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**A study on transformative learning of UK students in
China and Chinese students in the UK**

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**Doctor of Philosophy
The University of Edinburgh
2018**

Abstract

As international education continues to expand, countries providing such opportunities not only benefit but also face challenges. For traditional destinations, including the United States and the United Kingdom, the number of international students has been falling. At the same time emerging economies, such as China, are witnessing a rapid increase in the number of international students enrolled in their universities. China is, therefore, beginning to play an important role in the competitive global market for higher education. This thesis analyses and compares the experiences of international students in the UK and China using Transformative Learning theory. While there is an extensive literature on both international higher education and also Transformative Learning theory there are three important contributions that this thesis makes. First, this research applies the theory to two international student groups: UK students in Chinese universities and Chinese students in UK universities. Second, this study includes a focus on the intercultural learning of Chinese doctoral students in the UK filling a gap in current research. Finally, this investigation has extended the very limited number of current research projects on UK students in China.

It is generally acknowledged that international students will experience various challenges when they are in a culturally different context. Little research has focused on how and why learners are transformed through exposure to their new environment and, also, why sometimes they are not. This study applies Transformative Learning theory to address two research questions: first, do UK international students in Chinese universities and Chinese international students in UK universities experience transformational learning in/during their overseas studies? Second, what factors foster or impede international students' experience of transformative learning? To answer the above questions semi-structured interviews were used to investigate international students' academic and social experiences. Based on the insights provided by Mezirow, Taylor, and previous studies on international students, I argue that international students' intercultural experience is a complex process. Transformation can occur in various ways and social and personal perspectives underpin the transformative learning of the students. Contributing factors include culture shock, educational conventions, the student's motivation, expectations, personality, gender and previous work experience. The results reflect the significance of differences in teaching styles in the UK and China and the impact this can have on the student teaching and learning process when they move to a new university.

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Abstract of Thesis

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| Degree sought: | Doctor of Philosophy | No. of words in the main text of thesis: | 95630 |
| Title of thesis: | A study on transformative learning of UK students in China and Chinese students in the UK | | |

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| Title of thesis: | A study on transformative learning of UK students in China and Chinese students in the UK | | |

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Date last reviewed:
31.05.16

Acknowledgements

My deepest gratitude goes first and foremost to my supervisors Natascha Gentz and Daniel Hammond, for their constant encouragement and guidance. Daniel has walked me through all the stages of the writing of this thesis. Without his consistent and illuminating instruction, this thesis could not have reached its present form. I would like to express my appreciation to Natascha for her wisdom, support and patience.

I would like to thank my parents and both supervisors for their understanding and encouragement during the tough times when I was suffering constantly from illnesses in these four years.

Thanks to all the academic and administrative staff of the universities in both UK and China for providing me with all the information and help, and to all the participants who made my research so enjoyable and fascinating.

Author's Declaration of originality:

I, Yiran Wang, declare that the work presented in the Ph.D. thesis is my own and that it has not been submitted for any other degrees or professional qualification:

Signature:

Printed Name: Yiran Wang

Chapter 1

Introduction and literature review

1.1. Chapter structure

This chapter is organised as follows: Part one first provides some background to this study including global international higher education, UK international higher education and Chinese international higher education. Part two then talks about the importance and the value of my research. Part three defines the key concepts employed in this research. In Part four, the challenges and achievements experienced by international students described in the existing literature are reviewed.

1.2. Background information on international higher education

1.2.1. Global international higher education

There were 712,157 Chinese international students studying abroad in 2014, which is an enormous number for international education providers to deal with (UNESCO, 2016). The impact of large numbers of international students is reflected in various ways in the different host countries. Scholars argue that valuable educational and economic contributions can be made through providing education to international students (Andrade 2006; Huang, 2007; Telbis, et al., 2014). Montgomery (2010) thought that internationalisation should be viewed by education providers as having the benefit of building collaborations with institutions in other countries and of boosting the number of international students hosted, and also that staff and students would benefit through their internationalised perspectives. It is worth noting that, international students also play a role in fostering the relationship between their original countries and host countries. Especially the cooperation between the developing and developed countries (Montgomery, 2010). European countries (including the UK) and China do continue to work constructively on ways in which they can facilitate improvements to policy that positively affect both Chinese students in the UK and European students in China, rather than simply focusing on what has been called irregular immigration of large Chinese groups. 'It is of great interest for both European governments and for China to conduct more comprehensive policy reviews and improvements, which go beyond the current limited focus on Chinese irregular migration' (Shen, 2005 p434). Li and Bray (2007) also noted that,

economic development has become more eminent as a motive for student mobility, whereas cultural exchange has become less of a motivating factor. They further expressed that international student mobility is caused, at least in part, by the fact that economies are becoming interdependent one on another and post-school education is itself becoming more internationalised. Globalisation and internationalisation of education are considered as opportunities in some contexts while considered as threat in others. However, it is generally viewed that in the Chinese context, opportunities are larger than threats. Chinese students are keen to get to know the wider world, to experience its culture and to use these resources available outside of China. Chinese academic institutions are also keen to obtain knowledge from the wider world. International students spend money not only on essential costs like their tuition fees and living costs but also on non-essential items and they can also contribute to the development of other industries, such as tourism (Vickers and Bekhradnia, 2007). It is important that universities advise the appropriate support services offered to international students well so that they can assist with the adjustments required when settling in a new country, so that benefits to education and economies continue.

As international education continues to expand, countries providing international education are being challenged by new trends. For example, the distribution of destinations for international students has started to change in recent years. Notably, the number of international students taking courses in what have traditionally been considered core destinations, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada, has been falling (Choudaha, et al., 2013). Emerging economies, such as China's have experienced a rapid increase in the number of international students enrolled in their universities, and this now plays an important role in the competitive global market in providing international higher education (Yang, 2011). Bhandari and Blumenthal (2011) pointed out that 'international students are not only choosing non-traditional destinations but are also pursuing non-traditional forms of learning' (p10). It is worth noting that destination choice for international students has changed because of many related factors, which have not yet been fully investigated. This means that research on international student experience is more important than ever. A range of policies and measures have been implemented by universities for the purpose of attracting international students from all across the world; these have focused on increasing awareness within higher education establishments of the importance of developing good quality local higher education to increase international recognition.

Both traditional and new education providers, such as China and South Africa, face the core issue of providing a satisfactory service to the students (Bhandari and Blumenthal, 2011). Altbach (2013) pointed out increasing inequality of provision across world-wide higher education. Staffing levels and the quality of institutions facilities in many cases have not developed and prepared well enough to keep up with the on-going expansion of international students. In most countries, the academic profession has realised the reality that many academics are working second jobs to boost income. 'If the academic profession does not maintain adequate income levels, academic performance throughout the system inevitably suffers' (Altbach, 2013, p73). More pervasive, a lot of attention has been paid to students' experiences overseas. One strand of literature concerns educators awareness of the global implications for intercultural education gained through understanding international student issues related to adaptations to new educational contexts and unfamiliar socioculture (Andrade, 2006; Morrison et al., 2005). Shen (2005) declared that the Chinese workforce requires a large number of highly educated talented individuals to facilitate China's rapid economic growth. For other countries, the situation is similar. In an attempt to solve problems, such as low numbers of university-age young people and low degree completion rates, one challenge faced by the rich world is to try and retain the international students in the host country to boost the work force after they have successfully completed their degrees. At the same time, developing and emerging countries would then face the danger of 'brain drain'. It has been found that rates of international students who return home are modestly increasing world-wide as the economic situation in developing countries improves (Altbach, 2013).

1.2.2. UK international higher education

The long history of the UK's academic reputation and excellent universities, combined with the growing global use of the English language, made UK's institutions popular from the beginning of this process of enrolling international students. Tony Blair's Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI) in 1999 (followed by a second stage in 2006) had the aim of increasing the number of Chinese students in the UK and to foster cooperation between Chinese and UK educational and research institutions, which accelerated the flow of international students that continues to the present day. Shen (2005, p430) noted that 'with its advantages of language, academic reputation and history, the United Kingdom benchmarked its excellence in learning in PR China from the very beginning' when the first ever Chinese students came to study in UK. In order to maintain competitiveness in attracting international students, the UK under the Prime Minister's Initiative launched a series of changes with the aim of improving the

immigration procedures. Updated legislation was implemented in the following years with two main aims: to make the UK a more attractive education destination for overseas students and to retain the international elite students in the UK after finishing their degrees (Shen, 2005). Although Shen's account is out of date, it is still historically important. This was all part of New Labour's PMI, which included Fresh Talent in Scotland and high availability of postgraduate degree visas across the whole of the UK. However, when the conservatives came to power in 2010 they made changes to policies such as these, although they still claimed to want students to come to study in the UK. While recent governments have changed immigration rules for post degree visas, the number of Chinese students in the UK continues to grow, and highly qualified Chinese people do work in the UK.

At present, the UK is the second leading country providing international education behind the US; the UK government has sponsored initiatives to attract more international students, reported by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2016). Chinese international students form the largest group in international education worldwide (Henze & Zhu, 2012). The majority of international students that study for a British qualification originate from Asia and especially from China, and the UK is now in fourth place for Chinese international students' choice of destination for studying abroad (UNESCO). Data from UNESCO shows that 81,776 students from China studied in the UK in 2013, a statistic which demands attention from UK higher education institutions. Even though the traditional international higher education providers such as the US, the UK and Australia are still attractive to Chinese international students, Japan has been ranked in second place for Chinese students as their destination of choice (Gao, 2011). Not only is the number of international students large, but also, they are operating in an increasingly competitive and complex market. The issues of how to be attractive when recruiting international students and how to satisfy their demands have become a key focus for both the UK government and UK universities.

1.2.3. Chinese international higher education

In the six decades since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, there have been significant developments in the number of international students coming to China. According to UNESCO, China was ranked in 2016 as a top 10 destination host for tertiary-level mobile students. In the academic year 2009-10, Chinese universities received 238,184 international students from 190 countries and regions, and these students were distributed

between 619 higher education institutions (Gao, 2011). 93,450 degree students accounted for 39.2%, and the non-degree students 144,734, representing 60.8%. Among the total number of international students, 67.8% of them were from Asian countries, followed by European (15.1%) and then American (10.7%) (Gao, 2011, p406).

China has made impressive efforts in academic improvement. In building world-class universities that are attractive to the best professors and students, China has injected massive resources, provided funding and other types of support. At the same time, mergers between different facilities have taken place to establish institutions with a very high standard to ‘create an academic environment that rewards productivity’ (Altbach, 2013, p144). Asian countries face historical challenges relating to impediments and implementation of students and staff due to reasons, such as tradition. For example, it has been noted that in Asia, relationships are focused on ‘personal connections and networks – the Chinese call this *guanxi* – which still influences many aspects of academic life, from the admission of students to the promotion of professors and the allocation of research funds’ (Altbach, 2013, p145). It has been reported that, to some extent, the teaching and research in many Asian universities adopts quite traditional methods with little interaction between teachers and students that have been criticised for impeding long-lasting learning and individual’s independent thinking.

Compared to the UK, China is still in the early stages of developing its international education provision. Even though it has been recorded that China hosts international students coming from 189 countries and regions, most international students come from neighbouring countries such as Korea, Japan, and Thailand (Yang, 2011). Although China was seen as one of the most popular destinations for American students, who are ranked in second place by the number of international students, most of the US international students in Chinese universities are pursuing non-degree courses such as language courses of short duration (Yang, 2011). Doctoral candidates comprise only 5.83% of the whole international student population in China (Statistics of International Students in China, 2012). Altbach (2013) noted that China, even ‘with both large and increasingly sophisticated academic systems, find themselves at a significant disadvantage in the global academic marketplace’ (p10).

China has made great efforts and has been successful in building world-class universities and recruiting first-class scholars and students. With a dozen of these institutions already built, China can be competitive with the best universities globally, ‘for talent and prestige’ (Altbach, 2013, p154). Certain Chinese higher education institutions are now recognised as being of

world-class standard, for example the disciplines of Material Science and Chemistry at Tsinghua University and Peking University respectively. The Ministry of Education of China has signed 34 agreements with other countries on mutual recognition of academic degrees. These countries include the UK, Australia, and New Zealand, among others (Yang, 2011). Chinese postgraduates' good performance in their studies during their study abroad has also added to the credibility of Chinese higher education (Yang, 2011).

1.3. Research value and research questions

Based on previous literature, I found that the difficulties that international students have faced in both their academic and social lives are central issues that have received a great deal of attention from previous researchers; at the same time, recent research has put more focus on the positive influences that international students have experienced during their overseas studies. However, there is still a need to focus on how they are actually affected by studying abroad. The discussion of international students' personal, social and individual purposes in pursuing overseas study has at times been overshadowed because institutions treat incoming students as money making resources (Montgomery, 2010). Existing literature indicates that international students experience personal changes after exposure to a new environment (Gu & Maley, 2008), such as thinking of study and work with new perspectives. Murphy-Lejeune (2003) also argued that living in a foreign place creates a new stage in developing different aspects of an individual's personality compared to when they had close relationships of family and friends in their home setting. Whether students become aware of it or not, the strange environment places the individual into a situation where some changes are necessary to adapt to the new culture and life.

Scholars have noted that the intercultural experience of international students can be transformational where learners undergo personal growth and development, even although it is accompanied by considerable shock and personal challenges (Anderson, 1994; Furnham, 2004). Whether and how international students can experience a transformative learning process is the central research theme in this thesis. Previous studies on Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) have concentrated on various aspects of groups of participants and very limited attention has been paid to international students. For example. Kumi-Yeboah (2014) demonstrated that individual transformations could be triggered by being placed in a new environment and that there are other factors that can contribute to whether transformative learning has happened. In this thesis, both UK and Chinese international students' academic

and social lives will be investigated to see if individuals experienced a transformative learning process; in addition, the factors that contribute to these result will be analysed. Very little published work has focused on international students' transformative intercultural experience with respect to both social and academic aspects, especially research on Chinese and UK international students. There are even fewer that focus solely on UK students. There is a paucity of research that addresses factors that either impede or foster changes and/or transformations in international students' changes in their host countries. Students' transformative learning is important because educators can then determine what international students have learned from their education providers, and how students' viewed their overseas experiences. It is important to evaluate the effectiveness and achievements of these international students' both academically and also with respect to their lives in an intercultural context.

Chinese international students are a large group that have received considerable attention from researchers in their host countries; researchers have been interested in the challenges they face and how they adapt to these challenges. However, to date, little research has touched on their transformative learning. Few reports have been focused on Chinese Ph.D. students enrolled in UK higher education institutions, who constitute a group that has greatly increased in number over recent years. In comparison, when reviewing previous research, very little research conducted on the experiences of Western international students in China was found and those limited studies are satisfaction-related quantitative studies. For example, in a recent quantitative study conducted by Wan (2009), only 42.7% of a sample of international students studying in China that were surveyed considered themselves to be very satisfied with the academic teaching they had received. This study also discovered that less than 20% of survey participants were fully satisfied with non-academic aspects of student life, such as university provided entertainment, accommodation and medical facilities. Moreover, only 10% of participants were content regarding the extracurricular activities that were provided (p111). This current study uses a qualitative, rather than quantitative, research method because it is very useful for providing 'great insights into human society' (Walliman and Buckler, 2008, p149). The aim of this study is to, using the qualitative research interviews, explore and explain why international students have different experiences from each other and also to, if possible, gain a deeper understanding of how these students view their own transformations. Qualitative research is viewed as an essential method for uncovering deep levels of human behaviour and changes in thinking that are particularly essential for research on international students in Chinese universities and Chinese students in UK universities.

This research is an attempt to fill some important research gaps by examining the importance of international students' transformations during their intercultural experiences in their host country by conducting interviews with both UK and Chinese international students studying in China and the UK, respectively. In doing so, I hope to uncover the process undergone by the students in their overseas studies and in their social lives with fellow students. Through an exploration of international student perceptions of their well-being, the focus will be on how students view the differences and challenges they have faced in both academic and social lives, and in turn, how and why their thoughts and behaviours were affected by being abroad.

To achieve these aims, the research revolves around two research questions:

1. Do UK international students in Chinese universities and Chinese international students in UK universities experience transformational learning through their overseas studies?
2. What factors foster or impede transformative learning in international students whilst abroad?

1.4. Definition of key concepts

1.4.1. International students

This current study explores two groups of international students (UK and Chinese), and the term of international student in the current study context is defined as an individual enrolled in a higher institution who holds a temporary student visa with an educational purpose, has crossed national borders and is a non-native speaker of the official language in their host country.

1.4.2. Intercultural transitional and transformational experience

International students' experiences of being exposed to a culturally different country was seen as 'a significant transitional event that brings with it a considerable amount of accompanying stress, involving both confrontation and adaptation to unfamiliar physical and psychological experiences and changes' (Cushner & Karim, 2004, p292). Scholars have argued that the individual has to adopt new ways of living in order to adjust to a new cultural environment;

some changes have to be made in order to adapt more effectively (Gu & Maley, 2008; Murphy-Lejeune, 2003).

In this study, I consider that students' behaviours can be changed actively or passively due to their status as international students who will in all probability have a different academic and social background from that in the hosting country. For example, students in UK universities are usually encouraged to speak out during classes, which is not the case in Chinese universities. Therefore, when Chinese international students are in the unfamiliar context of their host institution, they are expected and required to involve themselves in group discussion during the teaching and learning process. Whether Chinese international students would recognise the utility of unfamiliar activities, such as group discussion during class, likely varies from student to student. If the students are forced to engage in group discussion without understanding the reasons for it, the changes in their behaviour will be likely to be temporary and will be abandoned as soon as they finish their courses. On the other hand, if the students have a comprehensive understanding of the benefits of sharing ideas with their peers, and they recognise that group discussion is a way to develop communication skills and brainstorming, they would appreciate this kind of activity and be more likely to actively involve themselves in other group discussions. The changes in attitudes and behaviours toward such a practice will not be limited only to their overseas academic process, but rather, there is the possibility that students may apply newly learned techniques and practice them in their future careers. For such reasons, this study will consider transformative learning in international students as changes that may have an impact on attitudes and behaviours in current and future activities with regard to both academic and social life.

Scholars have claimed that not every individual student will undergo a transformative learning process and that there is not only one type of transformation (Mezirow, 2000; Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009). Facing a new context, Anderson (1994) indicated that some individuals may refuse to adapt themselves to the new culture. However, if someone undergoes the process of adjusting to a new culture, 'the string of adjustments accomplished can produce marked changes in the sojourner, which can lead to a significant outcome. The cultural sojourn is a voyage that can end in the resocialization of the sojourner' (Anderson, 1994, p320). Mezirow (2000) claimed that there is 'a continuum for learning that moves from the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, to elaborating on existing knowledge, to revising meaning schemes, and to transforming habits of mind... the first kinds of knowledge are seen not to be transformative and the second two to be transformative' (cited in Cranton & Kasl, 2012, p394). The research

conducted by Schweisfurth and Gu (2009) on international undergraduate students identified at least two types of transitions: one is related to an individual's human development and his or her own maturation; and the other is 'intercultural, as they interact within a different educational environment and a different culture and society' (p471). Gu et al. (2010) argued that international students may experience both transitional and transformational experiences during their intercultural experience. This present study will consider the probability that an individual student's transformative learning is not constituted by a single incident. International students' original cognitive mindsets will likely still play an essential role in shaping new experiences in host countries. At the same time, a person's personal development and maturation can be acquired through challenges faced in new culturally different environment, the knowledge and skills they have obtained, and through other individual factors. These factors are interrelated and cannot easily be separated.

1.5. The challenges and achievements experienced by international students

Researchers have previously claimed that dissonance will be created when a person relocates from their home environment to a culturally different environment (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). The difficulties and requirements challenging international students in their adjustment in the host context are multi-faceted, and include 'cognitive, behavioural, emotional, social, and physiological levels' (Befus et al., 1986 and Searle & Ward, 1990 cited in Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004, p168), and can consequently bring about mental health-problems (e.g. psychiatric disorders) (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011), problems related to ethnic/local food, weather, and the living environment in the host country (Bochner, 1977, Tseng & Newton, 2002), financial worries (Barron et al., 2007; Telbis, et al., 2014), learning obstacles (Gu, et al. 2009; Telbis, et al., 2014) and adjustment difficulties with regard to psychological or sociocultural areas (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Ward & Kennedy, 1993).

It is indicated by previous research that international students' non-citizen status and having to face cultural differences, information asymmetry and difficulties in communication, may result in students being in vulnerable and uncertain positions where they feel challenged in their academic studies and isolated in social areas (Marginson, 2012). Although international students' social interactions include activities both on- and off-campus, this study is limited to their social interaction with other students and their teachers. The challenges and difficulties they face will be considered as potential factors that contribute to potential transformative

learning. In the following subsection there is discussion of literature on the general theme of international students, including aspects such as culture shock, cultural distance, non-cultural issues (individual variables and situational variables), different expectations, social contact with others, the host country's society and attitudes, Ph.D. students, international students' adjustment and transformative learning, and Chinese international students' development..

1.5.1. Culture shock

One of the most popular areas in which previous research on the reasons contributing to the academic and social maladjustment of international students has focused is culture shock. However, different arguments have been raised in the consideration of whether culture shock fosters or impedes individual adjustment in the new environment, and this will be discussed below.

In early research, culture shock was mostly explained as an obstacle in an individual's experience in a culturally different country. According to this view, once an individual engages in a strange environment, disorientation and helplessness may emerge (Sue, 1981 cited in Dao, et al., 2007). Rastall (2006) observed that, during transitions between educational systems, different underlying philosophies were presented as culture shock. Culture shock can contribute to an international student's academic challenges, which are defined by scholars in different ways, for example, 'academic shock' (Sovič, 2007, p2), and 'learning shock' (Gu & Maley, 2008, p230), which was based on the consideration that not only do international students have problems in a new academic environment, but that their student peers from the host country would have similar difficulties during the transition to the new degree study.

In recent years, however, culture shock has become increasingly thought of as a potential trigger for personal development. In other words, rather than considering international travellers (including international students) as victims of pathology, they can instead be seen as active agents from viewpoints based on wide theories of social, psychological and educational perspectives (Zhou, et al., 2008). Montuori and Fahim (2004) identified that culture shock is an important trigger in enabling people to become effective and competent, stimulated by 'accumulated breakdown in precisely those things we must take for granted – sometimes little, insignificant things, like how to ride a bus' (p259).

Increasingly, ideas such as 'adaptation' and 'acculturation' have replaced the term 'cultural

shock’ showing that the concept ‘has been transformed into contact-induced stress accompanied by skill deficits that can be managed and ameliorated’ (Zhou, et al. 2008, p65). Rather than holding the stereotypical view of culture shock as a factor contributing to international students’ overseas experience, in this study, it will be viewed from a neutral position to discover the role of culture in students learning and overseas experience, given the possibility that the topic of culture would be raised by participants during the interviews.

1.5.2. Cultural distance

Cultural distance was discussed by scholars when analysing adaptation of different groups of international students. Several studies have shown that the degree of difficulty in adjusting to the new environment is determined by the cultural distance between an international student’s home country and the host country (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Church, 1982; Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Ward & Searle, 1991; Zhou, et al., 2008). Leong and Ward (2000) referred to cultural distance as ‘the subjective perception of differences between the home and host cultures’ (p766). Scholars have argued that international students’ behaviours and performances will be influenced by different cultural conceptions (Zhou & Todman, 2009). Church (1982) concluded that the greater the cultural distance between countries, the more socially unskilled international students will be in the host countries, and the more social difficulties they will encounter in their cross-cultural interactions, a view which was also supported later (Ward & Searle, 1991; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Ward and Kennedy (1993) claimed that ‘on the group level, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic similarity may facilitate reliance on the host culture as the primary environment for social interaction’ (p243). They found that compared to Malaysian international students in Singapore, Malaysian and Singaporean students in New Zealand were more likely to experience obstacles and less able to integrate into the new environment. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that these findings are fairly old and in the present day the volume of international students is much greater. This could mean that these findings may need to be updated to account for factors, such as (i) the greater volume of students, which likely means that international students meet many other students from their own country whilst abroad, (ii) technology that can allow students to obtain a comprehensive overview of the new culture prior to travel, and (iii) technology allowing frequent contact with friends and family from home whilst abroad.

Based on the literature, the international student is more likely to experience stress in his or her adjustment if there is a greater difference between the host country and their original

country. One reason for a large difference is related to the concept of power distance. China is a very good example of a high power distance culture, which means that natives view the power of authorities as natural part of society. This has the effect that the host country 'teacher is seen as the purveyor of all knowledge: an unquestionable authority figure' by Chinese international students (Bailey, 2006, no page number). One hypothesis of my study is that international students who originally come from a country with a high power distance culture are more likely to have difficulties when adjusting to a more autonomous learning environment. Students in UK educational systems are largely expected to teach themselves from the materials and tasks to which they are exposed or to learn from student peers rather than rely on teachers. Consequently, students from a higher power distance background may perceive that teachers in UK institutions are unavailable and not supportive. Accordingly, this study predicts that international student's transformations would be more likely to happen because of the great differences between UK and China with historical and cultural differences, and that these transformations will be associated with international students' academic and social adjustment, specifically. Even although there has been limited research on UK international students in Chinese higher education institutions, this study predicts the difficulties the UK participants would experience as international students in China with regard to the educational systems and living and social customs.

1.5.3. Collectivist vs. Individualist

The concepts of Collectivism and Individualism are considered as a root contribution to cultural difference between Western and Asian countries, and has been a popular discussion topic for several decades (e.g. Telbis et al., 2014). Scholars previously defined the differences between these two terminologies based on geographic regions and nations. For example, Ho et al., (2004) argued that collectivist and individualist cultures are divided by geographical groupings with East and South Asians and Latin Americans, for example, belonging to the former group, while Western European countries and New Zealanders, for example, belong to the latter group. The participants in this study were selected from UK and China: The UK belongs to the individualist group and China to the collectivist group. Therefore, it is worth considering whether the concepts of Collectivism and Individualism are applicable in this study as the cultural background. The findings of this study will be discussed to see if they echo this division.

Ho et al. (2004) noted that an individual's behaviour can be categorised according to the

binaries of collectivism and individualism. They also suggested that cultural values could be a driving influence in students' learning approaches. In Asian countries with collectivism type cultures, Chinese learners' attitudes towards study may be affected by family and family hierarchies. (Jin, 1992). For example, in Chinese culture, family hierarchies can be revealed in family education and the relationships between parents and their children. Chinese students have been taught by their parents to be obedient and filial. Therefore, Chinese learners have to meet their parents' high expectation regarding their educational achievement, otherwise, they might be labelled as *Bu Xiao* which has a similar meaning to Black Sheep in the UK. According to Jin, Chinese learners are brought up to have a responsibility to show respect and meet the expectations of their family through hard work and achievements. Ho et al. demonstrated that students from collectivist cultures hold the view that there has to be cooperation with and support for educators and that confrontation should be avoided in class. In contrast, students with an individualist cultural background would not have strong feelings about or consciousness of 'face'; saving one's face would be of less concern than providing correct information. Jin (1992) also stated that fear of losing face to the family (or even losing face as a representative of China) acts as pressure to push students to academic success. Chinese put great value on the 'face' which represents social reputation (Hwang & Han, 2010). The emphasis on harmony advocated by Confucian thought has led students to establish and maintain good relationships with student peers, colleagues and especially with academic staff. Students prefer to repress their individual thoughts when they are different from those of the group. On the other hand, there is strong encouragement for and value placed on individual thinking and expression in Western academic practice (Jin, 1992).

Triandis (1994) stated that an individualistic group's core values 'are autonomy, competitiveness, self-sufficiency, and achievement'. In contrast, a harmonious relationship and group solidarity are valued by collectivists who have the willingness to sacrifice 'personal interests and goals for those of the group' (cited in Singh-Manoux & Finkenauer, 2001, p648-649). Turner (2006) argued that for international students from collective countries, the biggest problem in the academic area is the transition from a very structured teaching-learning environment to a much less structured one (Turner, 2006). Data from Chinese participants that were enrolled on taught Master's degree courses from Turner's (2006) study supported the differences between the UK and China in terms of the controversial themes of student-centred versus teacher-centred, and discovery-based procedural versus propositional learning. According to Hofstede (1986, cited in Gu & Maley, 2008), 'in collective societies (such as China) students are expected to learn 'how to do' in contrast to individualist societies (such as

UK), in which students are expected to learn ‘how to learn’ (p230). Kingston and Forland (2008) warned against research based on stereotypical assumptions about students’ native culture after analysing the studies of Chinese students in the UK that draw on theories of Confucian-heritage culture that may be out of date in modern China. Nowadays, both the government and academic institutions are aware of the need to reform Chinese education system to cultivate talent to meet the needs of rapid development economy. The aim of teaching has been reformed in recent developments in Chinese higher education to ‘teach the students to study by themselves’ (Ouyang, 2004).

Cultural stereotyping was questioned by Stephens (1997): her research on Chinese students’ attitudes towards academic study shows that attitudes were diverse. These findings are aligned with the perception about culture as a controversial issue that may affect international students’ academic achievement in a foreign country. She claimed that it is important to consider Chinese culture under its historical context with historical description and reference. Intercultural communication should be interpreted towards language proficiency related aspects instead of considered as cultural differences.

Montgomery (2010) argued that there are other factors that remain overlooked when links are made between students’ classroom behaviour and geographical groups, including ‘family backgrounds, age, ethnic diversity within countries or cultures, individual preferences and the influence of different learning environments’ (p30). Montgomery (2010) claimed that an individual learner’s personal learning ‘culture’ could be made up based on a variety of factors; therefore, even students from the same city with the same nationality might have different responses in the same classroom. In this study, I am interested in finding out individual differences in transformative learning. Based on the above discussion we can see that students from cultures with attributes of collectivism may present different features than those from cultures with individualism attributes. These features are affected by traditional philosophies and teaching conventions from the students’ home countries. Their previous experiences are very likely important factors that may contribute to their new learning and living in the host country (as suggested in transformative learning theory), however, individual variables also need to be given attention. Therefore, rather than considering these stereotypical assumptions of collectivism and individualism as preconceptions, the study will focus on broader perspectives on both situational and individual variables that foster or inhibit international students learning experiences.

1.5.4. Non-cultural issues

Some scholars have suggested that issues international students experience in academic areas are not always related to culture (Gieve & Clark, 2005; Gu & Maley, 2008; Kingston & Forland, 2008). Kingston and Forland's (2008) study that inspected students' grades in a UK university found that, from 2003 to 2005, East Asian students achieved a better degree than their UK counterparts. In contrast to how Western educators view Asian international students, it was found that Asian students recognised that the development of critical thinking skills and feedback on writing skills was important to their learning (Andrade, 2006). This would be ironic, especially since popular views of East Asian students as passive, obedient and lacking in autonomy represent a failure to understand the intricacies of the Confucian tradition (Andrade, 2006). Gieve and Clark (2005) and Gu and Maley (2008) also suggested that it is necessary to change the view that international students' learning problems are specifically culture related, because the problem is not always a cultural issue. Rather, more attention needs to be paid to individual factors and situational factors (Gieve & Clark, 2005). Gieve and Clark (2005) further claimed that in certain circumstances, attitudes to learning that are thought to emanate from cultural factors are often much less rigid than had been previously thought. I take the view that each individual student has his or her unique previous experience in both academic and social life, and as such, they should not be labelled simply by their country of origin or culture. Furthermore, scholars have recognised that the attitudes of the current generation of East Asian learners are becoming increasingly similar to those of their Western counterparts (Shi, 2004 cited in Kingston & Forland, 2008). Similarly, Rastall's (2006) study presented evidence that Chinese international students neither held strong Confucian values nor were they unduly concerned by the idea of face, which has long been considered as important in traditional Chinese culture. The Chinese students he studied expressed their lack of confidence in interacting with groups, but this was not because of a culture. He further indicated that Chinese learners can adapt to Western learning styles even though it seems that they hold different perceptions of learning when they first entered their host country. Montgomery (2010) noted that prejudice promoted by the misleading notion of viewing a whole nation as one culture would cause inequality.

Progression from old to new stages of learning, for example, school to university or undergraduate to graduate, can be universal challenges and difficulties relating to this need not necessarily be related to culture. Goode (2007) suggested that it is worth noting that the process of maladjustment into a higher level of education 'is not applied exclusively to international students: 'independent/good' and 'dependent/not-so-good' categories may contain both home

and international students. But there is a hint, nevertheless, that international students are seen as less likely to be in the former category' (p594-595). Therefore, to improve the teaching and learning experience for all students, including international students, assumptions about students' prior experiences, and cultural stereotypes (Ballard & Clanchy, 1997) need to be disregarded (Warwick & Moogan, 2013). Diversified internal and external factors are not related to culture (Gieve & Clark, 2005). Overseas experience varies considerably from one individual to the next. This variation may be due to factors within each individual's biographical, affective and cognitive variables and circumstantial variables, in addition to the effects of individual factors such as the learner's language, motivation and attitudes (Coleman, 2004 cited in Gu & Maley, 2008). The following section discusses how individual factors can affect international students' intercultural experiences.

1.5.4.1. Individual variables

In addition to considerations of cultural related variables and different academic transitions as discussed above with respect to effects on transformational learning, individual variables also require consideration. Research has shown that various individual factors exert influence on international students' intercultural adaptations, including age, gender, geographical aspects, language proficiency and skills, their field or discipline of study, study habits, length of stay in the host country, coping strategies, acculturation style, (prior) educational background, previous work experience, previous experiences of other cultures, previous exposure to international context, and supervisor styles (Andrade, 2006; Berry, 1997; Goode, 2007; Montgomery, 2010; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Turner, 2006; Yan & Berliner, 2011). For example, in Berry's (1997) stress-coping framework, he suggested that when dealing with issues in cross-cultural circumstances, both stress and coping strategies adopted by an individual are determined by his or her own characteristics and the society or situation (cited in Yan & Berliner, 2011). Turner (2006) also suggested that a variety of 'factors together combined to enable a more open response to their new context and an enhanced reflective ability from both Chinese and UK perspectives – embracing an implicitly reflexive, pluralistic position' (p39-40). Accordingly, this study speculates that based on individual characteristics, international students would have different levels of adjustment and transformative learning experiences in both academic and social interactions with other students. In the next section, the importance of the individual student's overseas experience, their adaptability and language competency will be discussed.

1.5.4.1.1. Limited overseas experiences

One important individual variable is overseas experience. Scholars have previously reported that when students with limited overseas experience are exposed to a new and strange country, they will be challenged by the host culture. Curtis and Lu (2004) argued that limited overseas experience imposes restrictions on most individuals who do not realise that their culture is not universal and consequently, cannot be understood or accepted by people from other cultural backgrounds. Yan and Berliner's (2011) research revealed that Chinese students were less stressed in the US if they had previous international exposure and were more likely to have realistic expectations in terms of life in the US. Similarly, both the research conducted by Cui and Awa (1992) and Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004) speculated that previous cross-cultural experience would facilitate the process of cultural learning, ultimately decreasing the degree of culture shock. However, their results showed that previous overseas experience did not have any significant influence on cross-cultural adjustment. Based on both the documented literature and the theoretical framework, this study will investigate whether an international student's previous overseas experiences can influence their transformative learning. I predict that this can have a positive influence, due to the intercultural knowledge and skills already gained from their prior experience with different education conventions and from social life experiences.

1.5.4.1.2. Individual adaptability

The importance of an individual's adaptability in a new and culturally different environment was reported by researchers (e.g. Gu & Maley, 2008). Proponents of the cognitive approach to culture shock postulated that cross-cultural adjustment depends upon an individual's ability to make correct attributions about the cultural values, beliefs, behaviours, and norms of the new society (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Telbis, et al., 2014). Furnham and Bochner (1986) contended that sociocultural adjustment should cover various abilities such as 'greetings, leave taking, and self-disclosure, making or refusing requests, and asserting themselves' (p14-15). Cui and Awa (1992) also contended that 'traits such as patience, tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty, and flexibility' had a vital influence on international students' effective adjustment and performance (p314). They further claimed that 'flexibility and resourcefulness seem to be the distinguishing features of well-adjusted individuals. Flexible persons tend to be able to find alternative solutions to their problems' (Cui & Awa, 1992, p314). In a study of Chinese students in a UK university, Turner (2006) suggested that the minority of participants who

reported having ‘the highest degree of personal emancipation and independence’ were more likely to experience ‘both the highest levels of understanding of the UK system (and academic success)’ during the year in the host country (p39). According to Furnham and Bochner (1982 cited in Chadelaine and Alexitch, 2004), international students in a new environment who are unaware of local culture-specific social rules will struggle; their ineffective interactions with their hosts will hinder adaptation and further personal development. Yan and Berliner (2011) supported this, saying ‘culture-specific knowledge and social skills provide the foundation for effective intercultural interactions; they facilitate psychological adaptation to a new sociocultural environment’ (p532). Therefore, insufficient socio-cultural knowledge can be seen as a factor hindering international students’ adjustment and achievement, as was reported by Andrade (2006).

1.5.4.1.3. Language competency

Language issues are important elements in international students’ academic and social lives and as such, are important aspects of this thesis. Researchers have raised concerns about the English abilities of international learners as an obstacle when studying abroad. A number of studies have suggested that there is a certain association between international students’ adjustment and performance with their language competency (Andrade, 2006; Cui & Awa 1992; Gu & Maley, 2008; Kathryn & Rosalind, 2007; Rastall, 2006; Sovič, 2007; Tseng & Newton, 2002; Yan & Berliner, 2011; Telbis, et al., 2014). Le and Gardner (2010) indicated that the issues of language would affect international students in both social and academic aspects. Gu and Maley (2008) also stated that learners suffer psychological, cognitive and affective struggles which primarily result not only from a lack of familiarity with traditional teaching and learning but also with learners’ insufficient language capacity.

Valimaa (1998) provided an example in her study in describing ‘the case of a Ph.D. supervisor who claimed to have read fifteen drafts of a student paper before it was ‘anywhere near satisfactory’ (cited in Edwards and Ran, 2006, no page number). Edwards and Ran (2006) argued that students tested by IELTS (International English Language Testing System), which is the most commonly applied test of English competence in the UK, ‘are not necessarily equipped to deal with the academic demands of their course, and one of the issues which engaged participants was the usefulness – or otherwise – of standardized tests’ (Edwards and Ran, 2006, no page number).

1.5.4.2. Situational variables

In addition to individual variables, which have been discussed above, situational variables that may affect international students' adaptation in their new academic and social lives have been considered by scholars from diverse perspectives (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Zhou, et al. 2008). Verthelyi (1995) defined the situational variables, include 'physical, social, and political', which will be considered in this study. The idea that there are some Asian student characteristics (at least, within Chinese education) was put forward by some Western scholars (Curtis & Lu, 2004; Hui, 2005; Turner, 2006), which include insufficient critical thinking (which is required in UK universities) (Huang, 2007), too much dependence on teachers and different learning styles and methods (Liu & McLaren, 2009; Rastall, 2006) that prevents Chinese students from achieving more academically (Liu & McLaren, 2009). This section will only present some examples with regard to the core elements that have a closer relationship with my study. Scholars have previously explained that whether there is classroom interaction and whether the teachers would offer students a chance to ask questions depends on practical constraints under specific circumstances including, for instance, the size of the class (Edwards & Ran, 2006; Todd, 1997). Nichols (2003) noted that for some students who were not accustomed to thinking analytically or critically, this may not have been because they were incapable of doing it, but rather that problems may be due to specific circumstances, such as large class size. Students under such circumstances were not confident enough to participate in classroom activities such as group discussion (Nichols, 2003 cited in Bailey, 2006). However, it has been found that dependence on staff is not specific only to Chinese international students or students from Asian countries, but that all international students face similar issues. Research conducted by Bartram (2007) on international students (including UK participants) reported that all interviewed respondents prioritised the need for receiving support from staff when developing and sustaining social networks.

Variables relating to family and marital status in the host country that may affect international students' adjustment have also been considered. Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004) found that international learners were less likely to communicate with people from the host country when they brought family members abroad with them. As a consequence, they would suffer more social difficulty and less intercultural communication. A social situation has been noted by Spurling (2006) that Chinese students were marginalised or isolated by their UK counterparts; that is, their UK counterparts did not include them in social events or interact socially with

them. A combination of factors contributed to this situation, including the context created by the university and the way in which the students interpreted this context.

There is also some evidence that sociocultural adaptation is easier for people travelling from less developed countries to modern or developed countries, rather than vice-versa (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). In the current study, I predict that Chinese international students are more likely to have a better adaptation in the intercultural context in the UK compared to UK international students in China. The first possible explanation for this may be that the UK context provides a multicultural environment for international students, where Chinese participants are likely to be treated as equally as other foreigners from around the world. Secondly, Chinese students appeared to encounter fewer sociocultural difficulties than UK international students due to the presence of a large number of Chinese co-nationals with whom they spend most of their time (Yamazaki, 2005). Chinese international students could obtain practical and psychological support from the co-national peer students, which is helpful in the beginning of their studies. In comparison, for UK international students in China, although UK students may be open to a new environment due to having originated from a multicultural and multinational country, they may experience more adjustment difficulties due to the early stage of development of Chinese higher education and China's monocultural context. Ward and Kennedy (1999) suggested that an individual's cultural awareness could be promoted by their original background when exposed to a new culturally different country, and this lends weight to my speculation regarding UK international students.

1.5.5. Different expectations of teachers and international students

The different expectations of roles and relationships between educators and students will likely have a negative effect on the satisfaction and achievements of international students during their overseas studies. The transition to a Western education system presents serious difficulty for international students, especially Asian students (Turner, 2006). Individual student expectation were seen previously by scholars as an important factor contributing to the learner's risk of academic failure (Golde, 2005; McLaren, 2009). Hofstede (1986) indicated that there are 'different expectations on teachers and students in different power distance societies, which suggests the consequences and important impact of cultures in the formation of teaching and learning cultures' (cited in Gu & Maley, 2008, p230). Yan and Berliner (2011) argued that levels of depression were related to the discrepancies between international students' expectations and experiences. Han (2005) considered that different educational

philosophies or education schemas are closely associated with expectations between teachers and students, which in turn influence communication between teachers and students, and consequently have an impact on the adaptation and achievement of international students. The different academic standards between international students' own countries and the host country leads to academic stresses and shock during their overseas studies (Huang, 2007; Gu & Maley, 2008). Based on their research conducted in Australia, Richardson and Hurworth (2007) claimed that the expectations held by international students were determined by their preparation and the information they had received before coming to the host country, which in turn had an impact on the degree of difficulty experienced by international students during their adjustment to the new environment. Given the great geographical distance between UK and China, and the very different historical and cultural backgrounds, it is not surprising that there might be differences in education styles between these two education systems, as is reflected in much of the literature. For example, as discussed by Rastall (2006), Chinese students have 'high (and, perhaps, unattainable) expectations' towards their experience in Western higher institutions and value this experience as important to their future careers and studies. For Western students in China, however, Dai (2013) demonstrated that, apart from learning knowledge and skills, they would prefer to make friends with Chinese people in order to experience the Chinese way of life. In this current study, I predict that international students' expectations will play an essential role in their potential transformative learning. An individual student's expectation and the differences between expectations of academic staff and those of international students may influence students' potential transformations.

The differences between UK and Chinese students' assumptions of teachers and students' roles have been previously noted (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997, Turner, 2006). Another cultural phenomenon, namely, the high respect paid to educators in China, was also raised during this cultural conceptualisation (Hui, 2005). Hui (2005) claimed that 'emphasis on moral education both in traditional and contemporary Chinese education gives rise to the Chinese cultural conceptualisation that Chinese teachers are indispensable moral cultivators and models in the process of transmitting knowledge' (p24). Curtis and Lu (2004) claimed that Confucianism is an authoritarian system that emphasises values which include 'conformity, submission, and respect for one's parents and elders' (p59). In addition, in China, teachers and students are more likely to engage in some friendly extramural relations (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997 cited in Zhou et al., 2008). The teacher plays a central role not only as a personal mentor but also as an educator and disciplinarian (Biggs & Watkins, 2001; Ho, 2001 cited in Turner, 2006).

Incorrect expectations of or misunderstandings with academic staff caused by cultural differences have negative effects on the relationship between learners and their supervisors. As responses from student participants in previous studies have repeatedly revealed, UK teachers were seen as insufficiently supportive, did not care about the students and were not interested in students' research (Bailey, 2006; Chiang, 2003). According to Aboutorabi (1995), international students found it very difficult to develop a proper relationship with their supervisors because of cultural barriers. Chinese students believe that 'a good teacher should be a knowledge model who teaches students what and how to learn with clear guidance, and even a moral model who sets an example for students to follow and takes good care of students' (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997, cited in Zhou, et al., 2008, p71). At the same time, a good learner in Chinese education should respect his or her teachers by gladly receiving what the teachers teach rather than criticising what has been taught. Criticism is considered as an activity that is not for those who have not yet completed the learning journey but only for people who have already finished (Turner, 2006). In comparison, Curtis and Lu (2004) argued that training students to become independent learners was seen as the aim of the UK's higher education system. Cortazzi and Jin (1997) argued that in the view of UK teachers 'a good teacher should be a facilitator and an organiser, helping students to develop creativity and independence. Students are expected to participate and engage in dialogue, and engage in critical analysis instead of just absorbing what the teachers say' (cited in Zhou, et al., 2008, p71). Similarly, Lovat (2003) stated that Australian academic teachers view an educator's role as being to 'construct and facilitate a conceptual and investigative world in which learners can increasingly take responsibility for their own learning' (p25).

Different teaching and learning styles is an important issue for international students with diverse cultural backgrounds. It has emerged that learners have considerable uncertainty with regard to the requirements for learning (Rastall, 2006), which make the understanding of expectations between teachers and students important. Even though previous research has noted the difference between Asian and Western countries (or collectivist and individualist groups) with regard to the different educational philosophies and expectations on educators and students, little or no research has been done in comparing two groups of international students who have experienced both culturally different education systems. Limited findings have revealed the similarities and differences between them when exposed to a new academic context despite having different expectations and previous teaching and learning experiences; this is one of the aims of the current study.

1.5.6. Social contact with others

When an international student arrives in a new country, it is generally accepted that he or she will undergo a period of adjustment, where they are heavily reliant on others to help them fit into the unfamiliar environment. The importance of receiving social support for the adaptation of international students is highlighted in the literature (Bartram, 2007; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Ward & Kennedy, 1992). Selmer (1999) suggested that getting through the cultural phase of adjustment can be very painful for many newly arrived students, painful for so long such that some simply never get through it. Some adopt an extremely hostile and critical attitude towards host nationals ('fight'), others retreat to the safety of an expatriate community or even prematurely return home ('flight'), and yet others rapidly and uncritically abandon their former identities and try to imitate host nationals in every possible way ('going native') (p518).

In terms of interacting with co-national and non-co-national students, there is a controversial argument among scholars with regard to the advantages and disadvantages of maintaining close ties with each group. In my study, one hypothesis is that adaptation and transformation of social life is influenced by (i) the different life styles and customs that international students have had previously in their home country and (ii) the attitudes held by international students towards the host country and local people.

1.5.6.1. Social contact with co-nationals

As discussed above, the issue of whether to maintain a close relationship with co-nationals should be encouraged and is not controversial. Some academics note that participating in an ethnic community through establishing strong ties with other people from the student's home country is one of the most important factors influencing the personal adjustment of international students (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Gu & Maley, 2008; Ying & Liese, 1994). They claim that establishing social networks and forming communities with people from a similar cultural background and nationality should be encouraged because it is a crucial strategy during their adjustment process within the university context, and has positive effects on international students' adaptation. Ying and Liese (1994) also argued that: 'ethnic social networks have been found to be beneficial for psychological well-being because they provide a sense of security and facilitate the transition, particularly at the initial stages' (p476). However, Bailey (2006) noted the pros and cons of making contact with co-national peer networks. Establishing friendship with co-nationals was seen as a significant source of

receiving emotional support and obtaining knowledge and information for international students when coping with the host environment. However, it is also worth noting that if the student becomes too extensively integrated into the ethnic community this is likely to create trouble that can have a negative impact on an individual international student's self-esteem (Al-Shariden & Goe, 1998). In addition, in one study, Chinese international students realised that their cultural learning was impeded by dependence on co-national peer students (Yan & Berliner, 2011). The cause of this impediment was not becoming involved in social activities with host students.

Based on scholars' observations and concerns, there are various explanations as to why Chinese students tend to bond together, including: culture related issues, little or no knowledge of the social mechanisms of interacting with hosts, the traditional education format in China, and being homesick/seeking the familiar (Bailey, 2006; Brown, 2009; Edwards & Ran, 2006; Gu & Maley, 2008; Yamashita & Schwartz, 2012; Yan & Berliner, 2013). Besides, international students are less likely to develop culturally relevant skills, such as how to integrate with their hosts, if this group of students has a large number of co-nationals in the host country that serves to reinforce the preference for students to rely mostly on others from their home country (Gallois et al., 1995 cited in Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). Zhou et al. (2008) defined culture specific variables that include 'knowledge about a new culture, language communication competence, social intelligence cultural distance' as the factors affecting individual's adjustment (Cited in Furham, 2012, p13). Having many Chinese students on a course makes it easy for course members to stick to their co-peers. Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004) argued that the degree of communication between international students and hosts decreases in proportion to the increased size of the group of co-nationals, due to problems arising from in intercultural interactions. In addition, Yamazaki (2005) further stated that 'in strong uncertainty avoidance countries, the main concern of the people from another culture is about avoiding failure and errors, which could sacrifice their chances for successful performance' (p527), which could be another explanation of why some international students stay with their co-nationals all the time.

One lecturer in Gu and Maley's (2008) research on tertiary level Chinese students in the UK universities expressed concern that Chinese international students were more likely to cluster together as a group. He expressed that the students joined the local Chinese community soon after arrival and conducted their lives as if they are still living in China, only emerging briefly to attend classes at the university. Barley (2006) argued that British people also tend to bond

with each other in expatriate communities when exposed in a foreign context. Therefore, he argued, there should not be an expectation in terms of international students that they should have a higher level of integration in the UK. This study does not start with an assumption that Chinese students are more likely to bond together, rather, it will speculate that individual students would have different preferences when choosing targeted groups for making friends; beside, there is a possibility that UK international students will also keep together with their co-nationals as Chinese international students do when they are in an intercultural context.

1.5.6.2. Social contact with non-co-nationals

The issue of whether close relationships between host nationals and other international students would be helpful for international students' adaptation has been greatly discussed. Many researchers, such as Richardson and Hurworth (2007), Ward and Kenney (1992) and Zhou et al. (2008) have suggested that forming friendships with local people (students and other residents) presents a number of benefits to international students. These benefits include improving language capacity, self-confidence, assisting the students in their understanding of the host culture, acquiring the culturally appropriate social skills and rules that are appreciated by the host culture (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Yan & Berliner, 2011; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004) also noted that a higher degree of interaction with members of the host population is linked to a lower level of cross-cultural obstacles. The rationale is that an international student who is more likely to master the host culture's social rules and skills through interaction will consequently experiences less social difficulty during interactions in the new environment.

Previous research revealed that establishing a close relationship with other international students is advocated by most international students (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). For example, Ward and Kennedy (1993) believed that, compared to host students, forming supportive ties with other international students was easier because of the shared status as being abroad, 'defined as temporary residents, and shared interests in exploring new cultures and creating new friendships' (p296). Moore and Popadiuk (2011) argued that fellow international students would provide new students with a 'shortcut' in obtaining valuable information regarding student peers' struggles, rather than having to go through the mistakes they made themselves. Some scholars also claim that a higher degree of interaction with hosts does not always have a positive impact on international students' adjustment (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). The attitude of the hosts is a predominant factor

contributing to international students' experience when communicating with local people, which will be discussed in the following section.

Cultural empathy is viewed as an important predisposition for effective intercultural interaction (Kelley & Meyers, 1995, cited in Cui and Awa, 1992). Becoming aware of the difference between home country and host country has a positive effect on the visiting student's adjustment and appropriate behaviour. Similarly, Lee and Larwood's (1983, cited in Selmer, 1999) study of UK managers' cultural socialisation in Korea found that when Americans adjusted their attitude towards local people, they felt more satisfaction in their work. Megginson (1967) suggested that for the American expatriate living in a foreign country, it is very important to dilute their original outlook and to accept the different ways of life with no judgement of right or wrong (cited in Cui and Awa, 1992). Although Megginson's statement is now decades old, it still holds some relevance today because developing countries like China are still in many ways less advanced than developed countries like the UK, for example, with respect to educational systems and living environment. When UK international students engage in Chinese environments, they face challenges that they would not experience in their home country. Therefore, an attitude of tolerance is important to facilitate adaption in the new environment.

Despite the reported benefits of social interaction between international students and host students, the limitation of interaction between these two groups in both academic and social lives has been noted (Zhou et al., 2008). It was reported by Ramsey and Mason (2004) that international students may have the intention to establish friendships, but they are limited by the difficulties of making the time to do so, taking into consideration the workload that students have to deal with. The priority for international students is academic, therefore, the issue of balancing time between studying and other activities such as meeting friends is a struggle (Andrade, 2006; Gardner, 2007; Ramsey and Mason, 2004); further, this is especially acute for Ph.D. students who have a family with children (Gardner, 2007). Sovič (2007) also noted that time management is an important issue, especially for students from academic backgrounds characterised by structured teaching-learning who have subsequently moved to a less structured, more free learning style.

The relationships between international students with co-nationals and non-co-national students are significant parts of student lives when studying and living in a host country. This is also one of the core research interests in this current study. I aim to explore whether UK and

Chinese international students experience transformations during their interactions with other people, and determine the factors that foster or impede the results.

1.5.7. Hosts society and attitudes

The literature suggests that the quality of interaction between international students and host members is significant: the host society has a variable influence on international students' adjustment in the intercultural environment (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Having a satisfactory interaction with host members can contribute to an individual's psychological adaptation (Ward & Kenney, 1992), which in turn influences international students' performances and achievements both academically and socially. It has been noted that intercultural interaction may also result in negative experiences for sojourners (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). In addition, the mutual understanding and accepted attitudes between hosts and sojourner have been highlighted in previous theories and empirical research (Berry, 1997; Zhou et al., 2008), especially in groups of immigrants. Unfortunately, limited attention has been paid to international students in terms of how they would be affected by host members. An aim of this study then, is to consider the potential influence of hosts' attitudes on the intercultural adjustment and transformative learning experiences of international students. For example, Ward and Kennedy (1993) found that international students experienced negative psychological consequences through social and cultural integration in Singapore, and there is speculation that this phenomenon may arise from negative host cultural responses to international students.

1.5.8. Ph.D. students

Some studies have been conducted on international Ph.D. students and this section will develop and highlight this group of students separately due to its different nature compared to other degree students. In a study of Chinese postgraduates in a UK university, Turner (2006) stated that it was clear that international students were striving continuously to gain a better understanding of UK academic conventions and evaluating their learning behaviours at the same time. However, he claimed that students got frustrated when they attempt to put into practice efforts to 'work within UK epistemological and pedagogical assumptions' due to 'a lack of opportunities to explicitly contextualise and discuss these issues within the framework of formal learning on the programme' (p46). That is an important area on which to focus and this study will therefore investigate Ph.D. students because they spend a longer time in the

host country. In this current study, I consider Ph.D. students as a different group, compared to other international students, due to the higher requirements from the university for students pursuing this degree. Furthermore, Ph.D. students have higher expectations with regard to their interaction with academic staff and the research environment, and students' concerns for future professional development, as Golde (1998) contended that doctoral students have to learn what the faculty expects of them and also what they need to do so as to be prepared for a future career.

To begin with, degree related issues need to be noted. A Master's degree in UK institutions is normally one year in length for the majority of students (including international students); this length of time is not quite sufficient to wholly expose students to a new academic or social context. In comparison, Ph.D. students have to spend more than three years for their doctoral study, that allows them a longer time span to get to know the new education system and the culturally different environment. Besides, since there are fewer co-national postgraduate research students enrolled in the same subject compare to Master's courses, international Ph.D. students may need to develop different social skills for the purpose of getting along with their classmates and/or colleagues. In this study, I predict that, compared to Master's students, Ph.D. students are more likely to have transformative learning experiences.

Relevant literature highlights the importance that supervision can have on research students' adjustment and outcomes (Seagram et al., 1998; Latona & Browne, 2001, cited in Brew & Peseta, 2004). Other research on Ph.D. students has also found that the supervisor plays a crucial role in student socialisation and development when in a foreign academic environment (Chiang, 2003; Gardner, 2007; Le & Gardner, 2010). However, even though the importance of the teacher-student relationship has been noted, the ways in which it affects international students' adjustments and achievements in academic and non-academic areas has been overlooked. The investigation of the relationships between student and supervisor, and the academic and research environment, needs to be further developed because of limited previous research, and it is a focus in this study.

Ph.D. students are required to become more independent as they are expected to be responsible for their own research. Ph.D. students from different disciplines have different levels of needs in keeping contact with their supervisors. Research conducted by Le and Gardner (2010) on Asian international doctoral students in the US emphasised that the supervisor was the only person with whom the students from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and

Mathematics) disciplines have frequent contact, based on the responses from the participants who indicated that their supervisors were the most helpful people for them. Compared to US peer students, international students in doctoral programmes are more likely to depend heavily on faculty members, while US students reported a higher dependence on peer students when looking for support (Le and Gardner, 2010). In a study of international Ph.D. students in a UK university, Goode (2007) also suggested that independence was seen as essential by doctoral students in the Arts and Humanities for successful academic study, which was attested by numerous handbooks. Independence or dependence is an issue that exists not only between disciplines, but also during stages of study. Le and Gardner (2010) believed that this dependence on faculty members is understandable because the teachers may be the first person that international students interact with when they first arrive in the department. This study examines whether independence could be an issue contributing to international students' satisfaction and transformation in their overseas studies.

The issues of the research structure and environment of Ph.D. students has rarely been mentioned in previous studies. Chiang's (2003) study, which makes a comparison between full-time Ph.D. students in UK universities in an Education Department and in a Chemistry Department, found that the Chemistry students expressed more satisfaction in their education due to acclimatising themselves to academic culture, intercultural research and research faculties in the research environment. Chiang (2003) explained that some of the different responses received from the students were due to the different 'fundamental research structures' in these two departments. Chemistry students had a 'teamwork' structure which meant that the students and their supervisors and other staff often shared the same project, spent more time together and therefore, had more opportunities for interaction, while an 'individualist' structure for Education students who needed to make formal appointments with their supervisors who may not have research interests in the same areas as their students' projects' (p17). This makes it unlikely that they will have opportunities for interaction. Even although it seems as if most supervisors are less likely to take on a student unless they are interested in the student's topic, the misunderstanding between teachers and students with regard to the support seemed to have been severe and needed to be further explored.

Ph.D. students in Le and Gardner's (2010) study have shown a positive response to the emotional and academic support from the peer students in the department. Their findings reflected that the social group the students have inclined to hang out with consisted of students who had common nationalities; for Ph.D. students in particular, this also included the sharing

of 'common advisors, common research projects, or common laboratory and office space' (Le & Gardner, 2010, p259). Consistent with other research (e.g. Bailey, 2006) on international students (both at undergraduate and postgraduate level), there is a body of reasons contributing to the interaction between international students with their host peers, which was also reported in Le and Gardner's research (2010) where they found that the status of international support, financial support, faculty and advisor support, and support from peers emerged as vital variables that have impact on students' overall intercultural experiences as well as on their persistence in completing their degrees. At the same time, similar to other groups of international students who are undergraduate or Master's students, Ph.D. students also have issues around their lack of linguistic skills during interaction and cultural differences which would exacerbate the distance from host students (Le & Gardner, 2010).

1.5.9. International students adjustment and transformative learning

International students' difficulties in academic and sociocultural adjustments were discussed earlier. Apart from the focus on international students' difficulties during their intercultural experiences, a second area of research has focused more on researching students' positive change and growth. Some researchers have argued that despite differences that exist between different education systems, and the challenges embedded in the academic and social conditions, most international students managed to adapt, develop, change and achieve (Gu & Maley, 2008; Gu et al., 2010; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). In other words, tertiary level Chinese students in UK universities expressed at least as much appreciation of their studying and living in the new academic environment and autonomous study style when compared with their peer students from European countries (Gu & Maley, 2008). This section focuses on international students' achievement and potential transformative learning in their academic and social areas.

It is assumed by Gu et al (2010) that moving to a new environment would induce individuals to realise the fact that there are people who think and behave differently than themselves. Under the context of living abroad, a person would be challenged when looking at their world from a different point of view 'which is often in conflict with personal values and beliefs: when they have an experience that cannot be assimilated into their original meaning perspective, the experience is rejected or the perspective changes to accommodate the new experience' (Brown, 2009, p508). Montuori and Fahim (2004) believed that an individual's personal growth would be fostered through the opportunity of being placed into a situation where people's 'understanding of self and world, and of how we believe things 'are' or 'should

be', is severely challenged' (p244). Existing studies have reported the challenges and hardships that could be involved in the journey of an international student; Milstein (2005) noted that there was the possibility that accelerated internal growth would be accompanied by some formidable task related to studying abroad. In a study of transformative learning theory, Taylor (1993) found a perspective transformation that could be induced by changing the place of living for a new place. The transformation occurs naturally and necessarily in order individual survival and relief of stress and anxiety that are often experienced by strangers when they struggle to adjust to a new environment (Taylor, 1994). Kumi-Yeboah's (2014) research on international students supports such a view and suggests factors could that contribute to transformative learning for an adult learner, including immigration and changing locations.

According to Taylor (1994), in order to survive and to relieve stress and anxiety, a transformation is necessary for individuals when they move to another culture and stay for a certain length of time. In the theory of transformative learning, a disorienting dilemma means that established 'patterns of thought and action become dysfunctional' under new circumstances and the effort to make sense 'in old ways does not work and we become compelled to redefine the problem' (Mezirow, 1993, p144). Mezirow and other scholars believed that reflection is an essential issue for potential transformation under a new environment. Whether or not the student is aware of it, the strange environment places the individual into a situation where some changes are necessary to adapt to the new culture and new life. Being exposed to intercultural circumstances provides the international student with the prospect of facing dilemmas, which was seen as a trigger for transformative learning in Mezirow and Taylor's statement on transformative learning theory. Adler (1975) noted that, although culture shock is considered to be associated with negative consequences for international students, it can also assist cultural learning, individual self-development, and personal growth. At the same time, personal development can rise to higher levels, triggered by the problems and frustrations encountered during their culture shock ordeal . Alternatively, an individual's transformational learning could also be precipitated through accumulated experience. McWhinney and Markos (2003) claimed that, rather than being stimulated by a disorienting dilemma, which a person would face in the new environment, transformational learning could be triggered by integrating circumstances.

It was also noted that some of the international students may have a fixed set of 'capabilities' that they may not even be aware of before going abroad to study. Bochner (1986) argued that an international student's development starts as soon as they arrive in a new environment (cited

in Brown, 2009). Even although confronted by anxiety and challenges, international students recognise their intercultural experiences as a learning process. Generally speaking, when international students return home after overseas studies, cross-cultural encounters could potentially lead to positive effects on individuals from a number of areas both academic and/or sociocultural, even though these areas are on different levels and perspectives. Researchers have previously considered international students' changes from diversified perspectives, including an individual's effectiveness in academic growth, learning skills (including class interaction), language competence, knowledge accumulation, recognition of academic difference, perceptiveness in viewing goals, creating new identity, personal development, the exploration of individual personal assumptions and beliefs, acceptance of different ways of thinking and being, different cultural and value learning, and changing from an ethnocentric view to an ethno-relative worldview (Gu & Maley, 2008; Montuori & Fahim, 2004; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). For example, Huang (2007) stated that despite the fact that in China to criticise authority is seen as disrespectful behaviour, particularly in the academic field, Chinese students become accustomed to being critical after they spend time in a UK institution. Gu et al. (2010) noted that students not only become accustomed to this learning format, they also acknowledge that it is a helpful way to learn. Turner (2006), however, referred to the fact that for all Chinese postgraduate participants who were enrolled on a Master's degree in a UK university, regardless of the international students' 'ultimate academic or personal destination, the journey over the year involved considerable suffering and enforced personal reflection in ways that tended to undermine confidence and, for some, the ability to move forward effectively' (no page number). The case applied in Turner's research suggested that attention needs to be paid to international students' adaptability to the different context and potential transformative learning possibility, which are important before and during the teaching and learning process.

As mentioned earlier, Gu et al (2010) argued that "'international students' intercultural learning experiences are both transitional and transformational and necessitate identity change to a greater or lesser extent" (p20). As Schild (1962) stated, the effects could continue even after international students return to their home environment. Brown (2009) stated that the overseas experience of students has implications for their professional and interpersonal relationships in the future. Curtis and Lu's (2004) research on Asian Master's degree students (studying Business Management or Marketing Management in the UK) found that 'respondents want to work in a more merit-oriented workplace with respect for individuals, rather than the authoritarian hierarchical system they have experienced in Confucian-oriented

workplaces' (p58). In my study, it is speculated that intercultural learning would affect international students' attitudes and behaviours either temporarily and permanently. Therefore, during the interviews, participants will be examined to determine what extent their overseas studies influenced their academic and social lives, and how their overseas studies might affect what they intend to do in the future. Since the participants will be interviewed during their studies, whether their changes are 'permanent' or not can not be determined in this current study. A longitudinal study method could be applied in further research to address this.

1.5.10. UK international students' development

Limited research has focused on the motivation of UK students pursuing higher education outside their home country. Research conducted by Waters, Brooks and Pimlott-Wilson (2011) on UK students' international experience, underlined that 'fun, enjoyment and the pursuit of happiness abroad' was a motivating factor for international study, rather than 'an emphasis in recent academic and media accounts on overt strategies around educational decision making' (p455). It was reported by several UK students that they wanted to escape the home country, in particular to be away from its rigid higher education attached with 'stresses, pressures and restrictions' (Waters, Brooks & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011, p457).

1.5.11. Chinese international students' development

Research conducted on Chinese international students found that overseas experience was particularly meaningful for this group of participants who stated that they came to be independent by traveling far away from their home. A majority of those Chinese students were born under China's one child policy, which means 'a child may grow up under the intensive care of six adults - four grandparents and two parents' (Gu & Maley, 2008, p239). Due to the one child policy in particular, the child in a family 'has become a precious commodity and families are often prepared to make considerable personal sacrifices as they invest in a son or daughter's future' (Edwards & Ran, 2006, no page number). This could explain why Chinese students are under more pressure from their family regarding their academic and future career development compared to their non-Chinese peer students.

In moving to a UK or other overseas university, however, the transition to a culturally different country for pursuing a degree brought some difficulties for Chinese international students: for most of them it was very likely to have been the first time living abroad independently, and

being away from supportive families, familiar shared values and cultural norms could be difficult. Especially for those who may lack in the ability to adjust and become integrated to the new environment. Academic problems and social tensions may become exacerbated under this situation (Shen, 2005). Even with these potential adaptation challenges, it was found that UK degrees are seen by Chinese international students as having greater career prospects compared to the ones they obtain in their home country (Counsell, 2011), which could explain why Chinese participants in this study were more likely to adapt to UK teaching conventions.

Morrison et al.'s (2005) findings emphasised that the unrealistic expectations towards teaching and learning held by Chinese international students would cause a worse studying and living environment compared to that of UK local students, because of the general challenges of facing significant problems with language, and cultural and educational differences between their original country and the UK. Rastall (2006) also notes that Chinese learners are generally ill-prepared in English when studying in their UK institutions because of their language learning experience when they were in China. In spite of this, it was also noted by Gu (2009) that beyond the problems the Chinese international students face, a majority of them, like most other international students, have positive experiences in adjustment and development during their academic process. This is reflected in students' improved language capacity, and increased self-confidence and engagement in classroom events and in their strong sense of independence in studying as discussed in the previous section. It was believed by Gu (2009) that 'given the distinctive intercultural environment in which they live and study', the international students' identity change process has been 'interwoven with the growth in their maturity (i.e. human development) and interculturality' (p44).

In fact, even with the good reputation of UK higher education, not all of the Chinese students have gained positive experience towards their study in the UK. For example, Turner's (2006) research on a group of Chinese students who were completing a Master's degree found that they experienced changes only in acquiring new educational skills and knowledge, while their attitudes in terms of learning remained uninfluenced by their overseas experiences in UK universities, even though Turner (2006) further stated that the students 'all seemed aware of shifts in the emotional and practical manner with which they negotiated their personal lives, related in some way to their learning experiences. In this way, participants' implicit theories of learning in their broadest sense did indeed develop' (p44). Similar results were found in Curtis and Lu's (2004) research, which shows that not all Master participants expressed that they were changed by the courses, but rather, students believed they had experienced changes

through working in a part-time job. Through applying the theory of transformative learning, this study has endeavoured to find out what factors contribute to the success or failure of international students in their academic and social lives.

1.6. Chapter conclusion, thesis structure and argument

This chapter has reviewed existing studies on international students' academic and social challenges and achievements in the host country. Controversial opinions on certain arguments about what factors would contribute to international students' experiences have been presented. In addition, this chapter draws attention to the gaps in the research to date upon which this study will focus. This thesis consists of four main chapters following from this introduction, starting with Chapter 2 - theory and methodology, Chapter 3 - data analysis of the UK participants, Chapter 4 - data analysis of Chinese participants and Chapter 5 - discussion, followed by Chapter 6, which is the thesis conclusion. As noted in the previous section, previous studies have concentrated on the challenges of international students when they were exposed to new cultural environment, whereas only limited studies have focused on students' transformation in their academic and social lives. Mezirow (1993) stated that transformative learning is a paramount developmental task for adults because it is believed that, 'adulthood becomes a time when we can become fully capable of critically examining these taken-for-granted belief systems', in modern societies (p141). Since there is no existing empirical research that has concentrated on UK and Chinese international students' potential transformational learning in academic and social aspects in Chinese and the UK context respectively, this study will fill the current gap through applying the theory of transformative learning. Students' transformative learning is thought to be significant because educators can then determine what international students have actually learned from their education providers, and how students viewed their overseas experiences. It is important to evaluate the effectiveness and achievements of these international students both academically and also with respect to their lives in an intercultural context. This study focuses on both groups of UK and Chinese international students who have all experienced UK and Chinese higher education, who can compare what they have experienced in the host country when they were attending home universities. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, in most of the previous research on Chinese international students' intercultural adjustment, scholars have investigated the difficulties the students have faced (as reported by Yan & Berliner, 2013), rather than their positive transformative learning experience. The very limited research that has been conducted on UK international students in Chinese higher institutions, has applied quantitative research

methods. The weakness of applying a quantitative research method is that scholars often fail to investigate international students' experiences in both their academic and social lives. These questions are significant but have been overlooked by previous scholars. In addition, it has been found that the process of international students' achievement and transformation in the intercultural context might be influenced by various factors, which will be taken into account in my study under consideration of each individual's biographical details and individual prior experience and contextual factors as advocated in transformative learning theory and in the existing literature such as Shaheen (2016). Furnham and Bochner (1986) declared that the experience of being abroad would make international students 'more adaptable, flexible, and insightful' (p47). In this study, I want to explore whether UK and Chinese international students from both groups experienced transformative learning through their overseas studies, and if they did, what factors contributed to their transformative learning. In conclusion, I will try to provide suggestions of what the educators and the students themselves could do to improve international students' overseas experience. In the next chapter (Chapter 2), the theory of transformative learning and methodology applied in this study is discussed.

Chapter 2

Theory and methodology

Introduction

This chapter is comprised of two parts (2.1 & 2.2), which aim to provide more details with regard to, firstly, the concept of Transformative Learning theory (TL) as a theoretical framework applied to this study and secondly, the semi-structured interview used as the selected research methodology. In the first part, 2.1., transformative learning as a theory applied to adult learners is reviewed and related controversial issues are discussed, in addition to perspective transformation as an important area of transformative learning. Next, six core elements that form the theory of TL are presented. Then, the strengths and weaknesses of the theory will be considered, and then the connection between TL and this current study are discussed. In the second part (2.2), the focus is on the methodology used in this study. It starts with the introduction of the semi-structured interview research method, followed by a description of the participants' backgrounds; in the third and fourth parts, the selection of participants and data analysis is explored, respectively. Finally, the use of a pilot study is explained.

2.1. Previously used approaches to studying the acculturation of international students and the importance of Transformative learning theory

The literature in this field contains diverse theories attempting to piece together the factors that contribute to the adjustment of international students in their host countries. Challenges that students are faced with to become well-adapted and for improving student support in host countries have been identified. Brown (2009) conducted an ethnographic study on international students in England and found that choice of groups of friends was a core issue that affected students' improvement of linguistic and cultural knowledge. Kingston and Forland (2008) examined the expectations between educators and their international students, finding that the current generation of East Asian students did not display an obvious difference in terms of adaptation to the UK higher education system; rather, they seemed to be becoming increasingly similar to their Western counterparts. Gu and Maley's (2008) study on

international students' intercultural experiences identified personal, pedagogical and psychological factors as key elements in influencing the Chinese international students' intercultural adaptation process and outcomes in the UK. Chapdelaine and Alexitch, (2004) and Warwick (2007) have focused on international students' academic and social maladjustment and attribute this to culture shock.

One possible theoretical framework that I considered for my study on international students that may help analyse some of these challenges was Berry's (2007) research on acculturation attitudes. Berry developed a classic model of acculturation strategies framework related to the assimilation, integration, separation and marginalisation of immigrants. This was appealing, especially for the investigation of Ph.D. students, because of their long term commitment to living abroad and the potential to seek extended or permanent residence. Ph.D. students will go through a process of acculturation similar to the immigrants who formed the original basis for Berry's research. Berry's acculturation strategies were derived from two basic issues that apply to all acculturating individuals. These two issues distinguish individual orientation towards their original group and towards new contact groups. The distinction is between: '(1) a relative preference for maintaining one's heritage culture and identity, and (2) a relative preference for having contact with and participating in the larger society along with other ethnocultural groups' (Berry, 2004, p704). The four acculturation strategies were further developed as follows. First, assimilation refers to a person who does not wish to maintain their previous cultural identity but to seek other ways of living and interacting with the newly contacted society. Second, and in contrast, people who seek to maintain their heritage and wish to avoid interacting with others are defined as following a strategy of separation. Third, integration, addresses individuals who have an interest in maintaining both the origin culture and in trivial interactions with other groups in the new setting. The final option, a strategy of marginalisation, covers individuals who have no interest in interacting with either group. However, these options are not always available. Berry underlined that the choices available to the non-dominant group (such as international students) is dependent on their freedom to choose the strategy they wish. The individual acculturation experience is largely determined by the dominant group's enforcement and constraints on certain forms and choices (Berry, 2004). These acculturation strategies have limited focus on investigating the scope of international students' academic and social experiences. For example, Berry's work emphasised hosts' attitudes to international students as a significant factor in influencing student well-being and development. Whether or not international students can achieve their best is not only affected by their hosts, but their relationships with other international students

and co-nationals. This important limitation shows that the model was not entirely suitable as a framework for the current study, so it was not used.

Another theoretical model that stood out was Transformative learning theory, because 'transformative learning rests on an enriched view of the human being, one that affirms our multidimensional nature and fundamental malleability. The methods by which we challenge our students, open them to change' (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010 cited in Parer & Wilding, 2012, p1). Transformative learning theory (TLT) provides a basis for this research as it states that as a person who travels to another culture and spends a period of time there, he or she often undergoes a transformation (Taylor, 1994). It assumes that changing places, and moving into a new environment, will induce individuals to realise the fact that there are people who think and behave differently than themselves. The transformation occurs naturally and necessarily to help survival and relieves stress and anxiety that are often experienced by strangers when adjusting to a new environment (Taylor, 1994). This is supported by recent research on transformative learning; for example, Kumi-Yeboah (2014) argued that there are factors that could contribute to transformative learning for an adult learner, including immigration and changing locations. Mezirow's TLT theory is well-suited to the current study in this thesis. His terms instrumental learning, and communicative learning appear to be directly applicable to the situation of the overseas student, faced by new situations where the student may struggle to make sense of things. His emphasis on the need for openness to alternative points of view, and the need for the ability to critically reflect on assumptions and their consequences chimed with my own experience earlier as a student in a new environment. Mezirow's own writing on Education and Learning was inspirational so this current study will follow the themes outlined.

TLT is a valuable theory that can explain international students' perceptions and behaviours after being exposed to the new context, which focuses on individual differences. Taylor (2009) found that there are six core elements of transformative educational experiences: (i) individual experience, (ii) critical reflection, (iii) dialogue, (iv) holistic orientation, (v) awareness of context, and (vi) authentic relationships. These six elements will be further illustrated in following section of 2.1.4. These elements are particularly apt for analysis of international students' experiences in host countries to determine factors that either foster or impede personal transformative learning. It is worth noting that, although there is a large body of research on transformative learning theory from a variety of areas/ disciplines, there are some

areas that have been overlooked by previous scholars, and need exploration. For example, even though some scholars have noted that international students' transformation could happen throughout their overseas study, very few studies explore how international students' previous experience affects their attitudes and behaviours in the new culturally different environment, and how their new experience affects their 'most immediate and concrete levels of knowledge, perception and action' (Palma & Pedrozo, 2016, p7). In one of the six essential theoretical elements, individual's previous experience is viewed as important, which can affect their experience in the new environment. The current author speculates that it may well be that students go through a transformative learning process in adapting to a new educational environment much as those described in some previous studies. There is, however, also the possibility that some students do not transform.

In recent years, transformative learning theory has started receiving limited attention from scholars (Kumi-Yeboah, 2014), who have attempted to raise international students' awareness of the need to critically examine their habits of taken-for-granted ways of thinking and to analyse their current situation and assumptions and thus encourage them to realise that there are different interpretations of other people's behaviours, especially people from different cultural backgrounds. Kumi-Yeboah's (2014) research on African learners' educational and non-educational transformative learning identified factors that have a bearing, including classroom activities, staff support, and studying a new language for educational learners, and new life experiences for non-educational learners. Kumi-Yeboah's identification of educational and non-educational experience is resonates well with this current study because the current study was designed to distinguish the differences between what international students have experienced in the teaching-learning processes, and in other areas such as relationships with other students. In the current study, biographical questions were asked, including questions about students' programmes of study, age, and motivation for attending the host country, amongst others. In addition, questions related to the teaching and learning process have been taken into account. Besides, both the relationship and interaction with others were investigated, with the previously held belief that when are exposed in a culturally different environment, through multiple communications with other people including classmates, colleagues, and university staff, we may question our own deeply held pre-suppositions or assumptions about home education and culture when compared with experiences in the host environment.

Mezirow (1993) stated that transformative learning in adulthood is the most significant developmental task, because ‘in modern societies, adulthood becomes a time when we can become fully capable of critically examining these taken-for-granted belief systems’(p141) , and provides the possibility for people to develop and change into more discerning and inclusive beings, and to free themselves from expectations and interpretation of experience that results from their former cultural experience, and that may be acting as a constraint to personal development. Transformative learning is considered important because it has the potential to positively support educators and students to explore ‘cultural identity and cultural perceptions in a classroom’, which are viewed as challenges to both educators and students; because in transformative learning focus is on ‘emotions, in deep listening, and in conscious expression’ (Parker & Wilding, 2012, p12). Transformative learning is considered as the essence for adult education where the goal is to support individual learners become more autonomous thinkers through negotiating their ‘values, meanings, and purposes rather than to uncritically act on those of others’ (Mezirow, 1997, p11). Mezirow (2003) claimed that adult education should also support the adult learner to realise their capabilities of becoming self-reflective and carry out reflective judgement through developing ‘the skills, insights, and dispositions essential for their practice’ (p62). Therefore, this study aims to add to existing examinations of whether international students will experience a form of transformative learning where there is influencing, shaping, and/or reconstructing of people’s existing knowledge, perceptions and actions at a deep level. For this study, it is predicted that in adapting to the changes in academic and social life, participants will be led to conduct a thorough and critical examination of themselves through the facing of disorienting dilemmas and/or other catalysts, or through accumulated daily incidents that lead to transformation.

2.1.1. Transformative learning theory

The essence of transformative learning theory needs to be presented before relating it to this current study. In 1978, Jack Mezirow first introduced transformative learning theory to the field of adult learning. The theory of transformative learning applies uniquely to adults (Mezirow, 2003; Taylor, 2008) based on the assumption that it is the process of qualitative and effective changes in an individual’s frame of reference, for adult learners ‘have acquired a coherent body of experience – associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses – frames of reference that define their life world’ (Mezirow, 1997, p5). Frames of reference are defined by Mezirow (1997) as ‘the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences’ (p5). Both Mezirow (2009) and Taylor (1998) considered the frame of

reference to be based on culture and contextual experience and language (Taylor, 1998; Mezirow, 2009) and for an individual it would be influential in terms of how they construe meaning and how they behave. The frame of references which are taken for granted by individuals include diversified aspects including interpersonal relationships, cultural bias, stereotyped attitudes and practices among others (Mezirow, 2003). The process of an individual's learning to make meaning is focused, shaped and delimited by his or her frames or references (Mezirow, 1994).

Mezirow (1994) noted that the assumptions of transformative learning theory are constructivist, allowing learners to remake new sense and meaning from their experience and thus advance new learning. Mezirow (1990) defined learning 'as the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation and action' (p1). He explained that we may perceive or fail to perceive and think or fail to think about some issues, which would be affected by our habits of expectation which constitute our frame of reference. It is impossible to comprehend the nature of adult learning or education without consideration of the prominent role of habits in making meaning. Mezirow (1997) referred to ethnocentrism as an example when analysing the process of learning. In relation to this, he claimed that there are four ways of learning. The first one is through seeking further evidence to support people's original prejudices they hold toward a group and extend the range or intensity of their viewpoint. The second way is to build new viewpoints, with the premise that because of the propensity for ethnocentrism, when we meet a new group, we can create new adverse meaning schemes through concentrating on this group's perceived shortcomings. The third way of learning is the transformation of our point of view. People's critical reflection of their misconceptions towards a particular group could happen when they become engaged in the other group's culture. Their points of view regarding the group they are involved with may be changed as a result. A more tolerant and acceptable attitude to that group could be a consequence. He noted that after being affected time after time, with many different groups, our governing ways of thinking would be transformed by this accretion. The fourth way of learning is that people may transform their 'ethnocentric habit of mind by becoming aware and critically reflective on our generalized bias in the way we view groups other than our own. Such epochal transformations are less common and more difficult. We do not make transformative changes in the way we learn as long as what we learn fits comfortably into our existing frames of reference' (Mezirow, 1997, p7).

Mezirow (2003) proposed that transformative learning theory offers an explanation of how

people's expectations which are 'framed within cultural assumptions and presuppositions', have a direct influence on the meaning that people derive from their experiences (cited in Kumi-Yeboah, 2014, p122). Critical reflection was emphasised in the earlier theories of transformative learning by Mezirow, and it can be presented 'more as an explanation of how learners construe, validate and reformulate the meaning of their experience' (Beaupre, 2011, p81). Palma and Pedrozo (2016) declared that the essence of transformative learning is a qualitative change in an individual learner's 'perception and construction of meaning' when undergoing a learning experience from where the learner 'asks or redrafts their assumptions or habits of thought' (p7). It is a learning experience that touches learners' deepest levels of existing knowledge and meaning, and then affects their 'most immediate and concrete levels of knowledge, perception and action' (Palma & Pedrozo, 2016, p7). According to transformative learning theorists, the theory of transformative learning is understood as meaning that people have their own ways of explaining the world and issues around them, and the way they make meaning out of their experiences is based on their prior experiences. When people encounter something unexpected, which does not fit in with their expectations in terms of how things should work, they would take action to reject or question it. Once people have started thinking critically about their habitual expectations, they make changes and act on the revised perspectives, and this is where the transformative learning process takes place.

In the last three decades, research conducted from a variety of disciplines and areas has provided a supportive but critical picture of the seminal work on transformative learning theory. Rather than considering transformative learning as a rational learning process, in recent research, it focuses more on both rational and 'extrarational' constituents in adult learners' transformation (e.g. Taylor, 1998). As discussed in chapter one, Mezirow (2000) claimed that there is 'a continuum in learning that moves from the acquisition of new knowledge and skill, to elaborating on existing knowledge, to revising meaning schemes, and to transforming habits of mind... the first kinds of knowledge are seen not to be transformative and the second two to be transformative' (cited in Cranton & Kasl, 2012, p394). However, Kegan (2000) argued that an individual's acquisition of knowledge should be counted as one kind of transformation. Kegan (2000) emphasised the point that individuals may experience many kinds of transformation, including 'one's fund of knowledge, one's confidence as a learner, one's self-perception as a learner, one's motives in learning, one's self esteem...' (p50). This study will not separate an international student's acquisition and/or increased knowledge and skills from their transformation, because all of these aspects are considered as components that together make up potential transformative learning.

According to Taylor (1994), Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation provides a theoretical framework for intercultural studies, which is the case in this current study that has international students as participants. Foronda and Belknap (2012) also claimed that the theory of transformative learning can encompass the process of reflecting on experience gathered during study abroad. Study abroad leads to students' transformation as noted by a number of studies (Evanson & Zust, 2006; Levine, 2009; Ruddock & Turner, 2007; Kadianaki et al., 2015), which include experiencing life changes, a major phenomenon in learning (Foronda & Belknap, 2012).

In this study, transformative learning is viewed as important and necessary for UK and Chinese international students because being exposed in a new, culturally different environment requires them to acquire new knowledge and skills. 'Patterns of thought and action become dysfunctional' in new circumstances' (Mezirow, 1993, p144). For example, in Bailey's (2006) review on international students in the UK, he stated educational issues that influence international students' academic achievement. Students' prior experience of learning may be seen as inappropriate by the educators. Furthermore, as Kadianaki, et al. (2015) noted, the intercultural encounter 'with alterity, that is with new ways of doing things, new values and new self-definitions, can stimulate change and self-reflection' (p31). In my study, transformative learning theory is defined as an individual's changes that include the knowledge and skills they have obtained, which would have an impact on a person's ideology and behaviours affecting their current and future actions. Their transformative learning could include accumulated knowledge and skills, their perspectives towards the world and themselves, and their personal maturity arising from the time spent in the intercultural environment.

Given that Chinese *international* higher education is in a fairly early stage of development compared to those in Western countries, international students from developed countries, such as the UK, with the most traditional and well-recognised educational system in the world, may have different motivations and considerations when choosing China as their advanced degree destination. In this study, I predict that UK participants in Chinese higher education and Chinese participants in UK higher education may undergo different transformative learning experiences in terms of dealing with academic issues such as class activities, relationships with academic staff and other students, which are deemed as essential components of their

adaptation to the new academic and life environment in China or in the UK. Therefore, there are some concerns as to whether these two groups of students' transformative learning experiences will be associated with educational or non-educational experiences, or both, in academic and social areas.

2.1.2. Perspective transformation

In their research on Chinese international students in the UK, Gu and Maley (2008) stated that international students would experience changes in both academic and social aspects after exposure to a new environment. Perspective transformation, which can be induced through changing living location for a new city, was introduced in Transformative Learning Theory (Taylor, 1993). Mezirow (1991) described perspective transformation as the process through which adult learners become aware of how and why their assumptions (pre-suppositions) have come to restrain the way they perceive, understand, and feel about their world. Kumi-Yeboah (2014) further described perspective transformation 'as a conscious and intentional one that begins with a dilemma and moves forward as distorted assumptions and as meaning structures become transformed through critical reflection' (p113).

Mezirow's description of components of a perspective transformation start with a disorienting dilemma, which can be described as a discrepancy between what an individual has always assumed to be correct in their previous experience and what has been challenged by their experience in a new environment. The challenges the individual has faced may contribute to the possibility of change. This was described by Cranton (2002) as a 'catalyst for transformation' (p66). As described by Mezirow (1995), a perspective transformation is induced by a dilemma, from where the learners are motivated to revise their structure of meaning, and this consequently promotes transformative learning.

The notion of the disorienting dilemma was later criticised by scholars as being decontextualised; they claimed that other kinds of life crises would possibly trigger a perspective transformation (Taylor, 1997). An expanded definition of a disorienting dilemma (Taylor, 1997) was devised; for example, Mead and Gray (2010) indicated that 'transformational change typically results from critical reflection after dealing with a dilemma or significant emotional event' (cited in Tello, et al., 2013, p113). It is worth noting that, although what serves as a catalyst that could trigger an individual's critical reflection might be

defined differently, Sammut (2014) declared that ‘in many instances the catalyst relates very closely to Mezirow’s infamous disorienting dilemma’ (p49).

Scholars have speculated that an individual’s transformative learning does not need to be triggered by catalyst or disorienting dilemma. For example, Mezirow (1997) described that a transformation could happen under one of two conditions, either as a result of ‘an acute personal or social crisis or through a series of cumulative transformed meaning schemes’ (cited in Taylor, 2008, p6). Cranton (2006) also suggested that transformative learning ‘can be provoked by a single event – a disorienting dilemma – or it can take place gradually and cumulatively over time’ (p36). Clevinger (1993) stated that ‘crises do not always precipitate a transformation; a crisis becomes a disorienting dilemma only when an established meaning perspective becomes dysfunctional for problem resolution’ (cited in Taylor, 1997, p38). In addition, Dirkx (2000a) noted that transformative learning can be produced by ordinary and everyday experience (cited in Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012). Jokikokko’s (2009) research on Finnish teachers in intercultural circumstances argued that ‘intercultural learning [should be seen] more as a gradual transformative process comprising different life experiences that cumulatively affect a person’s intercultural competence than as a process triggered by a major change or crises in life. However, it is recognised that this gradual process may also include crises and transitions’ (p143). Being exposed in a culturally different country, international students may be stimulated either by a single crisis and/or through daily routines. Therefore, the documented possibilities that are considered to contribute to the potential transformation in previous research will be taken into account in my research when considering the factors that foster both UK and Chinese participants’ transformative learning.

Due to the controversial discussion of the concept of the ‘disorienting dilemma’ as stated above, it will be carefully considered in this research. International students may not aware of a disorienting dilemma when being interviewed, whereas in actual fact, they may experience challenges on a daily basis. When an individual takes the correctness of his or her behaviour for granted he or she confronts a dilemma in the new context, which would likely cause negative emotional effects. For example, the way people greet each other is different. In some cities in China, people usually ask: ‘have you eaten?’ However, to say this in the same context in the UK would be found strange or funny or rude. In order to enjoy comfortable conversation, students may prefer to spend time with people from the same culture as their own, but as a consequence at the same time they may lose the chance to get to know local people. In

consequence, students have to critically reflect on the situation they face, and figure out what choice they would make realising that this would influence their future life. It is an interrelated consequence of an individual's behaviour that how the individual considers a particular issue will consequently affect his or her intention to act in a given situation, which could then lead to new behaviours in similar situations in the future (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2009 cited in Tello, et al., 2013). 'Transformational change typically results from critical reflection after dealing with a dilemma or significant emotional event' (Mead & Gray, 2010 cited in Tello, et al., 2013, p113). The challenges the person has experienced would prompt the individual to reconsider his or her previous paradigms and assumptions and adjust the models for future action. As Mezirow (2003) demonstrated, 'transformative learning is metacognitive reasoning involving these same understandings, but, in addition, emphasizes insight into the source, structure, and history of a frame of reference, as well as judging its relevance, appropriateness, and consequences' (p61).

As discussed in 2.1., Taylor's (2009) research include six core elements of transformative educational experiences: individual experience, critical reflection, dialogue, holistic orientation, awareness of context, and authentic relationships. These have emerged from previous empirical research and will be considered for the purpose of this research. Taylor identified that these six elements are essential components that frame a transformative learning experience and are dependent on each other rather than each standing alone.

2.1.3. Individual experience: prior experience & experience in the new context

International students' attitudes and behaviours could be coloured by their prior experience of learning in original country. Even though a number of researchers have previously noted that there are different shocks that international students would confront in the host country, rarely has a theory paid attention to how individual's prior experiences contribute to what they would attain in the foreign context. 'Individual experience is the primary medium of transformative learning, which consists of what each learner brings (prior experiences) and also what he or she experiences within the 'classroom' itself' (Taylor, 2009, p5). When involved in a new environment, a disorienting dilemma, explained by some scholars as a crisis, would be faced as the potential hurdle leading to transformative learning. Mezirow (2009) described the transformative learning experience from a holistic perspective, which is understood as the

process of adult students examining and transforming their prior frames of reference to new and revised ones to ‘make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change. Such new frames are better because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove to be more true or justified to guide action’ (p92). Sammut (2014) emphasised that it is important for a learner to recognise the limitations of their previous constructed knowledge for the purpose of moving successfully through their new environment.

In this study, I predict that participation in classroom activities could serve as a trigger or a disorienting dilemma and as a result, international students’ abilities to extract meaning and their critical reflections would improve, and transformative learning would occur, thereby providing an opportunity for the participants to experience direct and holistic learning. It was suggested that both learners’ previous experiences and the subsequent experiences they may obtain when they engage in active learning with others in the classroom ‘through activities, readings, and relationships with other learners’ would provide learners with triggers for critical reflection and dialogue (Taylor, 2009, p7). The mutually interdependent relations between learners’ experience and the critical reflection that follows contribute to a new point of view.

Based on the theory discussed in the last section, I speculate that, in this study, international students’ perspectives of the learning experience might be triggered by a single crisis or a disorienting dilemma in an intercultural context, or through cumulated experience from daily lives. The term ‘disorienting dilemmas’ will be carefully applied in this study because of the argument between scholars detailed above. Instead, during interviews, I will not assume whether or not participants have experienced a disorienting dilemma. During the interview, the author will allow time for participants to express themselves.

Additionally, this study considers that both international students’ prior experience and their experience in the new context are significant. Therefore, when designing interview questions, issues relating to an individual student’s prior study and work experience were included. Their actual experience in the classroom and in the host social context are also considered important for their transformative learning. Shaheen (2016) declared that the challenges that international students have encountered are largely derived from individuals prior ‘cultural backgrounds and the learning experiences they bring with them’ (p26). I speculate that what an international

student has experienced in their prior study will affect their expectations of new educators and those services provided by the university. Similarly, if an individual has prior work experience they would more likely have clearer targets towards what he or she wants to get from their degree. International students' expectations and what they have experienced are likely to influence the level of their transformational learning with regard to different aspects of academic and social lives. For instance, the international student has to access different kinds of support. What international students experience in the host country may force them to reflect back on their experience in their home country and think about values, beliefs and experience in academic areas. I speculate that the reasons international students experience these challenges is likely significant, in terms of transformative learning, and how they cope with these challenges. In addition, how the experiences of coping with these challenges affects their future actions is also important.

2.1.4. Critical reflection

Transformative learning theorists have claimed that critical reflection is important for an individual's transformative learning. I will assume that an international student's critical reflection on old patterns of attitudes and behaviours when they became dysfunctional in new circumstances would help that student to develop new knowledge and skills in order to adapt. According to Mezirow (2003), in transformative education, there is a requirement for critical reflection to understand 'the nature of reasons and their methods, logic, and justification' (p61), which is supported by a number of scholars (e.g. Kitchenham, 2008; Wilner, et al., 2012). Mezirow (2003) further claimed that 'transformative learning is metacognitive reasoning involving these same understandings but, in addition, emphasizes insight into the source, structure, and history of a frame of reference, as well as judging its relevance, appropriateness, and consequences' (p61). Merriam (2004) also stated that 'mature cognitive development is fundamental to engaging in the critical reflection and rational discourse necessary for transformative learning' (p65). As Taylor (2008) noted 'it is the revision of a frame of reference in concert with reflection on experience that is addressed by the theory of perspective transformation – a paradigmatic shift' (p5). Taylor (2008) also noticed that critical reflection was seen as a developmental process based on experiences. When people engage themselves in critical reflection, they start re-evaluating their frame of reference. Mezirow (2003) declared that critical reflection of presupposition (assumption) was involved in transformative learning that may arise either in group communication or independently. An individual works through

his or her beliefs and assumptions, reassessing their validity according to the new experiences or knowledge the individual has faced, and, at the same time, considering the sources and re-examining underlying premises (Cranton, 2002).

Taylor (2008) declared that critical reflection is central to an individual's transformation when it comes to considering their intercultural experience and discourse with other people. D'Andrea (1986) noted that reflection results from unpleasant experiences (cited in Taylor, 1997). Mezirow (1997) stated that the stressful and painful experiences of the individual would cause the person to question their pre-suppositions. The process of a person's former problem-solving strategies could facilitate the solving of problems they face in the new environment, which in turn leads to an individual's engagement in self-examination and critical assessment of pre-supposition (assumption) (Mezirow, 1997). Mezirow (1994) claimed that within the context most reflection takes place when we try to solve the problem. People may reflect on the content of the problem, the process when solving the problem, or the premise of the problem. Mezirow further considered that reflection on the nature and the development of problems in life is what makes us change our attitudes to life and allows us to make progress in our thinking. In this sense, reflection is a normal process. However, sometimes reflection on an important change or problem in life can change our way of looking at things. This change may result from one large change or a series of small changes, and offers a very significant learning experience.

Taylor (2008) noted that when in an intercultural context, being exposed to different languages and cultures after a long time staying in a culturally different country could trigger individuals to question their previously constructed knowledge and how they make meaning of the world. In this study, I consider that for international students, the new environment provides them with challenges from different perspectives in both their academic and social interaction with other students. International students' critical thinking plays a central role contributing to their experience of living and learning to adjust to a new environment. This is fundamental for all consequent actions, such as trying to adapt to the host culture and customs, to develop authentic relationships with others and to initiate dialogues for exchanging experiences and ideas.

2.1.5. Dialogue

Taylor (2009) showed that engagement in dialogue is essential for critical reflection. Dialogue has also been considered as a dominant concern inherent in the transformative learning process because transformation could be promoted and developed by means of rational discourse through dialogue with others (Taylor, 1998, 2007, and 2008). It was noted that, ‘the dialogue is not so much analytical, point-counterpoint-dialogue, but dialogue emphasizing relational and trustful communication – ‘highly personal and self-disclosing’ ’ (Carter 2002, p82 cited in Taylor, 2007, p180). In Mezirow’s work, he has emphasised that it is a key proposition to make the distinction between instrumental and communicative learning in transformative learning theory. Instrumental learning emphasises control and manipulation of the environment, and lays stress on the improvement of prediction and performance. The central focus of instrumental learning encompasses ‘assessing truth claims- that something is as it is purported to be.’ (Mezirow, 2003, p59). He explains that instrumental learning underlines that “‘the truth of an assertion may be established through empirical testing’, while in communicative learning, it is ‘essential for learners (is) to become critically reflective of the assumptions underlying intentions, values, beliefs, and feelings’” (Mezirow, 1997, p6). At least two people have to be involved in communicative learning, to strive to understand our interpretation of events or our beliefs. The goal is for the two (or more) people to resolve differences and reach an agreement. Mezirow (2003) claimed that in communicative learning, critical-dialectical discourse is required with the aim of testing the valid transformed frame of reference.

Previous research has supported the premise that the application of rational discourse and critical reflection is crucial in transformative learning. According to Cranton (2000), talking to others would help an individual with regard to their critical reflection through exchanging opinions, receiving mutual support and encouragement. Through rational discourse, where alternative perspectives are explored and evidence is brought forth and weighed, knowledge can be constructed through achieving consensus with others. In addition, Taylor (2009) claimed that educators should understand that, rather than having an analytical conversation, the engagement in dialogue involves an awareness of learners’ attitudes and feelings, from where building a relationship of trust through dialogue is promoted.

Based on the theory of transformative learning, in this study I predict that for both UK and Chinese participants, their dialogue with university staff and with other students will be

important for their understanding and adjustment in the new academic environment. Sammut's (2014) research indicated that some teaching aids have been shown to strengthen learners' reflective experiences, for example, through the use of reflective journal writing. Assistance in other areas from university staff members is essential for international students' transformational studies. Due to this, when designing this study, I had to think about what teaching activities and living experiences would foster international students' reflection and eventual reassessment of their prior knowledge and understanding and actions. When students are encouraged to organise academic activities themselves, will they understand the teaching intention and their responsibility to study? Students' understanding of academic staff members' instructions will likely affect how they evaluate their study experience, their level of satisfaction with the university, and their transformative learning experience in a whole. Therefore, the guidance in a university's student handbook may not enough, rather, effective dialogue and interaction between educators and students throughout the whole process of teaching and learning would be more beneficial. Marginson and Sawir (2011) noted that communication problems are often at the root of incidents that international students have faced in Australia (cited in Marginson, 2012).

However, it is worth noting that the dialogue for international students with their educators need not only be verbal communication. In addition, written feedback that students receive from their teachers is also one kind of 'dialogue' between teacher and student, that may help students know what educational targets are. Failure to receive feedback will impede international students' confidence and achievement in their new environment. The importance of the role of receiving feedback as a crucial element in people's transformative learning could be one of the important contributions that this study has, both for areas concerned with international students and also for transformative learning theory.

To facilitate students' transformative learning, educators must support them to develop a critical awareness regarding their own and other people's assumptions. Learners also have the responsibility to put into practice the identification of the frame of reference they have had and also application of imagination to redefine issues by applying a different perspective. Effective rational discourse, such as conversation or written feedback with others, is considered important in assisting learner's transformative learning. Mezirow (1997) underlined that 'discourse is necessary to validate what and how one understands, or to arrive

at a best judgment regarding a belief. In this sense, learning is a social process, and discourse becomes central to making meaning' (p10).

2.1.6. Holistic orientation

Based on recent transformative learning theories, an individual adult's transformative learning can be conceptualised as having two constituents: rational and 'extrarational' (e.g. emotions and personality) (e.g. Taylor, 1998), rather than only considering transformative learning as a rational learning process. Scholars have criticised Mezirow's work in terms of whether he was considering transformative learning using a holistic approach. Some concerns have indeed been overlooked by Mezirow in his earlier work and his published research has been criticised for having too much emphasis on rational discourse and the role of critical reflection, and also for Mezirow being unaware of the role played by affective learning and other learning methods in the process of transformative learning (Taylor, 1998, 2009). According to Brown's (2010) findings, 'people rarely change through a rational process of analyze-think-change. They are much more likely to change in a see-feel-change sequence' (p350). This is consistent with the work of other scholars who stated that a purely rational interpretation of transformative learning is not adequate and is supported by little evidence (Dirkx, 1997, cited in Cranton, 2002).

Taylor (2009) also highlighted that 'a less analytical perspective of dialogue requires a more holistic orientation or approach to transformative learning, where the learner and the educator engage in other ways of knowing' (p10). Sammut (2014) also claimed that 'emphasis on a holistic orientation is critical when a less analytical perspective of dialogue occurs. Here, engagement with *others ways of knowing* – the affective and relational – are paramount' (p50). In earlier research, Cranton (2000) also noted that 'insight, intuition, emotion, relationships, and personality may also play roles' (p65). Taylor (2009) indicated that other ways of knowing, such as affective knowing and through emotions, often act as a trigger for learner reflection and motivate them to question assumptions that they previously held deeply. Consistently, Kucukaydin and Cranton (2012) demonstrated that people are affected significantly by emotions, which either enhances or inhibits learning. They provided examples of the type of anxiety which could obstruct or motivate a person to learning in different situations. Researchers have stated that 'incorporating emotions, feelings, intuition, and imagination has

led to a more holistic understanding of transformative learning' (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006 cited in Kucukaydin and Cranton, 2012, p45).

The imagination is cardinal to initiation of the transformative learning process in that the learner is required to imagine how things could be done differently. Intuition is thought to substitute critical self-reflection because in some situations, transformative experiences would occur outside of awareness (Mezirow, 2006). Accordingly, international students are less likely to change their thoughts and behaviours if they believe that their 'old' assumptions are superior. Scholars have previously investigated Western individuals who have moved to the East and the role of their empathy towards new environments/setting in assisting foreigner's intercultural adaptation (see chapter 1.5.6.2.). However, this factor of empathy is rarely documented in discussion of people's transformative learning. The importance of the empathy component in contributing to foster transformative learning was raised by Taylor and Cranton (2013). They demonstrated that 'it is empathy that: provides the learner with the ability to identify with the perspectives of others; lessens the likelihood of prejudgement; increases the opportunity for identifying shared understanding; and facilitates critical reflection through the emotive valence of assumptions' (Taylor & Cranton, 2013 p37-38). The desire to change was also indicated by Taylor and Cranton.

In this study, a holistic approach including both rational and extrarational constituents are considered as significant for transformative learning. Besides aspects such as personality, relationship, and empathy, which has been presented above, I predict that for both UK and Chinese international students, their motivation contributes to why they chose their host country. Motivation plays a large part in how international students value their experience and how they deal with the difficulties they might face in the new context whilst abroad, and whether they have desire to change. In contrast to Chinese international students who pursue a UK higher institution because of its high reputation in the world of education, the fact that UK international students come to study in China may be due to different reasons, such as being interested in Chinese culture, or being financially supported by the Chinese Government. The reasons and motivations of international students for coming to the host country will likely affect their attitudes and behaviours in both academic and social lives. An aim of this study is to examine these motivations.

2.1.7. Awareness of context

In examining the personal and socio-cultural factors in the process of transformative learning, it is essential for the researcher to have a deeper appreciation and understanding of how context works in fostering transformative learning (Taylor, 2009). McWhinney and Markos (2003) claimed that transformation occurs when conditions that support such changes are present. The condition that fosters a person's 'search for new meanings is often one of loss, a loss of support for what has been, or the awareness that one can no longer turn back' (p21).

Sammut (2014) also suggested that 'external factors may include the conditions surrounding the immediate learning event, the personal and professional situation of the individual at the time and their prior experience, and the background or context shaping society' (p51). For example, Pierce (1986) stated that there would be fertile ground for perspective transformation to be created where disturbing events that happened in a participant's life are involved (cited in Taylor, 2009). Taylor further suggested that 'the lack of or resistance to change can also be explained from a contextual perspective, particularly in terms of barriers that are in place or inhibit what is necessary for transformative learning' (Taylor, 2009, p12). Taylor and Snyder (2012) also demonstrated that it is necessary to consider the individual in a particular context rather than applying a 'one size fits all' approach (p45).

In this study, context is considered being mainly within the campus, rather than in wider social environments. For example, some regulations of the university have been taken into account in the design of the interview questions for the current study when investigating the university's arrangement of living location for international students and its related influence on their adaptation and transformation. I predict that the living location and conditions could be an important factor contributing to international students' adaptation and transformation in both academic and social lives. Also, the academic atmosphere of the university is likely and important contributor to teachers and students' attitudes towards academia. Whether the university has strict regulation in terms of the difficulty of achieving the degree could affect students' time and energy that they would like to spend on their studies.

2.1.8. Authentic relationships

Previous research found that the role of relationships was essential for the transformative learning process; establishing a trustful relationship is paramount to the fostering of transformative learning for students (Foronda & Belknap, 2012; Taylor & Snyder, 2012). In Taylor's (1997) review of transformative learning theory, he claimed that a large volume of research reported the essentiality of relationships within the transformative learning process (Cochrane, 1981; Egan, 1985; Group for Collaborative Inquiry, 1994; Harper, 1994 all cited in Taylor, 1997). More recent research also reported that the essential effect in fostering critical reflection and transformative learning is to establish meaningful and genuine relationships with other people (Cranton, 2006; Taylor 1998).

Taylor (2007) recognised that authentic and trustful relationships were important in facilitating questioning discussions, sharing information openly, and reaching reciprocal and consensual understanding (Taylor, 2007). D'Andrea (1986) also suggested that relationships provide the context for reflection and dialogue (cited in Taylor, 1997, p38), and Taylor (2009) commented that through establishing an authentic relationship, a foundation for transformative learning is established between educators and learners. Sammut (2014) further claimed the importance of building trusting relationships in helping 'learners develop the confidence to deal with learning on an affective level, where transformation can at times be perceived as a threatening and an emotionally charged experience...the safe and sacred environment provides a physical space and emotional environment in which the coachee can be heard' (p51). If students can receive sufficient support from the faculty relating to the differences between host and original countries in terms of teaching and learning, relationships, culture and so on, the chances for international students to improve their understanding, adaptation and transformation of their cognition, affection, conation and other behaviours would be higher.

However, even though the complex nature of transformative relationships received much attention in a range of research papers, there are limited reports on what kinds of relationships were significant to the transformative learning of international students. In this study, international students' relationships with both academic staff and other students are considered in the research design in order to investigate international students' transformative learning in both academic and social areas. In this study, I predict that the relationships between teacher and student might be different abroad compared to similar relationships at home, based on the cultures in Western and Eastern countries. The international students' expectations towards

the educators' assistance in both formal and informal instruction would influence their satisfaction towards their overseas study and also towards their potential transformative learning.

2.1.9. Strengths and weaknesses of transformative learning

The terms 'transformational' and 'transformative' have described education theory for some time (Mezirow, et al., 2009) to explain the pursuit of excellence in meeting the demands of change while creating added value for organizations and individuals' (Tello, et al., 2013, p107). The theory of transformative learning has been tested by a number of empirical studies in adult education (Kreber, 2012; McWhinney & Markos, 2003; Sammut, 2014; Taylor & Snyder, 2012) and the results verified the utility of the theory. The investigation of international students' transformative learning in an intercultural context would bring benefits to universities, educators and students themselves, by helping them to achieve the most during their stay in the host country. In addition to the notable strengths of the theory of transformative learning, weaknesses have also been investigated. Such weaknesses of this theory are worth considering and will be addressed in this section.

One of the weaknesses of the theory that relates to the current study is the fact that previous research applied the theory from different perspectives with diverse groups of people, so that the findings of essential components in transformative learning were sometimes contradictory. In addition, there are limited empirical findings on international students as the target group on which to base this study. Secondly, some issues in the theory of transformative learning remain unclear. For example, the role of context and the role of relationship in the transformative learning process (Taylor, 2003 cited in Merriam & Ntseane, 2008). Besides, there are various perspectives in terms of how to define the notion of catalyst (Sammut, 2014). There is a need for thorough research that will clear up notable issues. For example, the roles played by emotions, intuition and imagination in the transformative process have been stressed by previous research but overlooked by Mezirow's earlier work. Recently, Mezirow (2009) agreed with this criticism of the transformation theory and viewed it as justified. At the same time, Mezirow underlined the importance of being critical and stated that:

The process by which we tacitly construe our beliefs may involve take-for-granted values, stereotyping, highly selective attention, limited comprehension, projection,

rationalization, minimizing or denial. This is the way we need to be able to critically assess and validate assumptions supporting our own beliefs and expectations and those of others' (p95).

Therefore, a cautious attitude is necessary when applying the theory in this study in consideration of the international students as the targeted group in an intercultural context. To address the weakness discussed above, it is worth considering that, firstly, more focus on the original theory and the development of Mezirow's central work is required. At the same time, consideration should be given to the criticism that other researchers have made and to reevaluate whether it is reasonable for them to be considered in my research. Alternatively, participants in this study have been given more opportunities to describe their overseas experiences rather than ask them questions made by the previous scholars that may contain stereotypical definitions.

2.1.10. The utility of transformative learning as a framework for the current study

Mezirow's thinking emerged against the very rich background of innovation in Adult Education in the 1970s. Influences included Freire's concept of conscientisation, which was a consciousness raising concept prominent among the women's movement, and also Kuhn's paradigms and a range of theorists from psychology and philosophy. Mezirow used and worked in the early stages of TLT in grounded theory methodology with women who had returned to college. His work was concerned with bringing about change. It also drew on the earlier work on Communicative learning and discourse, which was concerned with meaning and understanding. Mezirow (2006) saw knowledge and learning as being made up of symbols and images selected from a person's past experience but projected onto that person's sensory stimuli in the form of metaphors, which are used consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally, to provide coherence to past experience. He argued that we remember by drawing upon cues from our previous learning and then reconstructed these into new meaning. A person's existing frames of reference by which they know and understand things provide shape, focus and boundaries to enable new learning. Mezirow argued that the structures of new meaning exist two dimensionally. The first dimension has predispositions arising from psychocultural assumptions, and take the form of three sets of codes. These codes shape sensation, and set boundaries to perception, feelings, and cognition. Mezirow named the codes sociolinguistic codes (dealing with social norms, theories and ideologies), psychological codes (dealing with personality traits, repressed parental prohibitions which might block feeling, and

epitomical codes (which may be leaning styles or sensory learning preferences (e.g. learning a language through the sound, or rhythm, or by visual stimulus. The second dimension of our frame of reference is concerned with beliefs, judgements, and feeling. Mezirow believed that we cannot effectively learn things that exist out-with our meaning structures, and he identified a series of phases through his observations, the first of which was the 'disorienting dilemma', which is described in section 2.1.3.

The thoughts and behaviours that we have learned from our own culture and our related social context may need to be adjusted based on the things that we experience in a new environment. The previous accumulated knowledge and experience would definitely contribute to the habits we hold when we arrive in a new place, whereas, due to the cultural diversity, the need for awareness of differences is important. This is important not only for students but also for educators, who need to know how to respect and support the students from different backgrounds and to foster their learning. Parker and Wilding (2012) noted that 'engaging a student at the level of 'who they are' contextualizes learning in a way that makes education more meaningful and relevant' (p12).

The phenomenon known as transformative learning involves a sophisticated view of human nature that insists on our multidimensional nature and our capacity for change. There are many ways in which we challenge students and make them open to possible change but are more likely to be successful where cross- and inter-cultural studies that represent differing views of the world and its problems are presented sympathetically. This can also be effected by using historical models and the different presentations within history of society and the natural world and ensuing problems. Finally, cognitive science and psychology also present empirical studies that make us aware of cognitive and ethical processes on which our decisions and opinions are based (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010).

TLT was chosen as the theoretical framework for this thesis because of the aim to find the extent to which international students may question their own deeply held pre-suppositions or assumptions about their education, (for example, their home culture) when compared with their experiences in the host environment; and what aspects of themselves have really been transformed after spending time (and considerable money) by travelling far away from home. Previous research has provided abundant results on the challenges and hardships involved in

the stay abroad; and at the same time, it was viewed that there is potential that a person's accelerated internal growth would accompany the formidable task he or she has to face in the sojourn (e.g. Milstein, 2005). Chryssochoou (2004) also argued that in multicultural societies, the chance of encountering people with different languages, thoughts and values would promote changes in how an individual perceives and defines himself or herself (cited in Kadianaki, et al., 2015). However, it is worth questioning whether all the changes a person experiences in the new culturally different context is positive.

In this study, I am interested in finding out whether some international students do not undergo transformation during his or her overseas study, and what factors impede and discourage the transformation. Kumi-Yeboah (2014) demonstrated that respondent's transformative learning experiences take place as a consequence of individual ability to 'develop self or inner awareness from their previous knowledge and assumptions or reality of issues' (p123), which is consistent with King's (2004) assertion that the development of new perspectives would facilitate adult learners' transformative learning. I speculate that the lack of changes in an individual student could be interpreted as arising from a variety of factors; for example, considering whether the student has sufficient awareness of and desire to make the changes, their ability in identifying barriers, and whether they lack critical reflection to adjust themselves to the new environment. This study focuses on the fundamentals of transformative learning as covered by previous research, but at the same time, it intends to explore a more holistic interpretation of what contributes to or impedes international students' transformations. It takes into account many concerns, include individual's prior work and/or study experience, dialogue with university staff and with other students (verbal communication and assessment feedback in writing), holistic orientation (the role of motivation, emotions, personality, affective knowing), the role of context and authentic relationships with others, which play out in international students' overseas experiences.

Additionally, it is worth noting that transformative learning is not always positive, as has been reported by Morrice (2012). In the research to date (except Morrice) transformative learning has always been viewed as a positive experience and lack of transformative learning is viewed as a negative experience. The research conducted on international students paid great attention to their successful adaptation even though there were some discussions about the challenges they faced. However, students who dropped out from their studies have rarely been noted. Although in this study I predict that most international students would experience positive

transformative learning, for others, the potential risk of withdrawing from completing their courses can not be overlooked. This withdrawing can still be viewed as a kind of transformative learning, for example, the student realises that they do not want to study the thing they were studying due to the content of the course or due to the feeling of frustration in terms of the unacceptable teaching methods. In order to access both groups of participants' complex interconnections in terms of their personal perceptions and individual experiences, I have used face-to-face, semi-structured interviews as a research method in this study to explore responses in-depth. More details in terms of the applied methodology are discussed in the next section.

2.2. Methodology

This study on the transformative learning experiences of international students will concentrate on two groups of participants: UK international students in Chinese universities and Chinese international students in the UK universities in terms of their academic experiences in the teaching and learning process and social lives with other students when abroad. It intends to explore two research questions:

1. Do UK international students in Chinese universities and Chinese international students in UK universities experience transformative learning during their overseas studies?
2. What factors foster or impede whether they undergo transformative learning after being exposed to an intercultural context?

As discussed in the section above on the theoretical framework, rather than focus on the steps the international students would experience during their transformative learning, this study will explore deeply the individual student's experience in both academic and social life areas, and attempt to figure out the related factors that contribute to potential transformation. As revealed in the transformative learning theory literature, an overwhelming majority of scholars applied a qualitative research method. Mezirow (1971) indicated preference for 'a practical theory of adult learning that is qualitative in nature and focuses on understanding how people learn in real settings, as opposed to laboratory-based studies that could never truly capture the fullness of learning, even in instances of simulation' (cited in Goulet, 2014, p27). A qualitative approach will be used in this study.

Through conducting qualitative research interviews, this study will try to explore and explain why participants have different experiences from each other and try to obtain a deeper understanding of how international students view any putative transformations. When analysing the data, I will discuss my findings through consideration of practical suggestions for improvements in international education. In this section, the semi-structured interview as a research method will be discussed first, followed secondly by the introduction of participants' biographical background and academic aspects including their degrees and subjects. In the third section, both UK and Chinese participant selection will be discussed, followed by an outline of how data will be analysed and finally, a pilot study used in this study will be discussed.

2.2.1. Semi-structured interview as a qualitative research method

Previous research has used qualitative research methods when trying to figure out the transformative learning experiences of different groups of participants. The qualitative research method of one-to-one semi-structured interviews will be applied in this study to examine international students' potential transformative experiences in an intercultural context. Fraenkel and Wallen (1990) explained that qualitative research is different from other research methods because of its focus on a holistic picture. In other words, qualitative research focuses on the details of the analysis of the behaviours of people. Walliman and Buckler (2008) claimed, when referring to qualitative research, that 'their richness and subtlety' can 'lead to great insights into human society' (p149). Krathwohl, cited in Wiersma and Jurs (2005) stated that when researching a particular phenomenon, it is better to make quality assessments than to simply conclude the results based on pure numbers and/or measures. As explained by Mill (2001), a semi-structured interview is 'flexible and likely to promote fruitful reflection' by interviewees (p385), which meets the objective of this study to examine the details of how international students reflect on what they have experienced in both their academic and social lives with other students. In addition, one-to-one semi-structured interviews will allow the researcher to build a rapport with the interviewees and help them to understand the aims of the project (Silverman, 2006) and hopefully to obtain more systematic information than is possible in unstructured interviews (Berger, 2000).

Qualitative interviews can take different forms, for example, structured interviews or open-ended interviews. The choice of interview style is typically determined, in part, by the

researcher's underlying philosophy about the nature of interview data, or interview "accounts". One issue central to this is whether the accounts have the potential to give us "facts" about events in the world or whether the account is constructed by the interviewee or by a combination of interviewer and interviewee. Using the definitions of Silverman (2014), these philosophies fall under three categories: (i) positivism, (ii) naturalism and (iii) constructivism. Positivism holds that interview accounts can be representative of events in the real world, as opposed to an experience created solely in the interviewee's mind. Accounts are, in theory, reliable in presenting these "facts" in different settings and across different interviewees, and are also valid, in that they represent what the researcher says/thinks they do. With these assumptions, the best way to collect reliable and valid qualitative data is via standardised interview questions. Naturalism holds that each interviewee may hold deeper insights than those obtained via standardised structured interviews. Interviewee accounts still may represent events in the world, but the focus of a naturalist is on these facts from the perspective of the interviewee. To get these perspective accounts, an open-ended interview style is typically used.

The third philosophy from Silverman's typology is constructivism, which holds that interview accounts are actively constructed by both the interviewer and the interviewee. Proponents of this viewpoint are usually not concerned with the validity or reliability of the content of the account, but instead are concerned with how the account was constructed. Constructionists pay attention to what the respondents have described as part of the world. Constructionists may struggle to choose between form and content, and to classify interviews as one or the other; however, Miller and Glassner (2004) noted that it need not be seen as that, rather, focus should be given to understanding the origins of the stories and their method of production, what kind of stories they are and how they can be profitably and thoughtfully used when we draw up social theories. Silverman (2006) criticised constructionism by noting that it tended simply to examine how well the participants responded to the questions, and put less emphasis on the actual meaning of what they said and its relevance to the real world in which they were living.

Silverman (2006) suggested the term emotionalism to describe qualitative researchers that are essentially concerned with establishing rapport with participants and avoiding manipulating them at the same time. Interviewers are encouraged by researchers to be emotionally involved with interviewees. Interviewers' own feelings could be conveyed to both interviewees and readers (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997). There are researchers who prefer open-ended

interviews (naturalism) to applying a scheduled standardised interview (positivism). These researchers allow interviewees more freedom to express themselves without being constrained by the questions in the schedule. Byrne (2004) discussed that by applying an open-ended interview with flexible questions, it was more likely for the interviewer to receive a more considered reply than prescheduled closed questions. This will then provide better access to participants' views, and allow a deep and complex level of understanding that could not be achieved through other approaches, particularly for survey-based research approaches. Unstructured or open-ended interviews are more flexible and can allow researchers to study participants' perceptions and feelings to a greater degree than prestructured interviews. However, problems can arise; for example, comparing one interview with another becomes more difficult than with prestructured interviews (Selltiz et al., 1964 cited in Silverman, 2006).

Interviews should be conversational, so that the interviewees would not limit their answers, but rather, would to expand on what they have to say. At the same time, the process requires the interviewer to have some control over when to end a topic and to start a new one (Silverman, 2006). Therefore, in this current study, a semi-structured interview with some specific topics are pursued, including classroom activities, living environment, teacher-student relationships, and student-student relationships. At the same time, I allow time for participants to develop their own stories. Therefore, a few general interview questions are needed to elicit conversation between interviewer and interviewees, and some additional questions are designed as prompts to remind the interviewees when needed. In addition, compared to the structured interview, there is flexibility in how the questions are asked. Based on a particular context, inappropriate questions could be omitted, or additional ones could be included (Teijlingen, 2014).

Because I conducted a lot of prior research, some speculation about participants' experiences had been obtained, and this allowed me to consider the relationship between transformative learning theory and semi-structured interviews when designing the interview questions. The central and general interview questions were designed to address some particular aspects such as classroom teaching styles. Based on previous research, we know that when international students are involved in a culturally different context, they face a diverse range of challenges. Their ways of thinking and behaviour learned in their home country may not work well in the host country. Their frame of reference, which is based on culture and contextual experience might be changed after new experiences in the new environment. Transformative learning

touches learners' deepest levels of existing knowledge and meaning, and then affects their 'most immediate and concrete levels of knowledge, perception and action' (Palma & Pedrozo, 2016, p7). In this study, I am interested in obtaining rich information about international students' learning experiences in both academic and social lives. Based on what has been investigated in previous studies, I speculated that individual students may have their own story about their experience in the new environment even though the students who come from the same country. Participants' personality, prior study and/or work experience, their age and marital status and other factors may contribute to the differences between individual students. Individual students' unique intercultural experiences in new environments are affected by factors such as their personality, prior study and/or work experience, their age and marital status and amongst others. By looking at individual differences, this study analyses what factors foster or inhibit international student's transformative learning. Interview questions were designed in a semi-structured manner to allow time for participants to share their own stories. Common themes and unique characteristics may emerge through the interview data analysis. At the same time, unlike unstructured interviews, the researcher will have more control of the interview topics. When investigating international students' overseas experience, it is important to cover many different aspects of their lives. In this study, finding the central focus is essential so that a particular research topic is researched in depth.

Even though Scribner and Donaldson (2001) discussed that the approach of applying the method of interviews to collect data provided them with opportunities to discover where and how critical reflection of learning occurred, attention also needs to be paid to some drawbacks that arise in qualitative research. Walliman and Buckler (2008) stated that, compared with the numbers in quantitative research, 'words, and relationships between them are far less precise than numbers. This makes qualitative research more dependent on careful definition of the meaning of the words, the development of concepts and the plotting of interrelationships between variables' (p149). In addition, 'qualitative data, because they cannot be dispassionately measured in a standard way, are more susceptible to varied interpretations and evaluation' (Walliman & Buckler 2008, p149). Cohen et al. (2011) also emphasised the importance of avoiding making judgements during the interviews. As explained earlier in this chapter, to avoid the drawbacks of qualitative research methodology, during the interviews, I was careful when applying controversial definitions such as whether there has been a crisis contributing to a person's transformative learning. Rather, participants will be asked more general questions such as 'is there anything or are there any activities that could serve as triggers or cause a disorienting dilemma for your transformative learning?' The participants

will be provided with more detailed explanations if they do not understand what the question means. For example, the question could be replaced by 'is there any significant incident which happened during your overseas studies that contributes to making you consider whether or not your original thinking and/or behaviours were appropriate? If so, what did you do to adjust to the new context?'

The interview questions centre on the main issues of teaching styles (in classroom); teacher and students' relationships, academic support, hosts attitudes, context related issues, and students and students' relationships. Other factors which were also considered as essential and as having possible influence on participants with regard to whether they experience a transformative learning include, for example, students' motivation to study abroad, age, and length of time in the host country. Some of these issues were referred to by previous researchers and may relate to international students' new culturally different experiences (e.g. Kumi-Yeboah, 2014).

2.2.2. Participants' background

Interviews were conducted with 32 participants in total with 14 UK international students and 18 Chinese international students respectively. 30 participants either already had their degree or were in the process of their studies during the time of the interview. The other two participants were one UK participant and one Chinese participant who had dropped out in the middle of their studies. These two drop-out students were interviewed because I believed that failure is as important as success. The consideration was that the experience expressed by current students or the students who have obtained their degree was not sufficient to get the comprehensive information with regard to international students as a whole group. Opportunities may be missed to discover problems that could lead to students' failures, which are important, and may happen again in the future. Interviewing the students who dropped out from their study is a way to explore the potential risk that current students may also face, which is information that both university staff and students themselves need to be aware of.

This study was conducted with two groups of international students who came from UK universities and Chinese universities. For ethical reasons, given the small number of students, naming the institutions was rather problematic, therefore, the names of the universities have been anonymised. In Group 1, 18 Chinese Ph.D. participants were selected from two

universities, both of which had a large proportion of international Chinese Ph.D. students enrolled. Both universities had a good reputation for teaching quality and were ranked in the top 20 universities in the UK. Seven participants were from UK University A (UKUA) and ten from University B (UKUB), plus one other Chinese participant who had dropped out from UK University A (UKUA). Since there were limited numbers of UK international students in Chinese institutions, 13 participants were selected from seven universities for Group 2. The universities were located in Beijing, Tianjin, and Nanjing.

The importance of choosing these two groups of participants needs to be clarified. It has been noted that a continuous increasing number of Chinese international students come to study on UK higher education institution campuses. Although, compared to other international students in Chinese universities, the UK is one of the least representative nationalities, the numbers from this group have been increasing due to the rapid development of Chinese higher education, and the international students cooperative exchange programmes that have been promoted by both UK and Chinese governments in recent years. After conducting a pilot study in two universities in Beijing, and then conducting the formal research during the following year, it was found that the dramatically increased number of UK international students coincided with a significant improvement of the services provided by universities. Additionally, as documented in the literature, an increased number of international students are seeking graduate degrees in non-traditional countries such as China, looking for different educational and cultural experiences (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011).

Through conducting research on UK and Chinese participants, it may be possible to help the universities, educators and students themselves to have better understanding of these two educational systems. The good points in each system could be promoted, and attention paid to disadvantages in order to develop a higher quality of higher education to meet the needs of international students. In order to offer international students a more fruitful overseas experience in the host country, both UK and Chinese higher education institutions should be aware of the importance of what the international students have achieved during their experience, to ensure a positive development of international higher education in future. At the same time, bearing in mind the important role that international students play in higher education in the economy, cultural and educational exchange, this research aims to fill gaps in the knowledge of international students through considering the perspective of transformative learning theory. Therefore, the objectives of this study around international students' transformative learning are important.

Participants' degrees

The qualitative method of conducting interviews was designed to develop and explore detailed information from both groups of international students' transformative learning experiences. It was thought that the length of stay in the host country would influence international students' experience. Staying longer in a foreign country provides a learner with more opportunities to become familiar with the educational and non-educational environment and consequently allows more time during which participants may undergo transformative learning in both academic and social lives. This study, therefore, had a preference to choose participants who spend longer times on their degrees. Therefore, Ph.D. students were the priority option. The sample of Chinese participants was made up of full time registered Ph.D. students, who, at the time of the interviews, had finished their degree, or who were in their third or fourth year in both universities in the UK. However, due to the limited number of UK international students in Chinese higher institutions, UK Master's students were also been chosen as participants with the objectives of balancing the numbers of the two groups: UK Master's international students were selected as participants along with UK Ph.D. students, with ten and two students respectively, plus one other UK participant who dropped out of his Ph.D. studies. It is worth noting that in Chinese higher education, Master's students have to spend two to three years completing the degree. Compared to the one-year requirement in UK higher education, it seems likely that international students in Chinese institutions may have more time and opportunity to experience the host's academic and cultural areas. In addition, a majority of the Chinese participants had already completed a Master's degree in UK universities. When designing the interview questions, the classroom activities the participants experienced were considered for both groups of participants. Given the nature of Ph.D. students who have no (or few) compulsory courses to take, the questions relating to teaching styles in the classroom were targeted towards UK Master's students, and Chinese participants with a UK Master's degree background.

Participants' academic subjects

Based on my own experience as an international student, and also on the reports from previous research (e.g. Gardner, 2007), it was considered that different academic subjects would influence participants' experiences. For example, Engineering or Chemistry students would have more opportunities to meet their supervisors due to working in the same research areas,

and sharing the same equipment and working places (Gardner, 2007; Le & Gardner, 2010). However, for students from disciplines such as Education, most individuals focus on their own research subjects with less overlap between students' projects and those of their supervisors. In addition, based on my initial consultation with Chinese universities and personal research on universities' websites, it was found that, for international students who chose a Chinese higher institution as their destination, there was a tendency for them to choose subjects in Business, Finance, Philosophy and Media related areas. With the consideration explained above, and in order to balance the disciplines between these two groups of UK and Chinese participants, this study limited the scope when selecting Chinese participants and excluded Chinese international students from 'hard science' subjects.

2.2.3. Selection of participants

There are two ways of selecting UK participants and Chinese participants: criterion sampling and snowball sampling (Morrow & Smith, 2000). Due to the limited number of UK international students in Chinese higher institution, information on the individual student was gained by asking university staff whose job it was to recruit UK participants. The Chinese participants who were invited to participate in the study were informed by their university staff and also by their Chinese student friends. Before the interviews, participants were sent a consent letter explaining the nature of the study, advising on their right to withdraw at any time during the interview and also information on the study, the length of the interview, the researcher's contact information. Participants were also informed that their name would be kept anonymous and the process of the interview would be recorded. All the information provided in the consent form was designed to make sure the participants would feel safe and consequently provide sufficient knowledge about the research questions. In this thesis, the real name of each participant has been replaced by a number to protect students' confidentiality. For example, UKP12 represents UK participant numbered 12 and CHP6 represents Chinese participant numbered 6.

2.2.4. Data analysis

Rapley (2004) made the point that identity work and cultural stories are two interlinked phenomena revealed in interview conversations. However, he further noted that interview data should be analysed, at least initially, from the circumstances in which they were produced,

rather than by separating ‘our analysis from the turn-by-turn production (by both interviewee and interviewer) of these identities as stories (Silverman, 2006, p137). In this current study, an international student’s transformative learning is individual, while the factors influencing these transformational experiences might be culturally related. What the two groups of participants have obtained in their original cultural context would contribute to their unique experience in the new culturally different environment. They may share something in common, but they have their own individual stories. Participants’ responses could be coded into different sets of reasons for how and why their transformative learning has been affected. Some predominant reasons would be likely to emerge.

Rapley (2004) contended that a central rationale when conducting qualitative interviews is to obtain detailed and comprehensive responses. For this purpose, interviewers should follow up on the views the interviewees have described, foremost to leave interviewees time for expression. Semi-structured interview was chosen for this current study because of its flexibility in enabling the researcher to reach the topics they want and also in leaving the interviewees time for developing their individual stories. Teijlingen (2014) suggested that there are some important skills that can be employed when conducting semi-structured interviews, including controlling the urge towards self-presentation, to listen actively and emphatically, and to be patient. Noaks and Wincup (2004) suggested that the interviewer should do some probing, make a relationship and develop rapport with the interviewee, and have a comprehensive idea of the aims of the project. When conducting research with groups of people who may have negative feelings towards their experience, an interviewer’s emotions should be expressed carefully, so as to avoid influencing the interviewee’s response. After consideration, I decided to apply a neutral attitude during my interviews and analysis so that participants accounts, or narratives, were not shaped by the interviewer more than necessary, as suggested by Rapley (2004), to facilitate the participant’s talk ‘without asserting his opinions or making any appreciative or critical comments’ (cited in Silverman, 2014, p168) Overemphasis on emotions would likely cause problems because of my own position as an international student in a UK university. Also, as a Chinese person, when I interview an international student who is pursuing a degree in a Chinese university, I must ensure they express their own understanding with regard to the teaching and learning process. What interviewees express may be factually untrue, and containing emotions may be a challenge for the interviewer. Silverman (2006) indicated that assuming that feelings and lively experience is always present in the responses of the participants can cause the data from the interviews to

be analysed in an unemotional way. If there are similarities in these personal accounts, this suggests that these participants' answers may need to be analysed further.

The approach of narrative analysis will be applied in this research. Narrative analysis is a term used to cover a wide variety of qualitative data analysis. Merriam and SeonJoo (2012) indicated that 'narrative analysis is quite simply the analysis of people's stories' (p63). They also noted that the narrative analysis approach is particularly suitable for transformative learning research given the reason that it provides a chance for people to 'convey their personal experience of this type of learning through stories' (Merriam & SeonJoo, 2012, p63). Bell (2010) advocated that when the researcher wants to portray 'intensely personal accounts of human experience' (p19), a narrative approach is most appropriate. Narrative analysis is thought of as a constructivist approach. Narratives are a product of the participant's memories constructed through their particular beliefs, culture and prior knowledge; concomitantly, the interviewer participates in this construction by shaping the narrative through asking questions and then further questions based on the participant's responses, with the purpose of directing the narrative flow.

According to constructionism, the interviewees are not simply individuals with their own unique experiences. Rather, they represent themselves as members of their cultures; they are members who 'use culturally available resources in order to construct their stories' (Miller and Glassner, 1997 cited in Silverman, 2006, p134). They further explained that, for the sake of being understood by other people, interviewees deploy narratives to make themselves clear and their answers are considered as cultural stories. Miller and Glassner's analysis of their data also helped me to think about ways of analysing my data.

In analysing the data, firstly, notes were made alongside each transcription and the main points were highlighted as suggested by Bell (2010), such as the similarity and differences of participants' responses. Essential and necessary information was chosen for further discussion in order to obtain more in-depth information. Secondly, after reading through the transcripts several times while compiling written memos, the main themes were generated. These themes were compared when looking for similarities and unique differences according to the nature of the two groups of participants' experiences, and this comparison led to the finding of broader themes for categorising the participants' overseas experience. Data analysis that emerged from the interviews indicated seven major themes, namely: teaching in the classroom, teacher-student relationships, academic support, student-student relationships, hosts' attitudes,

living environment as a contextual factor, and international students' transformative experiences.

2.2.5. Pilot study

Bell (2010) suggested that 'questions and coding can be developed during the course of pilot interviews. There may be changes as you go on. What seemed to be a good idea at the start may not be appropriate as you proceed' (p164). Of the 32 participants selected, two were selected for a pilot interview. These two participants were asked the designed pilot questions. After that, revised semi-structured interview questions were applied to new interviewees. Although the basic interview questions were planned in advance, attempts were made to further elucidate the questions when the interviewees were confused or further information was required from them. This was another reason that I chose interviews as the research method. Seidman (1998) described that a skilful interviewer should have the ability to question participants' responses in detail, explore their motivations, and control the progress during the interviews. In addition, compared with the questionnaire method, interviews can reflect and provide valuable information through respondents' expression.

These two pilot interviews provided me with valuable information about not only the content of the interview but also the skills needed for effective interview and communication. The issues I identified in these pilot interviews are listed below.

1. The length of the interview questions. Some of the particular questions were very long, with more than one key point in one question. For example, when I asked 'how would you view your adaptation to the host teaching styles and learning methods?' participants may forget to answer about their adaptation of the 'learning methods' after they have made a long response to their views towards the 'host teaching styles'.

Solution: for this issue it was to separate the questions and ask them one by one, or following up the initial response with something along the lines of: 'and what about your thoughts on... (The learning methods)?'

2. Straying from the point. Since the topic of international student' experience is related to nearly all aspects of their life, when participants mentioned some interesting points, I

wanted to know more. This was in spite of it being beyond the core of my research.

Solution: the best solution is to be conscious of time, and to make a note to refer back to something later on if possible (if, for example, I have the time) and want to (because it is interesting).

3. Different participant backgrounds need to be considered. These two pilot interviews were conducted with two participants who had totally different backgrounds and status, including gender, age, and length of time in China, degrees, work experience, and understanding/experience of other cultures. When I went through previous research studies, I found that these factors had contributed to the students' experiences, but I had not prepared for them in my interview questions. I was trying to minimize these factors (since they have already been discussed) and instead attempted to highlight the effects of their attitudes and behaviours; however, it seems they are necessary and essential points that cannot be overlooked.

Solution: I included this information in the new updated interview questions.

4. Appropriate interview environment. Although the literature on methodology emphasises the importance of letting the participants decide on the place where they feel comfortable for the interview, suggestions might be made for certain places. In the pilot interviews, one participant chose a café bar as the interview place but there was loud music, so it was hard for me to complete the transcript later.

Solution: I recommended having our interview in a place such as a classroom, or I tried to make appointments with participants in the morning in order to avoid the busiest peak times in public places.

5. The different feedback I got from these two participants made me consider the different types of universities that students attend. For example, when responding to questions on their relationships with their classmates (or other students on campus), they had very different experiences. The participant from a university in Beijing said that she and her classmate (who was from Europe) seemed to be treated as representatives of Western countries. They were constantly surrounded by their classmates (although she is not the kind of person who needs a lot of friends). In contrast, the participant (UKP14) from one

university in Beijing said: 'I feel like sometimes foreign students are quite segregated. I feel cut off from Chinese students here'. As a result he found that it seemed easier to communicate with people outside the campus than with those inside.

It was important for me to consider that if this kind of thing should arise in later interviews that I would need to think of a way to probe further and find out more about why this sort of segregation happened. I thought that it may well be a university policy, a hangover from previous government policy, or a consequence of student attitudes. All these thoughts and issues contributed to my revision of the interview questions.

Some issues seem to have been overlooked or have been paid little attention by previous researchers. For example, international students' living accommodation/locations. In the pilot study, the student from a university in Beijing mentioned that the international students' dormitories were far away from the Chinese students' dorms, and classes were held in a separate building very near the international students' dorms. Most interactions with Chinese students occurred by chance and only with those who really wanted to talk to international students. It is worth considering that the content of this student's responses might not really be the case for other students, but if other interviewees had a similar approach (in terms of where buildings are, for example) then it will compound students' attitudes and feelings that they are segregated or different and if they are hostile to the host culture as well, then the problem will become exaggerated.

In conclusion, through conducting the pilot study, I addressed what did work and what did not work in my interviews, which was important as I went forward. Based on the review of the pilot study, it appeared that fewer questions were better, or at least that short, simply structured ones worked well. These can then be followed up with what is called 'probing', where I go for more detail once the participant has provided some initial information.

2.2.6. Interview questions

The interview questions were designed to identify the following issues including: (i) what factors would influence international students to have a rich experience in the host country, (ii) what students have experienced in order to integrate into the host teaching and learning styles, (iii) their relationship with teachers in academic meetings and private interactions,

socialisation with co-national students, non-co-national students (local students and other international students), (iv) to figure out that whether or not there are culture related issues such as the potential hierarchy of staff and students which was a stereotype held by previous scholars with concern under the Chinese context, and (v) to determine whether international students experienced transformative learning in a variety of ways in academic (educational) and social lives (non-education). The interview questions can be found in Appendix 1.

2.3. Chapter conclusion

In Chapter 2, the choice of transformative learning as a theoretical framework and the semi-structured interview as the research methodology have been discussed. Details are provided in terms of the reasons for applying the particular theory and methodology. Transformative learning theory has been considered an important learning process for adult learners through questioning their existing knowledge and meaning and the construction of the new-meaning. It is believed that people need to understand the risks they face and they are then in a better position to adopt new attitudes and behaviours, especially during exposure to a culturally different context under the pressure of finishing a degree. Attention has been given to the limitations of applying the theory and methodology. In the two following chapters, data selected from each group of participants will be analysed.

Chapter 3

Data analysis of UK participants

Introduction

Interview questions were formulated based on the discussion of the theory of transformative learning and the existing literature analysed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 to meet following research objectives: (i) exploring whether UK international students in Chinese universities and Chinese international students in UK universities experience transformative learning through their overseas studies, and (ii) determining which factors foster or impede this transformation. The data collected from both groups of participants is presented in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. This study investigated whether a person's transformational learning could be triggered by a personal crisis caused by moving to a new place and/or could be accumulated from daily experience, such that international students' perceptions regarding their experience in academic areas and in their social lives required to be elicited. Main themes that have emerged from the transcripts will be analysed.

In this chapter, analyses of five main themes relating to UK international students' academic studies and social lives with other students are presented. In section one, the individual students' biographical details will be presented. In section two, UK interviewees' views towards teaching styles in Chinese universities and academic support from the educators are presented. This is followed by UK participants' relationships with teachers and other students in sections 3 and 4 respectively. In section 5, UK international students' transformative learning experiences are analysed with factors that have emerged from UK participants' responses, including the attitudes and authority of the hosts, accommodation and living location, UK participants in programmes taught in English, and programme design.

3.1. Biographical details

Fourteen UK participants were selected for this research. Eleven of them were doing a Master's degree, two were Ph.D. students, and one Ph.D. student who dropped out from his Ph.D. degree. These participants were selected from seven universities located in Beijing, Tianjin and Nanjing. Five of them were doing Chinese taught programs and the other nine

were doing English taught programs. The majors that they were taking included Economics, International Relations, Social Security, New Media, Chinese History, and Film and Television Production, Environmental Protection and Management, and Chinese Philosophy. Biographical details of these UK participants included the following subcategories: 1. Gender and Age; 2. Previous work or/and study experience; 3. Length of time in China. 4. Reasons for studying in China.

3.1.1. Gender and age

There were four females and ten male participants in the UK group. None of the male participants referred to gender as a factor that influenced their transformative learning in their studies and social lives, whereas two of the four female participants (UKP4 and UKP11) believed that female students need more support than male students when exposed to a new environment. These two participants also identified that they experienced anxiety due to being away from their family and other relationships from home. Gender, as a factor contributing to worries about relationships and marriage, has been reported previously (Yan & Berliner, 2013). Yan and Berliner also identified that female students experience more pressure than male students do. In addition, one student highlighted that, due to the nature of doing a Ph.D., long periods of separation from her boyfriend were incurred, which caused her stress in addition to that from being alone in China. This was made particularly challenging because of a heavy workload and health problem. Yan and Berliner (2013) also noted that, ‘in many cases, the life of a student studying abroad was like a survival test for long-distance relationship or marriage’ (p70).

The age range of the UK participants was from 22 to 31 years old. Both female and male students considered age to be as an issue in the intercultural context. For instance, UKP2 expressed that his age was old enough to change his lifestyle by reducing the frequency of his visits to the pub to socialise with friends. In addition, being older than their peers caused trouble for UK respondents, particularly under certain circumstances in China where younger people are expected to show respect to elders. UKP1 shared his experience, saying that:

Some of them (the classmates) are 3-4 years younger than me. One of them is very respectful to me. It is a kind of weird friendship.

UKP11 also reported that she was the only international student doing a Ph.D. in her Chinese university. She found the fact that most other undergraduate and master’s students in the

Chinese university were much younger than herself to be stressful.

Transcripts revealed that, when gender is considered as a factor, female international students were more likely to be under pressure than male peer students. This was uncovered when participants talked about their well-being when exposed to the new and strange environment, particularly with limited numbers of international students from the same or similar cultural backgrounds in the same Chinese university, as reported by UKP11.

3.1.2. Previous work and/or study experience

As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the six essential components for the theory of transformative learning is the individual's experience, including their prior experience and experience in the new context. This section will discuss UK international students' prior work and overseas study experiences prior to studying for their current degrees.

Previous work experience

The transcripts revealed that all of the UK participants had work experience before they started their current degree; some of them believed their previous work experience influenced their perceptions of their current study (UKP4, UKP8, UKP9, UKP10 and UKP11). For example, UKP8 identified the importance of his previous work experience on his current study by saying that:

I have been working 9a.m. to 5p.m. so now I can organise my time better when I am studying, I can appreciate why I am studying, and it will help me to get a good job when I am older. I think some people don't have work experience; they just study for the sake of it, I think they don't know why they are studying. I think this has an influence, yeah.

UKP10 also expressed a better understanding of what he wanted in the future through his previous work and academic study experience, in these words:

I think I may want to get a government job, so maybe doing a Ph.D. as well. I thought having a master's may be something more specific than philosophy which is what I did in my undergraduate (degree).

In contrast, there is evidence that for participants (UKP1, UKP2, UKP3 and UKP6) who reported that their previous working experience did not have a significant influence on their

current study. This was because most of the jobs the participants had taken were part-time and were not closely related to their degree subject.

In short, what experience participants obtained from previous work experience could provide them with a better understanding of what they wanted to get out of the degree they were currently studying for, and a better understanding of their future plans. If work experience was related to degree subject, this was likely to make participants study harder. For example, UKP11 noted that, because she had work experience in a postgraduate office at the time of her interview, she had insights into how overworked the faculty members were.

Previous overseas study experience

There were five UK participants who had overseas study experiences in either China or in other countries (UKP1, UKP2, UKP5, UKP7 and UKP9). They all expressed that their previous overseas study experience did help them to adjust to the current situation in China. For example, UKP1 had lived in Hong Kong and had been in Beijing as an exchange student for two months before doing his Master's degree; since he really liked China, he applied for and received a scholarship to study for a Master's degree in China and returned back. He was very adaptive and positive about his experience and was trying to work very hard.

UKP5, who had previous overseas experience in the US, expressed a more tolerant and positive attitude towards the teaching styles in China. He thought it was interesting to compare them to those in the UK and US. He said:

The way I looked it, it's always look positive.... be educated first in the UK, I was educated in the old world superpower, went to America, the current world superpower, and now in China, the potential next world superpower. I have seen the best of three worlds now. So I am looking at the old way, the current way and the possible new way, because China is formulating its own way, it makes it far more interesting to study here (in China) than at home.

Based on the responses from UK interviewees, it was found that having previous overseas experience could have a positive impact on international students' attitudes towards the new, culturally different environment, and help to ameliorate the difficulties they had experienced in their overseas studies. Having met people with different backgrounds appeared to assist participants to gain a better understanding in terms of different ways of thinking, behaviour, and customs. Additionally, previous overseas study led to more realistic expectations in terms

of new life in the host country, which could help reduce pressure and subsequent depression and also facilitate their adaptation as a consequence.

3.1.3. Length of time in China

The length of time the UK participants had been in China for ranged from seven months to eight years. Few of the respondents reported that the length of time they had spent in China influenced their transformative learning experiences. There were no obvious differences emerging from the transcripts regarding understanding of the Chinese culture between participants who had lived in China for at least seven months and the one with eight years' experience of the country. The only difference was in their understanding around the work environment and relationships. For example, UKP12, even though she had been living in China for eight years (working for most of the time), reported that even though she had a better understanding of Chinese ways of life, especially with the experience of working with Chinese people, she was not sure that she has been transformed in many ways.

3.1.4. Reasons for study in China

When responding to the question of why a Chinese university was selected as their destination for further study, UK participants highlighted different reasons and motivations, which are displayed in Table 1.

| | | |
|----|---|--|
| 1 | Interest in culture (Chinese Culture) | UKP1, UKP3, UKP4, UKP13, UKP14 |
| 2 | Economic development in China | UKP1, UKP9 |
| 3 | Scholarships | UKP1, UKP2, UKP4, UKP7, UKP9, UKP13, UKP14 |
| 4 | Career development | UKP1 |
| 5 | Master's degree | UKP3, UKP4, UKP9, UKP10 |
| 6 | Learn a foreign language (Chinese) | UKP3, UKP6, UKP8, UKP10 |
| 7 | Factors relatives related to family members | UKP1, UKP3, UKP6, UKP7 |
| 8 | Ease of travel to and affordable living cost in China | UKP2, UKP8, UKP9 |
| 9 | Interesting project | UKP11 |
| 10 | No suitable supervisor in the UK | UKP2 |

***Table 1. UK participants' reasons and motivations for coming to China**

Most UK participants who reported that they chose a Chinese university based on being awarded a scholarship chose to go wherever the institution or the Chinese government could provide one, rather than making a choice based on the particular university's reputation and teaching quality.

Transcripts revealed that UK participants who wanted to learn a foreign language and experience culture as their main goals, did not view academic issues to be as important. For example, UKP4 expressed that the main reason for her choice was that she wanted to go somewhere else with a different culture, and obtaining a Master's degree in the process was an added bonus. When facing different and unsatisfactory teaching styles, UKP4 noted that:

When I was frustrated, at the same time, I have to think about myself, and the reasons why I want to study Master's in the first place. So I think if I studied a Master's in England, I would definitely learn a lot more. But I came to the China for the experience; this is why I didn't do it in England. It obviously has its pros and cons. I'm not learning much in the class, but I'm learning so much personally through the experience.

Another example, taken from UKP8, whose aim was to learn Chinese rather than something academic, was critical of the teaching at the Chinese university. He expressed that he did not feel very disappointed. In his words:

For me the main reason to do the course is to improve my Chinese, not to know about International Relations, not much. That's what I'm interested in, but wasn't my priority. So I don't feel that disappointed. If I had done it to understand International Relations, if I want to do a Ph.D. or something like that, I would feel a little bit disappointed by the course... now we just want to pass. I have met some people who say the same thing as me, some teachers are very good, but I think some of them are very low quality.

Analysis of the data revealed that the reasons and motivations for an individual to come to China may influence the amount of effort the student is then willing to put in when facing difficulties in both academic and social life, how they valued their experience in China (for example, UKP4 and UKP8), and, how much and in which perspectives they have consequently been transformed. A student's effort is important for obtaining transformative learning experiences. If students did not view their study as important, there was little chance for them to be transformed academically. For instance, UKP6 expressed that it was his motivation that

had contributed to his academic development:

I would say my own interest in the subject has been keeping me studying and trying to improve the ability to read and talk to people, because I'm interested in the subject. So I say, motivation.

UKP10 also stated that: 'it is my initiatives in going out and trying to make contact with teachers and other students after classes, see them about academic issues etc.'

3.2. Teaching style in Chinese universities

As discussed in Chapter 2, an individual's prior experience and current experience contribute to potential transformative learning. This section will concentrate on analysing the classroom experience of UK participants. UK participants' views towards teaching styles in Chinese universities will be presented. The challenges in the new academic environment provided a chance for the participants to think about their previous study experiences, and to figure out a way to get through the difficulties and better adapt to the new academic environment; this is considered to be critical reflection, one of the essential features contributing to transformative learning. The process of struggling and adapting may create a condition for an individual's transformation. Seven themes under the topic of teaching style in Chinese universities which emerged from the interviews will be analysed. They were: (i) Chinese ways of teaching, (ii) Lecturers' overseas experience, (iii) Lecturers' language competence, (iv) Lecturers' age, (v) Significance of the size of the class, (vi) Politics, and (vii) UK styles of teaching.

3.2.1. Chinese teaching styles

UK participants reported that there were some features particular to Chinese traditional teaching styles, including a lack of resources supplied by lecturers, a lack of discussion/debating and interaction during the class, and a lack of critical thinking and independent learning among Chinese students.

3.2.1.1. A lack of resources used by the lecturers

Firstly, a majority of participants reported that the use of resources was a significant difference between UK and Chinese universities when it comes to the style of teaching, which was rarely raised in previous studies. UK participants (UKP1, UKP3, UKP8, UKP9 and UKP10)

identified one of the features of the Chinese traditional teaching style was that it was not typical to receive reading lists before the class, while in the UK there was always some background information for students to preview. UKP10 described his experience of teaching/learning in China was that 'in lectures the students would sit and listen to the teacher reading his or her article or reading every word of a PowerPoint; and this played into a Chinese way of teaching'.

More specifically, the criticism from UK interviewees on Chinese teachers' preparation for the courses were twofold, 1) reading through PowerPoint slides for the whole lecture and 2) relying on only one textbook for the course. This situation caused some of the UK participants to question the lecturers' specialisations and professionalism as academics (UKP3, UKP4 and UKP8), for example, UKP4 said:

Sometimes we have teachers teaching us for the sole reason they are the only people speaking English, and sometimes they are not specialists in the topic under discussion, so sometimes they don't like to move away from the PowerPoint, because that's what they know, they don't know anything more.

UK participants compared the differences with regard to the application and use of resources in Chinese university to their previous studies in the UK. UKP9 noticed that in the UK, the professors' input seems to play a larger role than just prepare slides. UKP9 further described that:

In terms of the teaching, that would be, here (in China), we tend to use one textbook. While in the UK my programme will use one or two chapters from different books. We used a lot of books. It is quite different to get used to, you used to use two or three chapters and they are all from different authors and then you would have to think more critically to apply what author A said, what author B said, and compare whereas here (in China) it is more that we have to take what is given.

UK participants tended to be dissatisfied with their course due to the lack of resources provided by the lecturers because they were accustomed to receiving sufficient reading lists before the lecture in their home country. Some of them (UKP3, UKP4, UKP9 and UKP10) had to search for more materials by themselves. The internet became the only way to search for resources due to the limited access to the library for non-Chinese students, which was criticised by UK participants. UKP4 complained about the fact that there was no English guidance on how to use the library for international students. UKP3 expressed his attitudes when adjusting to these differences in teaching:

It is more just don't expect anything and take what comes, if (you) don't understand

what is going on, just do some extra stuff yourself.

3.2.1.2. A lack of discussion / debating and interaction during the class

When judging whether Chinese teaching styles were traditional or not, one of the judging standards used by UK participants was whether there was discussion and debate during the class. UK participants who were in Chinese taught programmes found that, unlike in UK universities, most Chinese students in Chinese universities did not enjoy being involved in discussion and were reluctant when it came to debating (UKP2, UKP3 and UKP12). This was in contrast to their previous study experience in the UK (UKP6, UKP7 and UKP11). UKP8 claimed that 'if there was discussion (in China) during a big class, it was between students-teachers, rather than students-students, it is one way only and everyone just listened'. Based on respondents' comments, it is apparent that there was little discussion in class and that communication was one way (from teacher to student), and that this feature was identified as particular to a Chinese traditional teaching style.

Subject differences are reflected in interview transcripts. UKP6 who studied Social Policy in China, noted that there was little debate during the teaching and learning process; compare this to UKP5 from the same university who studied International Relations. UKP5 expressed that his teachers were very supportive and encouraged students to debate in order to help form a student's personal theory:

In fact two people in my class have a tendency to agree with the teacher all the time, and they (the teachers) get really angry about that, they are not happy about it, because they (the students) just follow what the lecturer said, that is not that the course is about.

In contrast, UKP9 stated that the communication in the classroom is probably the strongest part of the course in Chinese university because there were only 12 people on his course, making the dialogue between students and professors a lot better and closer than his experience in the UK. Class size will be analysed in section 3.2.6.

3.2.1.3. A lack of critical thinking and independent learning among Chinese students

For UK respondents (UKP4, UKP5, UKP9, UKP10 and UKP13), in particular those involved in Chinese programmes (UKP6), it is apparent that there were often lectures that consisted of

students sitting and listening to the teacher reading his or her article or reading every word on the PowerPoint they displayed. Students did not need to do any critical thinking; instead, they admired and listened to the teachers' essay and learned something from that. It was normal for the teacher to talk and students to take notes and ask questions at the end. UK participants noted that some Chinese students could not think critically because they were perhaps too accustomed to this teaching style where they do not need critical thinking. This leads to Chinese students getting very nervous when they are asked to think critically because they are not sure how to do it; therefore, some of them just gave opinions cited from other authors rather than providing their own opinions. UKP5 stated that Chinese students are developing and getting better in this respect, but the process has a long way to go. UKP9 described his experience in a Chinese university by noting that:

In China, it's more about you reading the textbook; you do not necessarily need to think about it. You could theoretically just sit back in the class and not take any notes, whatsoever; just essentially watch the presentation without having to think critically about it.

There are at least two possible reasons that emerged from the UK participants answers that contribute to a lack of critical thinking among Chinese students. The first reason reported was an issue related to culture (UKP4). UKP4 commented that in Chinese society there was a lack of respect for individuals and for children. Based on UKP6's experiences in a Chinese taught Master's degree programme, he speculated that the study for Master's degree was the first time that some of his classmates had been asked to voice their own opinions. The second reason was more academic: some participants believed that some Chinese students perhaps did not have prior experience of doing research and this contributed to the fact that Chinese students were not used to questioning and thinking critically in and outside the class (UKP6, UKP9). In contrast, for UK participants, doing independent research with critical thinking was important when in the UK. In their previous studies in UK universities, UK students were used to being asked to provide their own opinions in class, even in primary and high school before that (UKP5, UKP8). For example, UKP9 compared his experience between UK and Chinese university and expressed that in the UK the academic atmosphere is important:

I was used to not only being asked questions by members of the department, but also to asking questions during lectures on a particular academic topic. In the UK, you have to think a lot more about the content provided in the class, [to think about] where it is fitting in the overall frame of the topic. Obviously the academic atmosphere in the UK contributes to that...

Similarly UKP10 also stated:

In the British system, it really teaches you how to think, whereas in the Chinese system, I mean it's a stereotype of China and at the same time it is the truth, like for thousands of years since Confucius, Chinese education has just been about repeating what you been taught, memorising it and just repeating it, and that is evident even today.

Teaching style was reported as having a negative effect on international students' academic success and transformation. UKP14 who dropped out from his study criticised the entire Chinese education system by saying:

Honestly, the Chinese education system really damaged my motivation to study. During my time in the UK, I was often doing more than 10 hours a day of study, and doing it happily. But the lack of independent learning and focus on learning through repetition and exam preparation was demoralising. Whereas in the UK we're encouraged to argue with the teachers with sound argument, in China our teachers taught us by dictation. There was none of the constructive arguing that tested critical reasoning ability and led you to question and defend the validity of your beliefs. My education experience in China did kill my passion for learning.

In contrast, UKP8 expressed a relatively positive attitude towards the teaching in the Chinese university. In his words:

I think there is no right or wrong with this, some teachers in my university, even though we don't have the chance to discuss very much, I think they are doing very well, and I learnt a lot from them. So it depends on the teachers as to the quality. Although I do feel if I get more chances to discuss with my classmates, this would cultivate a stronger interest between us and the course would make me think more on my own, because I know the teachers are probably going to talk, and I don't have to prepare as much as I would when I know I have to speak, and I don't think about things as much.

UKP5 also noted that, whilst he enjoyed being in China with supportive academic staff, at the same time he observed that he had experienced differing patterns of logic and structure in academic courses. In his analysis of how the teaching contributes to transformative learning he said:

When this happens it often triggers negative emotional responses. Also, it can work in two ways. The learning process becomes degraded and is often detrimental and inefficient. Or, alternatively, the learning process is intensified, as the student needs to adapt quickly to overcome an issue. Another variable is the quality of education: if it is bad, it will trigger major learning issues. From a personal point, right now I have to learn Chinese in NK Chinese language and culture department. The organisation of that department is disgraceful. So the quality and reputation of the department is diminished. And thus the transformative learning is degraded.

Based on the point of view of UK participants, it can be seen that Chinese traditional style was described as having no (or very little) discussion and debate, no critical thinking and that limited resources were used by lecturers. The teaching process is more likely to be one way (from teacher to students) as reported by participants. These findings support findings from scholars who stated that, in the Chinese context, students are not only expected to pay respect to educators, 'but also to the material that teachers have directed them to read' (Hui, 2005, cited in Edwards & Ran, 2006, no page number). The results of this study also highlighted the influence that provision (or lack) of resources in China can have on UK students as the data revealed this as a typical problem reported in Chinese universities.

UK participants indicated that the different quality of teaching depended on the individual teacher and whether or not they were willing to spend time and energy when giving a lecture (UKP2, UKP6, UKP8 and UKP10). The responses provided by participants that came from the same university but where they studied different subjects provided evidence of this (UKP5 and UKP6). For example UKP8 noted that: 'I think one of the teachers is the best I have had throughout my life, and he is in this (Chinese) university. But there are also other teachers (who are) absolutely not professional at all'. The interview data revealed that there are diverse factors that contribute to the different teaching styles used by lecturers, including lecturers' overseas experience, lecturers' language competence, lecturers' age, the size of the class, and politics, which will be analysed in the following section.

3.2.2. Lecturers' overseas experience

When it came to positive responses in teaching style in Chinese universities, all of the UK participants expressed that lecturers' overseas experiences played a significant role. It is interesting to note that a majority of participants (UKP2, UKP3, UKP4, UKP5, UKP8, UKP9, UKP11 and UKP12) indirectly expressed that positive experiences were actually derived from the similarity between China and UK with respect to teaching styles. They indicated that the extent of the similarity depended on whether the lecturer had experience of studying abroad. The country that the lecturers had visited, whether to the UK, USA or other European countries for a visit or study, was not important. Despite such overseas experience, some participants still found that there was less debate, less talking and less time for questions compared to that in the UK.

3.2.3. Lecturers' language competence

A factor that contributed to the effectiveness of communication between lecturers and students during the class, raised by a number of UK participants, was the English language competency of lecturers (UKP4, UKP5, UKP7, UKP10 and UKP11). UKP7 claimed that some teachers who had studied overseas were more comfortable speaking English. UKP5 criticised that sometimes the teachers did not understand them when they used some advanced use of English. UKP11 suggested that a reason why teachers would not speak to her a lot was because they were shy as a consequence of their limited language abilities. Participants, such as UKP10, expressed understanding regarding the potential difficulties for a Chinese teacher to prepare a course in English.

3.2.4. The lecturer's age

Participants also noted a link between the age of the lecturers and their teaching style (UKP2, UKP6). They believed that older lecturers were more accustomed to the Chinese teaching style of only providing lectures with no (or little) discussion. For instance, UKP2 realised that Chinese professors' teaching styles and their academic quality can vary significantly. From his experience with his supervisor, he stated that his supervisor's own work was very good but her class was quite boring and consisted only of the lecturer talking for three hours. UKP2 did not think that it was his supervisor's fault because she was quite old and old fashioned. He believed this supervisor did not know of any alternative approaches to teaching even though the class consisted of only fifteen students. UKP6 also stated that it was always the younger teachers who were enthusiastic about debating, while the older teachers just lectured rather than supporting the students' critical thinking.

3.2.5. Confidence of lecturers during teaching

Some participants noted that ineffective teaching and learning was due to a lack of confidence in the lecturers (UKP4, UKP7). UKP4 criticised that the lecturers were trying to produce a casual environment in the class, however, some international students did not show respect to the teachers. She claimed that: "In England, we respected the teachers much more, in China they respect us. If someone didn't finish his essay, they just tell the teacher: 'I'll hand in next week'. And the teacher will say okay. Some students think they can do what they want in some ways". UKP4 thought that the reason contributing to this was the teacher's lack of confidence

in teaching international students. Under circumstances such as this, UKP4 held the view that authority is on some levels necessary:

One of my teachers was in America for 4 or 5 years. He is probably my best teacher. His English was good, and he understands the culture of diversity. And he is probably the strictest of all teachers. I think he has more confidence about himself, so he understands that we should respect him instead of being like them, respecting us. He has much more authority which is much better, I think, because he controls the class much better.

UKP7 also noticed that some professors fear to offend some students from other countries. In her description of the classroom experience with teachers, she said:

In the UK and other places, there is lot of respect for the professors because they are people who are supposed to be respected in that (academic) field. In the lectures, people are respectful to their teachers as well. But here I found it is different (under Chinese circumstances). Even some international students always come late for classes; one hour late and professor wouldn't say anything. But in my university, the professor would never allow this. But here, people are not respectful of the professors sometimes; maybe people thought the professors didn't provide much.

It is worth noting that both UKP4 and UKP7 were from the same Chinese university and did similar programmes, and that other UK students did not provide similar reports; therefore, this phenomenon may only belong to this particular university and should not be viewed as being representative of the universities in China.

3.2.6. The size of the class

Some UK participants noticed that their learning experience in Chinese universities was better than in the UK due to the effect of the small size of the class: the relationship between professor and students seemed a lot closer (UKP4, UKP5 and UKP6). They stated that the size of class was a significant factor for creating a potential environment for teacher-student and student-student interaction (UKP3, UKP4, UKP5, UKP6 and UKP8). For example, UKP4 claimed that:

When I was in England, they would have lectures and there were maybe 200 students in one class, and it was quite similar to the Chinese way, students listen and write the notes down, and then after the lecture we have seminars which are a class usually with 15 people having a discussion, and it was much more laid back. While in China, there are only five students in the class which is very different.

It is worth noting the difference between undergraduate and postgraduate levels, different

subjects and regulations of the department and/or universities all need to be taken into consideration. This was noticed by UKP10:

In terms of the teaching styles, they are different because compared to undergraduate, the class is smaller, so you have more interaction with the teacher, I don't think that is a difference between UK and China, I think that is a difference between undergraduate and graduate.

The practical constraints on teaching in Chinese universities were identified by some of the participants and were also recognised by previous scholars (Edwards & Ran, 2006). Objective environmental factors such as class size, appears to foster or impede transformative learning depending upon whether teacher could give students enough attention, and whether or not teachers could develop discourse between themselves and students and also between student peers. The latter has been identified previously as an essential element in transformative learning.

3.2.7. Politics

UK participants highlighted that political factors also contributed to the interaction between teachers and students during class and consequently to their effectiveness in learning (UKP1, UKP3 and UKP5). UKP3 in a university in Beijing was very critical of the fact that every time during class, when students asked a controversial question about the government or school, the teachers always checked the camera first, then answered the question. UKP5 from another university in Tianjin also stated that:

In China, there was still a lot of silence when it came to Chinese history and politics especially talking about the Chinese communist party. In fact, this was one of the key issues as well as a lot of background knowledge of certain events..., a lot of (Chinese) students are afraid to get into this sort of discussion.

However, UKP6, who was from the same university as UKP5, expressed a different view by saying that:

There is some staff like that (discussion about some topics), but some professors just don't care. This is a natural thing (for me) to question the authority. Some of them encourage me to ask.

Both UKP1 and UKP3 were from the same Chinese university and other participants did not report the problem of cameras, even though one interviewee UKP5 complained about sensitive

topics, such as politics. Taylor and Snyder (2012) argued that it is necessary to consider the individual in a particular context rather than applying a 'one size fits all' approach (p45). This means that an international students' transformative learning experience would be influenced by the context in which they are involved. In this context it has been shown that the interaction between teacher and students was hindered by the university's political environment. This is especially so in light of the fact that authentic relationships between teacher and student have previously been identified as significant for the student's transformative learning experience.

3.2.8. UK teaching styles

UK participants (UKP1, UKP2, UKP4 and UKP12) noted that for some courses they were taught in what could be described as a UK-like teaching style. UKP4 believed that the Chinese university probably researched how schools in other countries teach their students and they adapted this into their own methods. UKP2 noted that:

The style is very similar to the UK, some professors have styles more from the West. And I found out there is a couple of professors who had actually visited America and studied abroad and one course I had, for example, is very similar to my course I had during my Master's (in the UK). The professor gives us readings to prepare and in classes we discussed the readings together and some of the classes were just lectures, it was a mixture of discussions and lectures, which is very similar to that in Britain. They give us some readings, photocopied readings, and we went away to discuss them, maybe (in groups of) ten students.

The transcripts revealed that nearly all of the UK participants noted that their preferred methods of teaching is the one they have identified as Western style, regardless of whether they were taking an English taught programme or a Chinese taught programme (UKP1, UKP3, UKP4, UKP5, UKP6, UKP9, UKP10 and UKP12). They believed that the Western way of teaching is better in fostering transformative learning because the elements such as critical thinking, debating and discussion were viewed as important for students to learn more from their teachers and fellow students. However, it is notable that, the UK students (in an English taught programme) still expected to experience more Chinese styles of teaching even although they had already experienced some Chinese lectures with Chinese teaching style, and were disappointed by that. In other words, the students expected to experience a Chinese style of education or a Chinese educational experience in spite of having signed up to an English taught programme and subsequently had misgivings about the style of Chinese teaching used.

Based on the transcripts, it can be seen that most of the participants still maintain their original

learning methods. For example UKP1 stated that:

I think it is more effective for me. Because I got used to them when I studied in Manchester I have been able to, maybe slightly change it, or adopt here, but mostly I use the same ones. I like to very much organise.

The different teaching styles were not viewed as important by all of the UK participants. UKP2 who repeatedly advocated that the approach towards a Ph.D. would be the same as it would be if he was completing a Ph.D. in the UK. He claimed that:

The differences in teaching methods I just ignored, or just put up with. I had to take courses in one semester, in the first year. I didn't take too much notice of it. For the rest of it, there wasn't a massive difference I suppose.

UKP2's argument has shown the differences between Master's and Ph.D. students, in terms of the amount of courses required for the degree. It can be seen that there was less influence from the lectures on Ph.D. students than on Master's students as both Ph.D. students (UKP2 and UKP11) have stated, that for most of the time they need to do research by themselves.

This section (3.2.8) looks at the analysis of UK international students' experience in the classroom and the factors that influence Chinese teachers' teaching styles. It was discussed in the theory of transformative learning that an essential element for transformation is when an individual would start re-evaluating their frame of reference when engaging in critical reflection in the new context. In other words, Chinese lecturers' teaching styles may foster or impede international students' transformative learning based on how the teaching and learning progress proceeds. The factors listed above would influence whether a lecturer would encourage the students to think critically and engage in debate and discussion. In the theory of transformative learning it is argued that an individual's prior experience and experience in the new context will play an important role in his or her transformational learning due to habits of learning that students are accustomed to have expectation about beforehand. Most UK participants reported that they did not undergo transformative learning during the teaching and learning class processes. Based on the responses from the participants, it can be seen that an overwhelming majority of UK participants did not enjoy the Chinese teaching styles. Therefore, they preferred to adhere to the UK styles of teaching and learning and tried to keep to them even when they were in a new academic context, rather than trying to become accustomed to the new ways of teaching and learning. Students' acceptance of the new context is important for their adaptation and potential transformation. UKP1 who had less criticism of

his experience, expressed that ‘personally I’m more open to new ideas. I’m in China, I have to learn how to adapt to these situations’.

3.3. Academic support

The majority of UK respondents indicated that they did not receive enough academic support during their studies (UKP3, UKP4, UKP5, UKP6, UKP7, UKP10, UKP11 and UKP13). This is mainly reflected in two areas including: orientation/guidance and information received from the university/department, and assessment feedback from the educators. Related factors which contribute to the efficiency or inefficiency of academic support will be analysed next.

3.3.1. Orientation/guidance, and course-related information

Based on the UK participants’ replies, it can be seen that only a few of them had positive responses towards the information and guidance provided by the university, while most others expressed a negative attitude. UK interviewees with negative attitudes described their disappointment from different aspects, which can be summarised into three main points: a lack of well-organised orientating activities before starting the course (UKP7, UKP11), a lack of clear guidance, information and instruction about the course during their studies (UKP3, UKP4, UKP5, UKP6, UKP10 and UKP11) and a lack of communication between different courses (UKP4, UKP7).

UK participants compared their experiences in China with their previous university experience in their home country. UKP7 complained that the orientation was too short in China and did not provide enough information to students. UKP10 noted that ‘unlike in China, when I was in the UK, the teachers will tell students clearly what they want from your essays, what they are looking for, this is what they expect’. Some UK participants had no idea about the regulations to be observed when writing a dissertation (UKP6) since there was no guidance or handbook for students (UKP11). UKP6 was critical, noting that he could only get information from a graduate student and not by consulting faculty members.

On the other hand, a couple of participants expressed positive attitudes towards the guidance they have received from the university (UKP1, UKP5). For example, UKP1 expressed that:

The department makes things clear, normally they will tell us what we need to do, so

you know how and what you have to adapt to. The teachers would tell us directly or we have a meeting or emails, this kind of thing was normally held at the beginning of the semester when we first came. Compared to my previous experience, there was less clear guidance from the department as a whole.

The lack of cooperation between departmental offices was another problem. UKP4 shared her experience when she had academic questions and looked for help:

There is an office the students can go to, someone in there is in charge of the course, but nobody speaks English. Some of them they don't interact with us because we can't speak Chinese, but if we want to go to the international office and we say there is a problem with my course, they say there is nothing they can do.

It is worth noting that UK participants, particularly those who were in their first year of study, normally found themselves at a loss about what they needed to do during this first year in terms of tasks like essay writing and so on. Unfortunately, when some of them were trying to consult teaching staff, they did not receive positive feedback and supportive information. Academic support from the university was deemed to be important to students' studies, particularly for the international students who were unfamiliar with the new academic environment. Insufficient information and instruction would lead international students to a more difficult situation while they were adapting to the host country both academically and socially. It was noted by UKP5 that transformative learning could be impeded by the limited support that students received from university departments and the larger university.

3.3.2. Assessment feedback

Some UK participants expressed that a strong negative attitude towards the feedback they received from the teachers in China (UKP1, UKP4, UKP7 and UKP10). They criticised their lecturers for not making comments on their work. UKP10 said 'there is no feedback mechanism here (in the Chinese university) I haven't received a single word of feedback on any of my essays. You just get a mark'. UKP4 supposed that a reason contributing to this phenomenon could be that the teachers were afraid to offend their international students. UKP3 also provided a similar opinion, noting that it may be difficult for lecturers when they give feedback to foreign students more because of fear of not being good enough in English or sufficiently professional in the discipline. UKP4 considered that the possible reasons could be because due to the teachers' age and working experience. In the words of UKP4:

In England, the teachers are older, some of them have worked in the (academic)

discipline for a long time; in my university the teachers have to have worked in the discipline for 10 years, most of them have worked in the discipline for 30 to 40 years. And they showed films they made before, we respect their achievement. Here the teachers are very young, some teachers who are in their 30s are actually younger than the students.

Dialogue was viewed as a core element in student's transformative learning experiences. The view taken in this thesis is that the dialogue between teacher and students does not have to be communicated orally to be effective. Written feedback provided by the academic staff on student's assessment is also important for students to achieve academic success. Receiving feedback from teachers has implications for international students with regard to their understanding of the new academic regulations that could consequently contribute to their potential transformative learning in academic areas.

3.3.3. Factors contributing to efficient or inefficient academic support

The factors that UK participants felt likely contributed to the insufficient support received from lecturers in China can be grouped by four main perspectives. Firstly, language was an important factor (UKP3, UKP11). For example, UKP11 stated that when she went to the international student office, she could not find anybody who spoke English.

Secondly, the number of years the programme had been running was a factor that had a significant influence on students' experiences. UK participants raised the issue that the programme they were taking in their Chinese universities were at an early stage of development (UKP4, UKP7, and UKP11). As discussed in last section, some of the programmes were at a very early stage of development and had poor administration and organisation in both course design and in providing guidance to the students. UKP4 and UKP7, who attended the same Chinese university were amongst the first group of students on the programme during their first year and complained bitterly about the university guidance and support in both academic areas and more general areas of daily life. UKP4 stated:

The other students study journalism which is a more established course, it's been running for 3 years, so they have like a leader to talk to about the thesis, classes... our course just started this year. Every time we asked, they say ask somebody else, we are kind of passed around...

UKP11 also criticised that:

The university did not have our contact emails. Maybe they have a university website

with some announcements page, but it is quite difficult for me to understand it in Chinese. Maybe I never even looked at it actually, so maybe it's on there. Things like this happened all the time, so we always miss these lectures because we are never told.

Thirdly, it is worth noting that there was an issue about the information being there *possibly (somewhere)*, but the student was expecting it to be given directly to them, as in the example provided above. Even though the information had already been delivered by the university via email, one student did not check this but instead expected the information to be hand delivered directly to them. In some cases, the issue was that some students did not feel they could find information easily. The urgency from the student to look for information in supporting their studies should be noted. Support from the university will be viewed as less efficient if the students are not willing to take the initiative to put effort into their studies. Another example could be taken from UKP3 when he talked about the academic activities organised by the university:

There is a British Council association kind of thing. They always run events like seminars with business people from China, like company owners, law firms, and do talks. Me and one of my classmates, we have been to one, it's quite useful. But I don't live on campus, so maybe (I am) not aware in terms of what's going on. But I do get emails about special talks from someone who gets invited... I think the university holds seminars and stuff, but I haven't attended.

Finally, UK interviewees noted that their status as international students also helped them to receive more attention and support compared to their Chinese fellow students (UKP5, UKP12), such as internship opportunities. Based on UK respondents' replies, most of them involved in an English taught programme noted that for the courses they took, the methods used by Chinese educators to teach Chinese students were distinct from the way the teacher taught international students. UKP13 observed 'I think they know they are dealing with different types of people, and we do have discussions in the classes'.

3.4. UK participants' relationships with teachers

As acknowledged in the previous section, both Master's and Ph.D. students were involved in this study. Since the programme for a Master's degree is at least two years long in a Chinese university, some of the UK participants had not been assigned an essay advisor because they were in the first year of their studies. In this section, the relationship with teachers will be divided into two main parts which include the relationship with an essay advisor/supervisor,

and relationships with other faculty members such as lecturers.

3.4.1. Relationship with thesis advisor/supervisors: making appointments and staff availability

In terms of the principle of making an appointment with teacher and supervisors, most UK participants had a positive attitude towards approaching the lecturers in Chinese universities. They noted that there was no big difference compared to their experience with their previous lecturers in the UK where most teachers have their set office time and students were all welcome to come to have a meeting. Some UK respondents even indicated that it was easier for them to meet lecturers in China in comparison with the UK institutions because sometimes there was no need to make an appointment with their Chinese teachers beforehand. For example, UKP3 said ‘there is no need for appointment to have a talk with staff, there are only nine of us, so maybe not too busy, they can see us whenever, quite flexible’.

UK participants who had been allocated thesis advisors or supervisors showed different attitudes towards the relationships. The level of availability of supervisors varied according to the UK participants’ replies. UKP1 and UKP7 disagreed with the claim that educators could be judged as having an important contribution to their studies and potential transformative learning; unfortunately, ‘they are always not in their office’ or ‘less available to talk’. While UKP2, a Ph.D. student, noted that his supervisor was very supportive and believed that completing a Ph.D. in China and in the UK is similar. He explained that for a Ph.D. student, even though the supervisors are important, students need to do most of their work on their own.

It is worth noting that for UK respondents, there was a difference between English–taught programmes and Chinese–taught programmes even although the programmes were delivered by the same university. For example, UKP6 attended the same Chinese university as UKP5 but was involved in a Chinese–taught programme in which the students had a different attitude towards meeting and talking to their lecturers compared to UKP5. Participants said that the reason why their lecturers were available or not was due to the size of the class. More attention might be received from lecturers if there were few international students involved in the English–taught programme, thus making it possible for teachers to have more time to have appointments with their students. UKP5 stated that ‘the lecturers are pretty friendly, they do not just want to be teachers, and they want to be friends as well’, while UKP6 who reported that it was a bit harder for him to contact some of the lecturers due to a large number of students

in the Chinese–taught programme.

Both UKP5 and UKP7 noted positively that in the UK only email addresses were provided by teachers while in China all teachers will give you their phone numbers. UKP7 further described that:

Students in our class have a group in WeChat. We communicate via WeChat, it is a very convenient way to get in touch, but apart from that, we have no interaction. I think the lecturers I have had a good relationship with are the ones who have been helpful: they have provided information, and they always encourage us to raise questions. And they respond to their emails. The ones we have a good relationship with are the ones who are very helpful... because they could assist me.

It has been noted that an individual's motivation can also have an impact on the meeting frequency between students and their teachers. For example, UKP8 indicated that, although his supervisor did not respond to student's email promptly, he would not refuse if a student requested more time for meetings. However, because UKP8 just wanted to pass and did not want to do more work, frequent meetings with the supervisor were not seen as necessary by UKP8. UKP8 thought that neither himself nor his supervisor took his studies seriously.

3.4.2. Relationships with staff outside the class

Some participants stated that compared to the UK, in China it was easier for them to meet teachers outside classes. Some teachers would take them to a restaurant for dinner and to celebrate some specific festivals like Christmas and other kinds of activities together (UKP1, UKP5). Reduced stress and homesickness was raised by UKP12 who noted that her mentor was very caring in her daily life. In her words:

They are very different from the West. The mentor would not care what you are doing every day (in the Western country). How are you feeling? So, yes, it's much more like a family in China.

Some UK participants (UKP1, UKP7 and UKP12) stated that they received more support from the university in their daily lives rather than in academic aspects. UKP1 and UKP5 raised the phrase of '*Guanxi*' that has been presented previously by scholars in the Chinese context (Gold & Guthrie, 2002). UKP1 seemed to become accustomed to the way of establishing useful networks in Chinese contexts. He expressed his feelings about the changes he experienced when dealing with the relationships with Chinese teachers and described the process of change

he experienced:

I think here there is a more personal relationship. To use the 'Guanxi', the connections, it has been really helpful. The department wants me to talk to other English students that are coming to look around the university, I have to give a speech. Before I was a bit uncomfortable about it, I think they want me to do this, but it has no benefit to myself, I do it because I have to, they asked. But actually now I know it would help me, I don't know how, in some way, but they will find a way to thank me for doing this. I quite like how it works, like informal. The support I have received from the teachers or the department is definitely good for my studies in helping me to find an internship and encouraging me to find work.

Other UK participants had positive attitudes towards the work cooperation between student and teacher that was supported by their educators/university (UKP2, UKP5 and UKP6): some participants even felt that they got more support in their Chinese university compared to when in the UK, because of their status as an international student, and the small class size (UKP5, UKP6). UKP6 described the support he received from his teachers:

For example, next month my teachers are going to take a project in Bin Hai Xin Qu, where they are working with local organisations to investigate the conditions of migrant workers in Bin Hai. My teacher is going to take me there, that's something I am interested in and she is happy taking me, that's a very good thing. I am not sure in England you will get that.

As discussed in Chapter 2, establishing an authentic and trustful relationship is paramount to fostering transformative learning for individuals. The data revealed that UK participants' positive responses were closely associated with their relationship with their teachers, both inside and outside the classroom. It is important that students have feelings of being supported when engaging in a new, culturally different, environment; it is essential for international students' adaptation, especially those who are under pressure to get a degree. Even though there are few positive reports on UK participants' transformative learning experience in academic areas, it has been shown that an authentic relationship between teachers and students is important for international students' potential transformation. Because of these trustful relationships, participants had more confidence in their studies and found it easier to have the courage to explore and understand the new academic philosophy in the host country.

3.5.UK participants' relationships with classmates/colleagues and Chinese local students

Apart from the essentiality of establishing authentic relationships with educators, this study

views the building of authentic relationships with other students important for international students' transformative learning both academically and in cultural understanding and learning. It is worth noting that there are differences between UK interviewees' responses because some of the UK participants took English-taught programs while others took Chinese-taught programs. Most UK participants in English-taught programs stated that the relationships with their classmates in China and in the UK were quite similar, however, when referring to the relationship with Chinese students, the situation was different, caused by various factors that will be analysed below. UK participants in Chinese-taught programs found that was hard for them to have a close friendship with their Chinese classmates. Instead, they still felt a natural bond with other international students or with other British people more than they did with Chinese students because they shared the same status and experience of being abroad, in China. For example, UKP2, who was in a Chinese-taught programme, stated that the relationship with his classmates was superficial. In terms of the reasons for this, UKP2 said that it was perhaps because of his status as a foreigner and the competitive situation in Chinese society. He described his experience with his classmates as follows:

It's just meeting for dinner that kind of thing. But we don't really talk about work. I think it is because we study similar things, sometime Chinese students can guard their subject very tightly... not only Chinese, other students as well.

UK participants' relationships with local Chinese students and other international students and factors related to this will be analysed in the following sections.

3.5.1. UK participants with local Chinese students

There were typically eight factors associated with the close or loose relationships between UK and their Chinese counterparts. These were: (i) age, (ii) language, (iii) same course/project or doing a Ph.D., (iv) topics/common interests, (v) individual's characteristics, (vi) Chinese social and/or cultural related factors, (vii) social places/occasions (celebration style and forming friendships), (viii) students association. Some of these factors are interrelated.

Age

A few UK participants stated that they seemed to have a strange relationship with local Chinese students (UKP1, UKP2 and UKP11). When analysing the reasons for this, some participants stated that age might contribute to this. UKP1 gave the example that there was one student

who was three or four years younger and who always showed more respect to him than UKP11 deemed normal, which made him feel very uncomfortable. UKP2 also expressed that because he was older than his classmates, and is also married, he felt that he was isolated by his classmates sometimes.

Language

Some UK respondents stated that language could be a crucial reason when it came to their relationship with Chinese students (UKP1, UKP2, UKP4, UKP5, UKP6, UKP7, UKP9 and UKP13). UK participants also noted that most Chinese students could communicate but were too nervous to talk in English and lacked confidence. Some of the UK participants emphasised that communication could be hard because their Chinese was very limited and this was compounded by the Chinese students' limited capacity when speaking English. UK participants, particularly in Chinese programmes, were less confident to ask questions and were more likely to feel uncomfortable when using Chinese language (UKP2, UKP6).

UK participants studying the same course/project or doing a Ph.D.

Some UK participants (UKP3, UKP4, UKP7, UKP9, and UKP13) noted that integration was challenging because they were on an English-taught programme. From UKP3's experience in an English-taught programme, he noted that he and his classmates (international students) were cut off from meeting other students in the university, while if they were on a Chinese programme, it would be much easier to interact. UK participants' indicated that opportunities for UK students in an English-taught programme to meet Chinese students were limited to occurring while taking a Chinese language course (UKP1, UKP9), or when meeting people from a joint project (UKP7), or when outside the campus (UKP2). However, it is interesting to see that even the UK participants (UKP2, UKP6) involved in Chinese-taught programme were still challenged when trying to establish close friendships with Chinese students. They occasionally met their Chinese classmates socially outside class, especially in the first semester. For example, UKP6 said:

I think it's been quite interesting, because it started with my feeling a little bit intimidated as the only international student. It took me a while to get to know them, to feel comfortable with them, speaking Chinese with them. When people are not from your culture, your language, it takes a bit of time to get to know them. Last semester, I didn't see my classmates socially like outside of class which isn't usual, you see. But this semester, I have been better. I spend time with them outside class. I can

always ask them. They always want to help me.

UKP11 compared her experience when she was doing a Master's degree in the UK:

It's a one year course, just six months classes and six months research projects, so you only spend six months with people, and within those six months, you can make friends for life. I guess we are working on the same course, so I can't really compare that to China where I was doing my own separate Ph.D. thing.

Topics /common interest

An overwhelming majority of UK respondents (UKP2, UKP4, UKP5, UKP6, UKP7, UKP9, UKP10, UKP12 and UKP13) noted that conversation topics with Chinese students were different compared with those with UK students and other international students. The findings from this study were that UK interviewees responded that they felt a natural bond with their co-nationals or people with similar cultural backgrounds rather than with native students and other international students. To 'have something in common' was raised by respondents when asked why they prefer to associate with students from the same country. For example, UKP1 stated:

Maybe I found Chinese students here are less open to kind of some normal things in England, like drinking, drugs, alcohol, sex...less open, less awareness or just they don't want to talk to me about (them).

UKP12 also noted that:

I have got a lot in common with students from the ethics department, because they are interested in movies and art... sometime it's hard in China because they all are so focused on their core subject, they have no hobbies or passions.

Individual's characteristics

A couple of UK respondents (UKP2, UKP12) reported that they did not have a close relationship with Chinese students because of their personal characteristic of enjoying being alone. UKP2 speculated that, even if he was doing a Ph.D. in the UK, his experience would have been similar because he expected to be lonely when studying at Ph.D. level and would not necessarily have many friends. Here he described his lifestyle when doing a Master's in the UK:

You don't have to make a lot of friends. I don't think that will happen in the UK necessarily. When I did my Master's (in the UK), sometime I had coffee with my classmates, but not necessarily. After the class just say 'Bye' and one goes on one's way... I'm not that interested in making lots of friends. Just one or two good ones. It's my characteristic, it doesn't matter whether I'm in England or in China.

UKP2 thought there might be psychological factors to explain why he could not make friends with some Chinese students. He explained that:

A lot of students studying in good universities in Beijing, they are from the countryside... so they maybe never met a foreigner before... there may be more of a psychological effect, sometimes they may be scared to interact with me or they don't really know how to...I think there is a big culture gap, because most of my Chinese friends are Beijingers or city people, they are more used to talking to foreigners or they are more outgoing.

Chinese social and/or cultural related factors

UK participants (UKP1, UKP3, UKP4, UKP6, UKP8 and UKP12) speculated that culture could be a factor influencing their relationship with local Chinese students. They claimed that Chinese people are more reserved, modest, and shy than people from Western countries and thus, interaction with Chinese students was restricted. UKP3 noted that for Chinese people who are very reserved, you either know them through friends or you don't know them. UKP4 expressed a similar opinion as UKP3 by saying that 'Chinese people in general are quite shy, quite modest, they don't come and speak to me...'

Some UK participants indicated that Chinese students work very hard on their academic subjects rather than spend time on leisure activities (UKP2, UKP4, and UKP12). UK participants noted that there are certain life style differences between them and Chinese students. UKP2 felt strongly about this stating that most of his classmates may get up in the morning and spend the whole day in the library even though they do not necessarily study the whole day. In contrast, both UKP2 and UKP4 view that some international students did not take their courses seriously. UKP12 explained that there is a kind of social factor contributing to that phenomenon. She said:

They (Chinese students) are so competitive. They are so regimental, military because you had to have certain skills to get to the university.

UKP4 further indicated that there are boundaries that stop Chinese students wanting to interact with international students. She analysed from her experience, saying:

Chinese people are like well behaved, while a lot of international students don't really worry about their studies, they just want to have fun. There are a lot of the ways international students are threatening to Chinese people. Like drinking, alcohol, pub... although I don't really drink, a lot of my friends drink. Some Chinese students say that the international students are crazy. Chinese people are like well-behaved and respect more...a lot of international students are not really concerned about their studies, they just want to have fun...

It was noted by UK interviewees that since Chinese students were reserved they were less likely to initiate conversation. The additional efforts that international students had to put in when trying to establish friendships with local students has also been documented by Lewthwaite (1996). Lewthwaite argued that it would take students' extra time to cultivate friendships with host members compared to making friends with students from the same country. Anxiety caused by making friends with host students was also referred to in his research, even although it was not obviously indicated by participants in this study. For example, UKP12 noted that:

If they are not interested in your culture, they would not initiate the conversation with you. At that time, we have to make an effort because we are foreigners, so we have to try to integrate into their circles. I was always thinking carefully before I took any action, or before I spoke out.

Social places and social occasions (The style of celebration and forming friendships)

The interview transcripts have shown that there are differences in social activities between Chinese and UK students. For example, a couple of UK participants gave the example that when UK and other international students celebrate events, UK students prefer to go to a bar and have drinks while Chinese students prefer to go to a restaurant (UKP4, UKP5, UKP6 and UKP12) or KTV (Karaoke TV) (UKP8 and UKP13) during the day. Even although participants such as UKP8 expressed that he tried very hard to have close Chinese friends (he had two), he still felt a natural bond with other international students or British people more than what he did with Chinese classmates. UKP2 compared his experiences in an UK university and in China by saying:

There will be a meeting place in the UK focused on social activities which is the students bar or pub; if you want to meet your classmates or other students, you go there, whereas in Chinese universities, there isn't the same focus. If you want to socialise with your classmates, you have to make an appointment with them and arrange a time to go to a restaurant...

Some interviewees had strong feelings about the differences regarding social spaces in China and the UK. For example, UKP6 noted that:

A lot of Chinese students have never been to a pub. It's very different. Just what you do socially in China is different from what you do socially in the UK... but I am trying to introduce some western culture to them. Now they accept something like going to a pub... in the UK going for a meal is not something you do when you first meet someone. It is something you will only do after you become friends. However, in China people could just meet someone and go for a meal with them.

UKP5 noticed that a lot of Chinese students tried to take him and other international students out for lunch because they were trying to be friendly, but sometimes the relationship was strange. He gave examples by saying that:

The other day, two Chinese students came to our department and cooked lunch for us. It's very odd and random, but I am not going to say no to that. They are keen to show you around, I think that probably sort of I am showing my culture and I can learn something from yours as well, have an exchange between us...

UKP12 supported UKP5's opinion and viewed it as differences in ways of thinking. In contrast, some of the UK participants had begun to get accustomed to the different social places in China. For example, in the words of UKP1:

It's quite fun to go to a restaurant, you can talk a lot more, it's easier to talk than in a bar, it takes a long time, it is relaxing. In the bar, maybe it's more exciting about what is going to happen, also it's louder, difficult to talk to people, and you might have to stand.

UKP9 indicated that cost could be a barrier contributing to the different social styles:

I mean look at the average wealth of an international student compare to a domestic student, it might be quite a difference. That naturally come with perhaps differences, where, what to do at the weekend, what to eat, things like that. I think that was one potential barrier.

The impact of different social and life styles between international students and host members in creating obstacles for effective connection was also reported in other research (Philo, 2010; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006) that found that true friendship was difficult to maintain due to the ways that different national groups celebrate together and meet together outside of the classroom.

Students' association

UK participants criticised the fact that they were surrounded by Chinese students yet found that there were few opportunities to make friends with them. The transcripts revealed that for both UK students in the English-taught programmes and also the UK students in Chinese-taught programmes, the students' associations, or meeting places, were potentially very important. However, this was unfortunately ignored by universities (UKP2, UKP3, UKP7, UKP8 and UKP10), with the exception of UKP13 who noted that he met his Chinese friends at a club which was arranged by the university. UKP9 noted that there were students' associations but most of them were organised in Chinese, which made it quite difficult for students in the English-taught programmes.

A couple of UK participants (UKP2, UKP8) reported that they experienced obstacles and stress in Chinese universities whereas Chinese international students in UK universities did not, when trying to interact with home students and other international students. The reason was that UK universities have more experienced Chinese international students operating the associations for Chinese students on most UK campuses, and from these associations newcomers could receive practical suggestions and help in both academic and non-academic areas (supported by Edwards & Ran, 2006). In comparison, there are very few UK international students in Chinese academic institutions now or in the past. Also, the vast majority are language students who are in China for one year or one semester and do not care about making friends or making associations because they will leave very soon. Since UK students' associations have not been established officially in China, it makes support from the university staff more important for UK students in China. Complaints of not enough activities to assist international students mixing with students of the host country were not unique in this research. It has been previously documented that there is insufficient support for students (Yang, 2010), and that student unions should arrange diverse activities to raise international students' interest and involvement (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006).

It is worth noting that, even although the support from the university staff or the student union is essential for international students, students' own efforts and communicative competence and skills when establishing friendships with host students and other international students should also be encouraged. UKP3 and UKP10 realised that there was an English corner in the university, but they never went to participate. UKP10 was critical of the lack of activities operated by the university, but at the same time, he responded that 'maybe I should go'. A similar answer was received from UKP9 who was more motivated to attend the activities and

noted that 'it is called the 'English corner' and is run by Chinese students and again international students come to help Chinese students to practise their English. It's where I meet a lot of my Chinese friends. Again, that is not run by the department, but I think it certainly could help, if they can run a program like that'. UKP11 observed that some of the international students in China do not have Chinese friends, which is a pity. She believed socialising in Beijing was not difficult but the international students should be pro-active.

3.5.2. UK participants with other international students

Nearly all UK participants stated that they spent most of their time with co-national students or other international students. UK participants noted that the most significant factor contributing to their close relationship with other international students was that they have more in common as international students, with English as their first language and they have the same, or similar, cultural backgrounds (UKP1, UKP3, UKP4, UKP5, UKP8 and UKP10). They noted that people from the same country or who were also studying abroad would stick together because they enjoy similar life-styles such as: going to a British bar (referred to by UKP2), drinking and partying (referred to by UKP8). UKP3 noted that forming a group is known as a kind of cultural learning where obviously people who speak the same language might sit together. UKP8 noted some common social activities for him and for other international students would not be accepted by Chinese students:

Sometime if I want to invite some Chinese friends to come out with us in the evening, they are not very comfortable, it doesn't look like they have a good time, maybe they just sit down like this and I feel bad.

Nevertheless, even though UK participants complained about the lack of opportunity to interact with Chinese students, a majority of them still expressed that they underwent transformative learning through exposure to the host country, which will be interpreted in more detail in the following section on UK participants' transformative learning.

3.6. Host attitudes and authority

As discussed in Chapter 2, Taylor and Snyder (2012) suggested that it is necessary to consider the individual in a particular context. Sammut (2014) also noted that importance of considering that 'the external factors may include the conditions surrounding the immediate learning event...' (p51). This study considers the hosts' attitudes and the entire campus environment as

part of the context in which the international students were involved when exploring their potential transformative learning. The data revealed that UK participants' learning experience was directly or indirectly affected in different ways by the Chinese hosts' attitude. Although UK participants pointed out that the hosts' attitude depends on individual teachers, they also commented that teachers' authority and the entire study culture reflected on the environment and that had a considerable significant influence on their studies.

Participants indicated that everyone (including the teachers and the students) would have a hierarchy or ranking in some occasions (UKP1, UKP2, UKP4, UKP8, UKP9 and UKP11). It was noted by some of the participants that there was a hierarchy represented in the classes (UKP2, UKP11, and UKP13). For example, UKP2 used 'admire' when talking about the situation of Chinese students' attitudes towards teachers in the class, saying '...the teacher just reads their own article, their own essay, and the students just admire or listen to the teachers' essay, and learn something from that'. The same feeling was shared by other UK participants such as UKP11 who stated that one lecturer in her class was at a very high level and it was difficult to ask him questions. She further described that:

The lecturer was almost like he was the president, he didn't talk to anyone, he would just enter at the last minute, and talk, and everyone else just went quiet and listened and then he left, I have to say I got the least out of these classes, even though he is at a very high level in his field. I wasn't used to this kind of relationships with the teachers.

As discussed in the section on classroom experience, UK participants stated that the lecturers do not allow much time for students to raise questions (UKP2, UKP7 and UKP12). UKP12 found it a challenge to get herself involved in the seminar participation or group discussions because there were one to two teachers set on maintaining their own ideas. She commented that it was difficult to change teachers' minds about the extent to which the students can work independently. As a consequence, being in this situation has an effect on how much the students can get involved in the class. UKP2 believed that 'it's the Chinese system's desire for everybody to be controlled'. He further explained that:

Sometimes there is (time for questions), but at other times they want to control the event, want to make it more like a Chinese style event, where the senior guest just gives their talk and no one questions him. It depends. We are expected to sit and be respectful.

UKP9 commented that teachers' experience is an essential factor contributing to this

phenomenon of hierarchy. He pointed out that a more experienced professor who seemed more knowledgeable in some sense also has more authority. On the other hand, the less experienced teachers not only in the field, but academically, would not expect to receive a lot of authority. UKP8 expressed a similar experience by comparing his experiences in a UK university and said that:

In the UK, there is less of a hierarchy. Your opinion is valid, their (the teachers) opinion is valid. They (the teachers) have more experience, but you don't have to sort of worship them.

Some UK respondents commented that beside the individual teacher's influence, the entire university environment is important. For example, the teachers were more cautious about some topics (such as communism, democracy, the one party system, government or schools) being discussed during the class or in other academic activities (UKP1, UKP3). At the same time, some UK participants were more cautious about what they would say in public because there were cameras in some classrooms and there was people filming academic activities, such as conferences. For example, UKP1 stated that:

...the teachers have to speak in order of age or seniority, and we also have our place, we have our name here, we have to sit there. The ranking is more important, the teachers' seniority. The most important teacher sits in the middle.

UKP6 and UKP8 also indicated that they were very cautious when addressing their Chinese teachers. They would say *Nin* rather than *Ni* (Applying the word '*Nin*' presents more respect to others). Or when they saw the teachers walking round, UKP8 would say '*Ni hao*, teachers'. They supposed that they may not have to do that, but they wanted to fit in when they observed how other students acted and then followed them. They suspected that some teachers may not have expected them to do that, while at the same time, the whole environment with its hierarchy had affected them and they thought that transformative learning took place.

Another interesting example was provided by a Ph.D. student UKP11, who was supervised by a UK supervisor and a Chinese supervisor in a joint programme. She stated:

My relationship with my Chinese supervisor and UK supervisor is quite interesting. For example, I call my English supervisor by his first name, I never called him Dr. XXX whatever. But I always call my Chinese supervisor [using title and surname – author's paraphrasing for sake of anonymity]. Maybe that is an example to show. I have equal respect for them both. My Chinese supervisor is more international and nice compare to other Chinese professors, but I still say I feel like he seems like an

uncle. I do want to make him proud.

UKP11's statement was supported by UKP10 who also noted that he addressed the teachers 'professors', rather than their names.

On the other hand, not all of the UK participants reported negative emotions in terms of experiencing authority. UKP5 provided positive feedback about host attitudes during their learning process. UKP5 commented that the lecturers in the Chinese university had modified the approach to a very western form of thinking where everyone was encouraged to express themselves freely. In his university, there was no hierarchical attitude although he had one experience where the lecturer shouted at Chinese students to ask them to speak more English. UKP5 stated that the teachers were always honest with him and encouraged him to ask questions. Sometimes the teachers would talk to them about the issues raised by the students, sometimes they would say directly that it is a sensitive issue that should not be discussed in the class. Even although UKP5 and UKP6 (from the same Chinese university) reported a less authoritarian system. It is worth noting that there are differences that exist between students in an English-taught course (UKP5) from those in Chinese-taught course (UKP6). UKP5 found that in his course, when a teacher came into the room, all of the students were very quiet. He believed there were two reasons contributing to this phenomenon: their limited competence in the English language and their sense of being in a hierarchy. The students felt that it was a very formal thing to do to show respect to the teachers by keeping silent. As analysed in the previous section, UKP5 realised that communication with teachers was easier than he found it in the UK because of the smaller class sizes.

As stated in previous research, authority is important in China: respect needs to be expressed to the teachers, the writers of the books, so to speak, and students are not expected to be critical (Helwig et al., 2003). While this study has shown that, in spite of the fact that some UK participants noted that even although there were side effects of host attitudes towards their studies, they still tried to maintain their own way of learning and studying (UKP1, UKP4, UKP5 and UKP12). UKP12 notes 'nothing happened that would change my mind about what I was doing'. UK participants noted that they were trained to express their opinions freely in the UK higher institutions. The significant differences between the teaching environment and the attitudes the students were expected to have towards the teachers were consequently more likely to impede UK international students' achievement and transformative learning experiences.

Based on the transcripts it is clear that international students from the UK in China experienced a dilemma, which runs contrary to that envisaged by the notion of transformative learning. This dilemma triggers a reconsideration of previously held ideas/understanding of knowledge and, through this reconsideration, students move on to a higher/deeper level of learning (from being receivers to doers or something similar). What the UK participants described about their experience was the opposite, which is part of my contribution to the area of international students' transformative learning.

3.7. Living location as a factor in transformative learning

Living location should be taken into account as a factor that may have considerable influence on international students' academic and social lives. Rather than having a great effect on students' academic performance, living location had more influence on students' socialising with other students as reflected in the transcripts of UKP1, UKP2, UKP4, UKP5, UKP7, UKP8 and UKP13. Most UK international students who held this opinion were located on a remote campus, in an international student building detached from Chinese local students. In addition, since there was no public area provided by the dormitory, no communities or group societies organised by the universities could be get together with other Chinese students. A few of the participants (UKP4, UKP9 and UKP13) expressed their understanding of why the university separated the international students from the local Chinese student: in their opinion this was because the university tried to provide them with a better living environment with fewer roommates in a bedroom, and with more freedom to leave and return to the apartment. Nevertheless, most UK participants made comments that due to the limitations of living in a separate accommodation, students had little interaction with Chinese local students who might have enabled them to know Chinese culture and as a consequence few had Chinese students as real friends. Some UK participants (especially in English-taught programmes) criticised that sometimes they did not feel they were in China. UKP9 considered that the reason contributing to the problem was 'because we are in an English taught programme. If we were in a Chinese programme, obviously it would be much easier to interact'. Unfortunately, as analysed in the previous section on relationships between UK and Chinese students, the English and Chinese programme was not the main issue contributing to close or loose friendships.

UKP1 described his experience of living with Chinese students in a shared room in his first semester. He also shared a common bathroom with 30 people and even although he did make

very close friends, he moved to another kind of flat in the second semester because he wanted his own private space. UKP4 explained that ‘if you want to do these things to an international student, they would leave the country’. In fact, UKP14, who dropped out from his study, is evidence of the above argument with his criticism of the dormitory regulations that he had to follow before he gave up his study. On the other hand, UKP8 considered this issue from a more positive perspective and expressed that living in an international student building does create a barrier with local students since they lived separately with other Chinese students; however, it did mean that he could make friends with people from all around the world.

It was noted by some UK participants that there were negative and positive aspects of living on and off campus (UKP3, UKP5, UKP10 and UKP11). For example, UKP5 lived off campus and said that even although they were living close to the campus, they were farther away from other students. Regardless of the academic perspective, there were positive aspects, such as meeting different people. UKP 11 explained that if she lived on campus it would be close to study groups, the library and the canteen. However, it would be very restrictive as well; she said, ‘sometimes you feel like you are in the small bubble and you don’t really feel like you are in a different country that you want to explore and so on’. UKP3 was very positive about his off-campus living experience. He believed that communicating with other students was not an issue because there were emails, WeChat and QQ. He said:

My experience, so far in 7 months, is more different than any of my colleagues who lived on campus. I can’t easily ask for help. I need to do a lot of things myself, so this is why I’m actually happy about what happened. Living on campus makes everything very easy, accessible, but I travelled here, so I know different routes, I meet different people.

In contrast, living off campus has drawbacks as well. UKP11 said she had to cycle 45 minutes every day each way to get to the university. However, she also mentioned that as a Ph.D. student and an independent researcher, there was no need be in a lab or a class every day. UKP2 was also doing a Ph.D. degree and had a similar response stating that living on campus was good, although not that important to a Ph.D. student.

Based on the UK participants’ responses, it is assumed that for the UK participants who were living on campus, the detachment of international students from local Chinese students, the lack of organised activities, the lack of public conversation/socialisation areas and the English–taught programme were barriers that impeded students’ communication. However, for Ph.D. students, the living location was not as significant as for Master’s students. Additionally, the

findings revealed that the participants who were living off-campus had better feedback with regard to their interaction with local Chinese people. They also reported positive responses in terms of acceptance by and understanding of their host country based on the frequency of contact with people both inside and outside the campus. The living location was viewed as a significant contributor to international students' potential transformative learning, which will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

3.8. Programme design

The programmes for international students in Chinese universities are currently at a very early stage of design. The programmes selected for this research ranged from being in their first year to three years old. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that most aspects of the services provided by universities or the departments may have lacked experience. Some issues raised by UK participants (UK1, UKP3, UKP4, UKP6, UKP7, UKP9 and UKP13) emerged when referring to programme design, which included departmental structure, course structure, course guidance, communication between programmes/courses, academic integrity, ways of assessment in different courses and website design. Because limited information was received from the department, participants had to ask previous students of the course for information (for example UKP6).

UKP4 commented that the design of programme on the whole was very poor:

There is no module leader, so there is no communication about which students goes to classes, which teacher teaches the classes, and then we go to the other class, and another teacher teaches that class, if you ask any questions about the courses at a whole, nobody knows... Every time we asked, they say ask somebody else, we are kind of passed around...

UKP4 suggested that, because the course she took just started that year, there was poorer course communication compared to that of the other students who studied journalism, which was a more established course and had been running for three years. The students in journalism had a leader to talk to about students' theses and they had methodology classes and literature review classes, while UKP4 and her classmates did not have anything. UKP7 criticised the course content provided by the university. She pointed out that, unlike the information she saw on the website, things changed a lot after the courses had already started. She explained that the department combined some classes with students from journalism, and a lot of these classes were more about journalism than media. UKP9 also commented that since the programme he

was taking was a relatively new programme and also English–taught, there was no guidance about what the faculty planned to teach and there were differences in the way that the assessment was applied.

Some participants indicated that the teachers did not see the programme as important. For example, UKP1 complained that:

Because there are only 12 of us, it is not a very big programme. I think sometimes being on a new programme is good, it helps the university to have a good reputation, good image, and it's like a marketing thing. Academically, for the department it is not so important, it's more to show people that they are a world, international university.

Even though UK participants made comments on the universities' programme design, some of them realised that the UK system had been established for many years, whereas everything in China was relatively new. UKP4 expressed that: 'in a way it's good, because they are always asking us about feedback, how next time they can make it better'. UKP5 also showed positive expectations to Chinese international education because based on the experience in his university he found out that the facilities expanded quite quickly and the development of the campus has been rapid as well.

3.9. Transformative learning

Even though UK participants had met difficulties during their stay in China, nearly all of them claimed that the overseas study meant a lot to them. They noted that they had changed in a lot of ways. They were all grateful for these changes and thought it was worth coming to China. From an overall perspective, nearly all UK participants claimed that they accepted and/or were aware of a different culture and that had opened their eyes rather than them sticking to stereotypes as before. One exception was UKP3, who stated that he had not experienced a change because it was not the first time he was an international student and in England his university also had students from different countries.

It is worth noting that, even although interview questions were mainly about students' experiences in academic areas, most participants believed they underwent more of a personal transformative development rather than an academic development (UKP4, UKP6, UKP8, UKP9, UKP10 and UKP14). They indicated that they learnt a lot about themselves, about the world and about China. For example UKP6 stated:

I would say although the teaching in China was not transformational and teaching methods largely not easy for me, I gained much more outside the university than inside it.

In response to questions about their transformative learning in China, UKP10 replied that:

Well, I met my girlfriend in China, so that's big. Academically, I guess I learnt how to learn effectively by rote and repetition, at least I was good at it while in China.

Only UKP11 expressed a positive response in terms of transformative learning in academic areas, even though she believed it to be more related to Ph.D. study. In the words of UKP11:

So I would have to say that in an educational way I think I did experience transformative learning although I believe this was more associated with doing a Ph.D., and was irrespective of where I was studying. In this sense, my critical, analytical and writing skills changed dramatically besides my gaining substantial and new experience in academic skills such as in publishing papers.

She further emphasised her transformative learning in non-educational experience by saying that:

However, I feel that my greatest transformational learning experience through study in China came from something less educational and more generally through softer, although still important life skills, and so non-educational. Here, I definitely believe my experience in China made my perspective on everything in life, society and conservation so much broader – even though I felt I was already abroad before I started. I became definitely much more patient and understanding as a result... And in general I truly feel some kind of deep connection with China as a country that I definitely didn't have before. I feel I understand China, Chinese people and culture more than before – and in a way I could never have learnt through reading or external methods of study – by actually living there my understanding was way greater.

Previous scholars have demonstrated that an individual student's overseas experience was more likely to involve three kinds of learning including: accumulated knowledge and skills; personal development and maturity, and transformative learning. While, in this study, all these three aspects were included in international students' transformative learning because accumulated knowledge could be a trigger that could lead to transformative learning. Additionally, personal development could also be viewed as part of the results transformation. The inclusion of these three changes is in fact supported by participants who said that they experienced transformation because of the skills they had obtained (such as language and communication), their maturity and also the intercultural experience of being abroad. To take

another example, UKP10 noted:

I learned a lot about the world and myself. I learned a lot about China, other cultures and myself. Part of that is just through getting older during the three years I was in China. But I definitely feel I'm a different person now than I would have been if I hadn't gone to China.

UK international students emphasised changes in their state of mind as being part of their transformative learning during overseas studies. Changes in state of mind include a diversification of perspectives, which includes views on China, views on the world, views on life, views on their relationship with parents, views on teacher-student relationships and views on the differences of cultures. Some participants stated that their views and impressions about China they had before they came to the host country had changed (UKP4, UKP5, UKP7, UKP8, UKP9, UKP10 and UKP13). The experience of being in China helped them realise the differences between what they knew about China before (from media, such as newspapers or documentaries, or a little bit more from international students) (UKP5, UKP9) and what their actual perception about China was after they came (UKP10). For example, UKP4 provided a positive attitude and noted that:

Of course I experienced a different teaching style, with the teacher having much more authority than in the UK; in China the teaching style is one directional so that taught me to respect teachers a lot more and to see them in a new way.

UKP10 also expressed that he was more understanding and accepting than before:

I have come to realise that a lot of things annoyed me about China. For example, the bureaucracy. It is just when I first came to China, I hadn't really worked in the UK or experienced much in the UK. I thought this is unique to China, this only exists in China, and this is China's fault. But I subsequently realised when I got older that these kind of things have an equivalent in the West too.

Most of the UK participants in this research were doing a Master's degree course. From their replies, it can be seen that they did not need to take a lot of classes during the semester, which led to a more relaxed way of life than they had in the UK. They became accustomed to the situation and started to think about their future life from different perspectives. These transformative learning experiences highlighted by the participants were reported as significant for their overseas studies. UK participants noted that they became far more accepting of cultures and traditions in other countries. For example, UKP4 stated that after experiencing time in China, she became very adaptable to changes and more patient because

she had to repeat herself all the time due to her friends not speaking English as a first language. UKP4 shared her feeling by saying that:

It makes me view the world completely differently. I don't want to have a limited life now. When I lived in England, I wanted to be rich, I wanted to be successful, I would be happy to live in England my whole life. But now I have come here, money seems much less important, and experience and development seem so much important for me now... living with a different culture also taught me a lot. I watched how Chinese people value their families which have made me much closer to my own family. I love the way that many Chinese people don't over think how others perceived them and that encouraged me to relax and care less how others see me and become happy in myself.

Being independent was highlighted by a few UK participants (UKP4, UKP11 and UKP13). UKP4 replied that due to the time difference, she could not communicate with her mother as much as when she was in England, even though she still sent her essay to her mother when she finished it. She realised that this was the time she had to do everything herself. She also stated that study in China was not like in the UK where she could receive help from the teachers on drafts. Therefore, she had to become more independent because she could not get feedback from the teachers. Participants noted that because of the language problem, unfamiliarity and the new environment, and inefficient support from the university, they had to figure out how to solve problems themselves (UKP4, UKP7). UKP4 noted that:

... I'm learning, I'm definitely learning because we learn how to become independent, lots of the time we are in China, we have to make a film, we don't speak the language, we have no idea about the locations, and we have to get our own agreements... I'm definitely learning through the practical side of it. Just the theory is kind of poor. I'm not learning much in the class, but I'm learning so much personally through the experience. The experience for me has become more important than I thought it ever could.

UKP6 also expressed how his life had changed as his language ability had developed by saying that:

I think my Chinese improved a lot to the extent that I could make Chinese friends and only speak Chinese with them, this was a new experience for me, and I could also travel independently around the country on my own to places outside of the tourist places. I also take more interest in Chinese film, TV and music. I'm going back to the UK and will be receiving funding for a Ph.D. that is China related, my study in China was the foundation for my language skills that helped me get this funding.

A couple of participants noted that after becoming familiar with Chinese culture, they were much more comfortable in China (UKP1, UKP8). For example, UKP1 noted the way of

celebrating, the way of having a chat with his thesis professor and also networking (the Chinese expression is '*Guanxi*'). He said 'I like how it works, like informal'. UKP8 noted that he had become more Chinese and he thought this would affect him when back in the UK. He said:

I think I have become more Chinese. I feel that that's the biggest benefit for me to be in China and doing this course. Maybe I don't improve that much academically, but I feel I understand China, Chinese people, how to conduct myself much better. So, more than just to accept other cultures, how to operate in that culture and being affected by those values as well. I think if I went back to the UK, I would still feel this, now I feel my teachers are above me, and I need to respect them more, I would feel that because I am used to that now. It's not like I know how it works in the UK, I know how it works in China. It is two different things. Both affected me. I'm like a sponge, so I can absorb different things. I wouldn't necessarily feel comfortable, but I would be very easily influenced by these things.

When analysing the factors contributing to UK participants' transformative learning, some points emerged during the interviews. Firstly, language was the most important factor that had an impact on UK international students' transformative learning experiences. Secondly, the encouragement and support from educators, relatives (partners, parents, grandparents and uncles) and friends was essential for UK participants' adaptation and transformational development. Thirdly, the environment of the university could be a factor in impeding or assisting the UK students' transformative learning, such as the arrangement of accommodation and the size of the class as discussed in the previous section and also the atmosphere of study. UKP1 indicated that:

I think over the entire environment (contributed to my academic achievement and development). I see the Chinese students studying hard, it makes me also want to study hard.

UK participants considered the friendly environment important when adjusting to the host country, especially for learning the local language, as referred by UKP12. She said:

I think in England it's been different, people are less patient than Chinese. They are so independent, they expect someone else to be independent. So back in China it should be easy to learn the language. People are so patient, so nice. Such as if you say 'Ni hao', Chinese people are amazed.

Fourthly, students' personalities, confidence, their own interest in subjects and personal motivation to learn things could affect whether the individual is willing to be positive to

explore and/or engage in new context, which consequently influences the extent of their transformative learning experience. For example, UKP3 indicated that:

I think more than anything, my personality is the most important thing because I meet other students who are in the same environment, but they wouldn't change or they wouldn't expect the different culture. I don't think they have been in any activities or courses which I found sort of helped me understand how I should behave in China.... just my own desire to watch and learn.

Fifthly, participants noted that being in China, rather than knowing China from documentaries, media or from Chinese international students in the UK, was very significant and helped them obtain a better understanding and/or accepting of the culturally different host country. It has been noted that, although it seems likely that international students would spend most of their time on campus, it was found that members of the group of UK participants experienced transformative learning through their experience outside the campus. For example, UKP10 believed that campus was a little island of peace, but he needed to go out of campus to figure out what the real world was really like. He found that there was not any one city that was representative of China. Through visiting different cities, he has gained a much deeper understanding of China. The experience of being actually in China helped him to realise differences between what he knows and the general perception about China.

'You know people in Britain know literally nothing about China. The stereotypes of foreign countries are very common (in the UK). Every time I take a taxi, the driver will say the British are like this, the French are like that. I thought Chinese people always worked so hard, for example. The first time I saw a Chinese person being lazy, I was extremely shocked and surprised. You can literally find hundreds of thousands of people to back up the stereotype you want to say something about China, but China is so big, as soon as someone says they understand China, immediately they have to reassess. The situation changes every minute.

Sixthly, the expectations of both teacher and students play a major influence on students' attitudes and efforts on their studies. UKP8 noted that:

I wouldn't be taking the job if I thought the expectation of me was higher. There is no way of I wouldn't graduate because of a job. So if they had a lot of expectation of my thesis, I would spend a lot of time on it. I wouldn't take the job, I would wait until I graduate. Another thing for example, I watched the thesis defence they had for the year above... it seems that no matter how badly you do, they don't want to stop me passing. It's really inconvenient to make a student repeat a year unless they really have to, so suddenly I felt more comfortable and motivated to put my own effort into things. If I worked very hard, I pass, if I don't work hard, I pass. Why am I going to spend this time really working so hard and trying to rearrange my thesis? I have so

many things to do in China. So that was a big influence on me as well.

Next, responsible teachers and the support from academic departments is one of the paramount factors in assisting UK participants' adaptation and acceptance in both academic and non-academic areas. UKP1 noted that:

The department also makes things clear, specific guidelines, but normally they will tell us what need to be done, so you know what you have to adapt to.... The good treatment I received from staff members. They were trying to help me.

It was noted by UK participants that there was never just one single factor contributing to whether transformational learning happened (UKP5, UKP8 and UKP14). UKP8 provided a detailed explanation by saying that:

There is one class I particularly enjoyed: that's a very small class, and there were only six or seven students who chose it. Four foreign students and three Chinese. The teacher is very good, encouraging discussion, she would speak a lot, and we have to come up with our opinions, because it was a small class, and also half the students are international. I feel more comfortable to use my Chinese to express my opinion, more comfortable in speaking. That is definitely the class I had where there was more debate. I got to understand the Chinese students' perspectives more, and that's down to the teacher and also down to the size of the class, also down to the makeup of the class. It wasn't one factor that did that. But another important factor there is my own confidence because there are other international students who didn't speak as much as me in that class. They enjoyed it, they just sat there quietly.

However, it is worth nothing that even though UK respondents stated that they had a worthwhile experience in China, respondents who potentially wanted to do Ph.D. stated that they would choose to do it in the UK rather than continue their study in a Chinese university. In addition, some participants noted that they had decided to leave China after they graduate because, even though there was diversity in food and topics and so on, they still felt very foreign in China (UKP10, UKP11). UKP10 further explained that he thought that, unlike in the UK, none of the Chinese native people expected foreigners to integrate themselves with local people. China's monocultural environment contributed to the loneliness experienced by international students because it was reinforced by lower acceptance by host members of foreign people. To ensure international students have a better experience and achieve the best in their overseas studies, the question of how to create a better environment for international students on campus is a challenge that Chinese higher education institutions need to urgently address. Moreover, a lot of the discomfort that students experienced in China was due to the fact that they were trying not to be transformed back into what they recognised as the more

problematic state of the uncritical/passive learner. More discussion around this finding is developed in Chapter5.

In order not to feel disappointed, quite a few participants held an attitude that they had no expectations and took everything as it was (UKP2, UKP3, UKP6 and UKP13). UKP3 further stated that: ‘that kind of attitude helps me a lot, because when you compare everything to back home, you might have a hard time dealing with your surroundings’.

Last, but not least, UK interviewees responded that, along with the development of international higher education in China, the service and support from the university had radically improved year by year (UKP2, UKP4). In the words of UKP4:

They (the faculty members) actually tried really hard to improve the staff after we had a big meeting and explained what (needed) to improve. They actually made the effort... they said they also learnt from us.

Based on the responses from the participants, experiencing life dilemmas was a trigger that forced changes in thinking about how to be independent in study and daily life and also in thinking of changing the way of life. Most participants also indicated that there were no big dilemmas during their stay in China (UKP4, UKP8 and UKP14), rather, what affected them was an accumulation of continual small daily experiences. The findings echo the theoretical assumption that an individual’s transformative learning does not have to be stimulated by a single crisis or event.

3.10. Chapter conclusion

This chapter analysed UK participants’ overseas learning and socialising experiences in Chinese higher institutions; it includes students’ biographical details, teaching styles in Chinese universities, academic support, participants’ relationship with teachers and other students and related factors. Because UK international students come from a different culture, the new environment produced a number of dilemmas that challenged their pre-acknowledged points of view. To live or survive in the new context, UK students had to adjust their behaviour to try to behave well to gain acceptance by the host country. As a result, the finding indicate that students experienced different transformative learning experiences in either educational and/or non-educational areas, or in both. Even though the interview questions were mainly about students’ academic experience, a relatively large number of UK participants believed

that they acquired more of a personal transformation (in daily life, such as being independent and changes in state of mind) rather than an educational transformation. Based on the responses of some UK participants, it can be seen that, even if they were disappointed with their teachers and/or courses, most of them adapted well to their current situation because academic development was not their only reason for coming to China. A number of factors contributed to these findings that are associated with an individual student's characteristics and with social factors including the campus environment and, to some extent, the support provided by individual university departments and the wider university staff.

Chapter 4

Data analysis of the Chinese participants

Introduction

A total of 18 Chinese international students were selected from two universities in the UK, with seven from UKUA and ten students from UKUB, respectively. In addition, there was one participant that had dropped out from her study at UKUA. For ethical reasons, given the small number of students, these university names have been anonymised. Both universities belong to The Russell Group (Association of United Kingdom-based universities) which was established in 1993, representing the 24 top universities in the UK.

The real name of each participant has been replaced by a number to protect students' confidentiality as explained in chapter 2. Four participants (CHP2, CHP8, CHP16 and CHP17) had finished their studies by the date of the interview, and another two participants (CHP12 and CHP14) had handed in their theses and were waiting for their Viva at the time of interview. The remaining participants were in their third or fourth year of their Ph.D. studies. The students were selected from a variety of subjects. These were Business (eight), Sociology (five), Education (1), Literature (1), and Law (3).

Even though all 18 participants were chosen from Ph.D. level, 10 of them had finished their Master's degree in UK universities before they started their Ph.D. degree (CHP2, CHP4, CHP7, CHP8, CHP9, CHP10, CHP11, CHP13, CHP14, and CHP15); seven students (CHP1, CHP3, CHP5, CHP6, CHP16, CHP17, CHP18) had finished their Master's degree in Chinese universities; CHP12 did not have a Master's degree from either a UK or a Chinese university; additionally, CHP3, CHP6, CHP16 had (partly) finished their first Ph.D. in China. Concerns will be given to their previous Master's and/or Ph.D. experience during the interviews with the aim of comparing them with UK Master's and Ph.D. international students who were enrolled in Chinese universities.

As stated in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, this study investigated international students' potential transformative learning experiences in both academic areas and in their social lives with other students. As we know, teaching and learning are core elements in an international student's

intercultural experience of being abroad. Everything included in the teaching–learning process could contribute to a student’s success or failure and their potential transformative learning. Therefore, interview questions relating to styles of teaching, teacher/student relationships and student/student relationships, and contextual related aspects such as the living location and environment, were used. Based on the framework of transformative learning theory, the interview has focused on an individual’s prior and current experiences, and related biographical questions were also covered. The findings have revealed that Chinese participants noted that they experienced transformative learning either in the educational or non-educational areas, or in both. They also noticed that there were issues and factors that impeded them from achieving a higher level of development and transformation; these are of considerable importance because they may cause potential risk of students’ failure in their studies as happened with CHP18.

The data selected from the interviews have been classified under the following categories and subcategories: (i) biographical details, (ii) teaching styles in UK universities, (iii) relationships with teachers, (iv) meeting individually or meeting in a groups, (v) relationship between Chinese participants with other students, (vi) academic support provided by the universities, (vii) hosts’ attitudes, (viii) curriculum design, (ix) living location, (x) transformative learning, and (xi) chapter conclusion. In addition, evidence of the participants’ statements are provided under each theme.

4.1. Biographical details

As discussed in Chapter 2, individual prior experience and the actual experience in the new environment was predicted to have an important contribution to transformative learning. This study predicted that international students’ prior work and study experience (especially their previous overseas experiences) may have a positive influence on their transformative learning. The individual variables of gender, age, previous work and/or experience; length of time in the UK, reasons for studying in the UK were also predicted to have potential impact on their attitudes and behaviours in the host country, and their transformative learning might be affected accordingly.

4.1.1. Gender

There were an equal number of males and females in the Chinese group of interviewees, while only female students (CHP2, CHP5, CHP10 and CHP15) expressed that gender was a factor which had an influence on their experience in the host country. Chinese female participants expressed that they were easily distracted by daily routines, and are more likely to have mood fluctuation compared to male students. For instance, CHP10 reflected that:

Some people think Ph.D. study is an intellectual thing, while in my point of view, it is an emotional thing to do. It is harder for female students than male students in the Ph.D. process because male students may have better control of their moods when facing pressure.

CHP2 also provided her explanation in terms of comparing the different ways of making friends with non-Chinese peer students between male and female. She said:

It is easier for male students to make friends compared to female students. They can have a pint of beer and watch football together, and then, they become friends. Female students, on the other hand, have to spend more time together talking about personal issues such as fashion and/or relationships.

CHP5 expressed her worries about finding a boyfriend due to the limited numbers of male Chinese candidates around. She noted that traditional Chinese philosophy that still has influence today in modern China holds the position that, in a marriage, husband and wife should match and have similar background and social status, so a female Ph.D. student should ideally find a male Ph.D. for a husband. However, male Ph.D. students are not expected to match with a female Ph.D. because they are deemed to have a higher social standing than females. In contrast, most males would feel under pressure if their wife has a Ph.D.

The data revealed that worries and pressures caused by gender were viewed as a challenge to Chinese female students in their overseas studies in the big picture. Based on how the participants responded, it can be seen that, differently from female participants who were worried about their age in finding a boyfriend or getting married, male participants had concerns about whether they could find their dream job after their graduation.

4.1.2. Age

The age of Chinese participants ranged from 25 to 40 years old. Based on the data collected from the participants, the age differences between participants did not obviously influence

individual adaptation and transformation in the new environment except for CHP6 (who was 37 years old). In the words of CHP6:

Young students have more opportunities than me, they can stay and work in the UK after graduating from their Ph.D., while I have to come back to China because my wife and child are there. I don't have a lot of choices because I lack the spirit of adventure at my age.

A couple of female participants (UKP5, UKP12) expressed their anxiety about getting married after finishing their studies yet this time was unknown due to the nature of the Ph.D. work.

However, it was reflected from CHP6's statement that, since he felt pressure when thinking about his age disadvantage, he spent nearly all of his time in his research and academic activities. He reported a dramatic transformation since coming to the UK in many aspects of his life, include teaching and learning and also through socialising with others.

4.1.3. Previous work and/or study experience

Previous work experience

There were six Chinese participants who had work experience before they started their Ph.D. studies (CHP6, CHP11, CHP13, CHP14, CHP15 and CHP16). CHP6 was 37 years old and had been working as a high school teacher in China for several years. CHP14 was previously a journalist for several years. CHP11, CHP15, and CHP16 finished their Master's degrees in UK universities and went back to China to work before returning to the UK to continue pursuing their doctoral degrees after one or two years. They had been working at a stock exchange corporation, in a university, and in a law firm, respectively. However, the data shows that although a couple of respondents (CHP6, CHP13 and CHP16) had thought about the effect of working experience on the studies themselves before the interview, few of the participants expressed that their Ph.D. experiences were associated with their previous work experience, only CHP13 had an opinion on the relationship between her current study and her previous work experience. It is more likely that participants with work experience may be clearer in knowing what they want from their Ph.D. studies, and may have higher expectations than participants who had no previous work experience. The results show that respondents who had work experience were indeed more concerned with their overall studies and with their career development in the future (UKP6, UKP13). Because they knew what they wanted from their

studies, they had more critical reflections than students who had not worked before. Critical reflection was considered as essential for transformation and this was supported by the participants in this study. More explanation will be provided in section 10.

Previous study experience

In terms of the Chinese participants' previous study experience, the data revealed that Chinese participants who had finished their Master's degree in UK universities before they started their Ph.D. degree had better responses with regard to their adaptation during the process of doing a Ph.D. because they were accustomed to the teaching conventions of UK higher education. It was also clear that those Chinese participants who came directly to the UK to pursue a Ph.D. felt more stressed than participants who had finished their Master's degree in UK universities. The results have shown that CHP12, who finished her undergraduate study at a Chinese university and went straight on to Ph.D. study in the UK, felt totally lost during the first year and a half due to a lack of knowledge regarding the subject and degree, the teaching style and being a new-comer to the UK at the same time.

4.1.4. Length of time in the UK

The length of time spent in the UK for the Chinese participants varied from two to fifteen years. It was found that that people who had been staying in the UK for a long time were better able to adapt to local life and also to the academic areas (CHP2, CHP8 and CHP13). For example, CHP2 and her husband, who had both finished their language courses, Master's and Ph.D. degrees and had been in the UK for ten years previously, when asked about her experience in the UK, she responded that:

I think I have got used to it since I have been living in the UK for such a long time. Conversely, I may feel maladjustment if I return to China now.

4.1.5. Reasons for studying in the UK

Through comparing the Chinese respondents' experiences in their overseas studies, it was found that there were certain associations between the reasons why they chose to study in the UK and the attitudes they held when confronted with challenges in their new environment. Seven reasons referred to by Chinese participants for choosing to study in the UK are displayed below. The data revealed that academic development, experience of a different culture, and

getting a degree for a better job were the most popular reasons mentioned by Chinese participants, particularly being emphasised by the participants when asked about their concerns with regard to dealing with personal relationship with their supervisors, local students, or other international students. Opportunity of obtaining scholarships was also highlighted by some respondents as a crucial reason for coming to the UK.

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | Academic development | CHP1, CHP3, CHP4, CHP6, CHP7, CHP8, CHP10, CHP14, CHP16 |
| 2 | Get a degree for better job | CHP1, CHP4, CHP7, CHP8, CHP11, CHP15 |
| 3 | The reputation of UK's higher education | CHP2, CHP3 |
| 4 | Get to know another world (experience different culture) | CHP2, CHP4, CHP5, CHP10, CHP13, CHP14, CHP15 |
| 5 | Go with the crowd | CHP9, CHP11, CHP15, CHP18 |
| 6 | Opportunity of scholarship | CHP5, CHP6, CHP12, CHP17, CHP18 |
| 7 | Not ready for a job | CHP5, CHP18 |
| 8 | 'Get gilded' (go with the flow/follow others) | CHP1, CHP2 |

***Table 2. Chinese participants' reasons and motivations for coming to the UK**

Academic development

Chinese participants who had rated academic development as the most important reason for coming to the UK had viewed that other aspects beyond academic areas were not important and they were not willing to spend time on them. For example, when answering how to maintain a good relationship with other students, CHP3 responded:

I would not deliberately maintain or develop the relationship with my colleagues because I go abroad for the purpose of learning, so I will put more focus on academic areas. On the other hand, cultural learning and getting to know other people are by-products for me, therefore, there is no need to impose myself with spending energy to care what other people think about you.

Getting a degree for better job

Getting a better job after graduation with a Ph.D. degree was underlined by some Chinese participants who suggested that Ph.D. study was seen as a medium for career development (CHP4, CHP7, CHP8, CHP11, and CHP15). For example CHP15 viewed her Ph.D. study as a means of self-promotion when looking for a better opportunity to change job when she went back to China. She further explained that:

At the very beginning of my study, I told my supervisor that I did not want to stay in the UK after I finished my degree, I do not want to engage in academia, do not want to publish articles, I have no other requirements but to get my Ph.D. degree in three years. Therefore he knows what I want. He would not expect me to go to conferences and socialise in academia.

CHP15 stated that, although she has stayed in the UK for a long time, she only made two or three friends. That was not because of the language but in order to get her degree as quickly as she could and to go back home to get a better job.

Get to know another world (experience different culture)

A number of interviewees directly noted that experiencing a different culture was one of the reasons for coming to the UK and consequently they wanted to get to know other people around the world. However, it was found that, although willingness had been expressed by the participants, most of them did not put in effort to engage themselves in the host society with the exception of CHP5. In the words of CHP4:

In fact, there is no need to experience the culture with an explicit purpose. When you live here, get to know the rules, you will know how it works.

Go with the crowd

A minority of Chinese interviewees stated that their choice of studying abroad was influenced by their relatives, friends, and/or classmates (CHP9, CHP11, CHP15 and CHP18). After finishing Middle school in China, CHP15 decided to continue his study abroad and had been in the UK for about ten years at the time of attending the interview. He stated that:

The middle school I attended in China involved a lot of foreign students, and from that time I was told that study abroad is a good thing to do, that's why I decided to

take a Master's degree and then a Ph.D. in the UK.

Opportunity of scholarship

To take the opportunity of receiving funding provided by the Chinese government or a UK university was the only reason for some Chinese respondents to study abroad (CHP12, CHP17). The regulation of signing a contract with the China Scholarship Council (CSC) required the students to go back to China and work for at least two years after graduation, otherwise they would be charged all tuition and living fees for the period of the Ph.D. degree (based on the funding programme of CSC). It was very obvious that Chinese students who signed up for funding with these restrictions were affected to a certain extent. CHP17 claimed that:

No one requires that you must make friends with foreigners. So I just take things as they are. Since I signed the contract with the Chinese government, I did not intend to stay and work here. I will just complete the degree within the specified time and go back to my home country.

It is interesting to find that there was a fairly obvious transactional approach being taken by some of the international students in that they come to university to get a degree, but they do not care about anything else. This is in spite of the fact that students who do not engage will probably not be as successful or make full use of all of the opportunities that are provided. It was revealed that being successful in academic life was the main target for Chinese students because it is this that will make their parents proud.

4.2. Teaching styles in UK universities

Generally, the better educational environments in the department and/or universities in UK compared to China was emphasised by a large majority of Chinese participants. Respondents from both universities gave positive feedback on the styles of teaching and expressed that they were able to adapt to the new academic environment after becoming accustomed to it. This study speculated that for Chinese international students who pursued their further education in the UK, they would have a higher possibility of experiencing transformative learning due to the higher quality and reputation in UK higher education institutions. However, since the different teaching and learning philosophies are derived and conditioned by specific social, cultural and historical factors in these two countries, obstacles during the teaching and learning process are very difficult to avoid and this may foster Chinese participants' critical reflection or impede their understanding of the host education system.

No obvious differences were found between the groups of participants from the two universities. Themes based on the issues related to their learning process which were raised from by the participants will be discussed including: (i) teaching targets, (ii) resources, (iii) group discussion and debates, (iv) significance of the size of the class, (v) research subjects, (vi) design of group discussion, and (vii) similarities to Chinese teaching style.

4.2.1. Teaching targets

Three of the Chinese participants (CHP4, CHP8 and CHP10) indicated that Chinese and UK universities have different teaching targets that led to differences in the styles of teaching. The essence of teaching postgraduate degrees as stressed by the Chinese participants were as follows: guiding (CHP2, CHP3, CHP5, CHP6 and CHP16), cultivating students' heuristic learning (CHP5), ability to take initiative (CHP2, CHP5, CHP17, CHP18) and independent learning capacity (CHP2, CHP10, CHP13, CHP17, CHP18). Participants showed their appreciation of these styles of teaching and viewed them as important for their transformative learning in educational perspectives. For example, in the words of CHP10:

I was planning to be a teacher after getting my Ph.D., while now I have changed my mind, because I think the study of a Ph.D. degree provided me with more opportunities and possibilities in choosing career directions. The transferable skills I have learned through the study could be applied in other areas as well.

Chinese participants stated that one of the differences during the teaching and studying process in the UK was guiding. In other words, the teachers emphasised students' abilities as individual researchers who can do research independently; teachers would tell students the origins and resources of the ideas and provide students with channels for self-learning (CHP2, CHP3, CHP4, CHP5, CHP6 and CHP12). CHP4 said that it was more like training as an apprentice in UK universities with the most important feature of teaching students is how to master the methods of doing research and getting to know the procedures of doing research. This was contrasted with Chinese universities where teachers focused more on memorisation and examination rather than knowledge itself. CHP4's point of view was supported by CHP8 who viewed himself as being trained independently through the whole process of his Ph.D. study. At the same time, participants highlighted that students should be aware of their own learning because teachers would not supervise on a daily basis or urge students to do their studies. For example CHP2 stated that Ph.D. students would only meet their supervisors once a month on average and sometimes there would be fewer meetings if the student left for fieldwork. As a

consequence, students' time management was more important than when they were in a Chinese university. CHP4 further explained that:

In the UK, the focus is more on research methods; therefore, we could take various training courses which include data collection, how to do interviews and questionnaires. They enforce the research methods, while in China we emphasise the results. In other words, in the Chinese academic environment we focus more on whether people could publish papers and the level of the publications.

CHP9 and CHP14 noted that in the UK education system, the cultivation of an academic spirit and ability was not only promoted in higher education or at a Ph.D. level but had already started from high school. CHP9 explained his understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of this way of teaching by saying that:

Once students get the ability to do research themselves, after graduating from the university, they could apply this kind of transferable skill to other areas. However, being too specialised also means a lack of knowledge from a broad horizon in a specific research area.

4.2.2. Resources applied by the lecturers

In UK universities, the fact that students would be assigned a number of papers to read before each class was mentioned by five Chinese participants (CHP2, CHP4, CHP14, CHP17 and CHP18). CHP2 noted that students would not pass the exams if they only attended the class and did not read the books on the list. In contrast, a few interviewees (CHP2, CHP4, CHP7, CHP16 and CHP17) stated that in Chinese universities, students could pass the exams without attending the class as long as they work hard to memorise the textbook that the lecturer had used in the class before the exam.

In UK universities, CHP4 noticed that lecturers will consult different references and material when they are giving lectures rather than relying too much on one textbook and each course would be renewed every year with up-dated information in the UK universities (CHP11). In contrast, some lecturers in Chinese universities would use the same coursework and slides for many years with only slight changes (CHP6, CHP9 and CHP11). CHP11 shared his feelings by saying that:

During lectures we can see that teachers in UK universities are competent and well-trained, at the same time, they are more responsible than Chinese teachers. From the resources we know that teachers in the UK have carefully prepared for the courses.

However, CHP14 and CHP15 noted that it depended on the individual lecturer whether or not they provided supportive reading lists to students. For example, CHP14 claimed that reading lists were problematic because they were not tailored to their individual research projects.

4.2.3. Group discussion and debates

Compared to Ph.D. levels, it is obvious that there were more compulsory courses for Master's degree students. Participants who had finished their Master's degree in UK universities before they started their Ph.D. degree highlighted that the situation in the large classes where they have more freedom of interaction and discussion and where students would ask questions to learn things was obviously different compared to the teaching style in Chinese universities where they just had lectures (CHP2, CHP4, CHP8, CHP10, CHP11, CHP15 and CHP17). They thought that the academic atmosphere in the UK was better than in Chinese universities.

Even though a majority of Chinese participants viewed the prevalence of discussion from a positive perspective, a few of the participants noticed both positive and negative effects of free argument and debates as a means of teaching and learning with lecturers or other students during classes. For example, CHP14 pointed out that one of her concerns was that time was wasted if students raised their hands to ask questions during the lecture. 'Maybe speaking after the lecture will be much better', she said.

Nevertheless, even though the participants advocated the teaching with discussion and interaction, the results revealed that Chinese participants were still more likely to be silent during the lectures. CHP8, CHP14 and CHP17 noted that their different cultural background might be one of the factors contributing to their performance in group discussion. CHP17 indicated that:

The fact that there are fewer interactions in large lectures may be due to students having different cultural backgrounds. Students from Asia are relatively more introverted or reserved with inhibited behaviour, while students from America or Europe are more active and energetic. Therefore, I would prefer lectures with a small number of students. For students who are reserved like me, there is an external force to stimulate us to behave.

Similarly, supported by UKP2, CHP10 and CHP14, CHP8 speculated that:

Compared to other international students, Chinese students would not be willing to express themselves and get themselves into debates. They may not agree with others but they wouldn't say it. The issue of being afraid of losing face was a concern.

In contrast, CHP12 stated that she was not afraid of losing face or making mistakes in when speaking in English because she reasoned that all of the people knew that English is not her first language and it was not possible for her to react as quickly as other UK students with perfect English expressions. Therefore, once she was at the stage where she could understand most of a typical presentation given in English, she wanted to raise her hand and ask questions. She further stated that:

I don't want other people to see that Chinese people are always keeping in silence in meetings. I am not sure whether the presenters really think about (my questions), but they always say that is a good question. For me, no matter what their attitudes are, that I get the chance to express myself in the conference or in meetings is important. There are experts and scholars in these meetings, and if you actively communicate with them, they would have an impression of you and have interest in you. That will help you to publish papers and develop your career.

To sum up, in terms of discussion, free argument and debates with lecturers or other students as a means of teaching and learning during classes, Chinese participants pointed out that their concerns included that time was wasted if students repeatedly raised their hands to ask questions during the lecture, they felt they lacked confidence to ask questions because of insufficient grasp of English and were afraid of being laughed at by classmates or lecturers. As a consequence, some Chinese participants preferred to have a smaller class where they can have small group discussions where there was less concern over losing face. It is notable that for most Chinese students who were not accustomed to initiating questions and discussion, this was because of their previous studies in China where lectures were more likely only to include the lecturer talking from the beginning to the end of the class. Students may be given the chance to ask questions at the end of the lecture, or maybe not. Under these conditions, Edwards and Ran (2006) suggested that 'students owe respect to those who provide knowledge; the authority of teachers is such that only they – and not the students – should initiate interactions in class' (no page number).

4.2.4. Design of group discussion

When speaking of the format of panel discussion in the class, CHP14 struggled to express her thoughts. She started by saying it was a good style even though there was little encouragement

from teachers for students to speak out. She also expressed strong negative opinions about the design of group discussion. She said:

Some students are very active. If you do not want to talk, there is no one to force you to speak. However, Chinese people do not take the initiative to speak because of our culture. I would more like the system where every person has a chance to speak. I think it is not only a problem of language but also of psychological barriers and may also have a relationship with low self-esteem.

CHP17 noted that when a teacher creates the environment in which students can engage, it may be down to the student to choose whether or not to engage:

I suppose that factors which contributed to Chinese students - having less initiative to talk cover language, culture and personalities. I wouldn't say it is all because of culture because I saw some Chinese students who were very brave to speak out even if with poor English.

Based on CHP14's previous comments it seems that she was struggling with both adapting to the different teaching styles in the UK but also to postgraduate study more generally. There was a difference between UK and Chinese postgraduate students' expectations of their courses, which everyone had to adapt to, and there were issues that should be considered. Clear guidance during the induction week might be helpful for international students (especially for those from culturally different countries) to understand these differences. At the same time, based on what was expected from the students, it was more likely that Chinese participants needed support from the educators to overcome challenges, such as the feeling of or the fear of losing face. There was obviously an obstacle between what the students said would be good and what they actually did in reality. The question of how to foster transformative study and help students to achieve their best should be considered by the educators and universities.

4.2.5. Significance of the size of the class

The size of the class was considered by Chinese participants as an important condition for creating the opportunities for group discussion (CHP2, CHP11, CHP14, CHP15 and CHP17). CHP17 applied for exemptions to the courses he was taking after attending three classes due to reasons including a large number of students, too much reading and the fact that the course was not compulsory for Ph.D. students. At the same time, he believed the course having group discussion in a small sized class which was held by their department (rather than by the college) was valuable:

The small size class was held in the office with only seven or eight students. We have many interactions since very few students are there. There was too much pressure when I took it at the beginning but we gained a lot from it afterwards. Unlike in large lectures where you do not need to prepare for the course, or to ask questions, you can just sit and listen, while in small lectures everyone need to engage in the discussion.

One Chinese interviewee noticed that even though group discussion was an effective way of improving students' study, it could not be applied in Chinese universities due to the large number of students in one class (CHP14). CHP11 also noted that a Master's level class in the UK could have both large and small classes. He further explained that:

There were teacher-centred teaching styles (used) in big classes, lecturers would not ask whether every student has understood what he has taught. In contrast, a small class used student-centred teaching style through which every student could be taken care of by lecturers. The teaching style depends on the size of the classes. Big classes could be more effective in utilising teaching resources yet less efficient in teaching results.

CHP3, CHP11 and CHP17 compared their previous Master's experience in a Chinese university and the course they were taking in the UK; they noted that there was no significant difference in terms of the size of the class and the styles of teaching in large and small classes. Even although it was not as active as in the UK, there were also discussions in small classes in Chinese universities. They believed that dialogue between teachers and students is important in fostering transformative learning in an intercultural context. Through communicating with teachers and other students, they could adapt to the new context in an easier way rather than feeling disoriented. More discussion around the importance of dialogue between teachers and students will be developed in Chapter 5.

In terms of the formats of having different class sizes and receiving reading lists for the class beforehand (both for big and small size classes), it seems there was a misconception regarding Chinese students' understanding of the expectations of their teachers. In UK universities, students were given reading lists before the class because the lecturers assume the students will have completed the required reading for the lecture in advance. In other words, in UK universities, it was expected that the students take personal responsibility to do the reading and therefore get something out of the class. The fact that a student might have felt they did not need to do the reading would be an issue, which would explain why they did not get much out of their experience of being abroad. Therefore, international students' expectations and understanding of the function of reading lists and of different teaching formats need to be

further considered by university departments. It is worth noting that students could easily keep a narrow focus on their project and not on learning as an end in itself, which makes support from the university more important. The same problem was reported by a previous scholar, Gao (1998) who argued that, in the context of Western institutions, reading is a fundamental problem for Chinese international students from two perspectives including their dependence on guidance from the teachers with regard to ‘what they should be reading and in terms of the sheer volume of reading recommended by lecturers’ (cited in Edwards & Ran, 2006, no page number).

4.2.6. Significance of Academic Subjects

Two Chinese participants (CHP1, CHP7) noted that the subject they were studying could be a factor contributing to the similarities of teaching in comparison between China and the UK. CHP1 noted that his subject was business and that it involved many difficult mathematical elements and that this could have been a reason for the limited interaction in the class. In his own words:

Same as in China, when we were in class, the teacher wrote on the blackboard and students took notes, there is little interaction between teachers and students. We hardly understand the content of the course so how can the students discuss with each other?

However, CHP1 found that there was more interaction, more group discussions and presentations for students taking Marketing as a subject. Consistent with CHP1, CHP7 was also in the Business School but from a different university. He commented that there were ‘no big differences in my programme. We have big classes here like we had in China as well’.

4.2.7. Similarities to Chinese teaching styles

It is notable that Chinese participants pointed out that although there are differences between Chinese and UK education in terms of the teaching target, some of them also expressed that there was not much fundamental difference in their studies even if they conduct their Ph.D. in China (CHP4, CHP6 CHP11 and CHP17). They noted that the differences in styles of teaching and learning were related to the level of study rather than in China or in the UK. For example, CHP4 believed that ‘I think the way they are teaching is the same as in Chinese universities’. Therefore CHP4 noted that even if he was in China doing a Ph.D., he would still work as he

did in the UK. CHP6 and CHP11 responded that, although the guidance of teachers in UK universities was more targeted, nevertheless, the quality actually varies from person to person – ‘at this point, there is no difference between China and the UK’, stated by CHP6. He also offered criticism by stating that:

I don't think it is student-centred teaching style in UK universities although some students valued this. I think it depends. The situation is similar to Chinese universities. Some teachers care about what students have learned, but some did not.

CHP17, who had finished his Master's degree in China, also stated that there were slight differences between his Master's experience in China and his Ph.D. study in the UK in terms of the modes of classes. The students were required to be independent in both their studies and daily lives. The only additional activity was group discussion.

One Chinese interviewee (CHP15) who had two years' teaching experience working for Beijing Foreign Language University found that the teaching style was the same as that experienced in the UK. Especially the methods of grouping large numbers of students together in order to deliver lectures and then separating them into small groups for discussion was the same.

Based on participants' responses, it was found that some Chinese universities had similar teaching methods to those used in UK universities. This suggests that participants originally from these universities would have had less dilemma in adapting their studies in the host country, and would consequently have less chance of experiencing transformative learning in educational perspectives.

4.3. Relationship with teachers

Regarding the relationship with supervisors, although the experiences of Chinese participants varied, almost all respondents noted that their supervisors played positive roles in their studies. Issues around student-teacher relationships revealed three central areas: availability of teacher/ease of making appointments; academic support from supervisors; and personal contact with UK supervisors. Related factors contributing to these relationships have been analysed accordingly.

4.3.1. Availability of teacher/ease of making appointments

Meeting frequency with supervisors varied for participants from once-to-twice a week to once-to-twice every two months. The principle of making appointments with supervisors received both positive and negative responses from Chinese participants. Even though some of them identified it as an effective way to manage themselves (CHP2, CHP6 and CHP10), a majority of participants viewed it as having negative effects on an efficient research process.

Chinese participants noted that waiting to make an appointment with the supervisor for a meeting may impede them from receiving suggestions and feedback from their supervisors (CHP1, CHP2, CHP8, CHP12 and CHP13), particularly when the supervisor did not act in a very responsible way towards his/her students by providing support, such as regular supervision (CHP2, CHP13). For example, CHP13 reported that there was no basic supervision between herself and her supervisors. CHP12 was critical of the instruction she received from her supervisor because her supervisors did not look at her research from a whole-picture perspective, which led to her wasting time re-doing work.

Chinese interviewees commented that sometimes a couple of minutes of small talk was necessary for them to get through the problems they have confronted during research, but unfortunately, they could not get that support from their supervisors (CHP1, CHP5, CHP13 and CHP16). CHP16 was very critical about making appointments with her supervisors:

Sometimes I just need a talk, maybe only five minutes, for a question...it would be better to meet regularly (with supervisors), just talk. They (the supervisors) are professionals, so it is always good to learn something from them. Unfortunately, we couldn't just knock on the door like when we did in China and say I need to chat, UK people are inflexible. Chinese lecturers are freer to contact, they would tell us 'do come to knock the door if you have any questions. You don't have to make appointment in advance'.

Consistent with CHP16, CHP5 also responded that:

Especially during the stage of writing up, when I was depressed, at that time, it was really difficult for me to try to make an appointment with the supervisor to talk. I was really upset but I have to wait for their reply and then have a talk. Sometimes the supervisor didn't even respond.

In addition, CHP5 hinted that the supervisor should be more aware of student's mind-set. Unfortunately, as noted by CHP5, UK supervisor's views on students' academic and private life should be kept separate. She said:

The supervisor may not know what your current state of mind is. They do not know what you went through in life. In particular, you may feel extremely depressed in mood while the teacher urges you to finish the chapter or hand in a report. This will lead you to a more intense and severe emotion and the entire state of mind will become more unstable.

CHP5's statement was supported by CHP18 who dropped out of her study when she felt too much pressure and could not be understood by her UK supervisor.

Furthermore, a couple of participants commented that some Chinese students who were more reserved about initiating conversation that could lead to less efficient communication between teachers and students (CHP1, CHP2 and CHP16). CHP1 expressed that it was much easier to talk to people in a Chinese university because they are all Chinese and are familiar with the rules there. It was more casual for him to meet his supervisor compared to the situation in the UK where he felt embarrassed to knock on his supervisors' door to ask questions. CHP1 repeated the word 'embarrassed' four times. When asked about the reason for his embarrassment, he answered by saying that 'I feel this may be due to cultural issues. In China, you would think the teacher should be responsible for you. However, it seems like teachers in the UK have no responsibility towards you. Therefore, maybe it is good for me not to bother them'. CHP1's point of view was supported by CHP8 who said:

In the UK, the teachers are only responsible for the rules and regulations. This is the bottom line they would achieve. For some teachers, the more you give to them, the more they return to you, which means if you produce good work then they would supervise you better. The supervisor would be motivated and it would be a lot easier (for your work) to have their effort, while for others, they wouldn't bother if you could finish your study or not.

CHP4 also noted that there were certain relationships between how close the students were to their teachers, and how much concern the teachers would give to their students.

In fact, only one of the participants highlighted any positive aspect regarding the principle of making appointments. CHP2 pointed out that:

As a teacher, your schedule would not be disturbed, and as a student you would have a more organised plan. I am quite ok with that. If I were a teacher I would prefer this way as well. I would feel I was being bothered if I was writing a paper while students knocked on the door asking questions.

Based on the transcripts, it seems as if most Chinese participants did not cope with the practice in the host country where academic staff managed their time carefully. The maladjustment of the students to the new academic environment led to academic difficulty for them. At this point, the dilemma the participants faced may have challenged them to think critically about their pre-assumptions, such as the teachers' and students' responsibilities to studies. The difficult circumstances would encourage international students to try to figure out how to adjust themselves in order to be accepted in the new environment and to be successful. That is where the transformational learning could happen. The findings of Chinese participants' responses showing reluctance to consult teachers for questions echoed Henderson, Milhouse, and Cao's (1993) research that highlighted the importance of 'the shame culture' of Chinese people that would cause the students to feel out of place when they look for support from their teachers (cited in Yan & Berliner, 2013, p64). Feeling powerless may impede an individual's transformative experience.

4.3.2. Academic support from supervisors

Chinese participants indicated that they received different kinds of support from UK and Chinese educators. CHP3, CHP6 and CHP16 who all completed Ph.D. degrees before coming to the UK claimed that, compared to their previous Ph.D. studies in Chinese universities, they received more academic support in UK universities. It is worth noting that, even though the Chinese students had received less academic instruction from their previous teachers in Chinese universities, respondents positively highlighted that they had received support on other aspects which included referencing and establishing networks, providing opportunities in fieldwork, which the UK supervisors did not offer (CHP3, CHP5 and CHP6). They commented that their UK supervisors would not care to assist in this kind of support unless the student asked (CHP1, CHP5 and CHP14). In comparison, when they were in China, teachers were more like parents or elders who would have the initiative and will to care for students both in their academic and personal lives. There was one exception of CHP9 who noted that his supervisor in the UK provided help in a variety of ways. It was noted previously by scholars that there is evidence to show that Chinese learners at the postgraduate level are challenged by understanding key concepts taken for granted by their supervisors, including 'substantial contribution to the field', and 'independent research' (Chen et al., 2003 cited in Edwards and Ran, 2006, no page number).

Based on Chinese participants' replies, it can be seen that students in Chinese universities received more support from the educators in non-academic areas, while they received more academic support when they were in UK universities. The support from their educators in professional training could be one of the factors contributing the most to their transformation. However, the different kinds of support the Chinese students received from their teachers led them to question whether the UK teachers were responsible for their work. This suggests that greater clarity regarding the requirements of being a postgraduate student is required in order to reduce stress and dissatisfaction with teaching and to reduce the number of students that give up their studies.

4.3.3. Personal contact with supervisors in the UK

The issue of having a distant personal relationship with UK supervisors was raised by Chinese participants. Most respondents expressed that there was little or no private interaction between their supervisors and themselves (CHP1, CHP3, CHP6, CHP10, CHP12 and CHP14), in contrast to much closer relationships with teaching staff when they were in Chinese universities. Additionally, Chinese participants who were involved in this study stated that in UK universities the relationship between teachers and students was more of a work relationship rather than the teachers caring about personal lives. There was a clear separation between academic and non-academic areas as noted by interviewees (CHP3, CHP6 and CHP13). Most supervisors were responsible for their student's work and provided academic support rather than providing help in dealing with private issues (CHP3, CHP4, CHP6 and CHP12).

For example, CHP12 described her experience with her teachers in her last degree in a Chinese university: 'teachers in China would not only care about whether you get a degree, but also care about everything that happens to the students'. In contrast, CHP12 noted that she would never meet her UK supervisor outside the office and her supervisor would not care about anything except her Ph.D. research. Consistent with CHP12, CHP3, CHP10 and CHP13 also noted that their supervisors never asked any questions in terms of a student's private life, and that they did not concern themselves with their students' marriage status or things like that. CHP13 commented that:

The supervisors only see the matter from one side. If I was late for the meeting, teachers in Chinese university would care about the reason and ask: was your child sick? But a UK teacher would only care about the fact that you are late.

CHP6, who expressed his concerns about a personal relationship with supervisors in UK and China, stated that:

I suppose a looser or a closer relationship is a kind of culturally related issue. There is no right or wrong about it. In my opinion, a looser relationship is better for international students to focus more on their academic matters rather than personal relationships. It would be better if we can find a balance between UK and China. I mean, does it really matter if UK teachers leave their phone numbers with me? Or why I have to take a Chinese teacher's child to school?

A few Chinese participants highlighted the importance of maintaining a harmonious relationship with their supervisors, particularly for Ph.D. students (CHP7, CHP10 and CHP12). Some respondents tried to improve their relationship with their supervisors in ways such as greeting teachers and preparing gifts during festivals. CHP12 noted that:

A supportive relationship is significant especially when you (students) get stuck during the research, you can easily get through it once you get instructions from the supervisor.

Based on Chinese participants' observations, two students indicated that there was closer relationship between supervisors and their students in their departments (CHP4, CHP8). Age as a factor that contributed to the relationship between teachers and students was analysed by some of the Chinese participants (CHP2, CHP8 and CHP10). For example, in the words of CHP8:

There are students in our department who were middle aged, and they had a closer relationship with their supervisors because there was less of an age gap between them. The supervisors may treat us as children at their age of 40 to 50 years old while we were in our early 20s.

There were other closer relationships also between Chinese interviewees and supervisors. CHP9 noticed that, after getting his Master's degree, his supervisor was the reason for him staying to continue his Ph.D. study. He had a pleasant experience with his supervisor in both academic and non-academic areas. He explained that his supervisor is an expert in his research area and very strict with his instruction. CHP9 believed that it was very important to receive guidance on academic development from supervisors; he further explained his own experience by saying that:

My supervisor would give students guidance in any kind of academic meeting, in

terms of what kind of people the students should meet, explaining the process during Ph.D. studies, how could get a lecturer position in the UK, how to apply for external funding...lots of supervisors would not care about these issues, but my supervisor was really responsible towards me.

Besides, it was found that external factors could contribute to the contact between supervisor and students. CHP17 described that his experiences may be different from those of other students because he and his supervisor shared the same office. Through frequent meeting and contact, his supervisor and himself found that they had common hobbies such as photography, which was helpful for them in developing a better personal relationship.

Even despite the comments the students made in terms of a loose relationship as analysed above, the findings have reflected that few Chinese participants became accustomed to the work relationship with their supervisors and to kept a distance from them (CHP9, CHP10, CHP14 and CHP15). CHP14 explained that:

There was no private contact between my supervisors and myself outside of academia. I was not accustomed to this relationship at the beginning but got used to it at the end. The current situation is good because he is my teacher after all. I want to respect him and treat him like a father.

With regard to non-academic contact, CHP9 expressed that although he received much more help from his supervisor, they did not have an intimate relationship and their interaction and relationship developed gradually. He realised that both his supervisors and himself were intending to maintain a work relationship:

I personally would avoid asking private questions. I think this is due to my personality. For me, teachers are teachers no matter what, and he would not be interested even if you laid out your family tree. I treated him as an elder. Additionally, I remember there is a famous British proverb: 'An English man's home is his castle'. I think it would be better if both of us are interested to develop a close relationship.

It is worth noting that even though most Chinese respondents (CHP3, CHP4 and CHP12) commented that they had a preference to have a closer relationship with their supervisors, they would not expect too much contact outside academic life whilst in the UK. They also noted that it was neither important nor necessary to bother their supervisors with their personal life problems as long as they were being supported academically. For example, CHP3 said:

This brings me back to the reasons why I decided to come to the UK. I am here to

pursue academic research, therefore, all other things such as whether I am being cared for by my supervisors or making friends with other students are less important to me.

The findings revealed that a majority of Chinese international students did not develop an intimate relationship with their teachers and that most of the participants still expected their educators to provide more concern and care in both academic and personal issues such as assistance with networking. Their traditional values did not change based on what they expressed: their preferences to treat their educators like elders, such as fathers, and for feeling cared for by their educators. However, the students on some level relaxed in this kind of hierarchical relationship despite their criticism of the support the educators have provided.

4.3.4. Personal contact with supervisors in China

The words 'family', 'elder' and 'parents' were repeatedly emphasised by some participants when referring to their Chinese teachers (CHP4, CHP12 and CHP17). A more personal contact, an intimate relationship, and more respect to teachers under the Chinese university context were reported by Chinese participants when they retrospectively considered their previous situations in China.

As noted in the previous section, in Chinese universities the relationship between Chinese participants and their supervisors was not limited only to academic areas but also covered non-academic aspects (CHP3, CHP5). CHP3 stated that when he was doing his Ph.D. in a Chinese university, the relationship with his supervisors was obviously different compared to that in the UK. He was able to receive help from his supervisor when dealing with issues in daily life because his supervisor was in charge of administrative duties as well. Personal relationships were also highlighted by CHP3, who provided an example by saying that:

I needed a guarantor before I came to the UK and he agreed to be my guarantor. This is a very personal relationship. So I would say I have much closer relationships in my Chinese university.

At the same time, CHP3 noted the negative aspects in his learning, saying that he has received less academic support when he was in China due to the distribution of time for his supervisor between academic areas and administrative work.

4.3.5. Supervisors' personal projects

Some Chinese participants (CHP3, CHP5 and CHP12) noted that they were not required to do any work for their supervisors' personal projects in UK university, while in China, the regulation for students to assist their supervisors was ambiguous. For example, CHP5 referred to the fact that in the UK, the whole teaching and learning progress was managed more professionally. This meant that students only did what they needed to do as students, and personal support for teachers were kept separate from academic supervision. Therefore, if a UK supervisor needs help, they would arrange a time to discuss the issue with students, as CHP5 explained:

Unlike when I was with my supervisor in China, my relationship with supervisors in the University in the UK simply worked on academic studies. The supervisor would not impose her projects on me, and if she needed me to do something for her, she would take time out to talk about this project, and also would discuss the matter of payment.

Even though UKP5 also indicated that she had a good relationship with her Chinese supervisors, she also criticised the fact that rather than focus only on her own research, she was required to help her supervisor to deal with administrative affairs and help with her supervisor's personal project. In return, her supervisor would be more concerned about her studies and networking or would buy her dinner.

CHP5 commented that students should concentrate more on their own subject rather than get involved in administrative matters and spend too much time on supervisor's projects. Moreover, CHP5 claimed that if students provided assistance to their supervisors, then how much work the students had done affected how much money they should be given. Unfortunately, in the Chinese academic environment, students who are taking a Master's or Ph.D. degree undertake more responsibilities in assisting supervisors to organise meetings, projects, and dealing with administrative matters. The issue was that students did not get paid, but it used up their time. CHP5 stated that the UK regulations about working for supervisors should be advocated and introduced in China.

Chinese participants stated that, even though their relationships with supervisors in Chinese universities was closer than in UK universities, their attitudes towards their Chinese teachers were still respectful. For example, CHP17 stated that:

I was keeping a certain distance from my previous supervisors in China. We are

friends, but the relationship between teacher and students is so obvious. There is an old saying: he who teaches me for one day is my father for life.

To sum up, there is certainly evidence of Confucianism having an impact on the hierarchical relationships between educators and their students (Chan, 1999), no matter in China or in the UK and with a close or loose relationship. The data from this study has shown that Chinese international students' acceptance of a work-only related connection between teacher and students has broadened. However, the traditional ways and attitudes that Chinese people have towards teachers, for example, treating them as elders, still exists and are predominant, while most academics in Western countries would not want to be seen as a parent, but more as an academic mentor. The different view towards knowledge holders (teachers) and teacher and student relationships is worthy of receiving more attention, and this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

4.4. Meeting individually or meeting in a group

In terms of meeting with supervisors, CHP1, CHP5 and CHP18 compared their Master's experience in a Chinese university and their Ph.D. experience in a UK university. When they were in China, they had the experience of meeting supervisors with a group of students who were supervised by one teacher. While when they were in the UK, they only met their supervisor individually. CHP1 did not demonstrate any apparent appreciation for one method or the other; he simply described the process and requirement of these two styles. He stated that he felt under pressure to produce some work because he needed to meet his supervisors regularly in the UK. He assumed that in a Chinese university, there was a kind of American way of meeting in a group where teachers and students met and discussed things together once a week. He believed that there were advantages and disadvantages for these two styles of meeting. In the UK, students were forced to complete a work target because it was a one-to-one meeting with supervisor. In China, however, it would not be a problem even if a student did not work for weeks because in every group meeting students were required to discuss a paper that was selected by one student rather than discuss students' own work. There were differences with regard to the work students were required to finish: students in Chinese universities were requested to publish a paper in every academic year, while students in the UK usually have to finish some work every two weeks.

In contrast, CHP5 demonstrated a clear preference towards her experience in a Chinese university. She noted that it felt like being in a team. She expressed that all of a teacher's

students were in a team and there was a much stronger sense of belonging than in the UK. She provided an example:

If there is something you have to do but you do not have time, such as to attend to an event, you could ask others to help you to take notes. When you are too busy to do something, you could look for a teammate to do the work for you. These kinds of things are very easy to arrange, especially at the stage of writing a paper.

Similarly, CHP6 also claimed that there were different formats of meeting in Chinese universities and UK universities. When he was in China, there were more opportunities to meet other students who were supervised by the same teacher, while in the UK, there were more chances to meet students from different research areas. Both positive and negative effects were highlighted by CHP6:

Communication between students under one supervisor would have more topics to discuss towards the research because we have a similar direction; therefore, it would help us for academic development and talking to students from different research direction could help us to broaden our minds and come up with more ideas.

Emotional support that CHP5 received from the team when she was in her previous university was emphasised:

When you feel very depressed, you can easily exchange feelings about the difficulties that you encountered in your research with others. At that time when a person is in the team, it naturally feels like being in a family, there is someone who cares how you feel and is concerned about your emotions. In a team with such a sense of belonging you would feel safer.

In contrast, CHP5 had a different experience under pressure in the UK. She stated that:

I experienced a time when my writing was stuck and I could not keep going since I was depressed in mood and under a lot of pressure. Under this circumstance how could I face the big deadline while the supervisor keeps pushing me? As a result, you may waste more time on it. However, when I was in China, things were better. My previous supervisors would ask about matters relating to my life, and my latest news as well. Even though they did not ask, they could get to know about me from other channels, such as other teachers or students in our team who knew about my situation. Therefore, sometimes there was no need to talk a lot because the supervisor already knew my situation and assigned tasks to me according that.

Compared to the experience in China, CHP5 found that in the UK it was very difficult to take the initiative to go and make an appointment and to talk to someone when she was depressed. There was a lack of any mechanism or platform where she could share her feelings with others

no matter if it was regarding stress or exciting news. In fact, CHP5 noted that academia should not be separated from other areas in daily life, especially in the Ph.D. process. The impact of emotion can have a significant influence on students' progress, particularly for international students. Analysis of CHP5 revealed that institutional culture contributed to these differences. In UK universities, teachers were not used to organising their students to get together and support each other.

Consistent with CHP1 and CHP5, CHP6, CHP14 and CHP17 also shared similar experiences of having no opportunity to communicate with students or colleagues due to receiving little support from their supervisors compared to when in China. CHP17 claimed that:

There was much more interaction between teachers and students, students and students in Chinese universities. The group cohesiveness is stronger than in the UK and the habit of having small discussions after dinner was very useful for students. While in the UK, we had no or little chance of having a group of students share our feelings, particular with non-Chinese students.

Based on Chinese participants' replies, it was found that in UK universities there was less communication between students supervised by the same teacher. Related concerns that require more attention from university departments were raised by participants. One exception has been mentioned by CHP11, who noted that although not having formal meetings, his supervisors in the UK were very encouraging of communication between students. The supervisor would gather students together and introduce each student's research speciality and provide an opportunity for students to help each other.

It is worth noting that Ph.D. students are supposed to be making the transition from student to independent researcher and many of them in this study seemed quite resistant to this. Based on the interviews, it was apparent that Chinese international students place a lot of expectation on the department and the teachers in wanting things to be done for them. Could they take the initiative? Did the department provide enough information to students during their transition to a higher level? All these issues are worth considering. The misunderstanding in terms of customs around the process of socialising under different culture contexts requires attention from both teachers and students. As Hui (2005) noted, the misunderstanding between teacher and students extends beyond the classroom, which indicates that Chinese students 'have difficulty understanding the behaviour of Western teachers: attempts to foster autonomous learning are often perceived as unfriendly and uncaring. The western tendency to limit student contact outside lectures to set office hours is, for instance, in marked contrast to what happens

in China, where teachers typically offer help whenever needed and, by solving students' problems, consolidate their high status' (cited in Edwards & Ran, 2006, no page number).

A majority of Chinese participants stated that the responsibilities of the supervisors were vague. It is difficult to measure whether the supervisors cared about their students' studies and, if so, to what extent they did. Participants noted that the quality and quantities of caring were still unclear and differentiated at the time of interview, even though it seemed that supervisors expressed that they did care about their students. CHP2 and CHP6, however, stated that supervisor responsibilities were clearly articulated in each university regulation with the explanation of how the supervisors should guide students. Unfortunately, it seemed to the students that the teachers did not make enough effort during their practical actions, which meant that students in the Chinese context did not receive enough support from their supervisors. Participants also demonstrated that, in fact, a similar situation was found in the UK. From participant responses it can be argued that teachers in UK universities were more responsible than compared to teachers in Chinese universities. For example, CHP13 made comments based on her friend's experience about the issue of supervisors asking students to do work for them: this happened not only in China but the same things had also happened in the UK, such as students helping supervisors pick up their children from school. CHP13 viewed students as customers, and questioned the service that students received from the university. She commented that there were detailed requirements for supervisors when dealing with their relationship with their students in the students' handbook in her university in the UK. She said:

These requirements cover many facets of students' spirit, sense of family and health, rather than simply just academic matters. When we were in China, supervisors would get to know students' family status, they would care whether a student's child was sick, while in the UK, supervisors are only concerned about why you are late. That is quite different.

In terms of the factors contributing to the different levels of relationships between participants and their supervisors, students' responses have been shown from three perspectives: firstly, the individual personality of both supervisor and student (CHP4, CHP10 and CHP11); secondly, the effects of culturally related issues which are particularly influenced by traditional concepts and the previous educational background of the student (CHP4, CHP12 and CHP17); thirdly, institutional cultures (CHP5).

Generally speaking, participants responded that their supervisors paid very little attention outside academic areas. Some participants had a strong expectation of a closer relationship, while some did not care a lot and said 'I am here to get a degree, as long as I can receive the academic support, that's fine' (CHP3). Although only two participants mentioned this point, it is interesting to note that for participants who were not willing to keep a close relationship with their supervisors, they believed the relationship with their supervisor should be confined to work and their teachers should be respected as elders. While for most Chinese participants' responses, it seems that there was a tense situation between some respondents with their teachers, which led to negative emotions that may result in students' reduced motivation, transformation and completion in their studies, such as CHP18 who expressed that the relationship between her supervisors and herself was the main reason contributing to her decision to give up.

4.5. Relationship between Chinese participants and other students

The data has shown that there were variations between Chinese participants with regard to socialising with other students. Some students had a preference to socialise with Chinese co-nationals all the time, seeking a sense of security and emotional support. However, a small number preferred to be more adventurous and stay away from Chinese groups and develop friendships with local and other international students to try to experience a different life while they were living in a new country. A group of Chinese participants expressed that they had a superficial relationship with their office mates or colleagues in the department (CHP1, CHP4, CHP7, CHP13, CHP14 and CHP17). Chinese international students' relationships with UK local students and non-Chinese international students, and with co-national Chinese students are analysed in the following sections.

4.5.1. Chinese participants interactions with non-Chinese students

A majority of Chinese participants noted that they had few non-Chinese friends. Even if they were working in the same office, there was still a natural bond with their co-nationals. Participants indicated that their connection with non-Chinese students was restricted by a number of factors, which are analysed below.

4.5.1.1. Research direction/subjects and supervisors and disciplines

Some Chinese participants felt that whether they had communications with non-Chinese students depended on their research directions or subjects (CHP2, CHP4, CHP6, CHP10, CHP14 and CHP17) and supervisors (CHP2). CHP2 stated that if there were similar research directions between students who were supervised by one teacher, they had more opportunities to get together to communicate. Chinese participants who had few co-nationals in the same discipline were inclined to have a closer relationship with non-Chinese students (CHP6, CHP7 and CHP8). For example, CHP8 noted that talking about his own research was a main topic in his communication with his office mates.

4.5.1.2. Topics and/or common interests

The factor of having common topics and interests was highlighted by an overwhelming majority of Chinese participants (CHP1, CHP2, CHP4, CHP5, CHP6, CHP8, CHP14, CHP10, CHP11, CHP16 and CHP17), which was explained as reason contributing to a loose relationship with non-Chinese students. The phrase having ‘something in common’ was raised by a few participants (CHP2, CHP4, and CHP16). For example, CHP2 noted that she needed to make more effort (i.e. find common interests or topics) if she wanted to make friends with non-Chinese students. CHP17 commented that a lack of topics would lead to conversational gaps with his colleagues. Chinese participants realised the importance of having knowledge about other countries that would allow them to have common topics when interacting with non-Chinese students.

4.5.1.3. Languages

Language as a reason contributing to less effective relationships was mentioned by participants CHP1, CHP2, CHP6, CHP8, CHP10 and CHP17. CHP1 stated that sometimes it was difficult for him to communicate with other international students with a strong (non-London) accent. CHP2 also noted that lack of English language, especially slang and informal language, influenced efficient communication.

4.5.1.4. Culture and geography

Chinese participants referred to their awareness of differences between people from different cultural backgrounds (CHP1, CHP2, CHP5, CHP6, CHP8, CHP10, CHP11, CHP12 and CHP17). They noted that students from the same country or same areas would be inclined to

gather together since they shared a similar culture and had more common topics in conversation (CHP1, CHP13).

In addition to culture as a factor, geography was also raised by a small number of Chinese respondents as having contributed to friendships (CHP2, CHP11). CHP2 claimed that:

Even with Chinese friends, I have a closer relationship with people from the north of China like me, rather than with people from the south of China, Hong Kong or Taiwan because we have a similar background and accent when speaking. We have similar ideas about how to treat our friends and how we expect to be treated by them. Northern people are straightforward while Southern people are more likely to be more concerned about personal gains or losses. So as in the UK, there is a big difference between Chinese and UK people in terms of history and culture. There are many unexpected aspects we need to overcome.

CHP1 also provided an example that since a lack of cultural knowledge sometimes exists, it was awkward when he was telling a joke and there was no reaction from other people who come from other cultures. Consistent with CHP1, CHP2 also considered that cultural differences existed as a factor when communicating with classmates in the UK. CHP2 expressed that it was very difficult for her to balance the kind of topics she could ask about and to what extent she could talk about them with students from the UK. She thought that there were some topics she could not discuss in depth with other students from the UK since they may not be able to understand each other. For example, UK people may talk about their family members even when they are waiting to be served in the bank, while some others would mind if they were asked about their relationship status. Therefore, 'the social activities with my classmates were limited to shopping and talking about some future plans' she said.

However, with an awareness of the differences, students could encourage international students to behave in ways that could be accepted by host country. Consistent with CHP2, CHP11 also indicated that he was trying to keep a harmonious relationship with culturally different students. At the same time, he became aware that it was necessary to respect other people's culture and customs in order to maintain that good relationship, which was viewed by him as a kind of transformation of tolerance to other cultures. This, however, is not the type of transformation that all the students experienced. For example, UKP10 outlined concerns regarding cultural differences when communicating with non-Chinese students. CHP10 stated that:

I have always been considering how to act properly and what is the bottom line for

their culture. I know, actually, therefore I think it is better to imitate, I can do that as well. But that's not me. That 'me' belongs to another world.

4.5.1.5. Privacy as a national trait

One significant point was put forward by some Chinese participants who indicated that non-Chinese students would prefer to have separation between work and their personal life that leads to a superficial relationship (CHP1, CHP4, CHP6, CHP7, CHP8, CHP12, CHP13, CHP14 and CHP17). CHP1 further explained that he felt non-Chinese students, especially UK students, were very polite but at the same time they cared about their private things very much: 'they seem to be very friendly, but they would not open hearts to each other'. CHP11 also speculated that:

It seems that Western students do not have set rules for making friends; people can even make friends with people they meet in bars, which is very different compared to the way that Chinese people make friends. Chinese people are more cautious when choosing friends, but once they become friends, they will have a deep relationship and maintain the friendship for a long time.

CHP17 believed that Western people makes friends under the premise of respecting other peoples' privacy, while there is a vague boundary of privacy for Chinese people. He said:

The different views on privacy could lead to the different level of intimacy between students to students, or friends to friends.

Differences exist between the relationship with colleagues in the same office or out of the office. CHP11 referred to the fact that, even though he had superficial contact with non-Chinese students on the whole, he had a closer relationship with his colleagues in the same office. In spite of this, he still found that there were noteworthy differences when communicating with co-national students and non-Chinese students on topics. CHP11's statement was supported by other students CHP3 and CHP16.

The different views of friendship between Western people from the UK and Chinese people was also noted. One significant point put forward by some Chinese participants is that non-Chinese students would prefer to have a separation between work and their personal life, which consequently leads to a superficial relationship between Chinese students with their Western counterparts because Chinese people are more accustomed to being interdependent with other Chinese people without clear division between work and life. This finding is similar to

Spencer-Oatey & Xiong's (2006) research, in which Chinese international students also had negative feelings towards the superficiality of their interaction with UK citizens. Similarly, the superficial friendliness was also indicated by Chinese participants in research conducted in America, even though a majority of Chinese interviewees in that research agreed 'that most Americans were nice and friendly, quite a few indicated that the friendliness was somewhat superficial' (Yan & Berliner, 2013, p72). However, Philo (2010) suggested that Chinese participants' perceptions may not necessarily match exactly to the reality in the UK. One interviewee (CHP9) pointed this out by saying that:

Even though I do not have a close friendship with UK local students, I could feel that they also have close relationships like we have with Chinese people. I am not sure about this, but it seems like they will have private communication with each other, maybe just do not speak about that kind of topic to us.

CHP7 also stated that even though she did not have frequent contact with local UK students, from her observation, she found that there was not much difference compared to the relationships between Chinese people.

As suggested by previous research conducted on international students in America, it is assumed that international students from a cultural background that promoted close relationships would be confused by interaction with students who have a background that emphasises personal independence, confidence and self-reliance. This could be a reason for the social connections in American culture being superficial and little interactions between Chinese students and American students as a result (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Only one Chinese participant advocated the way British people deal with friendship and the life style of keeping private spaces. CHP2 noted that:

It isn't like in China where when someone misses you, they will come to knock on your door without any prior notice. In the UK, people have private space. It is necessary to make an appointment before all kinds of meetings. People would not like being interrupted by a sudden visit. Besides, UK people won't ask you personal questions.

4.5.1.6. Social places (the way/style of celebration and forming friendships)

Chinese participants in this study strongly expressed that they could not get accustomed to the social styles of the host students and other non-Chinese international students. Social places

and activities noted by Chinese participants included drinking, having lunch, and going to the pub (CHP1, CHP6, CHP7, CHP8, CHP9, CHP11, CHP12 and CHP17). Most of the Chinese participants tended to assume a separation strategy when dealing with UK local students; they withdrew themselves from social activities such as parties for the reason that they viewed these activities as a boring and annoying way to communicate with each other. In some responses, Chinese students showed their preference for buying a number of beers and enjoying drinking it in the flat rather than spending more money to buy a glass of beer in a bar, which could be one of the reasons why they prefer to spend time with other Chinese co-nationals who find themselves in a similar situation. CHP1 provided a detailed explanation of his feelings when hanging out with non-Chinese students:

In the UK, everyone in parties holds a beer in their hand and just talks. There are no games. No other things to do but just talk and drink in a noisy environment. What is the fun of drinking a beer in the bar? It's noisy and boring. Why not buy a case of beer and drink it at home?

CHP9 also commented that:

The contact with other international students was determined by social settings. After an academic meeting, students from Western countries would like to grab a pint in the bar, while Chinese students would prefer to go to a Chinese restaurant.

It is worth noting that cost may lead to Chinese international learners showing little interest in participating in social activities, especially being in a bar or pub. As a result, the types of activities organised by the student union were also criticised by Chinese participants who argued that the drinking culture which predominated including pubs and parties (involving a lot of drinking) was the normal social style in the UK (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006), while an overwhelming majority of Chinese international students are not interested in and are unaccustomed to these activities.

4.5.1.7. Personality and nationalism

Chinese respondents noted that their personality could be one reason for a loose relationship with non-Chinese students (CHP1, CHP5, CHP6, CHP13 and CHP17). CHP13 noted that people with similar personalities would have a preference to communicate with each other. Some Chinese participants expressed a negative attitude towards developing relationships with non-Chinese students (CHP1, CHP5). CHP1 considered his own shy personality as an obstacle for communication. Another reason he believed to be important was his nationality and/or

nationalism. CHP1 listed some terrible incidents he had experienced and heard from his friends and in the media about being in the UK, and his view is shared by CHP5. For example, he said:

Some children seem to be not well-educated, they suddenly shouted at me twice when I walked on the street. That was really rude. One female student I knew has been robbed in the university campus. I heard a lot of things like this. There is no need to force myself to improve our relationships. I think I am a little nationalist, and I know I will go back to China after graduation anyway.

4.5.1.8. Life status and time distribution

The issue of the different status of being a student as a UK student and a Chinese student was highlighted by Chinese participants CHP7, CHP12, CHP13, CHP14 and CHP15. A majority of Chinese participants referred to the fact that Chinese students are under high pressure and have heavy workloads in their studies as a reason for having less interaction. Moreover, due to the struggle of time distribution between study and social life, Chinese participants stated that they had neither time nor energy to mix with non-Chinese students. They felt trapped by academic tasks even though they realised that there could be various benefits of connecting with host country students including social and cultural understanding and linguistic improvement. For example, CHP12 noted that:

I do not have energy to care about social life because of the pressure of studies. I think that is one of the reasons that why other non-Chinese international students and I cannot be close friends. Friends need to hang out and spend time together.

Consistent with CHP12, Chinese participants such as CHP14 noted that it was more likely that Chinese students kept to a stricter study routine compared to non-Chinese students in the UK. Therefore, it can be speculated that even although they may be curious about other cultures, Chinese students' time for social connection was limited (Schlemm, 2005 cited in Edwards & Ran, 2006). CHP14 further explained that:

The overall feelings of studying between Western and Chinese students are different. Chinese students work very hard while Western students are relatively more relaxed about their studies. At the same time, they do not have problems like visa and things like that. Besides, Western students and Chinese students have different reasons for choosing to embark on a Ph.D.. For example, the reason for a girl in my office to take a Ph.D. was only because she could not get a job.

CHP13 also noted that she tried to keep in touch with a couple of students who were interested in her research, however, since they all had their own work and business to do, there was not

enough time to maintain their friendships. She considered that there were two things that contributed to whether she could build relationships with colleagues or with other students: one was an individual's desire to do so, and the other was time.

One could speculate that Chinese students feel they are 'special' even though most international students (and even home students) are also under a great deal of financial pressure and/or pressure to succeed. A burden of mixed pressures was on Chinese students with their different cultural background, responsibility to family (to make them proud), and the pressure of getting married and having children. Participants noted that, in spite of having a strong desire to engage in social activities, being overloaded with work made frequency of interaction with others impossible. The research conducted by Lewthwaite (1996) on international students' experience in New Zealand supported the above finding and noted that students' workload influenced their interaction with other students even although they had the motivation and desire to meet and make contact with New Zealand people outside their study context, 'as the year progressed academic workloads made this increasingly more difficult, a situation that resulted in felt tension for students' (p175).

4.5.1.9. Whether interested in China

Participants (CHP2, CHP4, CHP6, CHP13, CHP16 and CHP17) responded that they needed to make more effort if they wanted to make friends with other students, and sometimes it caused pressure (CHP4, CHP17). Therefore, as noted by CHP2, the fact that some UK people were keen to know about Chinese culture would lead to a more comfortable relationship, while some others who were not interested in China would not have taken the initiative to communicate with Chinese students. CHP2 further stated that UK people would not refuse to make friends with Chinese students but would not take the initiative to make friends with Chinese students either. Consistent with CHP2, CHP13 also noted that people who were interested in China or Chinese culture would take the initiative to start the friendship, and this was the easiest way to make friends and get close to non-Chinese people.

It is notable that, regardless of the different concepts of friendship, the interpersonal relations in a Western country may also pose difficulties for Chinese international students. They may feel humiliated and embarrassed, and under pressure when interacting with people who are not friendly. Yan and Berliner (2013) indicate that 'Chinese students came from a more hierarchical society and were sensitive to others' evaluations of them. Chinese students' sense

of self-esteem faced a great challenge, because American people were much more direct in asserting their opinions' (p73).

4.5.1.10. Politics and Media

A couple of Chinese participants realised that politics and media had a significant influence on UK people's attitudes towards China, and this affected the relationship between Chinese international students with non-Chinese students as a result (CHP2, CHP4). CHP2 noticed that some misleading information provided by the media would cause UK people to have a stereotypical view towards China and viewed China as the same as it was in old days, especial when a minority of Chinese people (tourists abroad for example) behaved poorly. CHP14 also noted that some non-Chinese international students and UK local students were not friendly to Chinese students both on and off campus. She provided further comments that:

There are people who will ask you about political issues related to Tibet to try to provoke you. I would not bother to say 'hi' to this kind of people even after we meet. In a foreign country, you would feel you are easily and strongly being discriminated against.

4.5.1.11. The length of time in the UK

Participants noted that the length of time in the UK could be a reason for a close relationship with non-Chinese students. CHP9 speculated that since he had been in the UK for about ten years, he had different life circles compared to the new comers. The way of life he was used to and the topics he approached when communicating with other students were all influenced by his long stay in the UK.

4.5.1.12. Individual motivation

Chinese participants indicated that their motivation played a critical role in their attitudes and behaviour when building friendships (UKP3, UKP5 and CHP15). As discussed early in the first section of this chapter, the reasons and motivation for studying abroad contribute to students' attitudes and behaviour towards their whole overseas experience. Even though for a majority of Chinese students who came to the UK with the objective of academic development, a few of them such as CHP5, came to experience a different culture. Therefore, she described her experience in a very different way compared to most of other participants. International students' motivation for studying in the UK has been viewed as part of a 'holistic orientation' -

an important element for transformative learning, in which, as Cranton (2000) noted, ‘insight, intuition, emotion, relationships, and personality may also play roles’ (p65). CHP5 valued her friendship with local students and other international students by saying that:

I think the relationships between us are valuable to maintain. The friends are not only for now but for the rest of my life. After spending 3 to 4 years in the UK, my perspectives have broadened so that I consider myself as a global citizen. I’m not sure what will happen in the future, I may become a teacher in another country. I think my whole life is in the global market, and my friends are also looking for jobs in this global market. Under this situation, the friends I made here are much more valuable because we would have more possible connections in the future.

When asked what kind of strategies and effort they made to improve or maintain relationships with host students or other international students, Chinese participants expressed that they preferred to ‘let it be’. For example, CHP3 was more conscious about maintaining a close relationship with local and international students:

I will let it be. I treat them like the way I treat Chinese friends. I will keep my Chinese characteristics and won’t change myself to be the way they are. But at the same time, there is a need to be aware that you may not be able to be understood by other people. You have to learn to accept it. That’s a big thing that changed my attitude towards how to face injustice in an intercultural context.

4.5.2. Chinese participants with other Chinese international students

Based on the interview transcripts, Chinese participants seemed to prefer to stay and communicate with Chinese students or sometimes with international students from Asian countries. They noticed that they had much more relaxed and close friendships with other Chinese international students (CHP1, CHP2, CHP7, CHP12 and CHP13), and bonds with co-nationals were significant for them when exposed to a foreign country.

CHP12 expressed the importance of maintaining an intimate relationship with co-national students and said that:

You should have regular meetings with a couple of Chinese friends, it is best to have someone from the same country around, with whom you can share feelings and secrets. I do have foreign friends in my office, but we all have our personal lives and we do not interrupt each other’s lives. Other foreign students would not treat you like an intimate friend even though we seem close during the working day.

As discussed in chapter 2, an authentic relationship is important for an individual's transformative learning. This study has shown that a close relationship between Chinese students and their co-national peers would support their adaptation in the host country. However, the results have shown that international students' transformational experiences seem to be fostered by being involved in the intercultural context, rather than through establishing friendships with people. A numbers of factors contributing to the limited interaction have been analysed above. Apart from these this factors, the interviews also present that, even although students, such as CHP5, had strong initiative and willingness to make friends with non-Chinese people, as her curiosity decreased she changed her social circle after a couple of years and started to bond with co-nationals.

4.6. Academic support provided by the universities

4.6.1. Academic activities outside the class

The academic activities referred to by Chinese participants include training courses, seminars and presentations. Chinese participants responded positively towards these activities and indicated they had a notable influence on their Ph.D. studies. The benefits of attending these activities were reflected in the following aspects including: acquiring learning/research methods or skills, broadening the mind, establishing points of view on thinking, gaining resources and reputation, getting to know each other's projects and training the capacity for socialising, organising and presenting, relieving and supporting psychological well-being. For example, CHP2 stated that the training courses she attended were very important, as through those courses she learned how to make presentations and to look for library resources.

Participants stated that seminars held by the university departments were also useful (CHP2, CHP3, CHP11, CHP12 and CHP18). For instance, CHP3 stated that:

Our team frequently had meetings every week in the last year. Some teachers and students would attend them and provide the presenter with suggestions. Additionally, the department also invited lecturers from other universities to come to have presentations where we could have discussions and develop our ideas...

CHP12 noted that attending academic activities was important for combating loneliness. She noticed that it was frustrating when she was stuck in her research and at the same time there was no one to talk about it.

Even though there were no tight relationships between the seminars and her research direction, CHP7 considered them in a positive way and stated that she still learned a lot of things from seminar workshops by broadening her thinking. Consistent with CHP7, CHP12 also gave positive feedback and advocated attendance at the seminars by saying that:

Even though the presentation which was given by other students was not directly related to my research, I can keep myself updated on the field, which supplements my knowledge.

There were also negative responses from Chinese participants. Chinese interviewees expressed that they did not receive useful information from attending these activities (CHP4, CHP13, and CHP17). CHP17 found that it was less efficient to learn things from these academic activities as the topics in the seminars were marginal.

Factors, including limited language competence, lack of confidence, feeling embarrassed and being afraid of losing face were highlighted by participants as contributing to their performance during seminars (UKP1, UKP17). UKP17 wondered whether to conclude culture and personality as the main reasons. However, he also noticed that some Chinese international students were willing to express themselves even with poor language because of their strong confidence.

4.6.2. Financial support

CHP1, CHP2, CHP3 and CHP8 pointed out that, in spite of the university providing funding to support students in organising workshops, hardly anyone was willing to do that unless there were lecturers to initiate these activities. The main reason was due to very few students doing research in similar areas (CHP1).

Chinese participants were also concerned that there was limited funding for students attending academic meetings and conferences outside the city or the country (CHP13, CHP14). For example, CHP14 commented that:

The university only provides £200 a year for students attending academic meetings. That is sometimes too little even to go to London. Besides, we have to spend money to make a visa application if we want to go to other countries; therefore I have had to give up a lot of opportunities.

The opportunity to attend academic activities was viewed as significant by Chinese students who believed that interacting with people in similar research areas had helped them update information. The way of involving communication and debates influenced participants' points of view in terms of how important it was to share ideas. Interviewees (UKP5, UKP13) indicated that what they experienced in the new context (host country) influenced their view and/or how they will perform in their career in the future. For example UKP13 noted that, 'I will encourage discussion no matter what job I take. That is one thing that has changed me.'

4.7.Host attitudes

Chinese respondents suggested that their transformational learning was not affected by negative attitudes expressed by host teachers and/or students (CHP2, CHP4, CHP5 and CHP12). Based on international students' descriptions, negative attitudes referred to in this study include impatient, indifferent and impolite behaviours. In contrast, encouragement from both teachers and students has made a positive contribution to participants' performances (CHP5, CHP8). CHP8 provided examples when referring to the help he had received from his supervisors and said:

If I want to attend an international conference, since I have never been to such kind of conference before, therefore I have no idea about what's going on there, I could ask help from my supervisor and he would instruct me based on his experience. At the same time, he would tell me what I needed to prepare, and to what extent I am ready for this.

Consistent with CHP8, CHP10 also stated that the information she received from her supervisors towards academic development was important in enabling her to become familiar with the academic environment as a whole.

On the other hand, a couple of respondents (CHP10, CHP16) expressed that they experienced negative feedback from local students who displayed impatient attitudes towards Chinese students' research during seminars. CHP10 noted that at that time, it was important for her to build up confidence to get through the situation. CHP5 noted that each person had their own personality, strategy and attitude towards accepting negative attitudes from other people, and for himself, he preferred to ignore these negative effects automatically. CHP18, who dropped out from her study, strongly criticised the impatience her supervisors displayed during the instructions, and how the supervisor held different attitudes from her and the students from European countries in public meetings.

Considering teachers as a whole, CHP2 and CHP3 stated that, even though teachers in UK universities have varied ways of teaching and have individual personalities, most UK teachers have professional integrity. UK teachers would not make personal attacks even though they were dissatisfied with the students. CHP3 noted that, even if there were students asking foolish questions, teachers would encourage rather than laugh at them. Feeling supported was viewed by Chinese participants as crucial for their motivation to study, for successful adaptation and subsequent transformation.

4.8. Curriculum design

It is apparent that students from different disciplines and universities showed diverse attitudes towards curriculum design. It is assumed that each university department may have their own policies on curriculum design and that students' satisfaction of their academic success might be affected by these differences.

Due to the nature of Ph.D. study, students are expected to do research on their project rather than take many courses during the whole learning process. For most departments there were no credits/taught modules required for Ph.D. students. Additionally, participants like CHP3 and CHP10 had completed credits when they were doing their Master's degree in a UK university and, therefore, applied for exemptions from required courses during their Ph.Ds.

A majority of Chinese participants provided negative opinions towards curricula design (CHP3, CHP4, CHP8, CHP11, CHP13, CHP14, CHP15 and CHP17). Three aspects of concern towards curricula were raised by the participants: (i) too general and valueless for their research, (ii) course design, (iii) administrative problems.

4.8.1. Too general and valueless

UKP3, UKP4, CHP8, CHP11, CHP15 and CHP17 commented that the courses they took were too general and unrelated to their research, therefore, CHP11 and CHP17 decided to give up after a couple of classes. CHP11 had searched for training courses from the website and requested the university to pay for them instead. Consistent with CHP11, even though CHP4 (from Business School) was supported by his supervisors to attend the course, there was still confusion about whether it was necessary to spend time on it. He noted that:

My supervisor advised me to take the course of Social Theory. He said I may benefit from it sooner or later. So I took it. But so far, I still do not understand what the benefits are.

In contrast, CHP6, who came from the same university but was in the Education department, had a totally different attitude. He believed the course may not be directly related to his current research but developed his understanding about social theory from a bigger picture.

Even though CHP15 also criticised the course designed by the university as too general on research methodology, which did not match her research areas, she did advocate the courses provided by their department. She expressed that the specialised course on research methods was what she needed in her research in law.

4.8.2. Course design

CHP14 noted that the content of the courses lacked consideration of cultural differences. Teachers would only cite Western examples, which led to problems in understanding, especially for students who did not have enough Western background information. She further explained that:

There could be learning difficulties and obstacles which were caused by cultural differences. Hence, as people from another culture enter into the local education system, there is a need for great effort with transition. You have the difficulty of reading materials with lots of unknown vocabulary. I think there is no one we could blame for, it could happen to everyone who has a different background. We don't know how to overcome it, but it indeed exists.

4.8.3. Administrative problems

In terms of whether it was necessary for participants to take some courses, participants suggested that it would be better if this was controlled by students' supervisors rather than administrative staff in colleges (CHP4, CHP8). For example, CHP8 commented that:

If the supervisor can control it, you can just follow your supervisors' guidance or you can ask for exemption from your supervisor directly. However, in fact, it is much less flexible than this. In our subject, these issues are controlled by the department. Therefore, our supervisors have to argue with the department for us if we do not want to take the courses. Lots of supervisors are not willing to do it. They may think it is not worth doing. So they asked us just to take the course. However, the cumulative

task is quite heavy for a Ph.D. student.

4.8.4. Section conclusion

Compared to Chinese participants from the University A, it is apparent that interviewees from the University B have fewer comments about their experiences on attending courses. One reason contributing to this was because that in UKUA there were only optional courses provided by IAD (Institute for Academic Development) - a general course designed to support both taught and research postgraduate students. As reflected from the interviews it can be seen that some students in this study may not even know about this course. Additionally, there were no compulsory courses for Ph.D. students and in some disciplines in UKUA, therefore they did not need to apply for an exemption in the meantime.

Based on Chinese participants' responses, it is worth noting that some were not sure about the teaching objectives of the courses. Most participants assumed that all information was publicly available, even before they applied. Meanwhile, most participants supposed that, if they asked, either their supervisors or the administrative office would provide an answer. It is slightly alarming that people who are supposed to be capable of developing into independent researchers could not find out basic information for themselves, or ask for guidance when they needed it. Whether these problems only happened to Chinese groups is worth discussing in Chapter 5.

4.9. Living location

This study has shown that Chinese international students in UK universities had options when choosing where they wanted to live: they can live in student accommodation with co-national students, or mixed nationalities, or live with friends by renting a flat. However, it is clear that Chinese participants thought that living with non-Chinese students was a considerable challenge; the noise that non-Chinese students made during the night and the mess in public areas led to Chinese flatmates worrying and developing an aversion to non-Chinese flatmates. Participants commented that they could not understand why non-Chinese roommates' (UK students in particular) attitudes and behaviours lacked social consideration and ignored other people's feelings, even after receiving complaints. As a consequence, negative feelings towards students from culturally different countries developed, which reduced Chinese students' motivation to interact with non-co-national students.

When living with co-nationals, Chinese students were aware that the opportunities for communicating with local and other international students would be reduced, and that their language capacity and communicative competence would be improved. However, psychological support through staying with co-national students was more important for them to get through tough times in the new environment particularly during the early period of study. The positive assistance from co-nationals in easing the cross-cultural transition were also reported by Moores and Popadiuk (2011). Similar arguments were discussed by Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) who noted that it was not easy for people with an extremely different lifestyle to establish true friendships and to live in close proximity. Montgomery (2010) highlighted that geographical aspects were driving an influence on individual student's experiences by saying that 'where students live in relation to the university, who they live alongside and who they spend time with appear to be strong factors in delineating their experiences. These geographical factors are also an influence on the ways in which they study in formal and social spaces' (p65).

4.10. Transformative learning

Even although though Chinese international students criticised different aspects of their study and social lives, most of them expressed that they experienced transformative learning especially during the teaching and learning process. Elements included UK styles of teaching by encouraging critical thinking, debate and discussion, and professional attitudes towards academic matters were considered valuable for Chinese students' studies and even for their future career. They stated that they became independent and experienced changes in their thinking in diverse aspects. Even though CHP18 had dropped out of her study mainly because she had a bad experience with her supervisor, she also reported that the methods of involving discussion positively influenced her current job her current job. CHP13 also had been dissatisfied with her supervisor but noted that she still learned something. She said:

I used to do a couple of tasks at the same time, and then I found out that this way of researching was not very effective. I was wondering how my supervisor could be a professor at his very young age and then I found out that it because he is single minded. Besides, he always put emphasis on which author said what, which keeps me trying to find out the truth.

However, even though the participants showed their understanding (to some extent) of the different teaching patterns and loose personal relationships with their supervisors, there is still

evidence of their disappointment and unmet expectations. Further, for most of the participants, their views of what makes an ideal teacher and good student relationships did not change from the time they started their UK courses. Their previously held attitudes and values shaped through their experience with their teachers in Chinese universities still had a dominant influence on their expectations in the UK. In terms of social life, participants highlighted that exposure to the intercultural context was important for transformation, particularly for non-educational aspects. Although most of the participants did not have close non-Chinese friends, they had, through communication and observation in daily life, broadened their views of the world, the multicultural society and themselves, in the way that CHP5 has described herself as a global citizen.

4.11. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has analysed the data collected from the group of Chinese participants. It was found that a majority of Chinese participants provided positive responses towards their experience in the UK even although there were challenges from different educational conventions between UK and Chinese higher education. Similarly to UK participants, Chinese participants revealed similar obstacles when trying to make friends with local and non-Chinese international students. Chinese participants demonstrated that they had loose relationships with non-Chinese students. Some of the participants, however, noted that there were negative influences on various aspects both in academic and non-academic areas if most of the time was spent only with co-national students. An overwhelming majority of students still chose to bond with Chinese students for comfort and security. More discussion related to international students' transformative learning experiences and related factors will be provided in Chapter 5.

In Chapters 3 and 4, it can be seen that certain issues concerned in the theory of transformative learning were confirmed, including the importance of an individual's prior and actual experience, critical reflection, dialogue with others, establishing authentic relationships with both teachers and other students and the role of the context of being a foreign student in a new country.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Introduction

As noted in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, international students' transformative learning experiences have rarely been addressed in the literature. Based on the transcripts of the interviews that were analysed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, and relating to previous research on international students, this chapter explores a deeper understanding in terms of UK international students' and Chinese international students' transformational learning, and the factors that foster or impede such transformations. This study answers the research questions and shows that a majority of the UK international students experienced more non-educational transformative learning when they were exposed to Chinese culture and through socialising with Chinese people than they did educational transformative learning in an academic setting. In contrast, Chinese international students were more likely to have experienced transformative learning in both educational and non-educational areas than UK students, and relatively less non-educational transformative experience compared to their UK counterparts. Despite these differences, the study also found that Chinese students' views and expectations with regard to student-teacher relationships did not change. For both groups of participants, their preferences for making friends with co-national students was not greatly influenced by exposure to the intercultural environment. Related factors that contributed to foster or impede international students' transformation included individual characteristics and social aspects. Additionally, it was found that not all disorienting dilemmas contributed to transformative learning. Sometimes, when international students were under pressure that they could not endure, there were times that they chose to avoid and withdraw from the uncomfortable situation and/or from their studies.

In transformative learning theory, the importance of context to provide a disorienting dilemma that may lead to transformative learning has been noted. (McWhinney & Markos, 2003; Taylor, 2009; Taylor & Snyder, 2012). Mezirow defined a disorienting dilemma as 'a real-life crisis or more moderate growing sense of dissatisfaction with one's old meaning structure' (cited in McWhinney & Markos, 2003, p21). In this study, a disorienting dilemma is defined as an intercultural circumstance that the international students are engaged with. As reflected in the interview transcripts, being abroad led to international students feeling a loss of support, and having found that what they had been used to no longer worked well in the same way in the

new country. The awareness of these changes and differences caused students to reflect, to question, to think, and to work appropriately to adapt to the new environment in which the transformative learning happened.

Linked with the literature, the theory of transformative learning and the data collected from the interviews, this discussion chapter will present six categories to investigate how and why the transformation has been generated: (i) individual experience, (ii) dialogue with teachers, (iii) awareness of context, (iv) holistic orientation, (v) authentic relationships and (vi) Critical reflection. Similarities and differences in transformative learning between UK and Chinese participants will be presented later in Section 7. It is worth noting that, rather than being independent from each other, the six components represented in transformative learning sometimes overlap.

5.1. Individual experience

International students' previous study and/ or work experience is considered along with their current intercultural experience in the host country. Both of these experiences that an individual students had before undertaking their current degree were seen by students as important to their personal transformative learning. In transformative learning theory, a person's prior experience is considered important because of its potential for fostering or impeding students' transformation in both academically and socially, which has been largely confirmed in this study.

5.1.1. Previous study experience

Taylor (2009) argued that in transformative learning theory, an individual's prior experiences and what the individual has experienced in the new context could be triggers for critical reflection that contribute to a new perspective. Taylor's statement was confirmed by the findings of this study. The results have shown that both UK and Chinese participants' previous experiences and their experiences in the host country contributed to their adaptation and transformation.

This study considered international students' previous study experiences from two perspectives: the international students' degrees obtained previously and previous overseas experiences. The results show that a participant's last degree was important for transformative

learning in the host country. A participant who had not completed a Master's degree in either UK or China had a harder time than those who had completed one before doing their Ph.D. But this finding has rarely addressed in previous research and thus, the current finding make an important contribution. One reason contributing to this may be that it is quite unusual for a student to get onto a Ph.D. programme without a Master's degree in present times. The result supports Bochner's (1981) view of the influence of international students' level of education on their adaptation to the new environment (cited in Yan and Berliner, 2011).

International students with previous experience of studying abroad were better able to adapt to a new environment. This was the case for both sets of international students studied. For example, the UK students who had previously studied in foreign countries before coming to China were more tolerant and positive about the challenges they faced in the new academic and social environment. Their familiarity with different cultures actually supported their understanding of the diverse natures or cultures of home and host countries. Similarly, those Chinese students who had studied in the UK, mostly by completing a Master's degree, could more easily adapt to Ph.D. study compared to the students who had finished their Master's degree in Chinese universities. For example, CHP2 who finished her Master's degree in a UK university, stated that, being accustomed to the UK styles of teaching and learning reduced her feeling of pressure during the process of studying for her Ph.D. Also, her experience in the Master's degree also contributed to her educational transformation in her Ph.D. studies. Additionally, the experience of being abroad brought both groups of participants more realistic expectations towards the new life in the host country. The findings of this study support the argument made in Yan and Berliner's (2011) research on the relationship between international students' previous experience with their expectation in the US; they claimed that 'their expectations matched their actual experiences, facilitated adjustment, and alleviated anxiety and stress. Greater discrepancies between expectations and experiences were associated with elevated levels of depression' (p531). Similarly, Chapdelain and Alexitch (2004) suggested that international students' previous cross-cultural experience would facilitate them in cultural learning and consequently facilitate their academic and social adaptation.

5.1.2. Previous work experience

Previous work experience was revealed to have a certain effect on current studies, especially for participants whose prior job was related to their academic subject. All Chinese participants

who had work experience before starting their current degree expressed that they had a clear idea in terms of what they wanted to gain through their studies, and were more concerned with their overall studies and with their career development in the future. Some of the UK participants reported the same views, while others who reported that their previous working experience did not have a significant influence on their current study because most of the jobs these participants had taken were part-time and did not have a close relation to their degree subjects.

5.1.3. An individual's biographical details

Biographical details were also examined as they potentially influence international students' transformative learning; these include age, gender, marital status and the length of time in the host country. This study predicted that such variables have certain associations to an individual's stress, which was considered by Mezirow and Taylor as a disorienting dilemma (crisis) that may trigger an international student's transformative learning when exposed to an intercultural context.

5.1.3.1. Age

A few international students in this study expressed that there were certain relationships between their age and their adaptation and transformation when being in a culturally different context. Their attitudes and behaviours towards their studies, life style and concerns for future career development were affected by their age. There is an interesting distinction between Chinese and UK participants who were concerned about their age. Chinese participants were more likely to link their age to future career development if they were male, or marriage related issues if they were female. UKP11 had similar worries as Chinese participants about getting married due to her long-distance relationship with her boyfriend. The same result has been found in Philo's (2010) research on Chinese international students. The current findings revealed that UK interviewees reported that they were under pressure when surrounded by Chinese students who were younger than them. The feeling of being respected by younger students was noted as a bad experience (such as UKP1, UKP11). Although limited to a small number of cases, the findings from this study confirms previous research that 'the younger the individual, the smoother the process of adaptation, while young people who were older than others often encountered more substantial adaptation problems' (Yu, 2010, p305). Besides, a

couple of interviewees were inclined to consider age as an issue in terms of being old enough to change their lifestyle regardless of gender.

Ph.D. students, in contrast to Master's students, had more concerns about the issue of age. This can be explained by the Master's students being in their early 20s and less concerned about their age in relation to their studies and career development. Chinese interviewees in particular, were intensely aware of how their career and marital status would be affected by their age. This is supported by previous research that shows a relationship between students' age and the way they proceeded in the new context when faced by academic and social obstacles and their subsequent successful adjustment (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). The results of this study echo Yan and Berliner's (2011) statement that 'older students often experience substantial cross-cultural challenges and problems' (p528). Age was also considered by UK and Chinese respondents as a factor that impeded their interaction with some other students and/or some teachers; the relationship and potential transformation in both academic and social life were affected accordingly.

5.1.3.2. Gender

This study has found that gender exerted an influence on female international students' overseas experiences, which is consistent with the literature (Morrison et.al., 2005; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Analysis shows that it was more likely that female students from both groups (Chinese and UK students) had more worries than male students. Chinese female students described that they were more easily distracted by their emotions and daily routines. Concerns about settling down and getting married were raised in both groups of interviews. Chinese female participants received more pressure from their family compared to UK female participants. In contrast, male participants from both groups were more academic and career oriented. The finding supports Yan and Berliner's (2011) research that also suggests that in China, the pressure mounts 'in their late 20s and early 30s. Usually, this is the traditional age when most first marriages occur' (p69). Even though participants did not make comments on the relationship between gender and their transformative learning, it can be speculated that their pressure and worries about issues such as marriage may impede their well-being in both academic and social life.

Moreover, the results show that the length of time required to finish a Ph.D. programme was a source of anxiety for both groups of international students who were Ph.D. candidates. This

is particularly significant for female students: previous research rarely concentrated on international Ph.D. students' concerns regarding gender and age as challenges for their academic and social life.

5.1.3.3. Marital status

Two Chinese participants (CHP6, CHP13) who were married have also stated that they were distracted by their child and family affairs. For example, CHP6 expressed that his Chinese student peers who did not have family members with them in the UK would have more time and energy to concentrate on their studies and activities outside the campus. He felt burdened by the stress of his family. However, he also admitted that being accompanied by his wife and child could also comfort him when he felt stressed. This result supports what Chapdelain and Alexitch (2004) had noted that international students who go abroad with their family members were less likely to learn social skills in the host country due to the limited amount of time available to socialise with host members. In contrast, one participant (UKP2), who got married during his study, reported more positive support from his family and had been concerned previously that it was time to change his life style. Based on participants' replies, it can be seen that there are both positive and negative influences from being accompanied by family members, and that whether they fostered or impeded international students' adaptation and transformation in the intercultural context depended on individual factors.

5.1.3.4. Length of time in the host country

Chinese participants who had been in the UK for more than two years reported a successful adaptation and transformation as predicted by this study. The two participants who had spent ten to fifteen years in the UK had become used to the local life and academic patterns. CHP2 even indicated that she may feel maladjustment if she returned to China. However, for UK participants, there was no big difference shown between those who came to China seven months ago to those who have been in China for eight years. One possible reason for UKP12, who lived in China for eight years but still felt out of her depth in academic studies, may have been because she was spending most of the time in the work environment.

5.2. Holistic orientation

As noted in the theory of transformative learning, other ways of knowing, such as affective knowing and emotions, often act as a trigger for learners' reflection and motivate them to question assumptions that they previously held deeply (Brown, 2010; Taylor, 2009). This study considered that international students' subjective willingness and expectation when choosing the host country would influence their subsequent attitudes and behaviours and then contribute to their adaptation to the new environment and to their transformative learning in both academic and social life. Holding an attitude of cultural empathy could lead to a better adaptation for international students.

Based on interviewees' responses, it was found that there was no significant association between the some of the above-analysed individual variables and international students' experience of transformative learning; however, it is obviously shown that these variables have to some extent played a role in international students' adaptation and achievements. The challenges triggered by these individual variables need to receive attention by researchers because they lead to more pressure during intercultural studies.

5.2.1. International students' motivation for coming to the host country

As predicted before conducting this study, two groups of participants, one from UK and one from China participants, would have distinctly different overseas experience. One main reason predicted was the reasons for their choices to study in the host countries. The findings revealed that participants' reasons affects motivation to study abroad plays a paramount role in their potential transformative learning experiences. Based on the interview transcripts, it was found that the reasons why participants made their decisions to study in the UK or China contributed to participants' attitudes, behaviours and level of satisfaction towards their studies and social lives. It has found that there were certain associations between these reasons and the attitudes held when they are confronted with academic and living challenges in the new environment and that these will influenced the amount of effort that individuals were willing to invest. This study speculated that the two groups of participants may have different emphases on academic and social lives when exposed in the host country. Their focus on either academic matters or socialising with others was determined by their reasons to come to the host country, and this also determined the areas that transformations would take place.

The transcripts revealed that there were more differences than similarities between the two groups of participants about choosing the UK or China as the destination to continue their

studies. Chinese participants had a pervasive attitude in both the public media and private discussion towards the advancement of education, technology, and culture in the West. This was accompanied by regretful feelings towards the 'backwardness' of China. The feverish rush to go overseas was affected by increasing complaints about local conditions in China and the highly praised idealisation of the outside world. Despite the rapid economic development in China, people's concepts and attitudes remain unchanged, which may explain why Chinese participants more easily accepted the differences that they were confronted with in the UK, especially in relation to education, technology and culture. Therefore, for a majority of Chinese participants, academic development and the opportunity to get a degree with a mind to get a degree for a better job were considered as the most significant reasons. Therefore, when asked about their concern for developing closer relationships with their classmates/colleagues or other international students, it was not reported as being a priority for Chinese students.

UK international students, who may have received limited information and knowledge about China before they went (this was confirmed by the evidence in this study) may be disappointed about the 'real' situation after arrival and negative feelings arising from this may penetrate into every aspect of both their study and social lives. Their transformative learning potential was anticipated to be lower than international students from China. However, it could not be said that UK international students did not adapt well within the Chinese context: one of the reasons for choosing China as their further education destination was because they realised that their potential career development prospects may be improved, considering that when the Chinese economy had started to play a vital role in many areas in the world. As analysed in Chapter 3, the reasons for UK participants' choices were crucial. For most UK participants, the opportunity of obtaining a scholarship (with free tuition and living fees) was essential in their decision to come to China. It was shown that, UK students who obtained a scholarship and reported this as the main reason for choosing China as their destination, were less likely to be motivated to solve problems in academic areas. Cultural learning was considered as a secondary interest during their overseas lives. Some of them even admitted that they did not take their study seriously. In comparison, Chinese students were more eager to get academic support from educators, mainly due to the amount of money they had invested. In addition, Chinese students who obtained a scholarship from UK university or government, viewed the scholarship as a honour and expected to perform well academically. Also, experience of a different culture was another top reason. For example, UKP4 expressed that the main reason for her choice was that she wanted to travel to somewhere else with different culture, and the bonus was she would get her Master's degree in the process. When facing different and

unsatisfactory teaching styles, she had convinced herself that even though she did not learn much in the class, she learned a lot personally through her experience in the Chinese context. She declared that she had ‘experienced more non-educational transformative learning and the social life experienced become more important than I thought it ever could’.

As analysed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, it can be seen that an overwhelming majority of Chinese participants and a few UK participants who valued their academic progress as important were inclined to put more attention on course related areas, such as course content, academic activities and support from the educators and so on. Their expectations and criticism were in direct proportion to each other. However, participants whose priority was just to get a degree or experience a different culture did not value their courses as being as important as some the other participants did. For example, UKP8 who came to China with the motivation to learn a foreign language, expressed that although he was disappointed with the courses, he was not very disappointed to be in China because of the improvement in his Chinese language. This allowed him to experience many aspects of Chinese culture, and at the same time receive a Master’s degree. Chinese participants who came to the UK for academic development indicated that, even though most were disappointed with their personal relationship with their supervisors, they valued the fact that they were satisfied as long as their supervisors provided academic guidance and supported their research.

For the participants in this study, international students’ motivation was a reason when explaining the different responses in terms of their transformative learning experiences in educational and non-educational perspectives. There is evidence to show that the students who did not make an effort to overcome the challenges were less likely to adapt well and to be transformed in both academic and social life. For example, both UK and Chinese participants who complained of a lack of opportunities to interact with local students did not really put into use all the resources provided by the universities. In addition, the findings have shown that, when comparing feedback of students from the same department, they had a widely different levels of understanding of what was on offer from the university; some participants had abundant knowledge with regard to the support offered by the department while others had very little.

The above findings suggest that the differences in individual students’ motivation contributed to a significant predictor of academic and social adjustment and transformation of international students. A previous study documented the motivation for academic work that Chinese

international students held when they were studying abroad. Edwards and Ran (2006) suggested that for most Chinese international students the essential reason that motivated them was instrumental, which was obtaining a prestigious qualification, which would provide them with more opportunities and promote their status on their return to China after finishing their overseas studies. 'It would be short sighted, however' argued Edwards and Ran (2006) 'to consider academic issues in isolation from other aspects of the student experience' (no page number). Student motivation as an important and influential factor for their adaptation was documented by other researchers (Gu & Maley, 2008; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006). Tinto (1993) also emphasised the importance of students' attitudes and noted that 'a high degree of integrative motivation will lead to a high degree of interaction with faculty members and classmates. And such a high level of interaction with faculty members can enhance academic adaptation' (cited in Yu, 2010, p315).

5.2.2. International students' expectations of their studies abroad

An individual student's expectation was found to be an important factor contributing to a learner's academic performance in previous research (McLaren, 2009). The findings revealed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 suggest the important role played by expectations in the extent of students' transformation in their learning process in this current study. It has shown that international students' expectations were associated with an individual's motivation and with their previous experience. Chinese participants had more concerns regarding academic related issues and therefore place higher expectation on educators and on the university's support. They were more likely to spend most of their time on academic activities and had less time to absorb themselves in local cultures. Consequently, as they responded, they experienced more educational transformative learning compared to non-educational transformation. For UK participants, if they had come to China with non-academic goals, it was more likely for them to care less about academic areas. As noted by some of the participants, they chose China as their destination because of a scholarship. Therefore, their expectations in academia would not be as high as those of the Chinese participants. Due to the development of international education in Chinese universities being at a comparatively early stage, it is unsurprising to find that the Chinese teaching style was not acknowledged by UK participants as helpful and valuable. Therefore, as reported by a majority of the UK participants, they experienced transformative learning non-educationally through experiencing Chinese culture and society rather than in the educational perspective during the teaching and learning process.

The disparity between expectations and the reality of the host academic environment was significant for UK and Chinese respondents' satisfaction, educational transformative learning and even completion of studies. In particular, this was revealed in the transcripts of two participants, one from UK and one Chinese, who had dropped out of their studies in a Chinese and UK institution respectively. It was clear that one important reason contributing to these students' decisions to give up their study was due to their expectations not being met because of beliefs they held due to experience gained when studying previously. As described by UKP14:

Honestly, the Chinese education system really damaged my motivation to study. During my time in a university in the UK, I was often doing more than 10 hours a day of study, and doing it happily. But the lack of independent learning and the focus on learning through repetition and exam preparation was demoralising. My educational experience in China did kill my passion for learning. It's only in the last six months that I've returned to proper learning again through reading lots of books. Now I have the passion for learning back again.

Chinese participants were more concerned about academic issues compared to the UK participants. Large class sizes, fewer courses and activities than expected provided by the department and the university, and non-supportive educators, were all things they never anticipated. This research has found that these issues impeded Chinese participants from successfully achieving their academic target and being transformed educationally. Take CHP18, for example, who had dropped out from her study in the UK and described her experience saying that:

I heard that there would be different education systems in Western countries. That's why I chose to study in the UK for academic development. Unfortunately, teachers in the UK university did not provide enough support for my studies. The regular meeting with my supervisor is meaningless. He has no idea about what we have discussed in the last meeting and changed his suggestions all the time. Even though the academic support in Chinese universities was also poor, the teachers there care about the students' study progress and their lives. I don't think the teachers in the UK would care if I died in my room.

Evidence from Liu and McLaren (2009) provided evidence that students may decide to drop out of their studies if 'certain (or high) expectations about' the university are held and 'these expectations are subsequently dashed' (p4); in the same way, when analysing the experience of Chinese groups in UK universities, they further stated that 'if a student has certain expectations about the nature of student learning and also does not fully understand what UK

academics expect of them, then this can lead to underperformance and even failure in examinations' (Liu & McLaren 2009, p4).

The current findings suggest that students' transformative learning was impeded by the gap between expectations and realities that the students confronted in their host countries. The stress that students experienced could have either a positive or a negative effect on their transformations depending on the level of the pressure and from which perspective the pressure arose from. Chinese participants were more likely to have undergone stress if they had unrealistic expectations in terms of academic matters and life in the UK. As discussed in Chapter 4, some participants may not understand the difference between doing an undergraduate degree and the subsequent transition to a postgraduate degree and would then have more trouble in their studies. In addition, the different educational systems of UK and China reinforced these challenges to international students. However, since they appreciated the reputation of the UK's higher education system, and after being taught in the UK style, they noted that their abilities have developed. This stress (or disoriented dilemma) could likely be the trigger for their transformative learning.

Most UK participants who had no, or few, expectations towards their new life in China tended to have a less stressful experience, which had, in fact, a positive effect on their adaptation and transformation in the Chinese context. A majority of them stated that, even though their expectations had not been met academically, everything else about their experience in China had been good for their personal development and transformative learning, such as having better understanding of a different culture and people. It was found that participants who did not insist on what they had expected had in fact adapted better. For example, UKP3 preferred to have 'no expectations and to take everything as it is' and enjoyed his studies much more than participants with high expectation such as UKP12.

The interview transcripts support previous studies' findings that there is a relationship between international students' expectations and the extent of the stress they have experienced (Richardson & Hurworth, 2007). As Yan and Berliner (2011) stated in their study on Chinese international students' in the United States 'when immigrants have extremely intense or excessively high expectations about their life in the new society, and these are not met, this leads to greater stress' (p526).

It is worth considering that ‘filling the gap’ between international students’ expectations and the reality students face could potentially be facilitated by the university. This would seem to be important for both individual students and their hosting institutions. From the students’ side, they should take responsibility to have better understanding in terms of the new academic and living environment in the target host country and then have a realistic expectation before starting studies. From the side of the university, it should be important to keep in mind that some of the obstacles that international students meet are not inevitable. As suggested by Edwards & Ran (2006), universities simply handing their information sheets out may be a waste of time because this does not mean the information will be read by the students, particularly at a time when students first arrive in the host country and are overloaded with information. Proper support systems can help international students adjust to the new environment without taking too much risk. In some instances where students are not getting the information or accessing the services that might be available, the university should have the responsibility to address why this happened. On the other hand, individual students should be aware of the information provided by the institution, which is easily accessible in most universities. For participants in this study, there is evidence shown in the interview transcripts that the gap between international students’ expectations and the reality of the new country was based not only on the information they receive from public media, but also reflected their own efforts to collect information. The lack of guidance and support could definitely lead to unexpected trouble for newcomers and impede their adaptation and transformation in both academic and social areas.

5.2.3. Empathy as a vital factor

It is understandable that international students, who would likely be under pressure accompanied with negative emotions, would, however, be anxious to make the most of their experience in the host country, and know that they have a responsibility to manage themselves. As discussed in Chapter 1, an individual’s cultural empathy is crucial for effective intercultural communication in the host country (Kelley & Meyers, 1995 cited in Cui and Awa, 1992). Taylor & Cranton (2013) also noted that ‘despite the significance of emotions, they require self-awareness and management by the learner... it is in the context of dialogue, critical reflection, and experience that the role of empathy comes to life. It is empathy that provides the motivation (altruistic interest) to ‘listen’ to others’ (p38). For example, in this study, UKP4 noted that her transformation was based on her understanding of the difficulty of speaking

English through the relationship with her boyfriend for whom English was not his first language.

Understanding the different experiences between host and home country in terms of culture, customs and habits are likely important, for example, in helping international students adjust their attitudes and behave appropriately. Even though this view has received more attention with regard to students who come to China, it could be considered important to all international travellers including Chinese students to the UK (Kelley & Meyers, 1995). They suggested that forgetting someone's original perspectives would assist people in their adaptation and transformation.

5.3. Dialogue with teachers and other students

Dialogue developed between teachers and students and also students and other students are important for both UK and Chinese students' transformative learning educational and non-educationally. Since the participants in this study were selected from both Master's and Ph.D. degrees, the differences need to be considered with regard to their interaction with teachers and other students. For Master's students, it should include interaction between lecturers and students, and also between an essay advisor and student, when one is assigned to the student (normally in the second year). Due to the nature of Ph.D. study, where students rarely have courses to take, their interaction and meetings with supervisors is likely more significant. Besides, the written feedback on students' work/assessment from educators, as a form of communication, is worthy of attention but unfortunately this has been overlooked in most of the previous literature as one kind of dialogue between teacher and students rather than only considering oral, face to face communication. Feedback on students' work is important because it could support students in better understanding the requirements and in having realistic expectations in the new academic context, and from this, their potential transformation could happen as a consequence.

5.3.1. Making appointments and staff availability

Based on the reports from both UK and Chinese groups, this study found that there were considerable differences in terms of meeting styles in UK institutions (where a meeting was more formal) compared to the meeting style in Chinese universities (where appointments for a meeting may not be necessary). Most UK participants enjoyed this casual way of interaction

with their Chinese teachers (with some exceptions where some teachers were not always easy to make contact with), while Chinese participants were more likely to be unaccustomed to this and criticised the principle of having to set up a time and wait for a meeting. A majority of Chinese respondents reported this principle of needing to make an appointment as having a negative impact on the efficiency of their research process, particularly under the situation where some teachers were not very responsible in their work, for example, when they did not respond to emails. The results have shown that UK participants were more likely to experience either a very satisfied, or a terrible, experience when they tried to interact with their educators for a meeting, depending on individual teachers.

Both UK and Chinese participants reported facing a disorienting dilemma when taking the initiative to talk to their educators. For example, CHP1 repeatedly applied the word 'embarrassing' when describing his feelings when he was trying to interact with his supervisors. However, the disorienting dilemma the two groups of participants faced seemed different. What Chinese students faced in the new academic environment was associated with their views of the shame culture - losing face or not being clear about their teachers' responsibilities, whereas when UK participants emphasised this disorienting dilemma, it was because they were not sure how they should behave. This finding regarding Chinese students echoes those in Henderson, Milhouse, and Cao's (1993) research that highlighted the importance of the shame culture for Chinese people, which could cause students to feel uncomfortable and out of place when they look for support from their teachers (cited in Yan & Berliner, 2013). It was suggested that constantly feeling powerless would impede an individual's transformative experience; however, through observation and imitation, new communicative skills can be gained in the host country, and this is where the transformation happens.

The findings revealed that the issue of insufficient meeting time with supervisors was raised by participants from both groups and may cause academic side-effects, such as when students are under pressure with a particular issue they may get depressed and physically dysfunctional. All of these issues confronted by international students would likely impede their progress towards finishing their degree and harm their well-being and thus, their social lives. The results have confirmed Abiddin and West's (2007) comments that 'having regular, effective, and productive meetings with graduate advisors is essential to both the students' emotional well-being and academic success' (cited in Le & Gardner, 2010, p263).

The results indicated that there was not much difference between participants from different institutions in terms of the meeting with their supervisors in spite of some participants being entitled to a minimum amount of supervision, which was only set to meet the requirement of university regulations. Both UK and Chinese participants stated that whether they received positive responses in a meeting depended on the individual teacher. Most of the participants expressed their understanding that every supervisor has his or her own schedule and has their own way of guiding their students. However, it is worth noting that all participants in both groups were selected from the top universities in the UK and China and these institutions have specific regulations regarding teachers' responsibilities towards their students. The quality of instruction from teachers requires serious consideration from the universities because it will likely affect students' potentials in academic matters and would also likely affect the reputation of the university. In addition, students' perceptions of the role of supervisor seem to differ and their expectations should be considered by educators. The interaction in terms of the requirement of frequency of meeting is something that could be solved between teacher and students, and this could help to foster international students' academic transformative learning as suggested by participants.

However, there needs to be consideration of how to define educator response requirements: are they based on the student's wishes and needs? Or on the university regulations? Sometimes, responses from educators might be unsatisfactory for the student but perfectly prompt as far as the university is concerned. This might be an issue as students might only frame response times in their own terms while academic staff running a programme will likely be responsible for a large number of students, which would lead to different overall priorities. In all of these situations the mutual understanding between teachers and students is paramount. The information that the students received would likely contribute to whether they understand the degree requirements, their own roles as students and the roles of staff. All of these factors contributed to the levels of satisfaction and success for the students in finishing their degree. Understanding the programme and the various roles by international students would reduce their complaints. Students obtaining information would support them in better adjusting to the new academic environment, which would create a context for transformative learning. Clear information should be given about what students should expect in terms of meetings. For example, one of the goals of a Ph.D. is that at the end of the process a student should be an individual capable of conducting high quality research without supervision. Students might not like being left to figure things out for themselves, they might not like or understand what their supervisor(s) are requiring them to do, but this might be the point. The supervisor might

be engineering a situation where the student has to make the step from being a student to being an independent researcher.

In order for both groups of international students to experience educational success and to be supported in deriving the maximum benefits from their study, it is important to provide them with supportive information in the new academic environment. This support could help them overcome obstacles in their cross-cultural academic journey (Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009) and contribute significantly to changing adult perspectives (Daloz, 1999). The research conducted by Komarraju, Musulkin and Bhattacharya (2010) revealed that students who had 'high and moderate levels of interaction with faculty members (relative to low interactions) rate their academic program as being more interesting, exciting, and enjoyable, as well as more relevant and necessary for their career' (p334). Kumi-Yeboah (2014) also emphasised that 'mentoring provides psychological and emotional support, which aids students in their learning' (p120), and which plays a meaningful role in transformative learning.

5.3.2. Feedback from teachers/supervisors

The findings revealed that UK participants who rarely experienced educational transformative learning in academic areas reported a notable dissatisfaction with regard to receiving feedback from their Chinese educators. The issue of students' anxieties related to their dissatisfaction in receiving feedback from their teachers was not only found in this study; previous research also noted it as one of students' prevalent worries (Parry & Hayden, 1994). The importance of students and supervisors providing each other with feedback about the progress of research has been well documented (Aspland et al., 1999; Hockey, 1991; Lewthwaite, 1996). These studies showed that the provision of such feedback ensures the development and maintenance of quality student-supervisor relationships and, therefore, helps students do well in their studies and also improves student completion rates. In this study, students considered the feedback from educators an important element prompting them to think critically about their teaching and learning, which is an essential element that contributes to individual transformative learning.

Previous research also reported that, when evaluating good teaching, it was 'defined as teaching that involves giving helpful feedback, making an effort to understand the difficulties students may be having, being good at explanations, making subjects interesting, getting the best out of the students, motivating students and showing an interest in what the students have

to say' (Ramsden, 1992 cited in Trigwell et al. 1999, p66). Unfortunately, one serious problem shown by this current study, which has also recognised in other research (Moses, 1984; Robertson, 2000), was that participants from both groups commented that the reason that they did not receive helpful feedback from their teachers was because the teachers were not interested in their projects/research. It is worth noting that participants who made this point all complained about the lack of interaction with their academic faculty and/or the feedback they have received on their work. Similarly, I found in this study that a couple of students from both groups made comments to the effect that it seemed that teachers in host countries were not willing to take responsibility for their students. In Schweisfurth and Gu's (2009) work, they criticised that it was the student's luck whether he or she would encounter a responsible teacher.

There is considerable difference in the responses between the two groups of UK and Chinese participants, which centres on whether their teachers had spent time outside the teaching and learning process, and whether the teacher and the student discussed personal topics during formal (and informal) meetings. It is worth noting that students who felt that their supervisors were not interested in their research because the supervisors did not ask about their personal lives, may be misunderstanding what a supervisor views as a professional relationship that operates within set work boundaries. On the other hand, based on the complaint from the participants, there might be an issue to be considered in large programmes, or where students choose topics which do not match any staff member's expertise, as to whether there are professional educators guiding students' research areas in the programme they are following. If the students could not receive guidance in their study, this would cause unnecessary worry and pressure during their stay in the host country and could also impede their adaptation and transformational learning.

Even though conjecture about the educators' attitudes in terms of whether they are interested in their students' research would be impossible, the feelings of the participants should not be neglected. In this study, lack of interaction led to a decrease in student motivation. Therefore, this suggests that regular and effective interaction between teacher and student is an essential element for academic success and transformative learning because interactions between teacher and student could provide the students with an opportunity to be exposed to the teachers' enthusiasm for their specific field and enhance students' motivation for learning, as indicated by Komarraju, Musulkin & Bhattacharya (2010). Mullins and Hejka (1994) also suggested that institutions need to recognise good teaching if they want to guarantee the quality

of postgraduate education. Therefore, evaluation systems need to be put in place for supervision and guidance (cited in Aspland et al., 1999).

Tian and Lowe (2013) noted that different assessment methods may be found challenging by the Chinese students when they engage in the UK context. In their research, Chinese students reported that they have very limited experience of formative feedback from their previous assessment when they were in China. Instead, paper-based standardised tests were revealed as the assessment tool applied by the school. Students were distressed by the feedback that was reported; this factor was not presented, however, by Chinese participants in my study.

5.3.3. Language

The importance of international students' language proficiency has previously been documented and it is important because linguistic barriers could have a negative influence on students' social and academic adaptation (Andrade, 2006; Saravanamuthu & Yap, 2014; Gu & Maley, 2008). It is generally accepted that when arriving in a new country, international students' feelings of isolation are more likely to be aggravated due to communication difficulties (Edwards & Ran, 2006). Lin and Yi (1997) suggested that international students' academic success is likely to be affected by their limited language skills and as a consequence have a negative impact on their psychological adaptation.

Both UK and Chinese participants in this study referred to the fact that their academic performance and interaction with educators and non-co-national students were affected by the issue of language competence. Most Chinese participants who raised language as a difficulty noted that they were reluctant to interact with educators and/or UK local students due to lack of confidence in expressing themselves using a second language. Also, UK participants who reported language as an issue emphasised that communication was hard because their Chinese language competence was very limited and this was compounded by Chinese students' limited competence when speaking English. UK respondents from English-taught programmes were more likely to comment that their teachers had insufficient English ability to understand native English language speakers. This study investigated language as a possible reason why participants from both groups did not access services and/or activities provided by university and/or department.

Despite the problems with a new language, both groups of participants stated that their transformative learning included mastering a new language that offered them the opportunities to get to know local culture and to integrate themselves into academic and social life. Confidence was also established once their language competence improved. These findings echo recent research conducted by Kumi-Yeboah (2014) on African graduate students' transformative learning in US universities. The improving of or mastering of Chinese language was viewed by UK participants as a significant achievement and/or transformation in their overseas studies. For example, in the words of UKP6:

I think my Chinese improved a lot to the extent that I could make Chinese friends and speak only Chinese with them. This was a new experience for me, and I could also travel independently around the country on my own to places outside the usual tourist places. I also take more interest in Chinese film, TV and music. I am now back in the UK receiving funding for a PhD that is China related, my study in China was the foundation for my language skills that helped me get this funding.

In transformative learning theory, one dominant concern inherent in transformative relationships is engaging with other people; the dialogue between individual and other people is essential for stimulating critical reflection, which was viewed as the starting point for re-evaluation of people's frames of reference (Taylor, 2007, 2009). Therefore, insufficient language would impede international students' transformative learning in both academic and social lives during overseas studies. Both Lin and Yi (1997) and Weidman and Stein (2003) indicated that 'in turn, the lack of socialization to academic norms owing to this language barrier may ultimately affect the students' success and persistence to completion (Cited in Le & Gardner, 2010, p261). A rational discourse through dialogue with others was highlighted by Taylor (2007) as promoting transformation. Cranton (2000) also emphasised that the importance of talking to others would assist an individual's critical reflection, where alternative perspectives will be explored and evidence will be brought forth and weighed, and knowledge can be constructed through the sharing of ideas with others.

This section concentrated on dialogue as a critical element contributing to potential transformational learning. It has involved both verbal and non-verbal communication between teacher and students. The effective and regulated meeting and communicating between teacher and student is worth observing to ensure that the students have clear acknowledgement with regard to new academic tasks and social environment. Insufficient discourse with educators would likely cause mental stress in international students and would impede their transformation and lead to withdrawal from studies as a consequence.

5.4. Authentic relationships

Authentic relationships are considered from two perspectives in this study, and include relationships between teachers and students, and relationships between only students.

5.4.1. Relationships between teachers and students

As noted in Chapter 2, a large volume of previous research reported the essentiality of establishing authentic relationships under a culturally different context (Foronda & Belknap, 2012; Taylor & Snyder, 2012; Sammut, 2014). UKCOSA (UK Higher Education and Further Education that was carried out by the Council for International Education) reported that staff – student relationships can significantly affect students' views towards their university experience (cited in Montgomery, 2010, p25). This study found that the role of authentic relationships between teachers and students and students and students play a meaningful role in international students' intercultural adaptation and transformative learning. The relationships between teachers and students can be considered as being formal or informal. Formal interactions typically happen in class and/or in pre-arranged meetings. Informal interaction means contact outside the class and casual conversations on topics that involve not only on academic issues. This study found that for international students, the success and fulfilment of students' intercultural experiences should not only be gauged by their studies, but should also receive attention in non-academic areas that are believed to influence the energy and time the students could spend on their studies. Students' transformative learning in academic and social lives could overlap and could each promote the other.

The multidimensional impact from educators on learners was reflected in a variety of aspects in documented literature and a majority of these were supported by this study including: students' motivation and interest in their studies (Thompson, 2001; Christensen & Menzel, 1998); vocational preparation and intellectual development (Kuh & Hu, 2001); self-confidence (Plecha, 2002); competence in their study field and skills in communicating in groups and problem-solving (Bjorkland, Parente, and Sathiyathan, 2002); psychosocial and academic results (Daloz, 1999; Komaraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya's, 2010) and also the likelihood of reducing the withdrawal rate from the institutions (Hazler & Carney, 1993).

That interactions between faculty and student can have a far-reaching influence on learners' transformative learning in educational aspects in academic areas has been reflected in both groups of transcripts. For Chinese participants, frequent communication and closer relationships with educators played a significant role in their feelings of being supported in academic development and having their psychological needs cared for, which may also likely help to reduce worries in both academic and social life, especially in the early period of exposure to a foreign environment. UK participants were more likely focused on the support for their practical academic development in getting internship opportunities rather than on psychological dependence.

Both UK and Chinese participants in this study referenced the concept of networks (*Guanxi*) as a benefit they could receive from educators. The results show that in Chinese universities, the frequency of informal interaction between teacher and students after class was found to be higher than in UK institutions. A majority of Chinese participants and a few of the UK participants reported that a closer relationship with their supervisors would be helpful for their research progress and for establishing networks. It can be seen that the UK Master's international students in particular were more likely to value the time that their teacher spent with them outside the class because most of them were in the first year (of two to three years in total) of their study, and did not have an assigned supervisor. Similarly, Chinese international students considered interactions outside class with their Chinese teachers in previous institutions as important for them. Chinese participants commented that the formal and informal connections with their teachers were equally important for their educational and non-educational transformative learning in both academic and social areas. Chinese participants who finished their first PhD degree in a Chinese institution indicated that compared to the academic support from their UK supervisors, their Chinese teachers provided more help through providing them with social networks and fieldwork opportunities. They also indicated that through interaction with their supervisors they obtained life experience such as how to act with appropriate morality and correctly in society. Chinese participants indicated that *Guanxi* is a vital social pattern in the Chinese context. For them, *Guanxi* shaped their network that was relevant to academic development; therefore it is understandable that Chinese students expected a similar network could be accessed from their UK educators but in reality they were disappointed. The finding indicated that most of the Chinese interviewees commented that they were frustrated with their relationship with their supervisors and expressed the desire to be able to place strong reliance on personal informal contact with

teachers. For example, CHP5 noted how important it was to keep a close relationship with her teachers and expressed that:

What we could learn from the educators is not limited to academic areas: in traditional China, it is acknowledged that we will learn how to be a person from our educators. How we have been influenced and transformed is not only limited in acquiring the knowledge and skills, we would learn more than that. We learn teachers' attitudes in academics and work matters, for example. Therefore, I viewed the communication with my teachers as important in both academic and social life. Teachers could provide reference for us to meet people in academic areas.

Chinese participants' dependence on their educators has been documented frequently in the literature (Le & Gardner, 2010; McNaught et al., 2005). McNaught et al. (2005) demonstrated the specific reason for Chinese international students being less independent was because they are inclined to view their educators as a source of providing all knowledge. The findings of Le & Gardner's (2010) research on comparisons between international students and U.S. students also revealed that international students noted that their advisors were most helpful to them through the doctoral programme while U.S. students indicated that they were more influenced by their peer students. The different responses from international students and U.S. students may reflect their different demands and expectations from the university and also from academic staff.

There were obvious differences with regard to the two groups of students' views towards support they received from the educators, as illustrated by transcript segments. It can be seen that, although UK international students were disappointed with the support they have received from their teachers, they did not lose confidence in their learning. Instead, it was more likely for Chinese participants to potentially lose faith at times when the needs of interaction with their supervisors were not met. Previous research noted that the differences between cultures could result in different expectations of teachers and students in terms of providing and receiving support (Ballard 1995 cited in Todd, 1997). Telbis et al. (2014) also explained that international students from countries such as China where 'members of society are more interdependent on one another' (p332), are more likely to expect support. Besides this possible reason, it could also be explained that regular meetings for guidance with supervisors seems more important for Chinese Ph.D. students due to the nature of a Ph.D. which does not require taking courses. Therefore, students are not assured of regular opportunities for talking to and meeting supervisors. Furthermore, both groups of international students in my research viewed their teachers as the experts in specific fields and valued their expertise and advice. Wishing to seek professional guidance was a feeling highlighted by both groups of international

students. Students' motivation to do more work and their increased confidence when explaining their work to educators was also found in this study.

In terms of the gap in receiving support that was noted by both groups of participants, previous research suggested that cultural difference would lead to different expectations between teachers and students (Todd, 1997). When discussing specific Chinese circumstances, there was widespread awareness of the concept of networks (*Guanxi*) among Chinese people in previous research (Edwards & Ran, 2006; Gold & Guthrie, 2002; Leung et al., 2011; Philo, 2010). Based on these studies, *Guanxi* means 'especially use of personal relationships to gain advantages or exchange favours' (Philo, 2010, p100), and/or 'mutual support' (Edwards & Ran, 2006). It was noted previously that for some cultures, students would expect their educators to 'play an almost parental role' (Todd, 1997, p178). Scholars also explained that in Chinese social circumstances in particular, there was a much higher level of dependence on informal personal networking in pursuing backup due to the high levels of instability, and *Guanxi* as a feature works in a variety of areas of social activities. Chinese participants in this study viewed the network provided by the educators as an opportunity for their vocational development (as part of the transformation), which was impeded.

Rather than consider it as a cultural characteristic of Chinese people, Ladd and Ruby (1999) indicated that for students (in general), their primary interest was establishing warm personal relationships with their educators. Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed that the fundamental human need for belonging, for frequent positive contact, and feeling of being cared for by people is significant. Decker, Dona and Christenson (2007) emphasised that the relationship between teacher and students plays an incremental role in learners' social-emotional functioning rather than in their educational success. Based on the responses from Chinese participants, we can see that there were two stages of development for the students. Firstly, the students rely on their supervisors because that is what they expect (previous frames of references). Secondly, they do not like certain aspects of the UK (which is the crisis they were faced with). As a result, they are disappointed with what they have met in reality, even though some of them have shown their understanding with regard to the different teachers and students' responsibilities in UK and China. Therefore, although most of the Chinese international students acknowledged that they have experienced transformative learning in their studies, their traditional thoughts still exist in their minds, they have broadened their understanding while still being disappointed with the support from their educators.

It is notable that even though there are differences in expectations between teachers and students and in the views towards the roles of teachers and students, mutual understanding should be promoted. Hockey (1991) argued that the different types of teacher-student relationships would significantly contribute to students' success or failure in obtaining a Ph.D. degree. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to international students' expectations of the support they desire to receive from the educators. Moreover, it is the responsibility for both the university and the students' themselves, especially under an intercultural context where people have their own perception in terms of work and life, and relationships with others. Taylor and Snyder (2012) emphasised the importance of the role of relationships, which has been recognised as being essential for individual's transformative learning. Establishing a trustful relationship with educators is paramount to fostering international students' transformation in academic areas, as reported by Chinese participants. For example, as CHP5 expressed, sometimes a five minutes talk was important for her, it can be seen that the student needed to be heard and cared for especially under pressure and/or being stuck by the research obstacles. The finding echoes Sammut's (2014) statement that 'the safe and sacred environment provides a physical space and emotional environment in which the coachee can be heard' (p51). This also could be an example of a student's previous frame of reference (expectation) which could be related to how they react to what happened in the host country with regard to the new teaching and learning process. An individual's responses and behaviours in the new context are determined by their prior experiences as indicated by Mezirow (2003). Similar findings have been documented by previous research with regard to the communication between teachers and students. For example, Jacobi (1991) demonstrated that the interactions 'can be formal or informal, occurring either inside or outside instructional settings, with both playing an important role in determining students' academic success' (cited in Komaraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya, 2010, p333). The statement made by Jacobi is consistent with what the participants in this study emphasised: they viewed casual talk with their educators as an essential contribution to a trustful relationship, through what security and support could be found, and one which would also foster their understanding and transformative learning in their studies.

5.4.2. Relationships between students

Changing status to become an international student who will often have feelings of loneliness, isolation and vulnerability due to the culturally different conventions, could have led participants to experience disoriented dilemma(s) that fostered critical reflection, resulting in

a change or reduction of their motivation, and consequently impeded adaptation and transformation in the new context. Misunderstandings in the culturally different environment are not uncommon, and the compromising of relationships would be extremely challenging for international students who come from a different cultural background as discussed by Edwards and Ran (2006). The findings in this study revealed that for both UK and Chinese respondents, the support they received in overcoming challenges came from various sources including faculty members, family members, church and relatives. Nonetheless, one of the most significant providers of social support was co-national and/or non-co-national international peer students, who played different roles in international students' adaptation and transformation.

The findings indicated that both groups of UK and Chinese interviewees all responded that they felt a natural bond with their co-nationals or with people with similar cultural backgrounds rather than with native students and other international students. To 'have something in common' was raised by both groups of interviewees when asked why they prefer to associate with students from the same country or with similar background. The results echo Schmitt, Spears and Branscombe's (2003) conclusions that emphasised that 'international students turned toward a new group identity based on common difference from the majority, not toward their particular nationality' (p9). In addition, the importance of having knowledge about host and other countries had already been acknowledged by participants. Difficulty in applying a foreign language and developing interesting conversation with host students was highlighted by both groups of respondents. As Chinese participants noted, mixing with Asian students rather than European students can also be due to there being less cultural difference between Asians, and students being less intimidated speaking in English with other international students. The results are in accordance with Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's (2006) argument that language could be one of the reasons why many international students prefer to live with students from the same country as themselves.

The finding of this study confirmed what previous studies on Chinese international students have said: that there was a tendency of developing social networks with other international students rather than with UK students (Edwards & Ran, 2006; Yan & Berliner, 2013). The findings have also expanded upon the argument by Brown (2009), who criticised that Chinese students were always together and kept apart from other students. Brown did not seem to be aware that there is a tendency for a majority of international students (including from Western

countries, such as those that make up the UK) to have a closer connection with co-nationals rather than with other students.

The limited number of co-nationals in the department was also noted as a factor by Chinese Ph.D. students. The low percentage of international students/Chinese international students enrolled in their departments may explain why CHP3 and CHP5 had a closer relationship with their UK colleagues. This result supported Trice's (2003) argument that having few peers that the international students can cluster around makes integration easier. Nevertheless, CHP3 still noted that the support from his colleagues was limited, and after leaving the office, they had their own separate lives without much interaction. Therefore, even though he worked with non-Chinese students, when he went back home, he was involved in a circle of Chinese friends. Similar findings were revealed by UK participants in Chinese-taught programmes. Chapdelain and Alexitch (2004) also demonstrated that Chinese international students bonded together when the number of their fellow citizens is large. Even though there is limited study on UK international students, similar findings also revealed that they were inclined to mix with European students rather than international students from Asian countries.

It was suggested that social interaction is a significant factor in predicting the adaptation of international students in the new living environment (Hayes & Lin, 1994). A good relationship with local students did play positive roles for international students, including language improvement and understanding of the local culture. Developing an authentic relationship is an essential component for transformative learning, as identified by previous scholars (Mezirow and Taylor). Nevertheless, based on the interview transcripts, it was found that whether or not international students could make friends with students from the host country was determined by a variety of factors. Common factors proposed by both groups of participants that contributed to a loose relationship with non-co-national students in the host country include: university associations, social styles, living accommodation, languages, topics and/or hobbies, Ph.D. degree and research areas. Different factors that contributed to less contact with non-co-nationals and a closer bond with co-nationals were revealed by two groups of participants, with life status and workload reported by Chinese participants and being involved in English-taught programmes as indicated by UK participants. The results from Chinese participants supported what Graham (1983) attributed as the reason for Chinese learners' social isolation from their non-Chinese peer students to 'the traditional Confucian emphasis on scholarly achievement, such as hard work and a task-oriented ethic and high parental expectations, which alienated them from more fun-oriented and individualistic

American students' (cited in Yan & Berliner, 2013, p64). The issue of limited financial resources was also raised by some participants from both groups when considering why Chinese international students would not like to participate in social activities with UK students.

Bochner (1982) stated that international students could be facilitated in the achievement of their academic and professional targets through establishing networks with local students. The findings in this research indicated that the academic support that UK interviewees received from host students was limited to language improvement. The academic support received from their UK peers was reported by a small number of Chinese interviewees which echoes results revealed in Yu's (2010) research. The possible explanation may be that the Chinese participants were doing Ph.D. degrees and it is the nature of a Ph.D. degree that the student is expected to be independent throughout the research process and each individual student has their own research area. As for UK participants, most of them were in an English-taught programme which resulted in limited interaction with Chinese students. For participants in Chinese-taught programmes, one significant finding that emerged through comparing UK and Chinese international students during their connection with other students was that these two groups of participants had different attitudes in terms of the way in which they wanted to be valued by non-co-national students. UK respondents, such as UKP12, stated that 'when Chinese local students wanted to talk to us, they just viewed us as a representative of a culture or a country rather than as an individual, or they only wanted to have the chance to practise their English' (a similar finding was reported by Wang & Liu, 2007). UK students who raised this point expressed they felt very uncomfortable being treated like that. In comparison, Chinese participants noted that they felt encouraged to say more if non-Chinese people expressed their interest in getting to know Chinese culture or just simply wanted to learn something about China. Under this circumstance, a Chinese international student felt valued as a person who can share their knowledge with others (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011). At the same time, when they felt disinterested and/or underestimated by host nationals or other international students, this would frustrate Chinese international students and lessen their motivation to interact with non-Chinese students (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Lewthwaite, 1996).

Based on the data collected from the interviews, it is clear that both UK and Chinese participants were sensitive and vulnerable when exposed to a new and different cultural context. Additionally, the data shows that culture played an essential role when explaining that

in the UK, people like to be treated as an individual, while in China, people prefer to join themselves to a group and to be valued as part of that group (for example, Telbis et al., 2014). Analysis of both groups found that, how a participant was treated in their home country affected how they wished to be treated in the host country, which in turn, affected whether or not they underwent transformation during their overseas studies.

5.5. Awareness of context

Context as an important component in an individual's transformation was emphasised by theorists as has been discussed in Chapter 2 (McWhinney & Markos, 2003; Taylor, 2009; Taylor & Snyder, 2012). Vital links between the cultural context and the development of an individual's behaviour has also been clarified by cross-cultural psychology (Berry, 1997). For this reason, studies have investigated what would happen to an individual who has developed in one cultural context, and subsequently endeavoured to re-establish their lives in another one. Awareness of how the context works in fostering transformative learning needs to be carefully considered. It was well accepted by scholars previously that international students are a vulnerable group of people when exposed into a new culturally different context. Obstacles and challenges arise in nearly all of the areas of their study and social life. Therefore, whether students were involved in the hosting environment is important. An acceptable and welcoming context would provide the international students with comfortable fertile ground in which they could be involved in the new environment quickly and from where they could have a better chance for understanding with regard to academic and social related issues. The context in this study has been considered from four areas. Firstly, the participants' study programmes. This consideration emphasised the differences between UK respondents who have been involved in Chinese-taught programmes or English-taught programmes, Master's and Ph.D. degree, and the different subjects of both groups of participants. Secondly, class size as a possible factor was considered as significant for teacher's teaching style, students' participation, and teacher and students' interaction during the class. Thirdly, hosts' attitudes towards international students were taken into account as important for fostering or impeding students' transformative learning. Lastly, both groups of interviewees have suggested the living environment and location as having crucial influence, especially in their social interaction and friendship-making with local and other international students.

5.5.1. Participants' study programme

It can be seen that when comparing the responses between the participants in the UK group, the different responses exist mainly around an participants' motivation and attitudes towards study in China, and other external factors, particularly related to the different programme design between the institutions in which the participants had been involved. There is a need to consider the different programmes that the two groups of participants were involved in, including the different types of degrees (Master's or Ph.D. degree) and being involved in the Chinese-taught and English-taught programmes, and whether there were differences between the subjects. The findings revealed that UK participants in Chinese-taught programmes and English-taught programmes reported differently in terms of the teaching methods and their chances of meeting Chinese students. Enrolling international students in separate classes in Chinese universities was documented by Edwards and Ran (2006) as having the goal of providing international students with more support in academic and social areas. However, it is worth noting that the frequency of contact with Chinese local students is also important for international students' adjustment and getting to know the culture and people. There is a risk for these students to be left with a feeling that they are 'not in China' (UKP4). It is worth noting that regardless of the differences between Chinese-taught and English-taught programmes, Master's students in both programmes all noted they did not experience real educational transformative learning, but rather became familiar with some specific skills they could apply under a particular Chinese context. UK participants reported that even though they seemed to have more interaction and communication between teacher and students in English-taught programmes, it was still very different from the teaching styles in UK universities. They noted that some Chinese universities had started applying Western ways of teaching in Chinese higher education institutions and faculty members with overseas educational background had been recruited. However, silence (between teachers and students) still existed and this was influenced by Chinese traditions and/or political factors.

On the basis of participants' replies, when questioned about teacher and student relationships, student and student relationship, the factor of research direction/subject was put forward by some Chinese Ph.D. participants and one UK Ph.D. participant who regarded it as one specific feature of the nature of doing a Ph.D. Participants realised that doing a Ph.D. required them to be more independent which had a notable influence on their relationship with teachers and other students. Participants from both groups declared that the Ph.D. was a lonely journey due to having limited meetings with supervisors, and accompanied by peer students who did not have the same research interests. Most of them responded that the loneliness of doing research makes maintaining friendships with certain groups neither possible nor necessary. This is

particularly true for a majority of Chinese Ph.D. respondents who had more concern with academic achievement and expectations of their supervisors' help in establishing networking with other students and scholars, rather than spending too much time on cultivating friendships.

As indicated in previous sections, contact with educators is essential for international students during their overseas studies, which could be an important factor contributing to international students' transformative learning experience. For Ph.D. students who have no (or few) classmates (or colleagues) in the same area as themselves, their efforts to try to gain the maximum benefits from their supervisors is understandable. However, based on the participants' responses, especially for Chinese interviewees, it can be seen that it is a self-defeating circle which some of these Ph.D. students were involved in; the networks they need and desire are based on the connections they made as well as those reached through their supervisors. The findings from Le and Gardner (2010) also indicate that academic staff members were the most important resource in helping students' studies, even although they examined a different target groups of participants, 'most often the advisor is the only person with whom the student has a majority of contact (p258)'.

5.5.2. Class size as a factor

The context of class size is one of the important factors noted by both UK and Chinese participants. It was linked to whether debating and discussion with lecturers and other students in class was feasible or not. A few participants from both groups thought that class size that contributed to the difference between undergraduate and graduate levels, rather than any differences between the UK and China with regard to the ways of teaching and learning. Based on both UK and Chinese participants' replies, we can see that in both UK and Chinese universities they all had large classes with hundreds of students involved in Bachelor, Master's and Ph.D. degrees. The difference is whether or not the students received resources before the start of the course and whether there was further instruction after the course began. For example, UKP4 and CHP14 both said that there may be one to two hundred students in one class when they were following undergraduate and postgraduate studies in UK universities, respectively. The reason contributing to this phenomenon was an increased number of international students, especially in business schools. Chinese participants who were selected from the business school noted that they had more chance of a large class than participants from education and law. Moses (1984) found that organisational factors, such as institutions hosting too many students, were an issue.

A small number of international students and small size of class contributed to the increased attention the international students received from teachers, as reported by UK participants in Chinese institutions. For example, more opportunities such as getting an internship was likely to be offered to students in an English-taught class, where the students had the attention of their teachers in and outside the classroom. These findings echo what Edwards and Ran (2006) noted when they said that there were practical constraints on teaching in the Chinese university environment. However, even though constraints exist, the negative effects on international students should not be overlooked, especially for UK students who are accustomed to being active in the teaching and learning process. There is the potential that their motivation to participate in the class would be reduced, as criticised by UKP14 who dropped out of his study. Landbeck and Mugler indicated that students' efforts in making changes could be 'frustrated by the systems we have put into place' (cited in Todd, 1997, p179).

The understanding of what the differences are between teachings and learning formats is important for international students. As reported by both UK and Chinese participants, students were more active even though they were in big classes in UK universities, while Chinese students were quieter even if they were in small sized classes. Therefore, it can be seen that even though class size may be a factor in how students are expected to engage with their learning it does not necessarily affect how students do behave. Even although students had different expectations of learning in different class environments (e.g. lectures, seminars), students from different backgrounds behaved differently. Edwards and Ran (2006) noted that Confucianism 'provides a hierarchical structure which stresses mutual respect and harmony at all levels of society' (p5). They showed that the issue of discussion embodied 'an awareness of cultural patterns of interaction in teaching' (p6). Edwards and Ran further claimed that under the influence of Confucianism, 'students owe respect to those who provide knowledge; the authority of teachers is such that only they - and not the students - should initiate interactions in class' (p6). Other scholars also argue that Confucianism contributes to a hierarchical teacher-student relationship (Chan, 1999). Based on previous researchers' explanations, it can be speculated that the culture of Confucianism could be a predictor of less interaction in Chinese classes. The strongly hierarchical nature of Chinese education was deeply felt by both groups of participants.

It was substantiated by previous research that emphasised the importance of applying rational discourse and critical reflection in transformative learning. According to Taylor (2009), an

individual engaging in dialogue with others is essential for critical reflection, which was deemed important for an individual's transformational learning. In other words, the transformation could be promoted and developed by means of rational discourse through dialogue. Therefore, dialogue with academic staff and classmates is important for international students' understanding and transformation in the new academic environment; whether or not the participants could interact with lecturers and/or students would impede or foster transformative learning. If learners were reluctant to be involved in class discussions, and/or experienced a lack of opportunity or initiative to speak out in or out the classroom, it would impede their transformative learning as a result. Although interacting with others would likely help an individual with regard to their critical reflection through exchanging opinions, receiving mutual support and encouragement and being engaged in discourse could provide a context where students will explore alternative perspectives, bring forth and weigh-up evidence, and construct knowledge through making consensus with others (Cranton, 2000; King, 2000).

5.5.3. Host attitudes

China's monocultural environment contributed to the loneliness experienced by international students because it was reinforced by a lower acceptance of foreign people by host members. To ensure that international students have a better experience and achieve their best in their overseas studies, Chinese higher education institutions need to urgently address the challenge of how to create a better environment for international students on campus. It was noted that there was a lack of research on hosts' attitudes and how they influence international students' overseas studies and existing research is rarely focused on students' transformative learning experiences. The data collected from the interviews indicated that a majority of UK participants expressed that their transformational learning experience was directly or indirectly affected by hosts' attitudes in Chinese universities. In contrast, a majority of Chinese respondents stated that they were trying to ignore the adverse influence they received from host members with some exceptions, who noted that they were being affected by hosts' attitudes of being impatient and by being labelled as Chinese (Asian) students.

Authority (and/or hierarchy) as a core issue emerged from participants' responses. A majority of UK participants claimed that both teachers and students would have a hierarchy or ranking in some circumstances in Chinese universities. In contrast, Chinese participants noted that less authority was found in UK universities. Chinese participants expressed that they enjoyed the

way that the faculty members were more likely to be called by their first name. Chinese students viewed teachers who had this attitude as more approachable and warm which encouraged students to initiate conversations. Previous researchers also reported the appreciation of Chinese international students in terms of the way students name their teachers in Western countries (McDowell & Westman, 2005 cited in Komarraju, Musulkin & Bhattacharya, 2010).

On the basis of UK participants' replies, it is apparent that there were different standards in showing respect (authority) to teachers in the UK and China (as noted by Todd, 1997). In China, teachers were respected because of their positions as professors, for example, their age and their experience in their research area. On the other hand, UK participants noticed that in UK universities, teachers were respected because they had specialised and professional knowledge and long-term experience in specific research areas. Similarly, it was noted by some Chinese participants that there was less hierarchy in the UK even although some teachers had a rich experience in their professional lives. At the same time it was valid for both teachers and students to express their opinions, and also there was no need to worship the teachers, as was similarly reported by Philo (2010). However, in China, the way that Chinese learners had been encouraged to memorise the classics and 'to repeat great scholarly works word for word is part of their way of showing respect and acknowledge' (Chan, 1999, p300). Philo (2010) suggested that Chinese education 'has a history of being revered and even close to being worshiped, with temples devoted to scholarly pursuits. The absolute priority given to it by parents, together with its unquestioned status, means that relationships between teachers and pupils can be friendly and certainly not hostile' (p98). Chan (1999) also indicated that Chinese students have been raised to 'respect wisdom, knowledge and expertise of parents, teachers and trainers. They have been socialized to respect highly those who provide knowledge and to avoid challenging those in authority' (p298). The context in which the international students were involved should be considered as important for evoking the necessary internal conditions for well-being and for transformative potential both academic and non-academic areas. Being requested to show respect to educators and to the resources during the teaching and learning diminished international students' motivation to study as noted by UKP8 and UKP14, who viewed feeling of hierarchy as one of the important factors causing UKP14 to drop out from his study in his Chinese university.

Universities in China are highly bureaucratic. 'The dual management system constitutes a president', whose major responsibility is for academic affairs, and 'a party secretary (now

often called the chairman of council), with control over budget, ideology, internal management, and promotions. The party secretary is appointed by provincial or national authorities' (Altbach, 2013, p155). The misunderstanding about the different roles played by the department has caused problem for UK participants when they were looking for help for administrative issues (UKP4, UKP11). The participant demonstrated that one of the possible ways forward was for Chinese educators and departments to understand what the students experienced in their studies and social lives in Chinese higher education. These can be quite different from the other possible ways in other interviews, and in reports from the university and/or government.

Furthermore, both groups of participants pointed out that hosts' attitudes depended on individual teachers. It is worth noting that participants were not aware of the individual differences between teachers, in which case they had a very narrow view of why there was more hierarchy in some universities and less in others. This is as an important finding because it suggests to universities that if they want to influence student experience they need to work at the level of individual teachers rather than just think institutionally. Universities are under moral obligation to develop an integrated programme and upgrade the service including and staff qualifications and skills when they have an increased number of international students enrolled in the university, so that they can give good service to these students. International students invest a lot of money in their study; therefore, if the university wants a high ranking, they need to regulate university policies regarding teaching processes.

5.5.4. Living environment and location

Both UK and Chinese participants referred to accommodation being a problematic issue, albeit with different considerations. It would seem that both UK and Chinese participants were sometimes ambivalent about being placed together with their co-nationals or being separated. They were more likely to have opportunities to interact with non-co-nationals, but sometimes could not get accustomed to the life styles that other culturally different students had. This result was partly supported by Edwards and Ran's (2006) report that Chinese students seemed to want to live with UK students, but they were required to have co-national students in the same block. Based on interview transcripts it can be seen that UK international students were located in a remote part of the campus in an international student building, which was detached from the building where Chinese local students live. Therefore, it is not a surprise to receive negative feedback from the UK students in terms of being cut off from meeting Chinese local

students. International students' experiences with accommodation difficulties has been recorded previously by scholars (Barron, Baum & Conway, 2007; Edwards & Ran, 2006; Wang & Liu, 2007).

Housing international students in dormitories separate from the rest of the Chinese local students has been reported in Edwards and Ran's (2006) research. It has been documented by previous research that the provision in China of a separate dormitory for international students on campus is required by institutions (Beijing Educational Committee et al., 2005 cited in Wang & Liu, 2007). The reason for this requirement was due to the consideration that international students 'may not be used to the living conditions of Chinese students (six or eight Chinese students often live in a room while two overseas students live in a room)' (Wang & Liu, 2007, p4), as criticised by UKP1. Additionally, it was found that the strict administration of the dormitory was a complaint by international students which was contrary to the institutions initial intention when the rules were devised for the benefit of keeping international students in a secure and comfortable environment (Thurston et al., 1994 cited in Wang & Liu, 2007). It is worth noting that the UK student (UKP14) who dropped out from his study pointed out it was difficult for him to get used to the strict administration in his university, and complained that the dormitory door would be closed at 11 pm every night, which made him feel like he had little freedom. Kinnell (1990) argued that 'good accommodation in a comfortable and relaxing environment is an important prerequisite for settling down to study' (p89). To balance the best interests of international students – placing them together or separating them in different accommodation – should be crucial to the universities but it is currently undecided. This study suggests that a choice of preferences should be offered to international students to decide which type of living condition they want to choose before making their accommodation arrangements.

Both UK and Chinese participants have criticised the effect that living conditions have had on their relationship with other students. UK participants blamed the accommodation arrangement for impeding them making friends with Chinese local students and, therefore the chances of getting to know Chinese culture and people were diminished. Some UK participants indicated that their changes of views towards themselves, China and the world was determined by the interactions they had with people outside the campus, while some Chinese participants who noted that their motivation for making friends with non-co-nationals was actually damaged by living together. Different habits, customs and life styles were the main reasons given. Some Chinese participants stated that maintaining friendships was not the only way to

get to know the host culture, rather, the accumulated understanding of being in the context is more important. The much more reserved communication between Chinese students with non-co-nationals could be a reason why they expressed limited experience of non-educational transformative learning in social life.

Besides, even though the living location or environment was crucial, there is evidence that students' motivation was a vital factor linked to an individual's attitudes and behaviours when connecting with other students. Motivation has been discussed in section 5.2 on student's holistic orientation, and will receive more emphasis in this section. In recent years, Chinese universities have been enrolling more and more international students every year; therefore, it is not uncommon that most Chinese universities or student associations will run activities to facilitate interactions where international students can meet Chinese local students. During the interviews, however, a couple of UK respondents noticed that they were aware of some of these activities organised in the university, but they did not push themselves to attend even once. Even although in this study, international students were considered a vulnerable group that was exposed to a new and culturally different environment, international students' own efforts to overcome the obstacles and maladjustments should be encouraged rather than neglected, by the students themselves and also by the universities, so that these students are given the best possible chances to overcome their challenges.

5.6. Critical reflection

Critical reflection can happen when people are exposed to an environment with a language and culture difference. A lengthy stay, during which time people are often disoriented and uncomfortable, could trigger internal questioning of previously constructed knowledge, their originally held assumptions, and how they make new meaning of the world. (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008). Based on the responses from this study, it was revealed that both groups of participants had experienced critical reflection during the process of study and living when encountering disorienting dilemmas caused by the differences between the host and home country. Cranton (2002) described critical reflection as an individual working through his or her beliefs and assumptions, reassessing their validity according to the new experiences or knowledge the individual has faced, and, at the same time, considering the sources and re-examining underlying premises. Taylor (2008) declared that critical reflection is central to an individual's transformation when it comes to consider their intercultural experience and discourse with other people.

This study has found that, in spite of being confronted with many disorienting dilemmas, participants at least acknowledged what the differences were and questioned how to cope with them to some extent. However, whether the participants wanted to be transformed in the new context depended on their appreciation of the differences between home and host country. The findings have revealed that participants' critical reflection did not have to be linked with transformative learning, particularly for UK participants in their academic areas. UK participants have critically reflected more on how their views of a different culture and themselves have been changed through involving themselves in the intercultural context in person, rather than through the information acquired through media or other people. For Chinese participants, they have been transformed in educational aspects based on their long periods of experience in the teaching and learning process and their appreciation of UK higher education. The Chinese participants underlined the UK ways of teaching as being good, even though they were being challenged by new requirements such as getting involved in group discussion and being independent. They discovered that through their UK training, they had obtained transferrable skills that they could apply to other areas, rather than only academic areas. Taylor (2008) noted that critical reflection was seen as a developmental process based on experiences, which was supported by both UK and Chinese participants who expressed that their transformational learning happened with accumulated experiences under the intercultural context rather than being triggered by major life crises.

5.7. Similarities and Differences between the two groups of participants on transformative learning

When comparing the two groups of participants, it was found that there were some similarities and differences that existed in terms of their transformative learning in the culturally different country. Because the central object of the study was not to focus on a comparison of the two groups, only a brief look at such comparisons will be described below.

5.7.1. Similarities between the two groups

Most international students from both groups expressed that they valued their overseas studies in the host country as meaningful even though they were challenged by various obstacles and had, with a small number of exceptions, not met their initial expectations. The similar

transformational learning which the UK and Chinese participants gained through their study abroad was reflected mostly in non-educational areas and includes two aspects.

Firstly, being independent. Respondents from both groups highlighted the personal development of being more independent in both academic and social life. Some of them noted that because of language problems, unfamiliarity with the new environment, and limited support from the university, they had to figure out how to solve these problems themselves. They stated that, being away from a familiar and caring environment, they had to learn new ways of life for the sake of enabling them to behave correctly and to be accepted in the host country.

Secondly, changes in states of mind. A majority of UK and Chinese international students claimed that they became more tolerant in accepting multiple cultures and nationalities. They accepted and/or became aware of a different culture and this opened their eyes rather than allowing them to stick to stereotypes they held before left their home country. Respondents from both groups noted that their views towards China or the UK had changed after being in the host country. They recognised that what they had known about the country through the media and/or other resources was relatively one-sided. They changed their attitudes towards people from different cultural backgrounds and now felt that they make fairer judgements. Participants stated that their attitudes and behaviours had changed especially in the ways to deal with relationships with their family members. It is useful to report two interesting examples: CHP6 stated that, through his observation about old people's life in the UK, he realised that parents should have their own life after retirement, rather than looking after their son or daughter's children; in contrast, UKP12 noted that after becoming familiar with Chinese people, she changed her mind and valued the idea that her parents could have a larger role in helping her in raising her children after their retirement. To sum up, the participants' changes in their state of mind included a diversification of perspectives, which included views on the host country, views on the world, views on life, views on relationship with parents, views on teacher-student relationships and views on the differences of cultures.

Participants from both UK and Chinese groups commented on their transformative learning being impeded by the insufficient support provided by university institutions in terms of interacting with other students outside the class. For example, UK participants criticised the styles of teaching and resources used and argued that the universities did not provide the conditions and regular activities to make them interact with Chinese students. Similarly,

Chinese participants commented that they did not receive enough attention and support from the university or from the student union to meet host students and other international students from different countries. Besides, students from both groups complained that they did not know of the availability of university activities for international students because of the lack of information channels. All the issues raised by participants may contribute to their failure of overseas studies, as Telbis et al. (2014) emphasised that international students may be challenged by obstacles in 'social adaptability, language barriers, academic ability, and financial need' (p330), 'each of the four issues measured are significant enough to have a negative effect on completion of the studies' (p338). Gannon-Leary and Smailes's research (2004) has shown that there are different strategic approaches the learner could apply that are determined by how they are encouraged to behave.

5.7.2. Differences between the two groups

In relation to whether they were satisfied with their learning experience in the host country, and whether they had experienced transformative learning in academic areas, responses from both groups of participants were considerably different. Most Chinese participants acknowledged that the teaching styles in UK universities promoted their educational transformational learning in academic areas, such as applying critical thinking when reviewing other people's work and developing transferable skills in communicating. A minority of Chinese participants indicated that they became accustomed to UK teaching styles and became able to be more active and confident during class discussion. Similar results were reported by Gu and Maley (2008). Chinese students were generally satisfied with their experience although some of them did raise complaints with regard to the support from educators and/or the university. They took the view that there was a higher quality of teaching and better organisation in the UK compared to Chinese universities, even though some aspects such as course design, the availability of the lecturers and supervisors, also needed to be improved. Besides, the results have shown that Chinese participants had more concerns in terms of whether their academic development and networking would be supported by their supervisors. Even though most Chinese participants noted that they had experienced transformative learning, some Chinese respondents still worried when they wanted to ask questions or to express their opinions in front of other classmates or during a conference. Language and culture related issues of losing face and fear of shame or embarrassment are still common factors in Chinese participants' performances. Based on the findings, Chinese international students had established frameworks that were strong and allowed them to take control of their

studies in UK universities. However, some felt discomfort and were disoriented; they still had not overcome their challenges at the time of interview. The disoriented dilemma does not always trigger a transformation; rather, it causes pressure or psychological stress for a long time even leading to drop-outs from study, as reported by CHP18 and UKP14.

It is worth noting that both the UK and Chinese participants expressed different attitudes when challenged by the new teaching conventions. Research has shown that sometimes the same textbook were used for the whole course in Chinese universities. Based on the uniform textbook assigned by the university, the steps of the lessons were laid down in the lecturers' textbook and were usually followed, so that 'a good sense of linearity is usually not a problem with students'. However, this is an important aspect when Chinese students criticise their English-speaking teachers on their 'lack of systematic organization and linearity in the foreign teachers' classes, which resulted in a lack of a sense of achievement for the students' (Ouyang, 2003, p127). The results from this current study have found that Chinese students were more likely to have critical reflection compared to UK participants. It seems that the UK participants took their own position for granted and tried to convince the interviewer that their criticisms of Chinese teachers and the Chinese context were reasonable and understandable. They did not attempt to understand why Chinese educators teach students in the way they do, and they had no sense that their behaviours may not be found appropriate by the interviewee. In contrast, Chinese participants were more inclined to self-reflect and to constantly adjust their behaviours. They may sometimes have chosen avoidance in some circumstances, such as being involved in the group discussion, because they had not become used to this kind of teaching and learning activities in the past. But after reflection, they noticed that they should act differently, e.g. become involved in discussion, and some of them expected to be encouraged by the lecturers. They firmly believed that participating in these activities was a kind of training for them to get to know other people's ideas and also training from which they will benefit from in their future life. The different responses between UK and Chinese participants may represent some group features based on culturally related factors, which need further discussion in future research.

It deserves to be mentioned that, even though the interview questions were mainly about students' academic experience, a relatively large number of UK participants believed they acquired more of a personal transformation (in daily life) rather than an educational transformation, which contrasts with the findings from Chinese participants who reported academic transformation and achievement in the UK. Based on the responses of some UK

participants, it can be seen that even if they were disappointed with their teachers and/or courses, most of them adapted well to their current situations because academic development was not their only reason for coming to China. Besides, some participants who expressed, based on their own experiences and talking with other students, that the university will let everyone get the degree no matter how badly they perform. This could be a reason to explain why some of the UK students even indicated that they did not take their studies very seriously. It is worth noting that, a few UK Master's participants emphasised that students who wanted to develop academically or intended to do a Ph.D. would feel disappointed in Chinese classes because there was not enough knowledge conveyed through the courses. Therefore, it was shown that the group of students would choose to go back to the UK if they had a plan to continue their studies.

In terms of the reasons contributing to the different experience of whether the two groups experienced educational transformative learning, analysis should include the following aspects. To begin with, reasons for coming to study in a foreign country are a vital factor for these different results. Additionally, as has been discussed in Chapter 3, the programme run by Chinese universities for international students is at a very early stage. UK participants selected for this study were from different institutions where the international students programme ranged from being in its first year to being three years old. Limited support has been provided by new programmes which caused a number of problems to emerge from a variety of areas subsequently, such as insufficient guidance from the faculty members and less well-organised programmes run by the department, special non-Chinese living environment/location, which would definitely impede international students' understanding of the Chinese education system and their interaction with Chinese students. When frustrated by these obstacles, students' enthusiasms for study and socialising was destroyed, leading to a reduced possibility for transformation in both educational and non-educational areas.

5.8. Chapter Conclusion

It was found in this study and also in previous research that to adjust to a new educational system with a second language could be a notable challenge for international students (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011). The transcripts revealed that irrespective of the country of origin of international students, the two groups of participants shared many concerns about certain issues with regard to the challenges for their transformative learning in both academic and social life in the host country. Even though culture was not intended to be considered as an

essential issue contributing to international students' transformative learning experience for this study, it is important to note that certain points of the Chinese learning style on students' attitudes and behaviours in the class and also when dealing with teacher-student relationship, were specific to Chinese participants. Therefore, culturally related factors that led to the failure of transformational learning in higher education should be noted. As Seo and Koro-Ljungberg (2005) indicated, 'without understanding the role of cultural identity and heritage embedded in particular cultural framework, higher education (HE) cannot achieve one of its most important goals: to provide quality education for all' (p184). These results and the discussion can be used to help both UK and Chinese international students adapt to their new educational environment and to get to know how to maximise their transformational learning. This study provides suggestions to improve the services and programmes delivered by the host universities to their increasing numbers of overseas students.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Introduction

The literature on international students, specifically using the framework of transformative learning, is inconclusive and limited; therefore, the essential goal of this study was to discover the potential transformative learning of international students in an intercultural context, and to identify the factors fostering or impeding international students' adaptation and transformation in the host country. This final chapter of the thesis will draw together the discussion and provide answers to the above research questions. It will be set out as follows. Firstly, I will present the theoretical implications and methodological approach of this study. Secondly, I will detail the major empirical findings of this study. Thirdly, details of the theoretical contributions of this study and how they are related to the literature will be reviewed and discussed. Following this, policy implications and/or recommendations will be provided. Next, limitations of this current study will be highlighted and the chapter and thesis will end with some final comments.

6.1. Theoretical implications and methodological approach

The theoretical implications of this study are significant. Previous scholars have stated that moving to a new place can lead to significant changes for individuals (Kumi-Yeboah, 2014; Taylor, 1994). The results of this study echo what have been described by Mezirow, where a transformation could happen under one of two conditions, either as the result of 'an acute personal or social crisis or through a series of cumulative transformed meaning schemes' (Taylor, 2008, p6). This study approaches international students' transformative learning in intercultural environments more as a gradual process which consists of 'different life experiences that cumulatively affect a person's intercultural competence than as a process triggered by a major change or crises in life', while it has been noted that 'this gradual process may also include crises and transitions' (Jokikokko, 2009, p143). This study also confirmed the vital components included in the theory of transformative learning as Taylor (2009) further developed based on Mezirow's original theory. These components are essential in contributing to people's transformative learning experience, and include individual experience, critical

reflection, dialogue, awareness of the context, holistic orientation, and authentic relationships. These components that emerged from previous empirical research were examined in this study.

There are some elements that have been overlooked by previous scholars but have received attention in this study. As discussed in Chapter 2 on theory and methodology, Jokikokko (2009) claimed that the influences of social and emotional elements, including trust, friendship and support, were not examined in depth by Mezirow. However, this study has filled these gaps. The findings provide abundant evidence of the need to establish authentic and trustful relationships between international participants and others and have confirmed the importance of this. For example, results from this study highlighted the significance of support from other people including teachers, local students and other international students in influencing international students' transformative learning experience in intercultural circumstances.

Using semi-structured interview as the qualitative methodology, this study has examined whether UK international students in Chinese universities and Chinese international students in UK universities experience transformative learning through their overseas studies, including those who had dropped out from their studies. The study was conducted on 14 UK international students and 18 Chinese international students, respectively. Since the numbers of UK Ph.D. students in Chinese higher education institutions were limited, UK Master's students were selected to balance the numbers with Chinese participants. Even though all Chinese participants were Ph.D. students, half of them have previously obtained their Master's degree in the UK. Therefore, when talking about issues such teaching styles, UK and Chinese participants could share their experience gathered when doing a Master's degree.

As discussed in Chapter 2, a qualitative research method is better than quantitative research because it focuses on a holistic picture, which means that it is concerned with the details of people's behaviours during analysis. A qualitative method is also ideal when conducting research in transformative learning areas and has been used in many previous research studies, and was originally suggested for this area of research by Mezirow (1971). Through the interview interaction, this study has investigated in depth international students' experiences and feelings through their description of the challenges and difficulties and the changes in attitudes and behaviours they had experienced after surviving and getting through these challenges. The ample examples and evidence provided by the participants form the basis for the analysis of their transformative learning process. At the same time, the interview questions were also developed to focus on what factors contributed to transformative learning.

Interviews are useful for the collection of information used for analysing the factors contributing to international students' failure or success in their transformative learning because participants have described their experiences of the events. The results are significant in filling the gaps in knowledge of international students' overseas studies, particularly on their transformative learning. Through the analysis of student responses, I found that transformative learning does not always have to be triggered by a dilemma or turning point in an individual's life; rather, transformative learning can arise from an individual's accumulated experience, through a process that takes place gradually contributed to by a sequence of incidents. Furthermore, whether an individual would undergo a transformational experience was determined by a number of factors including individual factors and situational factors. These situational factors were not only related to contextual areas but include consideration of cultural issues. The findings have provided deeper understanding in terms of the theory of transformative learning by focusing on the 10 stages an individual would experience during their transformation (as discussed by, e.g. Taylor 1997) to explore what factors would influence the process of transformation, especially in the group of international students. There is limited research on international students' transformative learning. This study is consistent (but provides many more descriptions) with the findings presented in Sammut's (2014) research on African students in America that argued that international students could experience either educational transformative learning or non-educational transformative learning, or both.

6.2. Empirical findings of this study

The purpose of this section was to synthesise the empirical findings that emerged from the data to answer the research questions of the study. There is considerable evidence to show that rather than experiencing specific events (disorienting dilemma) as triggers, a cumulative process of being exposed in an intercultural context was viewed as creating an important objective critical environment that contributed to an international student's transformative learning. This study has shown that international students' transformative learning is highly variable and depends on social and personal factors. UK and Chinese participants have undergone different experiences, which is not surprising given that they originated from different cultures. Some discrimination manifesting in the host country was considered significant by participants, such as ethnic composition and extent of cultural pluralism.

6.2.1. UK international students' transformative learning

6.2.1.1. Did UK international students in Chinese universities experience transformational learning during their overseas studies?

Based on responses from UK participants, it appears that a majority of these (except UKP11) stated that they did not experience educational transformative learning in academic areas. A large majority of UK interviewees stated that, because they felt disappointed with the teaching conventions in Chinese higher education, they only enhanced their language ability for the purpose of making Chinese friends, and communicating with Chinese people and for travelling alone to suburban areas in China. Some participants confirmed that they had mastered how to learn effectively by rote and repetition and were at least good at applying these learning methods in the Chinese university.

Nevertheless, all of the participants expressed that they have experienced non-educational transformative learning that they had obtained through their experience of being exposed to the intercultural environment; this included changing their views in a variety of perspectives including being independent and tolerant. UK participants indicated that their relationships with other students, especially with local Chinese students, were valuable for their understanding of China and Chinese culture. However, even though they expressed their willingness to interact with local Chinese students, factors also influenced their friendships with non-co-national students, including life style, common interests and others as discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5. Given these reasons, when making friends with other students, a majority of UK participants preferred to establish friendships with co-national students and/or other international students who had a similar cultural background. Other objective reasons will be listed below.

Compared to Chinese participants with local UK students, UK participants presented a more harmonious picture in terms of the social exchange with Chinese local students. They benefited from the effects of their overseas experiences possibly more than Chinese participants in non-educational areas. They enjoyed contact with people outside the campus and travelled around both in the city and the remote countryside as their Chinese language improved. For some of them, the casual course arrangements provided them with more time to enjoy their life in the host context. Scholars have indicated previously that the ‘mechanics’, such as how, where and with whom the learners have spent time would affect their perceptions of their learning experience and in turn exert an influence students’ outcomes of learning (Montgomery, 2010)

6.2.1.2. What factors fostered or impeded UK international students' transformative learning?

There are factors from different viewpoints that contributed to international students' transformative learning in both academic and social lives, including issues relating to situational factors and individual factors.

a) Situational factors

Context as an important component in an individual's transformation has been emphasised by theorists. Awareness of how the context facilitates in fostering transformative learning needs to be carefully considered. One of the most important factors is the different educational conventions between the UK and China in academic areas. UK participants indicated that the lack of discussion, debate and resources provided by the lecturers were problems that they had never anticipated, and were obstacles impeding their dialogue and sharing of opinions with lecturers and other students. Students viewed dialogue as essential for critical reflection and its contribution to transformative learning. There is evidence that for UK students in China, the classroom practices and the campus environment actually held them back, in some instances appeared to actively try to cause them to regress, and this situation led to failure. One participant, UKP14, did not stay because he felt very much held back by the setup in teaching styles and living constraints.

Participants indicated that everyone (including the teachers and the students) would have a hierarchy or ranking in some occasions. It was noted by some of the participants that there was a hierarchy represented in the classes. The word 'admire' was applied by three participants when describing the situation of Chinese students' attitudes towards teachers in/outside the class. Hosts' attitudes and the entire campus environment was part of the context in which the international students were involved in when their potential transformative learning may have occurred. The data revealed that UK participants' learning experience has been directly or indirectly affected in different ways by the Chinese hosts' attitude. Although UK participants pointed out that the hosts' attitude depended on individual teachers, they also commented that teachers' authority and the entire study culture reflected on the environment and that this had a considerable influence on their studies.

Another vital factor that contributed to the varied experiences between UK participants is the different levels of programme development. The results have shown that UK international students who enrolled in English–taught programmes had a better experience compared to the ones in Chinese–taught programmes. Explanations for this better experience was the programme design having been tailored for international students and because the teachers in English–taught courses were more likely to have had overseas experience, despite the criticism voiced by participants about the lack of receiving feedback on their work, and the lack of debating and discussion. They said that the ineffective interaction between teachers and students has reduced their motivation to learn. At the same time, since Chinese international higher education is in an early stage of development, the design of the programmes and the services provided by the institutions were not yet well developed. Therefore, when looking for guidance and support from the academic staff, UK international students felt under pressure and lost: this situation was seen as a challenge and an obstacle for quick adaptation and consequential transformation. As discussed in previous chapters, when exposed to a new, culturally different country, international students would likely experience a ‘disorienting dilemma’ both academically and socially. Some of these disoriented dilemmas would lead to stress the student had to deal with and then contribute to successful transformation, while some could lead to the failure of dropping out. To overcome these challenges, the students had to know how to adapt and handle these challenges at which point transformation occurred. However, it has been noted that for UK international students, the transformation does not have to be achieved to ensure academic success. Some of them succeeded in obtaining the degree without adapting well to the new education. Even taking into consideration the loose regulation the Chinese university has applied to international students, a couple of participants have acknowledged that they knew how to study in the Chinese context, but actually their adjustment was only in order that they would obtain their degree. It has been found that an overwhelming majority of UK participants did not appreciate the methods of teaching applied by their Chinese teachers, which could be the main contributing factor why they did not experience transformative learning educationally.

UK international students, particularly who were involved in English–taught programmes, indicated that their interaction with local Chinese students had been negatively influenced because they were constrained by the living location and environment where they were separated from Chinese students. Moreover, host universities’ attitudes, which have been underestimated by previous research, was a factor viewed as important by some participants

in this study, especially UK international students who reported a negative influence from university staff when attending academic activities such as conferences.

b) Individual factors

Individual factors also considered important by the participants include age, gender, marital status and length of time in the host country. Also, as demonstrated in the theory of transformative learning, the component of the individual student's experience is considered as an important contributor to transformative learning. In this study, it was found that UK international students' previous overseas experience played a significant role in assisting participants in their new life in the host country. Participants from both groups who had overseas experience prior to the current degree expressed a more tolerant attitude to the host country both in academic and social life. International students' previous work experience was not significantly related to their study if the work was not directly related to their academic subject. However, participants who had rich work experience that was closely related to the course they were taking were more likely to have clear ideas in terms of what they expected to obtain from their teachers and studies.

For most of the UK participants, their prioritised motivation to study in China centred on the culture or getting a degree or/ and studying language. Therefore, as some of them noted, 'as long as I can get my degree, it would be fine' (e.g. UKP8). In addition, it was found that international students' previous study experience affected their expectations of the new education in the host country. UK participants who were used to having mutual interactions during the class, and to receiving effective feedback on their assessments expected similar standards in their Chinese university; however, these expectations unfortunately were not met.

6.2.2. Chinese international students' transformative learning

6.2.2.1. *Did Chinese international students in UK universities experience transformational learning during their overseas studies?*

After investigating the prospects of Chinese international students with regard to their transformative learning experiences in the host country and related factors, the data in the chapter on analysis of Chinese participants provided ample evidence to suggest that these

participants' transformative learning experiences were reflected in both educational and non-educational areas. A majority of Chinese participants in this study indicated that they experienced educational transformative learning from a variety of perspectives (even the student who dropped out from her study during the second academic year). Most Chinese participants provided positive responses towards their educational experience even though challenged by the different educational conventions between UK and Chinese higher education. Chinese students who have been used to Chinese ways of teaching with only one-way (teacher to student) lectures during the class changed after being enrolled in the UK education system. Chinese learners expressed their appreciation of the UK teaching styles, indicating that they had been through a transformative learning experience educationally, having been taught as an independent learner/researcher within a more free teaching and learning environment, even though they were at the same time challenged by differences in educational conventions between UK and China in various areas, such as being required to participate in group discussion and critical thinking. They advocated that the entire teaching and learning environment in academic areas was more professional than in China. They thought that the way of engaging in group discussion was beneficial in allowing people to share their opinions, which was not only good for students but also could be applied in work circumstances (CHP6 and CHP18). It can be seen that the transformative learning not only happened in participants who were successful in their studies, but also in the case of the participant who dropped out from her study.

Most Chinese learners who had educational goals as their essential target in their UK university showed a sense of achievement through increased understanding and by grasping hosts' educational requirements and expectations; they demonstrated their transformation by changing their views on academia, teaching styles and transferable skills. A few indicated that their previous frames of reference on teaching and learning were challenged and changed in UK education; also, they would apply discussion and debating methods to their future study and career.

Chinese international students also noted that they had experienced transformative learning in non-educational social areas through their actual experience in host country. Unlike UK international students, a majority of Chinese participants did not express a strong willingness to establish friendships with local UK students, even though they also speculated that a good relationship with non-co-nationals could support them in improving their language ability and in getting to know the new multi-cultural environment. The research has found that it seemed

as if Chinese participants who had experienced difficulties when they tried to become involved in social exchange with non-co-national students, especially with local students, preferred to stay within the Chinese groups, even though there were few Chinese students in their department or working in the same office, such as was the case with CHP3. It was predicted that compared to Master's students, Ph.D. students would have a closer relationship with local students because of the limited number of students from their own national groups, and that they would get more used to the living and studying environment in the host country. However, it was surprising to find that the long period of time needed to finish a Ph.D. study caused the participants to enjoy more the time spent with their co-national counterparts in sharing similar experiences which reduced pressure, except CHP8 who had previously come to the UK for high school and had a balanced number of friendships with Chinese and non-Chinese students.

It can be seen that Chinese students' appreciation of the teaching styles in UK higher education made it much easier for them to adapt to regulations in the new academic environment. However, the findings also revealed that, even though some Chinese participants recognised the UK teaching styles as being better for the development of an individual's competency in learning skills and/or becoming independent, these changes happened more in their thoughts rather than in their actual behaviour. For example, CHP14 and CHP17 expressed that they preferred to engage in discussion in a small group because they then felt that they had to make a contribution by speaking. However, they still expected that the teachers could push them rather than they take initiative themselves. In addition, a few Chinese students noted that their learning styles did not change. As CHP2 indicated, all her learning habits were formed under the Chinese education system, therefore, they could only be improved upon rather than changed. Similarly, Chinese international students said their views of what makes an ideal teacher and good student relationships did not change. Their previous experience with teachers in Chinese universities still played a predominant role when they were dealing with teachers in the UK. It is worth noting that a couple of Chinese participants expressed that there was no big difference between UK and Chinese higher education in terms of teaching and learning (CHP3, CHP15). They noted that when they were in Chinese universities, their teachers encouraged students having discussion and debating as well. It can be seen that Chinese higher education is tending to learn more from and adapt to Western ways of teaching. This finding also echoes what a previous scholar (Shi, 2004) indicated: that some Chinese students adopt the same ways of learning as their Western peers (cited in Kingston & Forland, 2008).

6.2.2.2. *What factors fostered or impeded Chinese international students' transformative learning?*

a) Situational factors

Chinese participants criticised the role of making appointments with their supervisors. They were also not accustomed to the clear distinction between teacher and students interaction in work and personal contacts. Based on Chinese international students' responses, it can be seen that since their priority was academic development, their expectations on receiving support from their educators in both academic and networking were viewed as significant by these students, but unfortunately were not met. The participants viewed networking as a part of academic development. Therefore, some participants noted that the loose relationship with their teachers tended to impede their transformative learning to some extent. It is worth noting that a couple of students refused to move away from the very strong frames of reference they held before came to the UK. The reasons for this could be explained from two perspectives. Firstly, as noted previously (e.g. Ouyang, 2004), even although Chinese universities have started cultivating learners' ability to study by themselves with the aim of meeting the needs of a rapidly developing economy, culture related issues still play a paramount role in influencing students' attitudes and behaviours even today in the present Chinese context. The results of this current study on Chinese participants have shown that this group of participants relied more on their UK educators compared to UK participants in Chinese universities, which echoes Turner's (2006) argument that international students transitioning from a very structured teaching-learning environment to a much less structured one could lead to problems. Secondly, the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate student could be an issue. Being an independent researcher was a challenge for a couple of Chinese participants, which could be explained as ultimately meaning that some of the Chinese participants would not flourish as Ph.D. students, although all of the Chinese participants expressed that they had experienced transformative learning.

Similar factors have been listed by both Chinese students and UK students in terms of the loose relationship with local students which has been discussed in chapter 5. Beside the shared similar factors, for the group of Chinese international students was found that availability of time and time management were considered as one of the main concerns when balancing study and socialising with other students. Chinese students expressed that they had more worries about their studies and tried hard to achieve high standards in academic matters.

b) Individual factors

International students' previous degrees were revealed as necessary to help the student to have a better transition from undergraduate to postgraduate; this was particularly obvious for the Chinese student who did not take a Master's degree before she began her Ph.D. Chinese participants' previous study experience affected their expectations of the new education in the host country; those who had a close personal relationship with their previous Chinese educators expected to have the same relationship with their UK teachers. They were looking for care, support and networking development that was not viewed as a priority by UK educators. Therefore, there is a need for both the educators and students to have mutual understanding with regard to the expectations and needs from each other to allow the university to provide a good service in assisting international students to achieve their best when in the host institution.

The reasons and motivations for studying abroad contributed to students' attitudes and behaviours towards their whole overseas experience. Since most of them came to the host country with the aim of pursuing academic development, they noted that, as long as they could receive support in academic areas, they would be satisfied. In addition, some students had signed a contract with their home government and had to go back to China after finishing the degree and this was considered as another factor. There is evidence to show that whether students experienced transformative learning in non-academic areas was not only determined by the quality and frequency of interaction between international students with local students or co-national students, but also depended on their motivation when being exposed to the intercultural context.

Some Chinese participants expressed that the negative feedback they received from their educators had inhibited their motivation to learn. They criticised that some teachers and students (especially local students) see the Chinese in terms of stereotypes. Some stereotypes included Chinese students as lacking in ability to do a good job in thinking critically and/or participating in a group discussion. They did not, however, repeat the stereotype of Chinese people as being well known as industrious and assiduous. The reason that some Chinese people did not debate with others was not because they had nothing to say, but because avoiding debate is a way of not putting oneself or other people in an embarrassing situation. 'We are Chinese, but still we could get straight As'. In the word of CHP10:

This negative stereotyping is dangerous and wrong: many Chinese learners hesitated to express themselves in front of others, however, their abilities are beyond question. It is not right to stereotype people without knowing them deeply.

Cultural stereotyping has been questioned by researchers previously (such as Stephens, 1997). Educators who have a stereotypical view towards China and viewed China as the same as it was in the past, especially when a minority of Chinese people (tourists abroad for example) behaved poorly. Stephens's research on Chinese students' attitudes towards academic study has presented their attitudes are diverse. The results of this current study support Stephens's statement and also show that Chinese international students experienced transformative learning in a variety of ways in academic and social lives.

6.2.3. Both the UK and Chinese participants

A majority of participants from both groups (including two who dropped out) noted that they had experienced personal development and radical changes in their perceptions of life and culture that emerged from to their experience of living in the host country, with the exception of UKP3, UKP7 and CHP5 as discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 respectively. It was emphasised by some UK participants in this study that their profound non-educational transformative learning experiences came from their everyday experiences of being exposed to a culturally different society rather than from their classroom activities. However, what is noteworthy is that, even though the individual student may have expressed that he or she did not experience a change, he or she also noted that they became a world citizen, which they viewed as a transformation in terms of how they view themselves; this could be a kind of transformation even although they may not have been aware of the change.

Feelings of being encouraged and supported through interaction with teachers were advocated by both groups of international students as having a positive impact on their learning. Last but not least, the common challenge of language when interacting with teachers and peers was reported as an important factor that would cause trouble especially in the initial stages as international students arrived in the host country, or could even continue to cause the international students to struggle to endure the whole process of their intercultural studies.

It is worth considering that, for both groups of UK and Chinese participants, the different or opposing responses received from participants who attended the same host department revealed the variation in an individual's understanding in terms of their degree or studies and the availability of the guidance of support and resources they could obtain from the teachers and the university. This result highlights that the motivating reasons for choosing a host country is important, as student attitudes and behaviours affect their academic and social lives. Besides, the importance of an individual's adaptability in a new and culturally different environment is worth noting, as suggested by Gu and Maley (2008). Insufficient socio-cultural knowledge of the host country can also be seen as a factor hindering international students' adjustment and achievement, as was reported by Andrade (2006).

This research has focused on international students' friendships with others, their experiences outside the campus and on understanding the role of authentic relationships and dialogue in the individual informal learning contexts. Apart from formal meetings with their supervisors or thesis advisors, personal relationships outside the classroom and social networks provided by the educators seemed to provide added value to international students' educational learning in the formal classroom. These results are particularly reflected by the UK participants, and also by one Chinese participant. When looking retrospectively at their previous contact with their Chinese teachers, Chinese participants also advocated the value of *guanxi* for receiving more support in both academic and social lives. The relationships and network the students had previously may potentially affect their success or potential to drop out of their studies at university. It has been acknowledged recently by scholars that learning beyond the formal curriculum is necessary (Clifford, 2009). To improve intercultural interaction and international experience, one of the keys is to make a link between formal and informal curricular activities (Montgomery, 2010).

Both UK and Chinese participants realised that a loose relationship with local students would have a negative influence on various aspects of either academic or social life, or both. However, after being challenged when making friends with groups of non-co-national peer students, and in the light of the accompanying language obstacles, an overwhelming majority of students still chose to bond with co-national students. Compared to Chinese international students with local UK students, UK international students had a closer relationship with local Chinese students who had supported them in their adaptation and transformation in getting to know Chinese people and culture.

The research presented in this thesis has underlined that, for international students, the social context of learning is significant. The students' transformative learning experience examined among both UK and Chinese participants indicates that there is a link between international students' informal and formal learning, related to what they learned in the classroom. Scant research has looked at the significance of social learning beyond the formal learning context (curriculum and classroom), especially for international students who came from developed countries (e.g. UK) but were hosted by developing education systems in the host countries (e.g. China). Scholars have previously acknowledged the magnitude of transformative learning in educational settings, whereas it seems to have been overlooked that learning does accumulate through daily life rather than being obtained only in educational studies. For international students who are involved in a new culturally different context, the non-educational learning is magnified with the focus on learning about diversities and similarities in people and practices.

In recent years, scholars started to warn against the stereotypical assumptions about international students, especially for groups of students from Asian countries, such as China. This study has revealed that Chinese participants' expectations of their educators for instruction and support is obviously higher than UK participants. UK participants who were not satisfied with their teachers were more likely to find solutions by themselves. Another example from this study is that it was rare that the UK participants expressed embarrassment when they were interacting with others; rather, some of them felt constrained by the environment (such as with the cameras in the classrooms) when the conversation was confined. In contrast, some of Chinese participants were more hesitant to put forward their opinions and/or requests to others. However, it is worth noting that, although some Chinese participants have presented with some typical features of Asian learner (such as consciousness of 'face'), other participants have enjoyed either engaging in group discussion or their relationship with teachers. A majority of Chinese participants expressed transformative learning in a variety of ways. Therefore, this study suggests that culture could be considered as a vital factor that can influence an individual student's transformative learning, while it is not the only factor, and can not be considered as predominant.

6.3. The contribution of my research and its relation to the literature

My study contributes in several ways through the investigation of international students' transformative learning in an intercultural context. Firstly, in the literature review, most of the previous research in the field of transformative learning focused on people selected in a variety of areas, such as AIDS sufferers and women returnees. This study extends the range of research of transformative learning theory to international students as a group through examining both their academic and social life experience, and factors that may have negative or positive influence students' transformative experiences have been identified. It is worth noting that the experience of engaging in a culturally different educational and social context is a significant opportunity offering possibilities for international students to rethink themselves, to consider different cultures, their relationships with others, and also to consider their directions in the future. How to promote these transformations is an important issue that needs to be considered by higher education institutions.

Secondly, the study has confirmed the main components involved in transformative learning. Based on the responses of both groups of participants, it can be seen that international students' transformative learning has six essential components as indicated in theory of the transformative learning. To further explain this, this study has confirmed that by being exposed to a culturally different environment, international students would experience disoriented dilemmas or challenges; these difficulties were defined as culture shock which was sometimes labelled by scholars previously using different terms, such as academic shock by Sovič (2007), or learning shock by Gu and Maley (2008). Through experiencing these difficulties in learning and in their social life, some of the participants described this culture shock as a catalyst for transformative learning. Most of the participants claimed that they did not experience a major life crisis, which has been considered as a trigger for individual's transformative learning by some scholars; however, international students in this study noted that they were influenced through their daily contact with the environment in the intercultural context. The finding echoes what Jokikokko (2009) described as 'intercultural learning as a fluid process that is not necessarily triggered merely by major life crises as assumed in the theory of transformative learning' (p143). Through challenges of daily obstacles, critical reflection developed and an individual student would change their frame of reference in order to adapt well and be accepted by the host country and this is where transformation occurred.

Thirdly, this study focused in part on UK international students in China, which is especially important considering the increasing numbers of students involved in Chinese institutions.

This study, therefore, makes a significant contribution due to the very limited research conducted on UK international students. It has found that the continued influx of UK international students has encouraged Chinese universities to add programmes taught in English. One of the prominent findings of this study is that UK participants' positive and/or negative responses were determined by the maturity of the programme of international courses. To be specific, the UK participants who were in a programme that had already run for three years were more satisfied than the participants who were in the first group of students in a newly established programme. Since the development of international programmes in Chinese universities is at a very early stage, it is not surprising to find that, as reported by most of the UK participants, aspects of services provided by the university or individual university departments were lacking. This study extends the understanding of current Chinese higher education by showing that, although most of the UK participants commented on their negative experience with regard to their educational experience in Chinese universities, they also expressed that the problem the Chinese institutions have was due to being in an early stage of programme development. They were positive about the future development in coming decades. UK participants also pointed out that the current generation of Chinese students is becoming increasingly similar to students from Western countries, which supports the findings of Shi (2004).

Fourthly, as discussed in Chapter 1, this study explored Chinese Ph.D. postgraduate students, a topic that has received limited attention in existing research. The results have shown that maintaining a relationship with supervisors is most important to them. Due to the nature of working towards a Ph.D., rather than attending regular courses, meeting with supervisors to get advice and support seems crucial for students' adaptation and transformation in their research projects. That the relationship with co-national students can have both positive and negative effects on international students' overseas studies has been presented several times in previous research (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011; Ward & Kenney, 1992; Zhou et al., 2008). A difference between the present study and research conducted by scholars in the past is that Chinese participants did not provide a lot of information in terms of their relationship with non-co-national students. One reason that may explain this was cited by participants themselves: 'Ph.D. study is a lonely journey, we need mental support from co-national students, so we would like to hang out together and celebrate our holidays, enjoying our home food...' (CHP9).

Fifthly, one area that has been overlooked by researchers previously is the effect of hosts' attitudes on international students' intercultural transformative learning experience. Some scholars have suggested that hosts' attitudes are varied and that could play significant role for immigrants in dealing with the relationship with local people, such as in Berry's (2007) research on immigrants' acculturation experience. However, little is known about the effects of hosts on international students' transformative learning experience in both the areas of academic life and social life. The findings from this study are that most UK participants expressed that their learning experience was affected by Chinese hosts' attitudes. Although UK participants pointed out that the hosts' attitudes depended on individual teachers, they also commented that the teaching conventions and the feeling of authority embodied within the campus environment had a significant influence on their learning. Chinese students also considered that the situation depended on the attitudes individual teachers had towards students. They noted that a majority of educators had been patient and willing to help students. However, the reason that the student who dropped out her study reported was the lack of support she received from her supervisors. The results of the current study have supported the research conducted by Jokikokko (2009) who said that learners' attitudes could be affected by teachers' attitudes and behaviours. In addition, the findings have provided valuable evidence that communication with teachers outside the class was considered by both UK and Chinese participants as a good opportunity for developing a good relationship with educators, internship/career development and personal networking.

Lastly, this study also highlighted the significance of situational factors that could be important for a transformational experience. Living location and environment, which was overlooked by the great majority of previous scholars when research was conducted on international students, were factors highlighted by both groups of participants even though they suggest different perspectives for consideration. Most UK participants commented that the living location could be an important factor impeding them from making contact with Chinese students and having access to university facilities. As discussed in Chapter 5, providing international students with a different living environment and location was considered by Chinese universities as an important support for students' wellbeing, while unfortunately it was not appreciated as such by participants in this study. The strict accommodation regulation even contributed to one of the reasons that UKP14 left the university. It is worth considering how the university could help to address this issue. In contrast, Chinese international students in this study have reported that they had more choices in choosing their living location. However, the different lifestyles of non-Chinese students caused problems and reduced Chinese participants' willingness to

establish friendship with non-co-national students. The results revealed that a majority of participants from both groups agreed that they felt unaccustomed to the life style, habits and/or customs of local students and non-co-national international students. The UK participants adapted better to Chinese local styles compared to the Chinese international students who showed more negative attitudes toward how local UK students and other non-Chinese-students celebrated or socialised, which may have led to dissonance in interaction, as highlighted previously by scholars (Ward & Kenney, 1992). Some UK teachers hold a stereotypical view that the phenomenon of Chinese international students bonding together is a culturally related issue. However, the findings of this study have also shown that all the UK participants emphasised that they still felt a natural bond with other international students or English-speaking people rather than with Chinese students. The results promoted awareness that we should not put stereotypical tags on learners. At the same time, whether students decide to remain in close contact with co-national students is not necessarily an issue related to culture. As suggested, if there are a large number of people from the same country then they are more likely to associate with each other (Chapdelain & Alexitch, 2004). Based on the data selected from both groups, it can be seen that some participants lacked initiative when it came to interacting with local students even though they have the intention and an initial willingness to do so. They blamed a lack of opportunities supplied by the universities and at the same time did not put in much effort themselves.

6.4. Policy implications and recommendations

This study examined whether the individual international student would experience transformative learning in both academic and social life areas, and what factors contributed to fostering or impeding their transformative experiences. What is noteworthy is that the different or opposing responses received from both groups of participants highlighted inconsistencies with regard to the teaching styles and the necessity of establishing a support system for coaching international learners. A supportive environment needs to be established to encourage the fostering of international students' transformational experience. It is possible that although it seems that academic staff are employed primarily on the basis of their teaching experience and research output, there is still need for consideration by the university of how to evaluate the competence of academic teachers and essay advisors/supervisors based on the various criticisms from both groups of UK and Chinese international students. It is also worth noting that what students perceive and what they get might be different. Both educator and the student attitudes and capabilities in teaching and learning should ideally work towards a

mutual understanding to lead to improvement on both sides. For example, considering from the view of the university, to make sure the students receive the information and guidance is essential. For international students who need to take responsibility for themselves it is vital that they look for what they need and understand the regulations in the new education system.

Based on the results it can be seen that Chinese participants had significantly higher expectations than their UK counterparts with regard to the academic related issues and the quality of teaching. Both UK and Chinese universities should ensure the international students have sufficient knowledge in terms of the institutional policies for postgraduate study and what both students' and academic staff members' responsibilities are. Even though most UK universities have a well-established system, the findings of this study revealed that some of the participants had no clear idea about how to access the information they need. Lack of understanding and unrealistic expectations of the students regarding teachers and the university can lead to disappointment and even cause students to drop out; in this case, it cannot be expected that the students achieve transformation in either academic or social areas. It is believed that the transition from a lower degree to a higher one would cause difficulties for students. Providing more information by sending guidance to students before the start of their courses might be helpful. Furthermore, attention should be given to the significance of classmates or local students who could assist international students in their intercultural learning. Therefore, the role of students associations, as mentioned by participants in this study, should place more emphasis on establishing or providing a helpful environment and places that support student interaction, particularly in Chinese higher education institutions. Student associations in Chinese universities could organise activities that involve both local Chinese students and international students participating together in some particular Chinese traditional festivals such as the Dragon Boat Festivals and the Mid-autumn festival. Based on the data, there is a need to prepare Chinese teachers for the international and intercultural context that has students with different cultural backgrounds.

6.5. Limitation of the study and recommendations for future research

Through sampling Chinese and UK international postgraduate students, this study has provided valuable evidence with regard to whether or not the international students experienced transformative learning and what factors contributed to these results. The study provides higher education institutions in both UK and China with information to assist in recognising what aspects of their studies and lives have caused concern for international

students. However, it is noted that there were some limitations encountered during the research, including the sampling and data collection which both need to be considered in future research. For example, compared to Chinese participants, there were fewer UK international students involved in this study, especially students who are doing a Ph.D. The reason for this limitation was because Chinese international higher education is still in an early stage of development and few students from Western countries appreciate its quality. Given the rapid development of Chinese international education, further research could be conducted in the near future.

In addition, this study focused on international students and explored their views towards the teaching and learning process and factors influencing their adaptation and transformation: all the related issues revealed in the study were taken from the learners' perspectives. Therefore, more research is required to address how academic staff would reflect on same issues, and what the teachers' concerns are in terms of the international students' potential transformative learning experiences. I believe that an increased awareness and effort from both university staff and the students would promote a better experience for all, on and off campus.

The results obtained from this study have examined UK international students and Chinese international students' potential transformative learning experiences through a semi-structured qualitative interview. This provides ample evidence to suggest that through their intercultural experience, international students undergo a transformation in educational and/or non-educational perspectives, even including the participants who dropped out in the middle of their studies. Wider implications of my findings impact not only on the nature of teaching and learning to foster transformative experience but are also important for universities that are increasingly competing against each other internationally for overseas students who can generate substantial revenue, culture exchange, 'brain gain' and future industrial development. As discussed in Chapter 1, there are global implications for intercultural education through understanding the issues of international student adjustment. Therefore, appropriate support services for assisting in the achievements of international students provided by higher institutions in both UK and China need to be well-informed in order to ensure that the benefits continue.

Appendix A.

1. Describe how you have experienced in terms of the teaching methods. How would you view your adaptation to the teaching methods during the class?
2. What specific factors influenced your perspectives in terms of the teaching methods in classroom?
3. Have you experienced a time when you realised there are similarities or differences compared to your previous institutions in the home country? (Where differences exist, which kind of attitudes have you adopted in order to adjust to these differences?)
4. How would you view your relationships with faculty and colleagues as being a factor in fostering or impeding your transition and achievement in terms of your academic development? Academic contact and non-academic contact.
5. How would you consider the living environment, does it affect your adaptation to your studies and to your life?
6. How would you view your relationship with your classmates or colleagues? Both local students, co-national students, and other international students?
7. Have you experienced a change in your acceptance of different culture?
8. Is there anything or are there any activities that could serve as triggers or cause a disorienting dilemma for your transformative learning?
9. Is there a gap between what you actual experience and expectations before you come to the university?
10. What did you take from this experience to your views of study or your life? And how has that shaped what you intend to do in the future?

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