INTERNATIONAL BRANCH CAMPUS STUDENTS: CHOICES, EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYABILITY

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Abstract

The research examined why students chose to study at an international branch campus (IBC) and how they perceived their experiences' impact on their employability. The research posed a question which has largely been studied using quantitative measures with a few notable exceptions such as Pyvis and Chapman (2007) who investigated offshore Australian programmes. Because quantitative studies cannot capture the underlying complexities encompassing the cultural system and socio-cultural properties influencing the agential powers exercised by the individual, this research attempts to explain student choices and experiences using the concepts of rates of return to education, signalling/screening and identity in the qualitative tradition from a critical realist perspective. The *leitmotif* of this thesis is the analytical dualism of structure and agency (Archer, 1995) in which the link between these two was an inevitable part of the narrative explaining how structure constrained and enabled participants who as free agents took responsibility for their destinies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 31 students from three IBCs.

The findings have policy implications for the research indicates that there are significant structural factors at the levels of host and source countries which affect the IBC market. There are also structural factors at the institutional level associated not only with the IBC and parent university but also with the local partner. At the individual level, there are socio-cultural influences which at times shape student choices but at other times, conflict with the individual's own life project. The research shows that it is important to understand the factors influencing student choices and experiences at the IBC and its parent campus within the wider framework of structure and agency in order to inform sector-wide and institutional internationalisation policies and strategic planning.

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Abbreviations

BIS	Department of Business, Innovation and Skills
BN	*Barisan Nasional* (National Front) is the ruling coalition government in Malaysia since independence from the British in 1957.
C-BERT	Cross-Border Education Research Team
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CR	Critical realism
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
HE	Higher education
IBC	International branch campus
MARA	*Majlis Amanah Rakyat Asli* (Council of Trust for Indigenous People)
NEP	New Economic Policy
OBHE	Observatory of Borderless Higher Education
PU	Parent university
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
ROR	Rate of return (to education)
RP	Received Pronunciation
TNHE	Transnational higher education
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
US/USA	United States of America
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Glossary

211 and 985 universities	Chinese flagship universities with dedicated government funding to achieve world-class status
Bahasa Malaysia	Malay language
Bumiputera	Literally translated as 'sons of the soil', used to refer to Malays and indigenous ethnic groups
Danwei	Work unit
Gaokao	National University Entrance Examination in China
Guanxi	Social network with a Chinese emphasis
Haigui	Literally 'sea turtles'; overseas returnees who have good jobs in China
Hukou	Household registration system
Ren	Humanity; fully human
Suzhi jiaoyu	Comprehensive development in education
Tanah Melayu	Malaya
Weigainian	Pseudo-concept
Xiaokang	A concept of gradual economic improvement in society where each household works towards owning their own private resources spurred on by competition
Xiaoqin	Filial piety
Xiushen zhixue	Learning for self-development

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Preface

So much of this research and thesis intertwined with my personal history. I had not imagined that embarking on this research would take me back to what I had left behind in Malaysia and China.

My grandparents were Chinese immigrants who had risked their lives in their journey to Malaya to flee famine in China in the early 1900s. I grew up hearing stories of poverty and hardship they and my parents had endured. Nevertheless, when I was younger I never had much affinity for China despite my mother's efforts to instil an appreciation for all things Chinese. I had identified myself primarily as Malaysian before my Chinese identity. This was largely due to my primary education at a national school with *Bahasa Malaysia* as the medium of instruction in a multi-ethnic and –cultural environment which I insisted on attending, rebelling against my mother's wish to send me to a local Chinese Mandarin-medium primary school. This Malaysian-first identity was challenged when I left for a teaching post in Beijing and found myself immersed in the mainland Chinese culture, discovering much of my ethnic cultural heritage which stretched my own understanding of self, culture and belonging.

It is this Chinese-Malaysian aspect which is unique to my researcher identity. This aspect was not merely my ethnic Chinese background with Malaysian nationality, but I brought to this research my own insights of the mainland Chinese culture and thought as well. Being able to blend in had been an advantage during my experience of living and teaching in China for 10 years. While having a sense of familiarity, I also felt like a foreign ethnographer whom the mainland Chinese took absolutely no notice of on the bus, the underground, etc. There is a combined element of insider and outsider identity with respect to both Malaysian and mainland Chinese participants because I know both contexts well and yet for Malaysia where I was born and grew up, I have lived away for more than 10 years while for China, it was familiar and I was regarded by

some as their own, and yet I am not. There is a remote sense of belonging to both but not an intimate 'home' tie with either. This almost 'distanced' position had been helpful to draw on when an 'observer' lens was required in the data analysis and reflecting on literature, but the 'insider' lens was also vital to understanding participants' perspectives and presenting them as accurately and faithfully as possible.

I had been reluctant to face the past history and present realities of the developments in both countries, particularly Malaysia. This reluctance I also detected in some Chinese Malaysian participants in my research. Much of what I know personally, read in the literature and heard in my participants' voices was not easy to record, analyse and synthesise in an objective and intellectually distant manner. However, rather than pretending to be detached, I felt openness and transparency was needed to maintain honesty and integrity in the way I conducted the research. Thus, where relevant, I have woven in my personal stories and experiences to elaborate the contexts and meanings the participants were situated in.

The most important aspect of my personal history which led me to this research is the 7 years I had lived and taught at an international branch campus (IBC). I was part of a pioneering team of international teaching staff with the responsibility to set up the Year One Programme comprising mainly of English for Academic Purposes modules to prepare the first cohort to undertake their degree programme the following year. Before taking up employment there, I had a summer teaching stint at its parent campus, PU1, in the United Kingdom (UK). Hence, with regards to IBC2 participants, I was an insider from the perspective of having been employed there and PU1. As for IBC1 participants, my insider insights stemmed from being Malaysian as well as an international student at its parent campus, PU1. During the course of my PhD, I was teaching on a summer pre-sessional course at PU2, the parent university of IBC3. The table below shows where these IBCs are located.

Location of parent universities and their respective IBCs

Institution	IBC1	IBC2	PU1	IBC3	PU2
Location	Malaysia	China	UK	China	UK

During my employment at IBC2, I was responsible for the oversight and management of the the Self-Access Centre*, and the in-sessional programme to support students to develop academic literacies. I later became committed to supporting students interested in working for multinational companies to develop their professional literacies in association with the Career Office. This role along with my involvement in an inter-departmental committee on student career development led me to question the practice and effort made in supporting the students' transition from university to the workplace. Being aware of the issues from the university's side, I was curious about how IBC students perceived and managed the experience and the transition as this was pertinent to the long-term sustainability of IBCs. This, thus, was the catalyst for the PhD.

* A self-access centre's role is to promote self-access language learning. See Gardner and Miller (1999) for its theoretical basis, approaches and practical models adopted in different contexts.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The motivation for the research is rooted in my previous work experience. I was curious about the under-represented IBC students' employability, and wondered about the future of international branch campuses (IBCs).

In this chapter I will introduce the process of globalisation in internationalising higher education, particularly the development of transnational higher education (TNHE) and focus on international branch campuses. The rationale for the research will also be provided along with host countries' national contexts including the research participants' socio-cultural background with a focus on the value of education. The research aim, questions and proposed contributions will be given together with an outline of the chapters of the thesis.

Throughout the thesis I used an active voice where my identity or personal experience was salient or relevant, and faded behind a passive structure to present the narrative in a less personal tone, reflecting nuances from my insider-outsider perspective. I used British spelling throughout the thesis except for direct quotes from sources published in American English.

1.2 Globalisation and internationalisation of higher education

> *"The process of globalisation is pushing twenty-first-century higher education toward greater international involvement (Altbach & Knight, 2007) and this has turned higher education into 'a global business engaging in marketing strategies to sell their knowledge-based products, attract foreign students, and establish international branches' (Spring 2009, p.100)." (Hou et al., 2014, p.300)*

Globalisation and internationalisation are closely linked but have different meanings. Altbach and Knight (2007, p.290) define globalisation as "the economic, political, and societal forces pushing 21st century higher education toward greater international involvement". In the context of higher education, internationalisation is a response to the impacts of globalisation as well as an agent of it (Knight, 2005). Globalisation impacts on higher education (HE) and in turn HE is also one of the driving forces in globalisation. The impact of globalisation on HE can be seen in the spread of internationalisation across HE systems and institutions globally. The motivations for internationalisation are commercial advantage, knowledge and language acquisition, adding an international dimension to curriculum, and enhancing institutional portfolio and profile internationally. In the United Kingdom (UK), universities vary in their response. Most have formed internationalisation policy and strategies. Some universities join forces with their counterparts in different countries to strengthen their position in the global competition in HE markets. It is in this context, TNHE has become an agent of globalisation (Leask, 2008 in Hou et al., 2014).

Globalisation and the development of the knowledge economy worldwide have increased competition between countries and institutions. This has resulted in the emergence of academic

capitalism seen in universities embracing corporate practices and commodifying knowledge, reorienting students as consumers and changing the nature, purpose and values of higher education. Many countries have had their HE restructured according to neoliberal market principles including the UK and Malaysia, and China's economic reform which began under Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin also follows the neoliberal paradigm (Zheng, 2009). In the UK, the marketisation of HE and the rise of the student consumer have emerged with successive governments' moves to transfer the funding of HE from the state to students. This suggests a shift from HE as a collective public good to a private good benefitting mainly individuals who are expected to contribute to its costs (Naidoo & Williams, 2015). This shift is also occurring in China and Malaysia to prevent overburdening of the state in funding public HE manifested in the expansion of private HE and proliferation of TNHE through partnership with foreign HE institutions.

1.3 Transnational higher education

> *"To many critics, the rapid growth of income-generating transnational programs looks like an unseemly gold rush threatening to undermine the public service orientation that should be paramount to higher education institutions." (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007, p.31).*

Global tertiary enrolment is projected by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to increase by 21 million between 2011 and 2020 and only 2% of this estimated number will study abroad (The British Council, 2012 in McNamara et al., 2013). Many developing countries' HE is not expanding quickly enough to meet forecast demand. Hence, TNHE, as a solution, stands to gain from this opportunity for both home/source and host countries.

The increase in international academic mobility is also reflected in the different definitions used to describe this phenomenon. TNHE has been used here so far but there are other terms such as borderless education and cross-border education. The term TNHE was originally employed in the Australian context to distinguish between international students studying in Australia and those enrolled on Australian offshore programmes elsewhere (Knight, 2005). The focus on the location of students in the definition evolved to include the location of institutions providing the education. The definition given by the Global Alliance for Transnational Education (cited in Knight, 2005, p.6) is an example:

> *"Transnational education…denotes any teaching or learning activity in which the students are in a different country (the host country) to that in which the institution providing the education is based (the home country). This situation requires that national boundaries be crossed by information about the education, and by staff and/or education materials."*

The definition adopted by UNESCO/Council of Europe's *Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education* offers a similar description: TNHE refers to "all types of HE study programmes or set of courses of study, or educational services...in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based" (UNESCO/ the Council of Europe, 2000 in Naidoo, 2009, p.214). The Code also stipulates that TNHE programmes may be part of an educational system other than the one where they are offered or they may be offered independently of any national system. Therefore, TNHE programmes transcend national borders and education systems which is the point 'borderless education' emphasises. In reality, 'cross-border education' may be more accurate in describing the global phenomenon because borders play important roles of determining jurisdictions for trade regulations or immigration laws (Knight, 2005, p.2). Conceptually, 'borderless education' sounds attractive since it implies the disappearance of borders but this is hardly the case for

most forms of the TNHE. For the purposes of this thesis, 'cross-border education' and TNHE are not regarded differently since it is concerned with, mobility of faculties, IBC students and programmes or course materials. It is student-oriented rather than regulation-oriented. TNHE is used throughout the thesis as, in the context of IBCs, 'transnational' is arguably a more appropriate term than 'cross-border' when taking into account socio-cultural and political elements which emerge in the development of IBCs such as the importance of IBCs' ranking nationally and measures taken by host governments to preserve a sense of national identity.

The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is a global agreement administered by the World Trade Organisation introduced to further facilitate trade in services including education. The GATS four modes of trade of service are as follows (Knight, 2005):

1. Cross-border[1] supply focussing on the service crossing the border, which does not require the physical mobility of consumers. Examples are distance education and e-learning.
2. Consumption abroad which refers to the consumer moving to the country of the supplier which means students taking all or part of their education in another country.
3. Commercial presence which involves a service provider establishing a commercial facility in another country. Examples include IBCs or franchises.
4. Presence of natural persons which means persons travelling to another country on a temporary basis to provide service. Examples include professors or researchers who are flown in/out to teach or work on research projects.

This thesis does not explore a range of these modes or TNHE initiatives but concentrates on IBCs. McBurnie and Ziguras (2007) describe this international mobility of institutions and courses on a large scale as a relatively new development compared to the

[1] The meaning of 'cross-border' here is narrower than its use in TNHE or cross-border education.

international mobility of students, a more common feature in HE. The establishment of IBCs encourages local students to study for a foreign degree domestically, and reduces the outward flow of graduates and foreign exchange. Simultaneously, an IBC can contribute to the national economy through attracting international students too. Although my previous work experience involved other forms of TNHE, I focus on IBCs because I am concerned about their vulnerability and long-term sustainability. They pose a higher risk comparatively to IBC stakeholders including students who tend to invest more financially and personally in terms of identity.

According to the Cross-Border Education Research Team (2015), an IBC is "…an entity that is owned, at least in part, by a foreign education provider; operated in the name of the foreign education provider; engages in at least some face-to-face teaching; and, provides access to an entire academic program that leads to a credential awarded by the foreign education provider." The Observatory of Borderless Higher Education (OBHE) defines an IBC as "…a higher education institution that is located in another country from the institution which either originated it or operates it, with some physical presence in the host country, and which awards at least one degree in the host country that is accredited in the country of the originating institution" (Lawton & Katsomitros, 2012, p.2). This definition shares commonalities with the Cross-Border Education Research Team's (C-BERT) but it covers institutions which confer joint degrees as well. Throughout this thesis, the OBHE's definition will be used as the research refers to an IBC which confers double degrees by its parent university and the local partner[2].

In 2012, the OBHE (Lawton & Katsomitros, 2012) reported that 200 IBCs operate worldwide and 37 more would be established in 2 years. In June 2015, the C-BERT's (2015) data show that there are 234 IBCs worldwide and 21 more in development. Both the OBHE and the C-BERT record a steady rise in the number of IBCs globally.

[2] The institutional contexts will be provided later in this chapter.

The OBHE points to "a shift in activity from the Middle East to the Far East" and the increase in the number of IBCs in South Asia including India, despite uncertainty with regards to its lack of coherent laws governing foreign provision (Lawton & Katsomitros, 2012, p.2). The number of home/source countries for IBCs has risen to 35 in 2015 from 24 in 2012 whereas the number of host countries now stands at 78 up from 67 in 2012 (Lawton & Katsomitros, 2012; C-BERT, 2015).

China and Malaysia are in the top 3 host countries for TNHE activities along with Singapore (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007; Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2015). Table 1.1 shows that Malaysia at the highest spot among the top 20 countries with 76,600 higher education (HE) students pursuing a UK degree in Malaysia, while China took the third place with 49,680. Table 1.2 displays the number of IBCs in China and Malaysia.

Table 1-1: Higher education students studying wholly overseas for a UK qualification by location (top 20 countries) and level of provision 2013/14 (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2015)

	Level of provision				
	Postgraduate (research)	Postgraduate (taught)	First degree	Other undergraduate	**Total**
China	340	3810	44935	595	**49680**
Egypt	65	1245	13365	35	**14710**
Ghana	25	2605	14315	185	**17130**
Greece	140	3040	9200	835	**13220**
Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China)	280	3745	24065	290	**28385**
India	65	3040	9365	280	**12750**
Ireland	175	2940	10175	350	**13640**
Kenya	45	1210	9785	40	**11085**
Malaysia	370	4595	68315	3320	**76600**
Mauritius	35	745	11965	105	**12845**
Nigeria	185	4585	23630	55	**28455**
Oman	35	1600	13740	115	**15490**
Pakistan	25	410	42290	675	**43400**
Russia	5	2475	6635	320	**9435**
Saudi Arabia	90	1470	6515	35	**8110**
Singapore	110	4770	43940	1245	**50070**
Sri Lanka	10	3965	9015	625	**13615**
Trinidad and Tobago	90	3060	9045	620	**12815**
United Arab Emirates	205	5895	8655	130	**14885**
Zambia	45	1035	7060	20	**8160**
Total top 20 countries	**2345**	**56245**	**386010**	**9890**	**454490**

In this table 0, 1, 2 are rounded to 0. All other numbers are rounded up or down to the nearest multiple of 5.
See data intelligence

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Table 1-2: IBCs in China and Malaysia (by author with data mainly from C-BERT, 2015 and university websites)

HOST COUNTRY	CHINA	MALAYSIA
ESTABLISHED	32 (the US has the largest percentage followed by the UK)	13 (the UK has the largest percentage followed by Australia; none by the US)
DEVELOPMENT	2	3
CLOSED	0	2 (Ireland; Australia)

There has been a shift in TNHE whereby traditional host countries like China are emerging as home/source countries. TNHE actors compete in recruiting students and faculty internationally, and creating successful regional education hubs (Knight & Morshidi, 2011). Furthermore, Head (2012 in Harrison & Bond, 2012) cautions that countries which rely on a regular influx of Chinese students in HE should rethink their growth strategies because these developments would mean more students choosing to study in China rather than abroad. Table 1.3 provides a snapshot of the IBC development among the top home countries such as the US (United States of America), the UK and Australia along with China and Malaysia with their IBCs in other countries.

Table 1-3: Top home/source countries with IBCs abroad in comparison with relatively new home countries, China and Malaysia, which are traditionally host countries (by author with data mainly from C-BERT, 2015 and university websites)

HOME COUNTRY	UK	US	AUSTRALIA	CHINA	MALAYSIA
ESTABLISHED	37 (5 in Malaysia, 8 in China)	88 (0 in Malaysia, 12 in China)	14 (3 in Malaysia, 0 in China)	5 (1 in Malaysia)	8 (1 in China; 1 in the UK)
DEVELOPMENT	5	6 (1 in China)	0	2 (1 in Malaysia)	0
CLOSED	0	8	5	0	0

In 2012, China was the source of one IBC (Lawton & Katsomitros, 2012) and at present this number has grown to 5 including 1 in Malaysia with another pending development, and one more in the US (C-BERT, 2015). Xiamen University is the first mainland Chinese institution to establish an IBC in Malaysia. It expects its first enrolment of 500 students in September 2015, and projects the enrolment expansion to reach 5000 in 2020 and eventually its maximum capacity, 10,000 (Xiamen University Malaysia Campus, 2014). The OBHE (Lawton & Katsomitros, 2012) reports the growth of 'south-to-south' IBCs in which both the home and host institutions are either in the developing world or the Middle East, but the headline findings from the C-BERT data may be indicative of this trend expanding beyond the 'south-to-south' pattern (C-BERT, 2015). India, for instance, has 10 IBCs located mainly in the United Arab Emirates and also Singapore and South Africa; Malaysia has one in the UK while China is setting one up in the US. TNHE is increasingly competitive.

1.4 The value of transnational higher education

Having explored the development of IBCs from the UK home/source perspective as well as the host institution's and country's perspectives, this section presents an overview of the value of TNHE as a foreground to why this research is important. The value of education exports has generally grown over the last decade as HE institutions and governments have increasingly realised the huge potential of international markets for a range of education and training services. The focus here is on the UK as a home/source country and other host countries.

According to the research paper prepared for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), the estimated total UK

transnational education revenue is almost £496 million for 2012/13, which is significantly higher than previous annual estimates reflecting increased activity (The Careers Research & Advisory Centre, 2014). TNHE represents approximately 11% of cumulative international fee revenues to UK HE sector. British qualifications are offered in 217 countries outside the UK, totalling more than 388,000 students (The British Council, 2010 in Waters & Leung, 2012). The value to UK universities lies not only in revenue generation but also in establishing a more prominent international profile.

Of the different TNHE modes, the report commissioned by BIS indicates that postgraduate distance learning has the largest percentage of total TNHE revenue for the UK in 2012/13, i.e., 37% (excluding University of London International Programmes and the Open University) (The Careers Research & Advisory Centre, 2014). On the other hand, despite IBCs' high profile in the sector and a combined turnover of around £140 million in 2012/13, they only bring small direct revenues to UK institutions due to their legal structures and trading arrangements. An indirect revenue of £42 million annually associated with IBCs is through campus exchange students who study at the UK parent universities (The Careers Research & Advisory Centre, 2014).

Host governments seek foreign universities to establish IBCs for a number of reasons. IBCs bring diversity to the range of institutions, improve the reputation of the education system and attract more international students to the host country. Singapore, Dubai and Malaysia are among those who aim to become regional hubs through IBCs of well-established foreign universities. Malaysia, in particular, demonstrates seriousness in achieving this goal by publicly communicating the recognition of IBCs and has a dedicated agency, the Private Higher Education Management Sector (part of the Ministry of Education), with overall responsibility for TNHE (McNamara et al., 2013). TNHE is accepted as part of the Malaysian HE system, and IBCs are monitored and accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency. Verbik and Lasanowski (2007) note that the

rise of foreign students in Malaysian HE has propelled Malaysia to be one of the 'emerging contenders' of the global market for international students. Moreover, there is a perception among parents, students and employers in Malaysia that TNHE programmes are of higher quality than domestic programmes especially in private colleges (McNamara et al., 2013). However, Arokiasamy (2010) cautions against adopting ideologies and global practices relating to HE as one of the effects of globalisation without first considering developing the Malaysian higher education system according to its own rich tradition and cultures. Similarly, overseas degrees are more highly valued than those from regular Chinese universities (Bai, 2008).

Host governments seek to maintain sustainable development of human capital through improving the HE sector. One way of doing so is to encourage local institutions or corporations to partner with well-established foreign counterparts in TNHE activities as part of domestic capacity building such as is the case in China (Yang, 2008). The British Council's *Going Global* report (McNamara et al., 2013) indicates that Malaysia's overriding objective of TNHE appears to be more economic than educational, while China seems to incline towards academic and knowledge transfer outcomes which TNHE can bring to the domestic HE system.

For local institutions, the draw lies in being able to offer programmes in partnership that they could not provide alone because of their lack of resources, expertise or status. By partnering, they can take advantage of the demand for foreign qualifications and attract a higher number of students than they could on their own. Some also hope that, in the longer term, such collaboration can build their capacity to deliver their own programmes without foreign partners.

Since the 1990s, TNHE has expanded in scope and scale with competition and privatisation as the main drivers. The number of international branch campuses (IBCs), joint/double degree

programmes, twinning arrangements and other forms of TNHE has grown along with competition for international students and faculty. Although TNHE is not an innovation, in the last 10 years it has expanded largely through British, Australian and American institutions in partnership with private colleges, universities, professional associations and corporations in the host country. The UK has more international students studying for a UK degree outside of the UK than inside. In 2013-14, the number of TNHE students was 638,850 while the number of non-UK domicile students was 435,495 (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2015).

According to the British Council's *Going Global* report (McNamara et al., 2013), the underlying factors which promote TNHE are rising income levels in developing countries, technological advancements and the growing importance of intercultural skills requirements in a globalised and interdependent economy. Universities often view TNHE as a profit-making means of cashing in on unmet student demand (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007). For this reason, Altbach (2004) proposes that Western universities can be labelled as neo-colonists seeking commercial gain. However, TNHE might not be dominated by Western universities for long if Asian universities continue to climb the global university ranking tables and establish their own IBCs. Moreover, McBurnie and Ziguras (2007) argue that TNHE students are not passive recipients but rather they evaluate their options of pursuing an international education often as critical and savvy shoppers choosing the best value for their investment. They add that, although TNHE is primarily part of the private education sector in host countries, its activities are encouraged by the host governments in line with the development of their national economic goals. Furthermore, host countries have their own nation building agenda in encouraging the establishment of IBCs.

At the country level, motivations for TNHE are often different for home/source and host countries. For the former, they generate revenue or establish international research cooperation. From a host country's perspective, there are a number of factors behind the

development of TNHE apart from expanding the capacity to absorb unmet student demand. For China and Malaysia, TNHE development benefitted from the alignment of educational reforms to national economic plans to develop human capital to sustain and produce economic growth as well as to curb brain drain. In 1995, 20% of Malaysian students studying overseas cost around US$800m in currency outflow amounting to nearly 12% of Malaysia's current account deficit (Silverman, 1996 in McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007). Although home/source and host countries may differ in their objectives, they can work together to fulfil their respective interests.

It is claimed that there has been little effort in TNHE, especially in Southeast Asia, to customise the curriculum to needs of students in different countries (Donn & Al Manthri, 2010 in Wilkins et al., 2011). Despite host countries' wish to ensure a link between TNHE curricula and the national society, culture and politics, students tend to be focussed on developing a private career rather than national citizenship.

In this rapidly evolving HE sector worldwide, staying ahead of the game and global positioning are central in the competition with other countries and universities (Marginson, 2006). Universities maintain their competitiveness by competing for reputation and academic prestige (Frans van Vught, 2008 in Portnoi et al., 2013). Many do this by establishing foreign operations, and IBC in particular is a tangible sign of a university's international self-image and ambitions going beyond geographical or historical boundaries of the parent university (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997 in McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007).

These revenue-seeking operations may not have a similar level of commitment to serving the host community as at the parent university. In addition, the parent university has another public and another state to satisfy when establishing a new IBC (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007). According to Lane and Kinser (2011), these HE institutions operate like multinational corporations with off-shore

partnerships and branch campuses in overseas locations not politically bound to the nation that the home campus was initially chartered and funded to serve. They call these multinational corporate-like institutions "the most extraordinary forms of privatization in the public sector" (Lane & Kinser, 2011, p.256). In their international outreach activities, these operations are often regarded as private activities (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007). However, they are fraught with risks, and there have been high-profile closures such as New York University's TISCH School of Arts Singapore-based branch. In the event that these transnational private activities lead to a massive financial loss to public HE institutions in the UK, it is unclear as to whether there will be a bailout by the UK government as was provided for the financial services sector. IBCs are generally deemed private institutions in their host countries in contrast to their parent universities in the UK. Even so, the host governments exhibit expectations of a public nature by looking at foreign parent universities to complement domestic public universities in achieving national goals (Lane, forthcoming in Lane & Kinser, 2011).

In summary, TNHE is a significant contributor to the UK's economy and highly valuable to UK tertiary institutions to both diversify their revenue sources and enhance their international standing. TNHE activities are also closely linked with host countries' national economic policies and they attract much needed status to the region to market and develop the local HE reputation. In addition, they help stem the outflow of foreign exchange and brain drain particularly through IBCs of well-known foreign institutions. Since IBCs represent the highest level of financial investment and risk, it is especially important to consider their long-term sustainability making them the focus of the research.

1.5 Aim, questions and contributions

One way of ensuring long-term sustainability is to link the development of IBCs with the motivations and aspirations of IBC students. Thus, this research aims to investigate the reasons students choose to study at an IBC, to capture their experience during university and how their choices and experiences are reflexively translated and woven into their present and future. The principal questions were:

1. Why do IBC students (who spend part of their programme at the parent campus) choose to study at an IBC?
2. From their perspective, how does the experience impact on their employability?

The research focused on the UK as a home/source country, and China and Malaysia being among the top three host countries for transnational higher education activities (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007). The research sites were two UK source universities with their IBCs in these countries. The research was framed within the qualitative tradition. It approached the questions from a critical realist perspective using thematic analysis as a theoretical narrative tool to present a meaningful discussion of the data. Archer's (1995) analytic dualism of structure and agency underpinned the theoretical discussion of how human capital, screening/signalling and identity economics were used to explain participants' choices and experiences during university, and the link between their choices, experiences and their future employability.

In this era of global HE competition, it is important not only for IBCs to survive but also to continue to grow sustainably. It is not enough to have quantitative measures to inform institutional policy on a range of issues from student recruitment to internationalisation strategy. Not only are the global marketplace and the workplace increasingly diverse and fast-changing, the socio-political changes also occur at an accelerated pace. Since July 2015, Malaysia has been stuck in a political impasse and the economy, already

weakened by the fall in oil prices and the devaluation of the Chinese Renminbi, struggles to cope with increasing national debt, decreasing foreign reserves, increasing loss of foreign investment and the plunging ringgit, the local currency (Pilling & Atkins, 2015; Weiss, 2015; Lamb, 2015; Welsh, 2015). Both situations have positive implications for the IBCs in terms of potential enrolment increase. The emergence of a middle class in China as part of its transformation from a planned to a market economy has an impact on the economy. The rising income level in China potentially enlarges the IBC market. The political crisis may result in an increase in the IBC intake of Malaysian students who may find the weakening local currency a financial deterrent to overseas study (Sharma, 2015).

Socio-political changes can affect social values and even individual identities. It is crucial to take into account identity as it is arguably the most important factor influencing economic decisions (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010). Identity has a profound role when choosing a brand of product/service (Croll, 2006; Tian & Dong, 2010). This research can, hence, provide an identity perspective on IBC student choices and experiences. IBC stakeholders will benefit from understanding how student HE choices are not made in a vacuum but rather in a reality where socio-political, economic and cultural forces interplay with individuals' aspirations. The findings should be useful in supporting students to attain their goals for choosing to study at an IBC and assisting students in reflexively engaging with their experiences while at university and articulating the value and relevance of these experiences for their future employability.

In summary, the theoretical contribution is to consider both structural and agential powers in shaping IBC students' choices and experiences, and perspectives on how these impact their future employability. The thesis undertook qualitative research to capture the complexity of these intertwined issues/factors and to explain

them using a theoretical narrative[3]. The practical contribution is to present the answers to the research questions framed in the socio-cultural nuances which quantitative measures may not be able to unveil. Previous research has informed the TNHE field on the impact on host and home/source countries (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007; McNamara et al., 2013) and also student motivations for choosing IBCs (Chapman & Pyvis, 2006; Pyvis & Chapman, 2007; Wilkins et al., 2011). The research adds to this body of knowledge by investigating rival and sister IBC students' perspectives in the same region linking their HE choice and experience to their employability.

1.6 National contexts

Having established the aim of the research, presented the questions and contributions, this section introduces the national contexts including the socio-cultural background to clarify the wider structural properties in which these IBCs and students were located. The value of education in these contexts is also considered.

The UK has left historical imprints on both China and Malaysia. While China's encounter with the UK could be described as semi-colonial, Malaysia has a stronger connection and the impact of the colonial past is still felt today. The national contexts covered are not necessarily comparative on a parallel basis but rather focussed on country-specific areas relevant to the research.

[3] Here, a theoretical narrative is a device used to explain the answers to the 'why' and 'how' research questions using economic theories situated within a critical realist framework.

1.6.1 Malaysia

Having been a colony of the British Empire for almost 120 years, Malaysia has retained much of its British legacy in its socio-economic and political spheres. Malaysia gained independence from the British in 1957 and established the Malaysian Federation in 1963 with the inclusion of Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak. Singapore seceded from Malaysia to become the Republic of Singapore in 1965. Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo (see the map below), often referred to as East Malaysia, are different from West or Peninsular Malaysia in terms of history, culture, economy and demography[4].



Figure 1-1: A map of Malaysia (Anon, n.d.)

Malaysia's total population in 2010 was 28.3 million (91.8% citizens and the rest non-citizens). Malaysians are multi-ethnic and –religious, consisting of three major ethnic groups: *Bumiputera* [5]

[4] In Chapter 4, these differences played a part in 'pulling' two participants from East Malaysia to IBC1 located in West Malaysia.

[5] *Bumiputera* is not an ethnic group per se, but refers to a special 'indigenous' status with privileges protected in the Malaysian constitution. It is literally translated as 'sons of the soil' and it is usually ascribed to Malays and indigenous peoples of Malaysia, although in everyday life the term has been used predominantly in reference to Malays.

(67.4%), Chinese (24.6%) and Indians (7.3%) and other ethnic minorities (0.7%). Within the *Bumiputera*, Malays are the largest ethnic group in Peninsular Malaysia (63.1%) while Ibans make up 30.3% of the citizens in Sarawak and Kadazan/Dusun comprise 24.5% in Sabah (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2011). It should be noted that the Malaysian ethnicity classification was created by the colonial British to manage a diverse immigrant population, and it has remained in use post-independence (Koh, 2015). These major groups – Malays, Chinese and Indians – are not culturally homogenous within themselves. While I agree with Pong (1999) that ethnic groups are often politically constructed to serve national goals, this thesis refers to Malaysian[6] participants according to these internalised ethnic categories because they used these terms to refer to themselves.

This ethnic division of labour and economic level inherited from Malaysia's colonial past eventually led to social and political friction (Koh, 2015). From Malayan independence through to the 1960s, the majority ethnic group, the Malays, were generally economically less well-off, mainly involved in agricultural activities in rural areas. There was relatively limited state intervention until the eruption of inter-ethnic violence on 13 May 1969[7]. Policy and politics following the tragedy promoted the formation of a *Bumiputera* capitalist class. From 1971, the New Economic Policy (NEP) focussed on poverty alleviation and affirmative action. The NEP was largely successful in achieving these objectives, but it is not clear that such achievement has improved inter-ethnic relations (H.-A. Lee, 2014; Jomo K. S., 2004). Economic growth and inter-ethnic harmony were enjoyed in subsequent years until the late 1990s when the Asian financial crisis began to impact on national socio-politics. Currently, Malaysia is embroiled in a scandal involving the Prime

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[6] Please note the distinction between nationality (Malaysian) and ethnicity (Chinese or Malay). Unless specified, Malaysian denotes nationality including both Chinese and Malay participants from Malaysia.

[7] See Jomo (2004) and Jomo and Hui (2014) for more historical background.

Minister and possible misappropriation of public funds (Ng, 2015) and the complexity of resolving this issue can arguably be attributed to this concentration of power and lack of effective checks and balances among the different branches of the government (Weiss, 2015).

Malaysia has been ruled by *Barisan Nasional* (BN) or National Front, a coalition dominated by the United Malays National Organisation since independence from the British. In 2013, BN retained power with three fifths of parliamentary seats by the following means despite losing the popular vote[8]:

> *"Historically gerrymandered electoral constituencies, a virtual monopoly of the broadcast and print media, abuse of fiscal, police and other government resources and often blatant political patronage and corruption over decades have been effectively deployed to retain political power."* (Jomo & Hui, 2014, p.xv)

Vision 2020[9], the brainchild of the fourth Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohammad, has been the drive behind the changes in all aspects of national development including the education sector (Tan, 2002). Its aim is to enrol 40% of the student age cohort in HE by 2020. This set the stage for HE reform to facilitate the transition from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1997 in Tan, 2002). The rising demand for HE and the need to produce highly skilled workers for a knowledge-based economy have led to the massification of HE (H. G. Lee, 2014). Tan (2002, pp.83–91), in examining the global forces which influenced the restructuring of the Malaysian private HE in the 1990s, identifies four key developments:

[8] It was not part of the research design to time phase 1 interviews in 2012 and phase 2 interviews after the 2013 General Election. Nevertheless, the influence of the election was evident on at least one participant.
[9] A long-term plan proposed by Mahathir, the fourth Prime Minister, to propel Malaysia into a developed country status by 2020.

1. The effects of trade liberalisation on the Malaysian economic structure from dependence on agriculture to manufacturing and service sectors, and the need for the labour market to match this shift;
2. The rising importance of the global economy and the opening up of other regional countries for foreign investment weakening Malaysia's competitiveness;
3. The emergence of the knowledge economy and the Malaysian government's aim to capitalise on this next wave of economic structure; and
4. Human capital development to ensure Malaysia's competitiveness globally.

Because of increasing public education cost arising from the government's affirmative action policies towards *Bumiputeras* and the lack of capacity within HE nationally, the government has encouraged the development of the private education sector and adopted a cost sharing system where students and parents are responsible for an increasing share of the cost of undertaking HE by replacing government scholarships with loans. Some argue that Malaysian HE reforms were executed in response to both the *Bumiputera* and non-*Bumiputera* middle class among other reasons (Aihara, 2009; Tan, 2002). Thus, economic factors have been the imperative behind HE reforms (Tan, 2002). They are:

1. The drive to export and substitute import of HE;
2. the drive to shift the burden of financing Malay students from public to private funding; and
3. the inadequacy of public HE and the complementary role of the private HE sector to produce the quantity and quality of graduates suitable for the labour market.

One thing of note is the dichotomy between public and private HE based on ethnicity, tuition cost, language of instruction and socio-economic status of students (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007). Presently

almost 50% of the post-secondary enrolment is in the private HE sector (Ong Kian Meng in The Malaysian Insider, 2015).

A key factor influencing the national educational policy is the tension between developing the competitiveness of domestic universities globally, especially in attracting international students, and preserving national identity together with enforcing affirmative action policy in favour of *Bumiputeras.* The quota system in public universities ensures that student enrolment reflects the overall ethnic composition of Malaysia (H. G. Lee, 2014), and there is also a high demand for private HE among the non-*Bumiputeras* who study in private institutions in English while the public universities are mainly filled with Malay students taught in *Bahasa Malaysia*.

Transnational higher education (TNHE) is seen particularly by the public HE sector to be a challenge to the traditional conception of education as a public good, and a widening ethnic and linguistic gap between the public and private HE sectors. The government established the Malaysian Qualifications Agency and put in place measures. It addressed the concern of TNHE's 'foreign characteristics' by requiring all students (whether international or Malaysian) to enrol in compulsory general studies modules as a precondition for the award of certificates, diplomas and degrees in private HE institutions. This is to promote knowledge of Malaysia, moral values and civic mindedness in line with the national educational philosophy (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012).

The Malaysian government's commitment towards HE is seen in total government expenditure of 20-25% from 1996 to 2010 (Foong, 2008 in Sengupta, 2015). In 2012, the government devoted the largest proportion of its budget, 16%, to the Ministry of Education (Sengupta, 2015). Enrolment in HE grew between 2000 and 2010 among all ethnic groups (see Figure 2). In 2010, the total enrolment in Malaysian HE was 1,134,134 (Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia in Project Atlas, 2010a).

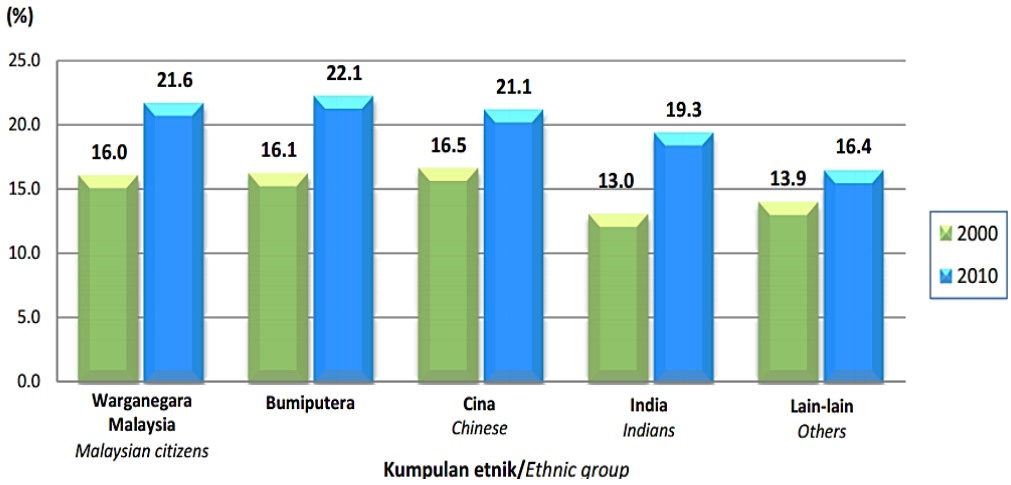

Figure 1-2: Ethnic distribution of Malaysians aged 20 years and above with higher education in 2000 and 2010 (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2013, p.7)

Apart from catering to its national needs for human capital development, the government promotes Malaysia as a regional hub of HE. To realise this ambition, policies have been implemented to facilitate and regulate incoming TNHE and as such, Malaysia was exceptional among 25 countries in the *British Council's Going Global 2013* report for its efforts to recognise TNHE qualifications (McNamara et al., 2013). Malaysia has been successful in attracting several foreign universities mainly from Australia and the UK to set up IBCs. The number of IBCs has expanded from 3 in 2001 to 9 in 2013 (Ortiz, 2014).

On the whole, Malaysia has succeeded in becoming a regional HE hub (McNamara et al., 2013). International students represent 6% of the domestic student population and TNHE programmes are estimated to be 15% of the total HE programmes. Malaysia had a total international student enrolment of 86,923 in 2010: 24,218 in public institutions and 62,705 in private institutions (Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia in Project Atlas, 2010b). The top three sending countries in 2010 were Iran (13.6%), China (11.8%) and Indonesia (11.4%) (Project Atlas, 2010a; Project Atlas, 2010b). One of the Malaysia Education Blueprint's targets for 2025 is to

increase HE enrolment rates from 48% to 70% and international student recruitment to 250,000 (ICEF Monitor, 2015).

1.6.2 China

For 30 years after the founding of the People's Republic of China, a process of destratification was undertaken to create a communist society (Lu, 2010). People were assigned either to the working class or the peasant class.

China has been undergoing a huge systemic transition and tremendous economic growth since economic reforms in the late 1970s. An enormous shift in ideology and policy within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) began in 2000 when Jiang Zemin (then Secretary General of CCP) broadened the CCP's base of power beyond the working class to include entrepreneurs, intellectuals and technocrats (Li, 2010). The state-sponsored discourse of the middle class is used to promote economic growth, consumption, and an improving standard of living while simultaneously mediate the growing social inequality (Goodman, 2013). With the economic development, the demand for highly skilled labour has also risen. The removal of the job assignment system (*danwei*) led to increased instrumentalism as university students are free to choose their own career paths (Bai, 2010). People are willing to invest in HE as a means to secure both a higher income and status in society, and they can afford to do so.

Despite the rapid expansion of China's HE sector since the 1980s, it would benefit from increasing capacity for more access (Yang, 2008) and improving the quality of its graduates to match the needs of the labour market (Morgan & Wu, 2011). According to Zheng (2013), the expansion had not been intended to improve the quality of HE or

the labour force, but rather to stimulate domestic demand, relieve fiscal strain and delay young people's entrance to employment[10].

The vast majority of mainland Chinese households have enjoyed increases in income for more than 25 years (Fewsmith, 2003 in Liu et al., 2010). China has moved from a low-income country to a lower-middle-income country (Lu, 2010). In 2001, a survey by China's National Statistics Bureau showed that more than 60% of Chinese families spend one-third of their income in their children's education, second only to food (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). In 2014, education remained the second highest in terms of Chinese nationwide expenditure after food expenses (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2014). In Confucian philosophy, education is highly valued for its power in self-cultivation and evidently, a good education is still highly esteemed by mainland Chinese parents and students, who perceive that it will lead to a better future (Duan, 1997 and Ashley & Jiang, 2000 in Yang, 2007). A graduate with a foreign degree is seen as having better skills, being more employable, often earning a higher salary and more likely to be promoted (Yang, 2007; Bai, 2008). In contrast to the Malaysian context, previous research demonstrate that pursuing a postgraduate study is a trend in China and it is even better if it is a foreign degree (Wang & Lowe, 2011; Bai, 2008).

China's HE has expanded rapidly since the 1990s. In 1995, the number of undergraduate enrolment at regular Chinese universities was 805,000, and in 2013, the number rose to 6,387,000 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2014). According to Zhao and Sheng (2010), two factors led to HE expansion: an increase in the number of secondary[11] school leavers and a rise in the proportion continuing their education at the tertiary level.

[10] This was seen as a temporary measure to alleviate unemployment among the large number of high school graduates.

[11] Malaysia and China have different educational systems prior to tertiary education. For consistency's sake, 'secondary school' is used to denote the schooling period before higher education for all participants.

The alignment of the HE sector to national economic plans from 1985 through educational policy reforms, such as decentralisation, changed the pattern of financing and functions (Zhao & Sheng, 2010) and enhanced the role of the market in HE (Yang, 2010). Although marketisation meant a decline in government contribution, it had by no means hampered the transition of elite HE to mass HE. The first wave of reform was to ensure that the alignment of HE to national economy would provide the human capital needed for economic growth, particularly engineers and managers (Zhao & Sheng, 2010).

The second wave of reform, commenced in 1993, devolved financial responsibility from ministries to provincial and local governments, and the *Decision on the Development of the Tertiary Industry in 1992* stated that education was a tertiary industry. Those who invested in it would own and benefit from it. Tuition fees were raised.

A concurrent change in the labour market was a move from a unified national job assignment system whereby employees were assigned to a position (*danwei)* for life to a two-way selection system, whereby students could choose what positions to apply for. This is a huge shift from earlier generations' experience of employment security to current generation's experience of a more uncertain job market following the HE expansion resulting in a higher number of graduates entering the labour market(Tomlinson, 2005). Therefore, mainland Chinese university graduates are likely to be the first generation in their family to face a transition from the university to a workplace with which their parents have little or no familiarity to guide them and this is even more so if their aspiration lies in seeking a better life abroad.

Then in 1999, the government proposed the idea of education as a stimulus for economic growth. Transnational education arose in China in the mid-1980s, and it expanded rapidly after China's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001 (Yang,

2008). The transfer of ownership from the public to the private sector was affirmed through the *Decision on Reform and Development of Basic Education in 2001* and *the Decision on Further Reform of Basic Education in Rural Areas in 2002* (Yang, 2010).

The third wave of HE reform is driven by China's ambition to enhance its competitiveness globally. Through the 985 and 211 projects, the government encourages premier universities to strive for world-class excellence. China's plan is to improve its own knowledge production capacity through these 985 and 211 flagship HE institutions, and import good practices from foreign universities. Therefore, China welcomes Sino-foreign joint ventures to develop academic programmes through which domestic universities have a hands-on learning experience to improve capacity, status and innovation in a short time (Garrett, 2004 in Yang, 2010). In this way, the Chinese government has promoted TNHE to accelerate the process of human capital building and ultimately economic development.

The British Council's *Going Global* report rates Malaysia as offering 'well above average' TNHE opportunity while China is regarded as 'average' (McNamara et al., 2013, p.6). One reason for the latter's rating is specific legislations governing transnational education in China which impose significant restrictions on home/source institutions, including *the Interim Provisions for Chinese–Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools 1995* and *the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese–Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools 2003*. These regulations require foreign institutions to partner with Chinese institutions and initially that these partnerships must not be for-profit, that 50% of members of the governing body of the institution must be Chinese citizens and the president or the equivalent must be a Chinese citizen residing in China, that the basic language of instruction should be Chinese, and that tuition fees may not be raised without approval (Garrett, 2004 in Yang, 2010). Compared with the provisions in 1995, the 2003 regulations have some important features, including: extending

government encouragement from vocational to HE; strongly encouraging Chinese universities to collaborate with prestigious foreign universities in offering new academic programs to improve the quality of teaching and learning; importing excellent overseas educational resources to local institutions; and allowing profit making (Yang, 2010).

From the domestic institutions' perspective, TNHE presents an opportunity to offer a programme in partnership that they could not otherwise have provided alone because of their lack of resources, expertise and inadequate prestige to attract students. Through TNHE, they can benefit from the demand for foreign degrees and the shortage of places at local universities. In the long-run, they aim to develop their own capacity to deliver their own programmes without foreign partners (Yang, 2010).

Despite the massification of HE, domestic universities cannot meet the demand. Furthermore, a high number of unemployed high school graduates, over 3 million, after the economic slowdown due to the 1997 Asian financial crisis was another motivation to expand HE so that there was an alternative for them (Zhao & Sheng, 2010). The Chinese government gradually warmed to the idea of foreign institutions operating in the country, especially after China's entry to the WTO. The British Council's Going Global report (McNamara et al., 2013) suggests that providing access to mainland students is not the main aim of TNHE from the government's perspective, but rather the Ministry of Education views TNHE as part of the strategy to increase international students to 500,000 in 2020 from 320,000 in 2012.

1.6.3 Socio-cultural background of participants

1.6.3.1 Malaysia

Malaysia's three major ethnic groups have distinctive cultural characteristics. Although Malays form the largest group, there were only one Malay participant and seven Chinese Malaysian participants[12]. Because an IBC is a private institution, this ratio is not unexpected since Malays tend to go to public universities, *Bumiputera* institutions[13] or universities abroad on government and private sponsorship due to the privileges they enjoy under Malaysia's preferential educational policies (Agadjanian & Liew, 2005).

Ethnicity or race (more commonly used in Malaysia)[14] is a fluid socio-political concept in multi-ethnic Malaysia. Article 160(2) of the Constitution of Malaysia defines a Malay as a "person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom…" (The Commissioner of Law Revision, Malaysia, 1957). Hirschman (1987) points out that a convert to Islam of any ancestry who adopts Malay language and custom can be considered a Malay. Malay traditional culture does not emphasise social mobility, economic success and academic success as strongly as the Chinese do (Pong, 1993).

Most Chinese Malaysians are descendants of early 19th century Chinese immigrants[15] who fled severe famine ravaging China then[16].

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[12] There were no Indian Malaysian participants. It could be socio-economic reasons why there were none but this is outside the remit of the research.
[13] E.g., Universiti Teknologi Mara is a *Bumiputera* only university (V. Anbalagan, 2013; Lee & Khalid, 2015).
[14] "Race" refers to the physical or biological such as skin colour or other visible physical attributes, and "ethnicity" refers to the cultural in social sciences, but these terms are generally used interchangeably in Malaysia (Pong, 1999).
[15] These historical and environmental factors made the Chinese strong and resilient in comparison with the Malays whose own hereditary and environmental influence made them weaker according to Mahathir (1970 in Pong, 1999), the fourth Prime Minister. Such a sentiment was prevalent

Although most intended to return, by 1949 the CCP began to rule in the homeland which meant they would have lost all their hard-earned wealth if they had repatriated. Consequently, many remained in Malaya [17] after overcoming hardship and over generations lifted themselves from their initial low social status towards a higher socio-economic position through education and entrepreneurship. It is often the case that Chinese parents stress the importance of education and academic achievement, and encourage their children to pursue HE.

1.6.3.2 China

The socio-cultural context for mainland Chinese participants is different to the Malaysians in that ethnicity is not a major issue. Ethnicity is not as prominent as the rich-poor or urban-rural divide is when it comes to access to HE, but neither was a focus in the research. This is because participants were homogenous in that they were of the Han ethnic majority and from a middle class background.

In the late 1970s, Deng Xiaoping came to power in China. He proposed developing a *xiaokang* society in the 1980s. The concept of *xiaokang* has become a development model during China's modernisation. *Xiaokang* describes "a realistic and competitive society, in which all members and their families own their private resources and live a life based on law and governed by elites" (Lu, 2010, p.111). This concept encourages the growth of a middle class, and China's economic reforms have offered opportunities to people of different classes to pursue a *xiaokang* life. After the

among the Malay politicians after the independence when major policies were formulated.

[16] See Zhu (2006) for more historical background.

[17] Malaysia was formed in 1963 with the inclusion of Sabah and Sarawak (and Singapore which seceded in 1965), and was previously known as Malaya or *Tanah Melayu*.

1980s, a new middle class[18] emerged in China (Li, 2000 in Sheng, 2014a). The middle class makes up 16% of the workforce in China, i.e., 120 million according to an official government report in 2009 (Chinese economic news, March 3 2009 in Li, 2010). China's rapid growth of mass HE has contributed significantly to upward social mobility and the expansion of the middle class. While the traditional class strata in China were based on occupational classification with an emphasis on individual income, now the individual's educational level is an added factor (see Sheng, 2014a, p.1) influenced by the drive for economic growth and the rise of materialism in China (Bai, 2008).

China's transition from elite to mass HE, the transfer of HE financing to students and the end of the *danwei* (job assignment) system, which previously guaranteed employment, has made graduate unemployment a real prospect. Despite China's massive economic growth, it has not generated sufficient demand for graduate jobs. Therefore, unemployment of university graduates has become a huge problem after the massification of HE. The annual enrolment in HE has increased from 1 million in 1998 to approximately 7 million in 2013 and the number of unemployed graduates has apparently risen to 2 million in 2013 (Liu, 2013 in Chan, 2015). Graduates from second- and third-tier institutions often have to accept a salary similar to or even lower than those of uneducated migrant labourers (Zheng, 2013).

Social change in China is leading to value shifts. One of *xiaokang* society's 'side effects' is a lack of social and public responsibility which is often the case when people become acquisitive, materialistic and tend to be indifferent to contributing to the society (Lu, 2010, p.114). Research shows that younger generations in

[18] The concept of a Chinese 'middle class' is a highly contested one in part because economic disparities are so wide that some scholars call it a pseudo-concept (*wei gainian*) (Li, 2010, p.18). My stance is similar to Chinese sociologists who acknowledge economic disparities and social tensions underlying the Chinese society but argue that the concept is still helpful in trying to understand the relationship between social structure and economic growth (Li, 2010).

China are more individualistic than older ones (Sun & Wang, 2010 in Zeng & Greenfield, 2015). In a competitive market economy, young people have to be more assertive, self-dependent and autonomous so they are encouraged to develop attributes which help them to be more adaptive in a market-oriented society (Yu, 2002 and Chen & Chen, 2010 in Zeng & Greenfield, 2015). This could be one reason why parents and students are more receptive to IBCs and studying abroad as there is a perception that Western education promotes such qualities.

In summary, the historical and current events in both countries have an important influence in the way people see their present life and the future of their children. These socio-cultural forces often lead them to seek for economic security and a good life elsewhere when the socio-political situation in their home country appears to threaten their future well-being. Next, I turn to the value of education for Malaysians and mainland Chinese and how this links to choosing to study at IBCs.

1.6.4 The value of education

In Malaysia demand for education is high among all major ethnic groups. Despite the government subsidy for education, many schooling expenses are borne by Chinese and Indian families. Among the Malays, these costs are substantially covered by the state through means such as scholarships and quotas. The average annual amount spent by each household on children's education is highest among the Chinese, intermediate among Indians, and the least among the Malays (Rahaman, 1992 in Sudha, 1997).

While demand for education is strong in Malaysia, it does not figure as highly in nationwide expenditure as it does in China. It is not even in the top five groups of goods and services according to the latest Malaysian household expenditure trend (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2010). The difference could be attributed to

socio-political elements in China such as the one-child policy coupled with the social expectation of caring for parents in their old age. Although a similar social expectation exists in Malaysia, most mainland Chinese, who are the sole child in their family, do not have any sibling to share the responsibility of looking after both parents in contrast to their Malaysian counterparts who are more likely to have at least one sibling. Thus, one explanation for the higher level of expenditure on their child's education is it is an investment by mainland Chinese parents for their own future (Qian & Smyth, 2011).

Although there is evidence of credentials inflation in Malaysia, it is not as acute as in China (Sin, 2009). In China, often a Master degree as well as a first degree are required for graduate employment (Goodman, 2013).

The Chinese social structure is fluid and less stable due to its transitional nature so Chinese society is likely to be more socially mobile compared to highly stratified societies such as the UK (Sheng, 2014a). Chung et al. (2009) suggest that Chinese cultural values have an impact on students' choice of international tertiary education. Education is highly valued by the Chinese society which views it as a key ingredient in social mobility. The level of parental education and family income have positive effects on a student's higher education enrolment (Qian & Smyth, 2011). Tsang (2013) discovers that the reason the mainland Chinese second-generation middle class chose TNHE after failing to be admitted to Chinese elite universities is to gain access to overseas study and by doing so, reproduce the generational social status and mobility which meant the middle class benefitted the most from Chinese HE reforms.

In Malaysia, education is likewise immensely valued but for different socio-cultural reasons as reflected in Smart (1988, p.26):

> *"Despite its relatively small population of 16 million, Malaysia has in excess of 60,000 students overseas – perhaps the largest single national overseas student population in the*

world. This is the outcome of Malaysian history – for Malaysian society, politics and hence education policy is the complex product of its colonial and multiracial heritage."

There is little agreement on what the Malaysian middle class constitutes of in the literature except that it is heterogeneous and HE is considered one component by which the middle class is identified (Aihara, 2009). Although it is also a difficult concept to pin down in the Malaysian context, it is still a useful one to refer to the main social class whom IBC student recruitment is targeted at. Education is not only essential for upward social mobility nationally but also for an increasing number of people regardless of ethnicity, education is seen as a possible passage for emigration to a better future due to income difference, professional opportunities and better education opportunities (Merican, 2015; Ehambaranathan et al., 2015).

Generally, education is highly valuable to both these developing nations particularly among the middle class who views it as increasingly vital to socio-economic mobility domestically as well as across the world. Particularly for those who aspire to work for a multinational company domestically, or seek employment, postgraduate study or emigration overseas, an internationally recognised UK degree conferred by an IBC is the first step towards that. IBCs' tuition fees are also much higher than local universities, so by deciding to study at an IBC, students and their parents make a significant investment and place their trust in the IBC.

Next, the contexts of the IBCs and their parent universities along with their local partners will be presented.

1.7 Institutional contexts[19]

> *"Some of these institutions in the United Kingdom have now launched overseas campuses, the existence of which makes the student experience question all the more complicated and demanding." (Humfrey, 2009 in Humfrey, 2013, p.162)*

This section introduces the broad institutional contexts. Further more detailed information on these university sites and their IBC cohorts is given in Chapter 3.

Parent University 1 (PU1) and Parent University 2 (PU2) are members of the Russell Group[20] in the UK. PU1 and PU2 were ranked in the top 100 and 200 respectively in QS World University Rankings 2014/15 (QS, 2015). In 2013-14, PU1 was in the top 10 list of recruiters of international students in the UK with a total number exceeding 7,500 while PU2 was in the top 20 list with over 6,000 international students based on the Higher Education Statistics Agency's data (UK Council for International Student Affairs, 2015). In 2014-15, non-UK students at PU1 number over 8,500. Two years after PU1 founded an international branch campus (IBC) in China, PU2 followed suit. They are both public higher education institutions in the UK while their IBCs are private institutions in the host countries.

Between 2000 and 2005, PU1 established International Branch Campus 1 (IBC1) and International Branch Campus 2 (IBC2) in Malaysia and China respectively. Recently PU1 entered into partnership with a prestigious Chinese institution to set up an academy (hereafter the Academy) which confers joint degrees of both institutions. The Academy is not within the purview of the research because it was established after its commencement and did not have any participants who fall within the research criteria within

[19] Some sources are not cited here to maintain anonymity of the institutions.
[20] The Russel group comprises of 24 universities in the UK with a shared reputation for academic prestige.

the time frame for data collection. Furthermore, it seems to be treated differently from its sister institutions (IBC1 and IBC2) which clearly form part of the university family and share its brand and name. By contrast, the Academy is not named as one of PU1's campuses but is labelled as an 'advanced academy'. While IBC1 and IBC2 are both purpose-built campuses, the Academy is a physical entity at the Chinese partner institution.

PU1 was invited by the Malaysian government to establish IBC1, an incorporated partnership with two Malaysian corporations which complied with Malaysian law governing IBC establishment. In order to obtain approval from the Malaysian Foreign Investment Committee, the joint venture company must meet the requirement of *Bumiputera* participation of at least 30%, with the remaining 70% held by foreign interests or together with local interests. In addition, an application for approval and licence by the Minister for Higher Education were required and like all private universities in Malaysia, IBC2 is a private company. PU1 owns a 29% stake, and the joint venture agreement confers PU1 total autonomy in academic matters. The Malaysian partners' shareholding is mostly held by Malaysian investors. IBC1 welcomed its first batch of over 80 students and at present, the student population has reached over 4,500 (including over 1000 international students).

With the approval of the Ministry of Education, IBC2 was founded by PU1 with its Chinese partner, a local key player in the education sector. IBC2's first intake was over 200 students, and at present the number has increased to over 6,000 (including over 500 international students). PU1 is responsible for academic matters such as providing teaching and learning resources while its Chinese partner for IBC2 assumes responsibility for the construction of the campus, management of the facilities, and provision of services such as IT, dining halls and dormitories. The municipal government as a third partner provided land for IBC use; otherwise, it would have been impossible to have a campus.

PU2 established International Branch Campus 3 (IBC3) with an elite Chinese university two years after IBC2's establishment. IBC3 is located in a higher education (HE) town in an industrial park. IBC3 was officially approved by the Ministry of Education, China and accepted around 160 students in its first intake. IBC3 had grown to 7000 (out of which 240 were international students) by 2014. IBC3 was constructed with the help of a municipal government. It is accredited to develop and deliver programmes which lead to a PU2 degree. Most undergraduate programmes involve a double degree: an award from PU2 and one from its Chinese partner.

The local partner's status in the Chinese context is significant as it is either a Chinese HE institution or an educational services company engaged in providing tertiary education as is the case for all the IBCs in China. In contrast, the Malaysian partners involved in IBC1 are corporations with a diversified portfolio ranging from real estate, pharmaceutical, energy and construction.

1.8 Thesis organisation

Chapter 2 presents a survey of the literature reporting previous research on TNHE with an emphasis on IBCs by examining:

- What is investigated? (which aspect of IBCs is researched and the scope of the research done);
- Where and who is investigated? (region and participants); and
- How it is investigated? (methods, methodology, theoretical framework).

Chapter 3 compares the quantitative and qualitative research traditions and different paradigms in order to situate the research. Critical realism is considered as a methodological approach for understanding reality and knowledge. The research design and

methods employed to gather and analyse data along with ethical considerations are discussed.

Chapter 4 reports the data and discusses findings relevant to the first research question and its preliminary question and Chapter 5 does the same for the second research question. Finally, Chapter 6 offers concluding remarks about the research findings and contributions including reflections, limitations and possible future research.

1.9 Chapter summary

In summary, Chapter 1 has looked at the development of TNHE with a focus on IBCs: what, how, why and to what extent they have grown globally, and the value of TNHE to home/source and host countries and institutions. It has proposed that due to the value of IBCs to their stakeholders and their susceptibility to high financial and reputational risk, they need to be sustainable in the long-term. It has proposed that in order to ensure long-term sustainability of IBCs, the motivations and aspirations of their main stakeholders, IBC students, should be considered to ensure enrolment rates, and to measure socio-cultural benefits to them personally. Next, Chapter 2 will provide a survey of previous research on this to situate the research in the field and identify gaps which it aims to meet. It also includes a discussion of the theoretical approach.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter presented the development of transnational higher education (TNHE) with a focus on international branch campuses (IBCs), and the value of TNHE activities for the home/source country, the UK and the host countries, China and Malaysia, and their participating institutions. This chapter considers literature on IBCs particularly student choice, experience and employability. It also takes into account literature on critical realism and economic theories of human capital, screening/signalling and identity. It should be noted that whilst all reading endeavours have informed the research in some way, a selection of literature which is most pertinent is used.

The purpose of this literature review is to examine what others have written on the research problem, what theoretical approaches, methodologies and methods they have employed, what findings they have made, and what knowledge and research gaps there are. From these gaps, I will show which ones I intend to fill and how the specific research questions are derived.

There is general agreement that TNHE data availability is insufficient (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2015) and TNHE is under-researched (Yang, 2008). Since TNHE is maturing in some host countries with regulations and quality assurance systems in place, there has been an improvement in access to sources, and this is reflected in the range of literature published over the last two decades. Research and publications on IBCs have grown. The trend in what has been published about TNHE and those on IBCs specifically is mainly concerned with:

- their development and impact (Lawton & Katsomitros, 2012; Katsomitros, 2012; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007; McNamara et al., 2013; McNamara & Knight, 2014),

- their management (Kinser & Lane, 2014; McBurnie & Pollock, 2000; Bolton & Nie, 2010),
- particular IBCs detailing their history and background, partnership with local institutions/corporations, mission and curriculum among other aspects (Feng, 2013; Banks & McBurnie, 1999; Sidhu & Christie, 2014; Ennew & Yang, 2009),
- host countries and their national goals involving IBCs (Cheng et al., 2013; Knight & Morshidi, 2011; Knight, 2014; Mok, 2011),
- student choices and recruitment (Pyvis & Chapman, 2007; Wilkins et al., 2011; Wilkins et al., 2012b; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011a; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011b),
- student experiences including teaching and learning, identity formation and student satisfaction (Wilkins et al., 2012a; Humfrey, 2013; O'Mahony, 2014; Mok & Xu, 2008),
- parental expectations and influence on choosing IBCs (Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Fang & Wang, 2014; Wilkins et al., 2012b),
- local and global tensions or issues involving IBCs and parent universities (Chan, 2013; Knight, 2014; J. T. Lee, 2014; Owens & Lane, 2014), and
- IBC characteristics' impact on students (Knight, 2011; Wilkins & Huisman, 2015).

In 2013-14, the number of TNHE students (638,850) exceeded the number of non-UK domicile students (435,495) (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2015). Yet when comparing the literature published on TNHE students on UK programmes with international students in UK higher education (HE), there is a vast amount of existing research representing the latter group but significantly less for the former. The main stakeholders of IBCs are students because without demand, there would have been no interest in the investment and establishment of IBCs. The recent closure of several IBCs was due to low enrolments. Therefore, the issue of

whether to establish an IBC or how to ensure its long-term survival must be preceded by asking what student motivations for choosing an IBC might be. Student choice of HE is connected to student experience, either their expectation of it before university commences or perception of it during university. Because the rationale for investigating IBCs is a concern for their vulnerability, IBC students' perceptions of their employability should also be examined. It is not only important to understand their reasons for choosing an IBC, but also to identify if there are concerns about IBC graduate outcomes. Hence for the purposes of this thesis, the literature discussed here is confined to previous research on student choice, experience and employability, and within these, I will locate the research.

2.2 Student choice

There has been much research on international student HE choice (Rounsaville, 2011; Abubakar et al., 2010; Bodycott, 2009; Choudaha et al., 2012; Chung et al., 2009; Gong & Huybers, 2015). By comparison, there has not been as much on TNHE student choice, particularly IBCs (Wilkins et al., 2011) albeit it is a growing body of literature. Given that IBCs are often in countries with less established reputation for HE, it is essential to discover why students decide to study there. This section concentrates on student choice literature in the IBC context. The table below summarises the key research and findings, methods and theories employed.

Table 2-1: IBC student choice literature (by author)

Source	Site	Host country	Local Partner	Foreign Partner	Method	Theory
Pyvis and Chapman (2007)	IBC	Malaysia	N/A	Australian university	An exploratory unstructured interviews with 26 students & in-depth semi-structured interviews with 8 of them.	Positional/self-transformative investments; Wenger's multidimensional identity
Malaysian students made positional investment while non-Malaysians chose IBC as a self-transformative investment.						
Wilkins et al (2011)	IBCs	UAE	Various	Various	Quantitative: 320 IBC students	Push-pull theory
A revised model of international student destination choice, which incorporates two distinct sets of push and pull factors—one that applies to the home campuses of Western universities and one that applies to IBCs, is proposed.						
Tsang (2013)	Joint-venture private univer-sity	China	N/A	N/A	15 in-depth interviews with parents and their children; ethnographic data.	Weberian, Neo-Weberian & Bourdieuian concept of socioeconomic status, sociocultural & cultural capital inadequate to explain the reproduction of social class in China. Social institutions like danwei & hukou need to be considered.
Parents used guanxi to send children to TNHE institutions as a stepping stone to study abroad to secure a generational reproduction of social class & mobility.						
Wilkins & Huisman (2015)	9 interna-tional schools in the UAE	N/A	N/A	N/A	407 students	Images of home versus branch campus
Focused on the sources of information and influence that impact upon the images of international branch campuses formed by potential students. It was found that personal recommendations and feedback was the strongest factor.						
Ahmad & Buchanan (2015)	IBCs	Malaysia	Various	Various	A survey of (218 students) & interviews (18 students)	Push-pull theory
Motivations for studying at an IBC are a function of the combined pull–push factors (i.e. institution and academic reputations, marketability of the degree, low tuition fees compared to home institution, low cost of living, safe country for study, similarity of education systems as well as cultural proximity). The success of an IBC is shown to be influenced strongly by the destination's costs, attractiveness, and location.						

In investigating pull factors which draw students to IBCs, Wilkins et al. (2011) find that main motivations of IBC students at the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are different from those who chose to study at home campuses (see the figure below). Rather than assuming IBC students' motivations in the UAE are the same as IBC students elsewhere, the position of my research is to inquire into whether there are factors specific to the research context.

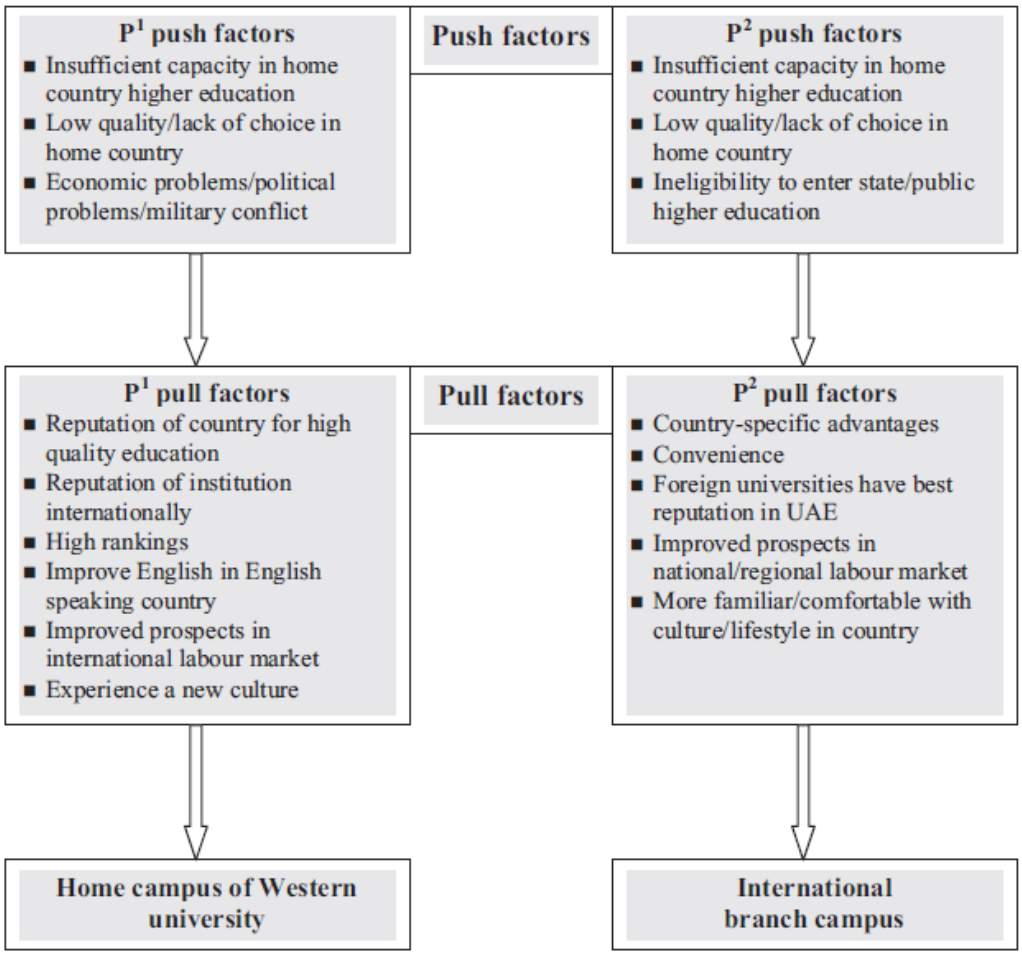

Figure 2-1: Push-pull models of international student destination choice by Wilkins et al. (2011, p.16)

Ahmad and Buchanan (2015) state that little is known about students' criteria in choosing IBCs and they examined this issue specifically in Malaysia. They also adapted the push-pull theory to suit their context. However, their adaptation does not include student or parental characteristics. The participants in their study

were diverse (Malaysians and international students). The pull–push factors (i.e. institution reputation, marketability of the degree, low tuition fees compared to home institution, low cost of living, safety, similarity of education systems as well as cultural proximity) reflected the diversity of their participants. However, their discussion pertains to the recruitment of international students in Malaysia.

Most use either a mixed method approach (usually using interviews to inform questionnaire development or using a survey to construct an interview schedule) or a large scale survey with at least 100 respondents. Ahmad and Buchanan (2015) employed a multi-method approach of conducting a large scale survey followed by semi-structured qualitative interviews with a small group selected from the survey. Pyvis and Chapman (2007) stand out for 1) adopting a qualitative approach by which a small number of participants at an Australian offshore campus were interviewed; and 2) applying a theoretical framework based on Wenger's concept of multidimensional identity. The other notable exception is Tsang (2013) who used in-depth interview and ethnographic data of students and their parents, at a joint-venture private university in China. Tsang employed Weberian, Neo-Weberian and Bourdieuian concepts of socio-cultural capital to examine how middle-class parents used their social capital[21] in their children's HE choices.

Student choice is often analysed using human capital theory, specifically the expected economic return (Yang et al., 2013), the push-pull theory (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Li & Bray, 2007; Fang & Wang, 2014; Wilkins et al., 2012b), choice experiment method (Gong & Huybers, 2015), and social capital (Tsang, 2013; Sheng, 2014a). In the context of IBCs, the push-pull theory is the primary theoretical framework used to explain drivers behind student

[21] Social capital in this thesis refers to the actual or potential resources which are linked to membership in a group and this includes the conversion of academic credentials into economic capital. The consequences of social capital investment are reproduction of privilege and upward social mobility (Waters & Leung, 2012 drawn from Bourdieu, 1986 & 1996).

decisions. Research on students with a Confucian heritage is incomplete without taking into account parental characteristics and influence (Bodycott, 2009; Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Spinks & Wong, 2010) and so, Fang and Wang (2014) extend the push-pull theory by incorporating student and parental characteristics in their study of TNHE student choices. Wagner and Fard (2009) also indicate parental influence along with friends and peers as a factor in Malaysian students HE choices.

Previous research looked at TNHE student motivations as a whole in relation to one particular TNHE institution (Pyvis & Chapman, 2007; Tsang, 2013; Fang & Wang, 2014), or several TNHE institutions in one country (Wilkins et al., 2011; Bhati et al., 2014; Ahmad & Buchanan, 2015). One exception is Wilkins and Huisman (2015) who investigated the image construction of IBCs among prospective students, specifically how the image of the home campus influences the formation of IBC image and how this affect student choices. In general, most do not focus solely on home students of the host country or international students (Pyvis & Chapman, 2007; Ahmad & Buchanan, 2015; Wilkins et al., 2011), but research on Chinese including Hong Kong based TNHE programmes tend to be about mainland Chinese participants (Tsang, 2013; Fang & Wang, 2014). This could be because in Hong Kong, mainland Chinese students are the highest non-local students. In all these studies, discipline of study does not appear to be a focus apart from it being a factor for choosing a TNHE institution. Wilkins et al. (2012b) find that motivations are different based on gender and nationality.

From the above, it can be surmised that research on TNHE student choices is a relatively new area of interest. This can be seen not only in the relative currency of their publication, but also in the scope and methods used. Previous research demonstrates priority on producing quantitative data to inform marketing and recruitment policy and strategies, and to mainly obtain an overview of push-pull factors which influence the UAE or East Asian markets. However, as TNHE develops over time and shows signs of maturation, it is

essential to also draw rich data from qualitative studies to inform aspects of policy-making which cannot be obtained through other means. Having identified this gap, the thesis contributes to this aspect of TNHE by 1) examining motivations of students from different British IBCs in the same region; 2) extending the push-pull theory to include elements identified as missing from previous research; and 3) examining student choice taking into account identity as the exercise of personal powers vis-à-vis the structural powers at play, and by doing so qualitatively, interview is the most appropriate instrument to shed light on this.

2.3 Student experience

> *"The students complained a lot – poor teaching, absent academics, out-of-date facilities. But they insisted they had a wonderful "experience". However, they gave themselves, not the university, most of the credit. Peer-experience, in other words, not corporate customer-care. That, I suspect, is a common view – and one that may reflect what universities should really be about, students building their own "experiences" within the welcoming embrace of their institutions." (Scott, 2014)*

Student experience has become a term associated with quality and evaluation of universities, and often forms part of the criteria for university ranking. This is partly an outcome of the marketisation of HE, by which students are increasingly treated as customers. Accordingly, students have been endowed with more power and authority, including taking part in the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) audit and review of UK universities. It has been argued that the increasingly economic-driven HE has impacted the student experience, and a competitive labour market has promoted an 'acquisitive' (instrumental) rather than inquisitive approach to

education (Lawson, 2006; Fromm, 1979; Brown et al., 2012; Evans, 2005 in Muddiman, 2015).

Student experience is a slippery term to pin down and there is little consensus on what it means exactly. Research is often undertaken to report student experience, but there is little attempt to define the term apart from a general consensus that it means more than teaching and learning. The literature on student experience is wide-ranging but this review covers student experience in the context of TNHE only.

Despite IBCs' growth, there has been little research on IBC student experience, other than the student feedback evaluations undertaken by institutions (Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2012b). Among those who have examined TNHE student experience including IBCs, their focus has been on student needs, expectations and satisfaction involving quality and teaching and learning issues (Ahmad, 2015; Mok & Xu, 2008; Chapman & Pyvis, 2006; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2012b; Miliszewska & Sztendur, 2010; Wilkins et al., 2012a; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013), cultivation of social capital (Waters & Leung, 2012), and the spread of cultural imperialism (Djerasimovic, 2014).

Apart from Djerasimovic (2014), the literature surveyed is primarily empirical. Wilkins and Balakrishnan (2012a; 2013), and Wilkins et al. (2012a) studied student satisfaction in IBCs in the UAE, and Ahmad (2015) did the same in Malaysia. They took into account curriculum and instruction design, teaching and teaching staff, use of technology, evaluation and assessment, programme management and organisational support. The others' research was concerned with TNHE programmes rather than IBCs. For instance, Mok and Xu (2008) examine how students assessed the quality of TNHE programmes and their confidence in the award.

HE institutions, driven by global competition, marketisation and a consumerist orientation towards students, place a high premium on offering a quality student experience and achieving student satisfaction. However, the consumer metaphor does not lead to

better consumer protection or accurate information about service quality to inform student decision-making (Maringe, 2011). Being the key stakeholders, students should be protected and have access to accurate information to evaluate their HE options. Their perspectives should be considered for long-term sustainability of IBCs according to a report by the OBHE (Miliszewska & Sztendur, 2010).

This research has a wide coverage of what student experience involves but does not focus on student satisfaction or service quality. It encompasses academic and non-academic learning and activities which students have taken part in during their time at university whether it is within or without the IBC and the parent university.

Investigating student satisfaction or service quality aligns with the metaphor of student as customer/consumer. This research does not label students as such although it assumes that in most cases, students and parents do look for value for their money. This research posits that they also search for options which match their ways of being and aspirations of 'becoming' within the means of affordability and their freedom to pursue these options. Following from the above, it is identified that the field lacks qualitative research. Therefore, the research contributes by examining more holistically, rather than a consumerist focus, the student perceptions of their experiences while studying at an IBC and its parent university.

2.4 Graduate employability

> *"The employability literature shows an increasing move away from instrumental definitions of gaining employment and securing graduate-level employment to more nuanced*

frameworks for personal development of capabilities or attributes as opposed to skills." (Speight et al., 2012, p.29)

Next I move on to the concept of employability. There is little agreement on the concept of employability in the literature even though employability has been a focus in the UK higher education (HE) for the past 20 years (Knight & Yorke, 2003; Boden & Nedeva, 2010). One reason is that employability is a cross-disciplinary issue ranging from education economics to human resources development leading to different meanings (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). Employability has an extensive literature on its conceptualisation alone which overlaps in various disciplines. The discussion here is narrowed to concepts applicable in this research context. In comparison with student experience, the literature survey for employability is wider since there are a few more aspects pertinent to the research to consider:

- Conceptualisation
- Empirical research on graduate employability in China and Malaysia
- Empirical research on TNHE graduate employability

In HE, there is difficulty in defining employability due to a lack of coherence about what is meant by the term itself (Tymon, 2011). This is because of its complex and multidimensional nature (Harvey, 2005), different stakeholders' perspectives and the duality of employability, i.e. its absolute and relative dimensions (Brown et al., 2004). There has also been confusion regarding employability and employment (being employable and yet unemployed), between gaining employment of a graduate-level job and any job. The measurement of employability is often deployed through surveys of graduate destinations and employment rates surveys which provide a limited overview of employment rather than employability.

Following from the above, it is critical to clarify how the concept is used in my research. According to Hillage and Pollard (1998, p.1), employability is 'about having the capability to gain initial

employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment if required'. Their definition seems to assume that there is ample employment to be gained. In an attempt to go beyond the narrow skills approach, Knight and Yorke (2004) advocate the USEM model of employability: understanding, skillful practices, efficacy beliefs and meta-cognition. They argue that it closely mirrors the goals of HE by developing aspects of teaching and learning which are often not explicitly or successfully embedded in the traditional academic curriculum such as reflective learning and learner autonomy. However, their model is about marrying the degree programme and employability, and it deals only with the supply side. Brown et al. (2004) emphasise the relative dimension of employability because employability is subject to the individual's positional advantage relative to other competitors in the labour market and not only on the absolute dimension of the individual's skills or characteristics. They define employability as 'the relative chances of getting and maintaining different kinds of employment' (Brown et al., 2004, p.24). Although they acknowledge that there is a subjective dimension to understanding employability, they do not explore it in any depth.

The skills-led employability agenda has been criticised for its ineffectiveness. Mason et al. (2009) question the assumption that skills can be effectively developed in universities except where there has been employment-based experience or employer involvement in courses. It is noted that any positive effects of a skills approach are only on immediate graduate employment prospects in the labour market. Holmes (2001), in his criticism of the skills agenda, traced the various terms which have been employed in the skills discourse from 'transferable skills' in 1990s to 'key skills' after the Dearing report, followed by a range of similar terms such as 'core skills', 'generic skills' and 'employability skills' which were treated in the discourse as broadly synonymous and its skills emphasis was regarded merely as a common sense matter. This is due to a lack of theoretical grounding in much of the skills literature or at best, it is

informed by human capital theory that focuses on developing skills of the workforce (Brown et al., 2004).

Furthermore, Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) find that employers operate beyond conventional skills discourse and consider a wider range of graduate experience in order to assess their potential. Holmes (2001) further objects to the skills model by arguing that the concept of graduate employability is too complex to be objectively observable through the simple matching of skills possessed to skills required. In criticising the implication that skills performance is measurable and observable, he suggests that this is far from accurate since performance is dependent on interpretation of a situation which is not simple to do. This is because it involves understanding the situation in terms of a practice and understanding the agents in terms of their identity in the context of that practice. Therefore, his argument is that graduate employability should be examined based on practice and identity in relation to performance rather than predicting performance based on skills possession since graduate recruitment is about the assessment of a graduate to determine if there is potential in terms of practice, identity and performance. Holmes' (2001) model demonstrates the relevance of identity together with practice when an activity is interpreted in the assessment of a potential to perform.

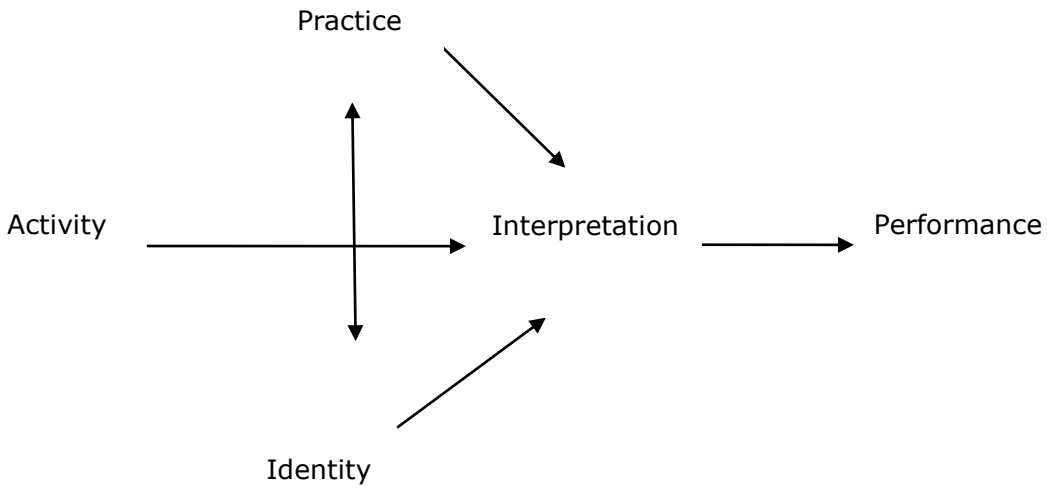

Figure 2-2: Practice-identity model of the interpretation of performance (Holmes 2001, p. 115)

Wenger's (1998) idea of 'communities of practice' seems to fit in with Holmes' 'graduate identity' approach above to enrich our understanding of graduate employability. Wenger defines 'communities of practice' as groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. A community of practice is characterised by the domain, the community and the practice which define it. By interpreting an employer as a community of practice, this idea is applicable from two perspectives. From the employer's perspective, graduate recruitment involves identifying graduates who can contribute to the practice and demonstrate commitment to the shared domain of interest and engagement with the members of the community. From the graduates' perspective, job recruitment involves convincing the community that he/she is a potential member.

How individuals 'make their way through the world' (Archer, 2007), including employability-related choices and experiences at university, is saturated with social meaning. It reflects personal, cultural, and social resources that are diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, social background and educational biography. Even among individuals who share very similar cultural resources such as those who choose to study at an IBC, they still differ in ways that are significant for competition in the labour market.

Archer, in studying how people have internal conversations about their situations and concerns, demonstrates how reflexivity plays a role in enabling us to 'make our way through the world'. She defines reflexivity as 'the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa' (Archer, 2007, p.4). Her rationale is the proposition that individuals actively mediate the effects of social structures and events by deliberating on their situation. As internal conversations mediate structural and cultural

forces in influencing social action, they play a critical role in explaining social outcomes. Archer puts forward a three-staged model: 1) structure and culture have an objective effect on individuals' contexts in which they act; 2) individuals have their own constellations of concerns; 3) individuals act as a result of reflexive deliberations by which they subjectively commit to practical projects in relation to their objective situations. In this sense, IBC student perceptions of employability could be examined through this model where 1) systemic factors played a role in pushing or pulling them towards an IBC; 2) individuals had their own personal project with the IBC being part of it; and 3) they made decisions based on their reflexive deliberations to realise their project through their IBC choice and experience.

Empirical research on graduate employability is wide-ranging so this aspect of the literature review is aimed at scoping out what has been done and a comparison is made based on methodologies and methods, theoretical perspectives and contexts. Most empirical research conducted on graduate employability has been quantitative focusing on graduate destination and large-scale survey data about employability and likely career trajectories of different groups of graduates (Tomlinson, 2007). A few notable exceptions are Brown and Hesketh (2004) who conducted 60 interviews with graduates, Tomlinson (2005) who did a qualitative study with students and academics from different disciplines in a pre-1992 UK university, and Kok and Cheah (2011) who conducted a mixed methods study on the role of the university with an emphasis on its responsibility to enhance employability. Some studies adopt multiple methods such as Mason et al. (2009) who examined the relationship between recent graduates' work performance and learning experiences at university. Brennan and Shah (2003) had in phase 1 social and educational factors associated with successful employment outcomes among graduates analysed through a survey; and phase 2 interviews with staff and students in four UK universities and some

discussion with three universities on issues related to improving widening participation students' employment prospects.

While there is debate on whether the university's role includes graduate employability enhancement, the research is more concerned with what the university has been entrusted to deliver as required by government policy. There is a quality assurance requirement for UK institutions involved in TNHE activities abroad to offer academic and non-academic learning and development opportunities comparable to those at the parent campus. This means that any provision developing employability within a UK programme should also be provided at IBCs. In the report, *Transnational education and employability development*, commissioned by the Higher Education Academy (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2015), its literature review reveals little evidence of this happening in practice. The report points to this as a gap within TNHE and specifically, the need to assess the development of employability skills in TNHE programmes.

In a review of TNHE literature, O'Mahony (2014) identifies 219 research records since 2005 but the theme of employability did not emerge. This is reflective of TNHE as a relatively new area of research and as such, the more common themes are about processes (e.g., studies on policy and strategy) rather than outcomes (e.g., personal transformation for students and their post-study transition into employment) of TNHE (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2015). Although the latter is under-researched, there are a small number of studies, such as Speight et al. (2012) and Bailey and Ingimundardottir (2015).

Tomlinson (2007) points out that the discourse into employability tends to focus on the supply side of the labour market based on the perspectives of policy-makers and employers, and views students and graduates as a collective mass of uniform rational investors who expect a rate of return (ROR) to their educational investment. By doing so, he highlights how little recent empirical work there has

been to explore the subjective dimension of employability which is vital given that the dominant skills agenda and human capital assumptions of individual behaviour do not account for orientations and work-related identities students develop in relation to their future labour market identities or explain satisfactorily with regards to students' behaviour towards learning and the labour market. There is, thus, a need for qualitative research on employability in order to give an account of the value- and identity-orientated employability relating to graduates' own dispositions and biographies.

Having explored employability from students' perspectives, I now take into account employers'. There is a tendency to assume rather than empirically demonstrate how employers evaluate the link between education and skills acquisition (Bills, 1988). According to Bills, there are generally four categories of explanation of the link. Within these categories, the differences are two-fold: 1) schooling's function, and 2) interpretation of educational credentials. These four categories are human capital, credentialism, cultural capital and screening. While his findings provide screening with the most favourable interpretation, it does not rule out other theories which can equally explain certain circumstances in his quantitative case study. Li et al. (2008) tested the screening hypothesis by examining job search behaviour of university graduates in China in relation to their use of formal and informal channels. Although the empirical findings show that different job channels have little effect on the probabilities of employment gain as determined by educational background, they maintain that education is still a strong signalling mechanism.

However, mass HE has decreased the value of educational credentials as a screening device (Brown et al., 2002). There is a perception among students that a degree is no longer sufficient, i.e. credentials decreasing in value and currency in the labour market (Tomlinson, 2008). Instead, Tomlinson (ibid) reports that students are using the discourse of 'experience' in a personalised narrative to

demonstrate their experiences and achievements outside formal learning for their employability enhancement. Because education remains a much utilised signal for employers, graduate employability of students at IBCs is a critical issue especially in China where there is a perception that private HE graduates are at a disadvantage in the labour market compared to public HE graduates (Li, Morgan, et al., 2008). At best, educational credentials may gain entry into the competitive labour market, but they do not ensure success in obtaining employment (Brown et al., 2004). Rivera (2011) reports that it is not the content of education (contrary to human capital assumptions) that counts, but the greater the prestige of the HE institution, the more weight screening appears to have in hiring decisions. Rivera also finds that 1) extracurricular activities have become credentials of social and moral character in the labour market, and 2) the way elite employers use and interpret educational credentials reproduces a social closure of elite jobs based on socio-economic status.

Despite universities' best intentions and initiatives, an individual's employability is ultimately his/her responsibility and institutions can only ensure availability of opportunities with appropriate support and guidance. Hence, the issue comes back to the construction of 'self'. Li and Lowe (n.d.) aptly end their article by stating that isolating employability from the rest of individuals' 'construction of self' would impoverish our understanding.

Having discussed empirical studies more broadly above, I now focus on China and Malaysia. Research on employability in China has predominantly been quantitative (Morgan & Wu, 2011). Generally research focussed on graduates from Chinese universities (Guo & van der Heijden, 2008; Li, Morgan, et al., 2008; Li et al., 2009; Li, Ding, et al., 2008) and returning Chinese graduates from abroad (Partridge & Keng, n.d.; Mallam-Hassam & Donaghy, 2010; Hao & Welch, 2012). There is little on TNHE graduates specifically. One exception is Speight et al. (2012) who explored attitudes of stakeholders of a UK IBC in China towards an extra-curricular

programme aimed at supporting students in developing their employability. They found that home campus and IBC stakeholders shared similar views, but they differed slightly in the understanding of, and responsibility for, learning for employability. In addition, China-specific themes are identified, and this shows the need to have different priorities and provision for the IBC from the home institution.

The Malaysian research landscape on employability is rather broad. Generally, employability research is on links between HE and industrial training (Pillai et al., 2012), differences between home and foreign graduates (Ball & Chik, 2001; Quah et al., 2009), and skill development (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2010). There is much research on employer perceptions (Husain et al., 2010; Hashim, 2011), and some on a comparison of employer and graduate perceptions (Gurvinder Kaur Gurcharan Singh & Sharan Kaur Garib Singh, 2008; Wye & Lim, 2009). There is also research on specific disciplines (e.g. Jusoh et al., 2007 on business graduates), and sectors (e.g. Mohamad Sattar Rasul et al., 2009 focused on the manufacturing sector). Location of tertiary institution (a proxy for quality) and racial preference in selection processes are also subjects of research (Lee, 2012).

Although there has been research on employability of graduates from the TNHE sector in Malaysia, the research in this area has concentrated on employers. While such research has value, most are not based on any clear theoretical basis albeit for most, human capital theory can be assumed. The majority are quantitative studies which adopt the skills approach. Consequently, employability seems to be reduced to a list of skills. When a comparison of employers' and graduates' perceptions is made, it means comparing how they rank these skills (e.g. Gurvinder Kaur Gurcharan Singh & Sharan Kaur Garib Singh, 2008). This line of inquiry underscores the importance of introducing identity-orientated employability in this context.

There is also a lack of clarity in terminology. For example, Quah et al. (2009) investigate employers' preference with regards to local graduates, foreign trained graduates and graduates from twinning programmes in Malaysia without clarifying whether 'twinning programmes' included franchise programmes such as 2+2 programmes offered by IBCs[22]. 'Foreign trained' could arguably include graduates of 2+2 programmes.

Qualitative studies on Malaysia are less common. Bailey and Ingimundardottir (2015) carried out a qualitative study using focus group and interviews with a UK IBC Malaysian and non-Malaysian staff and students to determine if there is an identifiable notion of international employability. Their findings suggest that the concept of employability, from stakeholders' views, is influenced by human capital theory, and more specifically for students, the rate of return, since they are more concerned with obtaining employment in the near future. A salient point they raise is that employability is 'a blurred, evolving and culturally based concept', and thus, universities with a large population of international students should be cognisant of the culturally different notions of employability among their diverse student body (Bailey & Ingimundardottir, 2015, p.44).

Pyvis and Chapman's (2007) findings show that in the context of an Australian offshore campus in Malaysia, Malaysians tend to view international education as a positional investment towards employment with (Western) multinational corporations, whereas non-Malaysians generally view it as a self-transformative investment, i.e. a personal development journey towards an evolving identity. They employ the construction of identity based on Wenger's distinction of five dimensions of identity. This case study is not on employability per se but there seems to be little else reporting specifically on employability of graduates of IBCs in Malaysia.

[22] 2+2 programmes refer to those in which students spend 2 years in the host country and 2 years in the source country.

Based on the above two studies, what stands out is how strongly cultural factors divide the results based on nationalities. This amplifies the significance of cultural systems in the background. Hence, this persuades me to 1) frame the notion of employability from the students' understandings; and 2) examine if data revealed nationality or culture based differences among mainland Chinese and Malaysian participants.

There has been very little research on TNHE in China, let alone employability of graduates in this context. The extensive employability research in Malaysia appears to be largely quantitative focused on employers without much theoretical grounding. This includes research on graduates from TNHE, but due to a lack of clarity in terminology regarding coverage of forms of TNHE, it is uncertain as to whether graduates from IBCs were included. This is not to say IBC and other TNHE students are vastly different, but it is argued that IBCs' distinctive characteristics are themselves capable of influencing student experiences which may impact employability. This is because an IBC not only encompasses programme mobility, but also institution and student and faculty mobility. Therefore, it is more visible and physical in nature, and so arguably, this is likely to affect students' identity in how they see themselves and who they are becoming.

Recently research providing some insights on TNHE's impact on host countries' labour market has been published. A report prepared jointly for the British Council and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) found that employers often lack understanding about what TNHE experience constitutes (McNamara & Knight, 2014). This reveals that the full potential of TNHE programmes in host countries is not being achieved and that much can be done to raise awareness of TNHE in the industry. The implication of this in China should be noted because empirical results show that the role of HE in China is more likely to be informative than productive (Li et al., 2009). Despite a lack of awareness on TNHE among different stakeholders, McNamara and Knight (2014) find that TNHE

graduates are regarded as better equipped than locally educated graduates across a variety of specific skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and international outlook.

Generally, there is a significant gap in the literature on TNHE particularly with regards to outcomes and qualitative research. This is even more acute in relation to IBCs in China and Malaysia, among the top three TNHE host countries globally. Hence, this research locates itself in this space to examine IBC student perceptions of why they chose an IBC, what their experiences there and at the parent university were like, and how their experiences impacted their employability. In short, it is about the students' reasons for choosing an IBC and perceptions of whether their IBC decision put them in a good position in relation to their employability in their respective personal life trajectory, while taking into account the larger socio-political and economic issues which may impact them.

The identified gap in the literature needs a theoretical lens which illuminates how contexts and individuals interact. Following this, the next section explains the critical realist approach to the study.

2.5 Theoretical framework

This subsection presents the critical realist approach, the basis upon which a combined framework of economic theories of human capital, screening/signalling and identity is used to explain the interaction between the contexts and participants.

2.5.1 Critical realism (CR)

The causal language within the framework of CR mirrors our daily experience. We are capable of shaping our future and yet often encounter constraints due to socio-cultural, institutional or

geographical factors. Therefore, CR "makes it possible to understand how we could be or become many things which currently we are not" (Sayer, 2000, p.11).

Two major forms of CR emerged during the latter part of the twentieth century (Shipway, 2010). First, a 'theological CR' is a response to a long dialogue between theology and the natural sciences. Theological critical realists, many of whom are also scientists themselves, seek answers from a position which assumes the existence of God and an ordered world in nature rather than looking for proof of God's existence in nature. Thus, they presuppose a pragmatic ontological position that they share with the more general form of scientific realism which presupposes a mind-independent reality that is discoverable. This is not a dogmatic *a priori* position but rather a scientific hypothesis that arises due to engagement with the world [23] (Shipway, 2010). Following this, theological CR extends this presupposition of a mind-independent external reality found in general scientific realism to include God. Examples are Collins (2010) in explaining his faith and work in the Genome Project with respect to what is popularly termed 'theistic evolution' and Meyer (2010) who proposes Intelligent Design as a scientific theory in the origin of life debate[24]. Second, another form of CR attributed to Bhaskar is where my research paradigm is positioned and explained below.

'Critical realism' was initially used by others in reference to Bhaskar's ideas of transcendental realism and critical naturalism in *A Realist Theory of Science* (2008, originally published in 1975) and he has eventually accepted this terminology. In the book, Bhaskar re-framed ontology by arguing for its necessity and irreducibility in

[23] Proponents derive support for their presupposition from the 'anthropic principle' borrowed from the natural sciences. Life would not have been possible but for certain physical constants of exact values such as the 'fine-tuning' argument in cosmology and biology (Lennox, 2009; Meyer, 2010).

[24] Interestingly, Collins and Meyer are at opposite poles since theistic evolutionists and intelligent design proponents do not agree on the role of evolution in the origin of life (Collins, 2010). Although they both assume an independent external reality, they point to different scientific evidence to support their positions.

order for science to be possible and exposes epistemic fallacy, the idea that one can reduce or analyse knowledge in terms of being, by demonstrating that being is an irreducible and necessary category. In other words, he proposed that the reality cannot be reduced to our knowledge of it. There are other features of CR but for lack of space, the discussion below is limited to its key elements. A brief summary of its critique and the reason for adopting it is outlined.

2.5.1.1 Key features of critical realism

2.5.1.1.1 How critical realism understands reality

A key distinction between CR and other meta-theories lies in Bhaskar's argument that a philosophy of reality must begin with ontology, a theory of 'being' before moving on to consider questions on the creation of knowledge about existence (Bergin et al., 2008). To do otherwise is to conflate ontology and epistemology resulting in epistemic fallacy as explained previously which is what empirical realists such as Jefferies (2011) have committed when they criticise the critical realist claim that knowledge may arise from a non-empirical source and challenge the proposition that the domains of the real and empirical are distinct. Bhaskar (2008, 1975) maintained that the nature of the world is made known through science but that does not mean that it is determined by science. For such discovery to be possible through empirical means, intelligibility of experience in science itself presupposes an intransitive reality which is ordered and determined by independent laws of nature. It seems to me, therefore, that critical realism presents a sensible and rational framework through which this world can be understood.

In addition to criticisms from empirical realists, interpretivists such as King (1999) also put forward their critiques. King accuses Archer of a solipsistic error of establishing her ontology on a single individual's perspective and that it is this commonsensical perspective which is the basis for arriving at her ontological

conclusions. However, Archer (2000a) has made it clear that knowledge of reality is not necessarily the same as what the reality is due to the fallibility of human knowledge. Thus, although critical realists adopt a subjective epistemology, it does not mean that their ontology is subjective also because to do so would be committing an epistemic fallacy.

As CR holds a stratified and differentiated understanding of the world, it wields the ability to explain and understand a phenomenon across different cultural contexts or different time period. For example, the definition of marriage in England and Malaysia is very different after the legal meaning was redefined in 2014 in the former. In Malaysia, marriage has a different meaning in Federal law and Sharia law governing the non-Muslims and Muslims respectively and so the differences in understanding this aspect of reality are cultural as well as legal even in the context of one country. Because of how reality is understood within the critical realist worldview, the stratified and differentiated understanding of the world of not only groups of participants from different IBCs and nationalities but also individuals within the same group (e.g., IBC1 participants from the Engineering discipline) could be accounted for.

2.5.1.1.2 The three domains or reality

Reality is divided into three domains: real, empirical and actual. With regards to the real domain, it is all that exists regardless of whether we experience it or have knowledge of it. It is an independent and pre-categorised universe that can produce phenomena or events. In the real domain mechanisms, events and experiences exist, but it is in the actual domain that these mechanisms or powers are activated and events and experiences are produced in reality. The empirical domain refers only to what is experienced which could be measured. These domains of reality relate to each other distinctly but also in terms of magnitude and dependency (Empirical < Actual < Real). In application, the

experiences of participants could be recorded through interviews in the empirical domain, and structural properties in the real domain such as the national context caused the experiences to be produced in the actual domain (e.g. how the one child policy in China could be linked to some participants' experience in HE).

	Domain of Real	Domain of Actual	Domain of Empirical
Mechanisms	X		
Events	X	X	
Experiences	X	X	X

Figure 2-3: The three domains of reality (derived from International Centre for Critical Realism (n.d.))

2.5.1.1.3 How critical realism deals with structure and agency

CR resolves the dualism between structure and agency by positing that while the former pre-exists the latter, in order for structure to survive, it depends on agents to reproduce or transform it (Bhaskar, 2014a; Bhaskar, 2014b). This resolution of the structure and agency dualism is Bhaskar's transformational model of social activity.

Archer (2000a) deals with structure and agency from the analytic dualist perspective and not one of a philosophical dualist as King (1999) claims. Archer argues that it is analytical because there is great advantage in viewing structure and agency separately to examine their interplay. This differentiation is possible through two propositions: that structure necessarily pre-dates the actions which transform it and that structural elaboration necessarily post-dates these actions. Because structures only emerge from the activities of

people and any effect exerted by structures is mediated through such activities, there is no philosophical dualism.

This feature of CR is useful in examining the relationship between structure (IBCs, parent universities, families, social norms, etc.) and agents (participants) in their interaction and in so far as the former may have influenced the latter. By employing an ontological dualism which posits structure and agency, I am able to capture individuals' perspectives and set them vis-à-vis the structural properties that have enabled or constrained them in their employability development.

While the interpretivists recognise the constraint which society imposes on the individual, they do not regard it as having structural properties but rather as outcomes from relationships between individuals which limit the individual's freedom. As such, King (1999) emphasises questions of how individuals constrain one another rather than ones of how structure constrains or facilitates individual action through structural emergent properties. However, Archer (2000a) shows that structure and individuals should not be conflated in her example of how native English speaking academics are privileged through the dominance of English language academic publications. Her example demonstrates that their academic privilege cannot be adequately explained in relation to individual academics and thus, the structure is not reducible to individuals as King claimed. Moreover, Archer points out that King (1999, p.223) concedes that "*[a]t some point then, in employing the interpretive approach and focusing on the specific interactions of individuals, the sociologist is going to have to assume certain background conditions which are not reduced to their micro dimensions."* Despite her affirmation of human beings as autonomous selves, Archer is not an 'individualist', the very label she has employed to criticise the interpretivists (King, 1999) but rather taken in the whole context of her argument, she refers to autonomous agents in the realist analysis of structural emergent properties which impinge on them.

Archer (2007) argues that the principal problem of structure and agency is not resolved by determinism or social conditioning because this negates individual capacity to define what we care most about and undermines our ability to design projects through which our personal concerns can be realised. She suggests that we do this through 'internal conversations'. In other words, we reflect on our social situations in light of our personal concerns, asking and answering our own questions of what to do.

2.5.1.1.4 Causal explanation

One of CR's strengths is using causal language to describe the world (Easton, 2010). From a critical realist perspective, causality is the process of 'identifying causal mechanisms and how they work, and discovering if they have been activated and under what conditions' (Sayer, 2000, p.14). Positivism approaches causality through a cause and effect relationship. One instance of this is where employers lack information, educational background serves as an observable indicator of productivity in recruitment (Albrecht, 1981). In contrast, the critical realist looks beyond what is directly observable within the empirical domain in her search for more comprehensive explanations (Danermark et al., 2002 cited in Bergin et al., 2008).

In interpretivism, causality is a process of constructing meaning which is an outcome of human activity. The interpretive tradition questions the existence of an autonomous and pre-existent structure and refutes the idea of objective causality in society. However, it does not write off the notion of social causality altogether but rather situates it in the practices and beliefs of individuals (King, 1999). From the critical realist viewpoint, this raises the problem of epistemic fallacy yet again. When confronted with non-interpretivist elements of society such as distribution of wealth, interpretivists face difficulties showing how these can be reduced to individuals and their interactions at all times. This is

illustrated in Archer's (2000a) response to King by referring to the power of mass production and the capitalist market which are more than mutual social situations and relationships among individuals. Therefore, capable of going beyond the philosophical constraints of positivism and interpretivism, CR offers a way of identifying causal mechanisms which may lead to greater understanding of how participants view the development of their employability in relation to the rhetoric or policy of the IBC or parent university.

2.5.1.1.5 Ontological realism, epistemic relativism and judgemental rationalism

CR combines and reconciles the three elements of ontological realism, epistemic relativism and judgemental rationalism which are briefly explained through the following three propositions (Scott, 2013). First, any engagement with the world presupposes a realist ontology and CR does this by asking the question of what the world must be like for knowledge of it to be possible (International Centre for Critical Realism, n.d.). This research looked at what the world must be like for each participant from his/her perspective and what is known about their socio-cultural context. Second, epistemology is relative to the activities and worldviews of groups of people in time and space. This is pertinent particularly due to the nature of the research involving participants from different backgrounds, nationalities, levels of tertiary education and different IBCs interviewed over a period of time in one to two phases. Third, a theory about the world does not necessarily have to be valued to be equally true as others means that it is possible to judge rationally between different accounts of the same object. An analogy would be how some people may come to faith in a particular religion based on reason and evidence that make the most sense of life and meaning for them rather than accepting pluralism or atheism uncritically (or vice versa). Bhaskar combines epistemic relativism with judgmental rationality, which asserts that there are rational criteria for judging some theories as having better and stronger

explanatory power than others (Irwin, 1997). This combination works for the research by wrapping the first two elements with a justification of which rival theories best explain the findings.

2.5.1.2 Criticisms of critical realism

Criticisms of CR are summarised from various quarters and responses given followed by reasons for CR in the next sub-section. The summary is by no means an attempt to include all criticisms but rather a snapshot to demonstrate awareness of the critiques.

Jefferies (2011) accuses CR of creating an unreal, metaphysical and metaphorical world which transcends reality and questions the source of their claim that there is such a reality beyond empirical experience. However, it is clear that by 'reality' CR does not claim to have privileged knowledge of it as to its non-empirical source but to state two underlying assumptions:

1. the real is whatever exists, be it physical or social, regardless of whether there is an adequate understanding of its nature; and

2. the real is the realm of objects, their structures and powers: whether they be physical, like metals, or social, like organisations, they have certain structures and causal powers, i.e., capacities to behave in particular ways, and causal liabilities or passive powers, i.e., specific tendencies to certain kinds of change (Sayer, 2000, p.11).

As Sayer (2000, p.12) puts it, *"[o]bservability may make us more confident about what we think exists, but existence itself is not dependent on it"*. Thus, rather than rely solely upon empirical means for making claims about what exists, CR puts forward a causal criterion too (Collier, 1994). Accordingly, a plausible case for the existence of transcendental reality can be explained by looking at the observable effects of such entities.

Interpretivists criticise the CR perspective that the society has structural properties, and instead argue that constraints which are imposed on individuals result from relationships between individuals (King, 1999). Archer (2000b) calls this 'upward conflation' in which structure is stripped down to people who alone have causal powers. It is problematic because it would be difficult to give a strictly individualistic explanation of individual behaviour, because material changes in society needs to be explained too (Bhaskar, 1989, p.28 in Archer, 2000a; Sayer, 2000, p.18).

Most of the criticisms on CR can be attributed to a difference in worldviews. Those who hold on to a materialistic or naturalistic worldview are unlikely to be comfortable with CR which operates outside a purely empirical boundary, and neither are those who refuse to acknowledge the structural emergent properties of society as not reducible to persons. However, the CR framework is broader than a materialistic perspective and is capable of explaining material changes in society. The CR's ontology recognises the possibility that unexercised powers may exist, which does not limit what could happen or have happened. In other words, the nature of the real objects present at a given time constrains and enables what can happen but does not pre-determine the outcome. CR therefore makes it possible to understand how participants could be/become many things which at the time of the interview they were not and the following sub-section summarises the rationale for adopting CR.

2.5.1.3 Reasons for critical realism

It is important to state which paradigm defines the research so it is clear which worldview frames it. Guba and Lincoln (1994) provide three fundamental questions which help to define inquiry paradigms: the ontological, the epistemological and the methodological, which help researchers to clarify what falls inside and outside the parameter of their inquiry (see the table below). Reasons for CR are structured accordingly.

Table 2-2: A brief summary of three approaches to define inquiry paradigms based on Guba and Lincoln (1994) (table derived by the author)

	Positivism	**Critical Realism**	**Interpretivism**
Ontological	Truth = Facts	Truth = reality is stratified and differentiated; exists independently of the researcher [Ontological realism]	Truth = understanding meaning and purpose
Epistemological	Objective knowledge – only proven facts are regarded as knowledge.	Objective knowledge of underlying structures capable of contradicting appearances Transitive knowledge = fallible & refutable [Epistemic relativism]	Subjective knowledge – regards individual meaning and purpose as knowledge
Methodological	Researcher is impartial; value-free	Researcher acknowledges potential bias, interprets meaning based on theory & evidence from body of data. Theory- & value-laden. [Judgemental rationality]	Researcher & participants construct meaning; Value-laden; theory-laden

2.5.1.3.1 Ontology

CR refers to a stratified and differentiated reality which exists independently of us. It therefore acknowledges that powers may exist but are yet not exercised (Bergin et al., 2008). One example is ignorance is not an excuse and thus, not knowing the law does not let one off the hook when power under the law is exercised. More specifically, external powers that influenced participants' context were examined in relation to their perceptions of their own realities. The powers were the social influences such as their family, the IBC and parent university in the roles they played during participants' time there, and their future employment or postgraduate study contexts.

CR fits the research for understanding employability from students' perspectives as it 'provides a way to examine social phenomena using an objective ontology (that reality can exist independent of the researcher) and a subjective epistemology (that criteria for

evaluation are not neutral[25])' (Farmer & Gruba, 2004, p.1). In this paradigm, the purpose of theory is to unveil the structured reality of the world beneath the surface of what is observable.

Because CR can account for each participant having different epistemological worldviews, it means that the objective reality does not change even if they change their views in the second interview. In particular, for IBC students, whose programme included spending time at the parent campus in the UK, this was a highly likely situation. This is an important rationale behind adopting a critical realist position since student perceptions had been tracked over a period of time in some cases with a long interval in between interviews. By using CR, potential changes in perceptions could be traced in a world where ontologically it might remain unaffected by these changes.

2.5.1.3.2 Epistemology

Collier (1994) summarises Bhaskar's account of social scientific work in contrast to both positivism and interpretivism. Similar to the latter, Bhaskar held that any study of social practice must begin with agents' conceptions of it. But unlike interpretivism and like positivism, Bhaskar proposed that these conceptions can be refuted. He maintained that social explanation is both causal (as do positivists) and interpretive (as do interpretivists), and therefore rejects their shared belief that these two notions are not complementary. Unlike positivism, agency has a role in critical realists' explanatory schema, i.e. agents are active in interpreting their own structural context. Since there would be multiple meanings given to a particular situation, part of the explanatory process would be application of hermeneutics, a way of understanding different meanings agents attach to their actions (Kerr, 2003 in Grix, 2010). As such, CR was chosen because while simultaneously providing a scope for causal explanation, it permits

[25] Subject dependent

interpretative understanding of IBC student perceptions and experiences as they shape their future and encounter constraints or enablements along the way. Moreover, the research is not seeking to verify or falsify a hypothesis following a positivist paradigm, nor is it within an interpretivist paradigm by considering the participants' interpretations solely and independently of the social structure that may have a bearing on their perceptions.

2.5.1.3.3 Methodology

Archer (2007) identifies three modes of reflexivity which delineate our responses to social conditioning, individual patterns of social mobility and contribution to social stability or change. This provides a basis upon which the methodological question is addressed. With CR as a guiding meta-theory, I acknowledge that the structures within society of which participants are part influence them with its structural properties, but they are mediated by the participants' powers of reflexivity (Archer, 2007). The influence may be construed as 'constraints and enablements' (Archer, 2003, p.4) taken into account in internal conversations which facilitate the design of their life projects to fulfil their personal concerns.

According to Archer (2000b), our personal identity is defined by our 'constellation of ultimate concerns'. Participants were active agents who did not merely have decisions made for them. Every participant would consider contextual endorsement or rejection under his/her own descriptions. Their deliberations and subsequent actions amounted to a dialectical process involving:

1. accepting (or rejecting) their parents,
2. developing their concerns in (partial) interlocution with them,
3. drawing upon their social networks, and
4. processing their personal concerns through on-going exchanges with this network until
5. a *modus vivendi* is established (Archer, 2007, p.147).

Using Guba and Lincoln's (1994) three principal questions outlined previously, CR in operation can be summarised as follows:

Table 2-3: What it means to apply CR in answering the ontological, epistemological and methodological questions (table by author)

	Critical Realism	Application
Ontological	Truth = reality is stratified and differentiated; exists independently of the researcher [Ontological realism]	Constraints & enablements in the socio-cultural structure within university, workplace and other cultural factors which exist independently of student participants.
Epistemological	Objective knowledge of underlying structures capable of contradicting appearances Transitive knowledge = fallible & refutable [Epistemic relativism]	Evidence sourced from relevant literature and interviews.
Methodological	Researcher acknowledges potential bias, interprets meaning based on theory & evidence from body of data. Theory- & value-laden. [Judgemental rationality]	An account of my role and potential bias was provided. Participants were given a summary of interpretation with an opportunity to comment. Ultimately, the interpretation with stronger evidential support would be adopted with acknowledgement of disagreement if any.

After dealing with the critical realist approach, the rest of this chapter presents the economic theories relevant to this research.

2.5.2 Screening/signalling and rate of return

Governments attach great importance to the role of higher education (HE) in economic growth (Knight & Yorke, 2004) and this priority has given rise to the massification of HE in the UK, China and Malaysia in the last three decades. The underlying theoretical framework behind such policy-making is that of human capital. This theory began with classical economists, notably Adam Smith, who indicated that education enhanced the productive capacity of workers much like physical capital increased the productive capacity of a factory (Woodhall in Halsey et al., 1997). It became more fully developed in the 1960s by Schultz and Becker. Schultz (1961) wrote of how people invest in themselves in anticipation of personal economic returns and how this investment can be related to economic growth. Becker's (1993) seminal work in 1964, used

human capital theory to account for the effect of different levels of education on economic growth, thereby demonstrating the importance of investment in human capital to raise the quality of labour as a means to economic development. This study is a qualitative inquiry so I will limit the discussion of the extensive literature on this theory to the rate of return to education (ROR).

Human capital theory posits that investments in activities which will increase resources in people will bring about productivity (Becker, 1993). The term 'investment' is used to indicate expenditure on education which will generate income in the future. This theory assumes that investments are generally rational responses to expected returns (Becker, 1993, p.15) and that education raises earnings and productivity by value-adding through generic transferrable or specific technical skills. In asserting that it is possible to measure the returns to investment in human capital using the same techniques of cost-benefit analysis used in investment appraisal for physical capital, Schultz and Becker acknowledge that the theory is controversial. The mere suggestion that human beings are reduced to capital goods may be seen as devaluing the value of being human.

The human capital theory assumes employers are able to make an objective and rational evaluation of a jobseeker's ability. However, the reality often involves uncertainty as a result of information asymmetry, not knowing individual characteristics, the quality of education, and imperfect knowledge of future demand and supply conditions (Levhari and Weiss, 1974 in Cai, 2013). The theory also assumes that a prospective student makes a rational choice on HE destination/institution based on the ROR to his/her educational investment. In the same vein, I argue that a prospective student often faces a reality fraught with uncertainties, such as feeling lost over their future direction, torn between different viable choices, and lacking knowledge of the future job market situation.

While I acknowledge the role of human capital theory in explaining the link between education and employability, in itself it appears to lack the depth required in a qualitative inquiry to investigate individual perceptions. This is not to say human capital theory does not apply in such a scope. Van der Merwe (2010) uses it in his qualitative study of student choices at university. However, it does not extend to student perceptions of employability development. Pyvis and Chapman (2007) use the term 'investment' in describing motivations. Their findings demonstrate that although positional investment is important, it is not necessarily the primary reason for choosing to study at an IBC. International HE 'as a means of transforming the self' can be a stronger motivation (Pyvis & Chapman, 2007, p.245).

Critics also argue that education does not necessarily increase productive capacity but functions as a signal. It acts as a proxy for innate ability or desirable personal characteristics which point to productive capacity (Spence, 1973; Li, Ding, et al., 2008; Li et al., 2009). The screening hypothesis assigns schooling the role of sorting regardless of whether skills are acquired through it, implying that most skills are gained in the workplace (Bills, 1988). Albrecht (1981) argued that if education is an efficient signal of unseen capacity, employers use it to screen job candidates when they have incomplete information about the productivity of a potential employee. Therefore, it is not that education increases productivity, but rather it screens the inherently productive from those who are less so because the theory assumes that high-ability people are more likely to succeed academically.

However if education does not also improve productivity, it would appear to be a very expensive sorting device as there are cheaper alternatives (Thiele, 1997; Becker, 1993). While a 'weak' version of the screening hypothesis is accepted since employers screen based on educational credentials, strong versions of it (i.e. that education does not increase productive capacity) are generally more difficult to support for a lack of evidence (Woodhall, 1987 in Halsey et al.,

1997). Despite HE massification and credential inflation, the screening hypothesis seems to still hold because in highly competitive labour markets, individuals strive to gain more credentials to distinguish themselves from others in order to secure entry into the job market (Brown et al., 2004). The screening hypothesis is also an indicator of how education impacts attitudes, motivation, and other personal characteristics. The implication this has for human capital theory is that value-adding should extend to the development of personal characteristics through the educational process in recognition of how complex developing productive capacity can be (Woodhall 1987 in Halsey et al., 1997). Becker (1993) himself stressed that the attention given to the economic effects of education does not imply that other effects are unimportant or less important. Although the screening hypothesis is often regarded as an alternative to human capital theory, empirical studies cited in Li et al. (2009 such as Grubb, 1997, Wen, 1999) did not find evidence refuting human capital theory. In conclusion, I view education as having both screening and value-adding functions (Lee & Miller, 2004; Brown & Sessions, 2004; Woodhall, 1987 in Halsey et al., 1997). However, regardless of which function it holds, for the individual, in most circumstances it means better earnings and is therefore worth the investment (Psacharopoulos, 1994). Though the choice of studying at an IBC may be explained as an educational investment, I question the adequacy of this argument for it alone cannot address the multiplicity of student motivations.

In summary, although screening/signalling and ROR have the explanatory power for this research, the extent to which they can explain motivations and experiences of students is limited particularly taking into account how they may be influenced by the socio-cultural system of the transitional society in China, and the changing political landscape in Malaysia as discussed in Chapter 1. Hence, additional theories capable of explaining these are needed.

2.5.3 Identity

"Human beings are thoroughly diverse." (Sen, 1995, p.1)

The university is traditionally a place of higher learning and knowledge production, and increasingly it is pressured to assume responsibility for ensuring students are work-ready upon graduation (Daniels & Brooker, 2014). While there is evidence that some students adopt a consumerist attitude towards university, expect the university to prepare them for the workplace too, and are often instrumental in their pursuit of a university degree, it would be simplistic and reductionist to define them solely on these terms (Tomlinson, 2007; Tomlinson, 2010). Therefore going beyond the explanatory frameworks of screening/signalling and the rate of return, I now turn to another economic theory which has the potential to fill this gap.

Akerlof and Kranton (2000) introduce identity economics to explain behaviour which income-/resources-based economic theories cannot. Arkelof and Kranton define identity as the sense of self. Because identity is closely linked with behaviour, choice of identity may be the most significant 'economic' decision individuals make. They argue that choice is not independent of social context but is made in conformity with the social norms of the groups with which they identify. They can gain or lose 'identity utility' as a result of their own or others' actions which conform or depart from accepted social norms.

Davis (2011), however, critiques Akerlof and Kranton for not addressing how people choose their identity. This is problematic because it means that individuals are able to make judgements about their utility functions by evaluation or consideration of different arguments. Davis seems to suggest that while identity economics sheds some light where conventional economic theories fail, there is a danger of borrowing ideas from outside the discipline

to fill in one large pothole leaving behind small new holes in the ground. Underlying his point is the problem of structure and agency. This is the juncture where economic and social theories meet.

Archer (2000b) suggests that what people care about makes them who they are. She calls this self-identity a continuous sense of self, something which everyone has (Archer, 2000b, p.9). Individuals define themselves by setting out their ultimate concerns. However, she also acknowledges that the exercise of personal powers to achieve those concerns is not absolute because we are often influenced by social circumstances, whether constraints or enablements. As such, while the economic theories discussed above are conceptually helpful in explaining behaviour of students in choosing where and what to study in HE, they are themselves are inadequate for the research narrative. They may explain the students' motivations in terms of ROR, signalling to prospective employers, and their identity as a utility function, which are helpful for the supply side of the story. Nevertheless, to get a panoramic view, the demand side must be told too. To portray both sides, Archer's conceptualisation of structure and agency enables the research to accommodate these complementary theories. This approach can also explain how students reflexively made their decisions in light of their sense of self (identity) and opportunities and barriers which they face.

Complementing the structure and agency approach is the notion that identity is multidimensional (Wenger, 1998). Wenger distinguishes five aspects of identity, summarised by Sachs (2003, p. 125 in Wenger, 1998, pp.239–240):

(1) identity as negotiated experiences where we define who we are by the ways we experience ourselves through participation as well as the way we and others reify ourselves;

(2) identity as community membership where we define who we are by the familiar and unfamiliar;

(3) identity as a learning trajectory where we define who we are by where we have been and where we are going;

(4) identity as a nexus of multi-membership where we define who we are by the ways we reconcile our various forms of identity into one identity; and

(5) identity as a relation between the local and the global where we define who we are by negotiating local ways of belonging to broader constellations and manifesting broader styles and discourses.

Sachs states that ''identity and practice mirror each other'' (2003, p. 126). Accordingly, this study was particularly sensitive about the need to observe how the social practice of engagement in an IBC impacted on identity.

As discussed above, the research identified TNHE as a developing field currently informed primarily by quantitative studies, and as it matures, qualitative studies can provide new perspectives. Accordingly this research does not apply the above economic theories quantitatively, but use them in a qualitative framework for their explanatory power on IBC student choices, experiences and perceptions on employability. Combined in one framework underpinned by critical realism, these economic theories paint a more complete picture by making visible under-represented TNHE students who are also part of the UK HE.

2.6 Chapter summary

This chapter began by presenting the trendy topics published on the relatively new and developing area of TNHE, especially IBCs. Then the discussion of previous research focussed on student choices, experiences and graduate employability identifying that being a current field, publications are fairly recent. They mainly concentrate

on processes of TNHE rather than outcomes. In consequence, they tend to be policy or conceptual papers providing an overview of the field in its development and impact on global, country or institutional level. In the same vein, empirical studies are predominantly quantitative as is expected for any new area which requires such data to inform policy decisions. However, as argued above, as a field matures, qualitative studies are needed to bring more depth, to identify possible blind spots or blank spots which quantitative research cannot.

The discussion included theories and methods used in different studies. The most common and suitable theory for examining student choices is the push-pull theory.

There is little attempt to define or conceptualise 'student experience' but there is general agreement that it is wider than teaching and learning. Most research focusses on student satisfaction and service quality. This research is interested in exploring student experience, preferring student data to refine and define which nexus rather than to delineate boundaries from the start. This is partly because the literature survey shows that there has not been much definitive focus apart from student satisfaction looking at issues like campus facilities which are customer-orientated research. There are studies which look at social capital or cultural imperialism, but IBCs being a topic so under-researched qualitatively, it would be significant to see what 'student experiences' were identified by students themselves as valuable for their time at university and future employability.

Economic theories such as the rate of return to education, screening/signalling and identity economics were considered. Although each has its own utility in examining the push-pull factors behind student choices, these economic theories in themselves are inadequate to explain the complexity of socio-cultural properties which appear to hold as much sway as the economic factors. The problem of structure and agency, thus identified, should be dealt with when examining the push-pull factors. When investigating

student experiences and their connection with student perceptions of their employability, these economic theories together with the conceptualisation of structure and agency were also considered with the concepts of employability and identity.

This topic lacks empirical studies in the IBC context. To date, it would seem that Speight et al. (2012) is a rare investigation of mainland Chinese context. They explored IBC stakeholders' attitudes towards an employability development programme originally developed and launched at the parent campus. With regards to Malaysia, there has been more research on employability in the TNHE context but only Bailey and Ingimundardottir (2015) seems to be on IBCs. In consequence, the thesis identifies TNHE, particularly IBCs, as an under-researched field in relation to its outcomes. Students, as the main IBC stakeholders, are very important but despite their significance, there has been little attempt to understand their motivations, experiences and perceptions of employability more deeply than using quantitative instruments which are inadequate to give a 'rich description' (Geertz, 1973 in Stark & Torrance, 2011, p.33) of the complexity of the factors involved.

Chapter 3 Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodology and methods which were informed by the literature covered in the previous chapter. I begin here with a brief restatement of the research aim and questions which were derived from the literature survey presented in Chapter 2 to fill gaps in transnational higher education (TNHE), specifically international branch campuses (IBCs). In the next section, quantitative and qualitative traditions are contrasted leading to a discussion of different paradigms and the implications of a critical realist paradigm. The research design is elaborated covering its components. The case study method is discussed in relation to its definition, problems and justification for adopting it. A reiteration and summary of the theoretical propositions underpinned by structure and agency are given. The criteria for safeguarding quality and practical ways to fulfilled them are provided. A brief overview of university sites is presented before semi-structured interviews are introduced. The procedure for conducting the interviews is explained. Finally, ethical considerations are given.

There is a significant gap in the literature on TNHE with regards to its outcomes and qualitative studies. The research locates itself in this space to investigate IBC student choices, their experiences there and the parent university, and how their experiences impacted their employability in their respective personal life trajectory in light of the larger socio-political and economic issues which may impact them.

The aim of the research was to understand the motivations behind IBC students' choice, and perceptions of those students who spend part of their programme at the parent campus of their experience and employability. The main research question was in two parts:

Why do such IBC students choose to study at an IBC? From their perspective, how does the experience impact their employability? This was examined through perceptions of participants from three IBCs of two British universities. In order to do this, a case study method was employed. The subsidiary method used to gather data was semi-structured interviews. The aim was to explore students' accounts of their university experience in relation to their employability during their programme at the IBC and also the period of study at the parent campus.

3.2 Methodology

This section discusses research traditions, focusing on the research paradigm and provides an account of critical realism and how it influenced the research.

I begin with explaining what a paradigm means and what implications different paradigms may have. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), a paradigm represents a set of basic beliefs which characterise one's worldview of the nature of the world, one's place in it and the various relationships to the world and its constituents. Hence, a paradigm impacts on decisions made and carried out in the research. At this juncture, it is useful to outline assumptions made by different philosophical traditions on the nature of reality and its implications for the nature of knowledge and inquiry, and the relationship between the researcher and participants. This provides the background to show how critical realism represents my worldview.

3.2.1 Quantitative and qualitative traditions

Having long enjoyed a pre-eminent position in the natural sciences, quantification had also gained a strong following in the social sciences. There are several reasons for this: 1) prediction and possible control of natural phenomena through verification or falsification of hypotheses; 2) the range of statistical and mathematical models available for the purpose of doing so (as is often applied in the economics of education); and 3) the general perception that quantitative data are valid, or of high quality by comparison (e.g. the preference for such data by government agencies) (Sechrest, 1992 in Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Nevertheless, there are two sets of criticisms of quantitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.107). First, when it comes to studying human affairs, quantitative research has been criticised for being detached from contexts, and meaning and purpose which are best dealt with in qualitative research. This can be seen in Barrie's (2007) investigation of academics' qualitatively different conceptions of generic graduate attributes, the richness and holism of which quantification would not have been able to bring to light. The second set of critiques challenges not only the nature of quantification of data, but also the underlying assumptions that guide research. This is claimed in criticisms of conventional economic indicators arguing that they ignore basic human needs like dignity and self-respect (Nussbaum, 2011).

It is noted Guba and Lincoln (1994) acknowledge that paradigms represent views of their proponents and as such are human constructions which are not necessarily error-free. This does not mean that paradigms are unimportant or that it is pointless to clarify them. On the contrary, it makes clarifying the research paradigm unavoidable because no research is independent of the researcher's worldview and values and therefore, simply being open about these

augments academic honesty and transparency and gives grounds to defend one's position.

Although qualitative and quantitative research methods are often described as opposites, it is more useful to look at them as complementary binaries as the ultimate goal of research should be to utilise the most suitable methods to find answers to specific questions. While quantitative research focuses on measuring and analysing causal relationships between variables (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), a basic assumption made in the qualitative research tradition is that an understanding of the world can be gained through conversations and observations in natural settings rather than through experiments under controlled environments (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998, p.119). My research was qualitative because the aims were to explain the reasons behind students' choice of studying at an IBC and describe their perceptions of their employability through interviews in a natural setting. Qualitative research is capable of revealing complexity in a way which quantification cannot (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Rather than measuring data for statistical generalisation, the methods were used to interpret, understand and bring meaning to interview data in order to answer the research questions and provide analytical generalisation in line with the theoretical framework.

3.2.2 Different paradigms

Within the qualitative tradition, there is disagreement among those who hold to different philosophical paradigms on how much our understanding of the world can approach objective knowledge or truth about the world. In the following discussion, I focus on positivism and interpretivism in contrasting them with each other and critical realism (CR) because CR is often linked to them (Grix, 2010).

Problems regarding positivist worldview were eventually acknowledged paving the way for a paradigm shift particularly after the seminal publication of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* by Kuhn (1962, 1970, 1996). Kuhn's construct of paradigm in his historical account of the revolution of conceptual change in the physical sciences has over time also influenced the social sciences including educational research (Donmoyer, 2006). While agreeing that one dominant framework may guide scientific inquiry, Popper (1996) challenged Kuhn on the nature of scientific enquiry and proposed that refutation could also be used to advance knowledge. Whilst there is much to be said about Kuhn, and Popper, I limit my reference to them here for my purpose was to provide some background to the term 'paradigm', defined as the basic belief system or worldview that influences the research.

The goal in positivist research is objective knowledge production by an impartial researcher. However, it is now more widely accepted that outcomes of research whether through observation or description are not strictly objective but influenced by the researcher's ontological position (Willig, 2001). For example, when research follows a thematic analytical method within a realist framework, the outcomes are likely to be reports of experiences, meanings and the reality of participants whereas one that adopts a constructionist method examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, and experiences are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

While positivists seek to (dis)prove hypotheses in the quest for 'truth', interpretivists seek to understand phenomena through multiple perspectives within a real world context (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998). Interpretivism challenges the view that the social world could be understood in the same way as natural science and views reality as a social construction. However, it is criticised for fusing 'being' with a discourse on 'being' because this leads to linguistic fallacy (Bhaskar, 1998 in Bergin et al., 2008). Moreover, Archer (2000b) argues that our sense of selfhood, an intransitive

property, is independent of language and thus, 'being' cannot be subsumed by the transivity of language as suggested by interpretivism. Because interpretivism does not explain the social world beyond participants' interpretations of it, it cannot take into account the structural, cultural and institutional aspects which are independent of participants' thinking. In other words, interpretivism's anthropocentric tendency to explain 'being in terms of human beings only' (Bhaskar, 2008, 1975) lacks the breadth to take stock of the complex relations between agency and structure and the potential impacts on participants' perceptions of their employability and hence, interpretivism in itself is not sufficient to answer the research questions.

3.2.3 Critical realism (CR)

While interpretivists attribute the social life entirely in subjective terms in their search for meaning, 'critical realists assume that there is a real world out there' independent of observers (Easton, 2010, p.119). In this respect, positivism and critical realism share a similar ontological assumption regarding a world existing independently but because the case study research dealt with an analytical generalisation rather than a statistical generalisation which a positivist framework requires, CR was adopted.

CR was the most appropriate meta-theory to answer the research questions for these reasons:

1. Ontologically, a mind-independent, differentiated and stratified reality accounts for the variety of world views of participants from various backgrounds and different contexts. Moreover, constraints and enablements which stem from socio-cultural sources could be part of the interpretation based on evidence from the data.

2. Epistemologically, the intransitive reality remains unchanged even if participants' worldview changes. It was on this basis, different modes of reflexivity were used to identify why participants

chose to study at an IBC and how participant experiences explain their employability development at university.

3. Methodologically, interpretation of data was carried out based on the theoretical and analytical frameworks and participants were given an opportunity to comment. I also gave an account of any potential bias and made a decision to stick to the interpretation with evidential support but would include any disagreement on interpretations by participants.

CR accommodates a wide range of research methods encompassing both quantitative and qualitative types but the selection of method should be appropriate for the type and focus of study, and what one hopes to learn from the research (Sayer, 2000). Being concerned with students' perceptions and experiences, it was important to understand their social world from the standpoint of these active agents who consider themselves in relation to their social contexts and vice versa in the qualitative tradition. Accordingly, a discussion of the theory and research design follows in the next section.

3.3 The research design

A research design is the logic which connects the data to be collected (and the conclusions to be drawn) to the initial questions of study (Yin, 2014). The design was informed by the literature surveyed and the role of theory was geared towards analytic generalisation in contrast to statistical generalisation which generalises results from empirical studies (Yin, 2014). Analytic generalisation can be applied in reinterpreting results of existing studies or defining new research for focusing on other IBC situations.

The research aim was primarily to investigate reasons for IBC students' decision to study at an IBC and the ways in which the

decision led to experiences that may have impacted their employability. The research design was not one of comparative research. This was partly due to such a scope being larger than one PhD researcher could handle for there were points for comparison ranging from national contexts to individual situations with a preliminary cohort of more than 30 participants. However, some comparisons were an inevitable part of reporting on the findings. A discussion on case study research and the rationale for using it is provided below. The research questions concerned IBC students who spend part of their programme at the UK parent campus so investigating the cross-campus experience also involved a cross-cultural aspect. Cross-cultural research refers to investigation of issues from two or more countries or socio-cultural contexts. When researching a social phenomenon, it is vital to consider its cultural influence particularly since the roles of structure and agency are central in a critical realist paradigm. In this multiple-case study, the socio-cultural specificity of each case would be taken into account.

The choice of language to use in interviews with individuals from different cultural backgrounds was an important issue to consider in cross-cultural research because the comparability of data could be affected due to translation of different languages. The decision to make English the language of interview with the understanding that participants could resort to their preferred language was to ensure consistency and avoid any compromise in the comparability of data. I decided that using English would be fair and consistent for these reasons. Firstly, Malaysian participants were of different linguistic backgrounds. Some spoke Mandarin while others spoke Cantonese. For some, English was their first language and they could not speak any Chinese despite being identified as Chinese Malaysian. Secondly, while all of them could converse in Malay, the mainland Chinese participants could speak only Mandarin and English in addition to their mother dialects. Since they had been students at IBCs for at least two years where English was the medium of instruction, English would be manageable for them especially as I

had made clear that they could resort to using another language if they could express meaning for certain terms much more clearly and some of them actually did that. I also stressed that pre-interview preparation was not necessary but made the interview schedule available should they want it beforehand.

Another aspect is my familiarity with participants' socio-cultural contexts. I am a Chinese Malaysian[26] who has lived and worked for approximately 10 years in different parts of mainland China. In particular, I have taught a summer course at PU1 and PU2 in the UK respectively, and IBC2 in China for 7 years[27]. Hence, there was also some familiarity with most of the research sites. While having this contextual familiarity enhanced the ability to perceive and judge 'thickly' using what Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) refer to as practical wisdom, there was equally a risk of having blind spots due to familiarity. There is also a need to safeguard against potential insider bias which is detailed in sections on safeguarding the research design quality and ethical considerations, but it suffices to state here that I sought the help of mainland Chinese peers to reduce the potential of blind spots and keep an audit trail to document reasons for decisions taken. In addition, one of the PhD participants, a Chinese Malaysian, accepted the offer to review the thesis in relation to excerpts and interpretation related to him.

In summary, it is important to highlight these different layers of socio-cultural contexts which would potentially impact the findings.

[26] In Malaysia, I would be identified as belonging to the Chinese race/ethnicity. However, the common term 'ethnic Chinese' would be inadequate to represent my identity. I am Chinese Malaysian no matter how the national political rhetoric attempts to polarise and reconstruct this identity (See Hirschman, 1987).

[27] IBC2's parent university is PU1.

3.3.1 Components of the research design

The figure below illustrates the basic components of the case study research design. The main research question was in two parts focusing on the why and how:

1) Why do IBC students (who spend part of their programme at the parent campus) choose to study at an IBC?

2) From their perspective, how does the experience impact on their employability?

Interview data were the main source of evidence although other sources of data also informed the research, namely relevant government policy documents, reports and statistical data; scholarly and journalistic literature; and institutional documents such as strategic plans. Each case represented one student participant who began his/her study in a Business or Engineering programme at an IBC followed by at least two-three months at parent university. Each participant was one unit of analysis. The other components were the combination of complementary theories underpinned by analytical dualism of structure and agency for interpreting the data to address the questions.

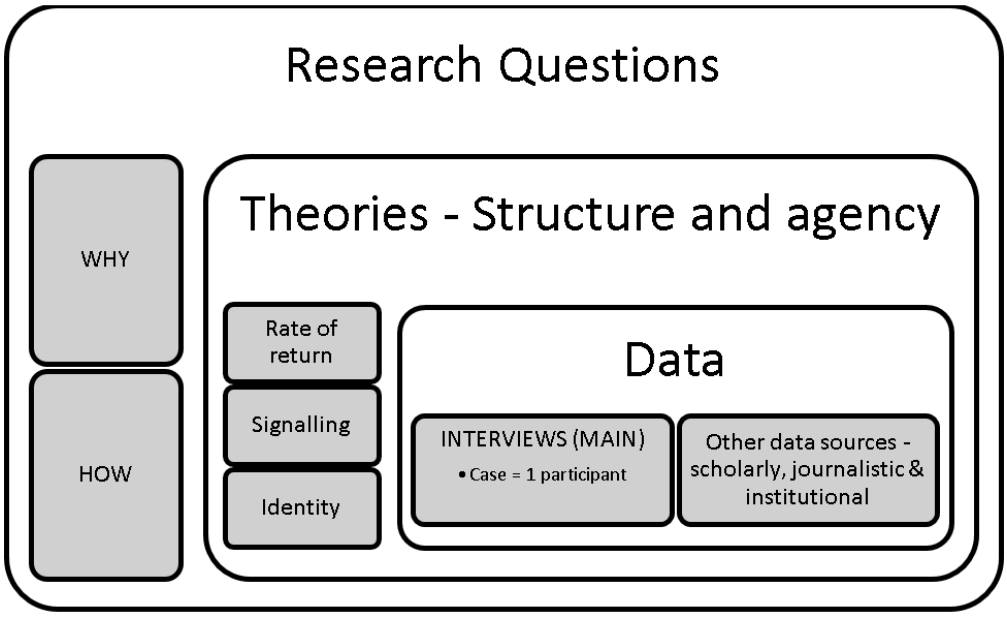

Figure 3-1: Components of the research design (by the author)

The analytical framework in the figure below was framed according to the main interview data sources producing a network of narratives derived from individual interviews with students from IBC1, IBC2 and IBC3. It was designed with a triangulation of data providers in mind as sources for a network of narratives from different IBCs. Furthermore, Figure 3-3 shows the research's theoretical triangulation underpinned by the structure and agency approach. Theoretical triangulation here refers to the employment of more than one theory in interpreting data (Denzin, 1970 in Bryman, n.d.).

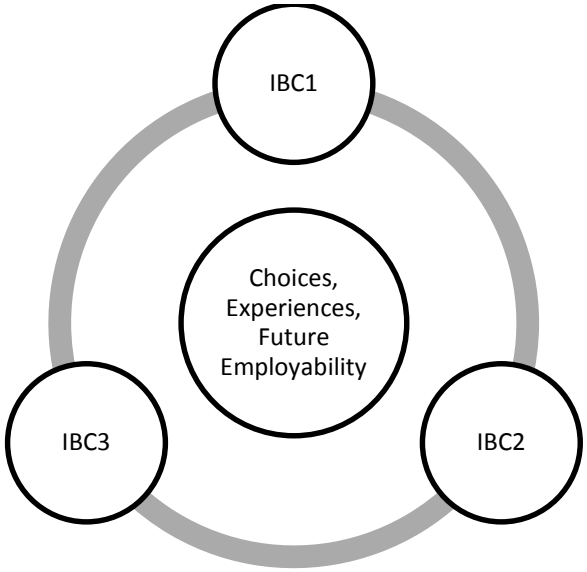

Figure 3-2: Data source triangulation - A network of narratives (by the author)

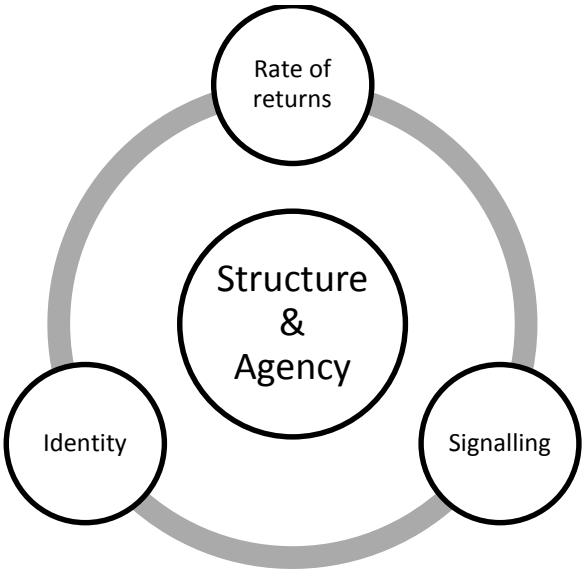

Figure 3-3: Theoretical triangulation (by the author)

The analytical framework was also supported by a structure of causal explanation and illustrated in Figure 3-4, in interpreting the data. Objects or entities are the basic theoretical component for a critical realist explanation and are similar to the concept of variables. Easton (2010, p.120) distinguishes them by pointing out that variables are 'measures of things and not things themselves' and entities capture the essence and capabilities of the things researched. Entities possess powers and liabilities to cause events to occur. Events are external and visible behaviours of persons, things or systems as they occur or have happened. Structure here for my purpose delineates an individual's characteristics which form part of the internal relations within that person such as gender, psychological or cultural structures. Mechanisms are the deal breaker or tipping point in the condition leading to a particular event, e.g., the ways of acting in relation to objects' employability.

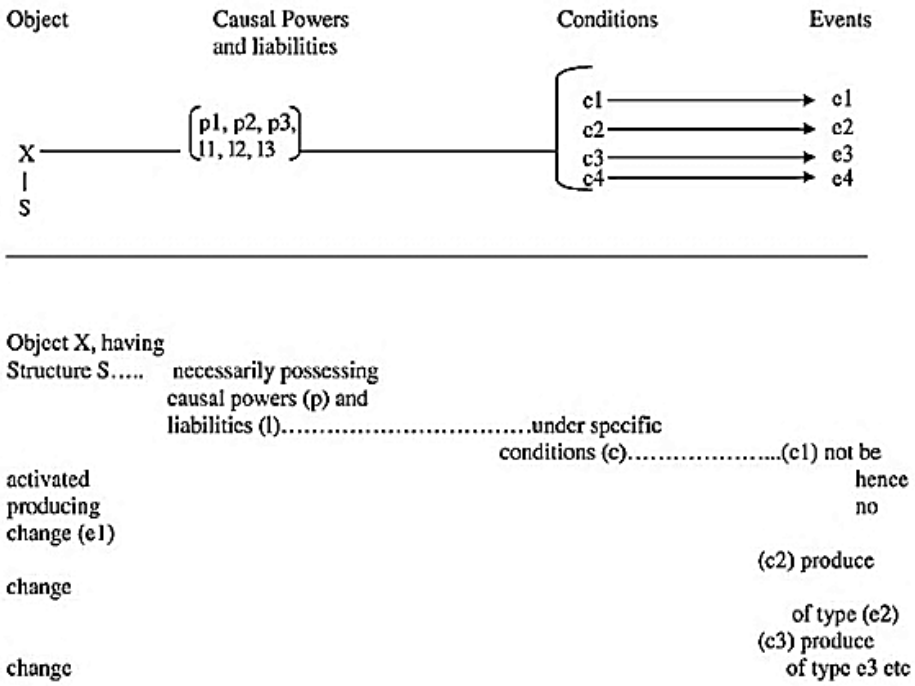

Figure 3-4: The structure of causal explanation (Sayer, 1984 in Easton, 2010)

In Figure 3-4, object X refers to each participant having structure S (e.g., knowledge, personality traits, etc.) who possesses causal powers (e.g., to perform well academically) and liabilities (e.g., to be inactive in extra-curricular activities) under specific conditions (e.g., a job opening in a bank or a PhD scholarship opportunity) leading to a particular event (e.g., to go to a prestigious university for postgraduate study). To extend the example in the brackets further, when activated, a mechanism (e.g., a fully funded PhD scholarship from an Ivy League university in the United States) determines the outcome or event paving the career trajectory of the object. Although this framework may appear simplistic in investigating the complexity of real world behaviour, it is at least a coherent one which guided the case study investigating competing explanations to provide an inference to the best explanation. A critical realist framework adopts a humble epistemology, i.e., there is room for academic critique and if necessary revision.

3.3.2 Case study research

There is disagreement about what a case study is (Swanborn, 2010; Easton, 2010). Yin (2014) defines a case study as a method whereas others prefer not to refer to it as such, but rather as a choice of what is to be researched and explored from various angles through any methods to produce an in-depth understanding of a specific topic (Stake, 2003; Thomas, 2011). Some view a case study as a process of inquiry and a product of that inquiry (Stake, 2003, p.136; Swanborn, 2010). The disagreement may be due to the conventional view of case studies. At its most extreme spectrum, they were regarded with disdain and treated as an unreliable scientific method but case study research has proven to be a method in its own right with some former critics becoming its ardent supporters (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

This research adopts Yin's (2009a, p.18 in Yin, 2012, p.4) definition of a case study as 'an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a "case"), set within its real-world context — especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident'. Stake (1995 in Rhee, 2004) distinguishes between intrinsic, instrumental and collective case studies. An intrinsic case study is conducted to understand a certain case. An instrumental case study is carried out when insights for a research question is the goal. A collective case study is conducted to apply an instrumental study to several cases. Yin (2014) distinguishes types of case study based on research questions: descriptive (covering background and description of the case), exploratory ('what') and explanatory ('how'/'why'). The 'why' and 'how' research questions sought answers over a period of time rather than frequency or incidence, and this indicated the type of case study was explanatory (Yin, 2014). It sought to understand a group of IBC students' motivations and perceptions in a specific natural setting using a theoretical framework. Therefore, this research adopted a collective, explanatory and instrumental case study according to Stake's and Yin's typologies. Before looking at reasons

for case study research, I address some problems related to case study in the next sub-section.

3.3.2.1 Problems related to case study method

A case study was formerly regarded as merely a tool in the preliminary phases of research such as a pilot study but was not recognised as a method in equal stature to others such as a survey. This was largely due to the dominance of quantitative tradition explained previously in relation to competing paradigms. However, a case study does not contribute to scientific development by way of broad generalisability in quantitative measures neither is it meant to do so. Instead, a case study is generalisable by way of theoretical propositions (Yin, 2014), or as Stake (1978) argues 'naturalistic' generalisation. Its generalisability is enhanced through strategic case selection (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In addition, reading case studies as narratives in their entirety does not negate the point on the generalisability of a case study with regards to theoretical propositions, because their potential applicability extends to reinterpreting outcomes of existing research or defining new research for other situations. Another challenge to case study is the claim that it is biased towards verification. However, because a case study allows the researcher to question preconceived notions and discount them if proven necessary, it actually has a greater bias towards falsification than verification and therefore, is a valuable research method which enhances learning during the research process (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

3.3.2.2 Why case study research

Critical realism is compatible with various research methods and the method of choice depends on the nature of the object and purpose of the research (Sayer, 2000; Easton, 2010). According to Yin (2014), case study research is particularly well-suited for situations

when 1) research questions which focus on the 'why' and 'how' such as the present research; 2) the researcher has little or no control over behavioural events, which was indeed my situation for the participants were not my current or former students but were recruited independently and neither did they know or have any links to my former students or contacts in China or Malaysia; and 3) the focus of study is a contemporary rather than a historical phenomenon allowing for depth in understanding phenomena like participants' perceptions of employability in the real-world context.

The case study method was chosen because the nature of the research question required causal explanations in an in-depth inquiry. This research was conducted in what Bhaskar (1975, 2008) refers to as 'an open system' with no or little control over how participants would respond. The complexity of the phenomenon being studied would not have been adequately explained using other methods such as a survey. A mixed methods design had been considered but dropped due to difficulty experienced in obtaining access to prospective participants. The number of participants would have been inadequate for any meaningful statistical analysis. It was finally decided that a qualitative inquiry employing the case study method using interviews was the way forward for all these reasons.

A multiple-case design was adopted based on each participant as one unit of analysis. The main advantage in comparison to single-case designs is the evidence is often considered more persuasive, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust (Herriot and Firestone, 1983 in Yin, 2014). The biggest drawback would be the increase in complexity especially in the data analysis process. However, it is also the rich complexity which makes a multiple-case study more compelling. Tellis (1997, p.2) argues that the unit of analysis is "typically a system of action rather than an individual or group of individuals" and that case studies tend to focus on one or two issues that are central to understanding the system being examined. This research based its unit of analysis on

individual participants to understand the system/phenomenon being studied.

The case study may be seen as a poor basis for generalisation especially since single units do not represent whole populations. This research does not claim to represent whole populations of IBC students. It seeks rather to provide generalisation to similar cases by which different features of this research, such as the methodological approach and theoretical and analytical frameworks, would resonate experientially with a broad cross-section of readers and promote a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Hence, it is left to readers to recognise salient similarities to cases of interest to them which they could establish as the basis for naturalistic or theoretical generalisation for application (Stake, 1978).

3.3.3 Three theoretical propositions

Theory development drew on the research topic to give an account about why a specific set of IBC students chose to study at an IBC and how their decisions had an impact on their employability in their perceptions of their experience at university. Based on the literature review, I investigated the topic in relation to the following groups of propositions (see the table below). As detailed in Chapter 2, there has been much research investigating employability of graduates focusing on human capital (specifically the rate of return to education) or the screening hypothesis (also signalling), but there is little based on identity. Most students desire to have a high rate of return to education (ROR) so that their future earnings would offset the investment in their education. Many base their choice of university on its reputation in order to signal to employers their ability to perform in the future. However, a more accurate picture should include identity which is likely to influence a student's choice of university and his/her account of how her experience impacts employability during university, and the quality of the experience there depends on how he/she fits in the social setting. Therefore,

my approach was to combine socio-economic theories which hold significant explanatory power in examining students' perspectives. I briefly re-state them here.

Table 3-1: A summary of propositions with their corresponding theories (table derived by the author)

Proposition 1 – WHY & HOW	**Proposition 2 - WHY & HOW**	**Proposition 3 - WHY & HOW**
The case study will show IBC students' decisions to study at an IBC are influenced by identity and norms in their social context and demonstrate how these reflexive individuals make their way through life at university (and beyond) with respect to their employability through the concept of identity.	The case study will show that IBC students' decisions to study at an IBC are due to the belief that their employability would be enhanced through transnational higher education and bring a higher rate of return to education.	The case study will show that IBC students' decisions to study at an IBC are due to the belief that the credentials will signal to future employers their ability to perform in a job or will function as indicators of ability to perform when employers screen candidates during recruitment.
Theory 1	**Theory 2**	**Theory 3**
Graduate identity in tandem with Identity Economics	Human Capital	Signalling/Screening Hypothesis
Structure and agency (Archer, 2000a; Archer, 2003; Archer, 2007)		

My proposition was that participants make decisions which impact their employability including the decision to study at an IBC with reference to their identity, i.e., their sense of self (Theory 1 in the table above). Akerlof and Kranton (2000) introduce the concept of identity in economics arguing that it explains social phenomena in ways which most economic theories fail to account for. For example, detrimental behaviour can be explained through identity economics. It also elaborates on how one person's actions may influence others from the perspective of identity as a new type of externality. For instance, IBC students' behaviours in IBCs could be a mark of their identity as distinct from students from other Chinese universities. Often they have been labelled as outspoken and proactive in problem-solving. These characteristics might be attractive to multinational companies, but Chinese employers may not take kindly to them due to differences in their respective workplace culture.

Identity also accounts for how preferences can change or be changed. Ideas about identity change within a society. Notions of identity spread even more quickly through globalisation. IBC students may consider the implications studying at an IBC might have on their identity. In addition, by crossing borders in the pursuit of education they are exposed to notions of identity other than those within their own socio-cultural boundaries. Therefore, the concept of identity in answering the question why they chose to study at an IBC and also the question of how the university experience influenced their employability would be essential in recording their perceptions because these would be inextricably linked to how they perceived their own identity evolved over time beginning from two transitions of high school to IBC and IBC to parent university, and a third transition for some participants from there to employment or to postgraduate study abroad. According to Akerlof and Kranton (2000), choice of identity may be the most important 'economic' decision people make. Therefore, it would be appropriate to investigate how participants may have consciously chosen who they wished to be in view of enablements or constraints (causal powers or liabilities) that may determine their employability development. Besides identity, the idea that norms could strongly motivate decisions also complements the critical realist's view of structure and agency.

The other propositions were student decisions made based on the ROR and educational credentials being the signalling device and how their experience at university matched the corresponding proposition. Human capital theory proposes that individuals invest in education with a view to reap returns to their investment in obtaining employment and this is often indicated by earnings (Theory 2 in the table above). The screening/signalling hypothesis, on the other hand, regards educational credentials as indicators to employers of individuals' potential to perform (Theory 3 in the table above).

Human capital theory, despite criticisms of its inadequacy, is the dominant framework behind higher education policies in the UK, Malaysia and China (less overt due to its humanist rhetoric on 'comprehensive development in education' or *suzhi jiaoyu* but it is still very much neo-liberal human capital theory driven). This concept of developing human capital through education has long permeated public discourse and thinking in these countries. It would not be surprising if findings pointed to its influence on participants' reasons for choosing an IBC or on their decisions in making their way through university. This is typically demonstrated through their belief that a higher level of education will provide a better return to their investment through higher earnings.

With the impact of globalisation on labour markets around the world, does reputation of educational institutions associated with the screening/signalling hypothesis still have any of its reputed weight with these IBC students? If it did at the point of choosing the IBC, could it also explain participants' decisions relevant to their employability enhancement during university and after graduation?

These three propositions were underpinned by a critical realist position which assumes that these individuals are active agents who exercise causal powers in relation to the structures they are part of to pursue their personal project (Archer, 2007).

3.3.4 Safeguarding the quality of the research design

Having presented the research design, I now turn to some guidelines that helped me reflect on the quality of my work. There are four tests generally accepted for assessing the quality of a research design (Yin, 2014):

1. Construct validity

2. Internal validity

3. External validity

4. Reliability

Sceptics of qualitative research, mainly from the positivist paradigm, argue that validity and reliability are inadequately addressed. Different terminology has been employed to demonstrate that this type of inquiry belongs to a different paradigm, viz. interpretivism. Guba (1981) proposes four constructs which correspond to the criteria in a positivist paradigm (in brackets):

1. credibility (internal validity);

2. transferability (external validity/generalisability);

3. dependability (reliability);

4. confirmability (objectivity).

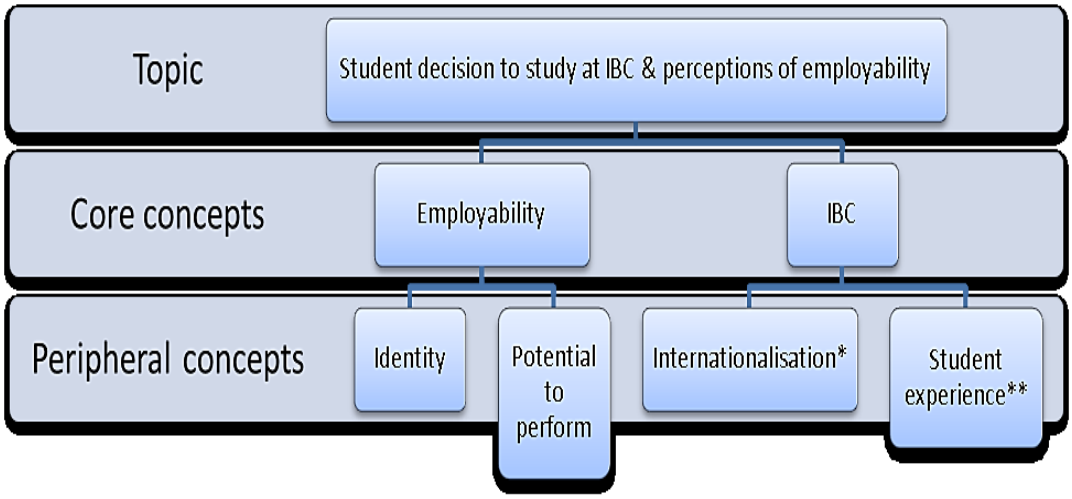

Figure 3-5: Core and peripheral concepts (by author)

Construct validity involves identifying and operationalising concepts being studied (Yin, 2014, p.46). Core concepts of employability and IBC, and the peripheral concepts were operationalised in the figure above. It illustrates how concepts were derived from the research

objective in correspondence to the source of evidence in interviews with students[28].

Credibility is concerned with whether a plausible causal argument can be offered to defend the research conclusions. According to Gibbert et al. (2008), ways of ensuring internal validity include a research framework (refer to p.91 above) derived from the literature survey in Chapter 2, p.39; a comparison of empirically observed patterns with either predicted ones or patterns in existing literature and in different contexts dealt with on p.115 (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Eisenhardt, 1989 in Gibbert et al., 2008); and theory triangulation enables a verification of findings by adopting multiple perspectives (Yin, 1994 in Gibbert et al., 2008) as detailed on p.98. These strategies were adopted to avoid anecdotalism by providing opportunities for systematic falsification (Gibbert & Ruigrok, 2010). Other safeguards were offering participants the opportunity to comment on interpretation of their data, and enlisting the assistance of a mainland Chinese scholar whose expertise is Chinese higher education, and a current PhD candidate in another UK university who used to teach at IBC2 to give feedback on specific areas such as my interpretation of Chinese-related aspects including Chinese interview extracts, and whether there was a connecting logic throughout the thesis leading to my conclusions.

With regards to transferability, I strived for analytic generalisation beyond this case study. Particularly since the research question concerned the 'why' and 'how', the choice of theoretical propositions and use of replication logic in multiple-case studies were strategies I incorporated in the research design for explanatory case study research.

[28] Internationalisation* in Figure 3-5: Core and peripheral concepts (by author) refers to any internationalisation activities either initiated by the university or individual students independent of the institution. Student experience** encompasses academic as well as extra-curricular and personal experiences (e.g. living in a hall of residence) at the parent university.

Finally, I addressed dependability by minimising errors and biases through recording an audit trail (examples in the appendices). My audit trail was documented through the following:

1. A research notebook recorded reflections on various fieldwork aspects of the research such as decisions and changes made and the reasons for them including relevant informal comments made by participants, supervisors and colleagues, and musings on what I read or thought were added throughout the research journey.

2. Literature notebooks contained notes and reflections on the literature read.

3. Folders of all interview related paper documents such as signed participant consent forms and interview schedules for all phases.

4. Contact summaries charted all information and reflections (including interpretations) of each individual case and also used as guidelines to follow during fieldwork and analysis.

5. The NVivo project contained the raw data – interview transcripts and audios including researcher annotations and memos.

6. Trails of thematic analysis on raw data in Excel spreadsheets.

Another objective for keeping an audit trail was to ensure a later researcher who wishes to follow the procedures to conduct the case study can do so. For example, further research could be carried out in relation to Malaysian institutions which have established IBCs overseas such as Limkokwing University of Creative Technology in Botswana and Lesotho.

3.3.5 University sites[29]

Participant selection was based on enrolment at the three IBCs and a minimum period of 3 months at their respective parent university in the UK as part of the study programme. IBC1 and IBC2 have the same parent campus, PU1. They were chosen because of personal interest and familiarity because I had worked in PU1 and IBC2 before, and I am from Malaysia where IBC1 is located. IBC3 was considered when I encountered difficulty in recruiting IBC1 Business students. Having access to IBC3 participants prompted me to modify the design to include them. IBC3 and IBC2 are located in China and IBC3 was founded 2 years after IBC2. Therefore, there is not a long gap in terms of their years of establishment. At the time of data gathering they were both listed as first level universities in their respective province and were located in the top two most prosperous provinces, which meant they both shared many similarities although important differences existed too. Overall, the selection of these IBCs and their parent campuses was purposive and convenient in the sense that they provided access to participants and were familiar contexts.

Having provided an overview of the research design and the safeguard measures, a discussion on the case study as the main method is described next.

3.4 Methods

This subsection describes the research methods used. It also provides reasons for employing semi-structured interviews and approaches taken to address problems associated with them. Then, a brief overview of the ethical considerations and the process and

[29] The background information of the universities is in Chapter 1.

procedure of data collection is given. In addition, an overview of the cohort is also provided.

The methods point to my view on what knowledge and the nature of reality are. They reflect the critical realist worldview that 'structure' and 'agency' constitute two distinctive and irreducible properties and powers, and that human reflexive deliberations play a crucial role in mediating between them (Archer, 2003). Accordingly, interview data were collected from student participants to take account of the interplay between 'structure' and 'agency' in the ways they reflexively exercised their personal powers in relation to structural constraints and enablements. Implicit in this subsidiary methods combination is the critical realist position that a participant's self-knowledge or societal-knowledge was not always accurate, so there was room for correction as relevant literature and institutional documents were also consulted. Each participant's course of action was personally conceived and designed by himself/herself, but the critical realist framework does not negate the causal influences which could prosper or frustrate his/her plans.

3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

In this section, the interview cohort, procedure, process, aspects of audio recording and transcription are elaborated. Practical matters related to the analytic method used to explore the data are outlined.

Gathering data in this research was over a sustained period through a process of interviewing to obtain students' perceptions and experiences. In this way, following a critical realist paradigm, it was possible to examine students as agents in relation to the various elements within the structure they were in such as the university and the workplace. In other words, 'the data were collected in close proximity to a specific situation', (the university, the site of transition to join the wider society, the workplace) which Miles and Huberman (1994, p.10) refer to as 'local groundedness'.

Interviewing is well-suited for a critical realist framework locating the meanings participants place on their university experience and employability, and linking these meanings to the social world. It is assumed that knowledge can be gathered through listening and interpreting participants' responses. I employed semi-structured or in-depth interviews as my main subsidiary method for data gathering because their flexibility incorporates both open-ended and more theoretically led questions, eliciting data from the participant's experience and data guided by existing constructs within the research framework (Galletta, 2013). This method gave me the freedom to probe responses as necessary while keeping me on track with all the intended areas to be covered.

As the interviewer, hence, I was responsible for the direction and outcome of the interview process. Although I had an interview schedule (see Appendices for samples), I had to be flexible in response to answers given and not be restricted by the order of the questions. Sometimes a subsequent area was voluntarily covered in depth making it unnecessary to go over it again and other times the interview might flow more naturally with differently ordered questions. As a result of the open-ended nature of the interview, I also followed up on unanticipated elements which might be important or file them away to see if they were corroborated later.

3.4.1.1 The cohort

Thomas (2011) argues that in a case study, a selection rather than a sample of participants is appropriate. Participant selection was conducted according to an information orientation rather than randomisation. The reason for this was to optimise what could be learned in the period of time available for the research (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Tellis, 1997). The information orientation was based on what has been reported regarding perceptions of IBC by prospective or current students at such institutions. A report (Kiley, 2011), commissioned by Duke University ahead of their plan to establish a

campus in China, shows that students are only willing to pay a higher tuition fee at an IBC if there is an opportunity to experience life abroad. It also reports that students do not assume that a university's global recognition will be shared by its IBC so it is likely that study abroad opportunity is the main draw when an IBC has a lower reputation. Moreover, there is evidence to show that international higher education experience has a role to play in developing employability (Crossman & Clarke, 2009; Counsell, 2011) and identity formation (Pyvis & Chapman, 2007). Hence, international experience is likely to be an essential selection criterion for prospective students and their parents. Accordingly, the target population consisted of students who had spent approximately a minimum of three months, this being the shortest length for non-2+2 IBC undergraduate students to stay at Parent University 1, PU1.

Business and administrative studies, and engineering and technology occupied the top two spots for the highest percentage of international students by subject area in the UK in 2013-14 (UK Council for International Student Affairs, 2015). PU1 is one of the largest UK recruiter of international students studying engineering in 2010. PU2 is equally renowned in the UK for its engineering programmes. Business, Commerce and Economics (57%) and Engineering (22%) are the top two fields of study in TNHE in China (Mok & Xu, 2008). According to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2010) in its audit of overseas provision in Malaysia, Business and Administrative Studies (30%) and Engineering (almost 20%) are also the two most popular subject areas. In IBC2, the Business Division has the largest cohort of students. The Business and Engineering programmes are available at all IBCs. For these reasons, I recruited Business and Engineering students. In this thesis, Business and Engineering are used as shorthand for a number of subjects subsumed under these labels.

Initially, the research sites were IBC1 and IBC2, branch campuses of PU1. Opting for 2+2 or 2+1 students was not as straightforward as

it might have appeared at first. Apart from 'BSc Computer Science with Artificial Intelligence' which was a new course offered in September 2011, there was no other 2+1/2+2 course which was offered in both IBCs but IBC2 had other 2+2 courses. Nevertheless, all 4+0 students have opportunities to apply for inter-campus exchange or transfer, or study abroad programmes. Therefore, the choice of disciplines for case bounding was based on disciplines with the largest numbers of students from both IBCs: Business and Engineering (including Architecture and Computer Science) courses. However, due to the zero participation from IBC1's Business group after 2 semesters of recruitment through various means, I then approached IBC3 students studying at PU2 (Parent University 2) after consultation with supervisors. Each individual's perspectives were gathered regarding their reasons behind their decision to study at an IBC and the ways in which their experience enhanced their employability. A profile of the 31 participants is listed in Appendix H: Participants' Profile.

Although I had intended to recruit only undergraduate students, I eventually welcomed Engineering postgraduates to participate. The first PhD Engineering student was interviewed because at the time, I was still recruiting and was worried that I might not have enough participants. The second was introduced by the first and was interviewed due to his unique experience of having the opportunity to study at all 3 sites: PU1, IBC1 and IBC2.

On the whole, PRC participants' parents were generally educated at a higher level than Malaysian participants' parents (see Appendix I: Participants' family background profile). Almost half of the Malaysians had both parents who had not attained a university level of education while only four PRC participants had both parents who did not.

3.4.1.2 Procedure

The plan was to conduct one to two phases of interviews depending on need and accessibility. An interview schedule was drafted for phase 1 based on the main research questions and a pilot study was conducted to test it. Three undergraduate students from IBC1 (1 male studying Engineering) and IBC2 (1 male and 1 female studying International Studies and Engineering respectively) were interviewed. The interview schedule was revised accordingly in consultation with supervisors for phase 1 (see Appendix C).

Participants who enrolled in IBC1 and IBC2 in Engineering and Business Schools were recruited and this process was on-going for approximately 2 semesters due to the difficulties of recruiting Business students from IBC1. Then phase 1 began in September 2012 after ethical approval by the School of Education was received. Although 30 students had responded, 5 were dropped because there was no further correspondence from them to carry on. IBC3 students were recruited from January 2013. In sum, phase 1 went ahead with 8, 17 and 6 students from IBC1, IBC2 and IBC3 respectively culminating in 31 overall (see Appendices C and D for samples of the interview schedule):

Table 3-2: A summary of participants by IBC, gender and course (by author)

IBC	Business	Engineering	Phase 1 Total
1	0	1F+7M = 8	8
2	7F+1M = 8	3F+6M = 9	17
3	0	2F+4M = 6	6

As far as possible, I strived for equity in the process. Equity is "a balance between means and ends, between what is sought and what is given, between process and product, and a sense of fairness and justice that pervades the relationship between participant and interviewer" (Seidman, 2006, p.111). The ways in which this was achieved were through the provision of a participant information

sheet detailing the purposes and processes of the research (see Appendix A), a participant consent form that outlined the rights and responsibilities of the interviewer and the participant including contacts for complaint (see Appendix B), scheduling time and place of interviews that were convenient to the participant and reasonable for the interviewer, and adopting a non-intrusive technique of interviewing (not looking for corroboration of personal views rather than the story of the participant's experience). All 31 participants were given a copy of the participant information sheet and requested to sign a consent form after an explanation of its content, the research and interview procedure. They also had an opportunity to ask questions before recording began.

Yin (2014) recommends having a case study protocol to guide each interview and ensure consistency in fieldwork, and I used what Miles and Huberman (1994) called 'a contact summary' for this purpose (see p.315 for a sample). There was a contact summary for each participant with his/her personal details, the interview schedule followed by responses either as a transcript extract or my own summary, interpretation or both. I also used it to track issues for follow-up in phase 2. Two other uses were to make connections to different theoretical propositions and other participants.

In phase 2 (from January 2014), students were contacted for a follow-up interview (see Appendix C for a sample interview schedule). 22 were re-interviewed. The others had either fallen out of contact or did not respond to a follow-up interview invitation.

Table 3-3: Phase 2 participants (by author)

IBC	Business	Engineering	Phase 2 Total
1	0	8	8
2	8	5	13
3	0	1	1

Analysis was supported by transcription of the audiotaped interviews. It was practical to transcribe directly on NVivo. It has a suite of in-built media which allowed me to play and pause the audio file and adjust its speed and volume while transcribing. I transcribed all interviews myself as transcribing was part of the analytic process: I annotated and wrote memos as I did so. Then I saved a code-free copy and proceeded to code on NVivo with on-going annotation and memo writing. I also completed the participant contact summary (Appendix F) and prepared the following phase's interview schedule which consisted of generic questions followed by those I flagged for clarification or further probing.

A transcript itself is not a verbatim record of discourse but is subject to the on-going interpretive and analytical decisions made (Emerson et al., 1995, p.3 in McLellan et al., 2003). Another point to note is I had to 'settle on' (McLellan et al., 2003, p.65) what was transcribed since the transcripts would never fully capture what transpired during an interview. Therefore, I decided that unless non-verbal cues threw some light on the interview questions, they were omitted. Whenever Chinese was used, the Chinese characters were omitted for pragmatic reasons. Instead, I kept the English translation and *Hanyu Pinyin* (Romanised Chinese). For such interview extracts, I took steps to check the accuracy of my work with Chinese colleagues.

3.5 Ethical considerations

This section considers why ethical issues are important, and ethical issues encountered as the data collection progressed.

Ethics is particularly important in social science research because we study 'human subjects' and as such, ethical safeguards must be put

in place for the protection of participants and the assurance of good research conduct to encourage future participation in research. Research ethics can be defined as 'good conduct towards others during the course of conducting research' (Vogt et al., 2012, p.228). While 'others' in the definition is not limited to participants, my discussion here is focused on IBC student/graduate participants. There were some informal interviews conducted with members of staff of PU1 and Chinese colleagues at the School of Education for background information only and thus, were not regarded as data for analysis and not transcribed.

With regards to the recruitment of IBC1 and IBC2 participants, ethics procedure was followed according the School of Education's guidelines after ethics approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee in July 2012 before recruitment of IBC3 participants was even conceived. After no interest from IBC1 Business students after two semesters of recruitment through different avenues, I consulted supervisors regarding the possibility of recruiting IBC3 students and the re-submission of a new ethics statement to the School for approval. Then I contacted IBC3 students studying at PU2 via Facebook in January 2013 to test whether anyone would respond to an invitation by a researcher who then was primarily researching PU1 and its IBCs, one of which is often touted as IBC3's rival. I was not optimistic. Therefore, I had thought it would have been a futile attempt to firstly contact the International Office at PU2 for help to recruit them. The failure to recruit IBC1 Business students through this channel and the Business School had deterred me from using these means as my first attempt at IBC3 recruitment. Drawing from this and my knowledge of mainland Chinese students in relation to what recruitment strategy might work, I ventured instead to make direct contact with IBC3 students and give them a chance to preview my Facebook profile which clearly indicated my identity as a PhD researcher which also included a web link to my profile on the School's website. Two initially responded with interest out of 56 who were contacted. With my supervisors' approval, I went ahead

to set up interviews with them and by April 2013 when I travelled to PU2 to conduct interviews, the number had grown to 6 with 2 more responding to my Facebook invitation and 2 more were introduced to my research by the two participants who had responded earlier. Because they had not met me face to face before, I wanted to develop trust by interviewing them in a location familiar to them. Hence, I arranged to meet them individually at the venue of their choice at PU2 with a request that it should be favourable for recording the interview.

3.5.1 Confidentiality and anonymisation

Other aspects of ethics considered are confidentiality in the research process and anonymisation of individuals and institutions in reporting. Confidentiality is a principle that permits people to express themselves in confidence but also prohibits publication of material that might cause harm (Piper & Simons, 2011). According to Piper and Simons, anonymisation is a procedure which protects privacy by avoiding identification but by itself cannot prevent harm. Labels were used to represent the parent universities and their IBCs in reporting. Although this does not guarantee that they would not be identifiable, at least it provides another layer towards ensuring anonymity of participants. Participants should remain unidentifiable as they were selected from courses which were the largest in terms of student numbers for this reason, and they had also been assigned a pseudonym to preserve anonymity.

3.5.2 Maintaining a balanced & ethical researcher position

There was also a dilemma between maintaining a good rapport and yet maintaining a professional distance. By building a good rapport with participants, this inevitably meant they were also enquiring into

the findings, what I was looking for and if I had found it. I had to be tactful in not divulging too much information such as my thought processes that might impact subsequent interviews or the relationship with participants. Another aspect is for a small number of Chinese IBC2 participants, I was one of the very few 'foreigners' or non-Chinese who was interested in them and established contact during their time in the UK but I had not realised this until their interview responses mentioned it.

Seidman (2006) refers to reciprocity as the most problematic issue in interviewing as the researcher profits more from the process than participants. While I had struggled to maintain a position which minimised my influence on the research, I felt morally obliged to help when a small minority asked me to proofread their postgraduate application documents. After all, it was stated in the participant information sheet that one of the benefits participating in the research would be the opportunity to reflect on their experience during their time at university and that this would benefit their own future employability. Some participants saw the research as an opportunity to do exactly this and to benefit from someone whom they felt could advise on future career or postgraduate study application. One participant commented that the whole process helped her to reflect on how her experience had been developing her and the interview gave her an opportunity to articulate it and focus her attention on linking her experience to her future career.

3.6 Data analysis

Data analysis began from listening and note-taking during interviews to jotting down impressions after the interview. I recorded impressions in my research notebook for each participant including background information (for a sample, see Item 2: Research notebook – Reflections on participant). I then used

descriptive coding in the first cycle (see Appendix F, Item 5) to provide an organisational grasp of the study followed by thematic analysis as the method to identify, analyse, and report patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Although thematic analysis is widely used, there is little consensus on what it is and how to do it (Braun & Clarke, 2006). My approach is a mix of deductive and inductive thematic analysis. The rationale for employing a mixed deductive and inductive thematic analytic method was to make the explanatory case study framework based on the three propositions work for an under-researched topic. I drew up a tentative list of broad themes relevant to my questions and theoretical concepts associated with the three propositions above, but I also added to the list themes I felt was meaningful or repetitive during transcription. In addition, I annotated transcripts for follow-up and wrote memos related to my theoretical concepts or impressions of emerging themes. I experimented with coding off hard copies as well as directly on NVivo. See Appendices F and G for examples.

After Phase 1 interviews, I revised the codes list through an inductive approach in order to obtain a richer description of the data overall. I went through each code with its corresponding transcript extracts. For each code, revision was undertaken based on the following:

1. How many references are there in the interview data set?

2. How does it answer my research question?

3. How does it relate to my theoretical framework?

4. How does it relate to my conceptual framework?

I also re-read each paper transcript and its corresponding contact summary. These steps were taken to examine if ideas were affirmed through repetition to form my first level coding. Appendix F (see Item 6: Steps in thematic analysis) contains samples of how

this was done for the question, 'Why did you decide to go to university?' Ideas from each IBC group which represented the raw data in the first spreadsheet were transferred to the second spreadsheet which listed ideas from all participants. Repeating ideas regarded as patterns formed themes and were linked to the theoretical framework.

Theoretical propositions (act as blueprint for the research) weave "a [hypothetical] story about why acts, events, structure, and thoughts occur" (Sutton & Staw (1995, p.378) in Yin, 2014, p.38). The theoretical statements explain a complex pattern of expected results (summarised in Table 3-1) which according to Rosenbaum (2002 in Yin, 2014) the more complex the better in order to produce a strong design with an enhanced ability to interpret the data. This was what I sought to accomplish in linking the findings to the theoretical framework in addressing both research questions.

3.7 Chapter summary

This chapter introduced quantitative and qualitative traditions, and different paradigms influencing social sciences. It presented critical realism and provided the rationale for it as the methodological framework. Then the research design was explained with its theoretical underpinnings. Measures were taken to safeguard the quality of the research was elaborated with references to relevant sections of the thesis. Methods employed were discussed and justified: the main method of case study, and the subsidiary method of interview. Ethical considerations were provided with a focus on interviews, confidentiality and anonymity, and researcher-participant rapport. Finally, the process of data analysis was presented. The procedure of analysis following a deductive and inductive thematic analysis approach was followed. Steps and

criteria for coding and revision of codes were detailed with PrintScreen shots to illustrate how raw data generated themes.

The presentation of interview data is split into two parts. Chapter 4 deals with the first research question, 'Why do students choose to study at an IBC?' and Chapter 5 covers the second question, 'From their perspective, how does the experience impact their employability?'

Chapter 4 The Interview Data & Discussion of Findings (Key Question 1)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data from interviews with international branch campus (IBC) students. The data here and in Chapter 5 are organised according to research questions. Research question 1 and its preliminary question are dealt with here and Chapter 5 will cover research question 2 and its preliminary question.

Thematic analysis was employed to identify and analyse data. It is used to report patterns within the data here and Chapter 5. For each question, patterns were derived from a mixed deductive and inductive thematic analytic method using a range of broad themes relevant to my questions and theoretical concepts and repeating ideas which occurred in the data. Appendix G: Thematic analysis demonstrates how a theoretical concept was derived from pattern recognition. Then the interview extracts were used to summarise findings according to each theoretical concept. The findings formed the basis for discussion together with previous research to show this research's contribution to knowledge with respect to student choices in this chapter and student experiences and perceptions of employability in the next chapter.

The theoretical underpinnings guiding this and the following chapters are reiterated. Applying the concept of identity economics originally used in schooling, the demand for higher education (HE) is largely determined by who students think they are and whether they should be at university (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010; Akerlof & Kranton, 2000; Akerlof & Kranton, 2002; Akerlof, 2002). When IBC students had to make the transition from secondary school to university, they thought about what kind of career and life they would have in the future, and for many that would include what kind of person they would become. This is the rationale for considering identity together

with human capital and signalling and screening theories within the theoretical framework underpinned by structure and agency. Their decision to study at an IBC was likely to have a significant role in shaping them and their future. Here the story tells of how the decision led to a HE journey starting in their homeland where the IBC was situated to their study abroad period in the United Kingdom (UK). The story records from their perspectives how their experience of this journey links to their employability. I present this story using a tool called theoretical narrative. According to Auerbach and Silverstein (2003, p.121), a theoretical narrative "retells the participants' story in the language of your theoretical constructs". An analytical framework is provided below to frame all these ingredients into a coherent, structured narrative. The role of agency and identity in participants' choices is then presented.

The rest of the chapter is organised according to the preliminary research question followed by the first key question, and presented as a theoretical narrative of IBC students' university choices, experiences and employability. This part of the narrative focusses on IBC students' choices and the narrative continues in the next chapter with their experiences and employability.

It should be noted that: 1) measures were taken to preserve anonymity of participants by using pseudonyms for items which may allow for their identification such as names of people, places and institutions, and 2) interview extracts were presented as they were transcribed with minimal modification to syntax. Although more modification might have increased readability, I felt that the extracts themselves were personal and cultural artefacts and should thus be curated as authentically as possible. Where necessary, explanation or interpretation was given to clarify meanings (e.g., Malaysian slangs or Chinglish/Chinese English)[30].

[30] I drew on my experience as an English language tutor in China for 10 years and my own familiarity with Malaysian English, the mainland variety of Mandarin and Bahasa Malaysia to provide clarification.

4.1.1 Analytical framework

An analytical framework was constructed based on the literature review findings. They are comprised of two major segments according to the research questions:

1. Why do IBC students decide to study at an IBC?
2. How do they perceive the experience as contributing to their employability?

As stated previously, the *leitmotif* of this thesis is the analytical dualism of structure and agency (Archer, 1995) in which the link between structure and agency, as data were analysed and interpreted, was an inevitable part of the narrative explaining how structure constrained and enabled participants who as free agents took responsibility for their destinies. The following section discusses the role of agency and identity of the participants. Then their reasons for undertaking HE are organised and discussed according to themes derived from repeating patterns in the data.

4.1.2 Agency and identity

Participants were active agents who would consider contextual endorsement or rejection under his/her own descriptions. This was apparent in Lee-Chun's and Yinbo's deliberation and subsequent choice of university. In addition to his parents' advice, Yinbo had also consulted his teacher but he made his own decision which meant rejecting his parents' suggestion.

> *"It's mainly my decision. My teacher just told me to, just first class in China because my scores not satisfy the first class but my teacher said some first class universities may decrease their score limit." (Yinbo, IBC3-E)*

Because Lee-Chun's parents were not highly educated, the decision was his with some influence from friends.

> *"The decision is basically on my own. My parents simply followed my decisions. Part of it is affected by friends as well. Going there together." (Lee-Chun, IBC2-EP)*

While both Yinbo and Lee-Chun might have not taken advice from parents because they had not attended HE, the parents' educational background might not be a determining factor. Mingming's parents were doctors, but she insisted on her own ambition instead of studying medical degree which was their preference.

> *"My decision because my parents graduate from medical school so they want me to be a doctor. But I don't like that." (Mingming, IBC2-B)*

Even Phil and Haimei, who were compliant with their parents' wishes, made the decision to maintain familiarity and conformity expected of them in choosing not only to go to university but the IBC of their parents' choosing.

> *"[P]reviously during my SPM[31], they were like you should take Form 6. After that, my parents saw this advertisement about IBC1 having an open day and they were like, OK, let's go for this open day. Then I went to the open day in January so I have 3 months to prepare myself." (Phil, IBC1-EM)*

Hence, they chose contextual endorsement as the outcome of their deliberation. Haimei placed high importance in the role of the university in giving her the space and time to be prepared for life in the society.

> *"[B]efore we're 18 years old, most of my decisions is kind of my parents' including university even our… my high school students', all my goals is just to go to the university. At that time, all parents think go to university is quite normal. It's even like you go to high school, yeah, just you need enter. So it won't ask me to explain why I decided to go to*

[31] SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) is the equivalent of General Certificate of Secondary Education in the UK.

university at that time. At that time in fact I thought every decision is made by them. I can't, don't worry about who or any result because it's not my decision. Not quite happy but in fact I just said yes, let's do it." (Haimei, IBC3-E)

Yunjun decided not to *"be different from others"* so he went to university despite the fact that his father, who never pursued HE, was successful.

"Go to university...I think it's a tendency in China. Every people, every student, every classmate around me, 90% want to go to university. So I have no choice. If I quit, if I do business or something, this will be not right. I will be different from others." (Yunjun, IBC2-E)

Thus, even obedience and conformity from such participants were their own decisions, and they were aware of other possible options. The data, therefore, show that major decisions related to education, which in participants' culture were traditionally a familial or parental matter, were exercised reflexively by participants with parental involvement, not usurpation. A survey on international student choice conducted by IDP Education (2012) appears to be further evidence of this. Students surveyed including mainland Chinese principally identified themselves as the primary decision makers in the choice of country and institution with the exception of Middle Eastern students. Ding (2009, p.66) laments the failure of existing studies to recognise that the majority of Chinese students, especially mature ones, are "agents with common sense capability of reasoning and reaction".

Part of one's sense of self is his/her gender. Wilkins et al. (2012b) refer to gender differences in the literature on student motivations. This issue did not arise with mainland Chinese male participants or the Malaysians. However, mainland Chinese female students talked about how their gender influenced their decision on where to study, course and career choice.

"[P]artly my decision and my parents, erm, at first they want to send me abroad but because they think maybe it may be a little difficult for a girl to be go abroad before receive some pre-education so IBC3 would be a very good university to prepare for study abroad." (Yimi, IBC3-E)

"It's because the Master degree in UK only takes 1 year but in America it's two years or more. For me, the youth of a girl is very valuable so I want to short my time of study." (Yimi, IBC3-E)

"Because FAM...so many courses in IBC2 for a girl, FAM, business affairs are more quiet and don't require many, for example, talk to people and I don't really talk to foreigners actually but I changed a lot since I go to university. I once was very silent people." (Chenqi, IBC2-B)

Lee-Chun and Chenwei had a childhood dream of becoming an aeronautical engineer which led them to the choices they made. For Lee-Chun his identity was constantly renegotiated throughout the course of his life from his childhood with the ambition to be an aeronautical engineer to becoming a PhD graduate in green manufacturing.

"[W]hen I was young, my ambition was to be a aeronautical engineering so I like aircrafts so the only way which I could involve myself into a career which related to aircraft is to study in a university which offer the course." (Lee-Chun, IBC2-EP)

As Wenger (1998, p.155) argues, identities ascribe significance to events in one's life. They provide a context to determine what is potentially important and among things that are important, what becomes significant learning. Accordingly, Wenger (1998) maintains that a sense of trajectory presents ways of sorting out what matters and what does not to our identity. It could be seen that both Lee-Chun and Chenwei had a sense of trajectory which helped to sort

out what mattered particularly with the decision to embark on a PhD degree and an undergraduate degree respectively. Lee-Chun had not planned on undertaking postgraduate study, but it is evident that the attraction of experiencing both China and the UK along with other perks changed his original plan of entering the world work after graduation. Chenwei did not allow his ambition of becoming an aerospace engineer to be deterred by the failure to enter into a domestic university offering aerospace engineering. Together with his parents, he looked for an alternative route to realise his ambition.

> *"I want to study the subject I choose and also in China, most students, after graduate from high school enter universities for further study." (Chenwei, IBC3-E)*

For Lee-Chun and Chenwei, their identity determined what events were significant in their HE decisions and how a sense of trajectory formed towards a direction. Neither can be accommodated on a model of *homo economicus*, as an individualistic passive agent whose circumstances push and pull him around (Archer, 2000b, p.74).

4.2 Why go to university

Before dealing with the first research question, the preliminary question of why participants went to university is explored. Patterns of perspectives are grouped according to the theoretical explanations (see Table 3-1 in Chapter 3). The interview data is presented according to the patterns in participants' perspectives, using thematic analysis to report the themes as summarised in the table below.

Table 4-1: Themes and sub-themes for preliminary question 1 (by author)

THEME (SUB-THEME)	**MEANING OF THEME**
Socio-cultural influences: A "common or general" phenomenon "So I have no choice" "Because of parents' expectation" The university's role in contemporary Chinese perceptions "I was made to think like that"	Going to university is a 'common phenomenon' so most participants felt they 'had no choice' since most parents also expected them to 'follow the others' in this HE pathway to prepare for the 'real world' of work and entering the society as an adult.
Identity: Participants' characteristics: "My ambition or self-achievement for further study" "University: a place for students to develop themselves" Identity in practice Identity as a learning trajectory Negotiated experience: participation and reification	Participants' sense of self affecting their decision to participate in HE.
Rates of return to education "The world revolves around education"	A perceived positive relationship between furthering one's education at university and obtaining a good high-paying job
Screening/signalling	Participants' recognition of university credentials as significant for their future labour market participation.

Both identity and socio-cultural influences figured prominently in the interview data presented demonstrating the interplay between structure and agency in their choices. Moreover, the interview data show that human capital (specifically the rate of return to education) and signalling and screening theories can also account for why participants they decided to pursue tertiary education.

4.2.1 The purpose of going to university

"In every social context, people have a notion of who they are, which is associated with beliefs about how they and others are supposed to behave." (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010, p.4) The theme of socio-cultural influences comprises of socio-cultural expectations (such as parental expectation, the high value Asian societies ascribe to education, and the role of university as part of the rite of passage to adulthood, a place of transition to the real world), and

building/maintaining social capital (specifically *guanxi*[32] here) and cultural capital. It featured strongly across all groups of participants.

Having their pathway 'directed' towards HE by socio-cultural influences and the need to signal their potential to perform to prospective employers did not mean participants were passive agents who simply had things happen to them. Applying the concept of identity economics, the demand for HE is driven by who students see themselves to be, whether they should be at university and which university they should choose (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010). Considering these aspects, I compared mainland Chinese and Malaysian participants on how they perceived the purpose of university.

4.2.1.1 "The university pathway: Entering into adulthood"

> *"In a sense, we never change but in another we are always changing. It is in this contradiction and mediation that we seek coherence in our lives. Importantly, we learn to compromise with reality in order to make the most of our circumstances." (Ding, 2009, p.68)*

Historically there has been a close relationship between education and social mobility since the introduction of the competitive civil service examination system after Tang dynasty to the implementation of the *Gaokao*[33] system from 1949 (except during the Cultural Revolution[34]) in China. After the period of reform in the 1970s, educational credentials became a sorting device for

[32] *Guanxi* is the Chinese trademark of networking, deeply ingrained in the society and vital for social positioning.
[33] The National University Entrance Examination in China
[34] The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was a revolutionary upsurge by Chinese students and workers against the bureaucrats launched by Chairman Mao Zedong (Xue, 2008).

evaluating and stratifying different social groups (Zhao, 2003 in Sheng, 2014a). Mainland Chinese participants' reasons for going to university reflected these historical socio-cultural influences which still permeate Chinese society but overall, their perceptions of the role of university were more holistic than Malaysians whose perceptions were more instrumental and so were more focussed on job prospects. The former tended to perceive the university as a rite of passage into adulthood and a preparatory place to be inducted into the 'society'.

> *"I think it's experiencing university pathway... as a student entering into adulthood, getting a transition from only learning, studying to working in real world." (Renshu, IBC2-B)*

For example, for Mingming, university was a place of higher learning and socialisation to pave the way to an independent social life.

> *"[H]igh school is only about the basic subjects but in university you can learn more. You can adapt into society more easier than just have a high school graduate degree. In high school, knowledge is only prepare for Gaokao." (Mingming, IBC2-B)*

For Haimei, the university gave her 'a space' where she had time to grow up before she went into the society.

> *"[B]efore we go to the society, university gives us a space and you have time to grow up and then to have the ability to suffer, to stable everything you will in the society. In time, you'd be part of society so I think it's good for us compared with directly go to work or doing the job in the city." (Haimei, IBC3-E)*

Although being holistic in their perspectives on HE was a distinctive feature of mainland Chinese participants, they were by no means less instrumental, many students (and parents) were driven by considerations such as IBC characteristics, subject choices, university ranking which they believed would promote future

prospects in career, upward social mobility and a better life possibly in a developed country. For instance, it is clear that employment prospects was important for Zhexi's mother in the advice on choosing a university but Zhexi had a motive which exceeded instrumentalism, her desire to experience learning in a different environment. I attribute this aspect to the Confucian philosophy of learning, i.e., *xiushen zhixue* (learning for self-cultivation) in that she was learning for the sake of herself (Tu, 2013).

> *"But that is one of my targets in the past because the top 10, top 20, top 50 universities in China will give the future employers a good expression or something in the interview to get a good job. So I planned to go to that kind of university at first but because I couldn't get really get the good… one in the top 10 or 50 so my mother said that maybe you could choose another kind of university which is kind of different from the Chinese one. Then she told me about the IBC2 which is a part of another campus of a foreign university. You could try this different style because I heard that you use the British education system and all the classes will be taught by English so my mother said if you couldn't get really good grade in your major then you can try to speaking English pretty well in the future because English will be a really competitive way to get a good job." (Zhexi, IBC2-B)*

> *"Another part of the reason is I also want to go to university and see what is it exactly is a different way to learn. Because university is different from high school. We won't be monitored. We won't be pushed by the teacher, study by ourselves. I want to try different things. I really like university now." (Zhexi, IBC2-B)*

Expectations within China revolve around better livelihood opportunities, material wealth and comfortable lifestyles of those of the middle classes domestically and abroad, and the mainland Chinese participants arguably displayed this concept of 'life-

shopping' indicating the tendency of the young to experiment through 'shopping' for the ideal lifestyle and job (Croll, 2006). In their search for a university, they were 'shopping' for an avenue which offered them possibilities for self-definition, social aspiration and a matching lifestyle which fulfilled these expectations. This was Wangfu's expectation in his choice of subject which he anticipated would open doors to employment in China or abroad.

> *"Because this major has a very, very big market in the whole world like in Australia and also in China. In China if somebody get a qualification in my major, he will earn about RMB15,000 a year." (Wangfu, IBC2-E)*

This idea of 'life-shopping' bears some resemblance to identity exploration, in Arnett's (2000 in Wintre et al., 2015) concept of emerging adulthood, which describes the state in which individuals explore who they are in terms of work, school and relationships. Zhaoyang's response reflects this mentality of experiment through shopping in the quest of self-discovery and –definition.

> *"It's just follow the steps to learning. … And of course, the university life is like a social and pre-social. When you step into the society, it can't understand why but when you go university and then get into the society, then maybe better. It's experiment. I think maybe it's the first reason, follow the others." (Zhaoyang, IBC2-E)*

A university's role tended to be mainly instrumental from Malaysian participants' perspectives. Pyvis and Chapman (2007) found that students in an Australian IBC in Malaysia were generally attracted to international HE being a key reason for choosing it, but Malaysian students were generally motivated by a positional investment in education compared to their non-Malaysian counterparts who made a self-transformative investment, seeking for a procurement of a new identity. Similarly, most Malaysian participants appeared more instrumental in their perspectives at the point of university entry than the mainland Chinese on the purpose of university, but the

former expressed a marked change in perspectives over time. For example, Joe did not see his time at university as important or different from school but went through a transformation as a result of his year-long internship in the UK.

> *"I think university is quite important because it prepares you for the working world. Like before I started the university, I never saw it like that. It was just another stage you go through in life, but my initial expectation was nothing too extraordinary and nothing too different from what you get out of school or college. But I suppose my expectation has changed. I think it's may be changed when I did my year out in the industry when I actually started working and seeing how what I learned in university can actually be applied in industry and how important it is to actually know your stuff as an engineer. So coming back from that internship, my expectations at university have changed a lot. Like even during attending like during my lectures, I'd think like how can this be relevant to my job in the future and everything else. So I expect a little bit more from...a little bit more relevance in whatever I learn." (Joe, IBC1-EM)*

It is noted, however, the change Malaysian participants perceived took place during their time in PU1 attributed to various factors not exclusive to internship experience. Thus, the question is whether IBC1 students who remained locally immobile for their entire study would also experience this.

Malaysian participants' motivations for a university education are familiar because they reflect the culture in which I grew up. A high premium is placed on maintaining or upgrading social positioning from education achievement to house ownership, symbolising individual social status. To this end, it is more accurate to say that the purpose of university is often seen as an expensive filter in the labour market for its degree rather than its intrinsic educational worth and consequently, the university was regarded as merely

another phase in life before the next one, i.e., employment. The factors which were significant to this group were also telling: university ranking, cost and length of programme. IBC1's characteristic as a British university in Malaysia with study abroad opportunities was a magnet at the time these participants were weighing their HE options. It has been argued that Malaysian jobseekers face an informal hierarchy of academic and social worth which favours individuals with study and work experiences in Western countries particularly in the UK and Australia for their historical and economic ties (Sin, 2009). This favourable perception has kept up the demand for UK HE attracting other UK universities to establish IBCs in Malaysia. It would be interesting to investigate how much this might have affected the demand for IBC1 since one of them offers a wider range of Engineering programmes with 2 years at its Russell Group parent university.

As shown **Error! Reference source not found.**, Malaysian participants also valued the social capital developed at university or 'institutional social capital' (Brinton, 2000 in Waters & Leung, 2012) which is a potentially crucial resource for fresh graduates.

> *"For one, this international, this whole idea of being overseas. It expands my network. Meeting different people from different countries." (Eddie, IBC1-E)*

> *"I think going to university is a good thing because you can interact with people from different faculties and not just your own circle of friends and you might get some knowledges from them and share the common interest." (Kai-Shan, IBC1-E)*

Contrary to Waters and Leung (2012) who assert that TNHE programmes are unable to support the development of such capital, respondents found that the formation of new friendships with students from their own country and also internationally was one of the most valuable experiences at university. This is mainly among students on 2+2 programmes who stayed for a longer period than

IBC2 Business and IBC1 Engineering students who typically had only one semester and one year stay in the UK respectively. The 2+2 cohort had more time to meet people and develop friendships. Nevertheless, for Eddie, who was in the UK for a year, what he valued most during his time in the UK was meeting people who had *"shaped (him) to become a better person."* He also thought that if he had not had the exchange year, his response would still be the people on campus who had contributed to his own personal development.

> *I: At this point in your second year and 3-4 month in the UK, what do you think it's the most valuable experience you've had in PU1?*
>
> *S: I think it'd be the people that I meet at university. That would be the most valuable in the sense that it definitely shaped me to become a better person. Personal development wise, I have so much to learn and I can learn so much from the people I've talked to, the people I've met like you know, there is a saying that university is the place to reinvent yourself and definitely a part of reinvention has being very evident and I've really changed myself personally because of university, people I've talked to.*
>
> *I: Would your answer still be the same if you didn't have this study abroad experience?*
>
> *S: It would be but in a different perspective.*
>
> *I: It'd still be the people?*
>
> *S: Yeah.* *(Eddie, IBC1-E)*

It is noted, however, that IBC students on 4+0 programmes who do not have any overseas experience were not part of this research but had they been, the findings might not be that different from that of Waters and Leung (2012) whose TNHE participants appeared to be

on accelerated programmes (shorter duration) and did not experience outward mobility.

4.2.1.2 Credential acquisition

It is appropriate at this juncture to highlight the similarity China and Malaysia share with regards to recent HE expansion in the 1990s increasing access to HE which some claim has led to over-education (Li, Morgan, et al., 2008; Li et al., 2010; Zakariya & Battu, 2013; Zakariya & Noor, 2014). Thus, it is pertinent to keep this as the backdrop when considering participants' perceptions of obtaining a university degree as one reason for participating in tertiary education.

The signalling theory is best used to explain Malaysian participants' perceptions of how a university degree is a minimum requirement for obtaining employment.

> *"To increase your chances of getting a job." (Phil, IBC1-EM)*

> *"For us to get a job now, probably we need a degree certificate at least." (Seow-Ern, IBC1-E)*

Whilst mainland Chinese participants' perceptions of the university's role were more holistic, this does not mean they were less instrumental in their decision-making. There is a trend among mainland Chinese students in accumulating credentials to position themselves in the labour market[35]. Credential inflation awareness is one of the reasons mainland Chinese postgraduates chose to study in the UK according to Li and Lowe (n.d.). A study by Wuhan University demonstrates this phenomenon occurring at China's top 10 institutions with more students graduating from postgraduate courses than undergraduate ones in 2011 (Sharma, 2012).

[35] The challenge would be to find a good job among the 7.27 million projected number of graduates in 2014, especially as over-education – where the supply of graduates exceeds labour market demand – is increasingly problematic (Morgan & Wu, 2014).

"Maybe apply for Master. I think it'll probably be in the UK. I was not thinking about Master when I entered into university. I think it's because of the current situation in China. I think if two guys entered into company at the same time and if one is Master and the other is graduate, maybe the company will choose Master first. I just think it's an added attractive." (Anni, IBC2-B)

This trend was evident among the mainland Chinese participants who mostly had several possibilities in their future plans.

"If I have a chance to research something about Civil Engineering, I may stay abroad. If I do not have this chance, maybe I'll go back to China and then work in some Chinese companies because I think some, these companies in China, the opportunity in China may be larger than abroad because English is still a problem. After the postgraduate study, I can also do some research work. It's depend on what the job is because if you just construction building work, it's not about the PhD but if you want to be a leader of the group or maybe it's required. I think this will be helpful." (Yinbo, IBC3-E)

In their various combinations of post-graduation plans, all mainland Chinese participants expressed the intention to pursue a postgraduate degree overseas after graduation as the first or second choice. Shanfan's post-graduation plan is a typical example.

"I think my career plan after I graduate as an architectural environment engineer, I'll be an engineer. I think I'll first get a Master degree or a PhD." (Shanfan, IBC2-E)

Among them, a minority wished to take a gap year to explore what they would like to achieve with a postgraduate degree before undertaking it, but they could face objection from parents who may not see such time spent as wasteful.

"The plan is always changing. [W]hat my parents want me to do is to apply a Master in the UK for one and a half year and

then go back to my hometown. I really, really want to gap a year. I mean, it's not really a gap year. Just want to go to the society, go to the company to learn some practical thing at first and then go back for the further study and it is also what I see in a lot of university. Like yesterday, I talked to a Master student in our major and most of them, they worked in big companies for 4-5 years and then go back for their further studies. I guess I should learn like this. I know that a lot of Chinese students, they don't look, they don't act like this. They will apply for the Master directly. So I want to apply maybe a building company for 3-4 years, both in UK or in China are OK. And then when I realise that I need to improve something or improve myself, I will apply for a Master or PhD. What I insist is that before I could figure out what I want to learn or what I want to get in Master, before that, unless I figured out what I should I do, what should I live." (Kefen, IBC2-E)

Some preferred to undertake employment but failing which they intended the postgraduate study to be a back-up plan. The approach of a few others was to opt for a path which gave them more credits towards upward social mobility by comparing the international reputation of the employer and the university if they were offered both employment and a place on a postgraduate programme.

"I think the main reason of deciding of whether I will go to my career directly or apply for the postgraduate, maybe depend on the ranking of the university. If the university is not so good, I will possibly go to my career and also it depends on the offer I received from the company I applied. If it is the offer from the big 4 accounting firms like PwC, KPMG, Deloitte or Ernst & Young, I will possibly go to my career directly." (Yunxi, IBC2-B)

So far the above emphasises upward credential acquisition to signal a stronger potential to perform through a higher qualification. However, there is also a trend to acquire not only in terms of a higher level degree, but to gain a similar level of qualification in more than one discipline or country. This reflects how competitive China's labour market is. A minority of mainland Chinese students affirmed this trend. When Senhai embarked on his 2+2 Architecture course at IBC3, he also enrolled in a distance learning Accounting course.

> *"I feel I can get 2 degrees that make me get better ability. Yeah, people could hire me as an accountant or to become architect." (Senhai, IBC3-E)*

Li (2009) argues that personal development in Confucian tradition has a broad meaning; it interrelates with external performance (successful career, academic achievement, etc.) and these two should not be seen as exclusive to each other. Hence, Anni's external accomplishment in accumulating additional certificates may be a positive signal to employers to demonstrate her achievement. She was studying for a Certificate in Management Accounting (CMA) by distance alongside her Finance, Accounting and Management course at university. This was also evidence that she has made good use of her 'free time', using it for her personal development which indirectly enhances her employability.

> *"I think certificates, first, can show the employer that you're capable and also you can acquire some knowledge from the certificate like CMA you learn a lot of management, accounting skills in it and if you do not learn it, maybe I will spend my time watching TV. It'll make your life more 'not that empty'. In Chinese, it's called* 'chong shi'*. It's about doing something more meaningful. Do something that may contribute to your future." (Anni, IBC2-B)*

Li, Morgan and Zhao (2011) state that the increased rate of return to educational investment in China corresponding to HE expansion

could be explained partly on account of a history of élite education and a screening culture. Therefore, there is a historical basis to explain the relationship between educational investment and income in China. This incident of over-education[36] is more intense among non-985 university graduates compared to the prestigious Ivy League equivalent dubbed as the 985 universities (Li et al., 2010). Evidence suggests that employers in China tend to look at national ranking such as 985 or 211 Chinese elite universities, or the UK Times Top 100 universities rather than global ones (Mallam-Hassam & Donaghy, 2010). This implies that both national ranking for IBC2 and IBC3 would be as important as their parent universities' ranking in the UK.

The findings show that mainland Chinese participants' motivations for HE were more holistic but paradoxically they also demonstrated a stronger tendency towards credential accumulation than Malaysian participants. This is a response from the supply side to the Chinese labour market practices (Yue et al., 2004 in Li, Morgan, et al., 2008). While the Malaysian labour market is not as intense, there are signs that the employment situation is changing largely due to government policy (Kashuerin, 2015; Sin, 2009). Therefore, over the next five years, the unemployment rate among Malaysian graduates is likely to rise judging from the current political and economic climate (Harding, 2015). Dave's comment was the only indication among Malaysians that there might be a rise in credentialism, but there is evidence in the literature that this is happening (Zakariya & Battu, 2013; Zakariya & Noor, 2014).

> *"I finished my course in N and I graduated with a diploma. I can choose to work or continue to get a degree. I'd say it is because of being exposed to engineering environment. It's like I talked to my supervisors and lecturers back in N so most of them have completed their degree and they didn't*

[36] Over-education describes a phenomenon which the supply of HE graduates exceeds the demand for them in the labour market which often results in them taking non-graduate positions.

found that it's enough so they are still working on their Master so after I had the chat with them, they'd encourage us while we are young, just go all of it." (Dave, IBC1-EP)

4.2.1.3 Rate of return to education (ROR)

It is no surprise that participants chose to study at university for instrumental reasons since the higher the level of education, the higher the level of earnings including the starting salary (Li, Morgan, et al., 2008; Li et al., 2011; Zakariya & Battu, 2013; Kenayathulla, 2013). The interview data also indicate that this was the expectation of participants. This indicates an internalisation of the dominant views of higher ROR to investment in HE by the participants as was the case with British undergraduates (Tomlinson, 2008).

"Because the basic salary in China for undergraduate and postgraduate get are different and my parents expect me to do postgraduate if I applied better school than PU1." (Yunxi, IBC2-B)

"[I]f you want to get employment in the future, get a good career, you have to go into either a college or university." (Lee-Chun, IBC2-EP)

Nevertheless, despite the high regard Malaysian society has for a degree, it was treated mainly as a sorting device at the recruitment stage by Malaysian respondents. They ascribed greater value to graduate attributes, such as having problem-solving skills, a good work attitude, etc., which were prerequisites to a long-term goal of career advancement.

"What I realised is that if you come up from a top university, obviously your pay will be higher but if you don't have the ability to solve problems for your employer, you're just the same as those people without any degree. When it comes to

work, degree is just to secure you a job but it won't actually help you in getting up the staircase, I mean the stairs." (Kai-Shan, IBC1-E)

4.2.1.4 Socio-cultural factors and identity

The socio-cultural and personal reasons in some circumstances featured prominently such as Nick's intention to accumulate social capital with like-minded peers, and Kai-Shan's desire to experience a more formal learning experience at university.

"Obviously it's to get better job prospects in the future. Maybe the lifestyle in university...like people you hang out with, interact with university probably are the same wavelength as you so you might be able to gain contacts because it's at university we're a group people who are...generally we are intelligent people. We are same sort of educational background so in the future some may switch big companies where you know, better credentials so it's obviously it's good to gain contacts." (Nick, IBC1-EM)

"Firstly as the world revolves around education, I think you'll have to have a degree in order to secure a job in the future and the main aim that pushes me to go to university is to get a better life, to provide a more comfortable lifestyle to my parents. Actually I'm a study kind person. I'd like to gain more knowledges which you cannot gain through magazines, video tapes, YouTube. It's the sort of experience." (Kai-Shan, IBC1-E)

The implication, therefore, is that when considering the first preliminary research question, IBC students should not be assumed as the 'intellectually passive other' who are only seeking a higher ROR (Sidhu, 2006, p. 175 in Sin, 2009). This research reveals that

their motivations and aspirations for their HE choices were far more complex than merely looking for economic gains in their educational investment.

4.3 Why an international branch campus

> *"Even if the qualification is of comparable quality to that of the conferring country, it is most likely the student experience is not. There is a danger of transnational education constituting solely an award-granting exercise rather than a learning experience." (Hill et al., 2014, p.953)*

Having tackled why participants chose to go to university, I now move on to the first research question. An understanding of decisions to choose an IBC involves an understanding of the participants' world of subjective meaning and a discovery of how the idea of an IBC is meaningful to them. This relates to what Croll (2006) notes about brand names being not just about product choice and quality but also about adopting new identities and lifestyles. Furthermore this also affects the process of nation-making with mainland Chinese consumers constructing the meanings of Western brands with their national past to forge their ideal future (Belk, 1992; Friedman, 1992; Wilk, 1994 in Tian & Dong, 2010) and arguably this applies to Malaysians too. Therefore, how participants attributed meaning to being part of an IBC community, and how this was translated in the appropriation of new identities and lifestyles were examined through the structure and agency framework.

With regards to the first key question, a common approach used to study decision-making by students who consider overseas HE is the push-pull theory (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007; Spinks &

Wong, 2010; Rounsaville, 2011). It argues that pull factors motivate students to study at host countries, and push factors (e.g., economic, social and security factors) in their home countries influence them to leave their home country (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). In applying this theory to transnational higher education (TNHE), Fang and Wang (2014) took into account student characteristics, an element which critics of the push-pull theory perceive to be lacking previously. Wilkins et al. (2011) discover that student motivations for opting to study at an IBC are different to those who prefer the home campus. Therefore, they propose a revised model incorporating two different sets of push-pull factors, one for the parent campuses and the other for IBCs. Taking into account both Fang and Wang (2014) and Wilkins et al. (2011), I adapted the push-pull theory in the following manner.

Firstly, I looked at push factors from three aspects (see the figure below):

1. domestic HE,
2. overseas HE, and
3. other IBCs.

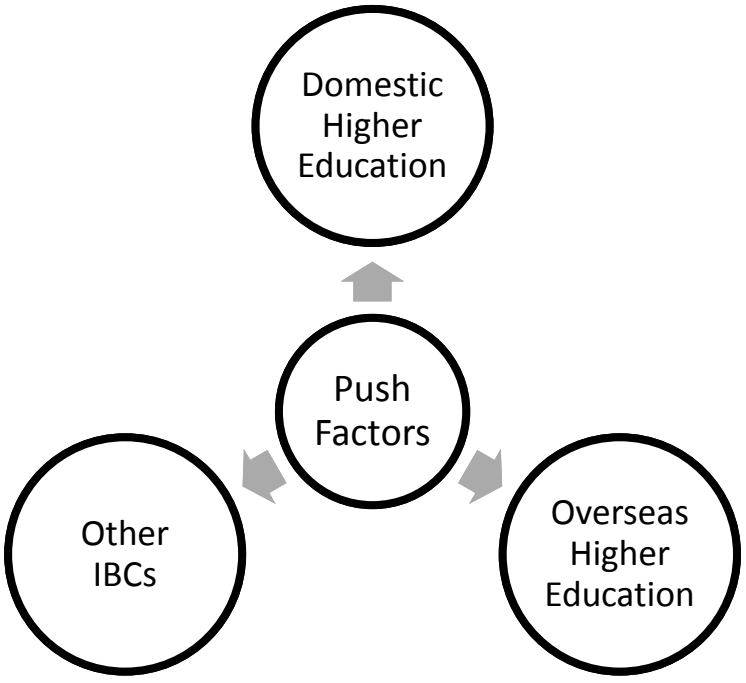

Figure 4-1: Push factors (adapted by author)

While domestic HE is a typical push factor with regards to the participants considering studying overseas, the difference here is in deciding whether to study at an IBC, not only domestic HE but also overseas HE play a part in pushing them towards the IBC. In addition, it was apparent from the data that some participants took into account features of other IBCs too.

Secondly, pull factors are grouped according to *institutional characteristics*, which comprise of not merely the IBC but also its associated institutions which collectively pull prospective students towards the IBC (see the figure below):

1. IBC,
2. Parent university, and
3. Chinese partner institution.

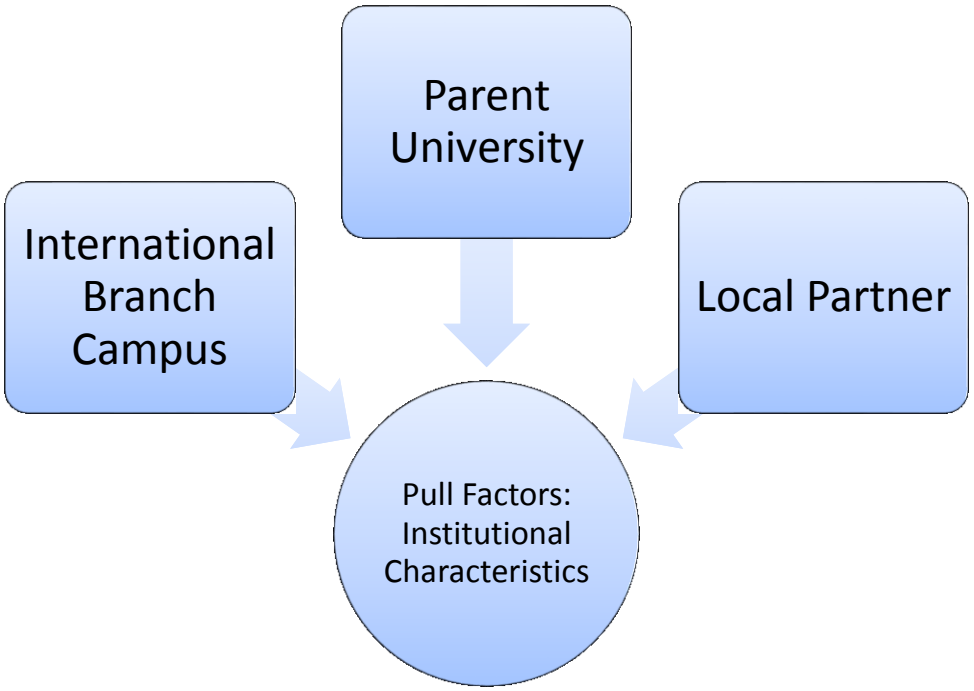

Figure 4-2: Pull factors (adapted by author)

Thirdly, student and parental characteristics were both considered. Fang and Wang (2014) rightly identify *student characteristics* as an element which failed to be accounted for previously. This is reflected in the analytical framework as identity, i.e., a sense of self (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000). The participants made a decision to study at an IBC which forms part of their pathway to realise their 'ultimate concerns' (Archer, 2000b). Furthermore, since these participants had an opportunity to study abroad as part of their programme, they could also be motivated by the associated benefits such as emigration, employment, lifestyle, and status (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003 in Wintre et al., 2015)

With regards to the influence of parents, the data are broadly in agreement with Spinks and Wong (2010), who argue that recruiting universities not only have to understand the psychology of Chinese students, their needs and motives, but also those of their parents. Tsang (2013) and Liu (2015) emphasise the influence of parental involvement in HE choices and graduate employment respectively particularly among middle-class parents. The implementation of a two-way selection mechanism in the labour market spells the end of guaranteed graduate employment. Thus, middle class parents seek to maintain their privileged positions through securing a generational reproduction of their status (Tsang, 2013).

Bodycott (2009) also emphasises the importance of the parents' role in Confucian societies through the concept of *xiaoqin* (filial piety) in which parents tend to do their best to ensure their child receives the best education possible. The child is expected to reciprocate by obedience to parents including educational choices such as study destination or career even if they are in conflict with his/her own wishes (Li, 2001 in Bodycott, 2009). However, it is stressed that this socio-cultural element is not the only determinant behind the participants' decision-making although it is a very influential one. Besides, the Confucian concept of *xiaoqin* cannot be reduced to a child's blind obedience to parents. Within Confucianism, the concept of *yi* obligates a child to remonstrate with the parents if the situation

calls for it (Ames, 2012). A memorable example of this is an incident I witnessed while queueing to board a flight in China. A Chinese boy of about 9 years was urged by his parents to cut the queue to get ahead. No disapproval was displayed by other adult passengers in the queue, but the child refused rather too loudly, "Teacher said it is wrong to jump a queue!" much to the parents' embarrassment. Praises in undertones for the child could be heard affirming his public remonstration of his parents.

All 31 participants except one are either mainland Chinese or Chinese Malaysians who shared a similar cultural heritage including *xiaoqin,* but it should be noted that there are still substantial differences between them in other cultural respects (Spinks & Wong, 2010). With regards to the sole Malay participant, there is a similarity in this aspect of Confucian principle with Islamic teaching on filial piety (Abdullah et al., 2011). Furthermore, all mainland Chinese participants were the only child in their family which meant in most instances, parental influence was strong but not necessarily the overriding factor. The parents of this "Little Emperor" cohort of students are more willing to invest more time, effort and financial resources into their child's education than previous generations (Chung et al., 2009). In summary, parental influence is a vital factor to consider for all participants regardless of their ethnic and cultural background. However, it is also noted that Confucian values in China, and Confucian and Islamic values in Malaysia are interacting with each other nationally, as well as with other cultural influences through globalisation.

There are two instances where participants concluded that they were chiefly responsible for their own decision-making, and their identity or student characteristics was the most influential pull factor and this is evident throughout their narratives: 1) where parents lacked information channels to contribute to tertiary education decision-making (such as Lee-Chun's - he was the first to attend university in the family); and 2) where participants had a strong determination in pursuing a particular career path contrary to

parents' advice (participants often ventured into the 'less familiar' to pursue his/her personal project which is different from parents' wishes such as Mingming).

> *"The decision is basically on my own. My parents simply followed my decisions. Part of it is affected by friends as well." (Lee-Chun, IBC2-EP)*

> *"My decision because my parents are...they graduate from medical school so they want me to be a doctor. But I don't like that." (Mingming, IBC2-B)*

Here one could see the interplay between structure and agency where participants exhibiting the autonomous or meta-modes of reflexivity acted in a way that leans away from contextual continuity. Autonomous reflexives actively sought to position themselves to become upwardly socially mobile which led them to stray from the familiar context of their own background while meta-reflexives were willing to pay the price of constraints and to forfeit the benefits of enablements in an attempt to live out their ideal (Archer, 2007, p.98).

4.3.1 The push and pull theory: an adaptation

The figure below summarises my adaptation of the push-pull theory which incorporates both student and parental characteristics. The notion of structure and agency is reflected in this first layer of analysis, and so it sits within the critical realist framework (refer to Chapter 2). By extension, when a participant converts her life 'concerns' into a practical 'project', she has found good reason for its pursuit because she has (fallibly) examined herself, surveyed the social contexts open to her and decided upon a feasible combination which involves studying at an IBC. She then commits herself to her project in the belief that she can realise her definition of the good life in a particular kind of social context, providing she works at it

(Archer, 2007, p.97). This was a shared belief and commitment among participants at least at the point of deciding to study at an IBC.

A summary of the push and pull factors which influence participants' decisions to study at an IBC is provided below. A spectrum of different aspects is grouped together according to each push factor as well as each pull factor.

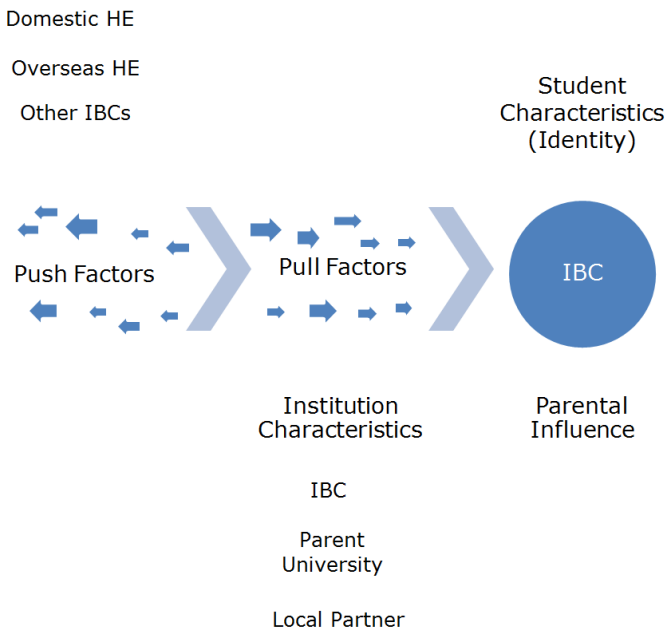

Figure 4-3: Push-pull factors affecting participants' choices (by author)

4.3.2 Push factors

The figure below summarises push factors in relation to national HE, overseas HE, and (regional) rival IBCs. Cost is the main factor related to overseas HE pushing students to IBCs. Participants considered rival IBCs' parent university's lower-ranking and higher tuition fees as push factors. With regards to push factors specific to domestic HE, there is a significant distinction between mainland

Chinese and Malaysian students mainly due to socio-political factors. Below I highlight the main issues for this distinction.

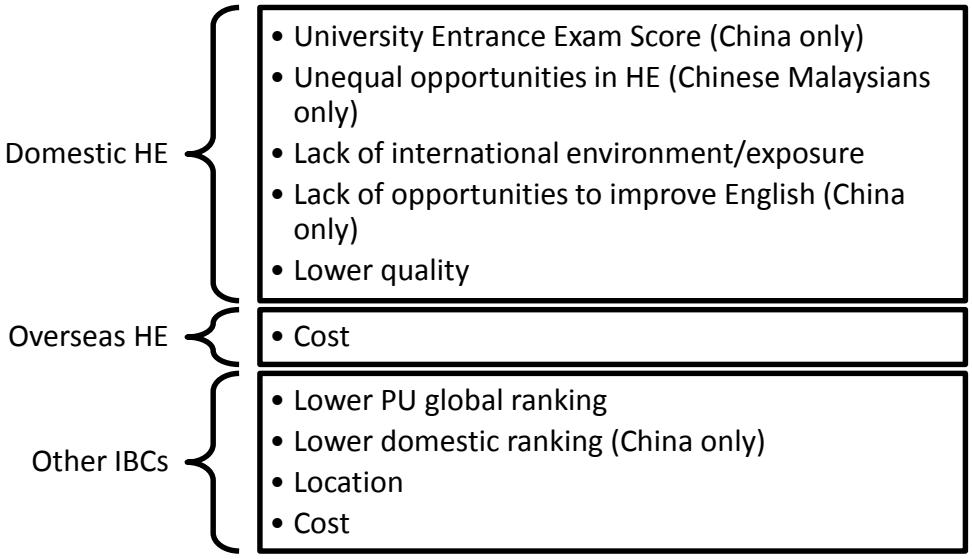

Figure 4-4: Push factors according to domestic HE, overseas HE, and rival IBCs (by author)

4.3.2.1 Access to public universities

Both groups of participants shared a difficulty in accessing public universities domestically. There is an inadequate supply of university places in China's HE (Zhao & Guo, 2002 in Yang, 2007). When the number of high school leavers exceeded the capacity of the labour market, the Chinese government expanded HE partly to resolve this issue (Zhao & Guo, 2002 in Yang, 2007). The Chinese educational system inherited a historical tradition of selection through examinations in the form of the National University Entrance Examination (*Gaokao)* to ensure a fair and equitable process based on merits [37], vital to preserving social stability.

[37] While there has been a surface-level perception of meritocracy (Ross, 2015), *Gaokao* has had negative impact on students, schools and social equality because the system favours urban and professional families (Morgan & Wu, 2015; Liu, 2013). The reform of *Gaokao* has been announced recently (Yang Yi, 2014).

Gaokao is very competitive. It has the potential to open doors to 211 or 985 elite universities[38] which offer access to networking with the upper-echelon of the Chinese society, enhancing their *guanxi* and upward social mobility. Of the 10.5 million *Gaokao* candidates in 2008, only 57% were eligible to enter China's universities, and only the top 10% were admitted to tier-one institutions (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). In researching their contemplation of studying abroad, Bodycott (2009) finds mainland Chinese parents rated the insufficient supply of university places in China as most important, whereas students were more concerned about the quality of education. For almost all mainland Chinese participants, the failure to obtain a place at one of the prestigious 211/985 Chinese universities led them to consider an IBC, the best choice for many based on their *Gaokao* score. Two of them said that *Gaokao* had a minor influence on their decisions compared to IBC characteristics. However, I strongly suspect that if they had the chance to study at top universities such as Peking University, none would be likely to turn it down in favour of an IBC.

> *I: So the reasons for choosing IBC2 were firstly Gaokao scores?*
>
> *S: Yes, very important. (Hailiang, IBC2-B)*

> *"[I]n China we have 211 and 985 universities that the Chinese government will give some support to it and generally it is the best universities… and because I want to learn accounting and my score is not enough to apply to these kinds of university so I choose IBC2. I think the main reason at that time is the Gaokao's results." (Yunxi, IBC2-B)*

Malaysian public HE has a limited capacity to absorb students which led to a high number of well-qualified students, particularly non-

[38] 211 and 985 universities are Chinese elite institutions identified by the government for dedicated support and funding.

Bumiputeras, having no access (Jamshidi et al., 2012; Hill, 2012; Yussof et al., 2008). On the surface, the Malaysian educational system appears to be similar, claiming meritocracy as a basis for public university admission, but in reality public education especially at the university level is a tool for the promotion of one ethnic group's interests leading to an expanding private HE sector in which TNHE programmes and institutions such as IBCs thrive (Brown, 2007; BERNAMA 2004, 2005 in Sin, 2009). University admissions quotas have been applied on a discretionary basis, although policy supposedly allocated 55% of places to *Bumiputeras* from the late 1970s and into the early 2000s (Aihara, 2009; Faridah, 2003 in Lee, 2012).

> *"As you know, in Malaysia 2As and 2Bs is not good enough for a Chinese to get your own desired university and your own desired course." (Lee-Chun, IBC2-EP)*

Domestic HE push factors figure more strongly among mainland Chinese participants in comparison to Malaysians. One reason is domestic tier-one Chinese HE institutions are highly regarded particularly since their recent improvement in global rankings and the government emphasis on developing 985 and 211 institutions to be world-class universities.

4.3.2.2 Lack of international recognition, exposure or environment

In response to internationalisation, HE worldwide is revamping curricula, changing traditional paradigms of scholarship, and using English as the academic *lingua franca* (Altbach, 2003 in Palmer et al., 2011). There is indication of this happening in China and Malaysia too. However, participants still identified the lack of international exposure or environment at national public universities as a push factor. Reasons for this could be: the origin of degree award signifying (global) recognition and academic pedigree, a

curriculum cultivating a global perspective, an English-medium environment and an international campus community.

Pyvis and Chapman (2007) find that in choosing an offshore Australian university, students' main motivation was access to an international education at a location of convenience. This is also evident in the data. Participants associated 'international' or 'British' education with quality, and therefore, UK degrees were regarded to have "greater career value" than local degrees (Counsell, 2011, p.48). This association is a mentality which still lingers on in post-colonial Malaysia (Rajakumar, 2000 in Sin, 2009). As for the mainland Chinese, this association was due to the success of *haigui* (returnees) who received preferential treatment and higher salaries when they returned to China and this led to a belief that something which is foreign (i.e., Western in nature/origin) is better than Chinese (Bai, 2008). Zhangxiang referred to exchange opportunities which were also available in regular Chinese universities, but apparently they were of lower quality compared to the IBC's offer.

> *"Actually most universities in China also have such a programme to exchange or study abroad but it's not so high quality. Because of its education system from UK and also the high quality." (Zhangxiang, IBC2-B)*

Yunjun described his learning as *"international and maybe the most advanced thing in the world",* and the value of having an international social network and good facilities at IBC2 and its parent university.

> *"What I learned here is although it is different from if I choose a Chinese university but what I learned is international and may be the most advanced thing in the world. … I said experience is learning experience, not life experience. Maybe some of them will work in the home or work in outside of China. I can have international friends.*

Maybe the resources may be much more better." (Yunjun, IBC2-E)

Pyvis and Chapman (2007) concluded that Malaysian students sought an 'international' education, preferably Western because of often planned careers in Western corporations in Malaysia. This is generally a reflection of the Malaysian participants who mostly wanted to work for a multinational corporation domestically. A few intended to work abroad.

"It's still my dream to work in Lamborghini and Volkswagen. These are the two car, automotive companies I'd like to work with. … Yeah, UK, Europe. Overseas. Not Malaysia." (Kai-Shan, IBC1-E)

"Hopefully I can get a job here (the UK). If that doesn't work out, I'd obviously fall back on my internship company (in Malaysia). If not, I'd try other countries as well maybe in Australia because I think they do need manpower I think in engineering based on the current market. If not Australia, maybe Singapore. Yeah, I'm pretty mobile." (Nick, IBC1-EM)

The only Malay Malaysian participant also aimed to work for a multinational corporation and while his first preference was Malaysia, he was open to consider other countries. Lee-Chun (Chinese Malaysian) who studied for his PhD in IBC2 (China) would prefer to seek employment in China and other countries.

"I can say that the first choice is China but as long as it's outside Malaysia, I can work in other countries." (Lee-Chun, IBC2-EP)

Most mainland Chinese participants similarly were attracted to multinational companies in China especially Finance and Accounting graduates like Zhangxiang, but many also planned to seek employment in the host country where they would pursue postgraduate studies.

> *"I want to work for big firm: KPMG, Ernst and Young and such… I'm interested in auditing and most of the jobs in KPMG or PwC are auditing or tax something like that." (Zhangxiang, IBC2-B)*

Yimi believed that despite the overall improvement in English proficiency of local graduates from Chinese universities, her *"more international view"* still had an advantage over them. When Yimi said she did not improve her employability with only obtaining an overseas degree, she pointed to her *"more international view"* which shaped her identity through engagement in activities and social interactions in the UK (Wenger, 1998). This is what local HE cannot produce due to a lack of international exchange or environment even though their graduates may have a good English proficiency.

> *"I don't think I improve my employability but only with an overseas graduation degree. Some Chinese companies may think that students from abroad may have some better English skills but I think it's not the situation now, but most Chinese students studying in local universities in China also have very good English skills now, so what I think is different from local Chinese students is I have a more international view." (Yimi, IBC3-E)*

In summary, participants chose to study at an IBC because of its attractive characteristics such as offering an internationally recognised education in an English-medium environment which they believed would enhanced their future prospects whether in their home country or abroad. Their identities would form in this kind of tension between their investment in various forms of belonging and their ability to negotiate the meanings that matter in those contexts (Wenger, 1998, p.188). IBCs tend to attract students who see the effects of globalisation on their domestic economy and government

policies, their future career and life, and their identity[39] in this fast-changing world. The process of identity formation through engagement in a more international context is, thus, valuable to participants. The main driver is aptly summed up by Lee-Chun (IBC2-EP):

> *"I think nowadays the world is globalised. A company in Malaysia, definitely you'll have to, you not only to communicate with Malaysian people. Definitely you'll have to communicate with other people around the world so if you study abroad, you'll have some ideas about how do (mainland) Chinese people think and maybe how do UK people think so because you have experience before to communicate with them and you know their country's situation. So it'll help you a lot because of the current trend of the world which is globalised."*

4.3.2.3 Quality

Quality refers to perceived higher standards of HE which participants measured by source country, and domestic and world rankings. The perceived lower quality of public HE institutions (Altbach, 1998 in Ahmad & Buchanan, 2015) with the exception of the top universities which they did not have access to was another factor pushing participants from domestic HE. This is especially the perceived quality of education from the demand side of the labour market (Mallam-Hassam & Donaghy, 2010; Quah et al., 2009). Hence, students preferred degrees which are widely recognised. Having failed to enter a prestigious Chinese HE institution, mainland Chinese participants would look for better alternatives than tier-2 or private universities which are considered to be low quality.

[39] See Bai (2008) for the effects of globalisation on mainland Chinese who saw themselves as *shijie ren* (global citizens) after China joined the World Trade Organisation.

> *"Tier-1, which is the good universities, but you have tier 1-minus which is better than tier-w but it is not as good as tier-1. I found not so good universities in all this so my father just looked down the list and found a university called IBC2." (Lizheng, IBC2-E)*

There are conflicting findings on whether Malaysian employers prefer foreign graduates over domestic graduates. Gurvinder Kaur and Sharan Kaur (2008) suggest that most employers prefer public university graduates because they are perceived to have the necessary academic qualifications and employability skills. However, research cited in Shafie and Nayan (2010) shows that Multimedia University, a private university, has the highest rate of employability compared to public universities. For literature which suggests that foreign-educated graduates is preferable, it is not always clear whether this includes IBC graduates who had spent a period of time in the UK parent campus. Nevertheless, it could inferred from Quah et al. (2009) who compare employers' perceptions of foreign-trained graduates, local graduates and twinning programme graduates, that this distinction might have place this research's IBC1 graduates in the same category as twinning programme graduates. They find that employers perceived foreign graduates to be superior in terms of overall performance than the others. However, their findings should be noted with caution because of the low response rate. The question which remains to be answered is how locally immobile IBC students are perceived by employers. The research participants expressed confidence in the acceptance of their UK degree by local employers, giving them an advantage over domestic graduates.

> *I: So in comparison with someone doing Civil Engineering in Malaysia for 3 years, you're saying that you have an advantage, yeah?*
>
> *S: Maybe with the reputation of the university. (Adam, IBC1-EM)*

However, if employers did prefer overseas graduates, it would be pertinent to investigate whether they distinguish between a Malaysian graduate who studied wholly at PU1, another who studied at its IBC and spent a period of time at PU1, and another who studied wholly locally at IBC1. This will bring to bear on the institutional strategy of issuing the same degree certificate to all PU1/IBC1 graduates. Because the PU1 student experience is unlikely to be replicable at IBC1, what sells the university brand is its non-differentiated product, the same degree.

4.3.2.4 English language proficiency

Being an international English medium institution makes IBC different from other domestic universities; thus, offering a 'different' HE experience in participants' home country. Yunxi described IBC2 as a *"quite unique university in China because it used English as a (medium of instruction)"*. Most mainland Chinese participants perceived the English level of graduates from most Chinese universities to be relatively low resulting from poor language development opportunities.

> *"Better English compared to other students in China because in China the other students cannot speak English as well as IBC3 students but some language university like Beijing or foreign language university students could speak really good English." (Senhai, IBC3-E)*

They believed that English language skills to be essential in the labour market especially among multinational employers.

> *"[S]ince English is an international language and if you want to work in some banks, accounting agencies, you need to acquire such language ability." (Yunxi, IBC2-B)*

Therefore, this acts as a push factor from the range of local universities they could access according to their *Gaokao* results.

Hao and Welch (2012) suggest that international perspective and competence in a foreign language (mostly English), *inter alia,* can constitute a distinct advantage in China's competitive labour market. However, they stress that these are insufficient and jobseekers need to understand the changing Chinese environment and navigate successfully between international and current local practices.

Malaysian participants did not raise this issue. This might be because most considered another IBC as an alternative HE choice rather than public universities. A phasing out of English as the medium of instruction in all public universities started in 1983 (Tan, 2002), and the Malay language gradually replaced it. Other IBCs would also be English-medium institutions.

4.3.3 Pull factors

Pull factors are broadly categorised in the figure below according to a) institution-related factors: IBC, parent university and Chinese partner; b) parental characteristics; and c) student characteristics (identity).

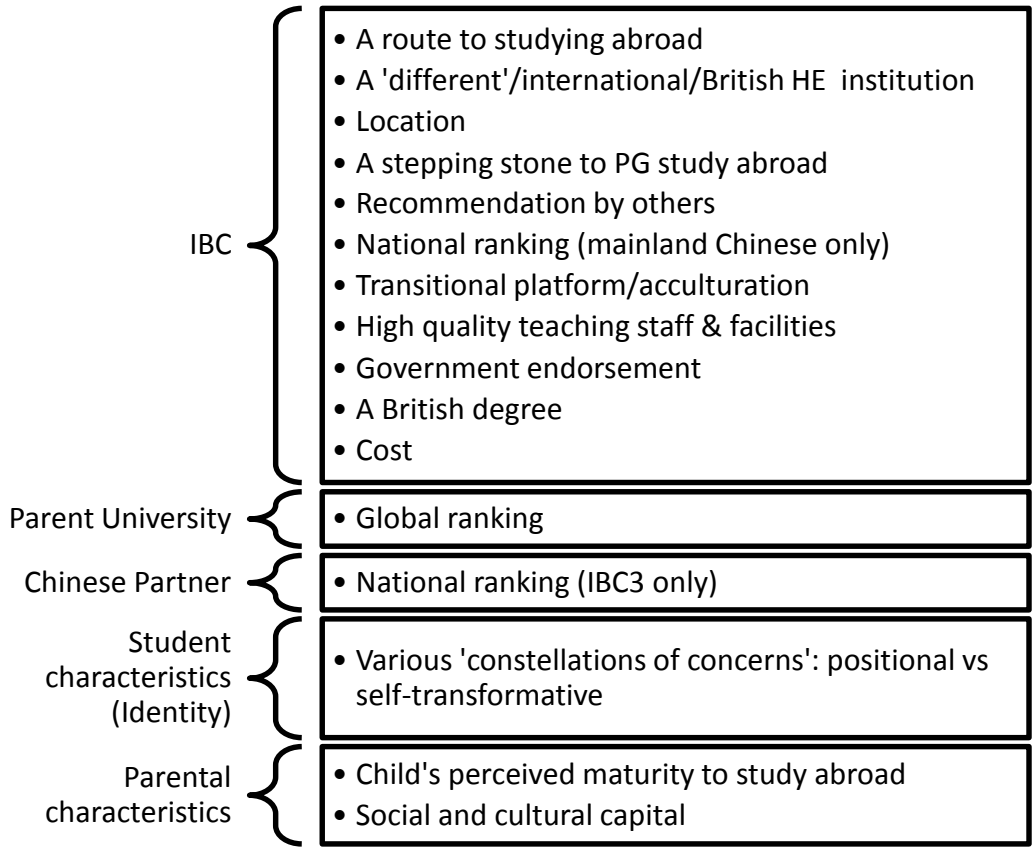

Figure 4-5: Pull factors by institutional, parental and student characteristics (by author)

4.3.3.1 Cost

Cost here relates to cost of tuition fees, living expenses, and travel cost. Complementing cost-related data below is the background information pertinent to China and Malaysia on the value of education and nationwide household expenditure on education provided in Chapter 1.

There was only one Malay participant and his route to HE was not a typical one for a *Bumiputera* since he not only went to an IBC but was funded by his parents. He had chosen a foundation year programme at a public university instead of taking *Sijil Tinggi Pendidikan Malaysia* [40] . He later switched to IBC1 despite a guaranteed place on a degree programme upon completion of his

[40] The Malaysian equivalent of A-level and the prerequisite to enter a public university

foundation programme because his preferred course, Civil Engineering, was not offered there. He also failed to obtain any state scholarship or loan which would have given him a direct path to study abroad.

> *"It is true, Malay students opt for public universities, but I think it's more about financial reasons. Before I went to UK, my dad* pernah cakap *(once said), if I cannot get a scholarship, maybe it's better for me to study in Malaysia. But every year I applied for MARA[41] scholarship, but always rejected. I even wrote a letter to apply for at least a loan, but still not approved." (Adam, IBC1-EM)*

The Chinese Malaysians were mostly also funded by their parents. Although most of them were from middle-class families who could afford to send them abroad directly for study[42], a few participants were uncomfortable with their parents' funding them at such a high cost if they had a more cost-effective route to HE such as a place at a renowned university in Singapore.

> *"Cost was the main concern at first. It was quite expensive and I never really liked the idea of spending a lot of my parents' money to provide me an education. So when I got rejected by Singapore, I was like yeah, I'd just study in a local university, graduate and find a job." (Joe, IBC1-EM)*

Two Chinese Malaysian participants had been accepted by prestigious UK institutions, but they studied at IBC1 instead. They failed at obtaining state or private sponsorship mainly due to requirements based on race.

> *"I was supposed to come to the UK in year one actually because I got offers from a few universities in UK such as Imperial and UCL but I didn't manage to get any scholarship*

[41] MARA (Majlis Amanah Rakyat Asli/Council of Trust for Indigenous People)
[42] The background on socio-political factors involved is attended to in Chapter 1. See also Aihara (2009, pp.86–87) for the historical context and data on the ethnic distribution of Malaysian students in local and overseas HE institutions.

from government or private sectors so I decided to go to IBC1 because it is top 75 university in the world and it is considered one of the best in Malaysia for engineering. They actually are pretty racist on giving to scholarships. You must be a Bumiputera*… in order to get the scholarship and no matter how good your performance and ability is, you're still refuted at the position. You won't get much chance to climb up." (Kai-Shan, IBC1-EM)*

"Because initially I took A-levels so I actually had a few offers from universities in UK like I could actually directly go there but financially my family isn't very strong as well. I am already from a UK-based education like A-levels so it's to continue from there. So I choose IBC1. I had offers from Imperial College, Bristol, Loughborough, Leicester and one more I can't remember." (Nick, IBC1-EM)

Since the degree awarded is the same as students in the parent university, IBC students who failed or chose not to apply for a place on the exchange programme still received a British degree.

"It was cheap. It's near my place. I'll get the degree which is the same as over in PU1 in UK so yeah, that's the whole reason." (Eddie, IBC2-E)

"And actually can save some money because you would study two years in China campus and tuition fees less.[43]" (Shanfan, IBC2-E)

"Most students didn't want to come because the fees here are higher and because IBC3 provides courses almost the same quality so they want to stay in IBC3." (Yimi, IBC3-E)

Because the cost of studying at an IBC is much lower than going abroad directly, it was a significant consideration for several participants. See the table below for a comparison of tuition fees at

[43] On the 2+2 programmes, IBC2 students paid 2 years of IBC2 home fees (approx. £6,300 p.a.) and 2 years of international student fees (£14,970).

IBC1 and PU1 with a rival IBC in Malaysia and the tuition fees at IBC2 and regular Chinese universities. The comparison was based on students' stated range of choices.

Table 4-2: An approximate comparison of tuition fees of relevant institutions considered by students (The author's table with figures derived from the universities' websites)

Subject	£ Sterling (p.a.)
PU1 Undergraduate Business (BA)	£11,420
PU1 Undergraduate Engineering (BEng/MEng)	£14,970
IBC1 Undergraduate (BEng/MEng)	RM36,500 (approx. £6,400)
O University, main rival Australian IBC	RM42,400 (approx. £7,400)
IBC2 Undergraduate (All courses)	RMB60,000 (approx. £6,300)
Chinese Universities (Undergraduate)	Between RMB4,800 and RMB6,500 (approx. £500-£700)

Cost often arises as a factor for overseas education. Here cost emerged as a common push factor in relation to overseas HE as in Ahmad and Buchanan (2015), and a pull factor for IBCs because IBCs offer a cheaper route to a foreign degree. As such, IBCs in China and Malaysia present an attractive route for improving upward mobility in developing countries (Tilak, 1996 and Gonzalez, 1997 in Tan, 2002). In one exceptional case, Yinbo could afford studying in the UK directly but he opted for IBC3 because the parent university, PU2, is higher in global university ranking than the UK university which accepted his application for an undergraduate degree. In relation to other IBCs particularly for Malaysian participants, cost also acted as a pull factor although this was usually evaluated in conjunction with rival IBC's parent university's world ranking.

> *"O University is a bad university in terms of ranking but when you compare with Engineering itself, PU1 is a better university compared to O University. That's one thing. The second thing is the tuition fee of O University is not much higher but will be higher than the tuition fees of IBC1." (Lee-Chun, IBC2-EP)*

Dave transferred to IBC1 from a local private college after completing a diploma. He had calculated that this option was more

affordable than studying at IBC1 directly even with the scholarship offered by IBC1.

> *I: Now because study abroad was such an important element for you, I just wonder why didn't you choose to go straight away to IBC1 and do an exchange here in Year 2? Is it financial?*
>
> *S: It is financial because one thing if I get 100% scholarship from Local College N comparing to paying even with the HA Scholarship, it is still a lot more expensive. (Dave, IBC1-EP)*

With the expansion of HE in both China and Malaysia, more working-class students have had access to it. Because IBC fees were much higher than public universities and other types of transnational programmes, participants were mostly from middle-class families with the exception of three Chinese Malaysians whose families could afford their education because they were the only child and/or they had received various scholarships which helped to ease the financial burden of studying at an IBC (see Appendix I: Participants' family background profile).

For some, while the cost of overseas study in itself was not prohibitive, it was the pull factor of the IBC location (e.g., Zhanghe and Anni), and usually in combination with the parental characteristics of either unwillingness to let their child leave the nest so soon or the perception of their child's lack of readiness or maturity to study abroad alone (e.g., Chenwei and Yimi).

4.3.3.2 Location

Location plays a key role in participants' decision to study at IBC in different ways as was evident in Pyvis and Chapman's findings (2007). Location influences decisions in two ways: first, IBC distance from home and two, IBC's programme included a study location different from participants' home country.

For Lee-Chun's undergraduate study, IBC1's location provided him an affordable cost of living with and independence from his family, while for Anni and Yimi, the close proximity to home made it attractive because it would have been less daunting than being so far away from the family for the first time.

> *"Because I am from Jingshan, you know. It's near my home, quite close. Actually in Fukui province there has good universities but the number is limited - choice. The university I want...the score to enter in is too high." (Anni, IBC2-B)*

> *"[A]nother reason is it's quite near my hometown so studying at this university, I can be not very far away from my home. I feel that I'm a little bit afraid to because it's my first time to be away from home." (Yimi, IBC3-E)*

This shows the importance of family and in fact, most chose the top university in their province as their first choice before the release of Gaokao results. When their score was not enough to meet the entry requirements, they then looked for the next best option in their province.

> *"[A]t that time I just wanted to go to Shenzhe University[44]. It means the key university in China. It's one of the 985 universities. I am born in Shenzhe so I tried to come to the Shenzhe University and it is very good in China. Yeah, that time I just wanted to go to that university but when I failed, I feel puzzled also. That time I thought IBC2 in TV shows maybe something that British education can attract me. Jingshan is near my hometown. It's easy to come home and stay with parents." (Hailiang, IBC2-B)*

This seems to support Choudaha's (2012) argument that IBC's primary market is the 'glocal' students who want a global educational experience while staying in their home country or region.

[44] Fictitious name

"And also it has the benefits of studying in China because you're in China. … So just be close to family and friends." (Chenwei, IBC3-E)

"The reason why I chose IBC1 was because it was very near my place. It's very convenient and because of the cost as well. I'd be saving a lot compared to if I were to go to UK and besides that, the course that I'm actually doing, I can complete my whole course here in Malaysia. The one thing that IBC1 really attracts me was that no matter where you are, the truth is there's only one U1[45]. And the degree that you get which in turns will give you better job prospects and everything like that is the same. So there are some universities whereby there are different campuses around but the degree is not the same as the original campus but U1 was a different case. It was a win-win situation for me." (Eddie, IBC1-E)

Identity plays a role here as it can be seen that Lee-Chun was keen on detracting from contextual continuity even from his preference for IBC1 for his undergraduate degree which is located further from his family home within Malaysia. This re-emerged as a reason for pursuing his PhD at IBC2 precisely because it is in China, a different country. Pyvis and Chapman's (2007) finding that non-Malaysian students in their study were 'more focused on developing new outlooks, dispositions, attitudes and new habits of thinking from their immersion in international education in an offshore Australian university in Malaysia' raises the question whether non-home/international students including Malaysians in an IBC (outside Malaysia) would have a different attitude and motivation towards studying there. Although Lee-Chun's (IBC2-EP) response suggests that this might be the case for him, he was the only 'non-

[45] The brand of the university family

home/international' IBC student[46] who participated in the research so this is not an issue I could investigate further.

> *"The other reason is that the scholarship is from IBC2. I like travelling but if the offer is from IBC1, I'll think about it but maybe it's 50-50." (Lee-Chun, IBC2-EP)*

Dave, from East Malaysia, similarly chose to be in West Malaysia for his undergraduate study, and the main motivation for accepting the fully funded PhD scholarship from IBC1 was the one year in PU1. He would have rejected the offer if there was no UK experience.

> *I: Earlier you said that study abroad was something that you really wanted to experience, right? If the PhD offer, they didn't have an element of coming to the UK for a year, what would your decision be?*
>
> *S: I wouldn't take it. (Dave, IBC1-EP)*

In the same vein, Zhanghe, from the city where IBC2 was located, opted for IBC3 because he felt he was too familiar with IBC2 (*inter alia*) with his high school situated so close to its campus. He sought for a new experience and chose to be further away from his hometown.

> *"I have 2 choices: IBC2 in Jingshan and IBC3 in Wensan. Because my high school is so close to IBC2, I almost know everything about it so I won't know so much if I have 4 years just stay there. So I come to have another choice. IBC3 have a more advantage thing is, Engineering is maybe more better." (Zhanghe, IBC3-E)*

Related to location is participants' preference for a campus university rather than a city university. The Victorian Auditor General (in McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007) emphasised the importance of location as a pull factor for students, noting that remote

[46] Lee-Chun, a Chinese Malaysian, studied for his PhD at IBC2 (China) after graduating from his undergraduate degree at IBC1 (Malaysia).

campuses are not as attractive as central ones, but location and cost often inter-relate and at times the link lies in the culture at the campus which is reflected in lifestyles of the student community there.

> *"I actually liked the campus feeling of IBC1 where you get to study and interact inside a something like a barrier; you can see the campus life. It's unlike those in E University or those in the city where you just go to the town and come back to study. I prefer the campus life where you can play sports. It's more of a healthy lifestyle, I think. Yeah, you shouldn't be like in the city where you just go to the shopping complex to walk then and you come back for a lecture or something." (Kai-Shan, IBC1-E)*

> *"Another main reason is the location of the campus itself because I'm not really used to city life. I visited O University[47] and it's very 'civilized'. I mean the lifestyle is very expensive as well over there." (Dave, IBC1-EP)*

IBCs were seen as a mid-way point to allow for their (often sole) child to be introduced not only to HE after secondary school but also to be orientated in an English-medium international university locally. Parents believed they would enlarge their child's range of options through enhancing their competitiveness in the labour market in China or open doors to postgraduate study abroad in the near future.

> *"The score you had didn't meet the expectations of your parents so they thought of going to well, let you go study abroad. They found that this [IBC] is a good choice. Well, my parents want me to go to America [for postgraduate study] because they think Engineering... They have better*

[47] An often compared rival Australian IBC which campus is in the city while IBC2 campus is located in the outskirts and is considered quite remote especially for those from Kuala Lumpur like Phil who described it as 'ulu' (remote, rural and usually backward).

job opportunities and also universities there on this engineering area." (Shanfan, IBC2-E)

This transition period also acts as a time of acculturation which many found valuable having come from a very different educational system. By learning to become members of the IBC community, they learned to prepare for the parent university community, learning ways of becoming, operating and carrying out practices of their communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

"[A]t first (my parents) want to send me abroad but because they think maybe it may be a little difficult for a girl to be go abroad before receive some pre-education so IBC3 would be a very good university to prepare for study abroad." (Yimi, IBC3-E)

"Because at that time my parents think I am not, how to say, not that grow up to study alone overseas. And also I think it's a good idea because in IBC3, I learned how to write essays, reports and how to get used to the education system." (Chenwei, IBC3-E)

Another reason why the location of IBC is particularly vital in China is the presence or absence of opportunities connected to the *hukou* (household registration) system which controls social mobility nationally (Tsang, 2013; The Economist, 2014). The system sorts Chinese nationals into hereditary classifications of 'rural' (agricultural) and 'urban' (non-agricultural) and allocates them a location regardless of their present type of work or place of residence. Thus, being a student in a location where the *hukou* is much coveted is attractive to prospective students who are from a less prosperous place (Zhao, 2011). The importance of this can be seen in the Careers Centre's (2015) advice on 'how to solve the "Hukou" barrier' for University of St Andrews mainland Chinese graduates.

The issue of *hukou* was the underlying reason for IBC2 students voicing their disapproval over PU1's (parent university) Pro-Vice Chancellor's announcement of opening another branch campus in Shanghai in 2010[48]. One of my personal tutees during my employment there had been vexed by the news and shared his concerns about the likelihood of IBC2's edge diminishing should the Shanghai proposal went ahead. He predicted the effect of IBC2's loss on him to be the decreasing value of his own degree. Whether his fears were founded remains to be seen now that the originally proposed IBC has been established as an Advanced Academy (rather than an IBC per se in its branding).

Although China announced a plan to reform the *hukou* system in 2014, the reform appears to have little consequence on graduates of IBC located outside megacities like Shanghai. The implication for IBC2 and IBC3 is that there is a high likelihood that students and parents would still prefer IBCs in such megacities, and the data demonstrate how readily participants would change their choices based on location and study abroad opportunities.

Recently a well-known American university has added another IBC in Shanghai to its global IBC network in addition to other TNHE options already on offer there. As mentioned, PU1 has also entered into another joint venture with a Chinese partner university to establish an 'Advanced Academy'[49] ("a physical entity within the Chinese partner institution to jointly deliver courses and training that will form part of degree programmes at both PU1 and Chinese partner institution"[50]). Students study for two years at the Chinese institution, one year at the Academy, and take their final year at

[48] I witnessed students including the President of the IBC2 Association of Students (equivalent of its parent university's Student Union) openly challenging the proposal and questioning the Pro-Vice Chancellor at IBC2 auditorium.

[49] Apart from the location and its relevance for *hukou*, main differences between this academy and IBC2 are the former's Chinese partner is more established and along with PU1, they award joint degrees from both institutions whereas IBC2 graduates obtain awards from IBC2 and PU1, not the Chinese partner.

[50] Reference for source withheld to preserve anonymity.

PU1. The combination of pull factors the Academy represents makes it a very attractive option. In light of this, my former personal tutee's concerns seemed justified especially since most participants who considered employment in China would like to work for multinational corporations usually located in megacities like Shanghai.

As previously stated above, study abroad is a crucial factor for many participants so while there may have been an initial desire to stay close to home, these participants all had at least one semester of study abroad and as it will be shown below, the experience was valuable to them.

4.3.3.3 Study abroad

Rapid economic growth in China has increased household income and more families can afford to send their children to overseas for education. Chinese government policy has also adopted a more positive attitude towards supporting international education (Bai, 2008; Yang, 2007). Consequently, going abroad to study has become a trend in Chinese society (Yang, 2007).

> *"I think the third reason is there's a trend. Many of your close friends, they study abroad and you can see they upload their pictures in China on Facebook or* Renren[51] *in China. And you will say 'Oh I want this chance to go abroad.'" (Yunxi, IBC2-B)*

Lifestyle has been a concept widely associated in China with development, whether as a yardstick, a policy-goal or as an instrument as well as a way of constructing and affirming personal identities and social difference (Croll, 2006). The trend of mainland Chinese parents sending their child abroad is part of the social mechanism they construct personal identities and affirm social difference and mobility. They perceive benefits of foreign education

[51] China's equivalent of Facebook

for their children as direct exposure to foreign languages and culture, accessing a better education and equipping them with better skills in the job market after graduation (Yang, 2002 in Yang, 2007). It can also be seen that some parents actively researched university options and a few recommended the IBC to their child after the release of the *Gaokao* results.

> *"[F]or the university, my father just played the role of a consultant. He gives me advice and to gather information and then also he asked me whether it's enough good to choose. But basically it's my decision. Because he learned Engineering so he knows how to collect information and how to... although he put all the information in Excel, so you know, the university ranking, the fees, and all of the stuff. He has one table for the Chinese universities as well as one for the American." (Lizheng, IBC2-E)*
>
> *I: I want to go back to this question, 4+0 vs 2+2, you said it'd influence your decision. How would it influence, would you choose another university?*
>
> *S: Yeah, probably. Because my father is very interested in the Chemical Engineering...in this course because they provide 2 years of the foreign, I mean in Britain, learning so he thought it was quite important for me because when you learned, the knowledge isn't so different whether in China or in the UK. Once you learn in the UK, you get a different environment. You meet British people, British culture and British environment. Still my father thought the experience is another part of important things...even more than studies. (Lizheng, IBC2-E)*

Tsang (2013, p.653) explains this parental characteristic as securing 'a generational reproduction of their class status and mobility' after their child's failure to gain admission to a tier-one national university. Human capital theory (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961) argues that education provides skills and abilities relevant to job

performance, and thus the higher the education level, the more successful graduates will be in labour markets in terms of both incomes and work opportunities. Most mainland Chinese participants intended to pursue postgraduate study so IBCs are a stepping stone to the United States of America (USA) or elsewhere for them. Chenwei referred to this as the *"biggest advantage of studying in IBC3"* since generally other Chinese HE graduates face a greater challenge in overseas postgraduate application.

> *"Because IBC3 we have more chance to study abroad. In other traditional Chinese universities is much hard to apply for abroad education. I think this is a very, this is the biggest [advantage] of studying in IBC3." (Chenwei, IBC3-E)*

Those who had planned to further their studies abroad were not worried about having the study abroad experience deferred until then if they had failed to obtain a place on the exchange programme. This is particularly so for IBC2 Business (e.g., Mingming) students whose programmes were not 2+2 and consequently, studying abroad was a competitive opportunity.

> *"And I think among my score, the best choice is IBC2. It has international view and I'm prepared to go to graduate education so IBC2 can help me more things like this. … If I don't have exchange, maybe I can have other experience." (Mingming, IBC2-B)*

Although IBC1 Engineering participants' opportunity to study abroad was similarly competitive, this was not a deterrent to choose IBC1 for a different reason. The findings show that they were confident of IBC1 because of its graduates' high rate of post-study employment record. Study abroad experience is an added bonus and the British degree awarded[52] to all IBC1 students is the same

[52] The degree awarded is also no different from the ones obtained by students who study at PU1 for their entire programme.

regardless of whether there was an element of study abroad or campus exchange programme.

> *"[G]raduates from IBC1 have a good reputation in companies… because our seniors did a good job in their companies so employers have good image of IBC1. So should be all right." (Seow-Ern, IBC1-E)*

In reality, both groups of participants were motivated by instrumental reasons. They differed only in socio-cultural and economic contexts. The highly competitive Chinese labour market has led to a competition for educational credentials at two levels: Intra-qualification (different degree levels) and inter-qualification (non-/elite university degrees) as a bid to differentiate oneself upon entry to the labour force (Wang & Lowe, 2011). Malaysian participants would not face such a fierce competition in the labour market and as such, most did not perceive a need for a postgraduate degree unless one's future career is in HE. However, there are signs that the Malaysian labour market is becoming more competitive, and the unemployment rate among locally educated graduates has risen (Darmi & Albion, 2013).

However, there were quite a large number of respondents who thought study abroad opportunities were the IBC's key characteristic. Zhexi would not have much confidence as an IBC without such opportunities is indistinguishable from a Chinese university.

> *"Maybe...I think I will not be as confident in this situation (if there was no study abroad opportunity at IBC2). I am not sure what really different between a local university." (Zhexi, IBC2-B)*

For 2+2 participants at IBC2 and IBC3 in China, the study abroad opportunity figured strongly as their reason for not only choosing the IBC but also the study programme. For instance, Shanfan and

Yinbo would have opted to study elsewhere if there was no 2+2 programme.

> *"If at that time when I choose university, I wouldn't choose it because I wanted to go abroad through this 2+2." (Yinbo, IBC3-E).*

Shanfan pursued Architectural Environment Engineering, a 2+2 programme, rather than Business programme despite it being a subject his parents had initially preferred.

> *"My reason is I wanted to go study abroad and they have this opportunity 2+2 programme. … Also we don't have 2+2 programmes for Business in IBC2. Actually I am OK with it to learn Engineering or Business because I want to learn more things except my personal interest. If you go to university and you study the same thing with your personal interest, you just restrict your life. How to say...the possibilities you might meet in the future. You don't know if you'd be interested in Engineering." (Shanfan, IBC2-E)*

4.3.3.4 Reputation and ranking

As mentioned, the Chinese new middle class families treat joint-partnership private universities as the stepping stone for study abroad (Tsang, 2013). The findings suggest that although study abroad opportunity is a pull factor for IBCs, their national ranking was also a determining factor for several participants. IBC2 and IBC3 are both tier-one universities in participants' province in China. Yinbo and Senhai both said their *Gaokao* score met the entry requirements of IBC3 which was tier-one in their provincial universities list. Despite his parents' suggestion of a tier-two institution with 2+2 opportunities, Yinbo insisted on choosing IBC3 due to IBC3's tier-one status and its parent campus' global and UK ranking.

"[My parents] had chosen a second class 2+2 school for me and I think I go to first class." (Yinbo, IBC3-E)

"IBC3 is at yi ben ke *(tier-one) and my mark is just a little bit higher than them. I cannot just drop myself to* er ben ke *(tier-two) because it'll make me feel erm, just not fulfilled. I just feel, yeah, not satisfied." (Senhai, IBC3-E)*

However, Yinbo and Senhai were aware that IBC3 were not well-known at the time they chose it and their decision evidenced a high-level of risk and trust.

"[A]t that time IBC3 was not well-known in China, a lot of companies do not know this is a first class university in China. Even after I choose this school, some of friends of my parents just don't know this school." (Yinbo, IBC3-E)

"IBC3 is kind of like an infant. It's growing very fast and… it has already started to gain a reputation because it starts from a unknown university to a, yeah, I cannot say that IBC3 is popular now. It's definitely not that popular at the moment but it is developing very fast and it is becoming more and more famous." (Senhai, IBC3-E)

Li, Morgan and Ding (2008) maintain that the reputation of the HE institution has a positive impact both on employment probability and salary, and an example of this is graduates from private institutions (perceived to be lower ranking) are at an apparent disadvantage both in terms of employment probability and in starting salary, compared with graduates from public HE institutions. This could be one explanation why IBC3 participants took into account the Chinese partner's reputation because it is one of China's elite universities.

"Yes, when I chose this university, it was quite new. And I took this in 2009 so at that time, there's no graduate, I think and I don't know about the employability and then I asked many from different provinces but almost over half of them don't know this university so I'm a little worried but two

universities, J University (Chinese partner) and PU2… good universities." (Yimi, IBC3-E)

McBurnie and Ziguras (2007) point out that a strategic partnership may bring reputational advantages to the local partner institution, but it may bring the reputation of the awarding university into disrepute if the transnational programme or the partner is seen to be of lesser quality or prestige than is expected of the awarding university. They propose that the establishment of an IBC might be the way to distinguish the foreign university from lower-prestige partner-supported programmes. However, the data show that the local partner reputation is arguably still very important particularly in China's context. Therefore, it is still risky if not even more so that any misstep or unethical conduct of the partner could potentially damage the parent university's reputation, since it involves not only a programme but shared university image and brand[53]. Such risks are higher in China because generally UK universities are less known with the exception of Oxford or Cambridge, whereas Malaysians tend to have better knowledge of British universities and their reputation. In fact, some mainland Chinese male students have been known to select UK universities based on their favourite football clubs making University of Manchester a rather popular choice[54].

It is important that host country recognition bodies make efforts to publicly communicate their recognition and acceptance of IBCs. Attaining a foreign qualification without leaving the home country is still an unfamiliar concept for many employers. However, none of the 25 host countries in the British Council's Going Global report appear to communicate directly with the labour market, but Malaysia and Hong Kong do make an effort to recognise TNHE qualifications (McNamara et al., 2013). IBC1 and other TNHE

[53] For instance, the risk of the local partner issuing a degree to a student who fails to meet the requirements of the course in order to appease her well-connected and powerful family.
[54] One participant actually mentioned this.

operations are endorsed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) as being part of the Malaysian HE system.

In addition to being a signalling device for the Malaysian participants, the reputation of the university also maintains or increases one's social status. Phil spoke of the importance of being a university graduate and having a renowned alma mater as criteria of inclusion within his social circle. It was interesting that he referred to world ranking of universities which implied that within his social circle, domestic universities were probably not considered for only University Malaya reached top 200 in the QS World University Ranking 2014 survey (Looi, 2014).

> *"Besides getting into a university, then the other criteria what university are you going? Is it a good rank? That sort of...you tend to look down on other universities if you're not in the top 10 in the world. Something like that but after a while, it doesn't matter anymore. … It was in the top 70. That was a good consideration." (Phil, IBC2-EM)*

Malaysian participants were concerned with PU1's especially the particular subject department's UK or global ranking than IBC1's. IBC1 obtained a tier-5 (Excellent) rating in the SETARA[55] exercise by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (2013) in 2011 and 2013, but participants made no reference to it. Malaysians tended to associate IBC1's reputation with its parent university's global ranking but considered its own reputation nationally through informal means. For example, local surveys some participants and their parents conducted were not concerned with IBC ranking but rather its facilities and teaching and learning experience either through word of mouth or online forums with comments or reviews on IBC1.

> *"IBC1 is because of the recognition of ... If I am not mistaken, it's top 75 in the world for Engineering and then it's*

[55] The review exercise for HE institutions in Malaysia measures the teaching and learning quality rating them between tier-1 (Weak) and tier-6 (Outstanding). Note that tier-1 here is rated as weak while tier-1 in China refers to an excellent rating.

one of the best universities you can find in Malaysia. … Research on like they have like best universities in terms of engineering or education or lecturer or study life. … [A]nd also one of my mother's friend's daughter was studying at IBC1 and she was enjoying her university life there." (Seow-Ern, IBC1-E)

I: So you said that the main reason is the reputation of the university in engineering. You said you heard so where did you hear it from?

S: From friends and also my parents' friends. (Adam, IBC1-EM)

Thus, there was significant reliance on information supplied by trusted sources. Bodycott (2009) places the importance of the advice of friends or relatives as equivalent to exhibitions or fairs, and more important than either agents or school careers advisors. Many of the participants referred to current or former IBC students and their parents as informants but some also sought the views of secondary school teachers and the local council's education department.

"To be honest, it's my father's choice because he listen to other teachers in high school of Y and they recommended the IBC2 to my father and that is the reason." (Wangfu, IBC2-E)

"My father had asked his friends and some of the officers from Education Department, their kids have been to IBC2. They think it's quite good." (Mingming, IBC2-B)

IBC1 in general enjoyed a good reputation among local students.

"It was mostly like the reputation as well so there are very good feedbacks about IBC1 at that time compared to [the Australian IBC]." (Dave, IBC1-EP)

Similarly, IBC2 has a good reputation in Jingshan[56], the Chinese city where it was located. When Yunxi was asked if she had to convince her parents about her decision to study at IBC2, her response was *"no, because IBC2 enjoys a good reputation in Jingshan."*

> *"I didn't do well in the Gaokao and I want to choosing accounting major and all the accounting major in all the universities is the highest major which requires the score is high. So IBC2 is a little above the...I don't know how to call it in English, zhongdianxian (the cut-off line for tier-one universities). And among the limited choices, IBC2 enjoys a good reputation." (Yunxi, IBC2-B)*

However, as Mingming said, IBC2's good reputation remained mainly in Jingshan and surrounding cities in Shenzhe province.

> *"But I think IBC2's reputation only remain in Shenzhe province." (Mingming, IBC2-B)*

To achieve sustainable competitive advantage, IBCs in China should therefore focus on improving their reputation and ranking along with the quality of their programmes (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011a). Furthermore, Bodycott (2009) and Yang (2007) find the advice of friends or relatives is just as important as that from exhibitions or fairs. Wilkins and Huisman (2015) agree that recommendations through personal relationships was the most influential factor specifically for forming the images of IBCs constructed by prospective students. In this research, most of the participants and/or their parents/grandparents used their social contacts to obtain biased-free information about the IBCs. Thus, being a significant pull factor, it is vital to maintain a good reputation of an IBC whether in terms of improving its national or global ranking, or promoting its institutional culture, status or characteristics among its current students and building an on-going relationship with its alumni network.

[56] Note that fictitious names were given to places throughout the thesis to preserve the anonymity of the institution.

4.3.3.5 International branch campus characteristics

> *"[Identification] is not merely a static relation; it is a dynamic, generative process. Because it represents an investment of the self, identification generates the social energy that sustains both our identities and our communities in their mutual constitution." (Wenger, 1998, p.192)*

Here I will attempt to synthesise how IBCs were characterised by participants and compare viewpoints of both Malaysians and mainland Chinese. Interestingly, while Malaysian participants tended to refer to the IBC as an opportunity of studying at a *British* university[57], the mainland Chinese did not seem to characterise it as British as much. They tended to use terms such as 'international' and 'different'.

> *"If I don't know they have a study abroad programme, maybe I will still insist on this choice because IBC2 is still different from other universities. [M]y father… found it is a really different university from all in China." (Xinjie, IBC2-E)*

> *"And I'm good at English in high school and IBC2 is more international. I think I can practise my English. Maybe a more different, maybe a good try. … I think probably I'll still choose it (if there is no study abroad opportunity). Because I think exchange experience is not that important but the university...I just like it when I enter into this university. Maybe such experience can be a point that may make it more attractive but it's not that important." (Anni, IBC2-B)*

The different perspectives between Malaysian and mainland Chinese participants here could be explained by the historical ties Malaysia

[57] At the time Malaysian participants enrolled at IBC1, there was not much choice in Malaysia but presently there are 4 other UK IBCs including another Russell Group parent university, which offers a range of 2+2 programmes in Engineering.

has with the UK and it being part of the Commonwealth nations. As to why Malaysian participants identified IBC1 as 'British', this could be although there is a wide range of IBCs in Malaysia, at the time of their decision there was one key rival IBC offering Engineering courses and its PU was not British.

Pyvis and Chapman (2007) find that students at an Australian offshore programme in Malaysia did not specifically choose it to obtain an Australian degree. Instead, the choice was for an international HE that for some was Australian, and for others just happened to be Australian. Since majority of them compared IBC1 and its rival Australian IBC, and in contrast, there is also data showing some choosing IBC1 for a British degree, it is fair to conclude that while Malaysian participants were generally seeking an international qualification whether it was British or Australian, there was still among some a bias towards a UK degree.

> *"Yeah, my primary reason to get a British degree and to come (to the UK) as well." (Phil, IBC1-EM)*

As for mainland Chinese participants, they did not have such a strong historical link with the UK unlike Hong Kong Chinese. Features identified as marking the IBC 'different' or 'international are having English as the medium of instruction, international staff and students, and a British educational system.

In its move to decentralise HE, the positive attitude towards overseas education from the mainland Chinese government also plays a role in driving demand for foreign education (Mok, 2003 in Spinks & Wong, 2010; Bai, 2008). Following this, the latter half of the 1990s saw transnational education provision grow at the rate of 40% yearly (Zhang, 2003 in Fang, 2010). Signs of government endorsement of particular IBCs in China in the form of official visits were viewed as significant by parents and students.

> *"Also because Chinese government approved this university and it's the first time China and UK cooperate together to*

build such a university. Their visiting means the government put emphasis on our university." (Wangfu, IBC2-E)

A highly important feature is the international recognition of the degree which facilitates future postgraduate study of mainland participants abroad. However, several saw the IBC experience as unique and rated its importance above the opportunity to study abroad at the undergraduate level. Chenqi reported that more students who could enter 985/211 universities are choosing IBC2 for the experience instead.

"Just experience. There are more and more students who get very high score in their College Entrance Exam went to IBC2. Sometimes the score is extremely high and may go to... maybe not Beida or Tsinghua, at least they can go to Zhejiang University but they choose our university." (Chenqi, IBC2-B)

While IBC1 was identified as 'British' by Malaysian participants, there was a sense of IBC2 as a hybrid university among the mainland Chinese. Xinjie described it as not Chinese but also not very distinctively international.

"IBC2 is a combined university but the international culture is not very distinctively, but here we can find that the culture is really different from China. The culture or education is different. Not to say it's better or it's good or not good. I don't know how to judge it but I think it's different." (Xinjie, IBC2-E)

Whether this hybrid nature amounted to the 'PU1 experience' in China is debatable but the report by Quality Assurance Agency (2012, p.1)[58] states that "students at IBC2 receive as fully a British education as it is possible to provide in China."

[58] The report is not referenced and labels used in the excerpt to maintain anonymity.

> *"The stated institutional intention is to provide its students with the 'PU1 experience' in China. As an integral part of PU1, the academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience at IBC2 are equivalent to those of the home university. IBC2 has achieved its stated intention to provide the 'PU1 experience' in China in less than eight years."*

The challenge of an English-medium IBC in China is creating the environment outside the classroom when mainland Chinese support staff is expected to uphold the English-speaking policy in communicating with mainland Chinese students. Because IBC2 holds itself to be so, it is likely to have built student expectation only to disappoint some students with this perceived superficial conformity.

> *"[Y]ou get English emails… like when I was first year, I went lots of time to the First Year Office. If you enter the First Year Office, you are supposed to speak English, but the officers are all Chinese. Their English is no better than you so it's a very superficial thing." (Shanfan, IBC2-E)*

According to Tian and Dong (2010), there are two concurrent national narratives of Western brands. One is linked to a vision of a future China characterised by greater freedom, translated through consumption practices. This vision is derived from a national narrative of the West as experiential space and Western brands as instruments of freedom (Gries, 2004 in Tian & Dong, 2010). Tian and Dong extend this depiction of Western brands to signify tools which create an imagined future China fashioned by access to experiences and ideologies from the West. By application, IBCs represent this vision of a future China in which mainland Chinese participants identified with and participated in. Overall, they were quite overt in expressing loyalty towards the IBC despite many acknowledging the parent university was better by comparison. I suspect Malaysians would have a similar sense of loyalty, but they

did not express such sentiment and the interviews did not specifically cover this aspect.

The above does not rule out the other nationalistic narrative which focuses on protectionism and Chinese brand loyalty. Although the former narrative encourages global exchange and Western brand consumption, it is not without taking into account benefits for China. It uses exposure to the West for transformational insights for national development (Tian & Dong, 2010). This is the rationale behind the Chinese government's reform in encouraging TNHE and the incentive to woo overseas Chinese graduates to join the HE sector to contribute to China's growth. Both these national narratives also show how identification is not merely a subjective experience for IBC participants, but a socially organised one too (Wenger, 1998).

The UK HE is generally perceived as being of high quality particularly among Malaysians due to their colonial heritage, whereas the mainland Chinese saw the USA as the ultimate HE destination. Alternatively, they viewed IBCs as a stepping stone to a better ranking UK university for their postgraduate studies. In general, Malaysian public universities are perceived to be performing poorly especially in world ranking and hindered from developing by the National Economic Policy which promulgated a racially-biased education system (Lim, 2011) while a British education is attractive for Malaysia still suffers from 'a mild form of colonial mentality, apparent in the uncritical tendency to make reference to and follow standards set by the former British imperial power' (Rajakumar, 2000 in Sin, 2009, p.290) despite almost 60 years of independence from its rule. However, this is not to say that the UK HE is not of high quality but rather by juxtaposing Malaysian and UK HE in light of public perception, it sheds light on the underlying motivations which push and pull Malaysians to IBCs. On the other hand, for mainland Chinese participants, IBC is contrasted with Chinese universities, particularly the 985/211 elite universities and the Chinese obsession for a taste of the American dream through

American HE. For example, Zhexi (IBC2-B) who originally wanted to go to the most eminent university in her province later chose IBC2 knowing that the international degree would ease her admission to an American university where she is currently studying her Master:

> *"Originally I plan to go to Shenzhe University which is one of the most best university in China, it's like top 5 but I haven't got enough grade to go to that university. But that is one of my targets in the past because the top 10, top 20, top 50 universities in China will give the future employers a good expression or something in the interview or something to get a good job. So I planned to go to that kind of university at first but because I couldn't get really get the good best one in the top 10 or 50 so my mother said that maybe you could choose another kind of university which is kind of different from the Chinese one. Then she told me about the IBC2 which is a part of another campus of a foreign university."*
>
> *"The direction is that maybe America (for postgraduate study)."*

Participants who wanted to study abroad valued IBC for acculturation. They needed time to adapt to a new situation so IBC was a *"preview"* to studying abroad in the future as well as a learning space to learn to become a member of a community of practice they hoped to be part of. Acculturation emerged more prominently among mainland Chinese than Malaysians.

> *"I think being here it kind of give you a chance to have a preview, pre-look at the living or study style at a British university to help us to get more prepared, and to see if you'll be get used to this system or this living area or not. And I think it also help me to get a more open mind but I think I am not a really person that will be accustomed to a new environment very quickly so I need time to get accustomed. I think it's really helped me and I am really grateful I can get this chance from this university." (Zhexi, IBC2-B)*

Sheng (2014b) finds that several middle-class parents were particularly concerned about campus culture in that their HE choices emphasised locating an appropriate university campus culture which matched their child's character and dispositions. These parents identified significant differences between graduates from an elite university and a general university embedded in their personalities and the way they resolved matters. In a similar vein, IBC students and parents also took into account the IBC campus culture's positive influences on their personal development, which might contribute to their future career after graduation and therefore, maintain or surpass their social position. Some participants and parents were convinced that the match they perceived between IBC campus culture and the participant's personality and disposition meant he/she would flourish in the IBC environment. They identified themselves with IBC student characteristics which were of similar family background and social status. Several mainland Chinese participants from both IBCs differentiated themselves from regular Chinese university students and those who studied abroad directly, both of whom they took to be less diligent, hedonists.

> *"I can sense from my parents actually these two options, they prefer IBC2. Actually they know me well like they know my characteristics well. IBC2 will be a very good option for me like I like to talk to people, I enjoy free atmosphere." (Yansi, IBC2-E)*

> *"I feel that I might well meet some students like this: We have similar family backgrounds. Also we all work hard. Some students who go abroad whose parents send them abroad are just rich kids. They don't really study that hard but students in IBC3 are rich kids as well but they do study hard. That's the difference. That's also why part of the reason why I want to go IBC3. I want to meet people similar to as I am." (Senhai, IBC3-E)*

"Actually in China most universities the students are not hardworking. They just want to pass these 4 years and play… yes, enjoy their life. But in IBC2, we enjoy our life by learning and playing, that is work hard and play hard. (Zhangxiang, IBC2-B)

There was insufficient data on Malaysian participants for inclusion here but it could be inferred from some Malaysian participants' preference for a campus university over a city university that they considered whether the campus culture and lifestyle matched their identity (see 4.3.3.2 Location).

4.3.3.6 Time

The length of study programmes is one of the reasons several participants preferred a UK degree. For example, Dave chose to complete his undergraduate degree in Mechanical Engineering at IBC1 due to its shorter duration than the rival Australian IBC and Adam's reason was similar.

"The duration: Because actually I wasted my time doing foundation and other parts for one year but the foundation is for 2 years so I was thinking if I can cut the degree into 3 years, I can graduate the same year as my friends now." (Adam, IBC1-EM)

4.3.4 The 'being-with-this-constellation-of-concerns'

"In dedicating oneself to a cluster of concerns, one takes responsibility for them and makes them one's own. The subject constitutes her identity as the being-with-this-constellation-of-concerns. Thus, through her internal conversation, the subject reflexively retains a strict personal

identity by virtue of her unique pattern of commitments." (Archer, 2007, p.87)

"Within internal conversations, subjects cannot subjectively conceive of any course of action they please and they cannot assume any social role they wish. There are objective structural factors which must be confronted: life chances, the distribution of resources, the availability of positions, etc. There are also equally objective cultural equivalents to confront. (Archer, 2007, p.88)

As humans, we are 'beings-with-our-constellation-of-concerns' and the participants were not different in pursuing their ultimate concerns. Every participant was committed to his/her own unique pattern of concerns albeit not all could articulate in detail, but there was a commitment to an idea of what they could achieve subject to structural factors. For example, Lee-Chun had a wide range of interests and his decision to accept the PhD offer by IBC2 fitted with his constellation of concerns even though it was not part of his plan.

"I looked at the topic offered by China. It's related to green manufacturing. It's to find a way to save energy in the manufacturing line so I found that it is quite interesting because besides I have the interest on Aerospace Engineering, I also have interest on environmental protection, politics, religion so I don't care that the PhD isn't about Aerospace Engineering. As long as they are in this scope, I'd consider about it." (Lee-Chun, IBC2-EP)

Similarly, Senhai could not express what his life project was exactly but it involved going abroad and experiencing Western culture. IBC3, therefore, offered his a window to realising his dream and a way out of the family business.

"I want to go abroad. I want to gain some experience. I want to know what Western life is like, how Western people see Chinese, something like that. I'm not interested in that

business because they require talks a lot and it's a bit risky and requires a lot of capital. And I think I can gain a kind of skill, a technical skill, that can help me work in the practice, and get to practice and get money." (Senhai, IBC3-E)

For some, their course of action was motivated by their ultimate concern of emigrating to secure a better life and future. The World Bank report, *'Malaysia Economic Monitor: Brain Drain'* (2011), estimated that there were 1 million Malaysian diasporas, of which over 30% were tertiary-educated skilled migrants and one in 10 of these emigrated to an OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation Development) country in 2010. The high rate of emigration and brain drain from Malaysia (which was double the global average) are a response to overall regression of the country which some trace back to ethnic affirmative action policies in education, a sluggish economy, rampant corruption, and race-based politics (Jomo & Hui, 2014; Koh, 2015; Lim, 2011), it is unsurprising that emigration is usually encouraged by parents particularly among non-*Bumiputeras*.

I: So does that mean that perhaps you might like to emigrate in the future?

S: I'd love to if I had a chance.

I: And being the only son, are your parents fully supportive of this?

S: Actually they don't advise me to stay in Malaysia.

(Kai-Shan, IBC1-E)

Emigration also has its attraction for mainland Chinese participants (e.g., Shanfan below) mainly for economic reasons of obtaining a highly paid job and a better life although other socio-economic factors are growing in impact such as social costs resulting from environmental degradation in China. This reflects the trend in China: In 2000, there were 816,824 university-educated Chinese who emigrated to high-income economies (Ozden & Schiff, 2005 in Kuznetsov & Sabel, 2006).

> *"I've always wanted to get a job here instead of going back to China so I have been trying hard to learn more English skills and am trying to socialise with native students. These are main part of my plan to develop my own employability." (Shanfan, IBC2-E)*

One reason Lizheng and his father thought it was best for him to move to the UK or the USA because his character appeared to suit living in a foreign country so emigration could become his ultimate concern.

> *"Based on my character, my father and I thought maybe I'd find much easier to stay in the UK, US, you know the foreign country rather than China. So that's my thought. They encourage me to do that (emigrate) but I'm still thinking." (Lizheng, IBC2-E)*

Therefore, the motivations for choosing an IBC include a hope that it might open doors to a better life abroad similar to some seeking education overseas directly (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), but in a less direct route. Zeng and Greenfield (2015) reveal a shift in China's cultural values over 40 years since the Cultural Revolution. Their study shows that there has been a cultural evolution from the traditional collectivistic values to individualistic ones. One possible inference from this is the younger generation may be keener to move to greener pastures in the quest of a better life and greater freedom particularly in view of the recently proposed Social Credit System by the Chinese State Council which reveals the government's plans to evaluate Chinese citizens to promote socialist core values such as patriotism and diligence (Creemers, 2015). Recent migration data (The World Bank, 2011) point to the increasing rate of Malaysians leaving for greener pastures due to disappointment with the lack of positive political reforms. This means that there is likelihood that both groups of participants may be less concerned with maintaining 'contextual continuity'. This is not to say that the participants who pursued 'contextual continuity'

were passive agents who did not reflexively make sense of her world in arriving at that as her life project. Archer (2007, p.158) argues that the production of social immobility as an outcome entails just as much effort and deliberation as does any other pattern of mobility. Anni longed for the familiar and comfortable, and her life project was to have a family of her own near her parents.

> *"I just want to be a normal person, not aggressive[59]. I want to stay in Jingshan with my family. And stable career. I don't need too much money. Just to live happily is...because I'm a girl. My family atmosphere is like this." (Anni, IBC2-B)*

Chenqi struggled between maintaining contextual continuity and the less familiar and more ambitious career with one of the four renowned financial firms such as KPMG, Deloitte, etc. In short, 'staying put' has to be worked at by an active agent.

> *"I actually always think very conflict in my mind. Sometimes I just want to stay at home and do some easy job. I can raise a child. It's very normal and traditional Chinese woman. Sometimes I want to get a great job and erm…have a regular thing to do and get out in the morning and come back at night. Just very different mind. When I thought I want to be a housewife, I am sometimes depressed and don't want to study. Be a housewife is OK. Most of the time I just to get a great job. I have to be independent." (Chenqi, IBC2-B)*

Gender was also a factor in Chenqi's situation. Wilkins et al. (2012b) suggest that there is a gender difference in student motivations. However, gender did not crop up with the Malaysians or mainland Chinese male participants. Although it was not a prominent factor, it was mentioned by mainland Chinese female participants with regards to course choice. For example, Zhexi was

[59] Aggressive here means Anni did not desire have an ambitious high-flying career.

encouraged to pursue a degree in Business because it was a less stressful career for a woman.

> *"Originally I was interested in biology, chemistry, environment protection but my mother said it was not a good idea for a girl to learn engineering. Actually she learned chemistry in her university and she felt that Chemistry will help you get a job in factory but she hates factory now she said it's not good for a girl. It's too hard or too many poisons and because you feel the factory production area every day and so she feared I would face this so suggested maybe business is good for a girl because you will sit in the office all day." (Zhexi, IBC2-B)*

Gender was also a parental motivation to keep their only child/daughter close to them (IBC's location was near their home) during the IBC transition to prepare her for study abroad.

> *"My relatives also other students in IBC2 so I have more information about it. And my father don't want me to go quite far from him." (Kefen, IBC2-E)*

Another aspect of identity has to do with participants' scope of perception. Some students' perspectives were global while some are thinking along the dual lines of the West[60] and the rest of the world. In this respect, there is a divergence in the way students perceived themselves ethnocentrically and others, and their place in the world, who they were and wanted to be, influencing their choice of IBC and subsequently their experiences at the IBC and later the parent university. Globally-minded students (e.g., Lee-Chun) saw more opportunities in postgraduate and future career paths outside their own country and were less discriminating in forming friendships and work destination, while dualists (e.g., Shanfan) did

[60] The concept of West is a complex one to unpack. As Tian and Dong (2010) illustrate, Japan is included in the idea of 'Western'. It is not delineated by advancement in development, 'high' culture or ethnicity but a matrix of these and other items.

so with the chief intention of seeking acceptance and membership in the Western society.

> *"I will not work in Malaysia after my graduation not because I don't love Malaysia but because I still want to explore to other countries to see more of the world, to gain more experience outside and then I can eventually learn from them." (Lee-Chun, IBC2-EP)*

> *"I'm trying to communicate more with native students to try and improve my English ability." (Shanfan, IBC2-E)*

4.3.5 Parental characteristics/influence

Most of the participants' parents were involved in the decision-making of which university to attend and took an active part in seeking information on IBC. This is unsurprising as research indicates Confucian values are still influential in contemporary Chinese society (Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Spinks & Wong, 2010; Fang & Wang, 2014) and parental influence often extends beyond initial decision making.

> *"To be honest, it's my father's choice." (Wangfu, IBC2-E)*

With regards to the Malaysian context, Abdullah et al. (2011) point to this similarity between Confucian and Islamic teachings so this would be a shared trait among all Malaysian participants. Phil's parents took the lead in his HE choices like the change from considering domestic universities to IBC1 whereas Eddie and Adam shared the decision-making with their parents.

> *"Actually I didn't choose to go to IBC1 because they [parents] figured that oh OK, there's UK university here in IBC1." (Phil, IBC1-EM)*

> *"They give me the opportunity to choose which courses to pursue." (Adam, IBC1-EM)*

I: So that was solely your decision not influenced by anyone else, right?

S: Yes. And my parents were very lenient with it as well. They didn't have any preferable idea of me doing any worse. (Eddie, IBC1-E)

Xinjie's father found out more about IBC2 on its website after reading about it in the local university guidebook.

"[M]y father then go to the website of IBC2 and found out that it is really different university from all in China." (Xinjie, IBC2-E)

In some cases as in Phil's and Xinjie's, the parents took the active role in gathering information about the IBC and then recommending it to their child. Conversely, Renshu insisted on IBC2 despite her parents' initial hesitance. They were ultimately convinced by her after consulting their own sources.

"Firstly it is solely mine. My parents not that agree with this decision. I think I convinced of them in a couple of days. Now they are quite love this university like me. … Maybe they think not that traditional, not that well-known. It's a lot of uncertainties. They are not sure about this so after I kind of introduced this university to them, they also did a lot of research, asked their friends including some professional educators. After that they found that it was worthy." (Renshu, IBC2-B)

Next, I will focus on Lee-Chun to illustrate push-pull factors specific to an IBC alumnus.

4.3.6 Push and pull factors influencing an IBC alumnus to accept a PhD scholarship at another IBC

Lee-Chun is a Chinese Malaysian who completed his undergraduate degree in Engineering at IBC1 (Malaysia) and was offered a PhD scholarship at IBC2 which included a year of study at the PU1. It makes his experience unique among all participants having studied at IBC1 (Malaysia), IBC2 (China) and PU1 (UK) all of the same university family. He was the first in his family to attend university and study abroad (see Appendix I: Participants' family background profile, p.334). As such, he did not have much guidance from them in HE decision-making, but was partly influenced by the desire to study at the same university as his friends.

> *"The decision is basically on my own. My parents simply followed my decisions. Part of it is affected by friends as well."*

4.3.6.1 IBC1 (Malaysia): Undergraduate degree

The higher cost of studying abroad and a rival IBC's higher fee served as push factors while PU1 being British with a higher ranking than the rival Australian IBC's parent university were pull factors leading to Lee-Chun's decision on IBC1 for his undergraduate degree. Location was also a pull factor.

> *"[T]he secondary reason is I still cannot afford to go overseas. [M]y family can't afford to send me to overseas for finish my degree so and then I found this university which is exactly a university, a British university. That's the only way I can finish my degree programme in a British university but in my country."*

"The second thing is the tuition fee of O University[61] is much higher, not much higher but will be higher than the tuition fees of IBC1."

"The location of the university as well. IBC1 is located in E and O University is located in W.... I preferred to stay outside because if you stay outside, definitely you can know more friends and can become more independent."

Researcher's annotation: Location of IBC1 is important because it allowed Lee-Chun to live away from his family (an experience he explained as important for his personal development - learning to be independent) in an area that had a lower cost of living comparatively than the rival IBC campus.

"O University is a bad university in terms of ranking but if you look into Engineering itself, PU1 is a better university compared to O University."

4.3.6.2 IBC2 (China with one year in PU1, UK): PhD degree

Lee-Chun originally intended to enter into employment after graduation. As for his PhD, the pull factors towards IBC2 proved much more attractive than embarking on employment. Similarly, there were structural and agential elements at work influencing his decision. While choosing IBC1 had been a cost effective decision, the PhD offer was enticing because it was a full scholarship with opportunities to live and travel in two countries abroad; thereby offering him an experience beyond academic opportunities which

[61] O University is a rival Australian IBC. The approximate difference in tuition fees for undergraduate Engineering courses for is £1,000.

matched his own personal project of seeing the world before obtaining employment.

> *"Yes, my early decision was to go out to work but I did not go out to work immediately. I participated in a work and travel programme to United States. Before I go into a working career, I should have travelled around the world. And during my working period in the US, one of my friends sent me an email and asked me whether I want to further my study in IBC2 for PhD programme. Actually I have never thought of pursuing my study in PhD."*

> *"I was paid monthly stipend so why not treat it as a job? I am working in China and at the same time, I'll gain my doctorate degree. As long as I do not pay for it, I think it's a very good decision."*

He might have considered a PhD at IBC1 had there been a full scholarship with a similar opportunity to spend a year in PU1, but it was clear that the experience at IBC2 would open doors to travelling in two countries and possibly Europe appealed highly to Lee-Chun.

> *"In 2010, there are only 2 scholarship offers from IBC1 because the government cut down the funding support for IBC1. One is for the Electrical and Electronic Engineering and the other one is for Mechanical Engineering which was eventually obtained by A and the other one is obtained by my other friend. So in 2010, I think not because I don't want to choose IBC1."*

> *"The other reason is that the scholarship is from IBC2. I like travelling but if the offer is from IBC1, I'll think about it but maybe it's 50-50. I will think about it but not sure whether I will actually go into it but because it's from IBC2, the topic is interesting and I'm thinking I will have a chance to travel around in China as well so that makes me to make the decision easily… so that's why if the PhD programme is*

offered in Malaysia, maybe I will not have as much interest compared to the offer in China."

4.4 Addressing question 1: Why do students choose to study at an international branch campus?

The research addresses question 1 in relation to relevant literature. This research shows that IBC students who spend part of their study at the parent campus have similar sets of motivations for their choices of destination to those who study at a UK parent university. However, these IBC students' sets of motivations do not overlap as much with those who study for their entire degree at an IBC. Wilkins et al. (2012b) find that IBC students who complete their degree there have different motivations to those who choose to study at the home campus of a Western university. This could be because Wilkins et al. had a diverse range of nationalities including home Emirati students whereas this research had only two main nationalities and they were almost all local students.

With respect to the push factors, this research had some areas of overlap with both sets of motivations Wilkins et al. identified for a home campus of Western university and an IBC respectively. Figure 4-1 in Chapter 4 summarises the push factors. In relation to domestic HE, these were inadequate access, a lack of international recognition or exposure/environment, perceived lower quality and development of English language proficiency. In both China and Malaysia, the number of HE students had outgrown the domestic capacity to absorb them in the 1990s and since then, massification in HE has emerged to meet the increase in demand but also to develop national economic capacity (Morgan & Wu, 2011; Wu & Zheng, 2008; Arokiasamy, 2010; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2010). The strongest push factor for mainland Chinese students is the

University Entrance Examination scores which were not high enough to be selected by elite universities in China. For most of them, they could enter a regular Chinese university at the lower end of tier-one or at tier-two. However, these acted as push factors because such a university was regarded as low quality. Despite the growth of tertiary education quantitatively from 1990s, the growing importance of educational quality has also made Malaysian public universities less attractive for many of them are regarded as low in quality (Lee, 2012). Moreover, the majority of unemployed Malaysian graduates are from public HE (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2010). A push factor specific to Chinese Malaysians was affirmative action policy restricting their access to public HE, which had created demand for an alternative route to HE. The number of Malaysians studying abroad remained relatively high, but declined from 103,700 degree-level students in 2001 to 53,900 in 2006 as private HE including TNHE programmes could grant degrees locally (Wan, 2007, p.4 in Lee, 2012, p.236). In China and Malaysia, the perception is that domestic HE lacks international exposure or environment. Mainland Chinese participants generally felt that the level of English proficiency in regular Chinese universities was not as high in learning outcomes and practice opportunities. Finally, a few students were not able to study the subject they were interested in at a public university either because they were not selected for admission or a subject like aerospace engineering was not offered domestically then. In terms of overseas HE and rival IBCs domestically, the push factors were their high tuition fees. The global ranking of an overseas university and a rival IBC's parent university were also taken into consideration by participants who could afford these choices.

Wilkins et al. (2012b) find two key dimensions behind the pull factors, i.e., convenience and country-specific advantages. This research's pull factors can be divided into institutional factors along with parental characteristics, and student identity and agency as Figure 4-2 (p.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**) shows. The main

dimension underlying the pull factors was IBC institutional characteristics. In relation to this, the pull factors important to both mainland Chinese and Malaysians were 1) study abroad opportunities including the availability of 2+2 programmes; 2) IBC location; 3) recommendation by personal sources; 4) perceived quality; 5) a British degree (favoured by Malaysian employers, and multinational employers and Chinese employers with international partners/markets in China)[62]; and 6) lower cost compared to studying abroad for the entire degree or studying at a rival IBC with higher tuition fees. China-specific pull factors in relation to the IBC were 1) the different or 'international' characteristics of an IBC including being an English-medium institution with international teaching staff and curriculum, and modern facilities; 2) IBC was a stepping stone to postgraduate study abroad; 3) IBC's ranking at provincial levels; 4) IBC was a transitional platform facilitating acculturation to Western academic culture; and 5) government endorsement seen through visits of high-profile government officers were implied assurance of quality, and government support to the long-term recognition and sustainability. This was markedly significant for IBC2 whose Chinese partner was not as high in status as the Academy's (its sister institution's), and IBC3's Chinese partners who were both elite Chinese universities widely recognised in China. Therefore, unlike the Academy and IBC3 which award joint degrees by the UK parent university and the Chinese university (for most undergraduate programmes), IBC2 does not offer a degree award by its Chinese partner. In the case of IBC2 and IBC3, many participants selected them because they conferred British degrees which are viewed as more easily accepted for American postgraduate admission than a Chinese degree.

[62] Generally in the local labour markets, Western degrees including those obtained domestically through TNHE programmes are seen to be of better quality than Malaysian public or private higher education and better than lower-tiered Chinese universities (McNamara & Knight, 2014).

With the arrival of IBCs of higher ranked American universities in China, IBC2 and IBC3 face stiffer competition. This potential threat was acknowledged in 2007 in the Agora discussion paper:

> *"But as David Pilsbury points out…, brand will be crucial, and the difficulties for less famous universities will only intensify when the big American players decide to make a real foray into China." (Fazackerley, 2007, p.3)*

In the last few years, big American players such as Duke University in Kunshan and New York University in Shanghai have collaborated with Wuhan University and East China Normal University respectively. These Chinese partner institutions are highly reputable in China, being part of Project 211 and Project 985 (both are groups of leading universities). Fang and Wang (2014) found that TNHE students in China are less concerned over the characteristics of the foreign partner university than over the characteristics of the Chinese partner university. They show that students mainly judge the quality of a TNHE programme based on the reputation of the Chinese partner university because they believe that universities only cooperate with universities of the same level. The possible implication for IBC2 in particular is that it might be in a vulnerable position to compete for students in the local IBC market for not only is the reputation of these American institutions better, their Chinese partners are also highly regarded. However, it is perhaps why some IBC2 participants referred to high profile government officials' visit to the university as important for it signifies government endorsement which makes up for the low status of its Chinese partner.

To the best of my knowledge, IBC1, on the other hand, has no such American rival IBC to worry about in Malaysia although there are Australian IBCs and other institutions which offer American twinning programmes. Besides, Malaysians also prefer UK degrees (Baty, 2009) but in Malaysia there has been a significant increase in the

number of British IBCs with at least one Russell Group university offering 2+2 programmes.

Parental characteristics in the research were largely their concern for their child's ability to cope with study abroad on their own, and their involvement in ensuring their child's HE destination would result in maintaining/improving their social standing and provide their child with the social and cultural capital to secure their social position (Sheng, 2014b; Wang, 2012; Tsang, 2013). This is particularly so if the parents themselves had attended university and studied abroad (Bodycott & Lai, 2012). However, participants with less privileged parents could not use them as a reliable resource but instead, drew from their own contacts of friends, senior students and former lecturers (Yang, 2007). This bears some similarity with Liu (2015) who finds that whilst underprivileged parents know little about their children's university life and job hunting experiences, middle-class parents contribute extensively to their children's job search.

As argued above, participants including those with a Confucian heritage were not passive agents. While most parents were involved to an extent, their involvement was not seen as usurpation. Participants exercised their agential powers in light of their parents' persuasion and counsel together with other sources of information to make decisions in delineating their life project. Thus, identity and agency play a significant part in IBC student choice.

The research reveals participants' perceptions that employers screened job applicants according to their university's reputation. Malaysian participants perceived a British degree as advantageous in the local labour market (The New Straits Times, 2001 in Sin, 2009) and international labour market. They typically aimed for the private sector, usually multinational companies. Thus, Malaysians were largely driven by a positional investment for choosing an IBC (Pyvis & Chapman, 2007). The difference is, in Pyvis and Chapman, Malaysian students were not necessarily aiming to obtain an

Australian, but rather an international qualification. However, this research finds that the Malaysian participants valued a British degree in itself for its prestige and status. Mainland Chinese participants were also instrumental in their motivation for choosing an IBC, and more so, for a few sought to distinguish themselves by obtaining a higher level of degree or professional qualifications. This was their response to a very competitive labour market although they were aware of credentials inflation. Hence, both mainland Chinese and Malaysians made a positional investment by choosing an IBC.

The results also show that the participants' instrumental motivations were concerned with their immediate future. Thus, this naturally concerned them more at the transitional phase during university. However, these sat within a wider constellation of concerns which were inquisitive and self-transformative. Virtually all participants viewed personal development and employability as inter-related, and the latter was often perceived as being a subset of the former. They also expressed that personal development was more important during their time at university for it (in)directly enhanced employability. This is another difference to Pyvis and Chapman wherein IBC students who demonstrated self-transformative motivations were non-Malaysian/international students. This research pertained to mainland Chinese and Malaysian participants only, but as they were mobile IBC students who spent a part of their study at the parent university, this could explain why theirs were positional and self-transformative investments. This implies that there are differences in motivations between mobile and immobile local IBC students.

4.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter I discussed participants' responses to the first main research question drawing from relevant literature and where appropriate, my own experience. I reiterated the concepts and theories which informed the theoretical framework. Then the analytical framework was provided.

As a precursor to the first question, I looked at participants' purposes for pursuing HE. These ranged from credential acquisition, a rate of return to educational investment, to the university is a pathway to adulthood and becoming a member of the society. These were culturally based so there were differences between mainland Chinese and Malaysian participants. Pronounced differences were how the more competitive Chinese labour market pushed mainland Chinese students to gain more credentials to distinguish themselves, and also how holistic they appeared by comparison. This paradoxical difference both found in the same group of participants could be explained by China's historical tradition and educational philosophy. Virtually all Confucian values are linked to the notion of *ren* (humanity). To realise *ren* or human flourishing in its most comprehensive sense requires learning not merely the simple acquisition of knowledge or skills but the building of one's character, i.e., the lifelong struggle to be fully human (Tu Weiming interviewed in Cowling, 2015). Although historically the civil service examination was a legacy of Confucian emphasis on learning, the seemingly latent but holistic purpose of learning for *ren* could still be read in the participants' responses. Malaysia, on the other hand, does not historically have this tradition. A fairly recently liberated country, its oldest university was established during British rule and was the only HE institution until after independence. Historically, there had not been any philosophy which permeated Malaysian society as profoundly as Confucian has in China.

One illuminating aspect is the participants' agency and parental influence. Although the literature has largely shown that parental influence plays a role in HE choices and beyond, the research has found that students did exercise agential powers even those who followed their parents' direction.

The first research question was dealt with using the push-pull theory, adapted after taking into account the literature and what emerged from the interview data. The push factors were analysed in terms of domestic HE, overseas HE, and other IBCs. Limited access to elite public universities due to affirmative action policy or *Gaokao* results, and the lack of international recognition or exposure, and lack of good English development opportunities at public universities are the domestic HE push factors.

The pull factors were examined based on institutional factors, student characteristics (identity) and parental influence. Among these are lower cost, location, study abroad opportunities, reputation and ranking, and IBC characteristics influenced by identity. A key difference between mainland Chinese and Malaysian participants is how the IBC is perceived in the context of the local labour market. For the latter, IBC1 is well-established and employers are familiar with it and its parent university. In contrast, IBC2 and IBC3 are well-known in their host province and surrounding cities but they are lesser known nationally. In addition, their parent universities are also not as familiar to the mainland Chinese market.

These socio-cultural forces bound and empowered the participants as they sought to understand their identities in a time of transition in their lives while making sense of fragmentation brought on by globalisation.

The next chapter will turn to what they understood by employability development followed by the second research question, which is how they perceived their experience in relation to their employability.

Chapter 5 The Interview Data & Discussion of Findings (Key Question 2)

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, international branch campus (IBC) student choices were examined and discussed. This chapter tackles the second research question. Before addressing the question of how students perceived the experience at university impact on their future employability, this chapter sets the stage by exploring what they understand by 'developing employability' in relation to the relevant literature. Participants' understanding of 'developing employability' were elicited before they reported their perceptions of their own employability. As above, the findings are organised according to themes derived from repeating patterns in the transcripts.

5.2 What is 'developing employability'?

The literature survey on graduate employability in Chapter 2 supplies an exploration of what this term means from various academic disciplines, and sets the scene for this research, focussing on how students see the impact of their decision to study at an IBC on their future employability. Before tackling this question, their understandings of the term 'developing employability' were firstly explored. The rationale for this is because first, the term is a rather contested one as the literature shows, and this is largely due to different underlying worldviews. Second, the research question concerned students' perceptions on their employability so it was more appropriate to analyse their responses according to their own

understandings of the term rather than fix a rigid definition and then frame students' responses according to it. Third, this was a multiple-case study with each participant as its unit of analysis within a critical realist framework, providing a methodological justification.

How individuals (un)intentionally make choices which impact their employability reflect their sense of their own identity and place in the world. Thus, their understanding of 'developing employability' would reveal their sense- and meaning-making of their identity in relation to their future participation in the labour market. As Archer (2007) suggests, individuals actively mediate the effects of social structures and events by reflexive deliberation on their situation. The following table summarises themes for participants' understanding of 'developing employability.

Table 5-1: Themes for 'developing employability' (by author)

Employability: Themes	**Meaning**
Knowledge and skills acquisition	Gaining knowledge and skills for obtaining employment
Practical work-related experience	Acquiring practical experience through which subject knowledge could be applied
Potential to perform	Improving the ability to perform a job
Character building	Personal qualities
Academic achievement	Obtaining good grades
Self-presentation during job recruitment	Understanding the job recruitment process and knowing how to demonstrate their potential to perform
Social capital	The actual or potential resources linked to membership in a group including the conversion of academic credentials into economic capital

Participants recognised the value of educational credentials as a signalling device, but they perceived that these are losing their value especially an undergraduate degree. Participants were aware of how competitive the labour market has become since the number of graduates has expanded with mass higher education (HE). This

perception is shared by British undergraduates (Tomlinson, 2008). IBC participants responded to this in two key ways. The first response was an emerging trend among mainland Chinese students to increase their academic capital through more distinctive credentials. China's trend of credential accumulation could be seen in two forms. The first and more common form is an upward route where students pursue at least one postgraduate degree, usually in a foreign country.

> *"[M]y father is a strict person and he kind of push me to get a postgraduate or even a doctor degree in the future. So now it's compulsory for me to get a postgraduate degree and he said it must be a foreign university especially in America or the UK so now I just need to plan for my postgraduate first and then only got my future employment. Oh yes, my father doesn't think that maybe an undergraduate degree will be enough so maybe I will take postgraduate in a better university." (Zhexi, IBC2-B)*

The second form is where individuals manage two different study programmes simultaneously (e.g., often enrolled on an undergraduate degree at an IBC and working towards a professional qualification such as the ACCA[63] through self-study). For instance, Senhai pursued Architecture at IBC3 while simultaneously studying for an accounting qualification via distance learning.

> *"Many years ago undergraduate is very valuable. … [B]ut now postgraduate degree is very valuable but undergraduate is just normal. … I feel I can get two degrees that make me get better ability. Yeah, people could hire me as an accountant or to become architect." (Senhai, IBC3-E)*

Notwithstanding participants' perceptions above, it is noted that Li, Morgan and Ding (2008) find that although the incidence of over-education has had a rising trend since the mid-1990s in China, it

[63] Association of Chartered Certified Accountants

was still lower than in the 1980s and the percentage of highly educated workers was lower than the corresponding international averages. Therefore, they present a fairly positive picture of HE graduates' over-education in China. Li, Zhao and Tian (2010) support their view and expressed this to be a temporary phenomenon which nevertheless needs tackling. However, it is reported that the Chinese Education Ministry officials were concerned over the rise in the number of postgraduates in China who are finding it harder than graduates with lower degrees to find employment (Sharma, 2012).

The second response is, as Tomlinson (2008) also detected among British undergraduates, to turn to the discourse of 'experience' in a personal narrative to distinguish themselves in their employability development. Wangfu expressed 'developing employability' as the need to get more qualified and opportunities like internships. Therefore, he wanted to accumulate evidence of his potential to perform not only through having a qualification to demonstrate his knowledge and skills, but also more internships to show he had some practical work-related experience in his chosen industry.

> *"The first thing I thought about is to get more qualified. Just the more hard in the contact your course tutor more often to get the opportunities to work for them or just ask questions to make them interested in you. Because employability to me is to get more opportunity. You have to know what you will work, what field you'll work in and also what you can do in the future, what's the industry and what you need for this work, for your job. Get more internships." (Wangfu, IBC2-E)*

Participants did not view developing employability as acquisitive only, but also part of personal development, i.e., self-transformative. Shanfan, who chose IBC2 for its 2+2 programme, did not think having qualifications or abilities would be enough. As Brown et al. (2004) affirm, educational credentials do not guarantee success in obtaining employment but may provide entry into the

labour market. Shanfan's perspective of identity-orientated employability development matched his strong inclination towards choosing IBC2 to achieve his personal aspiration of seeking a better life abroad.

> *"I think employability is about job. Develop means more than that. To develop yourself in every, erm, about your personality. Because you know sometimes you cannot get a better job doesn't simply depend on if you have more ability but also about your, the person yourself, the personality and your character." (Shanfan, IBC2-E)*

Participants identified character building as one of the indicators of employability development. Identity cannot be isolated from employability (Li & Lowe, n.d.). Several participants were of the view that the university alone does not have the sole responsibility of developing their employability. Some did not even think that the university could develop their employability comprehensively. For example, Lee-Chun coined the term 'a self-developed personality' to denote comprehensive self-development including an autonomous learning context outside the university.

> *"Why I use this term 'self-developed personality' because it is the thing we do not learn in the university. It's the other things that you study by yourself." (Lee-Chun, IBC2-EP)*

The above is supported by Speight et al. (2012). They indicate that some UK students at the parent university felt employability was more about attitude and behaviour than skills, and that employable graduates have personalities which stood out and capable of being a member of the community at the workplace.

Lee-Chun went on to illustrate the self-developed personality using 'willingness to learn' and expressed that academic achievement alone was inadequate to show one's potential to perform in a job interview. Instead, it would be the 'self-developed personality' that presents oneself positively during the interview; a more

comprehensive package of one's identity as Senhai's response shows.

> *"The self-developed personality. Yes, this stuff you can only do it personally because we will not learn them in university so I called it as 'self-developed'. I think the willingness to learn is a very important factor to add some points to get employment because sometimes in my own opinion, the academic results is a factor in a job interview but that is not all of them." (Lee-Chun, IBC2-EP)*

> *"It doesn't matter whether you're the best student in terms of your marks. It doesn't matter whether you're the best student or not. It matters whether you have fully developed all your real skills including the manners, your language, your attitude, your technical skills, yeah, anything like that." (Senhai, IBC3-E)*

The issue of self-presentation is particularly crucial for mainland Chinese students due to the complex nature of the Chinese labour market. Because of the co-existence of a command and control economy alongside a market economy (Velde, 2009 in Speight et al., 2012), graduates have to understand a prospective employer's history, their market nationally and internationally, and their work culture to carefully present themselves as a potential member of their community of practice. The way they present themselves to a traditional Chinese employer, a cutting-edge Chinese employer and a multinational employer would have to reflect the ethos and the 'fit' between themselves and a particular employer.

Participants also indicated the importance of social capital in reducing job information asymmetry and in developing their employability. Xinjie spoke about how through social activities she had expanded her social circle and learned from them.

> *"Besides social activities, through activities also I have get a lot of really good friends and they have teach me a lot." (Xinjie, IBC2-E)*

Joe summed up 'developing employability' as a process of forming his graduate identity through his past experience in group projects, internship, and extra-curricular activities, and using these to warrant his graduate identity in convincing prospective employers of his high potential to perform and to be a member of their community.

> *"I think for engineers, it is more of the past projects you've been involved in and the industrial experience you've had and how you carry yourself across during the interview. Probably also how involved you are in extra-curricular activities. For example, if you're committee of this club, you've organised club and if you can actually show success in all the projects you've been involved in and all the events you've been part of. Then I think erm...that'll be your proof. You can't really convince them 100% that you're the right person to employ, but I think what we can try to do is to convince them that you are better than a lot of other people and there is low risk in employing you." (Joe, IBC1-EM)*

Overall, instrumentalism was evident in the participants' understanding of 'developing employability'. However, the above also suggests that employability development to be more than instrumental. In contrast, Speight et al. (2012), reporting the findings of a UK IBC in China, show that IBC students' definitions of employability are instrumental and their belief that employability preparation should be from the start of their university study. Bailey and Ingimundardottir (2015) similarly portrayed the perspectives on employability of students at a UK IBC in Malaysia to be motivated by a rate of return to their educational investment. A possible explanation for the wider understanding of employability development in my research is the pool of IBC participants itself,

i.e., participant selection criteria included a minimum period of one semester of study at the parent university. The implication is that IBC students who spent part of their study at the parent campus may have a more holistic perspective on developing employability than their peers who stayed at the IBC for their entire degree.

5.3 How experience impacted employability

In this section the second main research question is addressed: How do students perceive their employability is developed through their decision to study at an IBC and subsequent experience there? The previous section set the scene by considering participants' understandings of "developing one's own employability". The discussion will take stock of these and significant experiences participants shared in answering the question in connection with previous research and literature.

Although both human capital and job-signalling theories seem to verify the hunch that education has a positive effect on individuals' labour market outcomes, it remains unclear what the determinants are in employers' recruitment decisions (Kjelland, 2008 in Cai, 2013). Moreover, Speight et al. (2012), Bailey and Ingimundardottir (2015) and Pyvis and Chapman (2007) seem to suggest that cultural factors play a pivotal role both in the supply and demand sides. Thus, I put forward an approach which accounts not only for the systemic factors but also the identity of graduates within the framework of structure and agency.

During the interviews, participants' understandings of 'developing own employability' were elicited followed by how it was achieved during their time at university based on their understanding of the term. They were asked about their expectations and plans during

university and if any of them were related to employability. They identified experiences within and without university which impacted their employability development. Some of these were intentional and sought with an instrumental objective with their future in mind while others were reported to have contributed to their employability without that in itself as an original aim. This could be linked to Pyvis and Chapman's (2007) findings on students who made self-transformative on the one hand and positional investments on the other. As per Zhaoyang's father advice, learning experience abroad is more than gaining subject knowledge, self-development is more important as an investment for his future achievements.

> *"[M]y father told me what I am learning here is just to improve yourself… it's just something like what you do in the future is probably quite different from what you learn here. But the ability, I mean the ability to talk to people, when you feel cultures and how you do acting, or something like that. Abilities like these. These things just affect what you'll achieve in the future." (Zhaoyang, IBC2-E)*

5.3.1 Perceptions: experience and employability

This section gives a brief overview on how participants viewed their experiences as contributing to their employability. First, participants distinguished between attributes or qualities which can be acquired within the university and those gained outside it. They acknowledged the role of university in promoting employability with respect to academic achievement, communication skills and knowledge sharing, *inter alia,* but some doubted the extent to which the university could promote other attributes such as teamwork. Therefore, experiences important for their employability development may be those occurring on- and off-campus during their university study.

"From 2 aspects, I think. First, like the technology, I mean learning ability. Of course, self-learning ability in fact, because no matter how many theories you've learned, you've proved in the last 3 years, it took far away from enough for you to just to survive the work so you still need to learn in the future. So the strong ability in the first aspect to improve. My own is developing. It's just from the learning from lecture, programme, experience in the lab and everyday about the empirical to improve your ability because here compared to the, I can be in a traditional university, compared with them, we have more freedom, time or (unclear) for us to choose. They have to deal with many course, a lot of work to do but for me, I think most of them still living a life like high school. Teachers told them what to do and they just do it. … You have to like self-study, you have to finish the problem and find the answer. This is one point to have (unclear) from the study itself and another aspect might be that anybody help, that mostly come from life, not study experience. You know, my hometown is H province. So for me, it's the first time to leave home. So when I live in Wensan and here, life experience teach me much more about the character so from both sides." (Haimei, IBC3-E)

Second, participants with internship experience tended to see limitations of what the university could do for employability development. For example, Nick explained that in the workplace, there will be more knowledge and skills to gain so what is learned at the university is the base upon which is built on in the future. This reflects the increasing literature emphasising the importance of continuous development of knowledge workers' skills beyond those required for a specific job (Overtoom, 2000).

"I think it's to get good grades, get a lot of job experiences like perform as many internships as you can like basically get as much working experience in the working world. In fact I did internship last summer. Working is completely different

from studying. I think what I learned from internship, studies...what we learn from studies is just, the knowledge you gained from studies is actually not very important but actually the skill of how you gain the knowledge is more important because as far as I know in the working world, when you start in a new job, I think you have to learn everything from scratch again so er...yeah, in terms of jobs, what employability, developing employability means to get as much job experience as I can." (Nick, IBC1-EM)

Third, participants articulated employability and personal development as interrelated. Almost all expressed that the latter was more important during university. For instance, Lizheng characterised his most valuable experience during university was his personal development in his first year.

"I think the most important one is about the first year study. At that time, I did many readings about the books, the history, so that's the first time…that I just read what's the real...for example, what the foreigners think about the world so also the idea and also the way of thinking, the critical and then judgement. This is also a very important point I learned in the first year. So these are the foundations of my further development. In the university give me understanding on how to develop a personal lifestyle and how to look to know what you should do and how you to do. You can say enjoy or how to spend your lifetime." (Lizheng, IBC2-E)

It is noted that Lizheng was studying Engineering, but he read many non-fiction books on history, politics and philosophy on his own initiative. The university library as a resource had empowered him and his ways of thinking had changed.

Interview data demonstrate that participants perceived their experiences at the IBC and/or the parent university had contributed to their employability overall. The experiences they identified were primarily about teaching and learning, social interactions and

activities within the university. There were also valuable off-campus experiences relating to internships, volunteering efforts, travel, and living in shared accommodation.

5.3.2 Teaching and learning

In defining 'developing employability', participants generally acknowledged academic achievement as an essential part albeit in itself it was not sufficient. They believed that not only employers might interpret it as an indicator of their ability to perform but also use it as a filter to screen jobseekers. Consequently, participants raised teaching and learning issues as a factor which impacted their employability. Hashim (2011) illustrates that academic excellence is the main selection criterion used by most employers, but it is not a determinant of Malaysian employees' performance. Nevertheless, Thondhlana and Gimenez (2010) propose that there is a close link between academic literacies and employability development which means that even if academic performance does not impact their employability, the literacy skills developed at university do.

Students from different IBCs placed emphasis on different aspects of teaching and learning. Those from IBC3 associated quality with the teaching faculty's academic affiliation. Their impression of the teaching faculty was of high quality with a number of mainland Chinese professors who were from elite Chinese universities together with international staff.

> *"IBC3 gives us opportunity to get in touch with more famous local teachers and teachers from different countries. I think those from America or Indonesia and some Europe teachers so they are very different kinds." (Yimi, IBC3-E)*

In contrast, IBC2 and IBC1 participants compared the IBC teaching faculty with their parent institution's on the basis of their academic status. Their responses gave the impression that PU1's teaching faculty was more experienced and professional.

"Teachers in the UK will be more professional than... (Jingshan). Because I think we only have 2 professors in Jingshan and here has more optional module choice. We want to compare the teaching, the environment." (Anni, IBC2-B)

Lee-Chun studied for his undergraduate degree at IBC1 before going to IBC2 to pursue his PhD and shared his observation on IBC2 academic staff.

"We have 3 campuses but I'd say that IBC1, it's always 50-50 or 60-40, I'd say that most of the lecturers, they are still from the same country. For example, Malaysia campus will have more lecturers from Malaysia and IBC2, they will have more lecturers from China. And to some extent, I also heard from some of my friends, they will say that the lecturers in PU1 will be more professional. They are from their own profession area so they work in the university sometimes just as a part-time job as a consultant but they have enough expertise from that area. Most of the lecturers from IBC2 and IBC1, I'd say they are fresh PhD graduates. They've never worked outside. They have been bred from the academic field so I'd, I think this is one of the negative part of the branch campus. So they will send any lecturers, PhDs even though they don't have the profession but they just want to fill the gap. What I meant is, for example, some of the modules in IBC1, I don't think the module convenor has enough knowledge for what he is teaching the class. When we asked some challenging questions, he cannot answer. Not because he doesn't know it but he isn't from that particular area." (Lee-Chun, IBC2-EP)

Lee-Chun's comment has some resonance with a general impression amongst staff that I was aware of when working at IBC2 that faculty members were largely fresh PhD graduates or (near-)retirees.

The student responses to some extent allude to the challenge of promoting faculty mobility and recruitment for IBCs. Altbach (2015) claims that IBCs may be unsustainable in the long-run because of

the difficulty of persuading home campus faculty to leave their work there. With the rise in the number of IBCs worldwide offering competitive remuneration packages, it is increasingly harder to attract experienced and high profile faculty particularly in locations like China and Malaysia, where issues like environmental pollution and academic freedom may affect quality of life and academic endeavour.

IBC2 students, Shanfan and Zhexi, described how the accent and the lexical choices of non-native English teaching faculty affected their academic experience. They had to do more self-study and preparation for their exchange period in the UK. Shanfan felt he was disadvantaged in his studies at PU1 by the different level of academic English of staff at IBC2. In my previous role at IBC2, I had initiated a project to conduct an audit of the academic literacy needs of Master students. The audit student responses were gathered through questionnaires and interviews. Teaching staff's accent was identified as one of their problems, but it was not specific to non-native English as they also had difficulty with less familiar British accents such as Glaswegian. This suggests that the issue is about students' familiarity with different accents. More familiar accents such as American or RP-sounding[64] British accents would be less challenging for them. Therefore, it is not a matter of native or non-native English accents, but students' lack of exposure to less familiar accents. Further research is required to investigate to what extent other IBC2 students are similarly affected. It is noted, however, that there was no mention of IBC teaching faculty's accents or lexical use affecting Malaysian participants' learning experience but some mentioned the challenge of coping with different accents in the PU1. Nevertheless, Kefen's response shows that this was not an IBC-specific issue.

[64] Received Pronunciation (RP) is commonly used in English language learning materials even though in the UK, varieties of British accents are widely acceptable now on television and radio.

"Language. I raised this question a lot of times since our professor, our lecturer, they speak fast. They speak in their own academic way and they never consider about us. And the third is that their accent is all different and because our listening is not very well also so we can't understand completely. Maybe we could only understand, can't reach 50%, I guess, 50% if they speak very fast. That's the main reason. Since we could understand they are professors, they have enough knowledge, they may think that we may understand what he is talking but actually we can't understand and I asked some of my international students, local students here, they said they also have the same problem so maybe the problem is much less for them but for us, it's a big problem. All we could do is just do the self-study and to re-look the [PowerPoint slides] after the class." (Kefen, IBC2-E)

Some mainland Chinese participants pointed to the first year or foundation programme's role in aiding their acculturation to the IBC's British education system and academic conventions. Yimi attributed her ability to cope with her study programme from the English and study skills components in the first year programme. This signals the importance of the first year foundation programme in fostering "autonomy in language, learning, and above all else, in living" (Candlin, 1997, p.xiii).

"So our teachers are very supportive and teachers from English Language Centre, they give us a more broader view, to improve our ability to search for materials, resources on the overseas websites. We know some Chinese students aren't used to looking for materials in English but IBC3 students are more clear on English academic resources so sometimes better resources so because I think these placed me in a good position." (Yimi, IBC3-E)

In a study conducted at a British IBC in China, Speight et al. (2012) report that staff highlighted learner autonomy as a developmental need for its mainland Chinese majority student population particularly to cultivate critical and independent thinking[65]. In most IBCs, the foreign provider has the overall control over academic matters. Thus, while it is important for the UK partner to understand how the local culture may impact on teaching and learning, the responsibility is more than that. It has to understand student motivations and needs and provide a support structure that will help them in their first year transition to the IBC academically as well as socially so that students may enjoy full benefits of intercultural experiences at a transnational university. In doing so, it is also vital in IBCs in the East Asian region where most of the students are Asians, they are not culturally stereotyped (Littlewood, 1999; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Shi, 2006). IBC2 and IBC3 tend to be more mono-cultural compared to IBC1 but the mainland Chinese majority students in the former two are not a homogenous group.

Most mainland Chinese students benefitted from the academic literacies they had learned in the foundation year. Lizheng described it as an indirect consequence of choosing an IBC and the impact it still had on him in subsequent years of contributing to his academic success and also his own personal development.

> *"There's indirect consequence especially IBC2 in the foundation year we learned about academic English but somehow it's not everything about English. It's about the cultures, the ideas, the ways of we thinking also is changed. All of these are changed. Told you how think about, how to analyse, how to judge and how to be critical about one point of view or one certain thing. … So sometimes why I*

[65] This is not to say that learner autonomy and critical thinking are not part of the Chinese educational philosophy. Confucius encouraged both (Kim, 2003), but also taught respect for authority as an ingredient for building an orderly and stable society. The emphasis on the latter has been promoted over the former to cultivate civil obedience.

understand, I develop my own personal lifestyle. Yeah, I think that most of it can be contributed to the first year studies. I mean how to deepen yourself." (Lizheng, IBC2-E)

With regards to this aspect, Malaysian participants were silent. Most of them had not been on the IBC1 foundation year programme but began their undergraduate study after their A-level or an equivalent pre-university qualification. This disparity is due to the national regulations governing undergraduate programmes in Malaysia and China. The latter requires all universities to offer 4-year undergraduate programmes including IBCs. The first year programme is, thus, built into the undergraduate courses and all IBC participants had begun their study on that programme. There are exceptions but none of the students in the research fell into that category.

Although most of the Malaysian participants did not undertake the foundation year programme, they benefitted from the learning experience at PU1 partly because there was a difference in faculty expectation there and IBC1. This is likely to stem from a disparity in underlying teaching and learning beliefs which influence their pedagogy. From being spoon-fed to taking responsibility for his own learning, Eddie had become more autonomous and discovered there was room for growth in knowledge discovery.

"I'd say that there's a really huge, huge difference to be honest. In the sense that...it's a big difference actually from the first year to the second year as much as for me transitioning from IBC1 to PU1. One being that IBC1 in a way is more convenient because they spoon-feed in a sense. All we do is to wait for the lecture to tell you things. There you are. You have your answers, your guidelines. It's very easy in that sense." (Eddie, IBC1-E)

"I think it's the whole the culture that's been set in itself that there is a certain way of teaching Mathematics for example. The difference between the Mathematics being taught

between IBC1 and now is entirely different in the sense that in here in IBC1, they said here's how to do it, here are the questions, follow this same pattern and you'll be fine but the PU1 is more of he just tells you on the surface kind of thing and sometimes comes across terms you don't know but they expect you to learn it by yourself, find it out by yourself so that's a huge transition from there. That's why I feel that there's a lot of improving to do in terms of finding knowledge process kind of thing. Yeah, that whole idea." (Eddie, IBC1-E)

Participants related challenges in learning and academic performance due to cultural and language barriers in the UK. In comparing IBC students with those at a regular Chinese university, Kefen saw the former not as in-depth in their knowledge as the latter because they spent more time processing information in English.

"Our academic knowledge is not as rich as the traditional Chinese students. Since they use Chinese, it's much easier for them to get more information on and so for us, we have to maybe use 60% time to still learning English in my 4 years but only 40% I could focus my time on the academic knowledge especially when I read the books from libraries, I can't understand totally so maybe I can get important part of what author want show us. … I mean they could get more knowledge." (Kefen, IBC2-E)

Haimei had similar concerns that her peers in traditional Chinese universities learn more than her partly due to a lack of language problems, a fuller academic schedule and a more comprehensive curriculum. IBC participants also considered the possibility that English may not even be used in their future job in China which caused them to question all the hard work of studying for a degree in an English medium.

"I think what I learned is you know, in the traditional Chinese universities, they'll learn a lot just from technology, I mean, only the knowledge. They'll learn much more than us. They'll, let me think, when my friend who learns similar with me, she'll work four days and her course much more than I and learn much more than me. I may learn quite simple or easier than what they learn in China but because it's write in English, I even have to pay much more time than them but I still learned not enough compared with them so I think that's quite a big difference… if I work there, my English maybe will never used there. And it's really wasteful for me to learn. I can't say the waste because learning is never longing, good or bad to support you a lot but only on work, only for the work. It'll be maybe useless for your work in the future so that's quite a lot". (Haimei, IBC3-E)

The modes of teaching and learning such as group work also have an indirect impact on employability according to participants.

"First of all, I think team working, this kind of skill is the most important one I had gained at PU2 but in China, I mean, I didn't mean IBC3, I mean in middle school, high school, primary school, these kinds of traditional educational system. When I was in that kind of system, all I was taught is to obey the rules, and people are a kind of selfish. They only want to fulfil their own stuff. They don't care about what other people might get. They don't care about group results. They only care about the individual results which is not so popular in this kind of international, yeah, worldwide, international civilization, environment. So teamwork especially Architecture Department, I've gained a lot of, we have to do some, for example, designing and make a model together and share the whole experience together. Yeah, I think this is one of the most important skills that I've gained." (Senhai, IBC3-E)

One interesting aspect which several participants raised is the disparity on assessment between the IBC and the parent campus. Senhai compared the level of difficulty and pass rates in examinations held in IBC3 and PU2.

> *"Yeah, and the examinations are very difficult compared to the examinations [at PU2]. Much more difficult and pass rate is only 70% of the pass rate here. There are only 200 students in total. About 40-50 got fail but can we say that they didn't pay attention, didn't work hard? No, they worked hard but because they just want to make the teaching quality good. Yeah, they set the examinations hard." (Senhai, IBC3-E)*

This relates to the point made by Chenwei about the relative ease in excelling in certain subjects at PU2.

> *"For Chinese students, study here and competing with other UK students is easier to compete with other Chinese students because especially in Engineering part because we Chinese students have, usually we have better Mathematics or Physics so it's also because high marks, I think." (Chenwei, IBC3-E)*

Another teaching and learning issue is the perception mainland Chinese participants had on Mathematics provision at IBC2. Zhexi gave an account of how some IBC2 students perceived Mathematics taught there as not advanced enough and paid a Chinese teacher to teach them.

> *"But in IBC2 we couldn't choose enough Mathematics module and in Year One I joined an advanced module, Advanced Mathematics module from one of the societies. It's kind of illegal for them to find a new teacher from other school to teach at our school. It's kind of secretive, yeah, in Chinese. There are two students who built up this society. They really like Mathematics but they… find that the Mathematics at*

our university is kind of poor so they find a local teacher. We learned something from him and we paid him... but we just learn from other upper grade students that the Mathematics in our school is not enough so we are in Year One, we have plenty of time so we... I hope the School can teach more mathematics because it is kind of challenge." (Zhexi, IBC2-B1)

Lee-Chun's description of his experience as a PhD student at IBC2 reflects challenges and opportunities students encounter in a newly established research programme.

"Maybe the main barrier is the newly established Engineering which doesn't have much equipment so it'll hinder my research progress because I have to apply my own research funding to buy the equipment by myself. That is one advantage because we are the first batch of PhD students in Engineering there so it's very easy for us to apply for the funding as long as we've got the ideas, we've got a good proposal. We can get the funding from the Graduate School to set up our own lab. So we're kind of the pioneers of the laboratories over there. Because it's not saturated at all, we can do what we want." (Lee-Chun, IBC2-EP)

The above discusses how participants understood the teaching and learning aspects of their experience as indirectly impacting their employability.

5.3.3 International experience

"When government representatives of foreign countries invite institutions from abroad to establish branch campuses in their countries, the implicit assumption is that they are bringing outstanding academic programming and creating a culturally relevant and socially acceptable campus environment for

students that reflects the fundamental ethos that exists on the main campus." (Wood, 2011, p.30)

For this research participants, international experience offered by IBCs was a strong pull factor as presented above and shown in the literature (Chapman & Pyvis, 2006; Pyvis & Chapman, 2007). However, Altbach (2015) argues that the IBC rarely resembles the home product, in terms of breadth of curriculum, quality of academic staff, physical environment, learning resources, and social facilities, and thus, can hardly replicate the student experience at the parent campus. Xinjie's description lends some support to Altbach's point.

"Although IBC2 is a university that combine foreign and traditional Chinese or something but I think go to the real abroad university is different. In reality, it is just different! Firstly it is because IBC2 are nearly all of my friends are Chinese and I communicate with Chinese friends. Also we learned in English from class but after class, we talked with Chinese." (Xinjie, IBC2-E)

In the Quality Assurance Agency's (2012) review of one of the UK IBCs in China, it verifies that the quality of the student learning experience is equivalent to the parent institution in as far as it is possible to replicate British HE in China. Given the possible differentiation in the experiences at the IBC and the parent university, this research offers insights through IBC participants who studied at the parent campus as part of their programme.

"Also IBC2 is a combined university but the international culture is not very distinctively but here we can find that the culture is really different from China. The culture or education is different. Not to say it's better or it's good or not good. I don't know how to judge it but I think it's different. I think it can make me want to learn. Here I want to go to library every day but IBC2, not. It's just different. I don't know exactly the reason." (Xinjie, IBC2-E)

Lee-Chun stressed that if studying at an IBC did not involve campus study exchange, then the whole experience would not have been good enough to develop employability.

> *"If you study for the whole degree programme in a particular campus, I don't think you'll be in a good position but if you did one year exchange either it's in IBC2 or PU1, then I think it'll place you in a good position. You have a bigger view. When you mix around with people around world, definitely you'll have different opinions about something. Knowledge exchange." (Lee-Chun, IBC2-EP)*

Senhai valued an international outlook and exposure at IBC3 and PU2, not only in terms of opening his eyes to the 'outside world' but also new ways of learning, thinking and becoming.

> *"Broaden my view, broaden my horizon. I know what the world is really like. Not like back in China. I didn't mean in IBC3. I mean in the traditional Chinese universities. Yeah, what we do is just reciting some stuff, and pass the examinations. We don't know what is happening outside. Yeah, they don't even know how Western people perceive China. We only know that China is a good country, so powerful, helping the other people but some other people might not think so. So it just broaden my view." (Senhai, IBC3-E)*

Intercultural competence is increasingly sought after by employers. Intercultural competence is defined as "the overall capacity of an individual to enact behaviours and activities that foster cooperative relationships with culturally (or ethnically) dissimilar others" (Kim, 2009, p.54). IBCs might appear to be a desirable institution where students can develop this and become an 'international person', but the question is tied up with what being 'international' means and looks like in each IBC's context.

Many have questioned the ability of IBCs to offer an institutional culture that mirrors the home institutions' (Altbach, 2015; Wood, 2011). While an IBC may not have this goal, they may have touted the IBC as an international campus to prospective students and their parents. Hence, they are likely to have created an expectation that the campus culture and environment would be international, and English would be the language of communication. Kuh and Hall (1993, p.2 in Wood, 2011, p.30) define campus cultures as "the collective, mutually shaping patterns of institutional history, mission, physical settings, norms, traditions, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions which guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institution of higher education and which provide frames of reference for interpreting the meanings of events and actions on and off campus". Campus cultures also impact on learning which is a social practice involving not only a relation to specific activities, but a relation to social communities. It implies learning to becoming a full member of the IBC community of practice. Thus, IBCs should take more care in managing expectations of prospective students in their recruitment materials and activities so as not to give the impression of an unrealistic ethos. Otherwise, it may be perceived as superficial and inauthentic to new students.

> *"[B]efore you entered this college, you thought you might, you expected to have more opportunities to do with English, to do many things about English." (Shanfan, IBC2-E)*

Because identity has shown to be significant in how students identify with an institution and how they behave socially and perform academically (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000; Akerlof & Kranton, 2002), it is important for IBCs to have a clear ethos and mission which aligns not only with the parent university and local partner, but the marketing and student recruitment policy and practices should reflect them too. This would prevent a mismatch between what prospective students expect and what current students experience.

Participants, in explaining 'developing employability', expressed character building as part of it. In many of the students' accounts, international experience plays a key part in forming their identity. Crossman and Clarke (2009) argue that with the advent of globalisation and internationalisation, graduates need to function in culturally diverse contexts. Their study suggests that connections between international experience and employability are evidenced through various outcomes such as formation of networks, experiential learning, language acquisition, cultural understandings, personal development and different ways of thinking. Therefore, planning a trip could be a learning experience which develops independent thinking and problem-solving skills for IBC students in their study period at the parent university.

> *"It could be like a challenge for me because it was the first time for me to take train the foreign country and also because actually this journey, I planned it for about the whole summer holiday so actually I learned a lot from it. So I come across like actually wasted a lot of money because I didn't have any experience about this. I think I learned a lot. Actually I really enjoyed this challenge even it makes me feel sad or disappointed, but I think I have to experience it. That's why I think study abroad is really important as well because if you are in China, even like Jingshan is far from my hometown but still you are in China so you have no difficulty to communicate with other people but here, not. You have to be alone. You need to learn solve all the problems by yourself. I think that's really important for me." (Yansi, IBC2-E)*

Most of the participants and their parents valued study abroad experience, and some of them chose an IBC because it offered 2+2 programmes whereas others took or switch to a certain course because of the study abroad opportunity. Lizheng's father rated study abroad experience to be more important than his academic study experience.

> *"[M]y father is very interested in this course because they provide 2 years of the foreign, I mean in Britain, learning so he thought it was quite important for me because when you learned, the knowledge isn't so different whether in China or in the UK. Once you learn in the UK, you get a different environment. You meet British people, British culture and British environment. Still my father thought the experience is another part of important things...even more than studies." (Lizheng, IBC2-E)*

Tian and Lowe's (2009) findings suggest that aspects of national identity, together with gender, level of study and time spent in the foreign country, may be important influences on individuals' constructions of and responses to their experiences, but that individual character and personal histories may be equally influential. One outcome of studying abroad is a heightened appreciation of one's culture and deeper intercultural awareness and understanding (Gu et al., 2009). Lizheng's account reflects a fresh understanding of the Chinese culture which began when he went to IBC2 but grew after he studied at PU1.

> *"But you know, after I get involved in the IBC2 and after I get involved in the Western culture so I have another clear view about how I look about my all the Chinese culture in a different way so I developed my view of the Chinese culture based on experience so I get a different, I mean a new idea, or even more understanding of the Chinese culture. So for me, I practise the martial arts just like the same as I play the cycling based on the same objectives but with a different pattern. So I just to look back there and I summarised and I thought I know more of my past." (Lizheng, IBC2-E)*

Comparing students who studied abroad with those who did not, Anderson and Lawton (2011) find that participation in a semester-length study abroad experience demonstrates a significant growth in

intercultural development. Eddie showed more empathy towards IBC1 international students after his sojourn at PU1.

> *"It has changed me personally in terms of the way I carry myself most importantly. Well, back in Malaysia local students and stuff like that, I couldn't see myself growing as much as I am here. Mixing with international students has definitely helped me to be more understanding towards the international students back in IBC1. I was a foreigner once in the UK, and now that I am back in Malaysia, I know how they feel. And it has definitely will help me in my networking." (Eddie, IBC1-E)*

Studying abroad also provides an immersion opportunity particularly for the improvement of English proficiency. Yinbo had expected his English to improve despite living with mainland Chinese students because being in the UK, he was immersed in the host society.

> *"I expected some like develop my English skills because I think living abroad will help even if I live with some Chinese students. I think daily life if I want to buy something or want to go to some places, it's all English, I think it'll improve my English skills. I think my English is better than I, because in China, I may not talk in English like this." (Yinbo, IBC3-E)*

Moreover, employers favour graduates who have study abroad experience (Quah et al., 2009) as Dave highlighted.

> *"[Y]ou asked just now how does studying abroad makes a benefit for Malaysian students, right? Basically Malaysian employers really like students that came back from overseas." (Dave, IBC1-EP)*

However, most participants found it difficult to get involved in social activities organised by student societies at the parent campus. Xinjie turned to the cultural difference in student social activities as the reason.

"The social activities here aren't like what we do in Chinese such as many societies take to partying. Societies in China we can understand but many of the societies, we cannot involve ourselves in." (Xinjie, IBC2-E)

Most mainland Chinese students did not take to the UK undergraduate culture of partying or clubbing, and many of the social events involve alcohol consumption which not many of them were accustomed to either. The other cultural difference is language and socialisation experience during secondary school according to Shanfan.

"[I]f you try to mix with native students, you'll find that it's actually very hard. Well, partly because of your language and partly because of your, well, it's about culture and it's also about the students here are different, the people here are different. But the education they get is different to your education. When I was in high school, what I did was study and study 12 hours a day and it's very different from here because they, if already taken part in variety of activities when they were back in high school or secondary school so generally they are more social than Chinese students. They will find it very hard to mix with them." (Shanfan, IBC2-E)

In contrast, Malaysian students tended to fare better in socialising with other nationalities at PU1 although they also found it challenging to befriend British students.

"The friends that I meet is so much different compared to the friends I meet in IBC1 maybe because of the familiarity with the local people and what not. Then again the opportunity is more compared to IBC1 in meeting international students which I really cherish personally of this experience here as well." (Eddie, IBC1-E)

Regardless of nationality, those who were active in on-campus sports activities or persistent in their efforts to participate in student

societies were fairly positive about their intercultural experiences. For example, Chenwei's oral English was not as fluent as his other IBC3 peers but his interest in engineering projects with other students had brought him many friends including British ones.

> *"They have many student societies like we Engineering Department we have Engineering Students Society. They organise many activities for students so I used to do some of the activities so I have a chance to meet other students." (Chenwei, IBC3-E)*

Whether it was the IBC or the parent campus, participants expected their decision to study at an IBC to offer a range of international activities allowing them to have intercultural experiences. For mainland Chinese students, this included improvement in English and exposure to new knowledge, culture, and perspectives which they would not experience had they not chosen to study at an IBC. This choice also gave them access to a fresh look of their own culture and understanding of their national identity and China, made possible through intercultural exchange and experience at the IBC and the parent campus.

However, IBC students do not all spend a part of their study at the parent university so one questions how their intercultural competence is developed or in Crossman and Clarke's (2009) terms, how their international experience at the IBC links to employability. IBC2 participants' accounts reveal the challenges towards forming an 'international identity' in IBC2's context. There were structural measures in place to segregate international students from the local students.

> *"There are many international students in IBC2 but the dormitory itself are separated[66] and there are not so many*

[66] At IBC2, international and domestic students have different resident halls with different regulations and facilities. As I recalled, this created some resentment among mainland Chinese students.

opportunities and activities for you to communicate with them, get to know them." (Shanfan, IBC2-E)

I: Do you see any particular challenges which you had to face as an IBC2 student?

S: When I studied in IBC2, yes. I want to experience different culture but actually most students are Chinese there. Chinese students and international students don't live together actually. They are in different social circles. (Chenqi, IBC2-B)

Such institutional policies are unhelpful in aiding local students towards their learning trajectory of becoming an 'international person'. Both local and international students have crucial roles in building the international atmosphere and character of an IBC. There needs to be a harmonisation between the students' perceived value of an 'international' HE and the processes and structures implemented by institutional management in creating an 'international' HE (Mohd Ismail Abd Aziz & Doria Abdullah, 2013).

Nevertheless, a few participants highlighted the role of the year one or foundation programmes at the IBC in providing the initial learning platform which, for Lizheng, has been the catalyst for his intercultural development.

"I think that most of it can be contributed to the first year studies. I mean how to deepen yourself. Because previously I am a lover of Chinese culture so I learned Chinese martial arts so I know what Chinese culture is like so how they thought about a problem, but now I learned how the Westerners analyse and to think about the world so I can compare and then you can develop your own style, a combination of the West and the China one because each of them have the disadvantages and advantages but you have to compare so you could know what are the differences, and

what you should do and what you should absorb." (Lizheng, IBC2-E)

Moreover, resourceful and determined IBC2 participants looked for opportunities to enrich their international experience.

> *"I take every chance to speak to foreign people and find activities that may be open to international people. … There's an organization, AIESEC, occasionally sends e-mails to us that some foreign people will come and who want to voluntarily offer accommodation to them. My home is near our university so I applied for that." (Chenqi, IBC2-B)*

This implies that an IBC can still be a means to an international identity formation to some extent even if students do not spend any time in their study at the parent university. Moreover, the research shows that the first year study at an IBC is pivotal in laying the foundation for self-transformation and international identity formation. This is especially significant for IBCs in China because of the predominantly mono-cultural and mono-lingual socialisation occurring in non-academic settings on-campus.

In light of these structural constraints and enablements, 'quality as transformation', which 'implies a change in all students in all aspects as a result of the higher education they receive' (Tam, 2001, p.51 in Chapman & Pyvis, 2006, p.238), is not impossible, but requires political will from the IBC management, concerted effort from staff and support from the student body to succeed. In Malaysia, this sort of 'quality as transformation' in IBC students might be equally hard to achieve despite the presence of a larger international student cohort (40%) and a lack of institutional measures discouraging shared living spaces. Research on international students in Malaysia has revealed the lack of interaction between them and Malaysian students (Jani, 2010 in Mohd Ismail Abd Aziz & Doria Abdullah, 2013). Malaysian participants also affirmed this.

> *"I noticed that Malaysian students because we're the majority, we tend to just mix with ourselves, instead of befriending international students. … I'd say for international students, they'd really have the courage and independence to move out of their community because, for example, African students who come over to IBC1 tend to mix with themselves as well. It's a both way situation. It's not that they can't mix with us but they mix too well with themselves or we mix too well with ourselves as well but if there are one individual that's willing to move out and try to mix with others, it actually works pretty good. Because I have like seen examples in IBC1. There are students from other countries who mix very well with everyone." (Dave, IBC1-EP)*

Therefore, there is a need to promote proper engagement opportunities between internationals and locals in establishing an 'international' educational community. I would add that there is also a need to encourage intermingling among Malaysians of different ethnicities as we tend to stay in our own ethnic circle of friends based on my observation at PU1 where there is a large Malaysian student population.

Another related issue is the social capital accessible to participants. Waters and Leung (2012) argue that the ability to cultivate social capital in the TNHE context is restricted in various ways with implications for subsequent employment opportunities and social mobility. In the context of IBCs, I would argue that this may also apply to students who are on 4+0 programmes and do not have any study abroad experience. However, this research's participants showed by their accounts being at the IBC (e.g., Senhai) and its parent institution (e.g., Phil) had given them access to social capital which enhanced their upward social mobility by 1) meeting others of similar social background as them; 2) augmenting their chance to further their postgraduate study at a higher-ranking university; or 3) obtaining a much coveted internship or employment abroad.

"I feel that I might well meet some students like this. We have similar family backgrounds. Also we all work hard. Some students, you know, some students who go abroad whose parents send them abroad are just rich kids. They don't really study that hard but students in IBC3 are rich kids as well but they do study hard. That's the difference. That's also why part of the reason why I want to go IBC3. I want to meet people similar to as I am." (Senhai, IBC3-E)

I: You came back here to the UK to do MEng because your parents wanted you to gain further experience here. What kind of experience?

S: [T]here is this chance of if you graduate, you could get possibly more opportunities compared to back home in terms of employability and jobs here basically." (Phil, IBC1-EM)

Students who decided to pursue a Master are presently studying at a globally higher-ranking university such as the University of California, Los Angeles or Imperial College, London. Two of the participants obtained an internship in the UK and are in full-time employment with employers such as Rolls Royce and East Midlands Trains Company.

5.3.4 Non-academic on-campus experience

Non-academic on-campus experience refers to extra-curricular involvement at an IBC and the parent university. This is arguably the most common response participants offered for the question of how they thought their employability was being developed at university.

"[T]here are many skills for me to develop at university. Actually joining a student society is a good choice for me.

Actually in the W organization, I can develop leadership, teamwork and communication skills and so on which is helpful for my future career, my job hunting." (Zhangxiang, IBC2-B)

As Tomlinson (2005) notes, graduates employ the discourse of 'experience' often of extra-curricular activities to present their claim to 'graduate identity' (Holmes, 2001) to employers. Although participants generally would like to warrant this graduate identity by presenting their experience as evidence, not all participants found time to join such activities usually due to time constraints and competing priorities.

"Not having the time to join. Yeah. Or that I prioritise my work more than extra-curricular activities." (Phil, IBC1-EM)

Wenger (1998) argues that identity in practice emerges from an interplay of participation and reification. The interplay takes place in the context of these activities. For those who were more instrumentally driven, the activities were more aligned to their subject area. It is this constant becoming which was evident in the participants' trajectories.

"I'm trying to communicate more with native students to try and improve my English ability. And also I attended some societies about like Architecture Society, and I attended some [guest] lectures about Architecture and I met some architects there." (Shanfan, IBC2-E)

In an IBC where it is largely mono-cultural and mono-lingual outside academic settings among the majority home students, it is expected that there are student activities which seek to provide more practice and effort in contributing to a more bilingual if not an English-speaking environment. Despite such efforts, it is challenging to overcome a mind-set which believes that a language can only be learned when communicating with native speakers.

"In IBC2, you take part in an English club and there will be all Chinese people there so their English is no better than you so

you actually won't learn something from them. I think they just want to reach more people and give themselves the impression that I am trying to learn English but they didn't actually learn something from it." (Shanfan, IBC2-E)

During my employment at IBC2, I was approached by a 'high-achieving' student well-known for his active participation in serving the IBC student community. He proposed that my team of tutors collaborate with his student society to support first year students to orientate to their new campus, and to co-organise student-led activities to promote a fun, social environment of speaking English, so that from the beginning they would overcome the awkwardness of speaking English to each other in a non-academic setting. This was one of the highlights of my previous job: to have the freedom to work on student-led initiatives to develop learner autonomy. We were often oversubscribed. Many first year students, who had a committed senior student leader[67] encouraging them throughout the first term to meet informally for social activities with the aim of speaking only English, gave positive feedback. In my experience both as an English language learner and tutor, and coming from a multicultural and multilingual background, I firmly believe we can learn from non-native speakers. I have seen evidence of it in my own life throughout schooling in Malaysia, and among my former mainland Chinese students in a mono-cultural/lingual class. Hence, it is possible to create a culturally appropriate environment for promoting English as the main language of communication, but it has to be justifiable without being seen as usurping the national identity and language or a tool for cultural imperialism.

Participants generally acknowledged the value of extra-curricular activities in communicating their potential to perform in the

[67] Senior students who volunteered as leaders also reported that their oral English proficiency especially fluency rose. During my employment there, many IBC2 students had indicated that their oral English fluency deteriorated after Year One due to lack of in-class practice. Most of the teaching faculty do not require them to discuss in English during seminars unlike in Year One. Thus, senior students participated in our activity to maintain their own level of English after Year One.

language of skills by relating these experiences to the kinds of practices they might encounter in employment. While they were active agents in the construction of their employability and in making decisions about whether and which activities to take part in, not all gave much time to non-academic activities for various reasons.

> *"If I don't prioritise my work that much and I just join something else, maybe that will work but at the same time, I have this anxiety that I have to make sure that I get my (unclear) right and I can't really commit so much in other activities. I mean I'd like to commit but I don't know." (Phil, IBC1-EM)*

5.3.5 Practical work-related experience

Practical work-related experience refers to internship and volunteering activities, which involve a more formal structure and practice. Some participants already had some internship experience before they came to the parent university. Some had used the IBC as a channel but due to limited opportunities, they usually drew from personal contacts or sought internships on their own initiative.

Graduates are increasingly expected to be work-ready and employers are growing more demanding in their recruitment. Participants were aware of this and highly valued internship opportunities. Some proposed that the IBC increase these. They felt that there was a broader range of employability activities at the parent university. Participants tended to seek internship opportunities in IBC host countries usually on their own and sometimes with some support from the IBC.

> *"Applying for internship is actually quite a problem because most companies they just don't want to take interns. They just..because like interns they just stay for a while, then they leave. I had that problem. I applied to 9 companies and*

none came back to me except Panasonic. So yeah, I applied through Jobstreet so that was a bad idea. … I could apply through the Engineering School because there was one lady. She was coordinating the internship programme. So she was the one who recommended some of these companies to us but it's actually more like first come, first served basis. Not many places available and stuff like that so it's like where is the company. If the company is based in Penang, I can't go because it's too far. " (Phil, IBC1-E)

Few participants managed to obtain internships during their time in the UK. A small minority were successful in their internship application during their study period at the parent university such as Kefen who interned at an engineering firm in London after her first year of study at PU1. For them, it was a significant transformative experience. Wenger (1998) argues that the temporal dimension of identity is critical because identity is constantly renegotiated and it also places our engagement in practice within this temporal context. This can be seen in the change in Joe's perspective when he returned to university after his internship. The engagement in practice gave him certain experiences of participation and what his community of practice paid attention to. Thus, the internship experience had jolted his experience of participation and brought his identity into focus which in turn gathered his academic activities on a trajectory through which they gave meaning to the engagement in practice in terms of the identity he was developing during his time at university.

"Before I started university, I didn't really see this as an important part of my life ... I think university is quite important because it prepares you for the working world. Like before I started the university, I never saw it like that. It was just another stage you go through in life but my initial expectation was nothing too extraordinary and nothing too different from what you get out of school or college. But I suppose my expectation has changed. I think it's may be

changed when I did my year out in the industry when I actually started working and seeing how what I learned in university can actually be applied in industry and how important it is to actually know your stuff as an engineer. So coming back from that internship, my expectations at university have changed a lot. Like even during attending like during my lectures, I'd think like how can this be relevant to my job in the future and everything else. So I expect a little bit more from...a little bit more relevance in whatever I learn." (Joe, IBC1-EM)

This is in agreement with Crebert et al. (2004) who find that whereas graduates recognised the contribution HE had made to their employability development, they greatly valued the learning experience during placement.

Students who were not on a 2+2 programme, did not have the time to consider internships. Not all participants who had a longer time at the parent campus took the opportunity to gain practical work-related experience for various reasons.

"I don't want to take part in part-time jobs because a lot of works like final year project." (Yimi, IBC3-E)

5.3.6 Anticipated employability outcomes

Here participants' perceptions on what their IBC decision and experiences might mean for their employability, whether for employment or postgraduate study, are provided. A few participants also commented on the need for more opportunities such as internships and work placements to promote employability at IBCs. This reflects the need to exhibit more attributes if they were going to be successful in the job recruitment process (Yorke & Harvey, 2005). IBC2 participants particularly contrasted the career services at PU1, for their wide-ranging employability activities, to the IBC2 counterpart for not providing a similarly extensive range.

"Because IBC2, such opportunities is really low. I think there should be more opportunities for students to improve this employability." (Xinjie, IBC2-E)

Almost all participants benefitted from the activities organised by career services at the parent university.

"[A]nother thing we are offered a chance to check out the companies. I mean the Student Career Service here (PU2) is very good and we're also getting involved in some very high reputation projections like electronic engineering." (Yimi, IBC3-E)

There is a perception in China that TNHE programmes are typically offered by low-status domestic universities with their foreign partners. Their main market appears to be students from an affluent background who fail to obtain a place at tier-one universities. Although IBC2 and IBC3 are tier-one universities within their respective province, this is not common knowledge particularly outside their province. Therefore, there was understandably a risk IBC students took when they chose to study there because they might be perceived as studying at a lower-ranking university.

"[A]t that time IBC3 was not well-known in China, a lot of companies do not know this is a first class university in China. Even after I choose this school, some of friends of my parents just don't know this school because many of the universities connected to abroad schools in China are not as good so they think this school is not a good school." (Yinbo, IBC3-E)

Speight et al. (2012) suggest that an international university should not only gain an understanding of the host countries' contexts where its IBCs are located but also internationally to facilitate their graduates' employability. Participants' responses reflected how the cultural system influenced their life and career trajectory affirming Speight et al.

Although some mainland Chinese students expressed concern about the relatively lesser known IBC outside of the home province, it was not a real threat to their employability for two reasons. First, these students, such as Senhai, were on 2+2 programme, and they would graduate in the UK with a PU2 award. Second, they chose the IBC because they had planned to apply for a postgraduate programme abroad using this route a two-step transition at the IBC firstly, and then two subsequent years at the parent university before moving upward to a better ranking university.

> *"First one, the brand of IBC3 is not that famous. I mean the reputation, it's not that famous. Some people might not even know it. The only people, I think, the people in my province are comparatively more familiar with this university but just the people in other province, other cities are not familiar with it. Even though it's not that good, it doesn't worry me that much because I can go to PU2 and I can get the degree of PU2, the same one as home students. So yeah, even though the degree I get from IBC3 is not that famous, I still can use the degree of PU2 to prove myself." (Senhai, IBC3-E)*

> *"Just go to a better university to continue my postgraduate education." (Yinbo, IBC3-E)*

On the whole, participants were optimistic about their future employability but a few who were still unsure of their career trajectory such as Senhai who teetered between architecture, accounting or hospitality and tourism. Although they were mostly positive about the extent their decision to study at the IBC and subsequent experiences had contributed to their employability, they were fairly perceptive and critical about what the IBC lacked and what structural barriers they faced during their time at university and what lay ahead in their future. They were generally resourceful in finding ways to enhance their own experience when they were disappointed by the quality of their academic or non-academic experiences; limited career services support; or mismatched

expectations – revealing how, as active agents, they confronted these challenges.

Some mainland Chinese participants were concerned about the less well-known IBC, but believed that employers would be favourable to their British degree. The implication is institutional management may wish to consider ways to improve the IBC reputation in the Chinese labour market. Nevertheless, they perceived themselves to be in a better position than most graduates from regular Chinese universities because they could distinguished themselves from them by their English proficiency, international outlook and cultural intelligence or intercultural competence (Crossman & Clarke, 2009).

> *"I mean it's less with the school's reputation, it's more with experience. [I]f I could get an interview chance, I am sure that I'll do much better than others and that's also what my senior classmates told me. We have a lot of like career presentations. They invite a lot of alumni. … Alumni from, graduates from IBC2. They told us a lot stories about the interview, about what they did in the interviews and what others did in the interviews. And also in companies what they've achieved different from others." (Kefen, IBC2-E)*

Those who were considering returning to China were concerned about how their English-medium education was going to affect their job performance. Their main concern was whether they could communicate effectively in Mandarin particularly with respect to technical issues because they had only learned them in English.

> *"From developing my employability, it'd be the language gap. Because you see some total knowledges I've learned here in English. Sometimes when I discussed some issues with my Chinese classmates in China, he talked about the same thing but in Chinese, but I don't know. So I'm afraid when I come to the interview in China, they ask me questions but I can't answer. I can only speak some English terminologies." (Yimi, IBC3-E)*

As for Malaysian participants, there was no concern about IBC1's reputation because it was well-recognised by Malaysian employers and its alumni seemed to have a good reputation in the engineering sector according to the participants.

> *"[A]t first the reason is because IBC1 has education in engineering. I heard that they produce good engineers." (Adam, IBC1-EM)*

IBC1 students valued the opportunity to spend a part of their study at PU1 for the chance to at least gain some work or internship experience if not for obtaining secure employment in the UK.

> *"There is this chance of if you graduate, you could get possibly more opportunities compared to back home in terms of employability and jobs here basically. (Phil, IBC1-EM)*

However, IBC1's respected reputation does not necessarily ensure its graduates would have a better footing in the Malaysian engineering sector. Phil's response was his degree was not enough to secure him a competitive edge. Chinese is widely spoken in most engineering firms but he did not speak it.

> *"No, actually. It will not if I were to work in Malaysia. Basically I am a Malaysian Chinese who can't speak Chinese. Most of these engineering companies are Chinese-speaking companies so one it's the language barrier which I faced a lot during my internship, that's why I didn't like it. But for others who graduate from the UK university and go back and speak Chinese, then yeah, they have a good chance." (Phil, IBC1-EM)*

If IBC1 intends to grow its postgraduate research programmes, then the research implies that institutional management should consider ways to create job opportunities other than academic positions which are attractive to PhD graduates who are more interested in working in the industry. Malaysia's strength is not in research and

development, and its economy does not readily foster innovation leading to little demand for PhD graduates.

> *"Yeah, because I'd say Malaysia is not prepared for...the job scope isn't prepared for a PhD graduate. Normally a PhD graduate would be doing research or something new or even a new invention or they'd be researching on a new concept that could be used for a pretty big contribution to the society but Malaysia is not prepared for those kind of areas so I'd say even as a PhD graduate, you'll still be doing Master or undergraduate work. It's basically just a platform and a degree for us to be promoted easily." (Dave, IBC1-EP)*

IBC graduates could potentially accumulate influential social capital as well as sought after scholastic capital associated with the parent university's international reputation and national and global alumni network. This point is significant because Mallam-Hassan and Donaghy (2010) discovered that the alumni network is the key channel for offering career services and employment opportunities in China. This is also evident in the data on IBC2 students showing that the alumni contributed to career services but being a young university, participants also highlighted the need to build the alumni network.

> *"Because IBC2 is established in 200x, it's quite young. The alumni is not so strong." (Yunxi, IBC2-B)*

An interesting outcome specific to IBC students who complete their degree at the parent institution is that being in the UK placed them in a good position whether it is postgraduate study or employment opportunities. Yimi shared that this is well-known among IBC students who saw their time at the parent university as an opportunity to score higher grades and improve their chances of applying to a better-ranking university for their postgraduate degree.

> *"Yeah, some students come here because… they can make it higher mark in PU2 so they can apply for a better college. I know… students have applied and received offers from Cambridge and Oxford so I think if you study 2+2, you get more opportunities." (Yimi, IBC3-E)*

Yimi believed that IBC students, who spend a period of their study at the parent university, are in a better position than their counterparts who do not. They draw from the social capital available at the parent campus such as advice and references from their lecturers who are more familiar with UK universities and their requirements for postgraduate application, information exchange with other students in the UK, and postgraduate application information sessions organised by Chinese student societies.

> *"One thing is that the lecturers here and like our lecturer in Embedded Computer Systems, he's from Southampton and you can find the lecturers to talk these universities and your personal tutors, they know UK universities more than the IBC3 and the international I mean the agencies and sometimes their advices, sometimes when you apply for postgraduate. The teachers here are very helpful to provide your references later and give you some suggestions. … [B]ecause of the student groups, we all applied for postgraduate in advance so… we exchanged information about the postgraduate. … So I think it's caused some students here know more about the UK than China so we get more information. … And there's also some groups like Chinese societies here also provide some lectures. They give some lectures at our university to help Chinese students especially those from IBC3 to apply for, I mean like general help, how to write personal statements." (Yimi, IBC3-E)*

This section has discussed participants' anticipated employability outcomes in relation with socio-cultural and economic factors.

5.4 Addressing question 2: How do IBC students perceive their experience while at university as contributing to their employability?

Participants' perspectives on 'developing employability' were elicited before their perceptions of their time at university as relating to employability were gathered. I conclude my discussion of findings by presenting my theoretical narrative (see the figure below). It portrays the participants' perspectives in the language of my theoretical constructs (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). It also depicts what participants themselves considered as valuable 'student experience'. The underpinning approach was based on structure and agency within a socio-economic theoretical framework using theories such as human capital (rate of return to education), signalling/screening, identity, and communities of practice to explain how participants made sense of their experiences at university in relation to their employability. This approach also draws from Holmes' (2001) concept of employability. Holmes argues that employability should be understood as graduate job-seekers presenting a discourse of their various activities at university to warrant a graduate identity to prospective employers. Each activity/experience is interpreted by employers in relation to his/her identity and a relevant practice in the workplace to evaluate if he/she has a potential to perform.

As stated previously, IBC participants who spent a part of their study at the parent university appeared relatively instrumental in their motivations. This generation of mainland Chinese jobseekers, who did not enjoy their parents' access to job assignment and security, face a real prospect of unemployment with little social protection (Chan, 2015). Hence, their IBC choice was largely a positional investment, but it could be argued that this acquisitive attitude was attributable to their transitional phase at university

before entering the labour market. Ultimately, university was only a part of their lifelong journey to become *ren* (fully human).

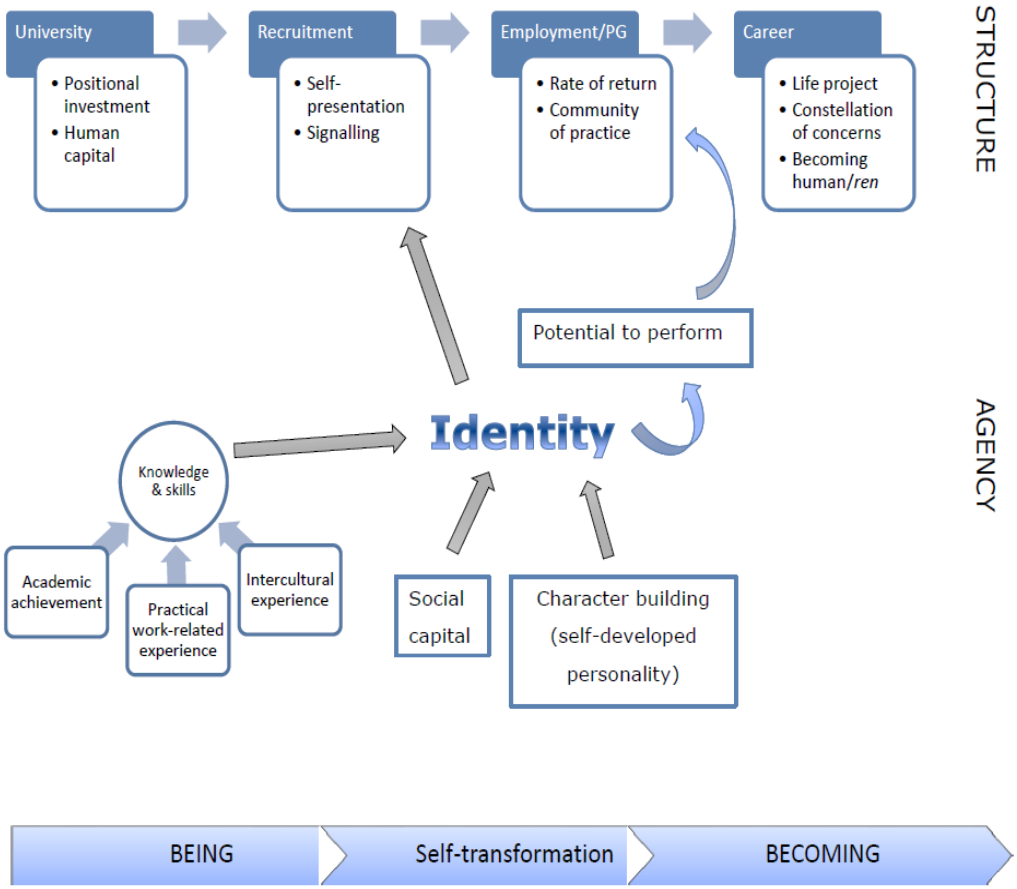

Figure 5-1: A theoretical narrative of IBC student choice-experience-employability (by author)

In examining the university phase alone, both mainland Chinese and Malaysian participants regarded it as a period where they were accumulating evidence to present themselves as having a potential to perform and be a member of a community of practice they would like to join (e.g., an accounting firm, a prestigious university in the USA). Indicators of knowledge and skills were academic achievement, intercultural experience and practical work-related experience gained through student activities on campus or internship off-campus. These together with social capital and

character development (self-developed personality) represented their graduate identity. Generally, participants who had internship experience had a fresh appreciation for the relevance of their subject knowledge to their future contribution in the labour market but they were sceptical of the extent in which university could develop employability particularly with the development of soft skills (e.g., team working). There was a broad agreement among participants that university provides opportunities for them to develop, but it was largely their responsibility to make an effort to step out of their comfort zone. Most participants who found it hard to integrate into the parent university culture had alternative means to build a social support structure which either meant sticking with the familiar (contextual continuity), or assimilating into a less familiar context (contextual discontinuity) through persistence and perseverance to learn to become a member of his/her chosen community.

In the next stage of job recruitment/postgraduate study application, they sought to present themselves in a way which 'fit' with the employer/university. Ultimately, participants had a 'constellation of concerns' which were being shaped along their life trajectory by structural properties they encountered and their own agential powers.

Overall, participants had setbacks and disappointments as a result of choosing an IBC particularly when their experiences there and the parent university did not match their expectations. Nevertheless, they made their way through the IBC and the parent university by making the best out of their teaching and learning opportunities, the intercultural experiences, extra-curricular activities and internship or part-time employment opportunities. They found ways of overcoming setbacks. All of them felt that they had grown personally, and almost all believed their future employability had indeed improved. While acknowledging some of the challenges awaiting them in particular labour markets, most of them expressed

a great appreciation for the opportunities the IBC had given them to boost their chance of achieving their life project.

5.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, before dealing with the second primary question, participants' understandings of 'developing employability' were provided. Participants' responses were rather mixed on the role university plays although the specific question itself did not refer to the university but was phrased: 'What do you understand by the term 'developing your own employability'?' Their collective responses reflected the complexity surrounding the definition of employability development in the literature. The literature has a tendency to pigeon-hole the concept of employability due to their underpinning worldview. The overall understanding of employability development they presented was not reduced to any single approach such as the skills agenda, but rather they displayed reflexive engagement with activities during their time at university that revealed their beliefs about the university's function and purpose which shaped the their identity formation at university including the choices they made and experiences they had involving (non-) participation in different activities within and without the university. This demonstrates how they had negotiated meaning of the purpose of their time at university. They mainly provided indicators to show what they understood by 'developing employability'. These are knowledge and skills acquisition, practical work-related experience, academic achievement and character building which they believed are needed to evidence a potential to perform to employers. Developing employability also includes knowing and learning how to present themselves during the job recruitment process by articulating this employability 'package' as a warrant for their graduate identity. They also included social capital

as an element within employability development because it can provide learning opportunities and reduce job information asymmetry.

In dealing with the second research question, a justification for taking the approach of mapping 'student experience' based on what participants considered significant for developing employability was given. Then a summary of the scope of the student experiences which emerged followed, and the subsequent sections focussed on aspects or themes derived from a repetitive pattern, i.e., teaching and learning, international experience, extra-curricular activities, and practical work-related experience. Finally, the section ended with participant perceptions on the anticipated labour market outcomes due to their IBC decision and experiences. Participants mainly elaborated their on- and off-campus academic and non-academic experiences but focussed on international experiences. They then related these experiences in how they (indirectly) impacted their employability and based on these, they shared their anticipated employability outcomes in the labour market or postgraduate study.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This chapter summarises the key findings and highlights the research's contribution to the field of transnational higher education (TNHE). Practical implications for stakeholders, particularly those in institutional management, TNHE programme design and delivery, and teaching faculty, will be provided. Then I will present limitations of this research and some thoughts on possible future research. Lastly, I will share reflections on what I have learned from this research process and journey.

This thesis began with showing the importance of researching TNHE especially IBCs. The home/source countries, such as the United Kingdom (UK), benefit economically from TNHE. In 2012/13 the estimated total TNHE revenue for the UK was almost £496 million (The Careers Research & Advisory Centre, 2014). The highest increase in non-EU international undergraduate students is concentrated in countries which have well-established UK TNHE (HEFCE, 2014; HEFCE, 2015). These countries also demonstrate a strong progression rate from TNHE courses into undergraduate courses delivered in England (HEFCE, 2014; HEFCE, 2015). Thus, this research has implications for institutional management in home/source countries as well as in IBC host countries.

Despite being in the top three TNHE host countries, there was little research on China and Malaysia beyond quantitative studies and those which focussed on processes of TNHE or customer-orientated research such as student satisfaction (Ahmad, 2015; Ahmad & Buchanan, 2015; Mok & Xu, 2008). There were some exceptions reporting research conducted at Australian IBCs in Malaysia (Pyvis & Chapman, 2007). Particularly with the recent developments such as the increase in the number of British IBCs there, this research is timely and relevant to a readership comprising those in institutional management, TNHE programme design and delivery, and teaching faculty. At least two of the recently established UK IBCs offer 2+2 programmes in Malaysia, including subjects which interested this

research's participants but were not previously available to them in private higher education (HE). The literature survey concluded that there was little on TNHE outcomes, such as employability of IBC graduates. Therefore, there was a need to carry out research of a different kind to the existing literature to bring students' perspectives to the fore. Despite being the main stakeholders, these under-represented students' voices are not often heard above a statistically generalised tone. The level of complexity discovered by using a combined socio-economic theoretical framework, applied in the qualitative tradition, illuminates and enriches current knowledge in TNHE.

After locating the research as a snapshot of IBC student choice-experience-employability narratives, a pilot study was conducted to refine the interview schedule. Then data gathering of interviews with 31 students from three IBCs at their parent universities began. Throughout the thesis, whenever I have discussed participants in groups, they tended to be categorised according to either nationality or their IBC. I had anticipated that by selecting two different disciplines, subject area was going to be a major area of contrast. There were some differences based on their course, but they were not as significant as disparities based on specific national socio-cultural and institutional factors.

6.1 Summary of contextual and theoretical boundaries

Chapter 2 set out the theoretical underpinnings and conceptual parameters, and surveyed TNHE students' choices, experiences and employability. Research on IBC students was principally quantitative focussing mainly on the United Arab Emirates and Hong Kong. There is also more recent work on TNHE in China and Malaysia. Most of the TNHE literature focussed on processes rather

than outcomes. It is an under-researched field particularly with respect to undertaking qualitative studies on outcomes such as students' experiences and employability.

The most common approach in examining student motivations for HE choices is the push-pull theory. Previously research using the theory had not taken into account cultural factors until recently where a study on mainland Chinese students took into account parental characteristics. The push-pull theory was also applied at two levels to account for different sets of motivations for students who study at a parent campus abroad and those who choose its branch campus. This research adapted the theory to include push factors for domestic HE, overseas HE and regional IBCs, and pull factors 1) institutional characteristics 2) parental characteristics; and 3) identity.

With regards to student experience, existing research is preoccupied with investigating student satisfaction and service quality. Students were assumed to be rational consumers motivated by value for their money. Such assumptions are unhelpful to elucidate what motivate these under-represented IBC students. Moreover, such customer-orientated studies focus on student experience related to university facilities, curricula, etc. which are restricted to aspects within the university and usually measurable quantitatively. However, 'student experience' which is linked to employability seems wider than these aspects, suggesting that there is another dimension including aspects which might not be quantitatively measurable/discoverable.

An overview of graduate employability was provided more generally and then centred on China and Malaysia. There is very little research specific to TNHE. Employability is a complex notion and many have attempted to define it in different disciplines. The graduate identity approach fits with the theoretical underpinnings: a socio-economic framework encompassing human capital theory (rate of return to education), signalling/screening and identity economics within the analytic dualism of structure and agency.

Chapter 2 concluded by locating the research contributions in informing the student motivations for choosing an IBC, and IBC students' perceptions of their employability as a result of their decision and subsequent experiences there and the parent university.

6.2 Key findings and contributions

6.2.1 Key findings

1. Why do students choose to study at an international branch campus?

The first key finding is that IBC students who spend part of their study at the parent campus have more similar sets of motivations for their choices of destination to those who study at a UK parent university than those who study for their entire degree at an IBC.

The second key finding is students were pushed by factors relating to domestic HE, overseas HE, and other IBCs (see Figure 4-4).

The third key finding for question one is the pull factors are institutional factors, parental characteristics and IBC students' identity and agency. The institutional factors were those of 1) the IBC; 2) its parent campus; and 3) the local partner (see Figure 4-5).

The fourth key finding is results also show that IBC students who spent part of their study abroad were driven by acquisitive and self-transformative motivations. This implies there might be differences in motivations between local mobile and immobile IBC students. Study abroad featured strongly for both PhD participants, which implies the need to evaluate recruitment and development of postgraduate research programmes across campuses.

2. How do they perceive the experience as contributing to their employability?

The first key finding is although generally students were expecting a good rate of returns to their educational investment, the investment was not always for economic returns only, and their motivations and decisions could not be consistently deemed as 'rational' in the *homo economicus* sense. They saw a connection between their decision and subsequent experiences, and employability development. They felt these experiences should be packaged to evidence their potential to perform and to warrant their graduate identity. Social capital and character building were also part of their understanding of developing employability. This also shows that an uncritical treatment of students as rational consumers is unhelpful. Although in some sense the findings did indicate that they were so, they also proved to be much more than that.

The second key finding for question 2 is specific to IBC management and teaching faculty operating in China or elsewhere with a mainland Chinese student cohort. It is important to take into account paradoxical motivations of mainland Chinese students who work hard at accumulating credentials knowing that there is credentials inflation and yet have a holistic view of university education. These have implications for how they view employability and how they develop it in their lifelong struggle to be *ren* or flourish as a human being. Hence, understanding their ways of being and becoming is important for thinking about the IBC ethos, campus culture and identity; teaching and learning issues such as pedagogic and curricular implementations; and fostering an intercultural experience at the IBC. The finding supports the idea that employability is a culturally based concept.

The third key finding is the significance of the year one or foundation programmes at the IBC in contributing to acculturation and intercultural development. This implies that an IBC can still be a means to an international identity formation to some extent even

if students do not spend any time in their study at the parent university. The year one/foundation programmes act as the first base for such development, but there also needs to be a careful and culturally appropriate approach to promote a campus-wide environment conducive to such identity formation and encourage intercultural interaction to occur more naturally and spontaneously. This is especially significant for IBCs in China because of the predominantly mono-cultural and mono-lingual socialisation occurring in non-academic settings on-campus. It is equally important to spur intercultural interaction and exchange at IBCs in Malaysia because IBC1's Malaysians and international students could benefit from better engagement with each other. Thus, 'quality as transformation', which 'implies a change in all students in all aspects as a result of the higher education they receive' (Tam, 2001, p.51 in Chapman & Pyvis, 2006, p.238), is possible with political will from institutional management and concerted effort from staff to facilitate a campus identity and culture for the flourishing of such identity transformation. However, Malaysia is a complicated case because even among Malaysians, different ethnicities do not intermingle very well so it would be a challenge on multiple levels to cross local socio-cultural barriers and to encourage them to reach out to their international counterparts as well.

The fourth key finding is virtually all participants viewed personal development and employability as interrelated, and the latter was often perceived as being a subset of the former. They also expressed that personal development was more important during their time at university for it (in)directly enhanced employability. This reveals that although participants were instrumental in their motivations for HE, they had a life-wide or life-long view of their development. They appeared instrumental in the data because they were at this university phase preoccupied with the transition to the workplace. Comparatively, mainland Chinese participants signalled a more holistic attitude towards their time at university than Malaysians. However, due to the intense labour market situation in

China, they also demonstrated higher levels of augmenting their chances of employment through differentiating strategies in order to distinguish themselves from other jobseekers.

6.2.2 Theoretical and practical contributions

The theoretical contributions are 1) the adaptation of the push-pull theory for the context of IBCs; and 2) the innovative combination of economic and social theories to explain structural properties and agential powers behind student choices, experiences and perceptions of employability.

The first main practical implication is to consider the IBC-parent university brand and campus characteristics in terms of how brand identity and student identity might converge. Thus, it is important to identify and evaluate campus culture, institutional image of both parent university, and the IBC. This requires careful research and management, and an astute grasp of relevant socio-cultural issues in order to avoid mismatched expectations and disappointments. IBCs charge much higher fees than most TNHE forms, so this aspect is critical for their long-term survival in this competitive global market.

The second practical implication is the reputation of all three – parent university, IBC and Chinese partner institution - would be considered by mainland Chinese prospective parents and students when making a decision on which IBC to choose. Findings also show that IBCs are mainly chosen as a stepping stone to pursue a postgraduate degree. Most aimed to do this in the United States.

The third practical implication is it is crucial to consider macro structural factors and be well-informed on host country and source country and international developments, but it is equally important to understand why and how they impact on different segments of the IBC market. For instance, the number of Malaysians studying

abroad and the growth of private HE are both parallel responses to Malaysia's continuing affirmative action policy (Lee, 2012), but hypothetically speaking, if the ruling government loses the next general election, there might be significant changes.

The fourth practical implication is the need to move beyond the business of teaching into building a research active IBC particularly in Malaysia. IBCs are expected to contribute to the host country's economy (McNamara & Knight, 2014). They could do this by encouraging innovation in research and development in collaboration with government organisations and the industry. Since there may not be much demand for PhD graduates outside of HE, IBCs could play a pivotal role in creating more job opportunities for their graduates.

The fifth practical implication comes from a general consensus among participant responses about the need to develop career services and alumni network in IBCs. With regards to Malaysian participants, the findings showed that IBC1 Engineering graduates typically had a positive attitude towards their employment chances in the labour market due to their perceptions of a UK degree being highly marketable. IBC2 mainland Chinese Business students shared a similar positive attitude. However, little is known about the Chinese labour market perceptions towards TNHE graduates in the engineering sector although there is existing research about overseas graduate returnees. Business programmes were offered from the inception of IBC2, whereas Engineering programmes were introduced a few years later and as such, there has been more information on Business alumni success in the labour market. The positive attitudes which IBC1 Engineering and IBC2 Business students had were related to the perceived success of alumni in their respective disciplines. Success meant either employment with established multinational companies in China or the UK, or postgraduate admission to higher-ranking UK/USA universities. Apart from enhancing IBC graduate internship experience and job-seeking prospects, prospective students consider the rate of

employment of IBC graduates, so improving the career services and the alumni network may be an asset in promoting IBCs to them.

Mohd Ismail Abd Aziz and Doria Abdullah (2011) highlight the lack of student perspectives in TNHE development and practices, and call for the IBC student voice to be heard in policy analysis and evaluation as they would provide insights into understanding issues affecting participation and successful implementation of internationalisation efforts of an institution. Altbach (2015) questions the long-term sustainability of IBCs with reference to moving the faculty and administration staff from the home university to IBCs, the problem of replicating the parent university. While I do not agree with all his points, I do think the long-term sustainability of IBCs is questionable in light of both macro cultural systemic issues and micro socio-cultural issues which the participants had enlightened and recent high-profile IBC closures. Therefore, I echo the call above for policy analysis and evaluation on IBCs to seriously consider the perspectives of their principal stakeholders particularly current students and alumni in ensuring IBCs are not only continuing to sustain themselves financially but be a place of learning and development for their own campus community, and the local community, and be an active stakeholder in contributing to the host country's socio-economic development.

6.3 Limitations

This research is limited in its scope in several ways. First, it dealt with only two broad disciplines of Business and Engineering courses. These are often viewed as degrees which are quite employable in China and Malaysia. However, when I was part of the Student Career Development Committee at IBC2, one of the acute problems one group of graduates faced was the difficulty of penetrating the media industry without any *guanxi*. This industry was purportedly

so tightly connected job vacancies were usually snapped up through the *guanxi* network and were hardly advertised externally. Quoting Li Kongzhen in the Global Times newspaper, there is pressure on institutions in China to encourage their undergraduates to pursue postgraduate studies because this is accepted as part of the employment rate of their graduates (Sharma, 2012). This is why nearly 60% of 2008/2009 graduates with BA International Communications, noted in Speight et al. (2012), took up postgraduate study.

Second, this research did not consider IBC students who are not internationally mobile and complete their full course at an IBC. The possible issues which arise might overlap with this research but there will probably be significant differences in their motivations, expectations and experiences.

Third, there were only two PhD students who took part in the research. The fourth practical implication above requires further research to assess the situation facing Malaysian PhD graduates from an IBC in the job market and to look into possible ways the IBC could develop its research portfolio and enhance the host country's national capacity. A possible explanation for the lack of demand for PhD graduates in the industry is because of the lack of significant technological upgrading and structural change hindering the growth of manufacturing (Rasiah et al., 2015).

Fourth, this research did not include employers' perceptions on the employability of IBC students. This would be a very complex undertaking because as shown, IBC students' life and career trajectories were wide-ranging in terms of sector (which did not necessarily match their discipline), types of employers (multinationals, etc.) and location of employment (home country or abroad).

Fifth, both IBC1 and IBC2 participants mentioned teaching and learning issues, viz. effects of the differences in the quality of teaching staff in IBC1 and PU1 on learning and/or examination

results. The variety of possible effects and their causes as perceived by them was too wide to be dealt with in the research.

Steps were taken (detailed in Chapter 3) to ensure the quality of the research was safeguarded. The main source was interview data, and I took at face value that participants were honest and their accounts were true representation of their experiences. I have employed a critical realist approach to explain what knowledge and reality encompass in relation to the interview data and other sources. Within this worldview, the interview data was analysed and interpreted along with existing literature, policy documents and my previous experience. This does not make my interpretations infallible, but it strengthens the credibility and quality of the work since participants themselves had the opportunity to review and challenge my interpretation of their data. Wherever possible, the opportunity was communicated but no one took it except for one who asked for her interview transcript but gave no feedback, and another who had a copy of my thesis draft but had not given feedback.

Although the research could have used multiple methods or sources, the justification for my decision on the choice of method and source was derived from the literature survey in Chapter 2 and reiterated in Chapter 3.

The above shows much research is still needed in TNHE especially to inform IBCs and their host and home/source countries towards careful planning and strategic measures for long-term sustainability.

6.4 Future research

IBC stakeholders would benefit from future research which focuses on IBCs' long-term sustainability. First, further research could be conducted to extend the scope of disciplines beyond Engineering

and Business especially those regarded as less employable. Second, a useful study would be to examine national and regional issues affecting China and Malaysia, and the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) region which may have significant impact on IBCs. For example, the extent of impact of recent policy changes on government funding may affect student access to private HE in Malaysia (Tan, 2015). Another example is the impact of China's control on university activities and Internet censorship on IBCs should be investigated to inform future planning and development of TNHE programmes on how a free exchange of ideas can take place and how to facilitate it in a culturally acceptable way. Third, given how intercultural experience is a strong pull factor and yet it is not necessarily a positive experience for IBC students, one should examine how it can be cultivated in IBCs particularly among immobile 4+0 students. Fourth, future research to investigate the impact of new IBCs entering into the market in regional hubs – viz. does the niche model of IBCs work to protect interests of each IBC targeting a different corner of the market? Fifth, there is an assumption on how branding of UK parent campus together with its IBCs projects a strong global identity, and it follows that research should be conducted to compare the different campus culture and identity, branding and image – how these impact prospective students and current students in their motivations and their identity formation. Sixth, Morgan and Wu (2011) identify social justice as one area lacking research in China's HE. Given how disproportionate TNHE distribution is in China, an area of social justice is to look into how this is widening the gap between affluent Eastern coastal cities and the less developed Western provinces, and what collaborative solutions could be proposed to ensure a more equal access to TNHE. For instance, research could be initiated to establish if there is collaborative interest and political will to found a TNHE programme or IBC-local university partnerships to target underprivileged students with the aim of lifting them out of poverty and empowering them to contribute to their communities in social justice issues such as gendercide and environmental degradation.

Seventh, there is a need to investigate employers' perceptions on different segments of TNHE gradates (e.g., mobile and immobile; different sectors of the labour market, etc.). For instance, a UK parent university could deploy research encompassing all its IBCs for a comparative analysis of employers' perceptions across IBC host countries and also the UK of their graduates. Finally, given that IBCs have to rise in the global ranking of universities to remain competitive in the global HE market, it would make sense to conduct case study research into the evolution of IBCs from teaching only to research active institutions as one strategy to build long-term reputation and sustainability. Related to this, two research areas are investigating PhD students' experience at IBCs to inform policy analysis and evaluation to better tailor support for them, and exploring opportunities for collaboration with the host government and employers to build capacity in different sectors and create PhD-graduate job opportunities, and/or conducting evaluative case study research on such existing collaborations.

6.5 Reflections

Overall, the PhD process has been personally and intellectually challenging, meaningful and fulfilling. It has been humbling and empowering. The areas in which I think I will continue to learn and grow as a result of my PhD are mainly to do with researcher identity, research tools, and time and research project management strategies.

The researcher identity has the potential advantage of attracting, or risk of discouraging, participation depending on who the participants are in terms of their background. In this case, I had a nagging feeling that the two groups of participants responded to me differently because of my identity – my age, previous experience and also nationality were probably factors which played a part.

I realised that learning to use a new software programme was very time consuming and found 'manual' data analysis more organic and effective for this relatively small amount of data. I also learned from trial and error with regards to time and project management strategies. I realised what I had wasted time on, and what I should have been more meticulous about.

I have learned how to conduct research from start to finish. It has given me confidence to undertake further research and contribute to my own community of practice. The PhD study has also sparked a deep appreciation for interdisciplinary perspectives and the discipline of social sciences. A promising beginning, I think, for a lifelong passion for academic inquiry.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

Project: Student Perceptions of the Employability of Graduates From International Branch Campuses

Researcher: Christine Lee

Contact Email: ttxcsl@nottingham.ac.uk

Tel: +44(0)740 2968684

Office Address: University of Nottingham, School of Education
C15 Dearing Building, Jubilee Campus
Wollaton Road
Nottingham, NG8 1BB

Explanation of the study

I am investigating international branch campus (IBC) student perceptions of their experience and employability with the intention of identifying the following:

- Do these students believe that their employability is enhanced through studying at an IBC? If so, how?

I wish to invite you to an individual interview (approximately 40-60 minutes). There is no preparation required.

Confidentiality and data security: All information collected will be confidential and will only be used for research purposes. This means that your identity will remain anonymous, in other words, no one beside the researcher will know your name. Whenever data from this study are published, your name will not be used. The data will be stored securely on the researcher's hard drive, and no one else will have access to it.

Your participation: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences. One main benefit of participating in this study is the opportunity to reflect on your experience of studying at this university with respect to how it has developed you in ways which you might recognize as taking you closer to who you are becoming/have become and what you would like to achieve presently and in the future. You will also be contributing to the research in international higher education and public knowledge about student experience at IBCs.

Further information: You may contact the researcher or supervisor if you require further information about the research, and you may also contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if you wish to make a complaint relating to your involvement in the research. You will be given your own copy of participant consent form which contains all these contact details.

Researcher's commitment: I am committed to provide all participants an opportunity to give feedback on my transcription and interpretation of data and inform them of any subsequent changes and publication of this research. If you wish to be contacted for any of this, please leave your e-mail address here:

Appendix B: Consent Form

Project title: Student Perceptions of the Employability of Graduates from International Branch Campuses

Researcher's name: Christine Lee

Supervisor's name: Dr. Sarah Speight

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audiotaped during the interview.
- I understand that data will be stored on researcher's hard drive and no other person will have access to it.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed ..... (Research participant)

Print name ..... **Date** .....

Contact details

Researcher: ttxcsl@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Sarah.Speight@nottingham.ac.uk

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator: educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix C: Interview Schedule (Phase 1: IBC1, IBC2)

QUESTIONS FOR PHASE 1

Do IBC students believe that their employability is enhanced through studying at an international branch campus? If so, how?

1. Why did you choose to study at university?

- To get a good job?
- Grads are better paid than non-grads?
- Any other reasons?

2. Why you have chosen a) IBC1/IBC2 and b) your course?

- The reputation of the university?

3. What do you think this term 'developing your employability' means?

4. How do you think you can develop your own employability?

5. What are your career plans after graduation?

6. Do you think that by studying at IBC1/IBC2 it will place you in a good position in the future? Please explain why you think so.

7. If there was no opportunity to study abroad, would it make any difference to your decision on the course or the university? Please explain the reason for your answer.

8. How important is the study abroad experience to your future employment or postgraduate study opportunities? Please explain your answer.

9. Who do you think your future employers are likely to be? What do you think they are likely to expect of you/expect you to be able to do?

10. How do you think your time at University will prepare you to be such an employee?

11. Can you sum up what you think you will be able to offer to employers by the time you graduate?

12. What challenges do you think you face as a IBC1/IBC2 student with regards to your employability?

13. How do you overcome these challenges?

14. What kind of challenges do you foresee yourself going through here in the UK?

15. Is there anything else you would like to add?

For MEng/PhD students: Q1-8 were same as above

9. Before coming to PU1, did you have any plans or expectations?

If YES, what were they?

Had they been fulfilled?

If YES, how?

If NO, what prevented them from being fulfilled? OR If NO, why is this so?

10. Do you think the experience of being at PU1 has changed you?

If YES, in what ways?

- Ways of thinking
- Personal development
- Future career
- Interests
- Social capital

11. Who do you think your future employers are likely to be? What do you think they are likely to expect of you/expect you to be able to do?

12. How do you think your time at University will prepare you to be such an employee?

13. What valuable experience do you think you'll be taking with you when you return to your country?

14. What challenges do you think you face as a IBC1/IBC2 student with regards to your employability?

15. How do you overcome these challenges?

16. What kind of challenges do you foresee yourself going through here in the UK?

Appendix D: Interview Schedule (Phase 1, IBC3)

QUESTIONS FOR FINAL YEAR PU2/IBC3 STUDENT

Do IBC3 students believe that their employability is enhanced through studying there, i.e. an international branch campus? If so, how?

1. Why did you choose to study at university?

2. Why you have chosen a) IBC3 and b) your course?

- The reputation of the university?

3. What do you think this term 'developing your employability' means?

4. How do you think your own employability is being developed?

5. What are your (career) plans after graduation?

6. Do you think that by studying at IBC3 it will place you in a good position in the future? Please explain why you think so.

7. If there was no opportunity to study abroad, would it have made any difference to your decision on choosing to study at IBC3? Please explain the reason for your answer.

- Course?

8. How important is the study abroad experience to your future employment or postgraduate study opportunities? Please explain your answer.

9. Before coming to Liverpool University, did you have any plans or expectations?

10. Do you think the experience of being at the University of Liverpool has changed you?

11. Who do you think your future employers are likely to be? What do you think they are likely to expect of you/expect you to be able to do?

12. How do you think your time at University will prepare you to be such an employee?

13. What valuable experience do you think you'll be taking with you when you return to your country? Why is it valuable? Do you think it's valuable from employers' perspective?

14. What challenges do you think you face as an IBC3 student with regards to your employability? Have you been able to overcome them? Please share the ways in which you have tried to manage them.

15. What kind of challenges do you experience here in the UK with regards to employability? Have you been able to overcome them? Please share the ways in which you have tried to manage them.

16. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix E: Interview Schedule: Phase 2 sample

QUESTIONS FOR PHASE 2 (23 January 2013, S1, IBC2-B)

Contact e-mail in China:

_____

If e-mail is not the best way of contact, please provide an alternative: _____

Do IBC2 students believe that their employability is enhanced through studying there? If so, how?

1. How would you describe your student experience in the UK?
   How would this experience enhance your employability?

2. Do you think the experience of being at PU1 has changed you?
   If YES, in what ways?

3. What do you think you'll be taking back to your country from your time in the UK which you value a lot?
   Would it/they be something that is useful in your future?

4. Can you think of something you have learned in the UK that you wouldn't have done otherwise? This can be academic but it can be non-academic too.
   Does it/do they have any impact on your future? If so, how?
   Do you think employers would value this?

5. Has anything else happened/you experienced which were out of your expectation while being here?
   Have you discovered anything about yourself which you hadn't expected?
   Would this be beneficial towards your future? If so, how?

6. What are some things you would like to do/achieve when you return to IBC2?

Are there things you would do differently in your country as a result of your UK experience?

Would doing them enhance your personal development or employability?

7. In your opinion, is there a difference between 'developing employability' and 'personal development'? Which is more important to you while at university?

8. In the first interview, you said the decision to study at IBC2 was mainly yours. How did your parents react when you expressed your decision?

9. How do you think your own employability is being developed?

10. Do you think studying at IBC2 has placed you in a good position for your future?

11. In the first interview, you had some expectations for your stay in the UK. Have your expectations been fulfilled?

12. Has there been an improvement in having cultural exchange with your international roommates? What other friendships or relationships have developed while at PU1? Has coming to UoN affected your friendships with other UNNC students?

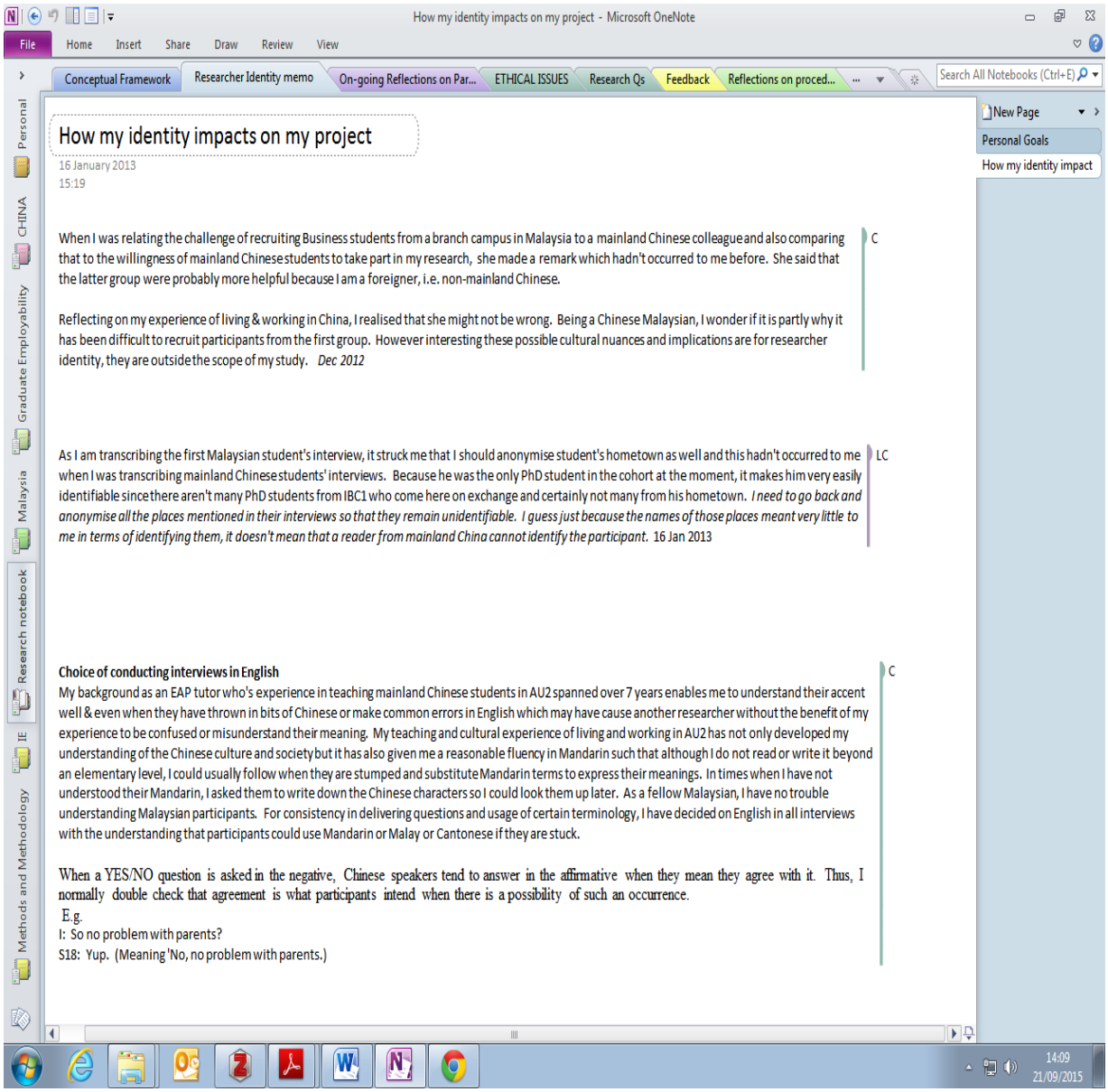
13. You mentioned 'socialising' or 'guanxi' as important so how do you view these friendships/relationships from this aspect (i.e. the nature of the friendships or relationships)?

14. You said that 'in England, you see many Business students, they must have a certificate. They just try to enrich their lives.' Can you explain this a bit more? Who are these students (Jingshan students in England or UK students)? By 'a certificate', did you mean CMA? What did you mean by 'enrich their lives'?

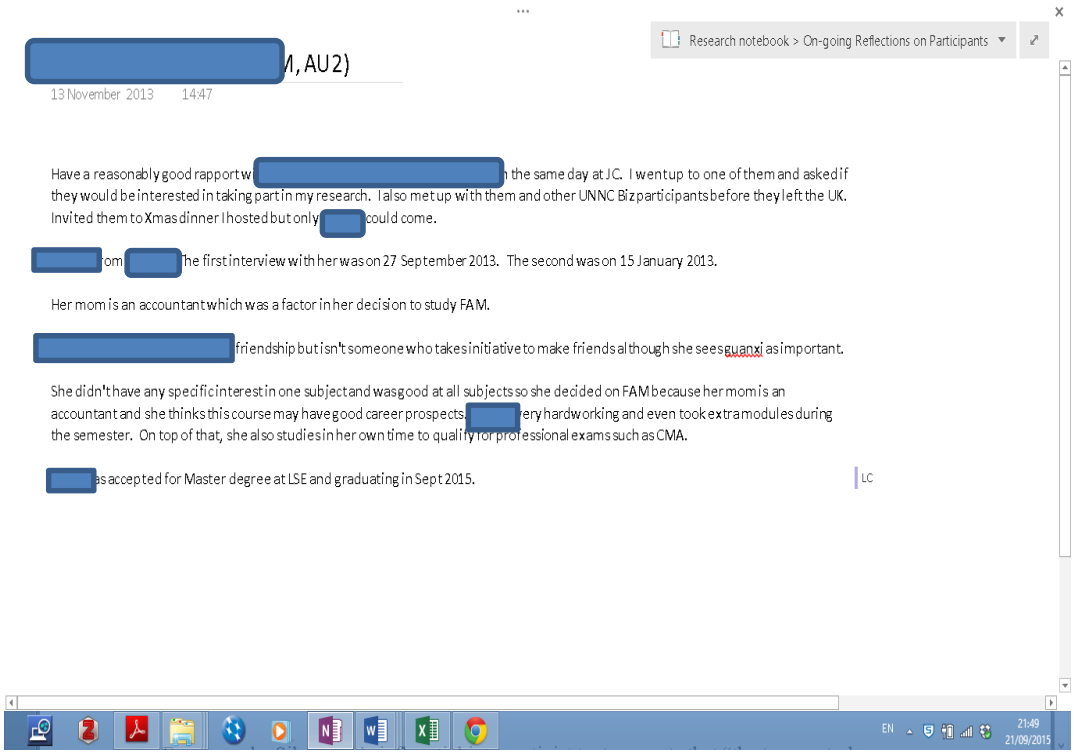
15. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Appendix F: Audit Trail

Item 1: Research notebook – Reflections on researcher identity

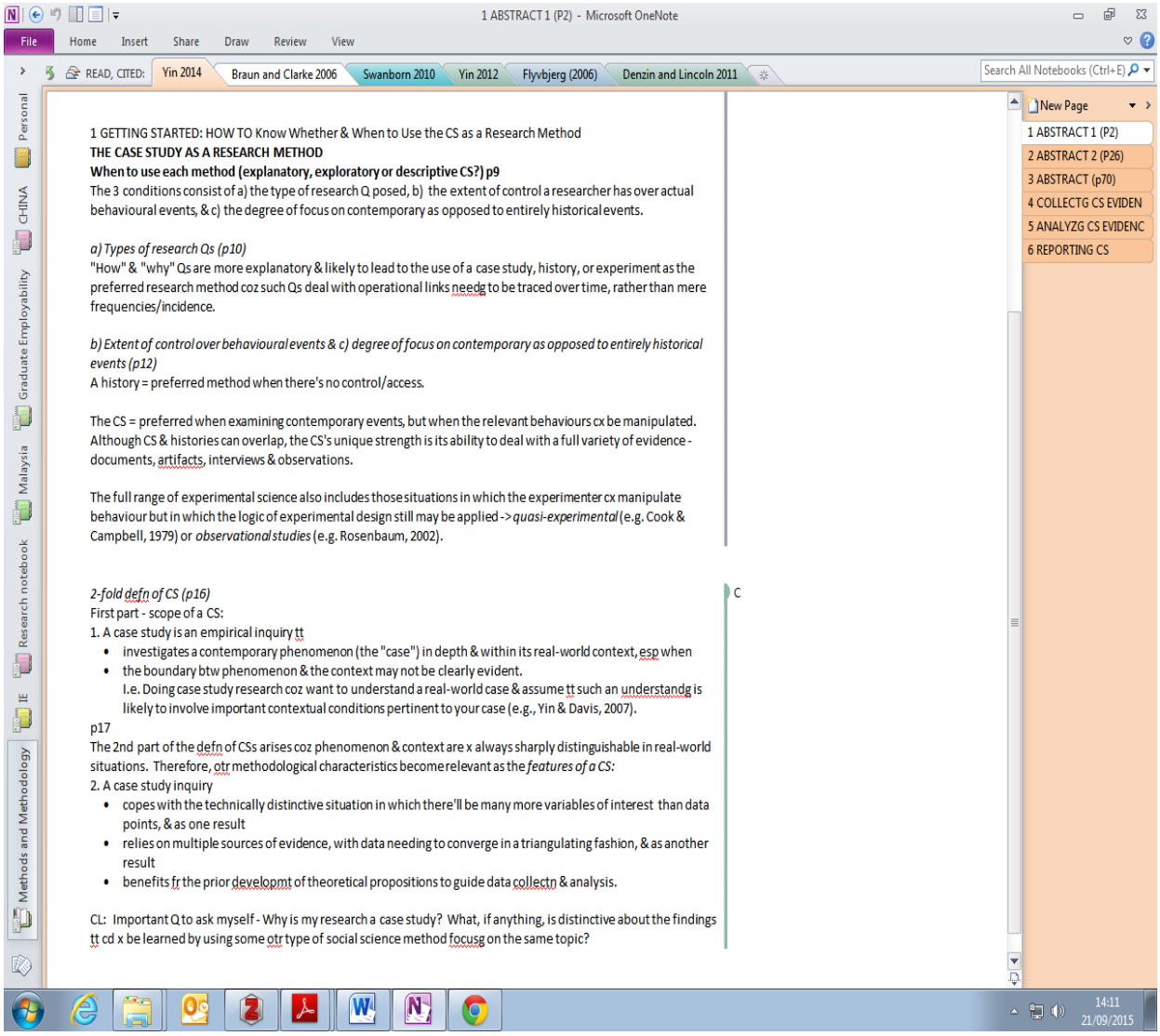


Item 2: Research notebook – Reflections on participants



NB: To keep the identity of the participant anonymous, identifiable items have been blocked out.

Item 3: A sample literature notebook



Item 4: A sample contact summary

Contact ID:	S14	**Contact type:**	F2F
Contact date:	20 Nov 2012-	**Course:**	Chemical Engineering
Level:	Bachelor	**Length of course:**	4 years (Foundation + 3)
Year of study:	3	**Date coded:**	
Contact via:	Letty Chan	**Length of UK stay:**	24 months
Audio 1:	20 November 2012	**Audio 2:**	10 April 2013
Audio 3:		**Last updated:**	4 May 2013

1. What were the main issues or themes that struck me in this contact?

S14 is from S which is rather far from Jingshan. It is unusual for someone in the north of China to study at AU1 which reputation was not that established then especially outside Jingshan. Furthermore, he chose to study Chemical Engineering which was offered for the first time at AU2.

2. Summarize the information you got (or failed to get) on each of the target questions I had for this contact.

Themes/aspects	**Interview questions for individual students & responses**	**Theories/concepts**
Uni education	**1. Why did you choose to study at university?** • Social expectation • To get a job. • Get higher earnings • University provides a more sophisticated, advanced level of learning (e.g. how to learn & how to do research)	HC Possibly personal development NB: S14 emphasised getting a job rather than a good job. Perhaps he meant a graduate job or how competitive China is that you need a degree even for a non-graduate job?
IBC – reasons for choice	**2. a) Why did you choose to study at AU1?** • GKS: Didn't get selected to attend the uni of choice (Shanghai Huatong Ligong Daxue, A list uni in T) • AU2 (A minus list uni in T) offers Chemical Engineering	UK award = signalling?

	• AU2 adopts a British education system. Mainly own decision in consultation with father who did most of the research.	
Reasons for choice of course	**2. b) Why did you choose to study your course?** • Good at Chemistry • Enjoy Chemistry as a subject • AU2 doesn't offer Chemistry but it offers Chemical Engineering • Better job prospects • More practical: learn more about how to design, develop critical thinking & evaluative skills Own decision	Personal interest Good job prospects – signalling/human capital
Reputation	**What did you think of AU2's reputation and how did it influence your decision?** • Very few ppl in T had heard of AU2 and most thought it was level C uni. However, it being an IBC distinguished it and quickly raised its reputation. Now it's level A in T. • S14 & father unconcerned about reputation becoz AU2's considered an IBC that offers a different education system. • S14 unconcerned about what employers would think about AU2 coz upon graduation, UKU cert is issued which, he believes, is valued more highly than the Chinese one.	Screening/signalling
Comparing CHEIs & AU2: reputation	Reputation of CHEIs is not great. Unethical & unprofessional conduct & practices leading to a compromise in quality at times among academics.	Archer

Study abroad – influence on IBC decision	**7. If there was no opportunity to study abroad, would it make any difference to your decision on the course or the university? Please explain the reason for your answer.** Probably yes coz *'my father is very interested in the Chemical Engineering…course because they provide two years of the foreign, I mean in Britain, learning so he thought it was quite important for me because when you learned, the knowledge isn't so different whether in China or the UK. Once you learn in the UK, you get a different environment. … Still my father thought the experience is another part of important things…even more than studies.'* – The study abroad experience was regarded as more important that subject knowledge because the latter is similar whether taught in China/UK. S14 would've picked another university.	Personal development
Study abroad – own reflection	**So non-academic experience is more important than studies according to your father. What do you think?** *'Yeah. I've been in the UK for more than one year and what I've learned, what I've seen and most of the things I've learned are non-academic experience. It's more valuable.'*	Personal development
Study abroad – impact on future?	**8. How important is the study abroad experience to your future employment or postgraduate study opportunities? Please explain your answer.** *Can't remember why this question wasn't asked. Perhaps I felt that he'd already answered it. Will insert it in phase 2.*	
What is 'graduate employability'?	**3. What do you think this term 'developing your employability' means?** • To make oneself employable to a great	Signalling/Human capital (skills)

	extent • Show one's potential to perform to employers	
How is GE developed?	**4. How do you think you are going to achieve this?** • Academic achievement: degree certs • Relevant professional/working experience: research related, internships or part-time jobs • Non-academic experience: cycling, martial arts	Screening/signalling CoP Self/Identity
	If you were going to give some evidence of your research or academic experience and also non-academic, what would you say? *'That's what I am doing in my CV applying for the MSc. I have the academic, I mean the CV and also I have the honours…in AU2 two years I got two scholarships and here I got the BP scholarship…. And also I have research background. For example, I worked for the PhD student and when I was in Jingshan, I also carried out research with one tutor. That's literature research. … It's about electric bikes, to gather information about the market, technology, industry. And also I can show non-academic skills because I can show about the cycling experience. I can show my Chinese martial arts experience.* I think this will be quite different from most of the Chinese students, what they have.'	CL: S14 is a reflective & self-aware individual who knows how to distinguish himself fr other Chinese students/grads in terms of employability. Signalling CoP Self/Identity Personal development Archer: reflexivity
	Why would cycling and martial arts be attractive to employers? Not many Chinese students are involved in cycling. '*I think that's very special but that's just the surface so when I*	CL: S14 demonstrates the ability to relate his extra-curricular activities and his personal interest in enhancing his employability.

	go, I can show what I was doing. In Jingshan I created a society, cycling society with my friends. I was doing cycling leader and some management affairs. So I just doing the society work but this shows abilities to management, planning.'	
	5. What are your (career) plans after graduation? MSc in the UK More familiar with the UK Changed his mind about doing MSc in US	
Strategies: applying for MSc (UK)	S14 plans to apply to lower ranked unis first to secure a place before attempting Cambridge or Imperial College. *'…I want to have a PhD after MSc so for me the MSc is just only a one-year study so its importance is not greater than PhD when I just consider it so MSc…UKU is still good. I don't want to put myself too much pressure on that.'*	Archer
Scholarships as a factor	S14 won't based his MSc decision on scholarship offers but this may be a factor for PhD.	Archer
PhD	**Why a Phd?** *'PhD is more competitive. I mean after you get a degree of that and also because I'm interested in research so PhD is maybe a good choice.'* *'Still I prefer to stay in the university because I love the academic environment rather than the industry although they make more money.'*	Human capital Signal/screening Archer Self/Identity
PhD	**Do you think that it's quite likely that you'll also stay in the UK for PhD?** *'I'm not so sure but because for PhD, I have a lot of choices so I may consider Canada or Germany or US or maybe AU2.'*	CL: Interesting that he considers AU2 for PhD – to follow up in Phase 2/3.
Personality & living abroad	*'Based on my character, my father and I thought maybe I'd*	Archer Self/Identity

	find much easier to stay in the UK, US, you know, the foreign country rather than China. ' S14 will consider emigration in the future & his parents encourage this. Identity-based motivation is the readiness to engage in identity-congruent action (Oyserman 2007; Oyserman, Bybee, et al. 2006) & to use identity-congruent mindsets in makg sense of the world (Oyserman et al. 2009). Although often experienced as stable, identity is highly malleable & situation-sensitive so which aspect of identity comes to mind is a dynamic product of that which is chronically accessible & tt which is situationally cued. (Oyserman et al., 2012)	The cued identity carries with it a general readiness to act & make sense of the world in identity-congruent terms, includg the norms, values, strategies & goals associated with tt identity, as well as the cognitive procedures relevant to it. What exactly this readiness looks like is dependent on what the cued identity comes to mean in the particular context in which it is cued.
IBC – enhances employability	**6. Do you think that by studying at AU1/AU2/AU3 it will place you in a good position in the future? Please explain why you think so.** Yes. Direct consequence: • Having a British certificate gives you an edge in the labour market. • A British cert is more valuable than a Chinese one when applying for postgraduate study abroad. Indirect consequence: • AU2 – Y1 programme provided an opportunity not only to learn EAP but also different cultures and ideas and this brought about changes in the ways of thinking. • Learned how to think, analyse, evaluate and be critical. *'So sometimes why I understand, I develop my own personal lifestyle.*	Screening/signalling Personal development Archer Self/Identity

	Yeah, I think most of it can be contributed to the first year studies. I mean how to deepen yourself. Because previously I am a lover of Chinese culture so I learned Chinese martial arts so I know what Chinese culture is like so how they thought about a problem but now I learned how Westerners analyse and to think about the world so I can compare and then you can develop your own style, a combination of the West and the China one because each of them have the disadvantages and advantages but you have to compare so you could know what are the differences, and what you should do and what you should absorb.'	
Plans/expectations - UKU	**9. Before coming to UKU, did you have any plans or expectations?** • Expected the study programme to be similar as AU2. • Wanted to experience British culture and meet people. <u>Work experience</u> Wanted to do something that would enhance his path to an academic career.	Personal development/Archer CoP/Signalling/Screening
Actual experience - UKU	• Wanted to break out of the Ningbo social circle: thought the scope of social activities within this was limited. • Tried to integrate into British culture @ uni: didn't like going to the bar, clubs or parties. • Finally developed his own personal interest in cycling & took it to another level: it became an integral part of his lifestyle – solo touring of the UK. *'…[W]hat I learned more…it's not*	Self/Identity Personal development Archer Self/Identity CL: He highly values this aspect of his experience: the highlight of his time in the UK (phase 1 interview).

	academic experience so that's it. Because I have a solo touring from Land's End to John O'Groats…which took me from the southwest corner of England to the northeast corner of Scotland so I learned is more than what I expected about people, the environment, the countryside and those things.' <u>Work experience</u> Volunteered to run experiments for a PhD student to gain exposure to research (summer 2012).	
Student experience - UKU	**10. Do you think the experience of being at UKU/AU2 has changed you? If yes, in what ways?** Yes: UKU. *'The tutor is just responsible for the teaching and if you ask any questions, you can just ask them but they seldom talk with you about life. Any Chinese tutor will tell you something about life but still, but here, you'll get more critical thinking and you'll judge and analyse yourself. But I don't know whether this one for myself, I mean because here no one will tell you what is right and what is wrong so you'll have to judge yourself and to give yourself and to think for yourself but for many people, they just follow what they've heard and what they've said so... But for me, a bit special case.'* S14 thinks he's different from other students because he reads extensively on history and politics, and other social science topics.	Archer Self/Identity Personal development CL: S14 feels that he has gained much understanding which has led to knowing himself better and as a result, he has more confidence in himself. Although his reading began when he was in AU2, his experience in the UK has triggered a depth of understanding from his reading.
Student experience – AU2	**How has the experience at AU2 changed you?** The most important is Y1 study: read extensively & learned to think differently, critically and evaluatively.	Self/Identity Personal development Archer Transformative learning

	'At that time, I did many readings about the books, the history, so that's the first time since I was born that I just read what's the real…for example, what the foreigners think about the world so also the idea and also the way of thinking, the critical and then judgement. This is also a very important point I learned in the first year. So these are the foundations of my further development.' *' Yeah, before AU2, I want to learn more knowledge and the university will give me much knowledge but after I left AU2, the university will give us new understanding of the ideas, the way of thinking, and such kind of things but now I also changed my mind. I think the university just have the life. In the university give me understanding on how to develop a personal lifestyle and how to look to know what you should do and how you to do. You can say enjoy or how to spend your lifetime.'* CL: This is partly due to tutors not sharing much about life with students so S14 has resorted to books to gain some knowledge and understanding about life. *'Any Chinese tutor will tell you something about life but still, but here, you'll get more critical thinking and you'll judge and analyse yourself.'* S14 thinks that many people follow what they hear but coz he's in an environment where no one tells him about life/what to do, his reading of social sciences literature has given him self-enlightenment which allows him to know himself and trust himself.	
	How does the understanding of developing a personal lifestyle	Archer

	relate to employability? *'Well, it's not directly related to that but still one person, well, for me, I have to know what you should do also. What your character is, your advantage is, your shortcomings so then you'll have a better judgment for yourself and so you'll know whether employers want what kind of person to take up the job so if you can't meet the requirement, so how you should improve yourself. But then if also if you want to get involved in the career, you have to be much clear about your future want to expect because if you don't want to, you know earning money is only one point of the things, it's not everything. So what about life? How you balance the life and the work? So that's also the problem.'*	Self/Identity CoP
Future Employers	**11. Who do you think your future employers are likely to be?** S14 had ambitions in Y1 (to be a researcher/work in a uni) but has found his ambitions becoming 'very ambiguous' partly due to his UK experience. British people don't appear to be as ambitious as the Chinese and they tend to pursue a career out of interest and a lifestyle they desire. This seems to have influenced him to now think that he should spend time at the present stage to do what he enjoys because he believes that it is hard to regain lost time/experience later. Previously S14 perceived his future to be part of a competitive society in which everyone rushes to be successful overnight but his cycling experience has taught him to look at life differently. He wants to live in the moment and takes things as they come,	Self/Identity Personal development? <u>Archer: Being Human</u> The 'inner conversation' is about exploring the terms of a liveable degree of solidarity for the self in its commitments, and the unique modus vivendi (way of living) to emerge is what defines the uniqueness of personal identity. We are who we are becoz of what we care about: in delineatg our ultimate concerns & accommodatg our subordinate ones, we also define ourselves. However, we don't make our personal identities under the circumstances of our own choosg. Our placemt in society

	enjoying each moment in every phase of life. *'读万卷书不如行万里路(dú wàn juǎn shū bùrú xíng wànlǐ lù). That's saying that you're better to read thousands of books but it can't compare with you walk thousands of miles so I learned that. Because before that, before the cycling, I just read many, many books. I just want to increase my knowledge and also improve my understanding but I found that words on the paper, you can't just summarise it and it seems very like a wisdom but somehow you cannot just put the ideas into your whole understanding or your whole feelings. But if you walk far enough or cycle enough miles, you'll learn it yourself by heart.'*	rebounds upon us, affectg the persons we become, but also & more forcefully influencg the social identities which we can achieve. Personal & social identity must x be elided coz the former derives fr our relatns with all 3 orders of reality whilst our social selves are defined only in social terms. Nevertheless, the emergence of the 2 are intertwined.
Employers' expectations	**What do you think they are likely to expect of you?** He isn't sure because it depends on the job. Nevertheless he is confident that his experiences and achievements (CV) are sufficient.	Archer
How IBC enhance employability	**12. How do you think your time at University will prepare you to be such an employee?** *'…I think it's more about yourself. Self-enlightenment. It's less to do with the university but still it's based on the first, I mean, the year, the foundation year…'*	Self/Identity Archer
Challenges	**13. What challenges do you think you face as an AU2 student with regards to your employability?** S14 feels that he's disadvantaged in comparison to British/EU students when it comes to job/internship opportunities. He also thinks they have priority in postgraduate study opportunities.	Self/Identity Archer
Overcoming challenges	**14. How do you overcome these challenges?**	

Challenges-UK	**15. What kind of challenges have you experienced here in the UK?**	
Student experience -IBC	**In terms of student experience if you compare AU2 & UKU, any differences? Any major differences between the two and how the differences affect your development and perhaps your future?** Academic: little difference – more diversity in UKU staff & student population Extra-curricular: major difference - Student socs, clubs, culture, environment	Internationalisation - IBC
Student experience - UK	**16. What valuable experience do you think you'll be taking with you when you graduate and go on to your MSc?** What he's learned and discovered about himself.	Self/Identity Archer
	Did you use the services of the Career Office at AU2 or the Career Services at UKU? Yes. AU2 Career Office still has a long way to go in comparison with UKU's Career Services.	
	You said that the most valuable experience/thing is discovering yourself. Can you summarise what has contributed to that self-discovery? 1. Cycling & Chinese martial arts are two channels of expression which have enabled him to reflect and developed his own philosophy and lifestyle. '*…[A]fter I get involved in the Western culture so I have another clear view about how I look about my all the Chinese culture in a different way so I developed my view of the Chinese culture based on experience so I get a different, I mean a new idea, or even more understanding of the Chinese culture. So for me, I practise the martial arts just like the same as I*	Identity/Self Archer

	play the cycling based on the same objectives but with a different pattern. So I just to look back there and I summarised and I thought I know more of my past.' 2. The foundation year in AU2 acted as a catalyst to opening his mind and a bridge that leads to a new appreciation of Chinese culture and philosophy after encountering Western culture and thought. 3. His character: Reflexive thinker He reads extensively and engages in reflexivity in relation to reading texts. 4. Parents share their life and educational experiences with him.	
Study abroad	**17. Is there anything else you'd like to add?**	

3. Anything else that struck me as salient, interesting, illuminating or important in this contact?

His father has done extensive research on unis in China and the US – to the extent of listing them in Excel spreadsheets for comparison.

He pointed out that it is hard for AU2 to be evaluated on the list of CHEI ranking because it has a different system and highlighted that AU2 is now in tier-1 in S.

4. What new (or remaining) target questions do I have in considering the next contact with this IBC and/or with this level of degree?

Why do you think you wouldn't be able to learn much from CHEIs?

OTHER QUESTIONS

What people, events, or situations were involved?

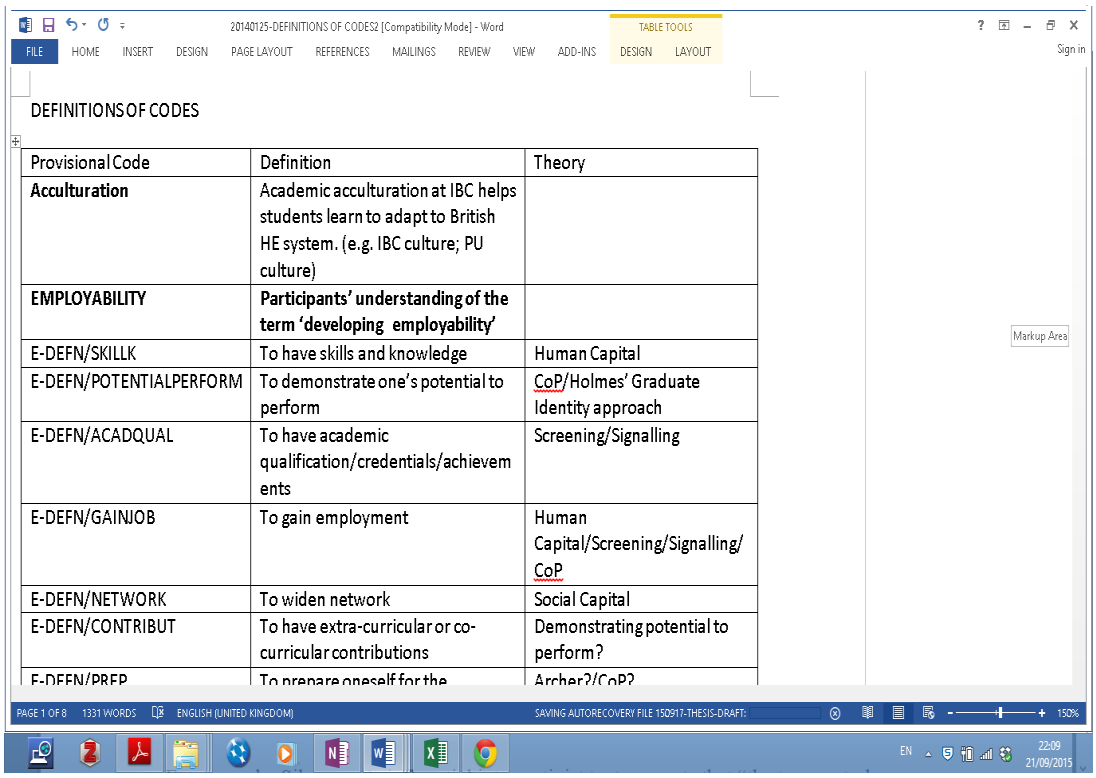
Although he has gained much knowledge from reading social sciences literature in AU2, it is the UK study abroad experience which triggers the learning process in a period of reflexivity. In sum, the UK life experience leads to a deeper and meaningful reflexivity interpreting the former with respect to his readings and they

collectively play a role when considering his life project in terms of learning and what he wants to accomplish at present and in the future.

Which research questions & which variables in the initial framework did the contact bear on most centrally?

Screening/signalling, Human Capital, Social Capital & Personal Development – Study abroad is an enormous factor

Item 5: First cycle descriptive coding - A sample of codes and definitions



20140125-DEFINITIONS OF CODES2 [Compatibility Mode] - Word

DEFINITIONS OF CODES

Provisional Code	Definition	Theory
Acculturation	Academic acculturation at IBC helps students learn to adapt to British HE system. (e.g. IBC culture; PU culture)	
EMPLOYABILITY	**Participants' understanding of the term 'developing employability'**	
E-DEFN/SKILLK	To have skills and knowledge	Human Capital
E-DEFN/POTENTIALPERFORM	To demonstrate one's potential to perform	CoP/Holmes' Graduate Identity approach
E-DEFN/ACADQUAL	To have academic qualification/credentials/achievements	Screening/Signalling
E-DEFN/GAINJOB	To gain employment	Human Capital/Screening/Signalling/ CoP
E-DEFN/NETWORK	To widen network	Social Capital
E-DEFN/CONTRIBUT	To have extra-curricular or co-curricular contributions	Demonstrating potential to perform?
E-DEFN/PREP	To prepare oneself for the	Archer?/CoP?

Item 6: Steps in thematic analysis

The raw data in the first spreadsheet were grouped according to repeating ideas.

Raw text data that inspired the Level 1 Code	Repeating Ideas
It's just follow the steps to learning. I think it also have the effection. And of course, the university life is like a social and pre-social. When you step into the society, it can't understand why but when you go university and then get into the society, then maybe better. It's experiment and some others. I think maybe it's the first reason, follow the others. Most of us want to go to a good university and the greater, the better. Get a good job and know people from a higher level. (S20-2E-1:2, 4, 6, 8, 12) (Zhaoyang, IBC2, E1)	Why uni - Social-cultural expectation: It's part of following the 'steps to learning' through 'follow the others' in climbing the social ladder to achieve a social status (by going to a well-known uni), to get a good job and to build a social network/'guanxi'. (S20-2E-1:2, 4, 6, 8, 12) (Zhaoyang, IBC2, E1)
Normally in China when we after the College Entrance Examination we will to university. That's how things go in China. I know that in the UK, things are quite different so students may gap year to experience life and then choose what they are going to do. (S17-2E-1:2) It's quite a tough question. I've never thought about it. Even in my high school, life...I not full of ideas of what I should do in my future. I know that what I want to do that must need some qualification so that's one way to get the effect to what I want to do. That's basically why I want to go to university. (1:12) (Kefen, IBC2, E1)	Why uni - Social-cultural expectation: It's part of following the 'steps to learning' through 'follow the others' to get a qualification. (S17-2E-1:2, 12) (Kefen, IBC2, E1)
I think for most of the students especially in China, I think most of the way is to choose the undergraduate after their senior high school and when they have passed the examination, you know the final examination to the universities. So generally if you want to have a job and want to have more salaries, the only way I think for most of the students is the way to just get involved in the university and maybe postgraduate, PhD but if you don't have a degree of the university, the life will be harder. (S14-2E-1:2) (Lizheng, IBC2, E1)	Why uni - 1) Social-cultural expectation: It's part of following the 'steps to learning' through 'follow the others' 2) to get a job and a higher salary to avoid a hard life. (S14-2E-1:2) (Lizheng, IBC2, E1)
Well, in my point of view but that's not all of the other students will think so but for me, university provides a better logical instrumentive education for implementing research or just to know how to learn knowledge, and you know, that's a very further study because in previously the high school no matter in senior high, junior high or primary school, they only teach you some basic knowledge but they can't tell you more about how to learn and how to carry out research. Yes, it's kind of advanced. (S14-2E-1:10) (Lizheng, IBC2, E1)	Why uni - Uni provides a more advanced level of education for carrying out research and learning to acquire knowledge c/f high school. (S14-2E-1:10) (Lizheng, IBC2, E1)
Actually I never think about what I want because in China, we always study hard during the high school and go to university and for what. Because my study not very bad so it should be like I just go to university. Something like this. Actually I never think of this problem. (S18-2E-1:2) (Yansi, IBC2, E1)	Why uni - Socio-cultural expectation: It's part of following the 'steps to learning' through 'follow the others'; a social rite? (S18-2E-1:2) (Yansi, IBC2, E1)
Yeah, because I think I'm qualified to go to university and because do you know nowadays if you don't go to university, it's hard to find a job? (S18-2E-1:6) Actually my definition is my dream job is like I can do what I love and I can also earn money. This is my final goal actually. (1:8) Yeah. (1:10) Yes. (1:12) (Yansi, IBC2, E1)	Why uni - 1) Eligible to attend HE; 2) To get a job (no uni edu, hard to find a job) (Yansi, IBC2, E1)
Go to university...I think it's a tendency in China. Every people, every student, every classmate around me, 90% want to go to university. So I have no choice. If I quit, if I do business or something, this will be not right. I will be different from others. (S19-2E-1:12) (Yunjun, IBC2, E1)	Why uni - It's a social rite every Chinese student goes through. He doesn't want to be different from others. (S19-2E-1:12) (Yunjun, IBC2, E1)

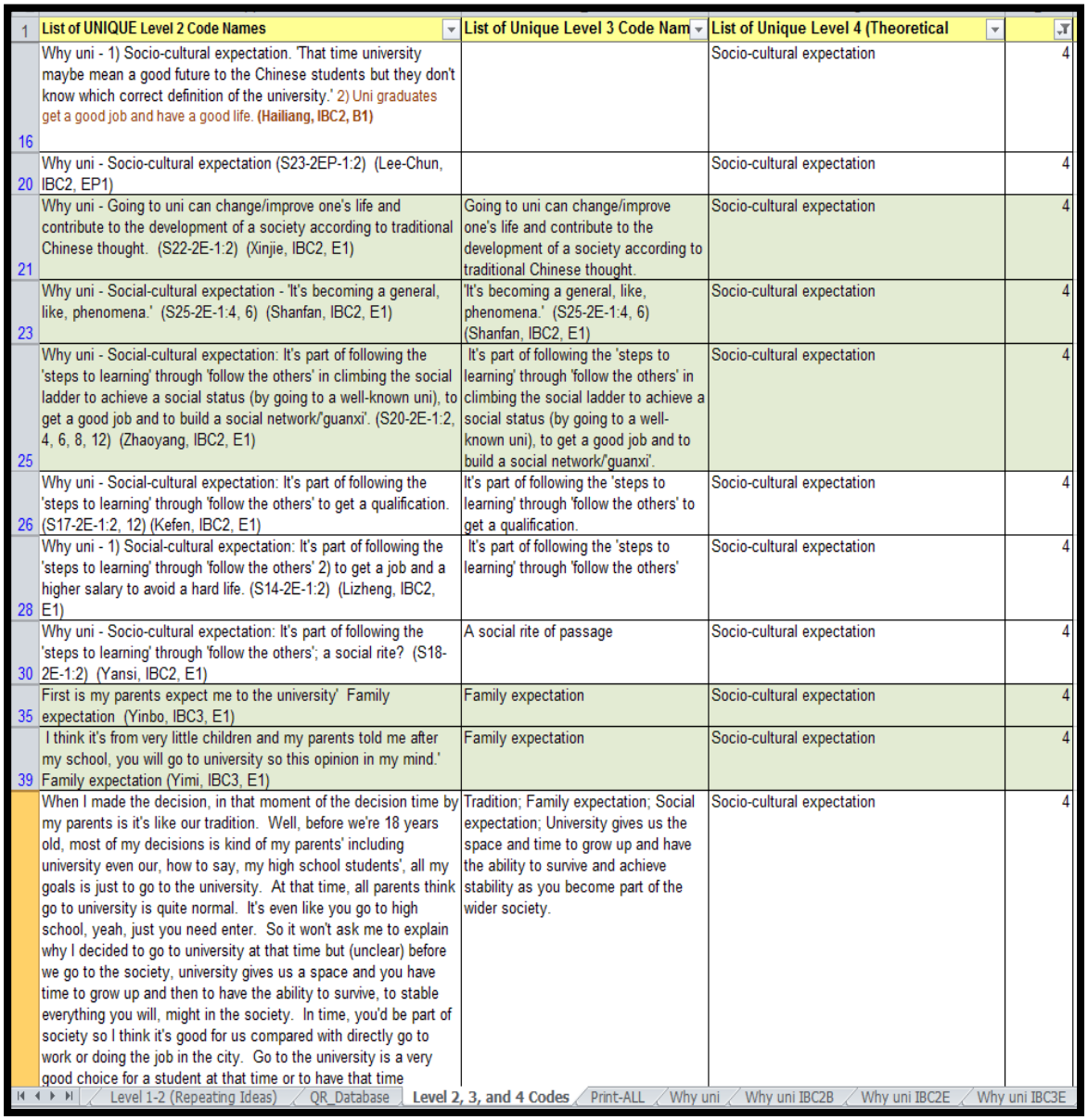
In the second spreadsheet, the patterns formed themes and were linked to the theoretical framework. E.g., Rate of return is labelled as 2 and the screening hypothesis as 3 in the last column.

1	List of UNIQUE Level 2 Code Names	List of Unique Level 3 Code Nam	List of Unique Level 4 (Theoretical	
14	Why uni - To meet employers' screening process in recruitment (Yunxi, IBC2, B1)	To meet employers' screening process in recruitment	Screening hypothesis	3
15	Why uni - Uni can develop your potential through a variety of social activities c/f High school where you only study all the time. (Yunxi, IBC2, B1)	University can develop one's potential through a variety of social activies c/f High School		
16	Why uni - 1) Socio-cultural expectation. 'That time university maybe mean a good future to the Chinese students but they don't know which correct definition of the university.' 2) Uni graduates get a good job and have a good life. **(Hailiang, IBC2, B1)**		Socio-cultural expectation	4
17	Why uni - 1) Socio-cultural expectation. 'That time university maybe mean a good future to the Chinese students but they don't know which correct definition of the university.' **2) Uni graduates get a good job and have a good life. (Hailiang, IBC2, B1)**		Rate of return?	2
18	Why uni - 'Now maybe university means a place for students to develop themselves and I think the most important is find their interesting so they can choose which job or which aspect that they can learn more or put themselves in the area. When I first entered in IBC2, the President of the School (Yang Fujia), he gave a speech. He said the most important thing you should do in the University to try to find your interest. ' (Hailiang, IBC2, B1)	University is a place where students develop themselves and find their interest.	Personal development - Graduate Identity	1
19	Why uni - Get a good job and a high pay. (S22-2E-1:2) (Xinjie, IBC2, E1)		Rate of return	2
20	Why uni - Socio-cultural expectation (S23-2EP-1:2) (Lee-Chun, IBC2, EP1)		Socio-cultural expectation	4
21	Why uni - Going to uni can change/improve one's life and contribute to the development of a society according to traditional Chinese thought. (S22-2E-1:2) (Xinjie, IBC2, E1)	Going to uni can change/improve one's life and contribute to the development of a society according to traditional Chinese thought.	Socio-cultural expectation	4
22	Why uni - To be in employment and have a good career (S23-2EP-1:2) (Lee-Chun, IBC2, EP1)		Rate of return	2
23	Why uni - Social-cultural expectation - 'It's becoming a general, like, phenomena.' (S25-2E-1:4, 6) (Shanfan, IBC2, E1)	'It's becoming a general, like, phenomena.' (S25-2E-1:4, 6) (Shanfan, IBC2, E1)	Socio-cultural expectation	4
24	Why uni - Get a good job and a high pay. (S25-2E-1:4,6,8) (Shanfan, IBC2, E1)		Rate of return	2
25	Why uni - Social-cultural expectation: It's part of following the 'steps to learning' through 'follow the others' in climbing the social ladder to achieve a social status (by going to a well-known uni), to get a good job and to build a social network/'guanxi'. (S20-2E-1:2, 4, 6, 8, 12) (Zhaoyang, IBC2, E1)	It's part of following the 'steps to learning' through 'follow the others' in climbing the social ladder to achieve a social status (by going to a well-known uni), to get a good job and to build a social network/'guanxi'.	Socio-cultural expectation	4
26	Why uni - Social-cultural expectation: It's part of following the 'steps to learning' through 'follow the others' to get a qualification. (S17-2E-1:2, 12) (Kefen, IBC2, E1)	It's part of following the 'steps to learning' through 'follow the others' to get a qualification.	Socio-cultural expectation	4
	Why uni - 1) Social-cultural expectation: It's part of following the	To get a job and a higher salary to	Rate of return	2

Level 1-2 (Repeating Ideas) | QR_Database | **Level 2, 3, and 4 Codes** | Print-ALL | Why uni | Why uni IBC2B | Why uni IBC2E | Why uni IBC3E

Appendix G: Thematic analysis

A sample from the Excel spreadsheet shows the steps from pattern recognition (columns 1 and 2) to the theoretical concept (columns 3 and 4). The interview extracts were then brought together to summarise findings according to each theoretical concept. Column 4 was filtered as '4', denoting the interplay of structure and agency.



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20	Why uni - Socio-cultural expectation (S23-2EP-1:2) (Lee-Chun, IBC2, EP1)		Socio-cultural expectation	4
21	Why uni - Going to uni can change/improve one's life and contribute to the development of a society according to traditional Chinese thought. (S22-2E-1:2) (Xinjie, IBC2, E1)	Going to uni can change/improve one's life and contribute to the development of a society according to traditional Chinese thought.	Socio-cultural expectation	4
23	Why uni - Social-cultural expectation - 'It's becoming a general, like, phenomena.' (S25-2E-1:4, 6) (Shanfan, IBC2, E1)	'It's becoming a general, like, phenomena.' (S25-2E-1:4, 6) (Shanfan, IBC2, E1)	Socio-cultural expectation	4
25	Why uni - Social-cultural expectation: It's part of following the 'steps to learning' through 'follow the others' in climbing the social ladder to achieve a social status (by going to a well-known uni), to get a good job and to build a social network/'guanxi'. (S20-2E-1:2, 4, 6, 8, 12) (Zhaoyang, IBC2, E1)	It's part of following the 'steps to learning' through 'follow the others' in climbing the social ladder to achieve a social status (by going to a well-known uni), to get a good job and to build a social network/'guanxi'.	Socio-cultural expectation	4
26	Why uni - Social-cultural expectation: It's part of following the 'steps to learning' through 'follow the others' to get a qualification. (S17-2E-1:2, 12) (Kefen, IBC2, E1)	It's part of following the 'steps to learning' through 'follow the others' to get a qualification.	Socio-cultural expectation	4
28	Why uni - 1) Social-cultural expectation: It's part of following the 'steps to learning' through 'follow the others' 2) to get a job and a higher salary to avoid a hard life. (S14-2E-1:2) (Lizheng, IBC2, E1)	It's part of following the 'steps to learning' through 'follow the others'	Socio-cultural expectation	4
30	Why uni - Socio-cultural expectation: It's part of following the 'steps to learning' through 'follow the others'; a social rite? (S18-2E-1:2) (Yansi, IBC2, E1)	A social rite of passage	Socio-cultural expectation	4
35	First is my parents expect me to the university' Family expectation (Yinbo, IBC3, E1)	Family expectation	Socio-cultural expectation	4
39	I think it's from very little children and my parents told me after my school, you will go to university so this opinion in my mind.' Family expectation (Yimi, IBC3, E1)	Family expectation	Socio-cultural expectation	4
	When I made the decision, in that moment of the decision time by my parents is it's like our tradition. Well, before we're 18 years old, most of my decisions is kind of my parents' including university even our, how to say, my high school students', all my goals is just to go to the university. At that time, all parents think go to university is quite normal. It's even like you go to high school, yeah, just you need enter. So it won't ask me to explain why I decided to go to university at that time but (unclear) before we go to the society, university gives us a space and you have time to grow up and then to have the ability to survive, to stable everything you will, might in the society. In time, you'd be part of society so I think it's good for us compared with directly go to work or doing the job in the city. Go to the university is a very good choice for a student at that time or to have that time	Tradition; Family expectation; Social expectation; University gives us the space and time to grow up and have the ability to survive and achieve stability as you become part of the wider society.	Socio-cultural expectation	4

Level 1-2 (Repeating Ideas) | QR_Database | **Level 2, 3, and 4 Codes** | Print-ALL | Why uni | Why uni IBC2B | Why uni IBC2E | Why uni IBC3E

Appendix H: Participants' Profile

At the time of interview, the undergraduate and MEng students were between 19 and 22 years of age, and the PhD students were 24 and 27 years old.

Studen	Pseudony	Gend	Nationality	Branc	Year	Graduate	Course	UK Stay
5	Seow-Ern	F	Malaysian	1	2	2014	Civil Engineering	1 year
4	Zhangxiang	F	Chinese	2	2	2014	International Business Management	1 sem
21	Wangfu	M	Chinese	2	2	2014	Architectural Environment Engineering	2 years
2	Chenqi	F	Chinese	2	2	2014	Finance, Accounting & Management	1 sem
1	Anni	F	Chinese	2	2	2014	Finance, Accounting & Management	1 sem
3	Zhexi	F	Chinese	2	2	2014	Finance, Accounting & Management	1 sem
7	Adam	M	Malaysian	1	3	2013+MEng2014	Civil Engineering	1 year
8	Renshu	F	Chinese	2	2	2014	International Business Management	1 sem
9	Yunxi	F	Chinese	2	2	2014	Finance, Accounting & Management	1 sem
16	Nick	M	Malaysian	1	3	2013 + M.Eng 2014	Mechanical Engineering	2 years
10	Hailiang	M	Chinese	2	2	2014	International Business Management	1 sem
6	Kai-Shan	M	Malaysian	1	3	2013 + M.Eng 2014	Mechanical Engineering	1 year
13	Mingming	F	Chinese	2	2	2014	Finance, Accounting & Management	1 sem
20	Zhaoyang	M	Chinese	2	2	2014	Architecture	2 years
17	Kefen	F	Chinese	2	2	2014	Architectural Environment Engineering	2 years
18	Yansi	F	Chinese	2	2	2014	Electrical & Electronic Engineering	2 years
19	Yunjun	M	Chinese	2	2	2014	Civil Engineering	2 years
22	Xinjie	F	Chinese	2	2	2014	Chemical Engineering	2 years
25	Shanfan	M	Chinese	2	2	2014	Architectural Environment Engineering	2 years
14	Lizheng	M	Chinese	2	3	2013	Chemical Engineering	2 years
12	Eddie	M	Malaysian	1	2	2014	Electrical & Electronic Engineering	1 year
15	Phil	M	Malaysian	1	M.Eng	2013	Electrical & Electronic Engineering	1 year + 1 year exchange during UG
24	Dave	M	Malaysian	1	PhD3	2014	Mechanical Engineering	18 months
11	Joe	M	Malaysian	1	M.Eng	2013	Electrical & Electronic Engineering	3 years
29	Yimi	F	Chinese	3	3	2013	Computer Science and Electronic Engineering	
26	Chenwei	M	Chinese	3	1	2015	Aerospace Engineering	3 years
28	Senhai	M	Chinese	3	2	2014	Architecture	2 years
30	Zhanghe	M	Chinese	3		2014	Electrical & Electronics Engineering	2 years
31	Haimei	F	Chinese	3	3	2013	Electrical & Electronics Engineering	2 years
27	Yinbo	M	Chinese	3	2	2014	Civil Engineering	2 years
23	Lee-Chun	M	Malaysian	2	PhD3	2014	Mechanical Engineering	1 year

Sheet1 Sheet2 Sheet3

Appendix I: Participants' family background profile

	Educational level		Occupation		
IBC participant	**Father**	**Mother**	**Father**	**Mother**	**Sibling**
Zhangxiang (IBC2-B)	Secondary school	Bachelor	Self-employed artist	High school teacher	Sole child
Chenqi	Teacher training college	Teacher training college	Elementary school teacher	Elementary school teacher	Sole child
Anni	College (Technology)	College (Financial accounting)	Businessman (steel)	Accountant	Sole child
Zhexi	Bachelor	Bachelor	International business manager at a foreign company	Chemical engineer	Sole child
Renshu	PhD	Bachelor	Doctor	Doctor	Sole child
Yunxi	Bachelor	Secondary school & Accounting certificate	Engineer	Accountant	Sole child
Mingming	Master	Bachelor	Government official	Government official	Sole child
Hailiang	High school	Senior high school	Manager	Sales assistant	Sole child
Lizheng (IBC2-E)	Master	Bachelor	IT Manager	Homemaker	Sole child; had 15-day US study abroad experience during high school
Wangfu	Secondary school	Secondary school	Restaurant manager	Homemaker	Sole child
Shanfan	Master	Bachelor	Manager	High school teacher	Sole child
Kefen	High school	Master	Businessman	Doctor, pharmacist	Sole child
Zhaoyang	Diploma (Computing)	Bachelor	Self-employed businessman	Legal court officer	Sole child
Xinjie	College graduate (reputable institution then)	High school	Manager	Restaurant manager	Sole child
Yansi	Bachelor	High school	Self-employed stockist	Quantity surveyor	Sole child
Yunjun	Junior School	High school	Entrepreneur (garment & light industries), owns & runs his own company	Accountant	Sole child; grandfather's influence on choosing IBC
Lee-Chun (IBC2-EP)	Secondary school	Secondary school	Cook	Lottery booking agent	1 older bro Dip in Quantity Survey, 1 younger bro, a cook in training

Eddie (IBC1-E)	Bachelor (spent some time in the UK)	Bachelor	Engineer	Private hospital administrator	1 older bro, Business graduate from IBC1 (no campus exchange)
Phil	Bachelor (UK)	Bachelor	Contractor	Manager	Older sis, private HE grad; younger sis completed SPM
Dave (IBC1-EP)	Secondary school	Secondary school	Clerk of works	Homemaker	Sole child
Joe Electrical & Electronic Engineering	Master (UK) Electrical & Electronic Engineering	Diploma (Singapore) Civil Engineering	Engineer (former); Businessman	Project management; Beauty consultant (former)	Older sis (NUS-Business Admin); younger sis, A-level
Nick	STPM*	STPM	Businessman	Senior bank officer	1 younger sis, SPM
Kai-Shan	SPM*	SPM	Businessman	Homemaker	Sole child
Adam	Bachelor (UK) Civil Eng	Bachelor (UK)	Engineer	Math teacher	Older sis in genetics, younger sis in accounting, others still at school
Seow-Ern	Bachelor	Secretarial training	Civil engineer; businessman	Homemaker	Has a younger bro
Chenwei (IBC3-E)	Bachelor	Bachelor	Government officer	College teacher (Philosophy)	Only child
Zhanghe	Uni diploma	High school	Manager	Manager	Sole child
Yimi	Bachelor	Adult education	Government officer	Accountant	Only child
Haimei	2-3 year College degree	College degree, Accounting	Doctor	Bank officer	1 older sis 3 yrs older Bachelor (Medicine)
Senhai	College	High school; uni distance learning programme	Entreprenuer, 'distribution centre', part of a marketing chain	Entreprenuer, 'distribution centre', part of a marketing chain	Sole child
Yinbo	High school; adult edu	High school	Businessman	Bank officer	Sole child, 1st to attend uni & study abroad

NB: Unless otherwise specified, all qualifications were local. *SPM and STPM are the Malaysian equivalent of O-level and A-level examinations.