?

Research Question 5: How do these international postgraduate students overcome or resolve the basic problems that confront them in this new educational setting?

Interactions, in the context of this study, are how students react to the situations and problems they face. These reactions are either instinctive or intentional. When the students came to New Zealand they experienced a significant difference in terms of culture and of education. While the effect of these differences varied from student to student, each person experienced some conflicts between what he or she had known in China and what he or she experienced in New Zealand. Some of the educational issues and problems, listed in the order the students’ rated them, that helped fracture the harmony of the established identity were: language; different ways of learning; cultural differences; quantity of reading; different teacher relationships; assignment emphasis; writing assignments; looking after self; lack of support; and financial stress. The established learner identity that had worked well for the students in China was not as

effective in New Zealand. This is why the interactions have been sub-titled ‘Fractured Harmony.’

The students in responding to this fracturing used a range of strategies and motivators that helped them overcome the problems they faced. The strategies included: accessing support structures at the university; relying on themselves; growing in language skills; growing in learning skills; drawing on prior learning in China; and benefiting from work experience within New Zealand. The motivators included: meeting family and society expectations; a desire for Western learnings; safeguarding costs; and a desire for self-improvement. The role of these strategies and motivators was to form a constraining force on the fracturing of the identity so that it could have the opportunity to resiliently respond to the new context and to allow significant change to occur in the learner identity itself. This brings us to the consequences.

### ***The Consequences: Impacted Identity***

The research question related to the consequences of the BSP is:

Research Question 6: What are the effects of such a change in learning ecology on the overseas students in terms of who they are as learners and their learning?

Consequences are the results of the actions that have been taken. In this case, the actions mean both the results of changing cultures to a significantly different educational environment and the ways that the students responded to the changes and the problems. The changes to the students as learners in the new educational culture had two parts: the change in the original learner identity; and new elements that were introduced. The original identity element was affected in three ways. Some elements stayed the same (still supported; still pressured; still competitive); one element became less relevant in the new situation (much less teacher centred); and some became more significant (working harder; more effective skills; greater success; better knowledge). New or significantly more important elements were introduced into how the students saw themselves as learners. These were, in order: more interested; more independent and more organised; more co-operative; and more practically skilled.

Overall, the way the students adjusted to the change in educational culture meant that even though there were conflicts, these became better understood the longer they stayed in New Zealand. It also meant that their view of themselves as learners grew. Not only did they carry forward from China what was useful to them in New Zealand but they also added new ways of being a learner and doing learning. In addition, the changes that were made were to some extent caused by external pressure from the environment but also caused by the internal adjustments that the students made, consciously or unconsciously, to themselves as learners. Therefore, the consequences of the model have been called 'Impacted Identity.'

From this review, it can be seen that the findings of this research project provided effective responses to the research questions. As a result, this study has responded to the research problem by helping determine the theoretical dimensions of the process the Mainland Chinese postgraduate business students used in adjusting to a distinctly different education system. The next section looks at the last of the evaluatory steps of this study's findings by examining its overall contribution.

### **The Contribution of this Substantive Theory**

In evaluating the contribution of this study it is important to underline that the substantive theory can only be a conceptualisation of the adaptation process of this particular group of students. In addition, this study's findings are largely in accord with what the literature suggests would be the case. This begs the question as to what 'unique' contribution this study has made to the wider body of knowledge in this field. In response, the following sets out the contribution of this study.

A major contribution of this study is that it presents an integrated picture of how a group of students moved through the cross-cultural educational adjustment process. By using the CIC paradigm it provides a more complete modelling of the process by examining: the pre-existing conditions (in this case how the learners understood themselves as learners: their established learner identity); the actions and interactions that took place, both in habituated and strategic ways; and the consequential outcomes of these changes on the learner identity. This is a step beyond the current research

which tends to major on the process of change without necessarily recognising in depth where the students may have come from and what they may have become.

Another major contribution is that the substantive theory presents a conceptual picture of the process. The significant complexity of the wider cross-cultural adjustment process and the interactivity of the many variables called out for such a conceptualisation (see Chapter Two: 'The Chinese Learner Overseas'). Grounded theory is primarily an inductive approach that is designed to move from the particular to the general or conceptual. This has been achieved, without a sense of oversimplification, in three major ways. First, the substance of the BSP has been elucidated by specifying the principles that link the movement of students and their learning through the process. Second, through the categorisation of the data the different facets of the process are clearly evident and expressed in terms which relate to the experience of the learner but also link through into the wider view of the process. Third, the process itself has been modelled using the conceptual categories in a relatively dynamic way that expresses the movement of the process (see: Figure 7.3). This has been achieved without creating cognitive distance between the data and its theorisation. Using grounded theory has meant that the conceptualisation of the adjustment process for this group of students is indelibly tied to the data from these students.

As well as the two general contributions of this study to understanding this field, that is, both an integrated and a conceptual view of the process, the research has also deepened the understanding of specific areas of the BSP. The first aspect is the defining, for this group of students, of how they viewed themselves as learners by way of the learner identity. While this did not necessarily reflect a high level of meta-cognitive or educational awareness, it created a grounded view of who they believed they were as learners, which established a base point to consider both the change and the outcomes of the process. A second aspect is the manner in which the pragmatic and instrumental nature of the forces that helped create the learner identity allowed the students to be more resilient than may have been expected when adapting to change. Therefore, the established nature of the learner identity, forged in a homogeneous and collective context, was not so entrenched to make adjustment too challenging. This aspect is related to the third.

The third aspect is the greater dimensionality that has been accorded the disequilibrium-equilibration process. Ballard and Clanchy (1991) had suggested that the adjustment options for the students were two dimensional in nature. That is, the students either adopted the learning skills suitable to the new context or redoubled efforts based on the old learning skills. However, the dynamic presented by this theory is more complex and integrative. First, there is the reliance on the established learner identity, which showed the pragmatic strength and the resilience to be able to adapt to the changing academic context. Second, the students were able to adopt a range of 'learning' strategies that scaffolded their necessary educational adjustments. Third, they were able to draw on a pool of motivational resources that enabled them to keep on persevering and eventually achieve 'success'. Furthermore, these three factors formed an equilibrating mechanism that had a constraining and/or protective influence of the learner identity so that it did not severely fracture under the strain of the adjustment, but instead allowed and even fostered change.

Two further specific contributions to understanding the cross-cultural educational BSP have been made by this study. The first is the nature of the outcomes of the process. As noted above, research in this area had tended to focus on the process of change rather than the consequences. The students' reported identity change in terms of alteration to existing identity elements and accommodation of new elements. While the specific nature of this change is limited to the reporting of these students it may still provide indicators for further research in this area. The second area is the recognition of a core category. As has been noted above (see Chapter Six: 'The Core Category') a better future has wide-ranging power in explaining the movement through the process and the variability within the CIC paradigm. This includes the way in which the conception of what a better future means may be modified by the transformative nature of the cross-cultural educational adjustment.

The substantive theory arising from this study has been evaluated by four means: developing a coherent theoretical summation of the model; meeting the grounded theory criteria for such a conceptualisation; reviewing how the theory responds to the research problem and questions; and determining its overall contribution to its particular field of knowledge. Having done so, the next step is to consider the implications that may be drawn from the cross-cultural educational process.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The focus of this study has been on the adjustment stories of ten Mainland Chinese students. Therefore, as the implications for the study are addressed the focus of the implications is also centred on these students. Naturally, there are ancillary inferences for other stakeholders in the cross-cultural educational adjustment process; but the primary focus is on the students. Therefore, the specificity of the following suggestions are framed in the light of the ten students' experiences. The implications are based on three areas: preparation; orientation; and support. This section ends with a discussion of the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research that may extend the applicability of this research project.

### Preparation

The students in this study would have benefitted from being better prepared for cross-cultural educational adjustment (see Chapter Four: 'Preparedness for Change'). Ward et al. (2001, p. 246) claim that "... there is ample empirical and theoretical justification for providing systematic training for persons exposed to unfamiliar cultures." It is suggested that this training needs to take place both within China, in terms of preparation, and in New Zealand, in terms of orientation. In preparing students to come, one of the most significant aspects that needs to be included in pre-departure training is awareness. In Chapter Five a case was made that these students come from a highly homogenous society and a potential consequence of this is that students may not have needed to become aware of who they are and why they are who they are.

A pre-departure training course needs to raise the level of cultural consciousness. The purpose of this is not to point out inadequacies of any culture but to raise the self-awareness level concerning their culture and the differences between cultures. In particular, they can understand how the strong external forces from culture, society, family, and education have shaped them as people and as learners, resulting in an externally bounded and culturally harmonised learner identity. They also need to be aware that this externality places pressures on them, particularly in regard to expectations. In addition, they may need to learn how they have internalised these expectations and accepted them as their own without consciously being aware of it.

This could apply, amongst other things, to the strong desire for a better future and how this motivator is a prime factor in their lives.

As well as addressing cultural awareness, a pre-departure training course could also begin to deal with the practical issues of living in a significantly different cultural context and help them to understand the differences between the education systems in China and New Zealand. While this may also be focused on in the orientation process (see below) an introductory awareness of these issues could sow valuable seeds of insight that may help them deal with some of the issues they will face. In particular, an awareness of the process of cross-cultural educational adjustment, such as established in this study, and general 'culture shock' theory may be useful preparatory knowledge. Also, some consideration could be given to expectations, for example, concerning the steep educational adjustment period over the first semester, the manner in which they may respond to this in seeking equilibration, and what steps they can take to help ensure positive outcomes from this period of overseas study.

Two further areas could also be addressed. One, the students need to be aware of the major they are enrolling in, how this relates to what they have previously learnt in China, and what the prospects may be like for employment in New Zealand following graduation. Second, is the issue of language, which was considered a major problem area by the students in this study. The students attending training need to be encouraged to improve their level of English skills as much as they can before they come to New Zealand. However, while the students in this study acknowledged in Chapter Five the rising demand in China for English ('Macro Conditions'), they also noted that barriers such as time, cost, and lack of opportunities make English language development in China problematic. This creates a dilemma in regard to who is responsible for ensuring this preparation takes place.

The overseas educational institutions, on the one hand, do not want to create barriers that may create uncompetitive barriers for their institutions, thereby marginalising them from this rich source of foreign funds. On the other hand, such institutions need to implement strategies that help ease the students through the difficult transition into a significantly different educational environment. The overseas students also face, on one hand, the barriers noted above that restrict access to suitable language development and, on the other hand, they may not fully recognize the issues that will

arise for them if they do not do so (see Chapter Six: 'Preparedness for Change' and 'Language').

The students need to realise that attaining the required IELTS score may not be indicative of their ability to cope well with the English requirements of a postgraduate course. They also need to be prepared to take advantage of language courses in China, if available, and New Zealand that focus on academics and university preparation. Attending general English language courses will not prepare the students for the demands of the new educational setting. Students also need to be aware of the valuable role in English development that living in a homestay context can bring, despite its additional cost. While homestays may not work for all and acknowledging the value of co-ethnic support, other opportunities also exist within the New Zealand community which may foster language growth (see Chapter Six: 'Growing in Language Skills'). New Zealand tertiary institutions who do not want to inhibit students enrolling because of pre-enrolment English requirements need to take responsibility to provide quality English learning for academic purposes within the orientation and course programming they offer in New Zealand (see below: 'Orientation' and 'Support').

### **Orientation**

In addition to a China-based preparatory course, the students need to have these issues addressed in more depth as part of their university orientation in New Zealand. While learning about potential differences and issues before they leave is important, the immediacy of being in a new environment gives these a sharper edge. Reviewing the material covered in the pre-departure course will help create renewed awareness of the cultural and educational differences. Particular issues, such as the very significant change in the teacher's role, need to be explained carefully so that false expectations based on the students' experiences in China are not carried forward into the new context. An explanation of the roles of the student, his or her fellow students, and the teacher can help defuse potentially destabilising scenarios. This includes creating an understanding of the value placed in Western academics of referencing sources and the appropriate ways in which students can cooperate.

This study has shown that the Mainland Chinese students drew confidence and encouragement from the success of other students. Therefore, senior or completed students telling their stories during orientation, preferably in their heart language (Mandarin), would be both inspiring and salutary. Another aspect that some students in this study needed particular help with was the selection of courses. They come from an educational context where they often had little choice over what subjects they would study. Steps need to be taken to guide the students through this process in order to avoid making wrong choices and sequencing errors. During orientation students are overwhelmed by the quantity of information they are given. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the academic orientation has a sufficient profile and place that alerts the students to its importance.

## Support

In China, students drew their support from their families, friends, and peers. They also had more availability of access to their teachers. In New Zealand these support structures are not so readily accessible. Parents and friends are now at a distance, connecting with their peers is more problematic, and the New Zealand lecturer is not as available. Further, the function of support in New Zealand has been institutionalised in student support centres and within particular courses, such as academic writing courses. The Mainland Chinese student is likely to be quite disorientated by this change. This is one reason why they seek co-ethnic support (even though this is more difficult than it was in China), they tend to rely on their own resources, and they become more self-reliant. Getting help from institutional support may be a cultural shock to them and taking courses designed to help them academically, even if they are credit-bearing, may be seen as a 'waste' of money and time.

Therefore, as part of orientation, the mechanisms of academic support need to be explained, information provided about what kind of support is offered and how it can be accessed, and the process affirmed by senior or completed students. In turn, those offering these services also need to be aware of what the students find to be academically difficult and how they are likely to respond to these issues. Studies such as this one are helpful in providing information about the students' academic needs to support staff. However, consideration needs to be given to what the students feel they

need, which is often someone to correct their spelling and grammar on a their-time basis, and the wider academic needs that they may not be so aware of. For example, the students will probably need support in areas such as writing, critical thinking, and managing reading requirement skills that are often provided by university support groups.

Wider than strictly academic support, this study would suggest that students can be helped by reinforcing the motivators they use to keep them moving ahead even when faced with difficulty. Praising their desire to create a better future for themselves and their families, encouraging them to see the value of their Western education, stimulating their desire for self-improvement, reinforcing the need to be aware of cost issues, and being accountable to their families can all be positive ways to keep up the motivation levels of these students. Fostering their strong sense of achievement motivation and their belief in the efficacy of hard work can also be beneficial. However, these areas should also be addressed, probably during their pre-departure training, in terms of both its positive and stress-producing aspects. In sum, working with the students to provide support in relation to what they are most likely to turn to in order to help themselves may be an effective means of sustaining them through cross-cultural educational adjustment.

### **Limitations**

This research, like all such studies, has to work within clear limitations. These limitations fit around two major areas: the methodology and the nature of the study population. Before briefly considering the weaknesses of grounded theory, it may be helpful to briefly list its strengths. Grounded theory is, according to Cresswell (2002): able to develop theory where theories are inadequate or non-existent because of its systematic approach; accessible for the researcher using it for the first time; due to the rigour of the approach, able to confirm the validity of the developed theory; and able to keep the findings closely matched to the data at all times.

Weaknesses are also evident in grounded theory (Cresswell). Too tight an attachment to 'preconceived' analysis strategies, such as the CIC paradigm, may lead to a premature commitment to a particular set of categories. It may also lead to a lack of

depth in the development of the categories and properties. The nomenclature surrounding grounded theory is also quite distinct (for example, constant comparative method, axial coding, selective sampling, et cetera) and these need clear definitions, otherwise misunderstandings may result. The mix of approaches and different design steps can be confusing. The researcher needs to have clearly chosen and justified the particular steps to be implemented in conducting the research. As specified in Chapters Three and Four, this study's research process has been able to counteract or limit the extent of these weaknesses.

Second, the selection of students in this study was from a limited population group. As a deeper understanding of grounded theory developed it became clear that a diverse range of students from diverse cultures would confuse rather than clarify the investigation. At that point, a choice was made to focus on students from Mainland China because while ethnicity may hold across Chinese students their cultures or sub-cultures are significantly different. The need to restrict the sample population to homogenised characteristics also led to a decision to focus on postgraduate business students at a particular university. For a fuller discussion of student participation and selection see Chapter Four.

The methodology and student selection processes may have had practical restrictions on the findings of this study. For example, the sample selection process may have resulted in the collection of students who were largely successful in their studies. Perhaps, studying less successful attempts to educationally adjust across cultures may highlight different aspects of the adaptation process. Also, this project has focused on what the students did do to respond to cross-cultural change; not what they could have done. However, broadening the scope of the study may have made it unfeasible and required a different methodological approach.

### **Further Research**

While this study has made a significant contribution to the understanding of cross-cultural educational adjustment there is still much that needs further explication. Future research may locate other pieces of the jigsaw by further testing the validity of the key principles claimed for this study in order to determine their ability to explain the BSP of

cross-cultural educational adjustment. Alternatively, a similar study could be completed on another core group of international students, for example, other groups of ethnic Chinese students or Indian students. It is hoped that a continuing exploration of this area may lead, over time, to the development of a more generalisable model of cross-cultural educational adjustment.

In response to what has already been said under limitations, it would be helpful to consider what possible responses the students could have made, but did not, to their change of learning ecology. Also, it would be good to broaden the horizons of this study by focusing on the experiences of the students who do not make a successful adaptation. For example, it would be worthwhile to know whether the core category of a better future only works best when students have the capacity to be successful or whether it still holds, in an adapted form as argued in this thesis, for those students who are less successful in completing their studies.

It is also possible to study more in-depth some of the findings raised in this study. For example, this study has not considered the timing of the issues faced by the students. If a timeline of issue occurrence could be developed this could lead to more pro-active support systems for international students. The level of assistance for students could also be enhanced by findings from a larger scale quantitative study on the issues they faced, perhaps using the issues noted in this study as a framework. This could also entail the investigation of change in the students' learner identity at the end of the first semester. Due to the methodological approach and timeframe of the research, it was not possible to investigate what may be the severest time of testing for the learner identity elements. Another potential area of investigation arising from this study is change reversion versus stability of change. On return to China how long do the students retain a greater sense of independence, the value they place on practical skills, a higher degree of self-organisation, and an interest in their learning? Will the alterations to the learner identity be lasting or only temporary? This pool of suggestions for further study is indicative only and the field of cross-cultural educational adjustment is still open and fertile ground.

## SUMMARY

Ten Mainland Chinese students' journey to the West has been documented, categorised, theorised, and modelled in this research project using the grounded theory approach. The results of this investigation indicate that the students' self-reported learner identity in China was externally bounded and culturally harmonised due to the homogenous characteristics of Mainland Chinese society. The effect of cross-cultural educational adjustment showed that this established learner identity was placed under significant stress by a range of overarching, learning, and personal issues. However, while it was fractured it did not break apart due to the constraining forces of the learning strategies applied by the students, their motivational resources, and the natural resilience of the learner identity. Even so, the learner identity was impacted by alterations to the established elements and the accommodation of new or newly prominent elements. Behind each stage of the BSP was the driving or striving force of a better future.

In this concluding chapter the adequacy of this theory has been evaluated by stating the key principles of the substantive theory, confirming it meets the grounded theory criteria for conceptualising data, reviewing the original research problem and questions, and detailing the significant contributions this research has made to the knowledge of cross-cultural educational adjustment. The implications of the theory were based around the students and addressed preparation, orientation, and support issues. Lastly, the limitations for this study were explained and suggestions made for further study. It is hoped that this study may raise awareness of the process international students go through in adjusting to a culturally different learning milieu, spark further research, and lead to a more comprehensive and generalisable understanding of the students and their adjustment processes.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview One Guide

#### INTRODUCTION

Introduce researcher and assistant. Warm up talk. Humour.

Purpose of the interview: educational adjustment – previous education, problems and how coping.

Clarify questions, inform re confidentiality, and gain permission for recording and grant permission to the interviewee to turn tape off.

Read and sign ethics clearance sheet and interview contract sheet.

Outline of interview sections. Key questions: What is going on? How are you responding to it?

Answer, for the respondent:

1. What will be asked in the interview?
2. Who is the info for?
3. How will the info be handled, including confidentiality?
4. What is the purpose of collecting info?
5. How will it be used?

*Any questions before we begin?*

#### QUESTIONS

*Must listen well to responses and frame new questions using these.*

*Continually evaluate for understanding/clarity of questions.*

*Important to take notes as well as record, noting key phrases/terms using interviewees own language.*

#### Section 1: Prior Educational Experience

What is your education background? Where have you studied? What have you studied?

How would you describe the education system at tertiary/university level in your country?

What kind of teaching/learning experiences did you receive?

What strengths do you see in the education you received in your home country?

What weaknesses do you see in the education you received in your home country?

How would you describe your self as a learner? What have you found easy to do?

What do you find difficult?

*Transition/prefatory statement: 2<sup>nd</sup> section asks questions about problems you may face.*

#### Section 2: Problems faced in educational adjustment.

What differences do you think there could be in the education and learning between your home country and in your present programme?

You've just begun, but what types of problems are you facing when you are starting to learn in NZ?

What do you feel is causing these problems?

How do you feel about (need to de-jargonise these terms): (based on learning theory concepts)

1. all the new information in your classes?
2. your ability to concentrate and pay attention?
3. how well you are recognising the information you are learning?
4. the relevance of what you are learning?
5. how organised/meaningful/easy to remember your learning is?
6. what you are learning is similar to what you have learnt previously?
7. the adequacy of your background or prior knowledge?
8. how what you are learning relates to what you already know?
9. how well you are able to organise in your mind the information you are learning?
10. your reading/listening/speaking/writing skills?

What things other than the learning itself are making things easy/hard for you?

*Transition/prefatory statement:* 3<sup>rd</sup> section asks questions about possible responses to the problems you may facing?

### **Section 3: Coping mechanisms to alleviate problems.**

What help do you think you might need to help with the problems you may face?

What places would you go to for help?

What do you think will motivate/encourage you to keep on learning, even if things get difficult?

What are the goals or objectives that you want to achieve by this time of learning?

*Transition/prefatory statement:* 4<sup>th</sup> section deals with any other matters you feel are important.

### **Section 4: Any other matters?**

What other important things that you think will affect your learning in this new situation?

Is there anything else you would like to say about learning at Massey so far?

*Transition/prefatory statement:* In conclusion...

### **Section 5: Face Sheet Data**

Start with some 'face sheet' data: some completed by interviewer, some by way of closed question.

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Nationality:

Previous Education (esp. tertiary level):

Prior Work Experience:  
Current programme of study:

*Transition statement:* In conclusion

## **CONCLUSION**

Thank.  
Reinforce value of time and appreciation.  
Transcribe and value feedback.  
Open door for follow-up interview.

## **FOLLOW UP**

Go over interview notes to see they make sense.  
Check back immediately if clarification needed e.g. over phone, e-mail.  
Record observations about the interview.

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Two Guide

#### Initial Interview Two Guide Questions

Plus

#### Key Nodes Arising from Interview One

**THANK YOU SO MUCH!**

#### INTRODUCTION

Warm up / preamble

Similar framework to last time – China / NZ adjustment / things that help

#### EDUCATION IN CHINA

##### ‘qualities’

What attitudes do Chinese people have toward learning?

What are the attitudes of a good learner in China?

##### ‘lucky one’

Many students say that they were ‘lucky’ to get to university. However, they worked very hard all through High School and they were very successful. So what do they mean when they say they are lucky?

[is it being humble?] [does it have some kind of religious meaning?]

##### ‘that’s finished’

Students have told me that if they had not passed entrance into the University from High School then their lives would have been finished.

What do you think they mean by ‘finished’?

What sort of attitudes does that kind of pressure create in a student?

##### ‘little emperors’

I was reading a book and it described the only child in many Chinese families as the little emperor. What do you think this means? How does this affect the students in their desire to learn?

##### ‘high respect for the teacher’

How does this encourage learning?

In what ways could a high respect for the teacher discourage learning?

##### University is a ‘closed society’

What do you think this means?

How does this help learning? How does it hinder learning?

Are NZ universities a closed society? If not, what problems does this cause the new Chinese student?

##### ‘classmates’

In NZ you do not have the classmate system you had in China. What problems has this caused for you?

**'memory'**

Memory was very important in China because of the exam based system.  
How does memorising help you to understand deeply?

**'homework' / assignments**

This was not so important in China. In NZ assignments are very important.  
In what ways was this difficult to adjust to in NZ?

**STUDY AND STUDY PROBLEMS IN NEW ZEALAND****Chinese learning skills and attitudes in NZ**

What skills as a learner that you developed in China have you found most helpful in NZ?

What attitudes toward learning that you developed in China have you found most helpful in NZ?

**Study in NZ**

What do you think is the main reason students go overseas to study?

You have more choices about what to study in NZ. How do you feel about having this wider choice?

Looking back on the last semester, what would you say are some major differences about the way students are expected to learn in NZ compared to China?

**'language'**

Most students tell me this is the number one problem with learning in NZ.

What could have helped you adapt to NZ English better?

Most students tend to memorise a lot of what they are learning in Mandarin/Chinese.

What problems does this cause?

Does this change over time?

**'extra mural'**

Have you done extra mural study? Do you prefer it to classroom learning? Why or why not?

Do you enjoy learning by yourself?

**Past experience**

Students often choose papers based on past study and work in China.

In what ways is this helpful?

If you felt fully confident in your language skills, then what would you study?

**Teachers**

Many students have described most of their teachers in China as traditional, formal and serious.

How are NZ teachers the same / different?

In China, the teachers supplies you with most of the material you need to learn. In NZ, often, you have to find the material. How do you feel about this change?

**Learn in a special way / learn in the NZ way**

Every year a number of Chinese students say they are having difficulty learning the NZ way.

What do you think they mean by 'having difficulty learning the NZ way'?

**Wider reading required**

How difficult was it for you to cope with the wider reading required for study in NZ?

In what ways do you find having to find your own information difficult?

**Feedback from assignments**

Once you have completed an assignment, had it marked and then returned to you:

- a. What kind of feedback do you get from your lecturers?
- b. How have you found this feedback to be helpful / unhelpful?

**ALLEVIATING PROBLEMS****Have to finish**

Students say to me that they could not return to China if they did not successfully gain their qualification.

Why do you think that is?

**Getting help**

Some Chinese students have really struggled to get the help that they want; others seem to have been able to find help quickly.

What has been your experience of getting the help you need to be a successful student?

Suppose a Chinese student friend of yours, who was really struggling with learning, was trying to study in their room. How would they be feeling? What would your friend be thinking / doing?

Some students have suggested that learning in China has made them passive learners because the teacher just provided them with everything they needed to know. In NZ a student usually has to be an active learner. Have you found becoming an active learner to be easy / difficult?

**Student Learning Centre**

Many students have reported to me that they have not gone to the student learning centre.

Why do you think Chinese students seem reluctant to talk to their lecturers about their study?

**'how can I write'**

Many students indicate that their writing skills are their least effective. What suggestions would you give a student who is really struggling with the writing required for assignments in NZ?

**'too much to read'**

Many students also indicate that they find the reading required too much! What suggestions would you give a student who is really struggling with the reading required for their courses?

**'economic'**

Who helps to pay for your study?

If your family, what kind of obligation does that bring to your family relationships? Do you feel pressurised by this?

**'family'**

Traditionally, Chinese society has a strong sense of devotion to family. How does this affect your study?

**'future'**

How do you think your study in NZ will provide a better future?

When you think of the future, are you thinking of your parents, yourself, your children?

Which would be the most important? Why?

**'English'**

Being able to learn English is considered by many students to be very important part of the reason for their study.

Do you feel that your English is improving? How satisfied are you? How would you suggest a new student to NZ improves his or her English?

Some people are disappointed in the amount of time they have to be with native English speakers. What should a student do?

**'practical vs theoretical'**

Many students say that NZ education is more practical than the Chinese.

In what ways does a more practical approach to learning help you?

**Advice**

If I was a new Chinese student, what advice would you give me on how to deal with the problems facing Chinese students learning in NZ?

**'conquer yourself'**

A student mentioned that sometimes it is very difficult to study in NZ and it can feel too hard at times. The student said they had to 'conquer yourself' and keep going. What do you think the student meant by 'conquer yourself'? How would you describe the attitude toward learning of a Chinese student studying in NZ?

**Recommend**

Would you recommend another Chinese student to come to NZ and study? Why or why not?

**WHAT ELSE WOULD YOU LIKE TO SAY ABOUT LEARNING IN NZ?****CONCLUSION**

Thank / valued / follow up interview

**FOLLOW UP**

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Three Guide

#### INTRODUCTION

*Warm up talk.*

*Purpose of the interview: To see the shape of and find patterns in what we have looked at previously. To try and determine what are the main/key things.*

*Outline question areas, inform re confidentiality, and gain permission for recording.*

*Outline of interview sections. Key: What is going on?*

*Answer, for the respondent:*

1. *What will be asked in the interview?*
2. *Who is the info for?*
3. *How will the info be handled, including confidentiality?*
4. *What is the purpose of collecting info?*
5. *How will it be used?*

*Any questions before we begin?*

#### QUESTIONS

*Must listen well to responses and frame new questions using these.*

*Flex the questions to the interviewee in relation to how he or she has responded in prior interviews.*

*Continually evaluate for understanding/clarity of questions.*

*Opening interview statement: This first section asks questions about how you thought about yourself as a learner before you came to NZ?*

#### Section A: Learner Identity in China

1. Self-Awareness as a Learner
  - a. If you could choose one word to describe education in China what would it be?
  - b. If you could choose one word to describe yourself as a learner what would it be?
  - c. What did you most enjoy about learning in China?
  - d. What did you find most difficult about learning in China?
  - e. How did you feel about yourself as a learner in China?
  - f. Why did you feel about yourself in these ways?
2. Cultural, Social and Family Factors, i.e., external or outside factors
  - a. What were the top three outside factors that influenced you most as a learner in China?
  - b. What influence did these three outside factors have on your learning in China?
3. Internal or Personal Factors
  - a. What were the top four personal characteristics that would describe you as a learner in China?
  - b. Who and/or what encouraged these characteristics to grow and develop in you?
  - c. How much did these characteristics lead you to becoming a successful learner in China?

*Transition/prefatory statement: This second section looks at the impact of changing cultures on you and your learning.*

### **Section B: Changing Cultures**

1. Culture Differences
  - a. What have you found to be the greatest difference between the Chinese culture and the NZ culture?
  - b. How has this greatest difference affected your learning during your stay in NZ?
2. Education Differences
  - a. What have you found to be the greatest difference between the Chinese education system and the NZ education system?
  - b. How has this greatest difference affected your learning while studying in NZ?
  - c. How do you think your experience of studying at university in New Zealand is different from a mature Kiwi student who, after having a period of time in the workforce, returns to postgraduate study?

*Transition/prefatory statement: This third section asks questions about issues you faced studying in NZ?*

### **Section C: Studying in NZ**

1. Coming to New Zealand
  - a. How well prepared were you for studying in New Zealand?
  - b. Have you found learning in New Zealand to be a stressful experience? How does this compare to the stress you experienced studying in China? Looking back, were you ready for another stressful learning experience? Why or why not?
  - c. What were your expectations when you came to study in New Zealand? Were these met? Why or why not?
  - d. What has been most helpful to you during your study in NZ? Why was this?
2. Belief In Your Ultimate Success
  - a. When faced with the challenge of studying in a foreign country what was one main idea that kept you believing that you would be successful?
  - b. Why was this one main idea so important to you?
3. Your Ultimate Motivation
  - a. When faced with the challenge of studying in a foreign country what was one big idea that kept you motivated through all the difficulties?
  - b. Why was this one motivation so important to you?
4. Your Ultimate Goal
  - a. Before you came to NZ what was your life goal?
  - b. How has studying in NZ helped you toward achieving your life goal?
  - c. How has studying in NZ made achieving your life goal more difficult?
  - d. Has coming to NZ changed your life goal? If so, why?

*Transition/prefatory statement: The fourth section deals with how you have changed as a learner as a result of your study experience in New Zealand*

## Section D: Changing as a Learner

1. Personal Impact of Studying in NZ
  - a. In what ways has studying in NZ affected you positively?
  - b. In what ways has studying in NZ affected you negatively?
2. Changes in YOU as a Learner
  - a. Do the four personal characteristics you mentioned in **Section A.2.a** still describe you as a learner?
  - b. If they have changed why have they changed?
  - c. How are you different as a learner now in NZ than you were in China?
  - d. Who controls your learning now? Is it those things that are external to you or those things that are internal to you? Has this changed from when you were a student in China? If it has changed, how has it changed?

## CONCLUSION

*Thank.*

*Reinforce value of time and appreciation.*

*Transcribe and value feedback.*

*Open door for focus group interview.*

## FOLLOW UP

*Go over interview notes to see they make sense.*

*Check back immediately if clarification needed e.g. over phone, e-mail.*

*Record observations about the interview.*

## CHECK ALL RELEVANT FACE DATA CAPTURED

*Data as at the commencement of the fieldwork in February 2006. Shaded sections already complete for all students.*

Mainland Chinese	
Male / Female	
Marital Status	
Children	
Age	
Degree in China	
China Work Experience	_____ years
Permanent Resident	Y / N
Time in NZ * (in years)	_____ years
Time in language study in NZ	_____ months
Studying Business	
Fulltime / Part-time	F / P
Postgraduate Study or Grad Diploma	P / G
Staying in NZ/ Returning to China	S / C

## APPENDIX D

### Email Questionnaire: Interview Three Guide

#### INTRODUCTION

*Thank you for agreeing to respond to the following questions by email.  
FIRST, please save this attachment on your hard drive before starting to write your responses.  
THEN, once you have finished, re-attach this file and send it back to me ([roruthomfam@maxnet.co.nz](mailto:roruthomfam@maxnet.co.nz)).  
THANK YOU*

*Robert*

#### QUESTIONS

##### Section A: Learner Identity in China

1. Self-Awareness as a Learner
  - a. If you could choose one word to describe education in China what would it be?
  - b. If you could choose one word to describe yourself as a learner what would it be?
  - c. What did you most enjoy about learning in China?
  - d. What did you find most difficult about learning in China?
  - e. How did you feel about yourself as a learner in China?
  - f. Why did you feel about yourself in these ways?
2. Learner Identity in China
  - a. If you wish, you can add one or two other aspects of learner identity into **TABLE A** that you think better describe your learner identity in China.
  - b. For column A ('How true was this for you personally?') for each aspect you can put:

5	4	3	2	1
very true	mostly true	Sometimes true; Sometimes not true	seldom true	rarely true

TABLE A

Aspects of Learner Identity	A
<b>In China ...</b>	<b>How true was this for you personally?</b>
I felt supported	
I had effective learning skills	
I worked hard	
I felt pressured	
I felt successful	
I had good content knowledge	
I was competitive	
My learning was teacher-centred	
<i>other...</i>	
<i>other...</i>	

### Section B: Changing Cultures

#### 1. Culture Differences

- a. What have you found to be the greatest difference between the Chinese culture and the NZ culture?
  
- b. How has this greatest difference affected your learning during your stay in NZ?

#### 2. Education Differences

- a. What have you found to be the greatest difference between the Chinese education system and the NZ education system?
  
- b. How has this greatest difference affected your learning while studying in NZ?
  
- c. How do you think your experience of studying at university in New Zealand is different from a mature Kiwi student who, after having a period of time in the workforce, returns to postgraduate study?

### Section C: Studying in NZ

#### 1. Coming to New Zealand

- a. How well prepared were you for studying in New Zealand?
  
- b. Have you found learning in New Zealand to be a stressful experience? How does this compare to the stress you experienced studying in China? Looking back, were you ready for another stressful learning experience? Why or why not?

- c. What were your expectations when you came to study in New Zealand? Were these met? Why or why not?
  - d. What has been most helpful to you during your study in NZ? Why was this?
2. Belief In Your Ultimate Success
    - a. When faced with the challenge of studying in a foreign country what was one main idea that kept you believing that you would be successful?
    - b. Why was this one main idea so important to you?
3. Your Ultimate Motivation
    - a. When faced with the challenge of studying in a foreign country what was one big idea that kept you motivated through all the difficulties?
    - b. Why was this one motivation so important to you?
4. Your Ultimate Goal
    - a. Before you came to NZ what was your life goal?
    - b. How has studying in NZ helped you toward achieving your life goal?
    - c. How has studying in NZ made achieving your life goal more difficult?
    - d. Has coming to NZ changed your life goal? If so, why?

#### **Section D: Changing as a Learner**

1. Personal Impact of Studying in NZ
  - a. In what ways has studying in NZ affected you positively?
  - b. In what ways has studying in NZ affected you negatively?
  - c. How have you changed as a learner from studying in New Zealand?
2. Changes in YOU as a Learner while studying in New Zealand

- a. Please list in the 'Aspects' column in **TABLE B** those things that you think **NOW** describe you as a learner. You can still use some or all of the aspects from the **TABLE A** above.
- b. For column A ('How true was this for you personally?') for each aspect you can put:

<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
very true	mostly true	Sometimes true; Sometimes not true	seldom true	rarely true

**TABLE B**

<b>Aspects of Learner Identity</b>	<b>A</b>
<b>Since studying in NZ I ....</b>	<b>How true was this for you personally?</b>
I feel supported	
I have effective learning skills	
I work hard at my study	
I feel pressured	
I feel successful	
I have good content knowledge	
I am competitive	
My learning is teacher-centred	
<i>other...</i>	
<i>other...</i>	

**Section E: Please Complete This Table**

China Work Experience	_____ years
Permanent Resident	Yes or No
Time spent in NZ * (in years)	_____ years
Time in language study in NZ	_____ months
Fulltime / Part-time	
Postgraduate Study or Grad Diploma	
Staying in NZ/ Returning to China	

**CONCLUSION**

*Thank you for participating in this way. Your help and patience is much appreciated.*

*Robert*

## APPENDIX E

### Attestation Group Interview Guide

The focus group is comprised of a small number (3-5) of Mainland Chinese postgraduate business studies students. They are students belonging to a particular finance class running in Semester Two, 2007,

#### SETTING THE SCENE

Pre-organise room layout to maximise visibility of screen and group member interaction.

Have some food and drink available.

Mingle and build rapport (**very important**)

Have people sit according to how 'talkative' they appear.

i.e., talkers on the outside, quieter ones in the middle

Assistant to note content, flow, and interaction patterns

#### INTRODUCTION

*Need to get through this quickly*

	Welcome Robert Ruth
PPT Slide 1	Overview What is the research about: Cross-Cultural Educational Adjustment
PPT Slide 2	Purpose: What do you think of the findings so far? Do they fit? What's your view? Research Problems and Questions
PPT Slide 3	Introductions Students: Start with a 'talker' Name, course, city/province–greatest thing!, time in NZ
	Consent Forms Consent is optional Have available, obtain signatures and collect
PPT Slide 3	Ground Rules Be relaxed – comfortable and confidential Everyone's ideas are MUCH APPRECIATED Everyone should be allowed an opportunity to speak I will encourage everyone to share What is said in the room stays in the room
	<b><i>Any questions before we begin?</i></b>

#### QUESTIONING

*Questioning should start broad (& reflective but not personal) and move increasingly to more specific and focused areas. Must listen well to responses and draw out comments. Make sure all get opportunities to share. Frame new questions using the base model and students' comments. Continually evaluate for understanding/clarity of questions.*

PPT Slide 4	Present Journey to the West Macro/Micro Identity and change								
	Lead in question: <i>Thinking back, what was university like in China?</i>								
	<b>Key Q 1: What made a person a good learner at university in China?</b>								
PPT Slide 5	Score the following on range below:								
	<table border="1" style="width:100%; text-align:center;"> <tr> <td style="width:20%;"><b>5</b></td> <td style="width:20%;"><b>4</b></td> <td style="width:20%;"><b>3</b></td> <td style="width:20%;"><b>2</b></td> <td style="width:20%;"><b>1</b></td> </tr> </table>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>					
	<table border="1" style="width:100%; text-align:center;"> <tr> <td style="width:20%;">very true</td> <td style="width:20%;">mostly true</td> <td style="width:20%;">Sometimes true; Sometimes not true</td> <td style="width:20%;">seldom true</td> <td style="width:20%;">rarely true</td> </tr> </table>	very true	mostly true	Sometimes true; Sometimes not true	seldom true	rarely true			
very true	mostly true	Sometimes true; Sometimes not true	seldom true	rarely true					
PPT Slide 6	<p><b>Macro:</b> In China, my culture and society values education  <b>Micro:</b> In China, my family encouraged my learning  <b>Group Score</b> learner identities [add any extras from <b>Key Q 1</b>]</p> <table style="width:100%;"> <tr> <td style="width:50%;">I felt supported</td> <td style="width:50%;">I had good knowledge</td> </tr> <tr> <td>I was teacher centered</td> <td>I was successful</td> </tr> <tr> <td>I worked hard</td> <td>I was competitive</td> </tr> <tr> <td>I had effective skills</td> <td>I felt pressured</td> </tr> </table> <p>My learner identity was externally bounded  My learner identity was culturally harmonised</p>	I felt supported	I had good knowledge	I was teacher centered	I was successful	I worked hard	I was competitive	I had effective skills	I felt pressured
I felt supported	I had good knowledge								
I was teacher centered	I was successful								
I worked hard	I was competitive								
I had effective skills	I felt pressured								
PPT Slide 7 PPT Slide 8	<p>When you change cultures and learning situations things change for you. These changes can be both positive and negative.  If you felt harmonised before, then now you might feel that this harmony is broken.</p> <p><b>Key Q 2: What are the problems when students change their cultural and educational context?</b></p> <p><b>Group put in order:</b> [Add any other major items arising from <b>Key Q 2</b>]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assignment Emphasis</li> <li>Cultural Differences</li> <li>Different Ways of Learning</li> <li>Different Teacher Relationships</li> <li>Financial Stress</li> <li>Lack of Support</li> <li>Language</li> <li>Looking after Yourself</li> <li>Quantity of Reading</li> <li>Writing Assignments</li> </ul>								
	<p>But many students survive and do very well. How do they do this?  They use various strategies and motivations.  A strategy is something they use to help solve a problem.  A motivation is something that encourages you to keep going.</p> <p><b>Key Q 3: What might those strategies be?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support: <i>Classmates, Teacher, Family</i></li> <li>Personal Character: <i>Perseverance, Self-Reliance</i></li> <li>Goals</li> <li>Grow/Learn: <i>Learning, Culture and Language skills</i></li> <li>Other: <i>Use Prior Learning, Work Experience</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Key Q 4: What might the motivations be?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Future: <i>Better Future, Success</i></li> </ul>								

	<p>Family: <i>Parents' Face</i>  Goals: <i>Life</i>  Western Learning: <i>Applied Learning, Western Certificate, English Skills</i>  Cost: <i>Time, Money</i></p>										
PPT Slide 9	<p>Go through PowerPoint  Any comments?  <b>Key Q 5: <i>What is the main thing that keeps everything together?</i></b>  Gain individual responses, query if there is a common factor</p>										
	<p>Looked at two of three areas:  What were you like as a learner in China?  What problems did you face and how did you overcome them?  Third area: How have you, <b>AS A LEARNER</b>, changed from you NZ experience?</p>										
PPT Slide 10	<p>These were some of the identity factors when you studied in China.  How would you score them now as a learner in NZ?  Score the following on range below:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td><b>5</b></td> <td><b>4</b></td> <td><b>3</b></td> <td><b>2</b></td> <td><b>1</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td>very true</td> <td>mostly true</td> <td>Sometimes true; Sometimes not true</td> <td>seldom true</td> <td>rarely true</td> </tr> </table> <p><b>Group Score</b> learner identities [add any extras from <b>Key Q 1</b>]  I feel supported                      I have good knowledge  I am teacher centered              I am successful  I work hard                              I am competitive  I have effective skills                I feel pressured</p>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	very true	mostly true	Sometimes true; Sometimes not true	seldom true	rarely true
<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>							
very true	mostly true	Sometimes true; Sometimes not true	seldom true	rarely true							
PPT Slide 10	<p><b>Key Q 6: <i>Are there ways in which you are different as a learner now because of your NZ experience?</i></b>  Which of these best reflects the changes you have seen in your self as a learner?  More Independent  More Organised  More Practically Skilled  More Co-operative  More Interested</p>										
PPT Slide 11	<p>Show model overview  <b>Any comments?</b></p>										

## CONCLUSION

Briefly summarise the assistance/ideas that the group has provided

Check that they concur

Any additional comments? Can email if any further ideas: give email address.

Reiterate re confidentiality

Review the purpose of the study

Thank them very much for their input

Wait around while people disperse [they may have some things to add]

Will email them a summary of the research findings when study complete

## APPENDIX F

### Access Letter to HOF BAF

Date

Professor \_\_\_\_\_  
Pro Vice-Chancellor

Dear Professor

I would like to request your permission to conduct research among international postgraduate students within your \_\_\_\_\_. My purpose would be both to address a current need facing international students and to contribute to my PhD studies on the cross-cultural educational adjustment of international students.

The increase of international student enrolments at \_\_\_\_\_, particularly within the \_\_\_\_\_, has placed a significant burden on both staff and students. However, we have little understanding, at a conceptual level, of how the international students understand and cope with this major change in their educational environment.

I would like your permission to conduct my research among first-year, postgraduate international students in your \_\_\_\_\_. This would allow me to approach students for interviews and to observe classes conducted in your department. It is important to emphasise that this study is focused on how the students understand and cope with their new and radically different learning context. It is not a study or critique of the teaching staff within your \_\_\_\_\_.

In addition, I require your permission to have limited access to the relevant databases that may store enrolment and academic details of the students. The access will be limited only to the students who make themselves available to participate in this research project and who have agreed to allow the researcher to have access to their records.

In writing up the research, pseudonyms will be used for \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ student. However, readers of the research thesis, seeing that it is a product of a \_\_\_\_\_ student, may suppose, but not know with certainty, that the context of the research is \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_.

I have attached details of my professional and educational background. [Removed]

Please contact Professor Wayne Edwards (my supervisor) if you wish to talk with him about this project.

Thank you for considering this request. I look forward to hearing from you concerning when we can meet to discuss this matter.

Yours sincerely

ROBERT THOMPSON

## APPENDIX G

### INFORMATION SHEET

#### *Cross-cultural Educational Adjustment: A Substantive Theory*

##### **Introduction of the Researcher**

My name is Robert Thompson. I am conducting research on how Mainland Chinese postgraduate business students manage the change of educational systems when they come to study in New Zealand. The research will gather data mostly from interviews, but it will also involve access to database information.

I am completing this study to fulfill the requirements for a PhD (Education) from Massey University. I am studying for this qualification on a part-time basis. I work for International Student Ministries as a voluntary postgraduate student support worker on the Palmerston North campuses of Massey University.

If you wish to contact me, or my supervisors, at any time regarding the project, then please use the following details.

<u>Researcher</u>	<u>Contact</u>	<u>Supervisors Contact Details:</u>	
<u>Details:</u>			
Robert Thompson		Prof. Wayne Edwards	Dr. Penny Haworth
Ph: 06 355 0239		Ph: 06 356 9099	Ph: 356 9099
Cell: 021 141 8742			
Email:		Email:	Email:
roruthomfam@maxnet.co.nz		W.L.Edwards@massey.ac.nz	P.A.Haworth@massey.ac.nz

##### **Participant Recruitment**

You may have been approached to help with this project in one of the following ways:

- during the International Student Orientation
- from contact details given by the College of Business
- from contact details supplied by the International Student Support Office
- by personal contact with the researcher.

I ask that you read this information sheet and the attached consent form. If, after your reading, you are willing to help me with my research, then please email or phone me. Then we can arrange to meet. At this time you will give me the signed and dated consent form. You may keep the information sheet.

The research involves a series of four interviews during 2006. The interview plan looks a little like this:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Interview: February/March.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview: June/July (after exams)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Interview: August/September
- 4<sup>th</sup> Interview: November/December (after exams)

The first interview will take less than two hours, and the other interviews will be just over one hour in length. That is a total of about six hours over the whole year. I will ensure, to the best of my ability, that the interviews are planned so you are able to be fully focused on your study. I actually believe that these interviews will be interesting and even helpful for you.

The interview questions look at two major things:

- The difficulties you are having adjusting to the university education system in New Zealand, and
- The ways that you try to overcome those difficulties.

We would like to assure you that your responses to the interview questions, and all other information concerning your study, will be kept strictly confidential.

### **Project Procedures**

The interviews will be held in a private area, such as a study room in the library. You, the research assistant, and I will be the only ones present. The interviews will be recorded on a tape. The research assistant and myself will also take brief notes during the interview.

The tapes will then be written out in full. When this is complete a copy will be given to you to read and check. You can add further comments or change your earlier statements if you would like to at this time. Then you will sign and return the copy of the transcript to me.

The interview material, and the data from the observations and the database information, will be analysed using a computer software program called NVivo. The purpose of this program is to gather together similar information and group it into related categories.

Toward the end of the project, some of the students interviewed will be gathered together to discuss the tentative results.

Access to database records, held by both the College of Business and the National Students Relations Office, will also be required in order to provide enrolment and academic data.

During the gathering and analysis stage of the project the data will be kept securely at my home address and under password on my computer. At the end of the project, the materials (tapes, transcripts, notes, disks etc.) will all be stored in facilities operated by the Massey University College of Education. It will be stored there for five years. After that time the material will be destroyed.

At the conclusion of the project the thesis will be available from the Massey University library. You will also be given a summary of the results. In addition, if a publishable paper is written that summarises the project, a copy will also be given to you.

Every attempt will be made to keep your identity confidential. Only the research assistant and I (and possibly the principal supervisor) will know your true name and contact details.

**Participant involvement**

Your involvement is generally limited to the time of the interviews and reviewing the written record of the interviews, which will be about six hours over the whole year. However, at times, the researcher (or his assistant) may need to contact you to clarify some point. To help make this as easy as possible, please inform me of any changes in your contact details (e.g. where you live, phone number, email address etc.)

Also, toward the conclusion of the research, a focus group of some of those interviewed may be brought together to discuss some of the initial results of the project. This would last approximately one to two hours.

**Participant's Rights**

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation to join the research project. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any stage;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- I also understand that I can ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

**Support Processes**

If, at any time, you feel uncertain about the project please contact my supervisor (see the details above). If you feel you need extra support please contact Julia (350 5935 or 356 9099 x 5935) at the Student Counselling Services (SCS). The SCS is able to provide confidential and helpful assistance to meet the concerns you may face.

**Project Contacts**

As I have stated earlier, PLEASE contact myself or my principal supervisor if you have any questions about the project.

**Committee Approval Statement**

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Application 05/85. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr. John G. O'Neill, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5799 x 8635, email [humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz).

**THANK YOU SO MUCH! ...**

**for reading this information sheet and considering signing the consent form.**

**Your participation in this project will help you, other international students, and myself.**

**Please contact me by email or phone if you are willing to be interviewed.**

Yours sincerely  
Robert Thompson

## APPENDIX H

### *Cross-cultural Educational Adjustment: A Substantive Theory*

#### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree / do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signature:** ..... **Date:** .....

**Full Name - printed** .....

## APPENDIX I

### *Cross-cultural Educational Adjustment: A Substantive Theory*

#### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – ATTESTATION GROUP

**This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I agree to not disclose anything discussed in the Focus Group.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signature:** ..... **Date:** .....

**Full Name - printed** .....

## APPENDIX J

### *Cross-cultural Educational Adjustment: A Substantive Theory*

#### CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I *Ruth Lois Thompson* agree to keep confidential all information concerning the project *Cross-cultural Educational Adjustment: A Substantive Theory*.

I will not retain or copy any information involving the project.

**Signature:** ..... **Date:** .....

## APPENDIX K

### *Cross-cultural Educational Adjustment: A Substantive Theory*

#### AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TAPE TRANSCRIPTS

**This from will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview/s conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used by the researcher, **Robert James Thompson**, in reports and publications arising from the research.

**Signature:** ..... **Date:** .....

**Full Name - printed** .....

# APPENDIX L

## NVivo Transcript Coding

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface. On the left, a tree view shows the project structure under 'Sources', including 'Interviews' (Interview 01, Interview 02, Interview 03) and 'IV By Participants'. The main window shows 'Interview 02' with a list of nodes and their references. A table below the list shows the number of free nodes per transcript. The transcript text is visible, and a section of it is highlighted with a red box, indicating coding information. A callout box points to a specific section of the transcript.

Name	Nodes	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
02	312	312	20/07/2007 10:30 a.m.	RJ	6/05/2008 4:20 p.m.	RJ
02	402	402	20/07/2007 10:31 a.m.	RJ	6/05/2008 4:20 p.m.	RJ
02	302	302	20/07/2007 10:33 a.m.	RJ	6/05/2008 4:20 p.m.	RJ
02	350	350	20/07/2007 10:33 a.m.	RJ	6/05/2008 4:20 p.m.	RJ
02	276	276	20/07/2007 10:34 a.m.	RJ	6/05/2008 4:20 p.m.	RJ
02	302	302	20/07/2007 10:35 a.m.	RJ	6/05/2008 4:20 p.m.	RJ
02	439	439	20/07/2007 10:28 a.m.	RJ	6/05/2008 4:20 p.m.	RJ
02	184	184	20/07/2007 10:35 a.m.	RJ	6/05/2008 4:20 p.m.	RJ

**Number of Free Nodes per Transcript**

**Eight Transcripts from Interview Two**

**Coding Information for a Section of Transcript**

In China, there are too many people to do this.  
How do you think studying in NZ will improve your future?  
First of all, it will improve my English. It is better for me if I go back to China. I can find a better job than before. Secondly, I can enlarge my horizons. I can learn a lot of things that I can not study in China. Another thing, I think I can become more independent. I can do some part-time job when I study. It is better. If you decide to go back to China will this independence cause a problem for you settling back into China? Not a problem.  
I guess many of the young people in China are increasingly being affected by independent values. Certainly, in some aspects, they change a lot. They become more independent. Also they have to cooperate with classmates and lecturers. So, I think it is not a problem.  
As you were saying before, often the students will say to me one of the best outcomes they can get from study in NZ is improving their English. Are you satisfied with the way your English has improved?  
I have improved a lot but I am still not dissatisfied.  
What would make you more satisfied?  
I still feel I can't communicate with the Koreans or foreign speakers.  
Quite a number of students have expressed disappointment about the lack of time they are able to spend with native English speakers. Do you feel that disappointment as well?  
I have this feeling. Because most of the time I stay with my wife. If I just stayed here by myself I think I can improve more.  
How would you go about improving your English?  
Communicate with the local people. Join more activities. Talk with foreign people. Even we can go to church - and many people in church they are very kindly and they help us. Sometimes we go to church - a cell group in somebody's home. Even there we can get help with our language.  
A lot of the students have said the study in NZ is more practical than it was in China, where, perhaps, it was more theoretical. In what ways has the more practical approach to learning helped you?  
For one paper this semester, our lecturer asked us to download data from the internet and also used the

APPENDIX M

NVivo 7 Tree Nodes Section

The screenshot displays the NVivo 7 interface for a project titled 'Cross-Cultural Educational Adjustment.nvvp'. The main window shows a 'Tree Nodes' view with a table of nodes and their associated sources, references, and dates. A sidebar on the left contains a 'Nodes' section with a 'Tree Node Folder' highlighted. A specific sub-section of the tree nodes is highlighted with a rounded rectangle, and a text box points to it, indicating that these levels are associated with interaction.

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Modified On
Interview Round 3 & Attestatio	0	0	23/02/2007 9:15 p.m.	17/06/2008 10:03 a.m.
01 Conditions	0	0	9/04/2008 4:00 p.m.	9/04/2008 4:00 p.m.
02 Interactions	0	0	9/04/2008 4:00 p.m.	9/04/2008 4:00 p.m.
01 Macro - Micro Cultural Changes	0	0	14/04/2008 8:22 p.m.	11/06/2008 3:43 p.m.
02 Issues Faced	0	0	14/04/2008 8:22 p.m.	17/04/2008 4:08 p.m.
03 Strategies	0	0	14/04/2008 8:22 p.m.	11/06/2008 7:57 p.m.
01 Support	0	0	11/06/2008 7:32 p.m.	11/06/2008 7:32 p.m.
01 Ask for Help	0	0	9/04/2008 9:40 p.m.	25/06/2008 3:21 p.m.
02 Family & Friend Support	0	0	9/04/2008 9:12 p.m.	25/06/2008 3:21 p.m.
01 Uncertain re Parents	0	0	25/06/2008 12:43 p.m.	25/06/2008 12:54 p.m.
02 Support & Encouragement	0	0	9/04/2008 9:12 p.m.	25/06/2008 12:54 p.m.
03 Study Well	0	0	25/06/2008 12:39 p.m.	25/06/2008 12:54 p.m.
04 Contact Family & Friends	0	0	9/04/2008 9:40 p.m.	25/06/2008 12:54 p.m.
05 Parents & Finances	0	0	25/06/2008 12:46 p.m.	25/06/2008 12:54 p.m.
06 Spouse Support	0	0	9/04/2008 9:10 p.m.	25/06/2008 2:37 p.m.
03 Student Support	0	0	9/04/2008 9:10 p.m.	25/06/2008 3:21 p.m.
04 Resources	0	0	9/04/2008 9:14 p.m.	25/06/2008 12:36 p.m.
05 Teacher Support	0	0	9/04/2008 9:19 p.m.	25/06/2008 12:36 p.m.
06 Student Learning Centre	0	0	9/04/2008 9:17 p.m.	25/06/2008 12:36 p.m.
02 Self	0	0	11/06/2008 7:32 p.m.	11/06/2008 7:32 p.m.
03 Language Growth	0	0	11/06/2008 7:33 p.m.	11/06/2008 7:34 p.m.
04 Learning Skill Growth	0	0	11/06/2008 7:33 p.m.	11/06/2008 7:57 p.m.
05 Prior Learning	0	0	11/06/2008 7:33 p.m.	11/06/2008 7:57 p.m.
06 Work Experience	0	0	11/06/2008 7:34 p.m.	11/06/2008 7:57 p.m.
20 Feedback Group	0	0	13/06/2008 12:37 p.m.	13/06/2008 12:37 p.m.
04 Motivators	0	0	14/04/2008 8:22 p.m.	11/06/2008 7:57 p.m.
05 Fractured Harmony	0	0	22/08/2008 10:22 p.m.	22/08/2008 10:11 p.m.
03 Consequences	0	0	9/04/2008 4:00 p.m.	9/04/2008 4:00 p.m.

Cross-Cultural Educational Adjustment.nvp - NVivo

File Edit View Go Project Links Code Tools Window Help

New [Icons] Sort By [Dropdown]

Code At [Dropdown]

Look for: [Dropdown] Search In [Dropdown] Tree Nodes Find Now Clear

**Nodes**

- Free Nodes
- Tree Nodes
- Cases
- Relationships
- Matrices
- Search Folders
- All Nodes

**Tree Nodes**

Name	Sources
Murrah For ME!	0
Interview Round 1	0
A - Study In China	
B - Transitions and Problems in NZ Learning	
C - Overcoming Difficulties in Learning	
Interview Round 01 Auto Code	
Interview Round 2	0
01 Learner Identity China	
01 Competitive	
Interview Round 1	
Interview Round 2	
01 Pressured	
01 Supported	
Content Based	
Effective Skills	
Future Focused	
Intelligent	
Successful	
Teacher Focused	
V Jorks Hard	
02 Context China	
03 Context New Zealand	
04 Problems Faced	
05 Motivators	
06 Strategies	
07 Learner Identity NZ	
Interview Round 3 & Attestab	0
01 Conditions	
02 Interactions	
03 Consequences	

**Interview Round 1 Major Categories**

**Round 1 Data Rolled Over into Round 2**

**First Level Expansion of Round 2 Categories**

**Interview Round 3 Major Categories**

RJ 13211 Items

Appendices [Comp...], FullDraft01 - Micros..., Cross-Cultural Educ..., Microsoft PowerPo..., FocusGroupMaterial

NVivo Documentation Overview

APPENDIX N

## APPENDIX O

## Research Journal – Supervisor Meeting

1/7/08 Supervision Mtg - Penny/Wayne

Review of Chapter Five – Conditions

[Note CIC slide for d/new]

\*Flow of chapters – CIC PPT Slide 'Where is this going?'

\*Flow of chapter 5

- big to small

- central argument

- Context creates Identity

- wholistic – X not poss to compartmentalize completely (Wstr)

- some overlap of material

- Keep to the methodology: lit

- conceptualization thru categorization

- Mix of findings under categorization is analysis

- it represents this group of students

e.g. Inr identity – could be more/less

- differently weighted

- doesn't have to be perfect

- just allow comparison

? - graphs/numbers

- can display

- but aids/supports structure

- focus on 'China Elements' – sets groundwork

imp – establishes Identity

- allows 'journey' motif

- OK with methodology

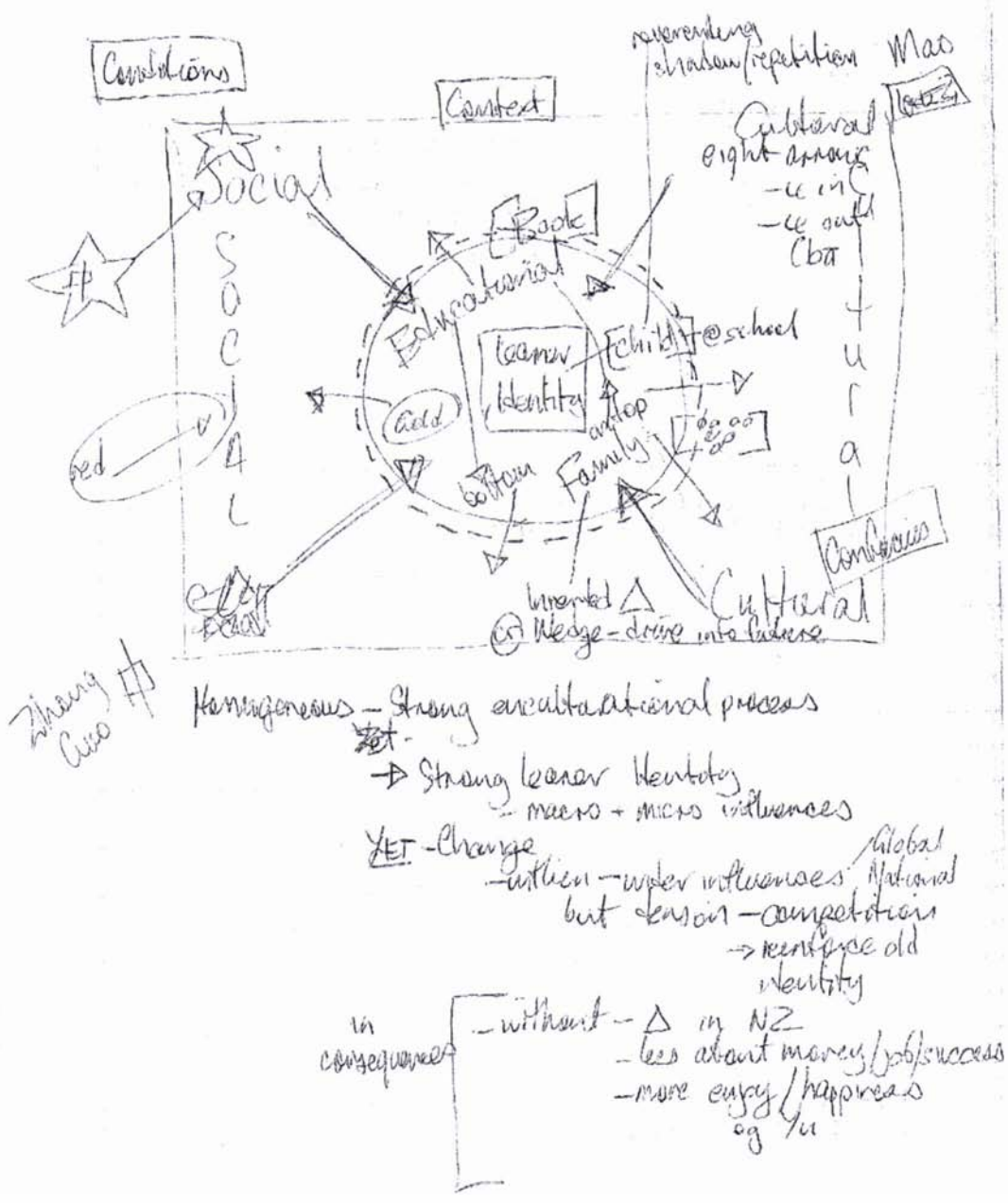
(could include 'issues') but

? - use of quotes

? - use of lit review

? - use of attestation group

Research Journal – Model Development



# APPENDIX P

## NVivo 7 Memo

The screenshot displays the NVivo 7 software interface. On the left, a tree view under 'Sources' shows 'Internals' expanded to 'Memos', which includes sub-categories like 'Central Concept', 'Research Journal', and 'Vertical by Participant'. A box labeled 'Memo Categories' points to this tree. The main window shows a 'Memos' list with columns for 'Name' and 'Node'. A box labeled 'Partial Memo List' points to this list. The list includes items such as 'Changing to University', 'Cultural Heritage', and 'English Language Learning'. Below the list, a text box labeled 'Example of NVivo Memo' contains the following text:

The competitive environment of China's education system and its stratified approach of attaining and passing goals before moving on to the next stage probably means that the child who moves through these steps is very goal focused and feels confident to be able to meet the challenges that arise in front of him or her. This must be well ingrained into a postgraduate student entering the NZ tertiary scene. It is a huge challenge but they have met and passed such huge challenges before. This must have constructed in their psyche a robust sense of their ability to overcome and succeed.

# APPENDIX Q

## Attestation Group PowerPoint Presentation

**Cross-Cultural Educational Adjustment**

Robert Thompson

**The Research Problem**

How can we understand the basic social process that occurs when a Mainland Chinese student enters into tertiary learning at postgraduate level in a New Zealand context?

**Our Focus Group**

**Introductions**

- Name
- Course
- City/province - greatest thing!

**Ground Rules**

- Be relaxed - comfortable and confidential
- EVERYONE'S Ideas are MUCH APPRECIATED
- Everyone should be allowed an opportunity to speak
- I will encourage everyone to share
- I look forward to your critical comments
- What is said in the room stays in the room



**Two Key Questions**

What kind of learner makes a good learner in China, especially at university?

What kind of Mainland Chinese learner is successful in New Zealand?

**What kind of a learner was I in China?**

China, my culture and society values education

I felt supported      I had good knowledge

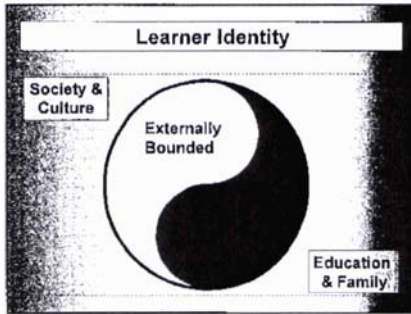
was teacher centered      I was successful

worked hard      I was competitive

I had effective skills      I felt pressured

In China, my family encouraged my learning

5	4	3	2	1
very true	mostly true	sometimes true; sometimes not	seldom true	rarely true



### Two Key Questions

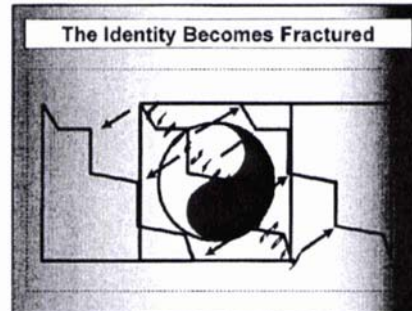
How have you changed your approach to learning because of your study in New Zealand?

Do you still learn in some of the same ways as you did in China? If so, what ways?

### NZ: What kind of learner am I now?

More Independent  
More Organized  
More Practically Skilled  
More Co-operative  
More Interested

I feel supported	I have good knowledge
I am teacher centered	I am successful
I work hard	I am competitive
I have effective skills	I feel pressured



### One Question!

What are the problems when students change their cultural and educational context?

### What Problems does this Cause?

**PROBLEMS**

- Assignment Emphasis
- Cultural Differences
- Different Teacher Relationships
- Different Ways of Learning
- Financial Stress
- Language
- Lack of Support
- Looking After Yourself
- Quantity of Reading
- Writing Assignments

### Two Key Questions

What motivates Chinese students to overcome the problems?	What strategies do Chinese students use to overcome the problems?
---	---

### Identity Holds Together

STRATEGIES	MOTIVATORS
Support	Future
Personal Character	Family
Goals	Goals
Grow/Learn	Western Learning
Other	Cost

Is there any one motivation that has made a real difference for you?

### Journey to the West

CROSS-CULTURAL EDUCATIONAL ADJUSTMENT

Identity as Learner Harmony	Problems, Strategies & Motivations	Identity Change by NZ Learner
--------------------------------	--	----------------------------------

## APPENDIX R

### CROSS CULTURAL EDUCATIONAL ADJUSTMENT: A SUBSTANTIVE THEORY A Summary of Findings and Analysis Sent to Participants

By Robert Thompson

Dated: 18/11/08

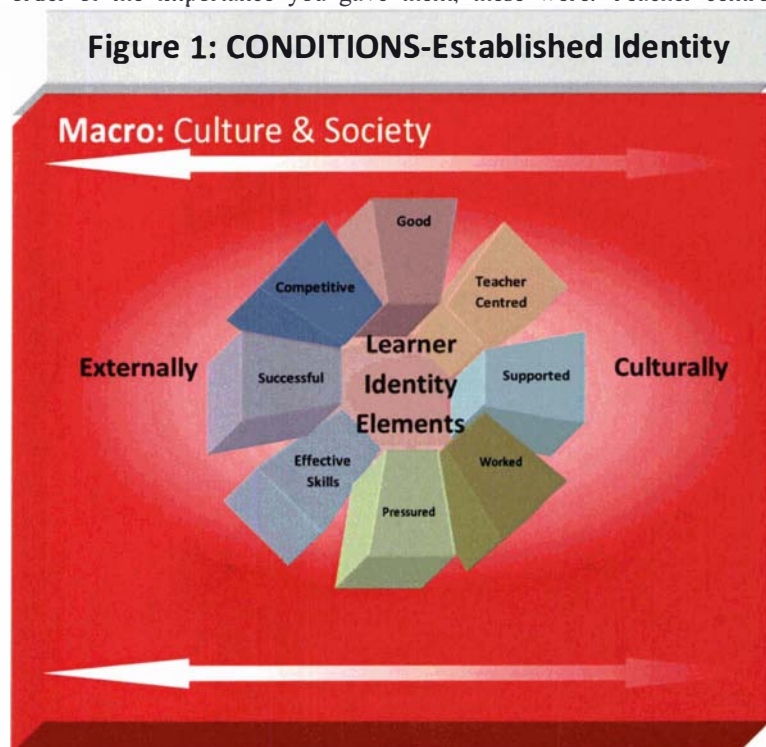
This summary is based around what is called a process model. It briefly describes what happened before, during, and as a result of your adjustment to university in New Zealand. It has three parts: The conditions (before); the actions (during); and the consequences (results). Each of these is looked at in turn and you can find a picture of the completed model at the end (Figure 5). The findings reflect only what was understood from the interviews held with our small group of students (10) and is, therefore, called a substantive or localised theory/model.

#### THE CONDITIONS

THE CONDITIONS describe the influences on you in China that made you the type of learners you are today. This is called learner identity. Figure 1 (below) tries to show the nature of those influences. From the interview data it was found that the major influences on this identity were the macro societal and cultural variables (above the top arrow in Figure 1). These have an indirect yet still powerful effect on the individual in his or her society. They include, for example: being part of a society where people are often seen as part of a wider group than as an individual; where society places quite strong and clear expectations about what a person should be like and do; where gaining social advancement is very important; and where failure can lead to significant disadvantages.

The more micro variables of family and education (inside the bottom arrow) were, for example: where parents have strong expectations; where there are supportive relationships; where education is highly valued; where the educational experiences are quite similar; and where growth in knowledge is strongly desired. The double-ended arrows in Figure 1 indicate that both the macro and micro influences have both a strong traditional basis in Chinese society and a continuing contemporary impact, even though many things are changing culturally in China today.

From the interview data, eight learner identity elements, which described how you thought of yourselves as learners, were found. In order of the importance you gave them, these were: Teacher centred; supported; worked hard; pressured; effective skills; successful; competitive; and good knowledge. Because of the strength of the macro and micro influences in Chinese society these learner identity elements were found to be externally bounded, which means they were more formed by outward pressure from society than internally, and culturally harmonised, which means because Chinese society, compared to some other societies, is quite similar everywhere in China the learner identity could be expected to be widespread. Therefore, the conditions of the model have been called 'Established Identity.'



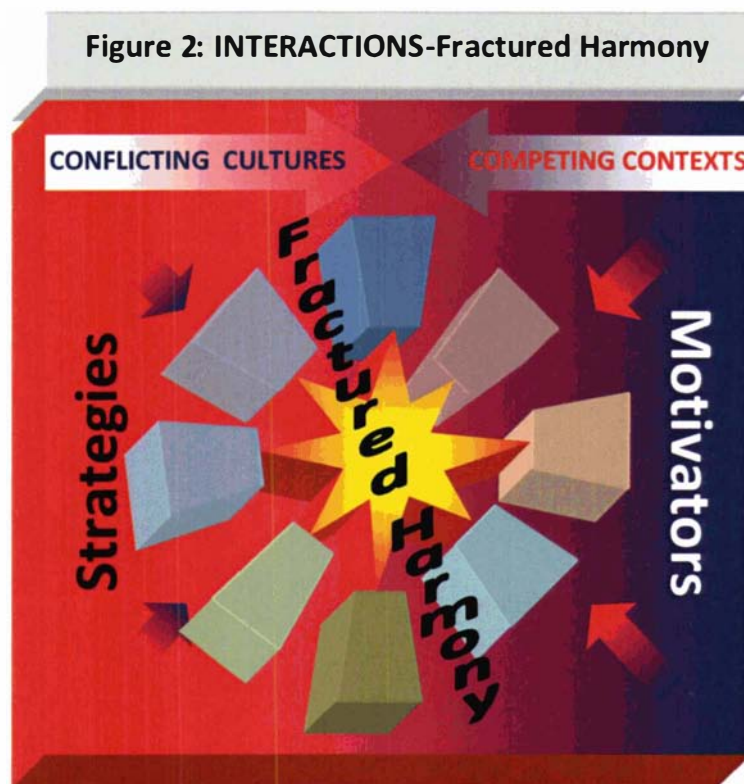
## THE ACTIONS AND INTERACTIONS

ACTIONS OR INTERACTIONS are how a person reacts to the situations and problems they face. These reactions are either instinctive, which means that you react that way without hardly thinking about it, or intentional. In depicting the 'Interactions,' Figure 2 firstly tries to show (see the arrows) that when you came to New Zealand you experienced a significant difference in terms of culture and of education. This was seen in the way in which you coped with the change and the adjustments you made to life in the New Zealand community. This varied from person to person but each one of you experienced some conflicts between what you had known in China and what you experienced in New Zealand.

One of the questions this research tried to answer was: What happened to the sense of identity you had as a learner in China (see Conditions above)? Your responses indicated that there were some interesting changes and these are discussed in the next section on consequences. It is sufficient to say that the established learner identity that had worked well for you in China was not as effective or useful in New Zealand. This is why Figure 2 is sub-titled 'Fractured Harmony' and this has been indicated on Figure 2 by the different learner elements being pushed out of their previously regular pattern. Some of the educational issues and problems you mentioned that helped fracture that harmony were, in order: language; different ways of learning; cultural differences; quantity of reading; different teacher relationships; assignment emphasis; writing assignments; looking after self; lack of support; and financial stress.

A second major question about interactions was: How did the students respond to this change and this fracturing of their harmonious learner identity? What was found was that you used a number of strategies and motivators that helped you overcome these problems and changes. The strategies included: accessing support structures at the university; relying on yourself; growing in language skills; growing in learning skills; drawing on prior learning in China; and benefiting from work experience within New Zealand. The motivators included: meeting family and society expectations; a desire for Western learnings; keeping costs low; and a desire for self-improvement.

If the use of these strategies and motivators were effective, then you were able to respond so that your learning identity or learning 'way,' even though it was changed, did not break apart and cause you to be unsuccessful in your study. This brings us to the Consequences.



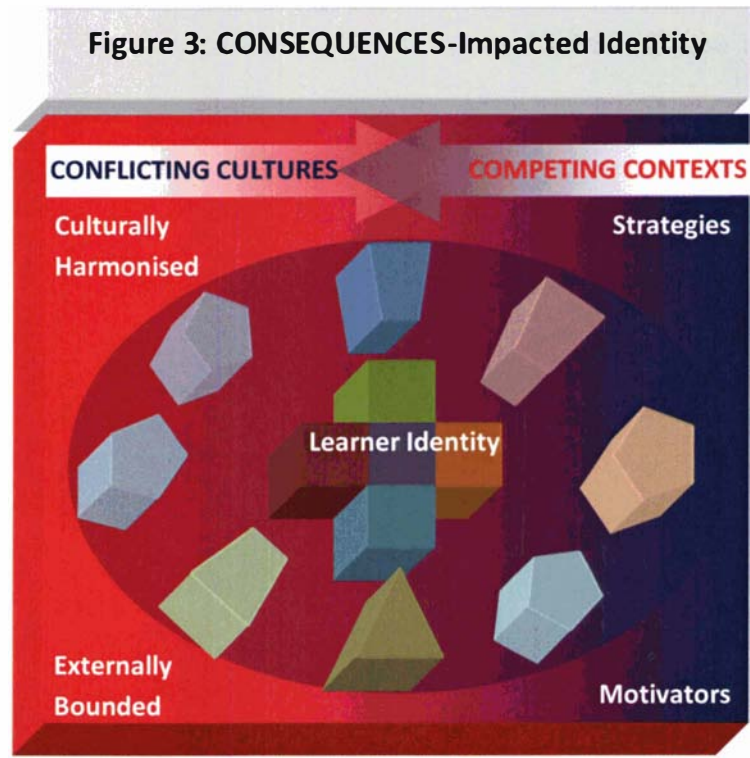
## THE CONSEQUENCES

CONSEQUENCES are the results of the actions that have been taken. In this case, the actions mean both the results of changing cultures to a significantly different educational environment and the ways that you responded to the changes and the problems. Figure 3 (below) highlights the ways that you understood yourself as a learner changed because of your experiences in adjusting to this new educational culture. The changes had two parts: How was the original learner identity changed? What new elements were introduced into the way you saw yourself as a learner?

The original identity element was affected in three ways. Some elements stayed the same (still supported; still pressured; still competitive); some elements became less important or less appropriate in the new situation (much less teacher centred); and some became more significant than they were previously (working harder; more effective skills; greater success; better knowledge). New or significantly more important elements were introduced into how you saw yourselves as learners. These were, in order: more independent; more practically skilled; more organised; more co-operative; and more interested.

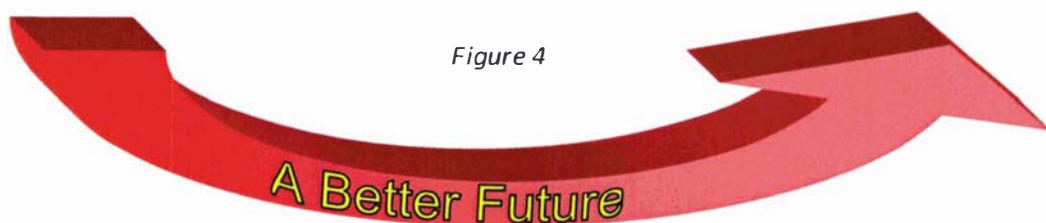
Overall, the way you adjusted to the change in educational culture meant that even though there were conflicts, these became better understood the longer you stayed in New Zealand. It also meant that your view of yourselves as learners grew. Not only did you carry forward from China what was useful to you in New Zealand but you also added new ways of being a learner and doing learning. Also, the changes that were made were to some extent caused by external pressure from the environment but also caused by the internal adjustments that you made to yourselves as learners. Therefore, the consequences of the model have been called 'Impacted Identity.'

**Figure 3: CONSEQUENCES-Impacted Identity**



### ONE LAST THING

In a process model like this, one of the things that is looked for is a central or core category that explains why things happened as they did. In this case, based on the interview material, it has been suggested that this core category or motivator was a deep desire to have a better future (Figure 4). The desire for a better future is the key element in why you overcame the difficulties of education in China, why you wanted to leave China and further your education in New Zealand, why you responded effectively to the learning issues you faced in New Zealand, and why you were looking forward into the future. The better future could mean gaining higher qualifications and being more competitive, getting the desired job, increasing your wealth for the benefit of your family and yourself, and being able to see and understand more of the world. The desire for a better future was the driving force behind the process of educational adjustment.



*Figure 4*

Figure 5, on the next page, puts the four elements of the conditions, interactions, consequences, and the core category together into a complete model. It is titled 'Journey to the West.' This has been a brief but hopefully understandable presentation of the findings of this research. If you have time, then it would be great to hear any responses that you would like to make.

## THE JOURNEY TO THE WEST

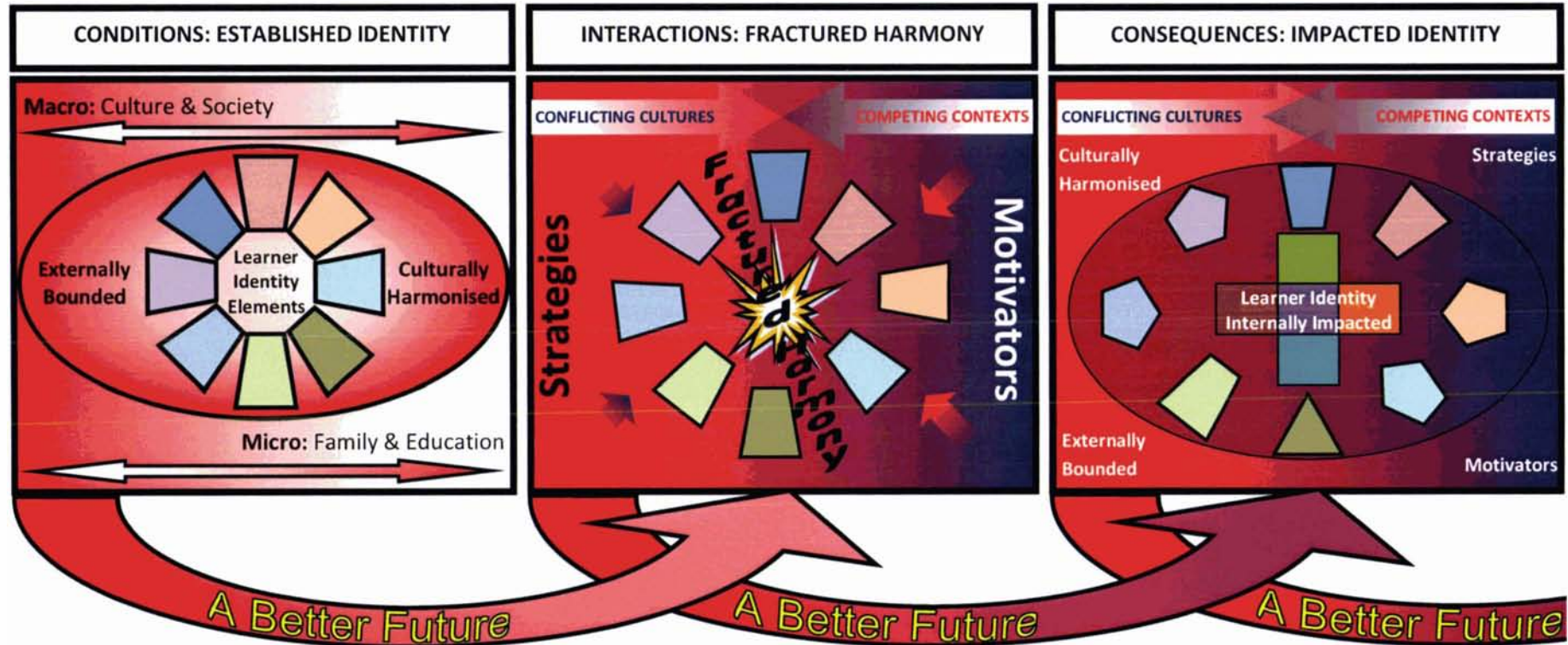


Figure 5: The conditions, interactions, consequences paradigm model for a substantive cross-cultural educational adjustment BSP

## APPENDIX S

### Statement of the Theorisation of the BSP

The principles which support the theorisation of the cross cultural educational adjustment experiences of the students in this study fall into three categories. First there are general assumptions, second defining axioms, and third specific theorems.

#### *General Assumptions: Regarding the Mainland Chinese Learners of this Study*

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| <b>G1</b> | <b>Conditions:</b> The macro and micro context of Mainland China may have a formative effect on the learner identity |
| <b>G2</b> | <b>Interactions:</b> Cross-cultural educational adjustment may elicit a variety of actions and interactions          |
| <b>G3</b> | <b>Consequences:</b> The learner identity may be impacted by changes to elements of the learner identity             |
| <b>G4</b> | <b>Core Category:</b> The central concept may drive movement through the cross-cultural educational adjustment BSP   |

#### *Defining Axioms*

##### *Conditions: an established learner identity*

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| <b>A1</b> | The influence of traditional cultural patterns of societal structure in Mainland China may currently be greater than other global, political, and economic influences that may diminish the impact of these traditional influences |
| <b>A2</b> | The homogeneity and collectivity of the macro and micro influences in Mainland Chinese culture and society may form learner identity   |
| <b>A3</b> | Educational and family conditions may form learner identity  |
| <b>A4</b> | The homogeneity and collectivity of macro and micro influences may lead to an established learner identity   |
| <b>A5</b> | The established learner identity may still allow the learner identity to display individual characteristics  |
| <b>A6</b> | The formation of the learner identity may be related to the core category of desiring a better future  |

##### *Interactions: a fractured harmony*

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|------------|--|
| <b>A7</b>  | The change to a different learning ecology may be significantly distinct and unfamiliar to the learners' prior learning experience         |
| <b>A8</b>  | The significant change in learning ecology may produce disequilibrium in the learners' established learner identity                        |
| <b>A9</b>  | The disequilibrium in the established learner identity may cause the learners to rely on the strengths of the established learner identity |
| <b>A10</b> | The reliance on individual elements of the learner identity may be related to the validity of the elements in the new context              |
| <b>A11</b> | The disequilibrium in the established learner identity may provoke and promote adaptation in the learner identity                          |
| <b>A12</b> | The ability of the learner to overcome the learning issues in the new  |

	learning ecology may be related to the core category of desiring a better future
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***Consequences: an impacted identity***

<b>A13</b>	The degree of conflict and competition between the different contexts and cultures within the new learning ecology may decrease with time
<b>A14</b>	The learner identity may be changed by cross-cultural educational adjustment
<b>A15</b>	The dimensions of the core category of a better future may be changed by the changes in learner identity

***Specific Theorems***

***Conditions: an established learner identity***

<b>T1</b>	The greater the homogeneity of the macro and micro influences in culture and society ... the greater the likelihood of the learner identity being culturally harmonised
<b>T2</b>	The greater the cultural harmony of society ... the greater the likelihood of the development of an established learner identity profile
<b>T3</b>	The greater the collectivity of the macro and micro influences in culture and society ... the greater the likelihood of learner identity being formed by external pressures
<b>T4</b>	The greater the external pressures of society ... the greater the likelihood of the development of an externally bounded learner identity profile
<b>T5</b>	The greater the similarity of shared family life experiences ... the greater the likelihood of the development of an established learner identity profile
<b>T6</b>	The greater the similarity of shared learning experiences ... the greater the likelihood of the development of an established learner identity profile
<b>T7</b>	The greater the strength of the macro and micro cultural influences on the learner identity ... the greater the strength of the established learner identity
<b>T8</b>	The greater the strength of the macro and micro cultural influences on the learner identity ... the greater the cultural specificity of the learner identity
<b>T9</b>	The greater the the strength of the established learner identity ... the degree of variability between individual's learner identity elements is reduced but still present
<b>T10</b>	The greater the desire for a better future ... the greater the strength of the established learner identity
<b>T11</b>	The greater the desire for a better future ... the greater the likelihood the learner may consider overseas study

***Interactions: a fractured harmony***

<b>T11</b>	The greater the change in learning ecology ... the greater the sense of difference and unfamiliarity
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- T12** The greater the sense of difference and unfamiliarity ... the greater the disequilibrium experienced by the learners
- T13** The greater the disequilibrium experienced by the learners ... the greater the risk of the established learner identity being significantly fractured
- T14** The greater the disequilibrium experienced by the learners ... the greater the initial reliance on elements of the established learner identity
- T15** The greater the cultural specificity of established learner identity elements ... the lesser the validity of the learner identity elements within a different and unfamiliar learning ecology
- T16** The greater the resilience of established learner identity elements ... the greater the validity of the learner identity elements within the new context
- T17** The greater the validity of established learner elements in the new context ... the greater the reliance that may be placed on them
- T18** The lesser the validity of established learner elements in the new context ... the lesser the reliance that may be placed on them
- T19** The greater the disequilibrium experienced by the learners ... the greater the need to make alterations to the established learner identity elements
- T20** The greater the alterations to the established learner identity ... the greater the ability of the learner identity to adapt to the new context
- T21** The greater the disequilibrium experienced by the learners ... the greater the need to accommodate new elements within the learner identity
- T22** The greater the accommodation of new elements to the learner identity ... the greater the ability of the learner identity to adapt to the new context
- T23** The greater the disequilibrium experienced by the learners ... the greater the need to adopt new learning strategies to support the learning
- T24** The greater the disequilibrium experienced by the learners ... the greater the need to draw on prime motivators to sustain the learner identity
- T25** The greater the ability of the learner to adopt new learning strategies and draw on prime motivators ... the greater the resistance of the learner identity against fracturing
- T26** The greater the ability of the learner to draw on new learning strategies and draw on prime motivators ... the greater the ability of the learner identity to adapt to the new context
- T27** The greater the strength of the core category of a better future ... the greater the ability of the learner identity to adapt to the new context

***Consequences: an impacted identity***

- T28** The longer the learner remains open to adaptation in the new context ... the more the learner becomes familiar with the cultural, social, and educational differences

<b>T29</b>	The greater the adaptivity of the established learner identity elements ... the greater the influence the learner has on the learner identity elements
<b>T30</b>	The greater the influence the learner has on a learner identity element ... the greater the likelihood that it may be subject to alteration
<b>T31</b>	The lesser the influence the learner has on a learner identity element ... the greater the likelihood that its role in the learner identity may be diminished
<b>T32</b>	The greater the influence the learner has on a learner identity element ... the greater the likelihood that new elements will be accommodated into the learner identity
<b>T33</b>	The greater the adaptation of the learner identity to the new learning ecology ... the more the learner identity is expanded
<b>T34</b>	The greater the strength of the core category of a better future ... the greater the likelihood that the learner identity may be adaptive
<b>T35</b>	The greater the change in learner identity experienced by the individual learner ... the greater the likelihood that the core category of a better future may be redefined
<b>T36</b>	The lesser the ability of the learner identity to be re-equilibrated in the new context ... the greater the likelihood that the core category of a better future may need to be redefined