An Investigation into the Transnational Identity of Chinese Student Returnees from the UK

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Abstract

This study explores the meaning of transnational identity of Chinese student returnees from the UK. The study is set in the context of transnationalism in the new era of globalisation. The scientific importance of this research lies in that it seeks to understand transnational identity in student returnees' experiences under the theory of transnationalism. It fills the research gap by providing a new theoretical perspective and methodological approach to identity. Under transnationalism, the study not only explores identity changes in a particular country and culture, but investigates it in the changing and overlapping countries and cultures, especially in China and the UK.

To provide a more nuanced description of student returnees' identity changes, qualitative methodology is adopted. Each student returnee is interviewed three times based on three different settings: first, based on their personal experiences in the UK; second, based on their personal experiences in China; the final round is the conclusion for the first two rounds. Altogether, 48 interviews were completed and analysed. Data based on the three rounds of interviews (two main settings) are organised into two finding chapters.

The study finds that transnational identity is understood as single, composing several dimensions. For this study in particular, student returnees' transnational identity can be explained by four major dimensions: the capacity to build connections between cultures, diaspora consciousness, diaspora values and attitudes, and expansion of behaviours and actions. In terms of the process in which transnational identity is formed, the study also finds that Chinese student returnees went through different phases and levels of changes of transnational identity. More importantly, the complex changes in transnational identity show the interplay between agency and structure(s). On the one hand, Chinese student returnees negotiated their identity of various levels of structures, including society, social group, institutional and virtual levels. On the other hand, although various structures provided the context in which student returnees negotiated their transnational identity, it was student returnees' agency that shaped their sojourn and homecoming experience and further identity changes.

In particular, it was the extent to which student returnees mobilized their agency that made the difference. Among many factors shaping different responses in agency, the divergence and convergence between agency and structure played a critical role in making the difference.

The findings not only nuance the theories of identity and transnational identity, but also deepen our understanding of Chinese students and student returnees' sojourn and homecoming experience, in addition to a new perspective into the phenomenon of culture shock and reverse culture shock. Finally, it is suggested that a more concerted effort from supra-national level to individual level is needed to provide Chinese students with more equal, qualified and intercultural education in the UK.

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Glossary

Terms	Definition in this thesis	Rationales and explanations
International students	In this study, international students refer to those who received tertiary education from abroad.	OECD in its Education Indicators in Focus in 2013 defines international students as subgroup of foreign students and those who did not study at their country of origin (OECD, 2013).
Chinese students	The term 'Chinese students' is used to describe students' living and studying experiences in the UK.	Chinese students are defined in relation to Chinese student returnees in this study.
Chinese student returnees	The term 'Chinese student returnees' is used when discussing student returnees' homecoming experience in China. This term refers to those who have already returned to China.	The term 'student returnees' is used by Ghimire & Maharjan (2015) in their recent report on students returning to their home country.
Social networks	The term in this study means the sum of communication and connections at the social group level of structure.	Wasserman and Faust (1994) explain social networks as the patterned interaction of various social groups in social structure.
Social groups	The term refers to interaction with parents, friends and colleagues in British and Chinese society.	Turner (1981) define social group as interaction of two or more people who share a common sense of identity.
Sojourn Experiences	In this study, sojourn experiences refer to students' living and studying experiences in the UK temporarily.	The Cambridge English Dictionary defines 'sojourn' as 'a short period when a person stayed in a particular place.'
Homecoming experience	The term in this study refers to student returnees' personal experiences upon return to China.	The term 'homecoming' is used very often in recent literature on returnees, for example, Gaw (2000) and Gill (2010).
Social behaviours	The term in this study refers to the manner in which students and student returnees behaved and acted.	Social behaviours refer to how people behave collectively in a society to distinguish from the social behaviours referring to the conduct of society as a whole.

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Chapter One Introduction

> ‘The more you know who you are, and what you want, the less you let things upset you.’
>
> (Coppola, 2003)

1.1 Rationale for the Study: A Dialogue with Myself and the Future

‘Any cashback?’ I still remember how confused I was upon hearing this question at the checkout in a store when I had just arrived in the UK. I could not connect with my previous experience to explain why a country was so generous to give money back to customers. Unfortunately, or maybe luckily, I was not ‘bold enough’ to ‘become a billionaire’ by asking for any cash back. Studying in the UK, for me, is to experience a different culture.

However, studying in the UK is more of an encounter with a different self, of meeting the unexpected, dealing with the impossible and witnessing the changes in life. I came to the UK in 2011 with the dream of becoming a simultaneous interpreter. As I look back, I could still remember my nostalgic feeling for China in the early days of my life in the UK: I shut my ears to foreign music and watched Chinese television (TV) programmes; I cooked and craved Chinese food; I phoned my parents once a day to share my happiness and sorrow; I hoped to rush back to my family and my beloved country as soon as I finished the master’s course.

The sweet day finally came. During my short visit to China, I indulged in the great joy and excitement of family reunion. However, when I realized I would rush to the TV when news about the UK was broadcast, a change in my emotional attachment struck me. Also, I started to drink coffee and eat cold food. I could not help but keep on saying ‘thank you’, ‘sorry’ and ‘excuse me’ in English. I waited in the queue and was more aware of my public manner. I shopped online on British websites. These were changes that only drew my attention after I returned to China.

Being aware of these changes, my second trip to the UK was smoother. On the one hand, I adopted more values, attitudes and behaviours. On the other, I still maintained my communication and connection with my family in China. Beyond these were more fundamental changes in my life. By the time this thesis was drafted, I realized my dream of being a simultaneous interpreter and became a lecturer in translation and interpretation. Looking back to the past, I can still see every major step in my life in the UK. Being overwhelmed with gratitude and sentiment, I know as I walk towards the future, the past is not left behind me, it is becoming part of me.

Hemingway (1964) once said, 'If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a movable feast.' Of course, the UK will never be the same, but I and the others, similar to Hemingway, will never return to who we were in the past. While bidding farewell to the past, we are moving towards new challenges and opportunities in the future.

Although this study has been driven by my personal story, I hope it will not be a personal story only. Beyond this personal experience is my conceptual focus on the transnational identity of Chinese student returnees from the UK. In particular, I wonder whether Chinese student returnees develop transnational identity and what transnational identity means for them. I am also curious about whether developing transnational identity could have any implications for student returnees' personal and professional life in China. The aim to explore the meaning of transnational identity may also contribute to a larger picture of internationalisation of higher education.

1.2 Research Focuses and Questions

The main conceptual focus of this research is to understand the meaning of transnational identity of Chinese student returnees from the UK. To clarify, 'student returnee' in this study refers to students who have already finished their studies in the UK and returned to China. Transnationalism theory already exists and is a major area of focus in the field of migration (Castles, 2002; Vertovec, 2006). This study aims to apply transnationalism theory to explore student

returnees' identity changes. It has been said that one of the fundamental changes for students living and studying abroad is identity (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Kim, 2008; Sussman, 2002). This argument gives a rationale for understanding identity under the theory of transnationalism. Hence, this study takes identity as the basis to understand and conceptualise transnational identity towards the end of this research.

With this main conceptual focus in mind, the study intends to identify the major characteristics and variations of student returnees' transnational identity. It also seeks to understand how the variations impact upon student returnees' personal and professional life in China. Finally, it hopes to contribute to the internationalisation of higher education by showing the research implications for student returnees, academia and policy makers. Given these focuses, two major questions and sub-questions are proposed as follows:

1. How do we understand transnational identity? What is the nature of Chinese student returnees' transnational identity?

1) To what extent has Chinese student returnees' identity changed?

2) If it has changed, what are the key characteristics of their changes in identity?

2. How has the transnational identity of Chinese student returnees changed over time?

1) Are there any variations in the outcomes of Chinese student returnees' identity negotiations?

2) What are the key factors shaping their construction and reconstruction of transnational identity?

3) How does Chinese student returnees' transnational identity influence their professional and personal lives, and vice versa?

As listed in the research questions, the first main research question answers the first main research focus. It explores whether student returnees develop

transnational identity and the major characteristics and variations of it. The second main research question corresponds to the second main research focus. It tries to understand the key factors shaping the reconstruction and construction of student returnees' transnational identity. In addition, it answers how student returnees' transnational identity influenced their personal and professional lives in China.

It is important to note that although transnational identity is the focus of this research as the title and research questions indicate, this study seeks to conceptualise the meaning of it at the end of this research. In other words, instead of having a conceptual framework about what transnational identity is before the fieldwork takes place, this study starts with understanding the conceptualisation of identity in general. Hence, 'identity' rather than 'transnational identity' is used in some chapters in this thesis. By understanding student returnees' identity changes in the British and Chinese societies, the researcher [1] hopes to conceptualise the meaning of identity under transnationalism or in particular, transnational identity across borders.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the research rationales, focuses and the thesis structure. Chapter 2 provides the research context of the internationalisation of higher education, as well as the demographic shift of Chinese student returnees. Chapter 3 reviews the existing literature on identity, transnationalism, and Chinese students' sojourn and homecoming experience. This chapter takes the stand point that an individual would only have one identity of different dimensions. It also views transnationalism as an appropriate framework for understanding Chinese student returnees' identity changes throughout China and the UK. Chapter 4 justifies the rationales of qualitative research methodology. It also explains the research design, analysis, and major issues of translation and doing fieldwork in China. Ethical issues relevant to this research are be addressed.

[1] The researcher here refers to me, who carried out this research on Chinese student returnees from the UK. To use a scientific tone of voice, I used 'the researcher' rather than 'I'.

After setting the stage in the previous chapters, Chapters 5 and 6 report the main findings with regard to the research questions. Chapter 5 answers the first main research question regarding the nature of student returnees' transnational identity. Chapter 6 responds to the second main research question as to what extent and how transnational identity has changed over time. To help the readers see the findings through a conceptual lens, Chapter 7 builds on previous findings chapters to show further theoretical implications. In particular, the two models suggest that transnational identity is a process, involving horizontal changes throughout different societies, as well as vertical changes across different layers of interactions. Towards the end of the thesis, Chapter 8 concludes all the chapters, by reviewing all the research questions and answers. Proposals are also made regarding the internationalisation of higher education.

Chapter Two Research Context: Internationalisation of Higher Education in the Age of Globalisation

2.1 Globalisation as a Wider Phenomenon

Globalisation has existed for a long time (Gu, 2011). The provenance of globalisation concentrates on the flows of goods, services, knowledge and cultures (Held, Anthony, Goldbaltt, & Perraton, 1999). Through these processes, globalisation was able to make economic, political, socio-cultural and technological impact across borders (Knight, 2004). In more recent literature, globalisation has changed towards more qualitative-based approach to individuals and how they could become more mobile at the global platform (Little & Green, 2009; Gu, 2011; OECD, 2017). With a focus on the quality of globalisation (Little & Green, 2009), there is also some debate on the tensions between the global and the local that have often been associated with competition and inequality in this new era of globalisation (UNESCO, 2016; OECD, 2017). In the following paragraphs, the researcher presents three major ways of conceptualising globalisation according to the relevant literature. She also deepens these conceptualisations with different perspectives and critiques.

2.1.1 The Conceptualisation of Globalisation

According to Held et al. (1999), there are three major ways of conceptualising globalisation: the hyper-globalist approach, the sceptical approach and the transformationalist approach. The first is the hyper-globalist approach (Ohmae, 1997), which views the convergence of nations in the political and economic domains as inevitable (Reich, 1991). This approach corresponds to the neoliberalist approach to globalisation (Shields, 2013). According to Shields, the neoliberal approach sees competition as a distinct feature of globalisation and competition can increase efficiency, improve economic growth, and drive technological innovation through wider and shared opportunities for all. Hyper-globalists under the neoliberalism assumption can be represented by Friedman (2005). In his work *The World is Flat*, he argues that globalisation makes

individuals, companies and countries in the world more well-connected and interdependent, especially driven by science and technology.

In contrast, the second major way of conceptualising globalisation is the sceptical approach represented by Hirst and Thompson (1996). In their opinion, globalisation is still driven and influenced by some major capitalist countries such as the U.S.A. In this approach, globalisation is explained as confrontation between different influential world powers and driven by changes in the world power relations (Shields, 2013). This approach can be best exemplified by Wallerstein (1996). In his volume of *The Modern World System*, he argues that the world modernization process, which is still capitalist in nature, is unequally dominated by several core powerful countries, with more countries being at the periphery. Supporters in this tribe criticize Friedmann's (2005) argument by claiming that the flat world only benefits the advantaged groups and nations (Spring, 2008). Aronica and Ramdoo (2006) also argue that globalisation in Friedman's view does not reflect the lives of the middle-class in this process of change. According to the OECD (2017) report, access to tertiary education reflected the differences in socio-economic backgrounds such as immigrant background and family education background. For those who had less-educated parents, their chances of getting access to tertiary education became lower (2017).

The final major approach is the transformationalist approach (Giddens, 1990). This approach is where this study stands. For transformationalists, globalisation has transformed the relationships between nations beyond the national borders towards a more interconnected way (Shields, 2013). This approach sees globalisation as a process of disseminating common values, attitudes and behaviours throughout the world (Boli & Thomas, 1997). In this new era of globalisation, individuals have to face more challenges and uncertainties (Giddens, 1990). This means individuals have to develop the capacity to speak foreign languages and communicate with foreign cultures. All these relevant skills to live in a globalised world are defined as 'transnational cultural capital' to survive competition and inequality (Carlson, Gerhards, & Hans, 2017, p.749). Internationalisation of higher education can be seen as a channel for students to

access more quality-based education and improve their intercultural competence in a globalised world (Gu, 2011; OECD, 2017). Here, it is worth highlighting that competence is an important part of the theory of transnationalism (Vertovec, 2009). For this study in particular, competence is defined as the capacity to respond to different socio-cultural contexts. Under the notion of competence, specific concepts of it, including language competence and intercultural competence, will be discussed later in the literature review chapter. More importantly, with the focus of this research in mind, the extent to which language competence and intercultural competence is related to transnationalism will also be discussed in the literature review chapter. However, before discussing more specific concepts, it is important to understand the context in which language competence and intercultural competence is required. Hence, in the next section, the relationship between internationalisation of higher education and globalisation is addressed.

2.2 Internationalisation of Higher Education in the Context of Globalisation

2.2.1 The Relationship between Internationalisation of Higher Education and Globalisation

Although internationalisation is not limited to the field of education, internationalisation in this thesis mainly refers to the internationalisation in education that gained momentum in the 1980s (Knight, 2015). The reason why internationalisation is addressed in relation to globalisation is because they are inextricably linked (Knight, 2014). On the one hand, globalisation is the driver for internationalisation (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011). Knight (2015) argues that globalisation cast a huge influence on higher education and the internationalisation of it. If we see globalisation as the context, internationalisation is the response (2015). According to Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley (2009), globalisation provides the context for economic, technological, informational and cultural interconnectedness, while internationalisation represents the policies and programmes of universities and governments in response to globalisation (2009). Globalisation as a driving force for the

internationalisation of education can be best summarized by Knight (2004, p.5) in that ‘internationalisation is changing the world of higher education, and globalisation is changing the world of internationalisation’.

On the other hand, globalisation and internationalisation are rivals competing against each other (Knight, 2014). Brandenburg and de Wit (2011, p.27) state that although globalisation and internationalisation are interrelated, internationalisation seems to be the ‘white knight’ defending the noble cause of cooperation and mutual understanding in education, whereas globalisation tends to see education as a commercial product devaluating internationalisation.

However, globalisation and internationalisation are not distinct from each other (Scott, 2005). As stated by Altbach and Knight (2007), although globalisation is inevitable, internationalisation can choose its rationales and approaches. As noted by Brandenburg and de Wit, we should not limit ourselves to the traditional and dogmatic view of internationalisation devaluated by the commercialisation of education. Instead, neither internationalisation nor globalisation is our final pursuit, but only a means to an end (2011). Our ultimate pursuit in internationalisation is to explore new meanings, rationales and approaches of internationalisation which can reflect its scope, form and nature in globalisation.

2.2.2 Defining Internationalisation of Higher Education

As globalisation, there is no standard definition of internationalisation. The conceptualisation of internationalisation has undergone a series of changes to reflect its changing scope, form and nature. At first, before the late 1980s internationalisation was mostly considered as a number of activities by institutions (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011). For example, Arum and van de Water (1992) define internationalisation as various cooperation and exchanges in education and technology at the international level. However, conceptualising internationalisation as an aggregation of multiple cooperation and exchanges across borders does not reflect the changing nature of it (Knight, 1994). Later, Knight bridges the gap by providing a new definition, seeing internationalisation as the ‘process of integrating an international and

intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of institution' (1994, p.7). In contrast with previous definitions, the most valuable part of this definition is the focus on the changing nature of internationalisation (Knight, 1994).

From the 21st century onwards, the world has been transformed from the dominance of technical assistance (development aid), cooperation and exchanges (de Wit, 2011) to what Knight (2004, 2008) characterizes as developments in trade liberalization, privatization, increased international labour mobility, new teaching, learning and research technologies, increased competition, cooperation, and more emphasis on the knowledge society but with less public funding for education. As a result of such changes, Knight (2003, p.26) updates her definition as 'the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education'. This definition draws attention to the global aspect of internationalisation. Knight also uses 'purpose, function and delivery' to reflect the complex and diversified rationales, approaches and players in internationalisation. Overall, the meaning of internationalisation has shifted its focus from being marginal and fragmented to more process-based (Knight, 2008, 2011).

As internationalisation is becoming increasingly diversified and complex, it is crucial to define the rationales for it. According to Knight (2015), in the year 1999, there were only four categories of rationales for internationalisation, including academic, economic, political and social aspects. Later, in 2015, the rationales became more encompassing ranging from individual layer, institutional layer and national layer to regional layer. Particularly in this research context, rationales at the individual level are the most relevant. Specific rationales under the individual level, concluded by Knight (2015), include developing a worldview, enhancing intercultural competence, accumulating knowledge of other countries and cultures, and developing networks across the borders. These specific rationales direct the focus of this research at the individual level in the context of internationalisation.

Rationales at the individual level then direct us to the relevant approaches towards internationalisation. According to Knight (2004, p.18), an approach is different from a definition, as 'an approach to internationalisation reflects or characterizes the values, priorities, and actions that are exhibited during the word toward implementing internationalisation'. According to Knight (2015), 'internationalisation at home' and 'cross-border education' can be seen as two main trends of approach to internationalisation. 'Internationalisation at home' refers to policies and initiatives aiming to bring intercultural teaching, researching, and learning and socialising experience to campus. 'Cross-border education' means mobility of students, faculties, programmes, providers, and creation of education hubs. In relation to this research, internationalisation means focusing on enhancing intercultural experiences for Chinese students studying abroad in the ever-increasing student mobility across borders.

Having reviewed the definition and rationales and approaches of internationalisation of higher education, the importance of improving students' intercultural competence, knowledge, skills and awareness at the individual level is highlighted. To achieve better quality internationalisation of higher education, it is worth noting some major challenges to internationalisation in this new era, addressed in the next section.

2.3 Challenges to Internationalisation of Higher Education in the New Era

According to Knight (2016), two new trends are emerging from the internationalisation of higher education. The first is the increasing numbers of self-funded students. The second is the growing importance of intercultural competence. In relation to these, this section addresses three major challenges that are most relevant to this study. The first major challenge is equality and equity. It focuses on access to internationalisation and argues that internationalisation is still limited to the socio-economic advantaged groups in China. The second major challenge is quality. It underscores the quality of internationalisation and draws on the attention to students' intercultural experiences. The third concerns the concerted efforts in internationalisation.

This part not only summarizes the first two challenges, but also calls for a synergy of commitment at individual, institutional, national and supranational levels in ensuring equality, equity and quality of internationalisation in higher education.

2.3.1 Equality and Equity

The first major challenge is equality and equity in the internationalisation of higher education (OECD, 2017). Although equality and equity are often used interchangeably, they are not the same (Espinoza, 2007). According to Secada (1989), 'equality' means giving the same access and opportunities to all. 'Equity' also concerns issues of equality but takes the advantages and disadvantages of various groups into consideration (1989). 'Equity' can be seen as the means of achieving equal access to internationalisation for all (Espinoza, 2007).

In the socio-economic aspect of equality and equity, access to the internationalisation of higher education remains unequal between socio-economically advantaged groups and less socio-economically advantaged groups (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Altbach et al., 2009). According to Altbach and Knight (2007), while recognizing the spread of internationalisation, education equality among less privileged students remains a concern. According to the OECD (2013) statistics, 4.3 million students were studying abroad, among which 53% were from Asia. Of all the Asian students studying abroad, 612, 000 come from China (OECD, 2017). Considering that access to tertiary education in some Asian countries remains unequal (UNESCO, 2016), it might be that access to internationalisation of higher education in China is a concern.

Except for the socio-economic aspect of inequality, there is also national and cultural inequality, as it seems that students from different national and cultural backgrounds are not treated as equal in internationalisation. According to the OECD (2013) report, higher tuition fees and tighter immigration policies have engaged domestic and international attention on equality; major host countries such as the USA, Canada, the UK and Australia have higher tuition fees for international students, whereas countries such as France, Japan and Korea have the same tuition fees for home and international students (2013). Even within

countries with a high enrolment ration, inequalities still persist (OECD, 2013), as participation rates for minority students continue to lag (Altbach et al., 2009). In addition, values and norms concerning how globalisation is based remains unequal. Knight (2008) argues that the impact of internationalisation can never be standardized among nations' histories, traditions, people, culture and priorities. Values, attitudes and behaviours in some countries remain more influential than in others (2008).

Behind the unequal access to internationalisation are the issues related to equity. This equity concerns how we can help the vulnerable groups enjoy the common fruits of internationalisation. Socio-economically, the concern is whether students from disadvantaged socio-economic groups can access the internationalisation of higher education, for example, whether students from disadvantaged socio-economic groups can receive more funding for the completion of their courses (OECD, 2017). In the socio-cultural aspect, it concerns whether international students can get support for developing their intercultural competence, knowledge, skills and awareness. All these equity issues are a means to help international students gain equal access to internationalisation. It also directs our focus on the needs and voices of international students to improve the equality and equity of internationalisation.

As shown from the above, equality and equity in internationalisation remains a concern. Different groups have different access to education in terms of their socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally, more attention should be given to international students studying outside their countries of origin. Issues of equality and equity, centring on international students, lead us to the next important challenge of internationalisation in quality, addressed in the next section.

2.3.2 Quality

Despite the remaining inequality, mobility in internationalisation continues to increase (Knight, 2015). However, the increasing mobility in internationalisation also brings problems in quality (2015). To ensure quality, Knight (2011) proposes a more qualitative-based examination of

internationalisation. She points out the superficial understanding of the quality of internationalisation based on international reputation, numbers of international students, institutional cooperation and international branding.

De Wit and Hunter (2016) argue that teaching and learning should be at the foundation of internationalisation, yet little attention has been given to these processes. As internationalisation is still largely dominated by western values (Fletcher, Harris, & Richey, 2013), it is doubtful to what extent internationalisation can open access to more culturally-responsive pedagogy (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011). To deal with the lack of focus on cultural diversity in teaching and learning, de Wit (2010) proposed a competency approach to improve teaching and learning, according to whom, this approach is more associated with intercultural education and can help develop faculty and students' intercultural awareness, values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and networks that might be suitable for the era of globalisation. In relation to this research, more attention should be given to Chinese students' living and studying experiences in the UK. In particular, it concerns whether Chinese students get appropriate and enough support to enhance their intercultural competence, skills, knowledge when they study in the UK.

The second issue concerns the evaluation of the quality of internationalisation. Knight (2008) proposes to track the quality of internationalisation in an on-going process and assess its quality based on outcomes. Such a view is consistent with de Wit and Hunter (2016) in that internationalisation has been assessed quantitatively rather than qualitatively. In relation to this study, the purpose is to investigate the outcomes of internationalisation in a more qualitative and continued manner. Specifically, the study explores the changes of Chinese student returnees' identity in terms of process and outcomes. Here, it should be noted that Chinese student returnees are an indispensable part of the internationalisation of higher education. Yet, research on their personal and professional life after living and studying abroad remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by exploring the outcomes of students who returned to China after studying in the UK.

Following 2.3.1 on equality and equity, this section has highlighted the importance of quality in internationalisation. In relation to this study, quality issues concern both students' sojourn and homecoming experience as both process and outcomes. To ensure quality of internationalisation, it is then suggested that a combination of efforts is needed, addressed further in the next section.

2.3.3 Commitment

Knight (2004) approached internationalisation by national, sector and institutional levels. Later, Sanderson (2008) supplemented the three levels of internationalisation with a supra-national level and a within-institutional level. The within-institutional level comprises faculty/department level and individual level. Bringing together all these levels of internationalisation, this section views that more attention should be given to the individual level of internationalisation. In addition, except for the individual level, addressing the aforementioned challenges of internationalisation needs concerted efforts, ranging from individual to supra-national level.

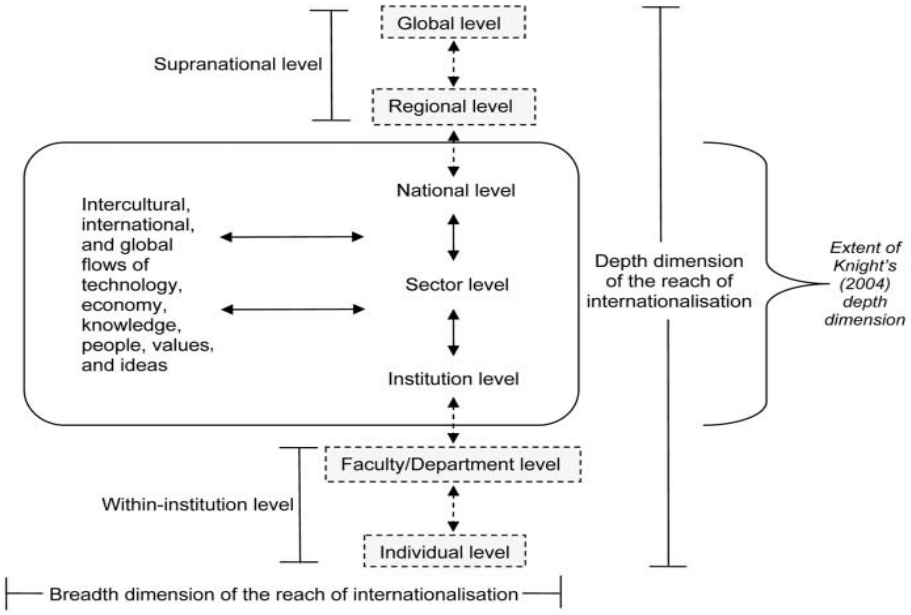


Figure 2.1 The reach of internationalisation proposed by Sanderson (2008, p.280)

In line with Sanderson (2008), this study focuses on the individual level of internationalisation. However, different from Sanderson who mainly addresses the academic self of teachers, this study addresses international students' voices and experiences. In particular, Chinese student returnees' sojourn experiences and homecoming experience will be investigated. By approaching internationalisation from Chinese student returnees' voices and experiences across borders, the study intends to bring back to the fore the central role of students and student returnees in internationalisation. The focus on students and student returnees' intercultural experiences at the individual level is what can be called as 'individual internationalisation' (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

Such focus at the individual level has been echoed in many scholars' views (Gill, 2007; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011; Tian & Lowe, 2009; Turner & Robson, 2008). Tian and Lowe (2009) argue that more attention should be given to the actual intercultural experiences of Chinese students rather than institutional strategies. Gu and Schweisfurth (2016) underscore the importance of individual agency in coping with challenges and difficulties in students' overseas study experience. They further argue that 'international students' intercultural learning experiences are both transitional and transformational and necessitate identity change' (2016, p.364). Hence, in investigating students' intercultural experiences, it is important to look more deeply into their varying agency and identity. However, while underscoring the importance of the individual level of internationalisation, this study does not lose sight of the influence of the other levels. Supra-national levels refer to response to cross-border education in internationalisation (Sanderson, 2008). National and sector levels refer to political, economic, social and cultural dimensions of internationalisation at the national and sector level (Knight, 2004). Institutional level means responses from teachers, faculty/department and universities in responding to internationalisation (Knight, 2004; Sanderson, 2008).

Taken together, the individual level concerns intercultural experiences and identity changes of international students. However, the individual level of internationalisation is not contained in itself but should be analysed in relation to other levels, including institutional, sector and national and supra-national

levels. All these levels might contribute to a more quality-based and process-oriented approach to internationalisation.

2.4 The Changing Context of Chinese Students in the UK

2.4.1 The Changing Driver for Internationalisation in the UK

According to Gu and Schweisfurth (2010), from the second decade of the 21st century, rationales for internationalisation at the national level in the UK have become more ideologically-oriented. Such rationales can be reflected in the UK government's stricter immigration policies since 2007 (Home Office, 2015). As immigration policies were tightened, more than 800 sponsor institutions lost their licence from 2010 to 2014 (Blinder, 2014). According to Blinder, from 2010 to 2016, the numbers of international students outside the European Union (EU) continued to decrease despite a slight increase in 2012. In addition, after the Brexit negotiations, the Home Office for the first time tightened their policy on EU students studying in the UK, requiring for higher academic ability and English language competence (Home Office, 2017). This may dampen EU citizens studying and settling in the UK (2017).

However, against the decreasing numbers of non-European students in the UK since 2010, the numbers of Chinese students studying in the UK since 2010 continued to increase (Wang & Miao, 2013b). In 2010, China was the second largest source country of international students in the UK (Home Office, 2015). In 2012, China surpassed India to become the largest sending country of international students in the UK (Wang & Miao, 2013b). The numbers of Chinese students studying in the UK topped 78,715, a 16.9% increase compared with the figure from 2010 to 2011 (2013b).

There are three possible explanations for this seemingly contradictory phenomenon. First, on the UK side, the country remains one of the top study destinations for Chinese students (Wang & Miao, 2013b). According to the report from the Universities UK International (2017), the UK is the first choice for international students, and international student satisfaction in the UK remains high every year. The good reputation of UK education might be a

crucial factor in continuing to attract Chinese students pursuing degrees in the country. Second, China has witnessed rapid economic growth and has a growing political presence in the world. Political and economic cooperation as well as the rise of the middle-class in China has opened wider access to education in the UK (BBC, 2015). Third, in terms of rationales for studying abroad, different from students who want to gain more internship and work opportunities, the rationale behind most Chinese students' studying abroad is to expand their horizon and enhance their intercultural experience (New Oriental Group, 2016).

It has been shown from the above that despite stricter immigration policies towards internationalisation in the UK since 2007, the numbers of Chinese students continued to increase from 2010. Such phenomenon brings to the fore the new characteristics of Chinese students and student returnees today, which will be discussed in the next section in the demographic shift of Chinese student returnees.

2.4.2 The Demographic Shift of Chinese Student Returnees

Research shows that Chinese student returnees generally have three major characteristics. The first characteristic is their relatively high socio-economic status in China. According to Wang and Miao (2013b), there were 523,700 Chinese students studying abroad, with only 25,900 students being government-funded and 16,000 institution-funded. The remaining 481,800 students studying abroad were self-funded (Ministry of Education, 2016). Although the numbers of Chinese students in the UK account for almost 14% for 2011-2012 (Wang & Miao, 2013b), access to internationalisation remains unequal in China (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011). According to UNESCO (2010), just under 40% of the population had direct access to tertiary education in China. Wang and Miao (2013b) defined Chinese students studying abroad as either 'socio-economic elite' or 'the educated elite'.

Second, there is a trend of Chinese students returning to China after studying in the UK (Wang & Miao, 2016). According to the Ministry of Education (2016), there was a double increase in the numbers of Chinese students studying abroad and students returning to China. The numbers of Chinese students studying

abroad increased by 3.97%, whereas those returning to China increased by 5.72%. The gap between outbound and inbound students gradually narrowed, with the annual outbound/inbound population ratio falling from 1.28:1 in 2015 to 1.26:1 in 2016. According to Wang and Miao (2016), the general motivation for most Chinese students returning to China includes a sound market environment and advantageous policies for business start-ups and innovations, better job opportunities for Chinese student returnees, and the convenience of living in a Chinese way.

Finally, Chinese students studying abroad have higher physical and social mobility in this new era of globalisation. Studying abroad is not 'separation from loved ones in life or death' anymore as for many Chinese in the past. At the same time, return may not be a final return forever. This is due to the consideration that a new source of mobility i.e. virtual mobility is emerging (Rizvi, 2005). According to Rizvi, boosted by communication technology, virtual mobility questions early conceptualisations on the 'brain drain' of skilled workers. He argues that under the new conceptual framework of transnationalism, it is necessary to reconsider individuals' 'identity, national affiliations, and deterritorialisation of cultures' (2005, p.175).

2.5 Summary: Bringing back to the Fore of Students' Voices in Internationalisation

Before proceeding to the next chapter, it is important to review all four sections in this chapter. The first section addresses the larger context of globalisation. Three conceptualisations of globalisation were explained, including the hyper-global, sceptic, and transformationalist approaches. This researcher's stand is for the third approach to globalisation in that there will be implications for the internationalisation of higher education and people may face challenges and uncertainties in this new era. After setting the scene for the larger context, the second section then explains internationalisation of higher education in globalisation, wherein the relationship between internationalisation and globalisation as well as the conceptualisation of internationalisation were addressed. The section argues that despite the trend of globalisation,

internationalisation is free to make choices on its own development. This argument then leads to the third section, which focuses on the challenges to internationalisation. In particular, three major challenges on equality and equity, quality and commitment were explored further. Taken together, these challenges indicate that more attention should be given to the individual level of approaches to internationalisation. Special attention should be given to international students studying abroad, especially with regard to their changes in identity and the role of their agency in responding to the changing society. Finally, before reviewing the literature on Chinese students' living and studying experiences in the UK, the changing context in the UK as well as the shifting demographic profiles of Chinese student returnees are addressed. Given renewed focus on students' intercultural experiences, their voices and their changes in identity at the individual level, it is necessary to review the literature regarding the relationship between identity and students' sojourn and homecoming experience, which will be further addressed in the next literature review chapter.

Chapter Three Literature Review on Identity and Transnationalism

3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter aims to establish the literature foundation for this study on transnational identity of Chinese student returnees. The chapter begins by conceptualising identity based on the existing relevant literature. Following the conceptualisation of identity, the second section reviews the literature on students' sojourn experiences and student returnees' homecoming experience in relation to their identity changes. Finally, based on the first two sections, the third section addresses identity through the lens of transnationalism. In particular, the appropriateness of using 'transnational' to describe identity in this study as well as the relationship between transnationalism and identity will be discussed. Towards the end of this chapter, research gaps and limitations will be identified to direct the future orientation of this study.

3.2 The Conceptualisation of Identity

The word 'identity' is often used rampantly so that people have a misconception of it: identity is supposedly understood without explanation. People tend to use identity in many ways such as professional identity, gender identity and self-identity but there is no scholarly consensus as to what identity is. Based on my understanding of the field, there are three major ways of conceptualising identity represented by three groups of people. These three conceptualisations on identity echo some scholarly views on identity (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008; Hall, 1996). Among all three conceptualisations, the researcher aims to find her own position. Though this study does not attempt to have a conceptual framework about transnational identity before the fieldwork, the researcher views that understanding how identity is conceptualised in the existing literature would serve as a starting point for understanding the meaning of transnational identity in the fieldwork.

3.2.1 Three Major Ways of Conceptualising Identity

The first main way of conceptualising identity is the essentialist approach. The essentialist approach was explained by Cartwright (1968) as possessing the essential. According to Hall (1996), the essentialists viewed that human beings only had one core and permanent self throughout history. For individuals, the essentialists viewed individuals as having one centred and unchanged identity (Spelman, 1988). For social groups, the essentialists regarded that one group might be fundamentally different from the other because of its social and cultural characteristics (1988). One of the essentialist views is cultural essentialism (Grimshaw, 2010). In relation to Chinese students, cultural essentialists might view Chinese students as collectively the same, possessing some common social and cultural characteristics.

Different from the first main approach, the second main approach is symbolic interactionism to identity, represented by Cooley (1964) and Mead (1934). They both viewed that identity was constantly changing in social interactions. Mead (1934) argued that self was a social process which contains both 'I' and 'Me'. In Mead's opinion, 'I' referred to the born characteristics of self, while 'me' was the social self. Mead (1934) regarded 'I' and 'Me' as interrelated and they could not be separated from each other. He argued that self was changing through social interactions with the others. Cooley (1964) used the 'looking glass self' to reflect how people's identity was shaped by their assumption of their identity in the eyes of others. In the 'looking glass self', the assumed others' perception served as a 'mirror', through which people could better understand themselves and their identity. Cooley also noted there would be no self if there was no interaction. When comparing symbolic interactionism to essentialism, although symbolic interactionism acknowledged the inner core of each individual, it focused on identity in social interaction with others (Hall, 1996). The complexity of modernity asked individuals to constantly change themselves through social interactions (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008). In this sense, identity can be seen in a continuous interplay between individuals and the larger social context (Hawkins, 2005).

The third approach is a post-modern or post-structural approach to identity (Hall, 1996; Zhang & Guo, 2015). If the symbolic interactionist approach concentrates on the interactional dimension of identity, a post-modern or post-structural approach regards identity as changing between multiple selves (Zhang and Guo, 2015). Two distinctive features marked the trend of this approach. The first feature was change. Compared to the symbolic interactionist approach which viewed identity as unified and predictable in social interactions, the post-modern and post-structural approach considered identity as fragmented and discontinued (Bauman, 1996; Hall, 1996). The second feature was a possibility. In an increasingly complex social world, individuals might face more risks and opportunities in their life resulting changes in their identity (Giddens, 1991). To explain how individuals have been transformed by late-modernity, Bauman (1996) made a distinction between 'tourists' and 'pilgrims'. In his eyes, individuals in the past were 'pilgrims' who hold a firm belief in an established society. However, individuals in the late-modernity were tourists strolling around the globe and changing themselves in a range of educational, social and cultural backgrounds.

Taking all the three conceptualisations of identity together, a fundamental question lies in whether identity should be viewed as single or multiple. The essentialist and symbolic interactionist approach views identity as single, while the post-modern or post-structural approach regards identity as multiple. Being fully aware of arguments on both sides, the researcher regards there being no right or wrong choice in terms of selecting identity or identities. However, given the context of internationalisation of higher education and globalisation, the researcher prefers to view identity as a whole, comprising various dimensions that are constantly changing and interacting with each other in the social identification process.

More importantly, the existing literature indicates that it was the capacity of individuals negotiating their identity in different contexts that shaped their identity (Taylor, 1989; Hall, 1996). Taylor (1989) argues that it is the capacity of individuals of being true to themselves that characterizes their identity. Hall (1996, p.2) contends that studying identity is not merely a study of 'subjectivity'

itself but an examination into the 'discursive practice' of individuals. That is to say, in Hall's views, it is the agency in action that plays the critical role in influencing identity.

Given the complex nature of identity, the researcher prefers to use 'identity' over 'identities' throughout the whole thesis. As Hall argues (1996, p.2), identity cannot always be "'won' or 'lost', sustained or abandoned". Human beings are not robots that can manage their multiple sense of selves. Instead, it may be the mixed conception of self in constant change compounded by the agency's response influencing the changes in identity. As the researcher views identity as a whole, comprising various dimensions that are constantly changing and interacting with each other, the next section summarises four dimensions of identity for identification with regard to this study.

3.2.2 Four Dimensions of Identity

From my understanding of the field, four major dimensions are deemed relevant to identity for this study. The first dimension is language competence and intercultural competence, considered relevant because studying abroad involves using a different set of languages, skills, knowledge and awareness (Byram, 1997) to communicate with people from other countries and cultures. The second is consciousness, identified for the consideration that changes may happen in student returnees' way of thinking after living and studying abroad. The third is values and attitudes, aimed at further exploring any changes in student returnees' way of thinking. Consciousness is abstract and one of the effective ways to understand consciousness may be through expression of values and attitude. The final dimension is behaviours and actions. Considering that studying in the UK may encounter different socio-cultural norms and etiquettes, exploring student returnees' behaviours and actions may be beneficial for understanding their deeper changes in their ways of thinking. Conceptually, the idea holding them together may go back to the researcher's standpoint on identity, whereby identity is a complete and complex whole, comprising multiple dimensions that contribute to a changing sense of self.

Before proceeding to these four major dimensions of identity, it is important to note again that given the researcher's limited understanding of identity before the fieldwork, it might be useful to know some major areas of focus on identity and to serve them as a starting point to compare, evaluate, judge and complement the current understanding of identity and transnational identity. Overall, the researcher thinks that it is better to be guided by a scientific approach to knowledge, rather than being limited by it.

3.2.2.1 Language Competence and Intercultural Competence

As previously noted, competence in this study refers to individuals' capacity to respond to changing socio-cultural contexts. Under the notion of competence, two specific but inter-related concepts are deemed relevant to exploring the transnational identity of Chinese student returnees from the UK. The first is language competence, and the second is intercultural competence. It should be noted that although 'language competence' and 'linguistic competence' have different focuses in meaning, with the former emphasising the capacity to use language as a system for communication and the latter stressing the mastery of the structure of a language (Hunston and Oakey, 2010), they are often used interchangeably in the research literature.

Overall, from the perspective of applied linguistics and English language teaching, since the 1980s, language competence has been subsumed under the broader umbrella of communicative competence. In one of the most influential models in communicative competence, Canale and Swain (1980), who developed the ideas of Hymes (1972), argued that grammar and vocabulary should not be the mere focus in communication. Instead, other dimensions of competence, including sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence and discourse competence, should also be considered (Canale, 1983a, 1983b). Later on, Bachman (1990) expanded the model by separating language competence into organisational competence and pragmatic competence. 'Organisational competence' refers to 'competences involved in language usage' (p.87), while 'pragmatic competence' refers to all the knowledge required for performing 'illocutionary competence' (p.42). By mentioning 'pragmatic competence',

Bachman suggested the importance of relating language use to context in communication.

The focus on the context in which language is used then leads to the second specific concept of intercultural competence, as culture is an essential ingredient for communicative competence (Hunston and Oakey, 2010). In the past 40 years, intercultural competence has been defined and assessed in numerous ways but has never been agreed upon (Collier, 2015; Deardorff, 2015, 2006; Byram, 1997; Lambert, 1994; Bennett, 1993). One significant trend in intercultural competence is the measurement of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Liberman and Gamst, 2015). Under this trend, one of the most influential models was the ICC model proposed by Byram (1997). Although Byram's model was based on the one proposed by Canale and Swain (1980), he added three additional factors for intercultural competence: skills, knowledge and attitude. According to Byram, skills refer to the ability of 'interpreting, relating, discovering and interacting' (1997, p.34-37) with self and other; knowledge refers to not only knowledge about one's specific country and culture, but also knowledge produced in dynamic social interactions; attitude, which is seen as the most important factor, means the ability to 'decentre' (Byram and Nichols, 2001, p.5) to view one's own worldview and perspective.

Beyond the three factors, Byram (1997) also reflected on the complex relationship between intercultural competence and communicative competence. In particular, Byram acknowledged the connection between language and culture by bringing to the fore the interactions of various dimensions of intercultural communicative competence, including linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and intercultural competence. These various dimensions of competence were closely related to the interaction of the five 'savoirs' (p. 34), or an expansion of the three factors of knowledge, skills and attitudes in intercultural communication. What is more important, different from previous scholarly argument on communicative competence (Hymes, 1972; Canale and Swain, 1980), Byram viewed that intercultural communicative competence should also take into account the

individuals' own identity and their ability to discover, negotiate and interact between different cultures and contexts (Byram, 1997).

This interactive view then calls for redefining culture in intercultural competence, which marks another important trend in intercultural competence research (Lieberman and Gamst, 2015). The way culture is interpreted influences how intercultural competence is defined and what individuals are expected to do in certain socio-cultural contexts (Hall, 1997). In the past few decades, many scholars have discussed practical issues of how individuals should adapt or adjust to certain socio-cultural contexts (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013; Li, 2012; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; Lewthwaite, 1996; Bennett, 1993; Ricoeur, 1992; Bakhtin, 1986). For example, Bennett (1993) proposed a development model of intercultural sensitivity, suggesting that the development of intercultural sensitivity was a process of experiencing differences. In particular, one had to go through different phases of development from denial to integration.

It has been widely recognised in the literature that culture should not be seen as unchanging, singular and homogenous (Grimshaw, 2010; Holliday, 2010; Gu & Maley, 2008; Byram, 1997). For example, Grimshaw (2010) argued that cultural essentialism has the danger of looking at Chinese students as homogenous. Gu and Maley (2008) also argued that every Chinese student is different and may react differently to the British socio-cultural context. Considering arguments on both sides, Street (1993) provided a new perspective. He argued that *'culture is a verb':* a *process* that is constantly changing and redefined by social interactions. Hence, in intercultural communication, it is how individuals respond to the changing socio-cultural contexts that matters the most. As Adler argues:

> Communication is like dancing – at least the kind of dancing we do with partners. Like dancing, communication depends on the involvement of a partner. And like good dancing, successful communication can't depend just on the skill of one person. A great dancer who doesn't consider and adapt to

> the skill level of his or her partner can make both of them look bad. (Adler et al., 1998, p.13)

Therefore, it is important to use an interactional, process-based approach to researching and conceptualising intercultural competence (Collier, 2015; Deardorff, 2015). According to Hoff (2014), one should be able to negotiate and seek connections between self and other, rather than highlighting the differences or the uniqueness of a social group or a culture. This view is also echoed in Holliday's (2016a, 2016b) recent articles on intercultural competence, in which he argues that one should be able to 'negotiate blocks and threads' between cultures. More importantly, in light of Giddens's (1990) theory on agency and structure, instead of discussing intercultural competence from the intercultural adaptation and adjustment perspective, it might be useful to focus on how student returnees would respond to different socio-cultural contexts. Similarly, views on the interaction between agency and structure have also been supported by many other scholars (Beciu, Mădroane, Cârlan, & Ciocea, 2017; Tran & Vu, 2017; Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, & Paloniemi, 2013; Welzel & Inglehart, 2010; Biesta & Tedder, 2007). For example, Welzel and Inglehart (2010) argue individuals' different development pathways were dependent on individuals' capacity of responding to both challenges and opportunities.

At this point, and with the focus of this research in mind, it is necessary to clarify the relationship between language competence, intercultural competence and transnationalism; in other words, how language competence and intercultural competence relate to the theory of transnationalism to explain student returnees' experiences across borders.

According to Vertovec (2009), there are three major dimensions of transnationalism, including political dimension (dual-citizenship), economic dimension (sending and receiving of remittances) and socio-cultural dimension (awareness of being 'here' and 'there'). Under the socio-cultural dimension of transnationalism, inter-cultural behavioural competence forms an important part. For Vertovec, intercultural behavioural competence is what can be interpreted as 'a new form of habitus', of responding to different socio-cultural contexts more appropriately and effectively. This habitus can be also defined as

‘cosmopolitanism’ or ‘cosmopolitan competence’ (Vertovec & Cohen, 2002), which specifically refers to the capacity to stay connected in a number of ways across borders. In other words, cosmopolitan competence concerns whether one can maintain transnational connections while fitting into the physically situated place. In this process, language competence and intercultural competence are seen as critical in displaying cosmopolitan competence. Without the ability to negotiate and interact using different sets of language, knowledge and skills, transnational connections, affiliations and movements will be elusive.

Therefore, in light of Steven Vertovec’s view on transnationalism and cosmopolitan competence, it can be said that transnationalism is the mechanism in which intercultural competence operates, and that intercultural competence is the catalyst for which student returnees are able to live and maintain a transnational life. On the one hand, it is transnationalism that gives rise to cosmopolitan competence, under which language competence and intercultural competence play critical parts (Vertovec, 2009). On the other hand, intercultural competence facilitates and enables individuals to maintain movements, connections and affiliations across borders (2009). Overall, it can be argued that there is ‘a positive correlation between the transnationalisation of life worlds and the cosmopolitanisation of attitudes and values’ (Mau, Mewes, & Zimmerman, 2008, p.16-17).

Before proceeding to the next section, it is worth revisiting the various debates in this section. This section begins by reviewing the relationship between language competence and intercultural competence. Then it discusses how intercultural competence has been theorized. By bringing various debates on culture and empirical research in intercultural competence together, the researcher argues that intercultural communication should be seen as changing and interactional, with individuals’ ability to search for connections between cultures at its core. Finally, intercultural competence is discussed in relation to transnationalism. It is seen an essential part of the socio-cultural dimension of transnationalism, and the driving force for which transnational experiences are formed. Following this, the next section will explore the role of consciousness, also an important part of the socio-cultural dimension of transnationalism.

3.2.2.2 Consciousness

Mead (1934) regarded consciousness as a reflection of mind and identity. 'Mind is the sum of our organised processes of consciousness, communication and decision-making' (Jenkins, 2008, p.52). For Jenkins, consciousness and identity were closely related, as consciousness involves the processing of identifying oneself in relation to others through making similarities and differences (2008). Such understanding of the relationship between consciousness and identity has been supported by other prior studies (Diener, 2012; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; W. Wilson, 1967). For example, Diener (2012) argued in one of his most recent publications that people's satisfaction with life and their sense of self was related to how they see themselves in relation to others in their cognition.

As consciousness is an abstract concept, many previous scholars (Mead, 1934; Cooley, 1964; Creighton, 1894; Jenkins, 2008) tried to understand consciousness in relation to human beings' memory and emotions. For example, Locke (1796, cited in Creighton, 1894) considered consciousness and memory as the foundation for identity. Locke believed that if one lost his or her memory, he or she would be a different person. In addition, Cooley (1964) mentioned that emotions have social attributes and are reflections of people's view of their identity in the eyes of others in society. Similarly, Jenkins (2008) viewed that emotion reflects how people see themselves in the social identification process. However, apart from memory and emotions, consciousness could also be interpreted in a more construct manner as a reflection of individuals' self-concept and self-esteem. According to Smith and Mackie (2007), self-concept refers to how individuals perceive themselves, while self-esteem relates to how individuals evaluate themselves, either positively or negatively, comprising people's personal values, attitudes, emotions and so on. In the most recent literature, it was suggested that people's evaluation of themselves, their goals, and aspirations had implications for their adaptation to the changing contexts and conditions (Diener, 2012; Diener et al., 1999). In particular, low satisfaction with life would be predicted should there be a discrepancy between what people wanted to be and the actual context in which they were situated (Wilson, 1967).

Although consciousness was seen as reflection of mind and self (Mead, 1934), it might be subjected to more changes and challenges in late modernity. Giddens (1991a) argued that in the era of late modernity full of opportunities and challenges, individuals had but to constantly reflect on their identity in consciousness to deal with issues related to trust and anxiety. As a result, new types of consciousness have emerged and been documented in the existing literature. According to Vertovec (2009), people would have 'diaspora consciousness' in a transnational context. From Vertovec's interpretation, 'diaspora consciousness' means identifying with more than one place, having double awareness of both 'home away from home' and 'here and there'. Findings on such change in consciousness resonated with other studies (Hall, 1990; Anderson, 1991; Dahinden, 2009). Hall (1990) introduced the concept of 'imaginary coherence' based on the same identity. Similarly, Anderson (1991) proposed the concept of the 'imagined community' based on nationalism. Dahinden (2009) put forward the concept of 'transnational subjectivity' to refer to people's changes in consciousness beyond borders.

In relation to this study, as consciousness has been seen as a reflection of identity, it is important to explore changes in students' consciousness. To capture any changes in consciousness, the researcher will look into consciousness through students' personal values, attitudes, emotional feelings and their views about themselves in relation to others. For consistency in this thesis, and considering the focus on identity in this study, changes in personal values, attitudes and emotional feelings are preferred over self-concept and self-esteem when describing students' changes in their identity. In the next section, the relationship between values and attitudes and identity will be addressed further.

3.2.2.3 Values and Attitudes

In this study, values are defined as the belief of an individual, whereas attitude refers to people's perception under such belief (Rokeach, 1973). To start with, one strand of the literature suggested a close relationship between values, attitudes and the acceptance of a culture (Bulhan, 1978; Feather, 1980; Pruitt, 1978; Smolicz, 1981). Better acceptance of the values, attitudes and behaviours

in a foreign society might positively influence the level of adjustment in that context (Bulhan, 1978; Pruitt, 1978; Feather, 1980). For example, Bulhan (1978) argued that those African students who were more oriented towards the American culture adapted better than those who were not. On the contrary, a rejection of the values and attitudes of a society might lead to negative influence on identity (Smolicz, 1981). Smolicz argued that rejection of the core values of a culture might lead to exclusion, as the core values might serve as a bridge, linking individuals and a particular society (1981).

However, contradicting the previous literature on the close relationship between identity, values, attitudes and the individuals' levels of adaptation in different societies, another strand of literature tended to argue for an indirect impact of values and attitudes on individuals' level of adaptation to a foreign society (Ward & Searle, 1991; Güngör, 2007). In the Ward and Searle (1991) study, out of their expectation, they did not find a strong link between values, attitudes and people's psychological and socio-cultural adaptation to a foreign society. Similarly, Güngör (2007) also found no direct impact of values and attitudes on people's level of adaptation. Instead, he viewed that the role of values and attitudes in the process of adaptation to a foreign society was only peripheral.

Based on these two strands in the literature, this study stands in line with a third strand, stressing the importance of people's capacity to respond to the foreign society driven by their values and attitudes (Inglehart, 1977; Inglehart, Foa, Peterson, & Welzel, 2008). For example, more recently, Welzel and Inglehart (2010) proposed the Value-Strategy Link to suggest the close relationship between people's values and their response to changing societies. For Welzel and Inglehart, different values would prompt different strategies in responding to the changing social circumstances (2010). However, people's values and attitudes were not completely free from the influence of the larger society (Coleman, 1990; Elias, 2004; Maryanski & Turner, 1992). When values and attitudes do not fit with the situated social context, it is people' capacity to adapt to the new life model that made a difference in their life (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010).

Taking together all three strands of literature, the researcher assumed that values and attitudes might play an important part in shaping students' sojourn experiences and student returnees' homecoming experience. However, further study is needed to examine the relationship more between student returnees' values and attitudes and their capacity of responding to the changing society.

3.2.2.4 Behaviours and Actions

According to Mead (1934), mind can be interpreted behaviourally. Regarding the relationship between body and mind, the relationship between 'habitus' and 'hexis' may shed some light on the relationship between mind and body (Bourdieu, 1977). 'Habitus' can be interpreted as 'the way of acting, feeling, thinking and being' (Grenfell, 2012, p.51), while 'hexis' is political mythology realized, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition, the durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of feeling and thinking.' (Bourdieu, 1977, p.69). For Jenkins (2002), 'habitus' and 'hexis' are closely related and are bridges linking human beings with the society. It is through the body that human beings express their way of thinking, behaving and living in a particular society (2002).

Giddens (1991a) further notes the importance of the dialectical relationship between body and self. In his opinion, 'body' as compared to 'self' is less complex, but 'body' is not just a fixed object or an entity. Instead, it is an 'action system, a mode of praxis, and its practical immersion in the interactions of day-to-day life is an essential part of the sustaining of a coherent sense of self-identity' (1991a, p.99). Giddens proposes two concepts related to body. The first is 'bodily appearance' which means the clues on body which people identify themselves from the others. The second is 'demeanour' which means how the body would react to certain contexts and situations. However, in Giddens' view, responding to different contexts and situations with changing 'bodily appearance' and 'demeanour' does not mean individuals will have multiple sense of selves. Rather, as viewed by Giddens, individuals could maintain a coherent identity through linkages between mind and body.

Drawing on the relationship between identity and body in the existing literature, this research will explore how body reflects identity, and see if there is an

inseparable link between body, mind and identity. Hence, it may be useful to include behavioural changes as part of the investigation into student returnees' transnational identity changes. Taking all these four arguments as a whole, if we see the four major dimensions as the bone or structure of identity, the process in which these four major dimensions are negotiated in students' experiences across borders is the flesh and blood. In line with the researcher's standpoint on identity as explained in 3.2.1, one cannot understand these dimensions as permanent and static. Therefore, from the researcher's understanding of the field, some major considerations for the social identification process will be discussed in the following section.

3.2.3 Identity in the Identification Process in this Study

3.2.3.1 Agency and Structure

Structure was generally defined as patterned relationships which have an impact on individual actions (Barker, 2005). For Giddens (1984), structure was referred to as the governing laws and opportunities that bind human beings throughout different time and space. Agency was interpreted as the capacity to respond to both individually and collectively in a designated context with aim and purpose (Tran & Vu, 2017, p.4). It can be seen as the individuals' way of charting their lives through choices and actions (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, & Paloniemi, 2013). As argued by Archer (2009), the relationship between agency and structure plays an indispensable part in shaping our understanding of the nature of a society. Hence, understanding the relationship between agency and structure will be crucial in understanding student returnees' identity changes in the social identification process.

However, previous scholars formed different tribes with regard to the relationship between agency and structure. Such differences were mainly due to different ontological perspectives of the formation of the society. Generally, according to the researcher's understanding of the existing literature, there were three main tribes in perceiving agency and structure. The first tribe, represented by Émile Durkheim, and Karl Max, underscores the importance of the inevitable social forces in shaping individuals' choices and actions. Durkheim (1982, p.6-

7) regarded ‘social fact’ as the external social forces in the ‘socialisation of human being’. Max (1978, p.247) also viewed that society was not simply constructed by individual actions but the total sum of human relationships.

Different from the first tribe focusing on the external social forces, the second tribe underlines the role of individuals or agents in social interactions. This tribe was largely represented by the symbolic interactionism (Cooley, 1902; Mead. Mead (1934) considered that social interactions involved the exchange of symbols, with meanings assigned to people, things and objects. In the exchange of symbols, it was the individuals’ own interpretations that influenced individual actions (Blummer, 1969). For Blummer, our actions were dependent on how we interpreted the meanings or with whom we interacted. The society was viewed and interpreted subjectively by different people (1969). Under symbolic interactionism, individuals were not passive agents in the external social forces, but positive agents in resisting and shaping the social reality (Goffman, Hughes, Dalton and Schein, 1989). Individuals achieve positive agents by making similarities and differences between people (1989).

The third tribe aims to bridge the gap between agency and structure by considering them interrelated. The close relationship between agency and structure indicated a renewed thinking on the definition of agency and structure and their influences on each other. Regarding structure, Giddens (1984, p.121) viewed that ‘social structures are both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time are the very medium of this constitution’. Social structures or the patterned social relationships, can be explained by Jenkins’ (2008) three levels of interaction at individual, interactional and institutional levels. Individual level refers to what went on in one’s mind; interactional order means how the individual interacted with the nearby social groups; institutional order pertains to the overarching organisational influence on identity. As individuals cannot form social relationships in their minds or by themselves, structures in this study mainly refer to patterned relationships at social group level (interactions between individuals), institutional level (individuals’ interaction with institutions such as universities, churches, organisations and the working environment), and society level (individuals with the society at large). Society

level is adopted here to refer to the total sum of interactions at these different levels (Abercrombie, 2006).

Under this renewed thinking on structure, agency is seen as the capacity to respond to the changing structures (Ahearn, 2001). The role of agency in responding to society has been addressed in much recent literature (Dolfsma & Verburg, 2008; Marginson, 2014; Beciu, Mădroane, Cârlan, & Ciocea, 2017; Tran & Vu, 2017; Welzel & Inglehart, 2010). For example, Marginson (2014) proposed the notion of 'self-formation' as an alternative reference to agency in the face of challenges and opportunities. Tran and Vu (2017) argued there are different kinds of agency in responding to the changing society. Specifically, the different kinds of agency include 'agency as becoming', 'needs-response agency', 'agency as struggle and resistance' and 'collective agency for contestation' (2017). In a transnational context, agency had a role to play in shaping transnational communication and connections (Beciu et al., 2017).

Overall, taking together the renewed thinking on agency and structure, this study stands in line with Giddens (1984b) and Ah (1986) on the correlation of agency and structure. In Giddens' (1984b) proposal in his structuration theory, agency and structure were seen as both 'medium' and 'outcome'. Therefore, the various structures in which student returnees are situated, as well as student returnees' capacity of responding to the changing society, may have new implications for the identification process.

3.2.3.2 Role and Identity

This sub-section explores the relationship between role and identity in the social identification process. It views that role and identity are interrelated. On the one hand, people's identity changes may influence their preference for a certain role in the society (Bourdieu, 1977). On the other, individuals' identity may be different when changing into different professional roles in society (Erikson, 1950). It will also vary with different social positions in society (DeLamater & Ward, 2013).

As established in the last section on the relationship between agency and structure, various structures are formed by different levels of interaction

between individuals, social groups, institutions and societies. According to DeLamater and Ward (2013), individuals' social positions play a crucial role in shaping these different levels of structure. In their view, such positions are closely associated with roles, as people act out their positions through certain roles and pattern social relationships. In addition, people will have expectations for certain roles and positions. Furthermore, social positions are related to social networks, a sum of interrelation of social groups in the society (2013).

Looking more deeply, the duality of relationship of role and identity can be illustrated by the theory of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). In *An Outline of the Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu proposed 'habitus' alongside two other concepts of 'field' and 'capital' and saw the three as interacting with each other (1977). 'Field' was seen as a sum of the relationships, networks and roles in a social domain. 'Capital' was described as the available resources in the field which agents can use. 'Habitus' was what agents could produce in their respective fields with the use of available capitals. In this process, the roles of agents or how agents perceived their roles were important, as it might decide what resources they would draw upon and what response they would have (1977).

If Bourdieu addressed the relationship between role and identity from the social perspective, then Erikson (1950, 1956) was concerned with the interplay between role changing and identity in people's different phases of life. According to Erikson, people starting their jobs may experience an identity crisis and role confusion, as they have to develop new relationships with the larger society. For Erikson, identity crisis and role confusion can be seen as people's active exploration into their meaning of themselves and their life. With Erikson's argument in mind, identity crisis with role changing may not be limited only to student returnees, but common to every individual living in society.

These major arguments on role and identity bring to the fore the importance of role changing and its implication to identity. In relation to this study, student returnees may change their roles in every different phase of their life throughout their journeys in the UK and China. First, Chinese students change from being Chinese students in Chinese society to Chinese student migrants in British

society. Second, as they return to China, they change again from being Chinese student migrants in British society to Chinese student returnees in Chinese society. Finally, as they start work, they also change from students to their professional role in society. These may all have implications on their sojourn and homecoming experience.

3.2.3.3 Individual and Collective Identity

According to Jenkins (2008), identity is made meaningful in the social identification process of making similarities and differences between 'self and others' and 'us' and 'we'. From another perspective, identity is not only about how to distinguish one individual from the other, but also concerns how to differentiate one group from the other (2008). This was especially the case in the toing and froing of Chinese student returnees between the British and the Chinese societies.

For Rouse (1995), collective identity refers to the sameness among a group of people. With regard to the existing literature, there are many different and overlapping expressions of such sameness. One expression is national identity (Hall, 1996), rooted in cultures, ethnicities, customs, traditions, languages and so on. Anderson (1991) also uses the 'imagined communities' to describe the common collective national identity. Such common and collective identity does not inherently exist when we are born but is imposed on us through the social identification process (Gellner, 1984). National identity is aroused when people face discrimination or violation of their rights as a whole (Rouse, 1995). In that case, people sharing the same collective identity will unite to defend their rights (1995).

The interplay between individual and collective identity indicates how people identify themselves among individuals and groups through categorisation (Jenkins, 2008). According to Holliday (2013), people would define themselves by drawing boundaries with others in the changing society. However, as argued by Jenkins, one should be careful when it comes to interpreting similarities and differences, as both concepts are not 'objectively real', but 'constructions or attributions of similarity and difference' in the interpretations of every

individual (2008, p.23). For Jenkins, in terms of similarities, or the form of similarities as solidarity, belonging and community, one should be alert to these similarities being more politically oriented and live in one's imagination. On the other hand, the concept of similarity lies in the fundamental assumption that there are inherent differences in individual and collective identity (2008). Hence, we should not fall into the trap of losing the sight of a more comprehensive and contextualised perspective of social and cultural phenomenon.

Due to the nature of this study on student returnees' experiences across borders, it may involve issues of how students identify themselves in relation to other Chinese students and people of different countries and cultures in the UK. As students return to China, it may concern how they identify themselves in relation to other local Chinese and people from different countries and cultures. In light of Jenkins, and Holliday, it would be interesting to see how students draw boundaries between other individuals and groups and how such boundaries change with time and space.

3.3 Identity in Students' Sojourn and Homecoming Experiences

This section reviews the literatures on students' sojourn experiences and student returnees' homecoming experience in relation to identity. According to the researcher's understanding of the existing literature, there are three major perspectives of seeing students' sojourn experiences, and student returnees' homecoming experience. The first is the social, cultural and cognitive perspective. It focuses on challenges and difficulties encountered by students and student returnees due to discrepancies in values, attitudes and socio-cultural norms. The second is the intercultural perspective, which looks into students and student returnees' changes in intercultural competence and identity as a result of their intercultural experiences. The third is the transnational perspective. This perspective pays particular attention to society spanning across borders, in which students' and student returnees' identity is negotiated. To help the reader to have a clearer view of the three major perspectives and their characteristics, Table 3.1 is presented below. The three perspectives are arranged one by one, each having further explanation in their study areas, key arguments on identity, major researchers, main research methods, strengths and

weaknesses. These three major perspectives run throughout the literature on both students' sojourn experiences and student returnees' homecoming experience.

In the following sub-sections, the literature on students' sojourn experiences is reviewed first, before reviewing that concerning student returnees' homecoming experience. Towards the end of each literature review sub-section, a transnational perspective of connecting between sojourn and homecoming experience is proposed. Limitations in the existing literature and future research orientation are identified.

Three major perspectives into students' sojourn and homecoming experiences in relation to identity						
Perspective	Study Area	Keys Arguments on Identity	Major Researchers	Main Methods	Strengths	Weaknesses
Social, cultural and cognitive perspective	Culture shock and reverse culture shock	The relationship between identity and acculturation strategies (Berry, 1997)	Erikson (1950); Oberg (1960); Berry (1997); Ward & Searle (1991); Ward & Kennedy (1993)	Quantitative analysis; qualitative study; observation	Bring to the fore the importance of culture and people's negative feelings in association with adapting to a foreign society and re-adapting to home society	Cultural essentialism; overlook challenges not in culture; lose sight of the connection between cultures, as well as sojourns and returnees' own capacity of responding to the changing contexts
Intercultural perspective	Changes in intercultural competence and identity in interaction with a different social, cultural and academic context; Changes in identity and outcomes in re-adapting to the home society	Intercultural personhood (Kim, 2008)	Gill (2007); Gu & Brooks (2008); Gu and Schweisfurth (2006); Gu (2009); Gu (2010); Grimshaw (2010); Kim (2008)	Qualitative interviews; Mixed method of qualitative interviews and survey questionnaires;	Avoid cultural essentialism by preventing seeing students and student returnees' experiences as related to culture only	Focus on students' and student returnees' motivation and willingness rather than their agency in responding to foreign society; not presenting a complex picture of students' identity negotiated in increasingly overlapping time and space
Transnational perspective	Plural society created by transnational education; Changes in students' identity in complex and interconnected social-cultural contexts	Transnational identity; 'Translanguaging identity' (Li & Zhu, 2015)	Gu and Schweisfurth (2015); Li and Zhu (2015); Tran and Vu (2017);	Mixed-method; qualitative Interviews; observations	Bringing together different societies beyond national borders; recognizing the role of agency	Unclear distinction between different forms of transnationalism, and the interplay between agency and structure

Table 3.1 Three major perspectives into students' sojourn and homecoming experiences in relation to identity

3.3.1 Identity and Students' Sojourn Experience

In the 1960s-70s, students' overseas study experiences were understood in terms of psychological and socio-cultural adjustment to the host countries (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Psychological adjustment refers to how well individuals accept a foreign society (Ward & Searle, 1991). The most widely addressed topic of psychological adjustment is 'culture shock' (Oberg, 1960), which refers to the negative feelings associated with the loss of familiar signs and symbols in a foreign society. Socio-cultural adjustment refers to the depth of interaction with the values, attitudes and behaviours of a society (Ward & Searle, 1991). Socio-cultural adjustment views difficulties experienced by individuals as lack of further interaction with the foreign society culture (1991).

The process of psychological and socio-cultural adjustment was interpreted by Berry (1997) as acculturation. Several factors were identified affecting the severity of acculturation and the acculturative stress (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). These factors include the underpinning ideology of the larger society, different types of acculturation group (such as refugees, immigrants, students), the mode of the acculturation group (characterised by voluntary or involuntary, or sedentary or mobile), and variations in the demographic, psychological and social characteristics (Berry et al., 1987). For students in particular, Berry et al. (1987) note the relationship between "push" and "pull" factors to the process of acculturation. The "push" factors include running away from an unpleasant situation at home and poor academic performance. The "pull" factors relate to higher academic reputation of universities abroad and personal growth.

To cope with the challenges prompted by psychological and socio-cultural adjustment to a foreign society, several strategies were proposed. According to Oberg (1960), for individuals to engage with the locals in the host country, speaking the language used by the locals is crucial. In his opinion, by being able to communicate in that foreign language, sojourners would not only feel confident but also feel they are part of the group and the culture. Apart from language competence, Berry et al. (1987) put forward four acculturation

strategies: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalisation. These different strategies indicate how individuals see themselves in relation to the host country and culture. Assimilation means adopting new values, attitudes and behaviours by abandoning those of the past to adapt fully to a society. Separation means maintaining traditional values, attitudes and behaviours by rejecting interaction with the host country and culture. Marginalisation means maintaining traditional values, attitudes and behaviours because of being discriminated and excluded from the majority group in the society. Finally, integration means balancing between different values, attitudes and behaviours from both home and host country and cultures.

Looking deeply, this previous literature suggested that identity was dogmatic and negative in responding to the changing society. With this limitation in mind, a new strand of literature began to explore students' identity changes in the intercultural learning process (Gill, 2007; Grimshaw, 2010; Gu & Brooks, 2008; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006, 2010; Gu, 2009; Kim, 2008). These studies not only focused on students' social and cultural adaptation to a foreign society, but also to some challenges beyond culture. For example, Gu and Brooks (2008) explained Chinese students' confusion over plagiarism and their lack of understanding of the British educational approach. In addition, these studies assumed that students' identity would be changed by dealing with stress at the start of adapting to the foreign society. Kim (2008, p.363) proposed a 'stress-adaptation-growth' model to indicate the challenges students might go through before having profound changes in their identity.

To deal with these challenges, several strategies were proposed. At the individual level, students are recommended to improve their foreign language competence (Lv, 2013). At group level, it is suggested that Chinese students should interact with home and other international students to improve their intercultural competence (Wang, Harding, & Mai, 2012), while bonding with co-nationals to maintain their traditional Chinese values, attitudes and behaviours (Gu, 2009). In addition, it is also suggested that Chinese students could get support from some institutions such as churches to enhance their intercultural experiences (Li, 2012). The outcomes for most students are

positive. There are profound changes in students' intercultural competence and personal growth (Gu, 2009; Gu & Maley, 2008; Gill, 2007; Kim, 2008). Kim (2008) argues that students will develop 'intercultural personhood' as a result of their overseas study experiences.

While acknowledging the merit of these studies of seeing identity and students' sojourn experiences through the intercultural lens, there were also some weaknesses. For this strand of the literature, although several strategies were proposed to facilitate students' adaptation to a foreign society, they did not fully explain the differences in students' response to the changing society. Most studies regarded that it was students' motivation and willingness to adapt to the foreign society that made the difference (Gill, 2007; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006). However, there was no further explanation as to why students are motivated and willing to engage with the foreign society and the variations among students.

Given these limitations, a third strand of literature focusing on identity in a transnational context emerged (Castles, 2002; Waters, 2008; Hons, Li, & Zhu, 2013; Zhang & Guo, 2015; Li & Zhu, 2015; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2016; Tran & Vu, 2017). For example, Castles (2002) proposed a transnational approach in understanding migrants and their social networks. Li and Zhu (2015) explored how students in the UK negotiated their identity in different languages. Gu and Schweisfurth (2016) argue how increased student mobility influences the shaping of students' identity changes. The strength of these studies brings together different societies across national borders. Yet the use of the word 'transnational' still acknowledges the remaining influence of nation states in shaping individuals' identity.

However, what distinguished these current studies from prior studies was their focus on students' agency in responding to the changing society. For example, Tran and Vu (2017) argue that agency plays a central role in shaping students' identity changes in a different society. Not only does agency play a critical role, the interplay between agency and structure is also critical to whether agency will succeed in responding to the designated context and situation (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). Except for the relationship between agency and structure, it is also indicated that students' expectations and goals of achievement are also

closely associated with the quality of overseas study (Quan, He, & Sloan, 2016; Yang, Webster, & Prosser, 2011).

3.3.2 Identity and Students' Homecoming Experience

Similar to the last sub-section, the first and the earliest way of interpreting students' homecoming experience is under the assumption of 'reverse culture shock' (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). As with 'culture shock', 'reverse culture shock' refers to 'the process of readjusting, re-acculturating, and re-assimilating into one's own home environment after living in a different culture for a significant period of time' (Gaw, 2000, p.83-4).

Under the assumption of 'reverse culture shock', a series of negative feelings, challenges and difficulties experienced by student returnees were reported (Gaw, 2000; Butcher, 2002; Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Ma, 2010; Cao, 2007). Challenges include the difficulties in finding a job in China (Hao & Welch, 2012; Hal & Welch, 2016), and limited use of knowledge and experiences from abroad in the Chinese society (McGrath, Stock, & Butcher, 2007). In addition, Cao (2007) identified returnees' frustration in dealing with *Guan Xi* (relationships with social groups), aggression towards student returnees from local colleagues, and disconnection with international counterparts. On top of these, factors including environmental pollution, crowdedness, no respect for personal privacy, politeness and peer pressure also contribute to challenges and difficulties in the homecoming experience (Gill, 2010).

There are many reasons behind student returnees' encountered challenges and difficulties. One of the main reasons identified by most researches was changes in self and identity (Gaw, 2000; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Sussman, 2002). Sussman (2002) tested 113 American teachers who returned from Japanese sojourns based on the Cultural Identity Model (CIM) and found that there was no correlation between overseas adaptation and re-adaptation process. Instead, cultural identity plays the fundamental role in affecting returnees' homecoming experience. In particular, Sussman explained that weak identification with the home country would cause more challenges and difficulties, while strong identification with the home country will help facilitate the re-adaptation to the

home country and culture. In addition to identity, Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) argue that the main difference between culture shock and reverse culture shock lies in expectation, as returnees may expect fewer or no difficulties when returning to their home country and culture. Therefore, returnees are often left unprepared when faced with challenges and difficulties in their homecoming experience (1963).

Looking deeply into the aforementioned literature, and in relation to identity, the studies tend to see identity as narrowing down after sojourn experiences (Haines, 2012). However, different from these prior studies, there were also those arguing for the expansion of identity as a result of living and studying abroad (Haines, 2012; Pritchard, 2010). Haines (2012) claimed that overseas study not only poses challenges but also opportunities as students are more aware of everything in themselves. Pritchard (2010) reported that student returnees in his research experienced few challenges and difficulties in their homecoming experience because they had clear professional goals. Sussman (2002) argued that there are four different types of identity among returnees: affirmative identity, subtractive identity, additive identity and global identity. Affirmative identity refers to returnees who have strong emotional attachment to home culture. Subtractive identity refers to those who have low emotional attachment to home culture. Additive identity refers to those returnees who have different cultural identity in different cultural contexts. Global identity refers to those who identity with no particular country and culture. These researchers tend to see that there are multiple identities and the sojourn experience can add or take away some identities.

In dealing with the expansion and loss of identity, several strategies were proposed. First, it is suggested that returnees should make readjustments to their expectations for their personal and professional lives in their homecoming experience (Gross & Connor, 2007; McGrath et al., 2007). Second, it is indicated that student returnees should balance between different values, attitudes and norms on return (McGrath et al., 2007; Pritchard, 2010). Pritchard (2010) mentioned returnees negotiating between ‘modernism’ and ‘traditionalism’, as well as between ‘individualism’ and ‘collectivism’. Third, it

is also advised that student returnees who looked for jobs by themselves tend to find jobs at transnational companies, as their knowledge, skills and awareness are more suited to foreign companies (McGrath et al., 2007).

In the most recent literature, there is a new trend of interpreting student returnees' identity change as more complex than simply loss or gain under transnationalism (Vertovec, 2009; King & Christou, 2011). This strand of literature mainly examines the transnational connections, competencies and identities of student returnees (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2016). In terms of transnational communication and connections, Chen (2008) generalized returnees in Beijing Zhongguancun (ZGC) Science Park into four main categories: transnationalism with strong local connections (type one); transnationalism with weak local connections (type two); non-transnationalism with strong local connections (type three); and non-transnationalism with weak local connections (type four). In his view, the majority of Chinese are marked by both weak transnational and local connections. In terms of competence, consciousness and identity, Gu and Schweisfurth (2016) identified Chinese student returnees as changing towards a double awareness, interaction with various social groups, a broadened worldview, international awareness, communication and professional skills, and fundamental changes in identity. Taken together, identity is seen as transformation in consciousness, competence and connections rather than an expansion of various forms of identities (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2016). Changes in these aspects contribute to the shaping of a more complex sense of identity (Moore & Barker, 2012; Sterling & Pang, 2013).

Through the lens of transnationalism, student returnees continue to display a positive influence of China and its communication with the outside world (Chen, 2008; Gross & Connor, 2007; Han, 2013; Zweig & Wang, 2013). One reason might be student returnees may bring knowledge, networks, ideas and technology back to their home country (Chen, 2008; Gross & Connor, 2007). Zweig and Wang (2013) also argue that Chinese returnees play a positive role in representing China to the outside world and may contribute considerably to international trade and businesses. According to McGrath et al. (2007), student

returnees may serve as foreign diplomats in connecting internationally, especially between home and host countries and cultures.

To summarise, 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 review the relevant literature regarding students' sojourn and homecoming experience. However, as shown from the above arguments, and taking into account the larger context of globalisation, it might be that students' sojourn and homecoming experience were no longer completely isolated from each other. Instead, a new perspective linking students' sojourn and homecoming experience is needed, which leads to the introduction of transnationalism.

3.4 Connecting the Dots: Identity through the Lens of Transnationalism

3.4.1 The Appropriateness of Using 'Transnational' in this Study

Transnationalism refers to cross-border communication and connections in economic, political and socio-cultural domains (Vertovec, 2001). Regarding the development of transnationalism, it increasingly gained momentum in the 1990s (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Since then, the transnational approach has been used by a host of researchers to describe migrants' various forms of connections and affiliations to both home and host countries (Glick Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992; Rouse, 1991; Vertovec, 2001). In this new era of globalisation, as argued by Levitt and Jaworsky (2007), transnationalism has become one of the most widely used approaches to migration.

Drawing on Vertovec (2006), transnationalism can be expressed in the following dimensions. Politically, transnationalism raises issues concerning political affiliations, dual citizenships and nationalities. Economically, transnationalism refers to transfers of remittances, small businesses and associations which may boost economic development in home and host countries (Cohen, 2011; Dustmann & Mestres, 2010; Conway & Cohen, 1998). Socio-culturally, as argued by Rouse (1995), the framework for understanding im(migrant)s has been transformed from bipolar patterns and localized identity to transnational social networks and a multiple sense of belonging. In other

words, migrants are brought into a social field with time and space being overlapped (Glick-Schiller, Basch, & Szanton Blanc, 1995). The changing society, expressed in the forms of transnational marriages, religious activities, media and commodity consumption, has considerable influence on personal life (Vertovec, 2001). For example, as described by Salih (2003), Moroccan women express their identity by shopping across the borders. For this study in particular, the researcher will mainly concentrate on the socio-cultural dimension of transnationalism and its impact on student returnees' identity changes.

To understand transnationalism better, it is also useful to explore the differences between transnationalism, globalisation and internationalisation. Regarding the relationship between transnationalism and globalisation, transnationalism is a bi-product of globalisation. According to Castles (2002), globalisation has changed the context of migration studies by disseminating transnational linkages. Regarding the relationship between transnationalism and internationalisation, Vertovec (2009) argues that 'international' underscores the flow of people, goods, services and relations between nation states, whereas 'transnational' focuses on the movements and linkages between different countries.

Given the definition of transnationalism, as well as its relationship with globalisation and internationalisation, the reasons for using transnational in this study are three-fold. First and foremost, 'transnational' connects student returnees' sojourn and homecoming experience across the borders. The word 'transnational' can be used to describe the changing and overlapping society in which students live (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004), the social networks and social groups in which students interact (Vertovec, 2009) and the various values, attitudes, behaviours and languages in which students negotiate (Wei, 2011).

Second, while noting the communication and connection between people, countries and cultures, 'transnational' also acknowledges the remaining existence of nation states (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). According to Kivisto (2001), even in this new era of globalisation and the context of transnationalism, nation states are still important. Anderson (1991) notes in the *Imagined Communities* that people will continue to express their nationalism

through the social groups they interact with. Compared with 'global' and 'international', transnational still recognizes the influence of borders on student returnees' identity changes. In relation to this study, students' identity formed in China and their further identity changes in the UK are not separated. In this relationship, the traditional Chinese culture and Chinese nationalism may be influential in how they live their lives in the UK and their further identity changes.

Third, although this study mainly explores the socio-cultural dimension of transnationalism, it will not lose sight of how other dimensions of transnationalism inform the understanding of student returnees' identity changes. In particular, through exploring students' sojourn and homecoming experience, this study also aims to see whether there are other dimensions of transnationalism, as well as how these dimensions interact with each other to shape our understanding of the relationship between transnationalism and student returnees in globalisation. For consideration is the development of communication technology (Francisco, 2015; Lingel, Naaman, & Boyd, 2014; Son, 2015). With more facilitated communication between countries, students' identity changes might be changed and expressed in a virtual world.

From the above, it is suggested that in the new era of globalisation, individuals become more mobile globally (Little & Green, 2009). That is to say, while acknowledging the remaining influence of nation-states, individuals are no longer confined to one place, either physically or socio-culturally. Hence, the researcher shall not lose sight of either students' sojourn or homecoming experiences when trying to explore the meaning of transnational identity. This gives the rationale of conceptualising transnational identity in this thesis.

3.4.2 Towards an Understanding of Transnational Identity: The Relationship between Transnationalism and Identity

As the title suggests, this section intends to define *towards* transnational identity. This is because the researcher did not want to assume the meaning of transnational identity before fieldwork. However, it was necessary to explore the relationship between transnationalism and identity. Transnationalism and

identity, as Vertovec (2001) states, are inherently correlated. On the one hand, transnational identity is the driving force for some individuals to keep transnational networks (2001). That is to say, the reason for keeping transnational communication and connections lies in migrants' improved attention and emotional attachment to both home and host countries (Castles, 2002; Rouse, 1991; Vertovec, 2006). In particular, identity negotiated in transnational social spaces may impact on home and host countries through a 'reconstruction of place and locality' and 'cultural reproduction'(Vertovec, 2006). That is to say, driven by emotional attachment to their home countries, migrants will bring their culture to host countries and rebuild their home cultures in the form of cultural products such as music, arts, books and poems.

On the other hand, in this new era of globalisation, people's identity is shaped and negotiated in the social worlds spanning across the borders (Vertovec, 2001). Even for those locally-established individuals, their identity may also be influenced by the fast flow of goods, services, knowledge and ideas in the new era of globalisation (Dahinden, 2009; Hannerz, 1996). That is to say, some transnational communication and connections may not be driven by identity. Dahinden (2009) makes a distinction between network transnationalism and transnational subjectivity. According to Dahinden, network transnationalism refers to social networks across borders, while transnational subjectivity means people's sense of belonging across borders. This is relevant to this research because in the new era of globalisation, it was impossible for Chinese student returnees to be completely disconnected from one country and culture. Therefore, any possible changes in their social networks and sense of belonging is deemed worthy of exploration.

The interaction between transnationalism and identity can be also interpreted from the relationship between agency and structure. On the one hand, transnational communication and connections driven by personal sense of belonging across borders may underscore the role of agency. Vertovec (2006) views that being transnational is the migrants' own strategic choice of resisting or adapting to where they live. It reveals the importance of migrants' strategic decision in choosing how to live their lives (Foner, 1997, p.23). On the other

hand, identity is changed under transnational spaces as the external structure. As a result, Hannerz (1996) states that people may carry out behaviours that embody social and cultural characteristics of various countries and cultures. This is relevant to this research because Chinese student returnees from the UK are negotiating themselves with various countries and cultures.

Considering the relationship between transnationalism and identity, the purpose of the study is to define towards transnational identity of Chinese student returnees. Putting identity into the perspective of transnationalism, arguments established in the previous sections remain valid. First, the researcher prefers to view identity as a complete whole, composing of various dimensions in a changing manner. Second, with the relevant literature established in the section of agency and structure, identity is negotiated in the interplay between agency and structures (Giddens, 1990). Given Jenkins (2008)'s three levels of interaction as stated in 3.2.3., and for this study in particular, student returnees negotiated with various levels of structures. Not only did they have to negotiate with their social groups in both China and the UK, they also had to negotiate with various institutions such as universities to experience with the British and Chinese society at large. The different levels of structures ranging from social group level, institutional level and society level across borders may impact on the shaping of student returnees' transnational identity.

Given the possible dimensions of identity and various levels of structures in which identity may be negotiated, Figure 3.1 below proposes a hypothetical conceptual framework for understanding transnational identity which is based on but extends the existing knowledge and understanding about identity change in the context of transnationalism and internationalisation. The whole circle comprises four dimensions of identity, including competence (short for language competence and intercultural competence), consciousness, values and attitudes, and behaviours and actions. These dimensions serve as the starting point of understanding Chinese student returnees' transnational identity in this study. Around the circle are three major levels of structures in which transnational identity may be negotiated, including group level, institutional level and socio-cultural level. Group level means patterned relationships with

various social groups in student returnees' sojourn and homecoming experiences; institutional level refers to patterned relationships with the institutional context in which individuals are situated; society level refers to the patterned relationships with the changing society in which individuals are situated. One dimension is left blank in case more levels of structures are added during fieldwork.

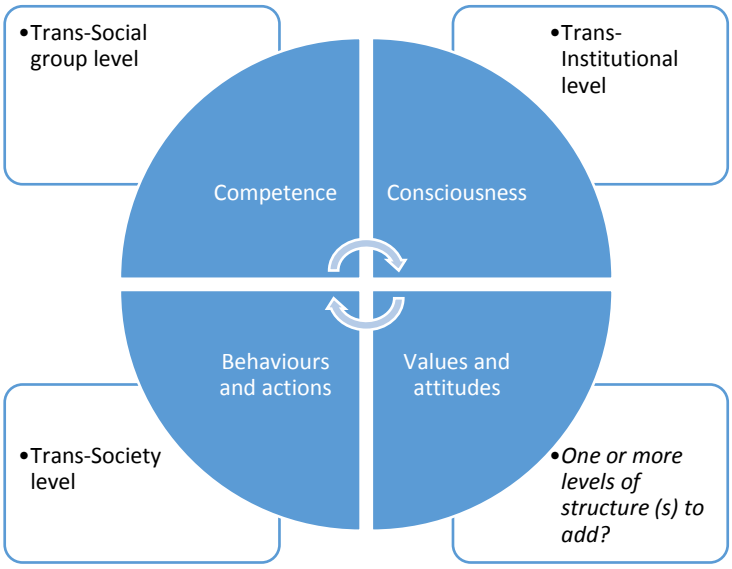


Figure 3.1 The hypothetical conceptual framework of transnational identity according to the literature review

In this study, student returnees' transnational identity will be investigated in the four major dimensions of competence, consciousness, values and attitudes, and behaviours and actions. Furthermore, these dimensions will be studied in relation to different levels of structures, including social groups, institutions, societies and others. By unpacking the process by which four dimensions of identity interact with each other at different levels of structures, I will explore the meaning of transnational identity in depth and provide the final research-informed and evidence-based conceptualised framework on transnational identity towards the end of this research. Hence, it is possible that the final framework may comprise, but may not be limited to, the above dimensions and structures.

3.5 Research Gaps and Limitations

In review, this chapter begins by introducing three major ways of conceptualising identity. The reason for reviewing the literature on identity first is that identity was a basis for understanding transnational identity in the end. Among the three conceptualisations, this study views identity as single, composed of various dimensions that are constantly changing and interacting with each other. Having had this standpoint, the researcher reviews four major dimensions of identity that were possibly relevant to student returnees' experiences across borders. Additionally, relevant issues in the identification process were also discussed. With some conceptual understanding of identity, the researcher then reviews the role of identity in students' sojourn and homecoming experience.

Towards the end of the literature review, it was important to highlight the gaps in knowledge and the scientific importance of my research in this context. Overall, there are three major research gaps and limitations. The first concerns the inconsistent conceptualisations of identity. Some see identity as single and permanent, while others interpret identity as changing and with different selves. This study aims to look for connections between different conceptualisations of identity, rather than being led by any. With regard to the initial framework presented in Figure 3.1, I prefer to see identity as single, composed of various dimensions interacting with each other at different levels of structures. The purpose is to understand how different dimensions of identity shape the meaning of transnational identity. In addition, in line with my argument on choosing between identity and identities, each individual student returnee should be seen as a unique and complete person in change, rather than being defined as having different selves by others, like robots.

The rationale for taking a different conceptualised approach to identity leads to the second research gap and limitation, which is the lack of explanation for which identity is formed. For this research in particular, to understand the meaning of transnational identity, it is important to explore how identity is formed across borders in overlapping societies and cultures. With regard to Figure 3.1, the researcher aims to understand how transnational identity is

shaped at social group level, institutional level and society level in both the Chinese and British socio-cultural contexts. With the three major issues of identification process (agency and structure, role and identity, and individual and collective identity) in mind, I will explore a framework which is grounded in theories and informed by empirical evidence from this research and which offers a robust explanation of the identification process of transnational identity.

Finally, by combining the first two arguments, the third research gap and limitation has to deal with a lack of connection between students' sojourn and homecoming experiences. It is often suggested that only student migrants studying abroad carry transnational behaviours (King & Christou, 2011). However, for Chinese students studying in the UK, return is an indispensable part of their sojourn experience (Long and Oxfeld, 2004; Han, 2013). Therefore, this is one of the first studies that connect students' sojourn experiences and student returnees' homecoming experiences together, through a transnational lens. With the initial framework of Figure 3.1 in mind, theories of both transnationalism and identity will be married together, so as to explain the meaning of transnational identity towards the end of this research.

To ensure the empirical data are more robust, the next chapter will focus on methodology and the trustworthiness of this research.

Chapter Four Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the philosophical and methodological underpinnings and implications of this research. According to Creswell (2003), a researcher has to take the following four aspects into consideration when designing a research: epistemological stances, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods. Following Creswell's train of thought, this chapter firstly explains the major steps which this research took. First, the researcher explains the ontological and epistemological perspectives as the theoretical underpinnings of this research. In relation to the nature of this research, a constructivist paradigm was adopted. Second, in line with this constructivist paradigm, the researcher adopts a qualitative research methodology. Third, under the general principle of qualitative research methodology, details regarding the research design, sampling, access and data collection methods are further elaborated. Fourth, with these preparatory works, the next step explains how the data were analysed step by step in between different periods of data collection.

Aside from these major steps in the research process, the researcher also includes another five parts to elaborate further on the major issues she encountered and dealt with in this research. Trustworthiness was the first major consideration in ensuring the quality of this research. Drawing on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four major elements of trustworthiness, the credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability of this research is illustrated. The researcher then discusses translation dilemmas in qualitative interviews, as well as the cultural consideration of doing fieldwork in China. Finally, ethical issues and the limitations of the study are demonstrated to complete the whole chapter.

4.2 Philosophical Stance

Research is not simply a 'tool' to solve research problems. Beyond different approaches to research problems was the researcher's 'basic belief system or worldview' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), indicative of a deeper philosophical view

of life. A person doing yoga would understand that to balance himself in a static pose, he had but to fix his gaze on one spot. Similarly, when doing research, to prevent imbalances and inconsistences among different methods, skills and tools, the researcher should be clear about his or her philosophical position. In general, a social science researcher's philosophical position is underpinned by his or her own ontological and epistemological understanding (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). The following paragraphs will address these two positions respectively, the relationship between them, as well as the researcher's philosophical position in this research.

Ontology is referred to as 'commitments to particular versions of the world' (Scott & Usher, 1996, p.5). It describes the definition and composition of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). People may take different ontological perspectives to the construction of social reality. According to Smircich and Morgan (1980, p.492), there is both an objective and subjective approach to ontological perspectives. Objective ontology sees reality as a 'concrete process' or 'concrete structure'. By 'concrete' Smircich and Morgan (1980) meant that they were a tangible entity as reality. Subjective ontology regards the reality either as a 'projection of human imagination' or 'social construction'. As opposed to an objective ontology, it sees the world as operationalised through 'abstract' social formation (1980). The difference between objective and subjective ontological perspectives lies in whether people see reality as pre-existence which we cannot ignore (Denzin, 2009) or as one that is established through co-construction of meanings and actions (Bryman, 2004).

Different ontological stances may lead to different epistemological perspectives, or the ways in which social phenomena can be understood and illustrated (Mason, 2002). The word 'paradigm' is used to refer to the way of obtaining and demonstrating knowledge. Many scholars have discussed choices among different paradigms (Creswell, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Robson, 2011). Given that their lists of paradigms were not consistent, the researcher only focused on two major paradigms: positivism/empiricism and constructivism/interpretivism. These two paradigms were the most relevant to

the researcher's dilemma over choosing between different methods, skills and tools.

Positivism/empiricism is theory-verified (Creswell, 2003). Scott and Usher (1996) gave a full explanation of positivist/empiricist paradigm. They illustrated that a positivist views the world as objective and manifested in its own lawfulness. There is a clear distinction between 'objects' and 'subjects', as well as between 'facts/truth' and 'values'. Under such rule of law, the aim of any research is to understand the lawfulness embedded in the world. Both natural research and social science research should follow this principle and conduct research in the same logic and methodology under this 'rule of thumb' (1996). To search for hidden governing rules, positivists often start with a theory as a general guiding principle (Creswell, 2003).

Constructivism/interpretivism is theory generated (Creswell, 2003). This paradigm tends to understand 'the world of human experience' (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p.36), by suggesting that reality is not naturally governed but socially constructed by human experience (Creswell, 2003). Constructivism sees realties as 'multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature, and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions' (Lincoln & Guba, 1994, p.110). Different from positivists, constructivists often do not start with a theory but 'generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings' (Creswell, 2003, p.9).

This research is located in the constructivist paradigm. Being aware that these paradigms were not like a shopping list from which researchers can pick, the researcher thinks that exploring transnational identity under a constructivist paradigm would benefit the research result the most. The decision was due to the following two major considerations. The first was the nature of this study on identity. Although there were different ways in which identity could be understood, the researcher shared her view with Jenkins (2008) that people only make sense of their identity in the social identification process. Such a viewpoint corresponds with the subjective ontology and the constructive paradigm in epistemological assumptions. The second major consideration was

that as argued by Scott and Usher, every ontological and epistemological perspective is 'culturally specific, historically located and value-laden' (1996, p.13).They viewed that as all research is carried out by human beings, there is no purely abstract rule of law from heaven. Instead, the rule of law is interpreted by researchers, who carry their own historical and cultural background. Human beings are not robots computerized and programmed under logical algorithm. They identify with each other and the way of their interaction constitutes the 'form and nature of reality'. Hence, a pure scientific method may not be genuinely trustworthy to interpret the human social world for this research.

4.3 Adoption of Qualitative Methodology

Subjective ontology and constructivist epistemology led to the use of qualitative methodology, which was adopted in relation to quantitative methodology, the other major approach to social science research (Robson, 2011). The qualitative and quantitative approaches were under different philosophical stances. The qualitative approach is guided by the constructivist paradigm, whereas the quantitative approach is driven by the positivist paradigm. According to Robson (2011), the qualitative approach mainly deals with words, and generalization is not the major concern. In qualitative research, an inductive approach is advised, waiting for theories and patterns to emerge (2011). Different from the qualitative approach, the quantitative approach is based on statistical analysis, and generalization is to be achieved to represent the wider population (2011). Qualitative methodology was adopted for this research for the following three reasons.

First, referring to the nature of this study on identity, qualitative methodology under the constructivist/interpretivist approach would be the most appropriate. Identity is complex and unique in every individual. The complexity and uniqueness of identity asked the researcher to explore deeply into people's life experiences and narratives. The qualitative methodology under a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm puts participants at the centre of the study (Creswell, 2003). It also has to take participants' personal biographies and experiences into consideration (2003). As argued by Schostak (2002, p.14), in terms of social science research, self is only understandable 'in the context of

the social, meaningful, or symbolic organisations of experience'. The fullness of an individual is best explored with 'scientific observation' and his or her 'own untrained consciousness' (Cooley, 1956, p.8-9). To explore the complexity of identity, qualitative methodology is also better at 'mapping out, or explain[ing] more fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour' (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p.223).

Second, qualitative methodology applies to the notion of 'fitness for purpose' (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p.217). Generalisation has been an important topic in both quantitative and qualitative analysis. According to Mayring (2007), there are eight different types of generalisation ranging from generalising of basic laws to more specific situations. For Mayring, the aim of generalisation is associated with the nature of the study and the researcher's philosophical stance. For this study in particular, and supported by the view of Mayring (2007), the aim is to develop hypotheses that can be tested for generalisation to a wider population in follow-up studies. The aim of generalisation hence lies in the persuasiveness of the research results (Neusar, 2014) rather than the numbers of participants involved. As Denzin (1978) argued, in order to reduce the burden of generalisation on the reader, a researcher's obligation is to provide detailed accounts of the research processes and contexts, so as to facilitate people's understanding on at least certain aspect of a phenomenon. In the following section, the researcher will elaborate on the research design and analysis process.

4.4 Selection of Participants and Access

According to Cohen et al. (2011), the quality of research not only lies in the adoption of the methodology, but also the sampling. This section introduces the sample size, sample criteria, and access in this study. The section begins by introducing the sample size and the rationales behind it. Following this, to paint a more diversified and nuanced picture of student returnees' identity, sample criteria including gender, age, occupation, educational level, duration of stay abroad, duration of return to China, and the site where this research was conducted will be further illustrated. For the readers' convenience, the detailed sampling criteria are also organised in a table for reference (see Table 4.1).

Finally, access to participants will be demonstrated. In particular, snowball sampling with the use of communication technology such as social media will be introduced.

4.4.1 Numbers of Participants

Considering the adoption of qualitative methodology established in the last section, a small-scale study would be the most appropriate scale. The rationale was to fit within the focus of this study (Cohen et al., 2011), i.e. to explore the in-depth and complicated changes in students' identity. Another rationale for designing a small scale in-depth study was due to the time constraints in doctoral research (Baker & Edwards, 2012). Although Baker and Edwards suggest a medium number of 30 samples, this study only recruited 16 participants because all 16 participants would have three rounds of interviews, totalling 48 interviews in the data collection. Considering there might be possible dropouts, 20 participants were invited for the first round of interviews.

4.4.2 Selection Criteria

Gender

The existing literature showed that there were different views regarding the role of gender in students' levels of adaptation to a foreign society. Lee, Sun Park and Kim (2009) found that gender was important in international students' adaptation to a foreign country. They argued that female students generally adapted more quickly than male students in a foreign society. However, Hashim (2003) found that gender did not influence international students' levels of adaptation to a foreign country and considered there were no differences between Meng and women in using coping strategies to adapt to the foreign society. Given the divergent views regarding the role of gender in students' adaptation to a foreign country, and with 16 participants in mind, this study tried to make a balance between male and female by recruiting eight male and eight female participants.

Selection of Age

Age was considered an important factor in re-adapting to the home society (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2005). Age here refers to student returnees' age by the time the interviews were conducted. In terms of the age differences among Chinese student returnees, according to China's Ministry of Education (2016), the age range between 22 and 34 accounted for 95% of student returnees. Within this range, 22 to 26 years old accounted for nearly 70% of student returnees. In addition, the average age for a student returnee with a bachelor's degree was 25.53; for a master's student returnee, it was 26.63; and for a doctoral student, it was 34.73. Based on these statistics, the researcher set the first age threshold from 22 to 26 to include nearly 70% of the current student returnees. As the average age for a doctoral student is 34.73, the researcher set the second age threshold from 27 to 34. This range might represent student returnees who have become more mature in their adulthood and might include most of the doctoral students or those who have accumulated more work experience. Finally, based on the study of adulthood development by Levinson (1978), the age range between 35 and 45 is regarded as middle-aged. The researcher set the third age threshold from 35 to 45, so as to get a more comprehensive view of students' sojourn and student returnees' homecoming experience. Among all these age thresholds, more participants would be recruited in the first threshold as it might include 70% of student returnees.

Selection of Occupation

According to Levinson (1979), work is one of the major ways for Meng to build connections with society and shape their sense of self. In terms of the nature of the work, according to the blue cover report (Ministry of Education, 2016), Chinese student returnees generally preferred to work for state-owned enterprises and foreign companies, with private enterprises, higher education institutions and research institutions coming next. Regarding the field of industries, the financial industry attracted more student returnees, followed by education, information and software service industries (Ministry of Education, 2016). In addition to these industries, there were also some student returnees having no preference for the nature of their jobs but they cared more for their job prospects, city of employment and salaries. In relation to this study, to cover

as many occupations as possible, and with the aforementioned statistics in mind, the researcher set four main areas of work, including finance, education, information technology, and others. In addition, the nature of the work as both national and transnational was taken into consideration. The researcher tried to make a balance between those who worked at state-owned enterprises and transnational companies. As established in the literature review chapter, this was due to the consideration that student returnees might face many difficulties and challenges in the Chinese working context such as complicated interpersonal relations and isolation from local colleagues (Cao, 2007).

Selection of Duration of Stay Abroad

According to blue cover report released by the Ministry of Education (2016), 47.31% of students chose to study abroad for a master's degree, while those who pursued bachelor's degree only accounted for 33.48% of students. There were only 5.59% of students aiming for a doctoral degree. Different types of studies then influence students' duration of stay abroad. Specifically, the average duration of the stay abroad was 3.59 years, with returned undergraduates 4.41 years, master's 2.82 years, and doctoral students 7.38 years (2014). Interestingly, nearly 85% of student returnees have overseas working experiences (including internships). The average duration of work is 2.05 years, with doctoral students 3.75 years, master's 1.48 years, and bachelor's 2.87 years. Based on these data, the researcher combined the study duration and years of work experiences and estimated two benchmarks. The first was from 1 to 3 years, the second was more than 4 years of stay abroad.

Selection of Duration of Return to China

According to Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), there is no exact estimated time on how long people would take to re-adapt to their home country and culture. However, a recent report drew the researcher's attention to how student returnees with different duration of return to China would respond differently in their adaptation to the home country and culture. According to the report (Overseas Study, 2011), those who have just returned or returned within less than a year from overseas study often experienced difficulties the most. They

often complained about the poor natural environment, low salaries, low work efficiency, complex social relations and so on in China. However, those who returned some years ago reported fewer difficulties and complaints. Given this report, the researcher set the sampling criteria regarding duration of return in two ranges: the first returning to China in one year or under, and the second returning to China for more than one year.

Selection of Educational Level

According to the Ministry of Education (2016), 63% of student returnees were masters, and 30% were undergraduates. Doctoral students only accounted for 6% of the student returnee population. Since the students' education level is indicated in every student's age and occupation, the researcher did not include educational level as one of the sampling criteria. However, it should be noted that students' educational level is taken into consideration in the analysis process, as it forms part of the students' demographic profile and personal biography.

Selection of Site

For this study, Shenyang city in north-eastern mainland China was selected as the research site. This was mainly due to three considerations. First, all the participants were from mainland China, considering that identity changes might be different between British born Chinese, mainland Chinese and Chinese people from Taiwan and Hong Kong (Li and Zhu, 2013). Second, all the participants were from Shenyang and returned to Shenyang upon completion of their studies. This was because Shenyang was also the researcher's hometown and thus, it might be easier for the researcher to gain access to student returnees through her personal contacts. Third, Shenyang is a less developed city when compared to Beijing and Shanghai, but has an influx of challenges, opportunities, modern and tradition. It was supposed that student returnees living and working in Shenyang might present a mixed picture of their identity changes. In particular, those who preferred to live in a traditional and local way might enjoy their life in Shenyang, while those who preferred to continue to enjoy living and working in a transnational context might face more challenges

and difficulties. Under such a contrast, the researcher could capture students' different responses and their interaction with the local Chinese society. With the larger site where this research was conducted, interview locations were more open spaces such as coffee houses. This was due to the consideration that the participants and the researcher were strangers to each other. Meeting in a public place would not only reduce participants' and researcher's nervousness, but also ensure safety for both.

Sampling criteria				
Selection of sites: Shenyang **Numbers in total: 16 (8 male and 8 female)**				
	Finance	**Education**	**Information technology**	**Other industries**
Occupation	State-owned:2	2	2	2
	Transnational:2	2	2	2
Age	22-26:2	2	2	2
	27-34:1	1	1	1
	35-45:1	1	1	1
Length of stay in the UK	1-3 years:2	2	2	2
	≧4 year:2	2	2	2
Return period to China	≦1 year:2	2	2	2
	> 1 year:2	2	2	2

Table 4.1 Sampling criteria

To guide the readers through this thesis and help the readers understand who is who under this sampling criteria, the researcher also includes the demographic profiles of all the participants completing the three rounds of interviews in Appendix D.

4.4.3 Access

Participants were recruited mainly through a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods, along with the use of social media on the internet which can be referred to as 'virtual snowball sampling' (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). Purposive sampling is one of the characteristics of qualitative methodology and it refers to selecting participants based on certain criteria (Cohen et al., 2011). Based on the selection criteria established in the last sub-section, the researcher hoped to identify participants embodying certain characteristics in the sampling criteria.

With this in mind, the researcher used snowball sampling to reach participants she did not know. The rationales of adopting the snowball sampling method were three-fold. First, there was no sampling frame to have a general view of different categories of student returnees. As a lone researcher, it was difficult to gain access to data from government institutions and organisations. Second, as an international student who was studying in the UK, the researcher could have easy access to friends who shared similar overseas study experiences to her and returned to her hometown. Third, given the nature of this research as an in-depth qualitative study, recruiting participants through familiar acquaintances might be the most efficient in finding those who would like to share their stories and be the most stable way in reducing the dropout rate.

While acknowledging the merits of the snowball sampling method, the researcher was fully aware of its possible biases. Although reaching student returnees in Shenyang was not difficult, owing to the researcher's overseas study experiences and her social networks rooted in her hometown, possible biases would be inevitable by recruiting familiar friends and their associated social networks. Therefore, to reduce the biases, the researcher decided to recruit only strangers who fitted the sampling criteria. One of the main approaches to access unfamiliar student returnees was through the social media platform WeChat (a Chinese version of WhatsApp). The researcher drafted a short statement, introducing herself and her research first. To attract more student returnees, a concept of 'crowdfunding' was introduced, whereby the participant would get some translation services or gifts as an exchange for their

voluntary participation. The statement was then circulated among the researcher's local family and friends' circles first and then disseminated across other platforms such as Shenyang Student Returnees Organisations.

As a result, the statement gained nearly 2,000 views. Eleven out of 16 interviewees were recruited through this approach. The other four were approached by the researcher herself at social activities that were often attended by student returnees from abroad. The other two were recruited through a more traditional way of being introduced by the researcher's friends. The purpose was to select participants more purposefully after the internet recruitment process.

4.5 Data Collection and Analysis

4.5.1 Data Collection Method: Semi-Structured Interviews

There are many data collection methods such as field notes, interviews, participant observations, diaries, life histories, documents, and so on (Cohen et al., 2011). According to Cohen et al. (2011, p.236), the semi-structured interview is the most popular approach in qualitative study. The following paragraphs introduce the rationales behind this semi-structured method of data collection.

The first rationale was that the semi-structured interview allows for more in-depth exploration into the uniqueness of every student returnee's identity. According to Bryman (2004), qualitative interviews take participants' views and opinions as pivotal. Silverman (1993) argued that qualitative interviews can help capture individuals' beliefs, feelings, motives and behaviours from the past to the present. Research questions are 'non-leading' and interactive with participants (Carspecken & Apple, 1992, p.159-160). This might be useful for identifying important issues that have been taken for granted in interview designs (Silverman, 1993). In relation to this research, given that identity was unique in individuals, and considering that student returnees' experiences were all different, qualitative interviews might be the most appropriate approach to encourage different responses from student returnees.

The second rationale is that semi-structured interviews may well explain the complexity of student returnees' identity changes. According to Cohen et al. (2011, p.236), qualitative interviews prompt 'flexibility' in conversations. Not only do such interviews allow for a more personal account of their own experiences, but also corresponding explanations and interpretations in context (Bryman, 2004). Such 'flexibility' prompts for the co-construction of meaning in semi-structured interviews. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.268-270), qualitative interviews involve 'construction', 'reconstruction' and 'projection' of relevant issues and the constant validation and verification of data. The centre of these processes is the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Mason, 2002). That is to say, during each interview, the data are a contextual and social process through which both the researcher and participants could learn and evaluate their narrative and understanding (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

To use the advantage of qualitative interviews in collecting in-depth and rich data fully, three different settings were designed (Table 4.2). The time frame, theme, aim and focus for each setting are listed in the table below. To clarify, all the three rounds (phases) of interviews were conducted after all the students had returned to China. However, during the three rounds of interviews, they were also asked about their past experiences in the UK to help the researcher gain a nuanced understanding of their identity change.

Phases	Setting	Aims and focus
2015.5-7 (month)	Setting One (UK context): Students' living and studying experiences in the UK	Explore students' identity changes by the time they left the UK in relation to their identity as soon as they arrived in the UK
2015.10-12 (month)	Setting Two (China context): Students' homecoming experience in China	Explore how student returnees' identity changes were tested in China and the factors contributing to the construction and reconstruction of identity
2016.5-7 (month)	Setting Three: Reflections and conclusions over the journeys throughout the UK and China	Concluding stage by seeking confirmation from participants and checked any missing questions from previous interviews

Table 4.2 Three phases of study based on settings

With reference to Table 4.2, the first setting was in the UK, aiming to understand students' identity changes by the time they left the UK as compared to their identity as soon as they arrived in the UK. The second setting was in China, focusing on exploring the reconstruction of identity in China, before conceptualising the meaning of transnational identity. There were three months in between the first and second setting so that the researcher could see the emerging patterns from the initial transcription and analysis. The third setting aimed to confirm the previous analysis and complement what was missed from the first two rounds of interviews. There was a longer time in between the second and third rounds of interviews to achieve more in-depth analysis before seeking confirmation from participants about the interpretations of their experiences.

By using semi-structured interviews as the data collection method, a detailed explanation for the interview schedule with reference back to the literature was designed before fieldwork and is included in Appendix G and H. Appendix G

shows the interview schedule to understand sojourn experiences in the UK. Appendix H aims to explore student returnees' homecoming experiences in China. Each interview question has its layer of analysis, interview questions, problems and theoretical underpinning. The layers of analysis responded to the three possible levels of structures outlined in 3.4.2 in the literature review chapter. All the interviews were conducted in the language the participants preferred to use (all in Chinese). Each interview was designed to last for one hour to avoid causing inconvenience and impatience for participants.

4.5.2 The First Two Phases of Fieldwork and Analysis

Before the formal data collection, a pilot study on three student returnees was conducted. Interview questions were sent to the researcher's three friends, who were also student returnees but not participants in this study. The initial interview questions were sent to them before the interviews so that they could have time to reflect on questions that were possibly addressed. The pilot study helped the researcher to revise her interview questions and sharpen her interview techniques further such as being more aware of time and building sound interaction with participants.

Interview	**Areas targeted**	**Research questions targeted**
First round interview	Students' sojourn experiences in the UK	Respond mainly to the first major research question
Second round interview	Student returnees' homecoming experiences in China	Respond mainly to the third major research question and sub-questions
Third round interview	Review and conclusion	Respond to all the research questions in case anything is missing from the first two interviews

Table 4.3 Interviews, targeted areas and research questions

After the pilot study, the fieldwork started formally. Table 4.3 below clarifies the areas that each interview targeted and shows which interview responds to

which research questions. Detailed research questions are listed in Appendix G and H, as explained in the last section. For each phase of data collection, there was a round of data generation process, improving the researcher's understanding of the meaning of transnational identity step by step.

The first phase was conducted between May and July, 2015. This phase of data collection aimed to understand students' sojourn experiences in the UK. Before the interviews, as in the pilot study, every student was contacted one week before the interview. The researcher sent the electronic ethical consent forms and scenario one interview questions to give the participants a general idea of the purpose, content and implications of their participation. All the interviews were recorded and lasted an average of one hour. Most participants were very cooperative, and the interviews lasted even longer.

Each interview was transcribed immediately after the interview was finished. During transcription, automatic speech recognition (ASR) was used to help the researcher transfer the voice recordings into words. Considering that it was more difficult for the ASR to recognize voice from recordings than the real human voice, the researcher also used her simultaneous interpreting skill to repeat what the participants said word by word concurrently while letting the ASR identify and transfer her words into written text. This helped the researcher save a huge amount of time in typing herself (from three days to produce a one-hour interview transcript to one day). By the researcher taking advantage of communication technology and her professional skill, she not only improved transcription efficiency, but also re-engaged herself with the participants' interviews.

Transcription and coding were carried out at the same time. This means that once the researcher finished transcribing the first interview, she started by analysing the first participant's data while transcribing the second student's interview. The coding was done manually. The researcher started coding by using the Nvivo first but after several tries, she felt that the software was more of a barrier rather than a helpful tool. In light of Miles and Huberman's (1994) work on the map of coding, the researcher decided to use paper and pen to allow for more flexibility in thinking.

The data were analysed in the original language, Chinese, but were coded in English. The reason for analysing the data in Chinese was to keep the original language features and meanings to the full extent to prevent bias from translation. In addition, coding in English rather than Chinese helped the researcher think and organise themes in an English way. There was a time the researcher translated the Chinese transcripts into English first before coding. However, she found that the translation process paralysed her thinking. After this experience, the researcher viewed that translation was not the priority task in the analysis. Rather, it was only a tool of communication helping the readers in English understand the data.

In terms of how data was generated in the first phase of data collection, the researcher followed the three analysis procedures proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). For them, the first step of analysis was 'data reduction', meaning 'losing weight' from the data and extracting only the most relevant data for further analysis. According to them, the general selection principle is to compare the data with reference to the research questions. With this in mind, the researcher then read the whole interview transcript line by line and selected the information most relevant to the research questions. For example, to answer the research question '*What are the key characteristics of their changes in identity?'* the first step was to extract the descriptions relevant to the competence, consciousness and behavioural dimensions of identity with reference to the literature review chapter. Taking the initial coding of English language competence as an example (Table 4.4), the researcher read all the data relevant to English language competence line by line and assigned them with meanings. On the left-hand side was the initial coding and on the right-hand side were the descriptions.

Example of the first round of data generation	
Limited listening comprehension	'When I just arrived in the UK, they could tell that I couldn't understand them when they said the first sentence. Then they elicited the meaning word by word.'
Limited vocabulary and sentences	'I was on a rush to the UK and you can just imagine how limited English was I had learned by that time! All I could say was ABCDEFG, Hello, How do you do and Han Meimei and Li Lei (Some odd English from Chinese English textbooks).'
The use of body language	'You know, body language, if I went to a coffee house, I would point to the things I wanted from them. Maybe your English is better and you want to express more but all I want to express is I want to drink this coffee.'

Table 4.4 Example of the first round of data generation

Following the initial coding, the second procedure was 'data display' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.91). For Miles and Huberman, data display is seen as the core of the data analysis process. Data display means the reorganisation of the coded meanings by drawing connections between them to help the researcher explore the interrelationships between different coded meanings and formulate higher levels of themes. Again, taking the language competence dimension of identity as an example (see Appendix F), the researcher drew a matrix consisting of all the reduced data relevant to a participant's English language competence. She then explored the interrelationships between linguistic skills, function, and attitude in the improved English language competence. The way the data were displayed was similar to a tree, mapping important details onto participant's English language competence.

After the first round of data collection and analysis, the second phase of fieldwork was conducted two months later. The phase of study focused on student returnees' homecoming experience after living and studying in the UK.

Building on the experiences of the first fieldwork, the second round of data collection and generation was completed in the same manner and spirit. As data regarding students' sojourn and student returnees' homecoming experiences were collected, in the data generation process, the researcher also drew a table marking the changes of students' various dimensions of identity. As shown in Table 4.5, the researcher drew a table for each dimension of identity for all the participants. Under each dimension, the researcher marked each student's changes with different colours and explanations. The reason for this was to help the researcher capture similarities, differences and changes between each participant across different times in a more comprehensive manner. Table 4.5 is just a snapshot of a larger table in the analysis.

Participants	**Diaspora consciousness**				
	The awareness of the UK/abroad situation	Increased Chinese national awareness	More critical view of the UK and abroad	Being more reflective and positive about own China	Awareness of double perspective/understanding from others' perspective
Ye	Remained strong connection	Improved	Improved	Improved	Improved
Guai	Remain connection	Improved	Improved	Improved	Improved
Qi	Remain connection	Improved	Improved	Improved	Improved
Meng	Remained strong connection	Decrease	Improved	Improved	Improved

Table 4.5 Example of the third round of data generation

Taking together the first two rounds of the data collection and generation process, the researcher aimed to find answers for the two main research questions and sub-questions, particularly the key characteristics, variations and

changes of transnational identity. Despite the comparisons and contrasts, the researcher reminded herself to be humble in making conclusions before seeking confirmation from all the participants in the third phase of data collection and analysis.

4.5.3 The Third Phase of Fieldwork and Analysis

The third phase of fieldwork corresponds to the final procedure of 'conclusion drawing and verification' put forward by Miles and Huberman (1994). It means seeking confirmation from all the participants about the conclusions drawn from them in the first two phases of fieldwork.

To confirm the researcher's assumption on these sub-themes of changes in identity, the researcher drew a table for each sub-theme (see Appendix E). In terms of how this table was assembled, all the relevant interview data were re-organised into different levels, ranging from level 1 to level 5. Each level can be seen as an abstraction of the relevant interview data. For example, as shown in Appendix E, English language competence is one of the sub-themes uncovered in the analysis. Based on the students' varied English language competence, the researcher put the interpretation of the relevant data into different levels. Each level has an interview quotation to give the readers a more vivid illustration of the meaning of this level.

Following this, the researcher then levelled each student returnees with reference to the dimension of identity dimensions and values in spider charts. To level student returnees means to evaluate them from number 1 to 5 according to the description of each theme in Appendix E. Not only were students levelled at one time, they were also levelled at four different times, including UK1 (as soon as students arrived in the UK), UK2 (by the time students left the UK), CH1 (when students just returned to China), CH2 (current life in China). Here, it is important to clarify that these time points were different among all the participants. For example, CH2 is not the same length of time for each participant. That is to say, although the three rounds of interviews were conducted at, relatively, the same period in China, each participant's story was based on different time points in their own life. They might have a different

duration of stay in the UK and return period. This may not seem to be problematic as this research focuses on individual identity changes and the exact time points should not be controlled in different settings.

The purpose of doing this was to explore the identity changes throughout different times in a more individual way, as compared to the tables in the previous data generation process. For each sub-theme, the researcher followed the same procedure of levelling students from 1 to 5 in different times. It is worth noting that although these levels were different, they were not hierarchical. That is to say, there is no discrimination against student returnees at different levels in different sub-themes.

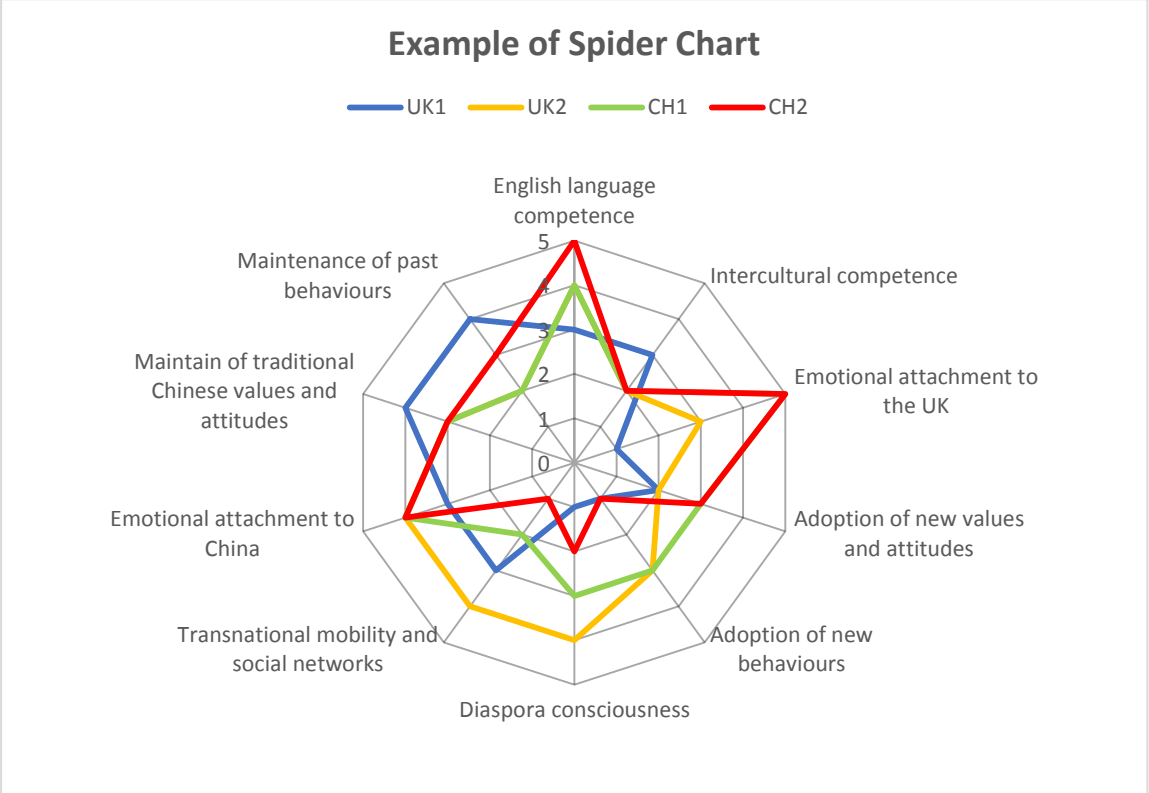


Figure 4.1 An example of spider chart

In the end, a spider chart organising all the sub-themes was compiled (see Figure 4.1). The meanings of all these sub-themes will be further explained and explored in Chapters 5 and 6. There are rationales in using spider charts in this study. First, the spider chart was used to confirm the data being collected and analysed in the first two rounds of interviews. In the final interviews, participants could check, revise and add their comments to the spider chart. Second, in the findings chapter (Chapter 6), the spider chart was used to guide

the readers through the researcher's more in-depth and narrative interview data. Third, the choice of spider chart as a method to illustrate the dynamic, changing nature of identity could provide evidence to the researcher's claim on the complete identity of multiple dimensions, as stated in the literature review chapter.

While seeking confirmation from the participants in the third phase of the fieldwork, it was admitted that there were inconsistencies with the data collected in the first two phases of fieldwork. One possible explanation might be that identity is complex and constantly changing. To deal with any inconsistent statements made by the participants, the researcher asked for clarification on certain points in the third-round interviews. In addition, the interview data were interpreted with each student's own personal biography and understood in context. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), data can be coded in an axial order, taking the condition, context, strategies and outcomes into consideration. In this way, the researcher not only understood the contradictions, but also how students responded to the changing conditions and contexts.

4.6 Trustworthiness

This research drew on the four paradigms of trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). According to them, the first paradigm is credibility, meaning the extent to which the findings reflect the students' individual identity. The second is conformability, meaning whether the researcher is fair in reporting the voices of the participants. The third is transferability, which means how well the findings in the particular research context could be applied to other contexts. The fourth is dependability, which means whether the findings are consistent and could be repeated. In line with these four paradigms, the researcher discuss her dilemmas, principles and strategies to improve the trustworthiness of these four aspects.

4.6.1 Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe some techniques for ensuring credibility, namely, long-time participation in the participant groups, extended period of

observation, verification from different angles and perspectives, and discussion with the same peers and so on. For this research in particular, it was not necessary to use all these techniques as they were considered the means and not the end. However, these techniques shed light on how the researcher could ensure the credibility of the findings.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that prolonged engagement and persistent observation enable the researcher to develop a full understanding of the society in which the research is conducted. Therefore, the researcher spent a year in her hometown in Shenyang to engage fully with the participants. At first, to get in touch with more student returnees from the UK, she attended many weekly social activities and events organised by the student returnees' organisations in Shenyang such as the 'Toastmaster Club' and the 'Arabian Night'. On these occasions, she met many student returnees from the UK. She talked to them about their current personal and professional life in China, as well as their study experiences in the UK. By chatting with more student returnees from the UK, she had a general view of their student returnees' experiences across borders. She was also able to identify some problems and interesting topics.

Once her participants were identified, to improve the depth and scope of research by building rapport with participants over time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the researcher designed three interviews for each participant, spread across different times over one year. As the study progressed, the researcher could see the improvement in her relationships with participants. In between the interviews, the researcher also invited some participants to movies, dinners and family visits. Similar interview questions were discussed in greater depth and in a more natural environment. As this study did not involve any sensitive topics, the participants were willing to share their overseas study experiences. In addition, as the participants and researcher were strangers, the participants could share more personal feelings with the researcher, without being concerned for the researcher revealing their personal feelings to someone they knew.

Finally, during the analysis, to ensure credibility, the researcher also used triangulation of sources to confirm the data at different times, in different settings and situations, and compared between the findings between different

participants (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999). As the interviews were based on settings, the data were collected at different times so that the researcher was able to compare whether the narratives in one interview corresponded with the answer in another. Furthermore, the initial findings were constantly tested against the rest of the participants in the analysis. In particular, the researcher analysed the interview transcripts of the first four participants. The conclusions and hypotheses based on the first four were then used to test against the other four participants in the on-going interviews and analysis.

By the final-round interviews, drawing on the multiple choice on identity designed by Sussman (2010), each participant was asked to answer some multiple choice questions to see whether their choices echoed the narratives in the previous interviews. What was different from Sussman's design was that every multiple-choice question was unique to each participant. This was due to the consideration that identity was individual. Every time the participant chose an answer, the researcher would ask the participant to explain the reason so as to give a more nuanced and deep understanding about the assumption. For example, one person who was naturalised as a British citizen was asked to answer the following multiple-choice question:

How do you identify yourself culturally? Please choose an answer that describes you the most and state your reason (Multiple choices):

A-I think I am a pure Chinese.

B-I think I am more of a Chinese, but I sometimes act and think in a foreign way.

C-I think I am a world citizen; I am all-embracing and I don't belong to anywhere. I don't like to define myself,

D-I think I am neither Chinese nor British. I don't know how to identify myself and I am confused.

E-None of the above.

Overall, participants' answers from the multiple choices, together with their explanations and interview data, depicted a more comprehensive and complex picture of identity, which further ensured the credibility of the research.

4.6.2 Confirmability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), one of the major techniques of ensuring confirmability is reflexivity and the role of the researcher. Traditionally, the values attached to researchers were treated as bias which had to be removed from the design (Maxwell, 2005), since the result would be inevitably influenced by the researcher's identity, emotions and way of thinking (Kirby & McKenna, 1989).

From this study, the researcher could not exclude the possibility that some participants wanted to present a positive image to the researcher. In the interviews and in further analysis, it came to the researcher that the experiences students and student returnees shared were more positive than negative. For example, a participant said that he 'did not have any bad influence' and all his 'good aspects were further deepened', owing to studying and living in the UK. The problem with such a claim was that it was difficult to define the boundary between good and bad, or even positive and negative. In addition, his response seemed to suggest that identity changes were highly intelligent and selective, without having to consider the limitation of the larger context that individuals live in.

By acknowledging the influence of the researcher on the research results, the researcher shall be very careful and humble in making any assumption and statement. The researcher's task was not to simply assign every sentence with meanings. Instead, she analysed the text, alongside the participants' demographic profile, the context in which the interview was conducted, and the condition in which the participant answered the question. She also used some other approaches including seeking advice from the supervisors, writing personal diaries and conducting informal follow-up communication with sample group students to prevent such subjectivity.

To make sure interpretation for each participant reflects their real intention and meaning, the students were shown their individual spider chart. Based on their own perception, they were asked to select from one of the two spider charts, Figure 4.2a or 4.2b that represented them the most. They were also asked to give explanations for their choice and comment if there were any changes they wanted to make to the spider charts. The purpose was to help the researcher further confirm her previous analysis. Here is an example:

The following is a spider chart, which can illustrate your changes in various aspects throughout your journey from the UK to China. The four coloured lines represent four different periods of time: UK1 (just arrived in the UK), UK2 (by the time you left the UK), CH1 (just returned to China), CH2 (current life in China). Which chart do you think represents you the most? Are there any changes you want to make?

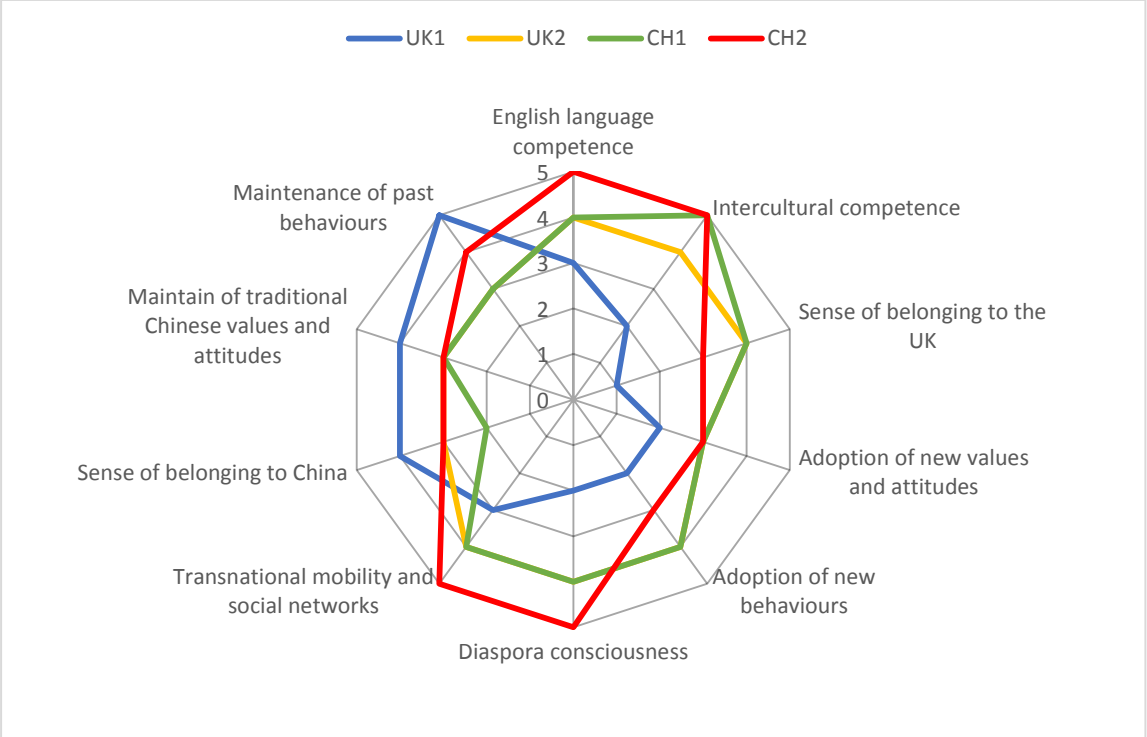


Figure 4.2a Illustration of the role of spider chart in ensuring confirmability[2]

[2] Figure 4.2a is the spider chart of Ye. Please refer to the sampling criteria for Ye's demographic profile. It should be noted that this spider chart was only generated after the first two rounds of interviews, after narrative data was collected. Each person has his or her own spider chart. Ye's spider chart is presented here only to demonstrate how the researcher sought confirmability in the third-round interviews. Later, in the findings-two-chapter, similar spider charts were grouped into one cluster and each cluster was represented by a participant's spider chart.

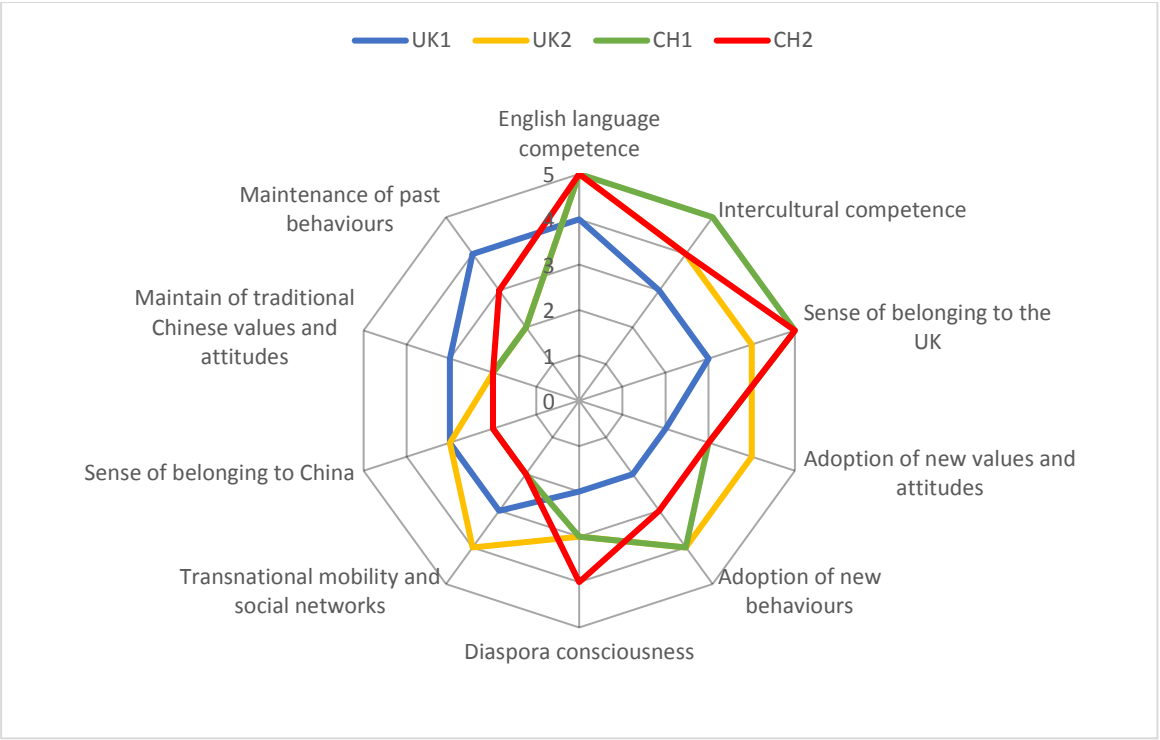


Figure 4.2b Illustration of the role of spider chart in ensuring confirmability[3]

While acknowledging some possible biases with the presence of the researcher, the researcher's first-hand knowledge and experiences is also important (Robson, 2011). To illustrate the role of the researcher in an international education research context better, Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014) discuss the relationship between the researcher, the researched, and the context in which the research is conducted. They regard the level of proximity between the researcher's home culture and the actual context in which the research was conducted as closely related. Being familiar with the research context is viewed by Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014) as facilitating the research. The major consideration is how to fit the local research context into the international education research framework, as the researcher has to interpret and present the data in a different culture (2014). Despite that, the role of the researcher should

[3] Figure 4.2b is a spider chart of Bai. Please refer to the sampling criteria for Bai's demographic profile. It should be noted that this spider chart was only generated after the first two rounds of interviews, after narrative data was collected. Each person has his or her own spider chart. Bai's spider chart is presented here only to demonstrate how the researcher sought confirmability in the third-round interviews. Later, in the findings-two-chapter, similar spider charts were grouped into one cluster and each cluster was represented by a participant's spider chart.

be acknowledged in that she opened wider access to the research context and the researched.

Conversely, the closer relationship between the researcher and the researched has some hidden problems. One of the problems is that the researcher as an insider might lose sight of many issues an outsider is able to perceive. An outsider's perspective may contribute to more possible new interpretations of the same phenomenon. Another problem concerns how the researcher positions herself in her relationship with the participants. In this research, the researcher carried two roles as both researcher and friend of the participants. A closer relationship with the participants may allow more in-depth and natural data, but too close a relationship might also affect the researcher's judgement in the interpretation of the findings. For a while, the researcher struggled in attending social events and helping the participants with some personal matters regarding which she did not necessarily have the commitment. One of the most valuable experiences of the researcher was to 'set the table' before or at the beginning of the first interview by informing the commitments for both the participants and the researcher. This way, the researcher can establish a sound relationship with the participants, without burdening herself with extra work during the research and causing disappointments for the participants.

4.6.3 Transferability

Transferability is closely related to the level of application of this research into other contexts. In this study, the researcher admits that she could not claim representation on the wider groups of student returnees in China in three considerations. First, in terms of the scale of this study, it was only a qualitative study on small groups of student returnees in China. Sixteen participants for three rounds of interviews (48 interviews in total) might be enough to illustrate identity changes for each person, but not enough to generalize to a wider population. Second, in terms of research context, the research was conducted in a medium-developed city in China as compared to more developed cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou where most Chinese student returnees are concentrated. The researcher was fully aware of this limitation, taking into account possible differences in the results had the study been conducted in the

developed cities in China. Third, in terms of dropout rates, although only four student returnees dropped out of the study, leaving 16 participants, it was necessary to consider whether this caused any 'attrition' to the trustworthiness of the research (Gorard, 2014).

While confessing to these potential threats to research trustworthiness, the researcher had to acknowledge that these problems were the result of the struggle between ideal research trustworthiness and 'practicalities' or 'cost-benefit analysis' (Gorard, 2014, p.54-55) of the research. That is to say, a lack of representation was also due to the limitation of the available economic and geographic limitations of the researcher as a doctoral student at this stage. However, it should also be emphasized that simply confessing to the hidden threats is not a 'magic wand' to improve trustworthiness. Therefore, the researcher also had some strategies to improve the quality of representation of the small cohort of student returnees in the local context. The main strategy was to make sure that different from large-scale quantitative analysis or interviews with hundreds of people, this research tried to use 'thick description' to interpret the data with greater depth and situated context (Geertz, 1973; Holloway, 1997). This not only enhances the richness of the data, but improves the validity of the result (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Besides, the one-year track of students' identity through three different interviews also gave students' their own say on their identity in a process-based and non-fixated manner. Furthermore, to reduce the impact of dropouts on the research results, the researcher interviewed four more students (designated numbers 16) in the first round of interviews. All the 16 participants whose data were used remained in the research from the beginning. Since this was not a large-scale research study aiming to claim representation for a larger group, 16 participants were enough to explore the deep and changing process of each one of their identities.

Overall, the researcher did not try to argue for the generalization of a wider community, but for generalization within a small cohort of students with greater contextual depth. As noted by Gorard (2016), a smaller study can be a small part of a larger impact as long as the researcher addresses the studied phenomenon with appropriate weight and non-discriminatory tone. The goal of

this research was not to change theory based on a small cohort of people, but to push forward the theoretical development by providing a new angle or interpretation of the phenomenon.

4.6.4 Dependability

Dependability refers to whether a study is consistent and repeatable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba, one of the major techniques of ensuring dependability is to invite some 'external auditors' to validate the research. Hence, to ensure dependability, several 'examiners' were invited to make sure the data drew the correct inferences and conclusions. The first auditor was the researcher's main supervisor and the audit was conducted through analyst triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999). In the on-going analysis process, a finding report was drafted every month and sent to the main supervisor for further discussion and verification of the credibility of the findings.

The second auditor was the researcher's peers and friends. The method of talking to some uninvolved peers to ensure trustworthiness can be termed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as 'peer debriefing'. Once the data collection was finished and after the researcher returned to the UK, her Chinese and international student identity gave her the opportunity to engage with other international students among her peers. To get in touch with more international students to test her findings, the researcher lived at the university students' accommodation on purpose and selected roommates comprising various nationalities, including mainland Chinese, Hungarian, German, British and French. The small 'United Nations' enabled her to talk to some peers who shared similar overseas study experiences but were uninvolved in her research. The majority of Chinese students she engaged with further validated her research findings by showing the pattern of staying with Chinese students most of the time and living primarily in a Chinese way. Meanwhile, as there were no main language barriers between the researcher and the other international students who spoke English well, it was interesting to find that her peers from other European countries were better listeners and they could provide some new perspectives that the researcher might overlook. Since the observation was

conducted in natural settings, the researcher could test her findings without being unduly concerned about any influence on her part.

4.7 The Cultural Considerations of Doing Fieldwork in China

In this study, some cultural considerations of doing fieldwork in China would be discussed. Cultural considerations have been merely mentioned by researchers for the fear of exposing problems in research trustworthiness (Heimer & Thøgersen, 2006). However, no research is perfect. Hiding the problems would only make the findings less trustworthy. The researcher had to admit that despite being Chinese and conducting research in her familiar context and mother tongue, she still struggled with two major issues related to culture. The following two sub-sections will address these two issues and give strategies, accordingly.

4.7.1 Interpersonal Relationships in China and Implications for the Research

The first issue concerns the complex inter-personal relationships in Chinese society and the implications for research. On the positive side, interpersonal relations in China may facilitate work and enhance trust (Guo, Rammal, Benson, Zhu, & Dowling, 2017; Kriz, Gummesson, & Quazi, 2014). It has to be acknowledged that most participants in this research were very kind and generous. The longitudinal research throughout a year has witnessed many selfless contributions by most participants. Although the researcher and the participants were strangers before the first interviews, most asked for no exchange of benefits for their contribution to the study. For example, a female participant maintained several hours of interviews during her pregnancy. Another female participant did not drop out despite a close family bereavement in between the second and the third interviews.

However, although it has been argued that interpersonal relations in China became less important (Wilson & Brennan, 2010), the researcher gradually realized that she was not void of the interpersonal relations between people in the Chinese society. As the interviews progressed, the researcher gradually

realized that some participants might have agreed to join the interviews to gain access to the researcher's social networks and resources. As according to Stockman (2000), in Chinese society, Chinese people cultivate their interpersonal relations to gain access to social connections and resources. Although giving participants a hand when it was appropriate and needed might not affect the research trustworthiness, the researcher felt that sometimes she was torn between research responsibility and personal commitment. For example, after the first interview was finished, one male participant, who said he did not want any rewards from the research, asked the researcher to translate 25 pages of company files with the expected market price of £2,000-3,000 for free. Another man who introduced the researcher to one female participant kept sending messages to her for potential business cooperation.

These encountered barriers caused a certain level of stress and confusion to the researcher. Chang (2010) explained that Chinese society is based on social networks of support, reciprocity and social creativity. Therefore, from the researcher's understanding, in relation to this study, some participants might participate in the interviews because they wanted to have an exchange of reward, either in the form of resources or social connections. For example, the man who asked for business cooperation might want the social networks in exchange for the participant he recommended, while the man asking for translation services might want some professional services in exchange.

In addition, as the research progressed, she found that people's relationships in the local context were interwoven. Although all the participants were recruited through different sources, it came to the researcher that they knew each other very well. Therefore, the researcher had to be very careful of cultivating a relationship with every participant, as the erosion of one relationships might undermine the relationship with the other. What was more difficult was that some student returnees who did not want to participate used the 'face-saving strategy' to reject the researcher. This means that they did not express their real intention (such as being unwilling to participate) directly but left the researcher to guess. For those who did not want to participate, they all expressed it in an indirect way by not replying to the researcher's messages. Some kept saying

they had no time and left the researcher waiting several weeks for their response. Although the researcher was born and grew up in this context, it still took her a long time to understand the 'face-saving strategy' used by some student returnees.

When the interviews were finished, and after experiencing some inner struggles, the researcher proposed some strategies as a reference for future researchers doing research in Chinese society. First, gift-giving was recommended for researchers who have extra research funding. This was due to the consideration of gift-giving in China being a sign of reciprocity and respect (Chan, Denton & Tsang, 2003; Chang, 2010). By giving gifts, the researcher might save himself or herself from extra personal commitment, as their efforts have been recognized and returned with gifts.

Second, it is necessary to state clearly the commitment and responsibility for both the researchers and the participants in written form before the interviews. This is more relevant to those researchers who do not have sufficient funding for gifts. As a researcher, committing to a personal relationship in personal time was not compulsory but might be necessary in the Chinese cultural context, as the relationship would directly affect the width and depth of the data. Meanwhile, while building rapport with participants, the researcher should be fully aware of the limit to such personal commitment. Hence, any responsibilities, commitments and rewards were better to be made explicit on the research invitation form, as an exemption for future disappointment and extra commitment.

Third, for those who do not want to participate, the researcher could send them a formal letter stating appreciation of their interest in the study. Instead of saying explicitly that they were withdrawn from the study because of their silence, the researcher can say that they will be notified if their data are used and the relevant data would be destroyed once the research is finished.

Overall, despite many difficulties when dealing with the interpersonal relations in China, the researcher found she grew up quickly and became more confident in dealing with people from all walks of life in the Chinese society. To ensure

research trustworthiness, the researcher tried not to be affected by her negative emotions while engaging with various kinds of people positively. She believed that no relationship was inherently wrong. It was the wrong management and interpretation of the relationship that made it wrong.

4.7.2 Translation Dilemmas in Semi-structured Interview Transcripts

This section addresses two main dilemmas of translating semi-structured interview transcripts in this study. Since all the interviews were conducted in the student returnees' preferred Chinese language, the analysis process involves translation issues which might also affect the trustworthiness of the findings. A good translation should not only embody the original language features, but also reflect the real meaning and intention of the participants in communication. To achieve these purposes, the 'equivalence-based theory' by Nida (1964) was adopted as the general guiding principle of translations in this study. According to Nida, there are two forms of equivalence in translation, including 'formal equivalence' and 'dynamic equivalence'. 'Formal equivalence' means that the translator is dedicated to both the content and the form so as to reflect the original meanings and language features of the source language; 'dynamic equivalence' is more reader-sensitive as the translator tries to borrow some foreign language features and meanings to improve the readability for the readers in that foreign language. Overall, the two translation dilemmas are the interplay between these two forms of equivalence.

Although all texts that yield meanings can be translated (Davidson, 2009), translations between cultures involve more complex issues than simply producing the meanings. Hence, the first translation dilemma was translation with words and phrases with no equivalent meanings in another culture. For example, the phrase *Hongsejiaoyu*, which literally means 'red education' in English, registers culturally embedded meanings in the Chinese culture and history. For example, in section 5.3.1 in Chapter 5, one participant who was born in the late 1980s mentioned this phrase to refer to the influence of Chinese education on his way of thinking. Translating this phrase then caused a dilemma

for the researcher because there is no equivalent event in the west. If this phrase were translated directly as ‘red education’, readers in the west would be confused due to their different historical, social and cultural backgrounds.

During the translation, several versions were carefully considered. The first version was ‘education with Communist manifesto in China’. This version might be more understandable to western readers. However, the choice of words ‘the Communist manifesto’ indicated political implications and such implications might be interpreted differently by western readers from Chinese readers. When reviewing the original meaning and intention of the participant who mentioned ‘red education’, it would be inappropriate to translate it this way, as the participant did not show his political orientation in the interview and it would be unethical to judge him on this matter. The second version was ‘revolutionary education’. However, revolutionary education was culture specific and could mean all education that was under profound changes. In addition, the original language features and cultural meanings have all been lost.

In the end, the researcher decided to use the third version of ‘red education’ to conform to the original content and form (formal equivalence) but then gave an explanation for its cultural and historical background (dynamic equivalence). She put ‘red education’ in quotation marks and then inserted a footnote in the page where this interview quotation was used. She then included more historical and cultural background information for readers in the west. She also used a variety of sources without offering readers a biased view towards Chinese culture and history. Alternatively, one could also give background information to readers in the paragraph following the interview quotation. In this manner, the researcher not only provides background information but also puts the translation into context.

The second translation dilemma was to deal with words and phrases with deeply embedded theoretical meanings which might cause confusion to readers, especially to academics in the respective field. For example, in the interview, one participant mentioned his experiences of studying and working in multiple countries. Initially, the meaning was simply directly translated as ‘transnational experiences’. However, a discussion with the main supervisor made the

researcher realize that such translation might cause confusion to readers who were familiar with theories in transnationalism. Under the framework of transnationalism, the word 'transnational' could have political, cultural and social dimensions. Therefore, simply translating the participant's original meaning into 'transnational experiences' not only causes confusion to readers, but also misinterprets the real meaning of the participant. As a result, the researcher decided to translate the participant's phrase as 'experiences of living, studying and working in China, Canada and the United States', so as to fully explain the real meaning and intention of the participant. This more detailed and more narrative translation version was agreed by the participant who mentioned the phrase in the first instance.

Therefore, when translating words and phrases with deep theoretical implications, the researcher could not simply translate their form and content (formal equivalence) but also had to include their real meanings (dynamic equivalence). Hence, researchers should be more aware of translation with abstract words such as 'identity', 'environment', 'context' and 'structure' in English. In these cases, direct translation (formal equivalence) might cause confusion and misunderstanding as these words could be all-encompassing and understood in different ways. It is therefore suggested that the researcher could give a more elaborative and descriptive account of the original meanings and intention of the participants, alongside the direct translation in quotation (if necessary). To do this, the researcher should seek confirmation from the participants who elicited the meanings and check if more specific interpretations are correct. Such practice not only concerns the trustworthiness of the findings but also the ethical issues relating to translation of other people's meanings and intentions. After all, it is the participants themselves who have the final say of their own words.

Finally, for quality assurance, a three-dimensional interaction with supervisors, participants, and the researcher was conducted. Specifically, the researcher translated the original meaning into English. She then sent the translated quotation to her supervisor, who is also bilingual in Chinese and English. Her supervisor helped her identify some direct translations which might cause

confusion. She then rephrased the translations according to her interpretation of the intention of the participants. After this, the researchers sent the translated quotations together with the Chinese version to the participants to seek confirmation and advice from them, respectively. In this triangulated way, the researcher made sure the translated meaning was equivalent to each participant's original ideas.

4.8 Ethical Issues

In this section, some key ethical issues before, during and after the fieldwork were identified. In particular, the following ethical issues are discussed in detail: Recruiting participants in the first instance, participants' rights to check the transcribed interviews, storage and maintenance of data, and data access. On top of these, ethical considerations have been given to the translation process and the lone researcher in the local and cultural settings. The University of Nottingham Code of Research Conduct and the *Data Protection Act 1998* served as reference for drafting relevant ethical documents in this research. To ensure the research was conducted within the Code of Practice, a triangulation of the researcher, supervisors and internal examiners from the Ethics Committee of the School of Education were formulated.

4.8.1 Ethical Issues before the Fieldwork

Having considered ethical issues throughout the whole research was to identify potential 'harm, stress and anxiety, and a myriad of other negative consequences for research participants' (Robson, 2011, p.194). Drawing on the ethical considerations mentioned by Robson, it was important to ensure participants' equal rights. To begin with, during the recruitment, participants agreed to have the interviews under voluntary participation. Before meeting each participant in person, ethics forms, including a brief statement of the research aims (see Appendix A), an information sheet (Appendix B), and the participant-consent form (Appendix C) were sent to the volunteers. These forms clearly stated all the information participants might need such as their commitments, rights and confidentialities in detail. They also clearly explained the potential influence of this research so that the participants fully understood the nature of it and their

involvement. Sufficient time was given to allow for the participants to consider in a serious manner whether they were still willing to participate in the study.

Meanwhile, since all the participants were strangers to the researcher before the interviews, it gradually came to the researcher that due consideration should also be given to her own safety as a lone researcher in this study. Before the fieldwork, the researcher was nervous in contacting the participants and scheduling appointments with them. At some point, she even became reluctant to meet the participants for fear of her own safety. It was especially the case when some participants invited her to their homes on the very first meeting. It was also the time when the researcher felt the 'relative strength of power and powerlessness', as mentioned by Loubere (2014). Sometimes, to proceed with the interviews, she had to visit the other's home or even waited for the participants for several hours. One of the experiences the researcher gained from this fieldwork was to take more initiative by arranging the meeting in some public places. Another strategy was to conduct telephone interviews instead to save the time and reduce the concern for her own safety.

4.8.2 Ethical Issues During and After the Fieldwork

During transcription, full interview transcripts were given to each participant several days after the interview was finished. The aim was to keep the participants updated on the research progress and build connections with the participants further through checking the accuracy of the interview transcripts. Feedback from the participants showed that most of the transcripts were full and accurate, making participants surprised at the amount of work the researcher had done. Many participants also thanked the researcher for helping them remember the most precious time of their life in text form. Some participants added a few more explanations based on the interview transcripts sent to them. These comments were taken seriously and added to the interview transcripts as follow-up comments from participants.

During the analysis, interpretations regarding student returnees were sent for further verification for ethical consideration. After all, it was student returnees themselves who had the final say of what their identity was. Such opinion has

been echoed in some scholars' views regarding identity. According to Giddens (1991a), people express their identity through their personal narratives across different time and space. For Giddens, reflexivity characterises people in late-modernity. Reflexivity refers to individuals defining themselves when reviewing the past (Holland, 1999). Brown and Toyoki (2013, p.849) also argue that there is a link between identity and 'internal legitimacy', meaning that identity only makes sense in one's own definition of self.

In this study, most agreed with the researcher's interpretations. Some student returnees even mentioned that without this research, they would not recognize their changes in so many ways. From an ethical point of view, and from the participants' positive comments, the research achieved its aim by helping student returnees reflect on their journeys throughout China and the UK in a meaningful way. Still, it might be possible that not all the student returnees treated the research purely as meaningful reflection of the past. They might see the interviews as consuming their time and energy. To reduce the possible burden for participants, the researcher would confirm to the participants about their time allowed and commitment before each interview. As the one-hour interview came to an end, the researcher would ask if the participants wanted to proceed or save the topics for next time. Most participants were cooperative and were always willing to share more with the researcher.

Once the analysis is finished, translation with interview quotations also involves ethical issues. In this study, translation was not only a replacement of language features. Instead, it was more concerned about interpretation of student returnees' identity. With this in mind, after the interview quotations were translated, they were sent to participants for verification. Considering all the participants were once students who studied in the UK and obtained their degrees, they were supposed to have the capacity to check the meanings of the translated interview quotations. By seeking confirmation from the participants, the researcher could make sure the translated meaning reflected the meanings and intentions of the participants.

Finally, after the data were collected and analysed, they were all stored in the researcher's home in China and the locked drawers in the researcher's office in

the UK. The electronic transcripts were kept confidentially with a secure password on the researcher's computer in the office. Data access was restricted only to the participants, the researcher, the supervisors and the future examiners. The data were only used for academic purposes such as at conferences, the doctoral thesis and future publications. Every participant would be given anonymity and their personal information would be made as generic as possible to ensure their confidentiality. Considering that this research is an investigation into the transnational identity of Chinese student returnees, it might be helpful to use pseudonyms under anonymity to assign a different name to each participant. In other words, participants could also be anonymous by using a different name, but they have a name at least to have a voice in this research. As argued by Svalastog and Eriksson (2010), using anonymity without giving a name to a participant might also be unethical. Therefore, more careful consideration has been given in anonymity. Participants were asked if they wanted to use their real name. They all expressed that they wanted to hide their real names but would be happy to be assigned a different name in this research. Data would be stored in accordance with the *Data Protection Act 1998* and the University of Nottingham Code of Research Conduct (see the information sheet in Appendix B for further details).

4.9 Limitations of the Study

The first limitation was memory. In this study, interviews were conducted based on settings and the participants were asked about their experiences in the UK and China. Because of this, data on students' sojourn experiences and student returnees' early homecoming experience were largely based on participants' memories and their interpretations of their memories. This may have implications for the trustworthiness of this research, especially when it comes to whether student returnees' personal memories could truly reflect how they felt in the past, whether they wanted to forget about something on purpose, and whether they exaggerated because of the presence of the researcher. In addition, student returnees' past experiences might be interpreted differently over time, as student returnees themselves became more mature and changed their own understandings of the past. Finally, how the participants reflected on their

personal stories could also depend on the research questions and their interaction with the researcher. Before the research was conducted, the researcher was fully aware of all these possible weaknesses.

However, according Shamir and Eilam (2005), there is plenty of research on life narratives, with the rationale of trying to reflect the meaning of identity. Participants' recollections on the past were viewed as personal, as identity is shown through story-telling or personal narratives (Bruner, 1986; Fitzgerald, 1988; Simmons, 2002). From another perspective, although memory might not be consistent, the way participants organized their memories (anything they remember vividly, or they want to forget on purpose) reflected their sense of self (Fitzgerald, 1988; Conway, 2005) in their experiences across borders. This argument highlights the strength of this research approach, as participants may help the researcher identify the memories or events that were most important to them, their sense of self, or the sense of self they wanted to project before the researcher.

On a different note, the trustworthiness of data could be enhanced by the data collection approach based on different settings, as this will enable the researcher to check any inconsistency in their accounts/stories, or difference between interpretations of participants' experiences and stories with the participants. Additionally, it could also help the researcher get a more comprehensive understanding of students' identity changes within the rather short period of time stipulated by the doctoral study.

By acknowledging this shortcoming, and to ensure the trustworthiness of this research, the researcher decided to check for consistency in the three rounds of data collection. As demonstrated in section 4.5.3 on the purpose of the third phase of homework, as well as section of 4.6.2 on the confirmability of the data, checking consistency was to check whether what participants said in the first two rounds of interviews matched the final-round interview. The same or similar questions would be asked for verification. If any inconsistency in data were spotted, participants would be asked to clarify and explain the inconsistency.

The second limitation is the representation of the study. As mentioned in 4.3, the aim of this thesis is not to make generalisation of a wider population, but rather to develop a basis for generalisations in the following studies (Mayring, 2007). In this study, the researcher could not claim representation on a wider population for two reasons. The first is that this was a small-scale study on only 16 participants. Although the rationales behind this number of participants were stated in section 4.4.1, the researcher was fully aware of its limitation in numbers. The second reason was that all the student returnees had the same return destination of Shenyang. As mentioned in the selection criteria in 4.4.2, Shenyang is less developed than some big cities such as Beijing and Shanghai in China. It is still a city with an influx of challenges, opportunities, traditional and modern. The researcher acknowledged that she could not have a broader view of student returnees throughout China by concentrating on one city. However, a city full of contradictions in challenges, opportunities, and traditional and modern might expose student returnees' changes in identity the most. In particular, the researcher could explore how student returnees adapt to a different society, as well as how they respond to both challenges and opportunities in life. Overall, a small-scale research study did not mean no implications. It was rather how the findings on small-scale research reflects what they meant to reflect.

Given the limitations of this study, the researcher was aware that she had to be very careful in making assumptions to reduce weaknesses and highlight strengths. Therefore, echoing the researcher's view on identity in 4.3, in the following findings chapters, the researcher tried to present interview data on student returnees' experiences with more in-depth descriptions, careful interpretations and constant comparisons to complement our current understanding on identity.

Chapter Five Finding One: Developing Transnational Identity in the UK

5.1 Introduction

There are two findings chapters in this research. The first findings chapter is set between the students' early arrival in the UK and the time they left the UK. The focus of this chapter is to investigate whether student returnees develop transnational identity in the UK. With this focus, four shared themes as characteristics of students' identity changes were unpacked. The second findings chapter is set between students' early return in China (the period when they first returned) and their 'current life' (at the time of the fieldwork) in China. The aim of this chapter is to explore the key factors shaping the reconstruction and construction of student returnees' transnational identity, and how these factors influenced student returnees' personal and professional lives in China. For the first findings chapter in particular, the researcher seeks to answer the first research question and sub-questions on transnational identity (for specific questions, please refer to Appendix G):

1. How do we understand transnational identity? What is the nature of Chinese student returnees' transnational identity?

1) To what extent has Chinese student returnees' identity changed?

2) If it has changed, what are the key characteristics of their changes in identity?

By the time students left the UK, evidence shows that there were four major themes related to students' identity changes. The first theme was the capacity to build connections between cultures, meaning whether students had the capacity to make sense of their identity by searching for connections between cultures. This theme comprised two sub-themes of English language competence and intercultural competence which, taken together, explained the meaning and functionality of the capacity to build connections between cultures. The second theme was diaspora consciousness (Vertovec, 2010), which meant improved

understanding of the 'national us' and 'foreign others', 'reconstruction of place and locality', heightened awareness of multi-locality and multiple sense of belonging. The third theme was diaspora values and attitudes, meaning the maintenance of traditional Chinese values and attitudes and the adoption of new values and attitudes. The final theme was expansion of behaviours and actions, meaning the adoption of new behaviours and actions without abandoning the past. All these four themes addressed the competence (language competence and intercultural competence), mind, consciousness and behavioural dimensions of identity, and helped the researcher conceptualise the meaning of transnational identity by the end of this thesis.

5.2 Capacity to Build Connections between Cultures

The first theme was the capacity to build connections between cultures. The word 'capacity' refers to the ability and skills to do something (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015). In this study, the capacity to build connections between cultures referred to whether students have the ability to make sense of their identity by searching for connections between cultures. Overall, two sub-themes were found to be closely related to students' capacity to connect with other cultures. The first is English language competence, represented by the three groups of students. The second is intercultural competence. 'Competence' here means the ability to respond appropriately and effectively in the changing socio-cultural contexts.

5.2.1 English Language Competence

This section focuses on the language competence aspect of identity. In this study, English language competence referred to the students' ability to communicate in English independently and smoothly. Overall, by the time students left the UK, 14 out of 16 students perceived that their English language competence was improved. With improved English language competence, students broke the language barriers of building connections between cultures. It was also through this process they changed the way they saw themselves and their identity in the reflection of the others.

By the time students left the UK, most students reflected different levels of improvement in their English language competence and their corresponding identity changes. Among them, seven (Yuan, Xi, Fi, Xiao, Ye, Meng, Allen) reported changes in their language competence aspect of identity the most. These students reflected that they changed from those who could barely speak English to those who could initiate English conversations independently and smoothly. In other words, by breaking the English language barrier, they changed from those who felt distant from the British society to those who felt closer to it. In the interviews, they used 'frustration', 'fear', 'lonely' and 'shock' to describe their sense of disorientation with the UK in being unable to communicate in English independently and smoothly. By the time they left the UK, they used words such as 'comfortable' and 'smoothly' to refer to their closer relationship with English and the British society where English was in use. All these words indicated their perception of changes in their English language competence and their language competence aspect of identity. The changes in their ability to speak English was best illustrated by Xi, who came to the UK only knowing how to say A, B, C and some simple phrases such as 'how are you'.

> *'I could understand them without having to pay special attention to what they said. Besides, I could sense that when they talked to me, they spoke very fluidly, and they did not have to slow down their pace and spoke word by word to make me understand anymore.'*

Xi's quotation not only indicated her improved English language competence but her change in the way she perceived herself and was perceived by others. Throughout the interviews, Xi reflected that during the later stay in the UK, she felt the way the locals talked to her was the same as when they talked to their 'own nationals'. She felt the words they used were not those very formal and standard ones, but more local language. She felt the British people treated her 'as one of them'. This evidence suggested that the improved English language competence provided Xi with a new perspective of understanding herself and a new opportunity to have a deeper engagement with the locals in British society.

In the interviews, Xi reflected that in contrast to her first year of stay in the UK when she had but to rely on other Chinese people to communicate, she could leave them and stand on her own once her English became improved.

There were some common characteristics in these students. First, they all came to the UK with very low English language competence, evidenced by their low English examination scores, limited vocabulary, and poor listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Second, all these students stayed in the UK for more than three years, with the longest duration of stay 14.5 years[4]. The one who stayed for 14.5 years felt 'qualitatively' different from those who stayed for three years. She used a 'Bradford accent', 'talking to my own people' to refer to her improved English language competence, while others mostly said there were 'no barriers' in their English language communication. Third, all of them did part-time jobs and internships while studying in the UK. According to them, part-time jobs offered them the opportunity to communicate with the locals in a more proactive and practical way, rather than sitting in the classroom learning English by just listening.

There were another seven students (Sophia, Bai, Da, Guai, Qi, Wei, Xila) who reported certain levels of change in their English language competence and the language competence aspect of identity. All these students reported no major barrier in English language communication as soon as they arrived in the UK. Their difficulties were mainly with following the accent, speed and subject-related terminologies in English. Different from the first seven students, English language competence seemed to have had a less negative effect on their initial adaptation to the UK. Most used 'enjoy' and 'smooth' to describe their initial stay in the UK. By the time they left the UK, they all reflected that the difficulties in accent, speed and terminologies were basically resolved. Still, they said their English was not improved as much as they imagined. However,

[4] According to Xi's interview data, she went to the UK at the age of 15. She had a language course for half a year and studied GCSEs for one year. After that, she studied A-Levels for two years and a national diploma in nursing for another two years. She then had her undergraduate study in International Business Management for three years, and master's study for one more year. In 2010, she obtained her British citizenship owing to ten-years of stay in the UK. After 2010, she come back and forth between China and the UK for her working visa in China and to visit her sister who settled in the UK permanently.

most reflected that they felt English had already became ‘a useful tool’ or ‘an important part of their life’. A review of their demographic profiles suggested that most stayed in the UK for less than three years. Apart from this, most did not have part-time jobs when they were in the UK, a possible opportunity to practise their English in British society further. These students reflected that they basically improved their English language competence by having their courses of study, talking to their foreign roommates, friends and classmates, and communicating with people at supermarkets, banks and over the telephone.

Except for the 14 students, there were two students (Jing, Lv) who reported no major improvement in their English language competence and little change in their language competence aspect of identity. Different from the rest of the students, these two were very confident about their English language competence when they first arrived in the UK. Such perception reflected these students’ capacity to break the language barrier and their different language identity. For example, Jing said she ‘completely felt at home’ as soon as she arrived in the UK and she could not ‘see anything unfamiliar to her’. A review of both students’ personal biographies suggested that they both had very high English language competence before they studied in the UK. This could be further evidenced by their working and studying experiences abroad before studying in the UK. Their previous overseas study experience might explain their closer relationship with English and smooth adaptation to a foreign society.

Thus, language was seen as the most basic tool for building connections between cultures. Being unable to communicate in English independently and smoothly referred to loss of familiar signs and connections. The three groups of students demonstrated the relationship between English language competence and feelings of relationship with British society. It also illustrated how the improved English language competence impacted on the way students perceived themselves and their identity changes in the reflection of others.

5.2.2 Intercultural Competence

Simply having an improvement in English language competence did not mean that students became more capable of building connections between cultures.

The capacity to build connections between cultures also concerned their intercultural competence. For this study in particular, and in line with Holliday's 'grammar of culture' (2013), the researcher viewed intercultural competence as the capacity to search for connections between cultures, by discarding prejudices and embracing differences. As stated by Holliday (2016a, p.318), intercultural competence was about how people who carried their own culture formed in their upbringing to 'negotiate blocks and threads' when encountering another culture. Overall, by the time the students left the UK, they had developed different intercultural competence. By developing different intercultural competence, the students changed their identity and drew a closer relationship with the British society.

The majority of students (13 out of 16) showed improvement in their capacity to embrace and accept the British culture and society. Although their personal biographies did not seem to have made a difference, students (Xiang, Bai, Guai, Xila) with great interest in the British culture and art seemed to build connections with the British culture more naturally. They either made plans for a greater depth of exploration into the UK before departure, or expressed that they felt their social and cultural behaviours were more fitted within the British culture and society as soon as they arrived. For the other students whose intercultural competence was improved (Yuan, Xi, Xiao, Ye, Qi, Meng, Lv, Jing, Da), they went through a process of change from relatively low to high intercultural competence (low and high was judged with reference to the table in Appendix E. See details of how it was assembled in 4.5.3). Such a process of change could be supported by the following two main pieces of evidence. First, they changed from those who felt unable to build connections with the British culture and society to those who felt more confident in building connections with the British culture and society. These students reflected that they did not feel 'timid' and 'scared' anymore. Instead, they felt more 'confident' and 'motivated' to communicate with the locals. Such a changed attitude in themselves could be best reflected by Xiao, who felt timid and scared to communicate with people from other countries and cultures when she just arrived. From the quotation below, Xiao changed from the one who was unable to understand the 'foreign' way of communication to one who tried to embrace

and integrate their way of life and communication. The quotation also showed Xiao's willingness to make a connection with the British society.

> *'For now, I would talk to them with smile rather than covering my face in my hands. I think this is a change by a different lifestyle. At that time, I gradually learned to say hello to foreigners, understood their passion, and was edified by their passion. This is an integration, because I wanted to speak, and I wanted to integrate into this place. It all happened very naturally.'*

Second, they changed from frequent comparisons between China and the UK to views of China and the UK through a connected lens. In their early stay in the UK, most students said they frequently compared various aspects in the UK such as environment and commodity prices with those of China. They often made such comparisons when they expressed their nostalgic feeling for China, or made an effort to understand the society in the UK better. By the time they left the UK, these students reflected that the frequency of such comparisons became less. They also said there were no big differences between China and the UK. Their opinion could be best illustrated by Ye, who cried over the rainy days in the UK when she just arrived.

> *'In fact, the overseas study experience shared many similarities with my life in China. The only difference would be nothing but in language. I did not treat this experience as an overseas study experience like someone else would think. I just felt I went to a place far away from my home when I was young, went to college, met some friends, and experienced something that every young person would experience in their life.'*

However, in contrast with the 13 students who tried to embrace British culture and society, three students (Fi, Allen, Wei) showed increased prejudice against the differences between the Chinese and British society. A review of these students' demographic profiles also suggested that they were all male and

considered themselves as introverts, but these were not the only associations. Fi showed a very strong sense of rejection to making foreign friends. Allen and Wei did not have any intention to make foreign friends. They all said they came to the UK to broaden their horizons, but they did not have clear goals. They also indicated that they did not like learning English and lacked interest in other countries and cultures. These claims contradicted their initial purpose of study. From another perspective, such contradiction might demonstrate their lack of being mobilized in making changes to themselves to fit into British society. Although Da did not reject communicating with the locals, he had always stayed happily with his Chinese friends. The convenience of staying with his Chinese friends and speaking in Chinese dampened his willingness to communicate with others from different countries and cultures. Besides, he said that since there were no British classmates and nearly 90% of students in has class were Chinese, he did not have too many opportunities to get in touch with 'foreigners'.

Seeing from the above, apart from improved English language competence, most students also improved their capacity to build connections between cultures, by shelving differences and discarding their prejudices. Still, there were variations in students' capacity to build connections between cultures, and such differences might reveal deeper changes in their consciousness, which will be further elaborated in the next section.

5.3 Diaspora Consciousness

In this study, 'diaspora consciousness' took a broader meaning than that defined by Vertovec (2010). There were four sub-themes under diaspora consciousness. The first was an understanding towards 'national us' and 'foreign others' which meant most students reconsidered their identity by setting and dismissing the boundaries between the Chinese people and people of other countries. The second was the 'reconstruction of place and locality' (Vertovec, 2010), meaning most students expressed their identity through constructing and reconstructing a different micro society. The third was the heightened awareness of multi-locality (Vertovec, 2010), which referred to being more aware of a multiple society and seeing them through a connected lens. The fourth was a multiple sense of belonging, which was explained as feeling attached and being accepted

by more than one country. Throughout these changes, a new sense of identity emerged as students reconsidered their positions, set boundaries, and connected between differences.

5.3.1 Understanding Towards 'National Us' and 'Foreign Others'

This section explores how students reconsidered their identity by making similarities and differences between the 'national us' and the 'foreign others'. It was found that the experiences of living and studying in the UK enabled students to reflect on their Chinese nationalism and the boundary with people of other nationalities, nationalism meaning being patriotic to China and the awareness of being Chinese. Nationalism was the focus here, as this section explores more of the national traits rather than cultural traits of students' identity. It was through the interplay between the 'national us' and the 'foreign others' that students stood back from their own limitations and started to reflect on the standpoints of the 'foreign others'.

As soon as the students arrived in the UK, enhanced Chinese nationalism was implicated first in most students' enhanced awareness of being Chinese. Some (Guai, Qi) mentioned that as they transferred from China to the UK, they changed from the 'Chinese majority' to the 'Chinese minority'. Others (Allen, Wei, Fi, Xiao, Xi) also used 'marginalised group' and 'disadvantaged group' to describe themselves. These students were spread in their age, gender and duration of stay in the UK, but none had ever been abroad before studying in the UK. For example, Qi, who was never abroad before his UK study, reflected how 'uncomfortable' he felt by realizing himself to be in the minority on his flight to London.

> *'On my flight from Moscow to London, most of the passengers were British and only my friend and I were Chinese. This was the first time I felt I was in the minority.'*

From the quotation above, Qi seemed to draw a distinction with the 'foreign others' as soon as he went abroad. When asked whether he distinguished himself from the 'foreign others', he said that although he realized there were

differences, he tried to accept and not exaggerate the differences. However, he felt that it was not him who drew this distinction but that the locals distinguished themselves from him. He felt the locals lacked 'interest' in knowing the 'minority groups' when they themselves were the 'majority in their own country'.

Additionally, the enhanced Chinese nationalism was also illustrated through stronger patriotism in the face of national rights and reputation while students were studying in the UK. Most felt that they loved China more once they went abroad, especially when 'foreign others' (non-Chinese people) spoke ill of China. One student even mentioned that there was always a Chinese national flag hanging on the wall of his accommodation. An overview of these students' whole experience in the UK suggested that the enhanced Chinese nationalism was the strongest in students' early stay in the UK and among those who had no overseas experience before going there. For those who had never travelled, worked or studied abroad before, the enhanced Chinese nationalism was unexpected. For the two students (Jing, Lv) who had worked, lived and studied abroad before, they also expressed a sense of 'discrimination' and 'marginalisation' when they studied in other countries, but did not reveal the same feeling when in the UK. The enhanced Chinese nationalism in the students' early stay in the UK was best illustrated by Xila, who had never been abroad before her UK studies. Xila's quotation suggested her patriotism was activated when she was outside China. Such patriotism grew even stronger when she felt that the rights and reputation of China were under threat or subject to criticism. This quotation also indicated Xila's nationalist position and the change she underwent before and after going to the UK.

> *'When I was in the UK, I would be very angry if anyone said bad things about China. I didn't know that I could have such a strong national awareness before going abroad. Before I came to the UK, I also criticized my own country but once I went abroad, things became different.'*

By the time the students left the UK, most had developed changed views about their relationship with the 'Chinese us' and the 'foreign others'. In their eyes,

the ‘foreign others’ were not distant anymore and the ‘Chinese us’ were not as close as imagined either. These students were spread in their demographic profiles but all expressed alienation to their own Chinese counterparts. Some (Ye, Jing, Xi, Jessie) were disappointed with the Chinese people they knew in the UK in that they saw these Chinese as ‘not friendly’, ‘poorly-mannered’, and ‘money-oriented’. For those students (Sophia, Xi, Jessie) who stayed in the UK for more than six months without returning to China in this period, they reflected on the differences between themselves and other newly-arrived Chinese in appearance, way of communication, and public manners. For example, Xi expressed her feeling of disorientation towards the local Chinese people on her first short visit to China after a two-year stay in the UK,

> *‘I think the so called ‘foreign people’ were my people and when I first came back to China, Chinese people were foreigners in my eyes. I don’t know why but I thought the appearance, style of conversation, way of thinking and the way they were dressed were all foreign to me.’*

This quotation demonstrated that for Xi, the ‘Chinese’ were not ‘us’ anymore and the ‘foreigners’ were not ‘others’ either. Xi’s quotation also suggested that the way she drew a distinction between us and others was based on appearance, deportment, and way of thinking. For her, the relationship with the ‘national us’ and ‘foreign others’ seemed to have changed.

Through interaction with the ‘foreign others’, students started to reflect on their own national standpoints and biases. Some students reflected that they were more tolerant of other people’s claims on their own rights and identity. As judged by them, while they were studying in the UK, they were exposed to different views which enabled them to reflect on their own perspectives. For example, Meng, who had never been abroad before, described how he started to reflect on his own standpoint when he was shocked by a word used by a Lithuanian.

'I was shocked by a word used by a Lithuanian. Due to the 'red education'[5] *we received, we might think it was the Soviet Union that "rescued" Lithuania. However, my Lithuanian friend said, 'It was the Soviet Union who "invaded" us.' I was shocked by the word "invade" he used and then I got him to confirm that he'd used the word "invade". He said, 'Of course, they invaded us.' I was shocked, and then I wonder if I have to reflect on my standpoint.'*

From the quotation above, the word 'invade' represented a different perspective, a perspective made by a person with a different identity that was originally formed through his upbringing and education. In the past, Meng considered that there was only one possible interpretation of what he had learnt but from that moment on, he said he started to reflect on the rationale of other people's claims on their national rights and identity.

Given these data, by the time students left the UK, most developed double or multiple perspectives, through defining themselves between 'national us' and the 'foreign others'. Beyond such nationalism awareness might be their enhanced awareness of being both 'here' and 'there'. Hence, in the following section, evidence on students' heightened awareness of multi-locality will be presented.

5.3.2 Heightened Awareness of Multi-locality

This section explores how students further expanded their identity through a heightened awareness of 'here' and 'there'. For this study, the 'heightened awareness of multi-locality' is interpreted as being more informed of the social-cultural contexts in both China and the UK and building connections between them. 'Locality' is defined as 'a structure of feeling, a property of life and an ideology of situated community' (Appadurai, 1996, p.189). By the time the

[5] The original phrase of 红色教育 was translated as 'red education' to maintain its original language features and meanings. For the participant, 'red education' refers to the education he received that is collective and united. In the early founding of the People's Republic of China, the country had just escaped from foreign influence and had to unite against aggression. Readers in the west should consider the combination of factors in China, rather than simply interpreting the phrase as negative or positive comments by the participant.

students left the UK, it was found that they had all become more aware of the society in the UK while being mindful about the society in China. Through such heightened awareness, and by using their own reflexivity to make comparisons and contrasts between China, the UK and elsewhere, most students started to think outside their Chinese socio-cultural bias and changed their identity towards one that is more critical, reflective, flexible and adaptive.

By the time they left the UK, most students admitted that in contrast to the past when they only knew the UK from newspapers and other forms of media, they had seen the UK with their own eyes. As reflected by them, they were more informed about UK society, including the embedded values, attitudes, and behaviours in British society, as well as the culture and civilization of the UK and other European countries. The ways these students gained a better understanding about the UK were varied. Some students (Fi, Wei) improved their understanding more through observation. For example, Fi reflected that although he did not have any actual experience of spending Christmas with the British, he had at least sensed the holiday atmosphere and seen how it was celebrated in the UK. Alongside observation, most students also improved their understanding of the UK through deeper interaction with their foreign classmates, roommates, friends and colleagues. There were also some students (Da, Sophia, Bai) who mentioned exploring the UK with their Chinese peers. They enjoyed the time spent with their Chinese friends to have an adventure in a foreign country. Students' improved understanding of society in the UK could be best illustrated by Guai, who gained her understanding of the pub culture through her work experience in the UK.

> *'They [the British people] really fancy going to the pub. When I started working in the UK, a British guy asked me to go to the pub but from what I thought at that moment, only the bad guys went to the pub. For now, I understand that going to the pub after a full day's work is part of their culture. It is their way of social networking…back then I think I did not have a sense of belonging to the pub culture.'*

Guai's quotation showed her limited understanding of the British pub culture in the past. It also demonstrated how Guai used her bias of pub culture from the Chinese society to interpret pub culture in the UK. However, as she engaged further with her British colleagues while working in the UK, she developed a better understanding of the social-networking nature of the UK pub culture. By jumping out of her own socio-cultural bias, Guai developed a better sense of belonging to the British culture.

While students showed better understanding of UK society, four students (Bai, Qi, Ye, Guai), who were spread in their demographic profiles, also developed better understanding of the Chinese culture. They mentioned that being situated in a foreign culture made them value more of the Chinese culture, especially with regard to their filial piety. In this study, filial piety mainly refers to students respecting their parents and having an awareness of taking care of their parents. Bai also reported developing an interest in Chinese traditional cultures such as painting, calligraphy and Chinese opera (Peking Opera and Kunqu Opera) while studying in the UK.

The analysis of students' enhanced awareness of both 'here' and 'there' suggested two major implications for students' identity. The first was that most students became more critical and reflective. In other words, they could not only make comparisons between China and the UK, but also be capable of evaluating both countries' advantages and disadvantages for the benefit of their own. For example, Lv demonstrated how he made choices based on his critical view of various countries he once resided in:

> *'For now, I acted more like a 'secret agent'. For example, I would compare the prices on the same commodity or service across China, the UK and elsewhere for the benefit of my own. China has the lowest human cost, while the UK possesses the most advanced technology. I would often make such comparisons and evaluations.'*

The second major change was being more adaptive in a different society. This was echoed in four students (Xi, Jing, Lv, Ye). As judged by these students,

they had very high English language competence with no barriers in daily English communication by the time they left the UK. Besides this, they all had either foreign friends or colleagues to interact with frequently while they were in the UK. These students used the words 'switch between channels' to describe their level of adaptability to a different society. For example, Jing, who travelled across China, France and the UK, reflected on her different ways of communicating with people from different countries.

> *'I can switch between 'channels' very naturally. The way I speak to Hong Kongers, Taiwanese, Americans, French and the British is completely different. I firstly developed such a mind-set when I came back from France.'*

Before proceeding to the next section, it is important to highlight some key observations. By the time students left the UK, their changed identity was indicated in their heightened awareness of being both 'here' and 'there'. From another perspective, students' heightened awareness of multi-locality may implicate how students live and act in the British society, which will be further elaborated in the next section on the reconstruction of place and locality.

5.3.3 Reconstruction of Place and Locality

'Reconstruction of place and locality' (Vertovec, 2009) refers to consciously creating a different micro society within a larger society. It was found that students constructed, reconstructed, selected and lived in various social and cultural contexts when they studied in the UK. The building of a different society within the UK reflected students' individual and collective sense of identity in the British society.

As soon as students arrived in the UK, most students proactively reconstructed a micro Chinese socio-cultural circle. The main purpose was to either facilitate their adaptation in the UK, or to express their nostalgic feeling for home. Eight students (Xi, Fi, Jessie, Da, Ye, Allen, Wei, Xiao) reported clustering around other Chinese people such as their classmates, friends and roommates as soon as they arrived. They reflected that in their early stay in the UK, speaking

Chinese and socialising with Chinese people marked their daily lives. These students had relatively poor English language competence, for none of them could communicate very fluently with native English speakers on arrival. Among them, four students (Ye, Xiao, Jessie, Fi) also reflected on communicating with their parents in China to reduce their nostalgic feeling for home. For example, Xiao reflected that by talking to her relatives online every day, she did not feel she was in the UK for the first three months before the semester began.

> *'For the first three months, I did not actually feel I was in the UK. I went online and chatted with my family through QQ [a social media platform]. They all asked you the same question: What time is it? Is it cold in the UK? I lived every day in the first three months like this. They were the people I could talk to with my eyes closed. They made me feel at home in a strange country.'*

Xiao's quotation suggested her isolation from British society. Xiao mentioned that she did not dare to go outside by herself and was not confident to speak English. Her communication with her family online created a micro Chinese society or an 'umbrella' for her in the 'rainy days' in the UK. Speaking Chinese, a language she was familiar with, and chatting with the people she felt close to, confirmed and protected her Chinese identity in the past and made her feel at home.

As time went by, some students (Luan, Allen, Wei, Da) not only reconstructed Chinese society by themselves but co-constructed it with other Chinese students. They were all males and they reported very low English language competence. By the time they left, although their English language competence was improved, they reported the convenience of staying with their Chinese friends made them less willing to engage with the locals. From another perspective, they established and solidified a Chinese micro society by staying in their Chinese social circles, speaking Chinese, eating Chinese food every day, and going to the Chinese restaurants and supermarkets. The reconstruction of

Chinese society either by themselves or with other Chinese students marked their Chinese identity and set a boundary with the British society.

Different from those who reconstructed a micro Chinese society for themselves, seven students (Bai, Sophia, Guai, Jing, Xi, Xiao, Qi) showed an intention to construct an English society once they felt more adapted to the UK. They reflected that the purpose of studying abroad was to know more about the local culture and society. They did not want to stay with Chinese people and were motivated to engage with the locals' life. They shied away from the Chinese circles by having a romantic relationship with British and other foreign nationals, purposefully selecting roommates with a composition of different nationalities, and making friends with their foreign classmates, roommates and lecturers. The intention of creating an English socio-cultural environment was best illustrated by Sophia, who only stayed in the UK for one year.

> *'I did not join the Chinese society on purpose. They often go the Chinese restaurants or Karaoke. Why do you do these things in the UK when you can experience them all in China anyway? Besides, you have already had many Chinese friends, why always hang out with Chinese people when you go abroad?'*

Sophia's quotation showed her resistance to remain in the Chinese social circles. In the interview, Sophia said she always tried to prevent herself from being situated in a Chinese circle. To achieve this purpose, she proactively disoriented herself from things carrying Chinese characteristics such as 'Chinese restaurants', 'Karaoke' and 'Chinese friends'. In relation to identity, this suggested that she tried to embrace a new identity rather than clinging onto her Chinese sense of identity.

However, by the time these students left the UK, all admitted that no matter how hard they tried, they still could not create a totally English environment without any Chinese people involved, as they were surrounded by large numbers of Chinese classmates, roommates and other Chinese students on campus. They also had to communicate with their parents in China almost every week. It might

be that the significant numbers of Chinese people in the UK, as well as their connection with China, served as an external and more complicated society for them to adapt to. Even so, the purpose of inhabiting an English society indicated the students' role of agency to break the boundary of one single society and embrace a new sense of self.

The reconstruction of a micro Chinese society, which was mostly students' individual actions, had collective meaning and impact. On the one hand, most students transplanted Chinese values, attitudes, cultures and behaviours into the UK. Some mentioned performing a dragon dance for the British locals during the Chinese New Year Festival. Others mentioned teaching their foreign friends and roommates to make Chinese dumplings. On the other hand, some students (Da, Xila, Fi) were engaged in some Chinese communities in the UK to express their needs, rights and voices. For example, Da and Fi joined Chinese student unions, clubs and societies during their studies in the UK to make more friends. As they reflected, the Chinese institutions often organised the Chinese New Year Gala, networking events and peaceful strikes so as to express the rights and voices of Chinese people in the UK. The reconstructed Chinese society provided a framework for the Chinese students to connect and celebrate their Chinese collective identity. Looking deeply, the micro context was also a response to their psychological need to connect with their home culture, search for a depth of understanding, and seek intimacy and closeness built upon common values, attitudes and behaviours from their co-nationals.

Thus, most students were engaged in various societies while studying in the UK. Some stayed in the Chinese social circles for their own convenience, while others were more willing to leave the Chinese circles to be more engaged with the British society. Still, no matter how they lived and acted, they were not completely isolated from either society. The enhanced awareness, together with the reconstruction of place and locality, contributed to the students' multiple sense of belonging by the time they left the UK.

5.3.4 Multiple Sense of Belonging

In this study, the multiple sense of belonging was composed of two parts. The first part was the emotional attachment to students' living and studying experiences in a country. In this study, the emotional attachment was related to students' experiences of living and studying in the UK which led to their personal growth and identity changes. The second part was agreement with the values, attitudes and behaviours in society. Taking these two parts together, a sense of belonging towards China in this study refers to the emotional attachment to the living and studying experiences in China and agreement with values, attitudes and behaviours in the Chinese society. Similarly, a sense of belonging to the UK refers to the emotional attachment to the living and studying experiences in the UK and agreement with the values, attitudes and behaviours in the British society. Overall, by the time students left the UK, they regarded their sense of belonging to China as taking the lead, while their sense of belonging to the UK was a supplement. A predominant sense of belonging to China, coupled with a supplementary sense of belonging to the UK, contributed to more mixed conceptions of their identity.

Overall, it was found that most students showed more emotional attachment to their living and studying experiences in China. Most students reflected that they did not miss China in general. Instead, it was their growing-up experiences and the time they spent with their families that made their life in China unforgettable. Students' change of emotional attachment was also associated with their feeling of being accepted or not by a society. Some students (Xi, Lv, Xiao, Allen, Wei, Fi) expressed that they could be better accepted by the Chinese society and not the British society. All these students had work experience in the UK. They all reflected that they were not given equal opportunities in their work. Lv said there were bottlenecks in his later career development in the UK, while others said they could only do some low-skilled jobs which they would never have done if they were in China.

Alongside the emotional attachment to the living and studying experiences in China, by the time students left the UK, most students expressed enhanced emotional attachment to their UK living and studying experiences. They

reflected that the experiences of living and studying in the UK, as well as the effort they put in meeting the challenges in their life and study in a foreign country, left a beautiful memory for them. Among them, two students (Bai, Sophia) expressed stronger emotional attachment. They had all had no previous overseas study experience and spent less than three years in the UK. In their expressions, they used phrases such as 'not fully experience' the UK culture, 'still did not know the real UK life' and 'feeling engagement with British society was pretty shallow' to describe their emotional attachment to their UK living and studying experiences. For example, Bai reflected how her emotional attachment to such UK experiences caused resonance among other Chinese students.

> *'When I did a tax refund at Selfridges, an old man employer asked me, 'Do you like London?' I said, 'Yes, I do. I have always loved this city.' He knew I was sad to leave, so he said, 'Don't be sad, my dear, London is just like a little idiot here waiting for you. He will be there, and will never leave you. If you miss him, come back and visit him.' I twittered this story to WeChat [a social media platform popular in Chin]) and all my friends who were returning to China soon shed tears.'*

Apart from emotional attachment, the students' sense of belonging was also associated with their agreement with various values, attitudes and behaviours in the British and Chinese societies. On the one hand, most students changed towards having strong agreement with certain aspects of life in the UK. These aspects, which carried values and attitudes embedded within the British society, included relationships with family and friends, work ethics, educational approach, and ways of living and thinking in Britain. On the other hand, most students also acknowledged that they valued more some traditional Chinese values and attitudes such as family bond, respecting the elders and honouring traditional Chinese culture. For most participants, the bond with their families, and the love for their parents in particular, explained why they had a leading Chinese sense of belonging and identity. The role of the family bond in the

students' sense of belonging to China was best illustrated by Lv, who had worked and lived in the USA, UK and Canada for ten years.

> *Researcher: How do you identify yourself culturally? Chinese? British? American or something else?*
>
> *Lv: I think I am more of a Chinese, but I can think and act in a foreign way.*
>
> *Researcher: Which part of you makes you think you are more of a Chinese?*
>
> *Lv: For me, the best virtue of the Chinese people is the family bond. This is something I cannot find anywhere in the world. Family love among the Chinese people is imperative, and it is what I valued and cherished a lot.*

In the end, the enhanced emotional attachment to the living and studying experiences in China and the UK, as well as the agreement with various values, attitudes and behaviours in the Chinese and British society, contributed to students' mixed sense of belonging and concept of identity. In the interviews, most students regarded themselves mainly as Chinese, but they said they 'could act and think in a foreign way'. For example, Xi showed very strong emotional attachment towards China. She was happy to stay with her family and enjoyed more equal opportunities with no discrimination in the Chinese society. However, she was also confused about her identity. The quotation below suggested how Xi's Chinese sense of belonging and identity was compounded by her British political identity, as well as her strong agreement with certain values and behaviours in the British society after years of stay in the UK. It also indicated Xi's mixed conception of identity.

> *'Honestly saying, I think I am neither a British nor a Chinese. I do not belong to anywhere. If you say that I am a Chinese, my political identity is a foreigner, and I think in a foreign way. Also, I have an open-minded character that other*

Chinese people might not have! I dare to wear a bikini outside in the streets.'

Overall, most students regarded their sense of belonging to China as predominant, with their sense of belonging to the UK as supplementary. However, student belonging and conception of identity became more complex. Their mixed sense of belonging was comprised of a mixed emotional attachment to the living and studying experiences in both China and the UK, as well as agreement with various values, attitudes and behaviours in both the Chinese and British society. To further explore the depth of students' diaspora consciousness, diaspora values and attitudes will be described in the following sections.

5.4 Diaspora Values and Attitudes

'Diaspora values and attitudes' refers to the adoption of new values and attitudes but maintenance of some traditional Chinese values and attitudes. The focus was on the new values and attitudes that might be related to students' living and studying experiences in a different country and culture, or whether students would experience the same level of changes if they did not study in the UK. Overall, taking into account the students' phase of development, three major aspects of values and attitudes were further deepened through the living and studying experiences in the UK. The first was becoming independent, meaning students establishing an awareness of being independent, being independent in managing their personal lives, and developing an independent sense of self. The second was the value of individualism, which referred to pursuing freedom, valuing privacy and being different from others to voice their opinions. The third was greater respect and tolerance for diversity, meaning being more respectable and tolerant of different people and new things. All these three aspects served as frames of reference for students to make sense of their identity.

5.4.1 Becoming Independent

Overall, it was found that by the time students left the UK, most students saw themselves as different people by establishing their own sense of self, gaining

capability to manage their personal life independently, and developing a more independent sense of self. Although students might become independent without studying in the UK, it was suggested that the overseas study experience further pushed forward their independence and their changed views towards themselves. The British society, with its unique socio-cultural values, attitudes and behaviours, provided students with a different context of growth.

First, some students (Jessie, Ye, Fi, Xiao) viewed themselves differently by being spiritually independent and establishing their own sense of self. These students all went to the UK in their late adolescence or early adulthood, with the youngest eighteen years old and the oldest twenty. They all reflected that before studying in the UK, they were not very independent, as they lived with their parents and were taken care of by them. As soon as they arrived in the UK, they were suddenly cut from their parents' emotional and life support (but not financial support). Therefore, they had to learn to live on their own step by step. For example, the change from having an emotional attachment to their parents to developing more of a sense of self was best reflected by Ye, who went to the UK at the age of eighteen and started to reflect on her change during a short visit to China.

> *'When I visited my family, I suddenly realized that their life did not change much because of me leaving. Previously, I thought if I was not at home, my parents would be devastated…when I was young, I thought I was the centre of the universe…this was the first time I genuinely felt that the world could continue to spin without me. As I returned to the UK, I suddenly felt released and decided to pursue my own life.'*

The quotation above indicated Ye's change from regarding herself as the centre of her family to a person with her own independent life and pursuits. Such change might be partly attributable to her transfer from adolescence to early adulthood. However, as reflected by Ye, living and studying in a foreign country by cutting all her previous close relationships and support suddenly instigated her reflection on independence.

Second, most students saw themselves differently by learning to manage their personal life more independently. On the one hand, most students reflected that they became better at managing their personal life, ranging from cooking, doing the laundry to dealing with financial burdens. Most reflected that if they were in China, they would not have had to deal with so many life chores as that in the UK. For them, the UK study experience was an all-round life experience which not only nurtured their independent study, but also developed their ability to live more independently in life. Hence, in relation to identity, and taking into account the students' phase of development, it was supposed that the context of their growth would have been different had they studied in China.

On the other hand, some students (Sophia, Qi, Xiao, Allen, Wei) who were spread in their demographic profiles reflected that they became better at dealing with loneliness, owing to their living and studying experiences in the UK. Some of these students reflected that the education in the UK focused more on independent study and there was a lot of spare time for them to manage. Others reflected that they were influenced by the larger society. As what was observed by them of the British society, most people were self-sufficient and independent. Dealing with loneliness with an independent spirit was best reflected by Sophia, who went to the UK at 24 and stayed for only one year.

> *'When you were in China, I could talk to my family, and play with my dog. However, when I was in the UK, I was all by myself and whenever I felt bored, I would think of ways to kill the loneliness: see dramas, read books, have a walk outside and feel the fresh air, or go to the gym. Sometimes I did feel very lonely, but I learned to find a way to face it.'*

From the quotation above, it was suggested that Sophia might not experience the same level and kind of loneliness had she studied in a Chinese university, as she had to face the loneliness of living in a foreign country, where all the familiar contacts, entertainment and support were disconnected from her. In a deeper sense, the improved capability of dealing with loneliness was developed in the context of a different country and culture, which pushed Sophia's change towards more independent sense of self.

Third, some students (Xi, Fi, Jessie, Xiao, Ye, Sophia, Bai) reflected that they became different people by developing a more independent sense of self. Such change was attributable to both their phase of development and life experience in the UK. These students were spread in their age, gender and UK duration of stay. In their eyes, they felt they were not mature enough and being less-confident and timid might be a sign of their young age. Meanwhile, those students who had working experience (Xi, Fi, Ye, Xiao) in the UK said their UK working experience while studying enabled them to get in touch with people from all walks of life. To deal with different kinds of people and adapt to various environments, they had to be strong and independent. The unique context in the UK under which students developed their independent sense of self could be best illustrated by Ye, who did her internship in the UK.

> *'You can get in touch with people from different walks of life and cultural backgrounds…sometimes when I was agitated by my colleague, I had but to express my temper to claim my rights. It partly explained why my personality was changed.'*

It might be possible that Ye, as well as other students who underwent such change, would have had a similar change had they studied in Chinese universities. However, as reflected by Ye, her living and studying experiences further pushed forward her change towards an independent sense of self in a more forceful way. In a tough environment where there were various challenges and difficulties, Ye said she had to be strong and more decisive.

As seen from the above, some students developed a renewed sense of self by being spiritually independent, life independent and self-independent. Although students might still become more independent with their growth in age, experience and knowledge, situating in a more diversified society might push the growth of students' independence and sense of self. Such sense of self, for some, developed further into their value on individualism, which will be explained in the next section.

5.4.2 Value on Individualism

This section explores how an individualised society as the UK influenced the identity changes of the Chinese students who were born and raised in a collective society such as China. Overall, students' individualised identity was expressed in the following three ways, with which further evidence would be provided.

First of all, five students' (Meng, Jessie, Sophia, Bai, Qi) individualised dimension of identity was suggested in their pursuit of freedom. The variations in their backgrounds did not seem to have made a difference to their sense of individualism. By the time these students left the UK, they expressed a willingness to refrain from other people's (especially their parents and relatives) interference with their personal matters such as their future job characteristics and marriages. Most of these students felt the people they interacted with in the UK did not seem to live under the shadow of others. According to Xila,

> *'For now, I think I should follow my heart, rather than living under the shadows of others. This was a subtle influence, as when I was in the UK, people around me were all like this. You would see a nation, from children to the elders who were quite confident and self-reliant. You would naturally think, this is something good, which makes me happy, and others happy.'*

Second, five students' (Jessie, Xi, Meng, Fi, Ye) individualised identity was shown through their value of privacy. These students were also spread in age, gender, degree, and duration of stay in the UK. According to them, they learned to respect other people's privacy and kept a reasonable distance from others, including their parents, relatives and friends. These students said they underwent such a change due to observation of the society and interaction with their local friends and classmates. From Jessie's observation, she felt that people in the British society seemed to be more independent from each other and thus had more awareness of keeping their privacy or reasonable distance from others.

> *'I think kindness is kindness. As I observed from the British people, you would not touch on their private issues even if you were best friends. There was a distance between people. For now, I still hope to keep a distance with others. I do not like to be too close to others.'*

Finally, four students' (Fi, Jing, Da, Lv) individualised identity was indicated in that they were not afraid to be different from others. Their personal biographies did not seem to have made a difference to their more individualised identity. Da reflected that when he studied in China, he just followed the others and did whatever his teachers told him to do. Jing, Fi and Lv reflected that when they lived and studied in the UK, they felt being different and unique seemed to be encouraged. Lv also mentioned that university seminars nurtured an atmosphere of encouraging students to voice their opinions and challenge others. The context in which students developed their individualism was best demonstrated by Lv, who worked while studying in the UK and said:

> *'Different from 'shooting the birds taking the lead' in Chinese society, we were open to any possibilities and were not afraid to be 'standing head and shoulders above the others'. We did not think anyone who stood out from others was shameful. For me, this was the biggest influence.'*

From the quotation above, 'shooting the birds taking the lead' in Chinese society was Lv's reflection on the 'other' as being different or isolated and thus taking a risk in the Chinese collective society. 'Standing head and shoulders above the others' implied his reflection on the 'other' as precious and much encouraged in the British individualised society. The contradiction between the individual and collective society influenced Lv's individual dimension of identity.

However, despite the students becoming more individualised, the interview data showed that they also maintained some of their traditional Chinese values and attitudes. As established in section 5.3.4, most students showed their Chinese sense of belonging through their value of family. In the interviews, most students also expressed honouring filial piety by showing care, respect and

responsibility towards their parents and elders. This demonstrated that while students adopted new values and attitudes, they still maintained several traditional Chinese values and attitudes which, taken together, further influenced the shaping of their identity. More detailed evidence regarding the maintenance of various values and attitudes will be presented in Chapter 6.

5.4.3 Greater Respect and Tolerance for Diversity

Enhanced respect and tolerance towards cultures and diversity refers to being more respectful and tolerant of diversity and differences. Overall, it was found that by the time students left the UK, all 16 participants developed greater respect and tolerance to diversity and differences. It was suggested that students changed from those who hold their own bias and discrimination to those who were more open-minded and all-embracing.

Three students (Da, Xi, Xiao) changed the way they viewed themselves and others through enhanced respect and awareness of diversity and differences. These students did not all have previous overseas study experience. Additionally, their English language competence was relatively low, and they lacked the experience of communicating with others in English. By the time they left the UK, they reflected that 'when in Rome, do things as the Romans do', a way of showing respect to the locals. Da, who never went abroad before his UK study, noted his enhanced respect towards the cultural others through the careful use of Chinese in an English-speaking context.

> *'I had a teacher named Eric who didn't want us to speak Chinese. One day we spoke Chinese during the lecture break. He kept silent for a moment and started to speak Spanish for five minutes. As he stopped, he asked us how we felt. Of course, we said we could not understand anything. He said that was exactly how he felt when we spoke Chinese. Since then, I learned how to respect others. Before this, I wasn't even aware that I should speak English with my Chinese counterparts before non-Chinese speakers.'*

The anecdote told by Da suggested that he did not mean to disrespect his Spanish-speaking lecturer when speaking Chinese with his Chinese friends. Instead, it was because he lacked awareness to show respect for his lecturer. It was through this interaction that he realized the discourtesy of using his mother tongue in a foreign country. By becoming more careful of using Chinese in the presence of non-Chinese speakers, Da renewed his sense of self and his self-image in the eyes of the 'foreign others'.

Apart from enhanced respect, most students viewed themselves differently by developing greater tolerance. They viewed the British society and culture as very open and diverse, with different ways of living and people of different religious and cultural backgrounds merging together. As reflected by them, by embracing such diversity, they became more tolerant. Guai, who stayed in the UK for two years, reflected on her improved tolerance by the time she left the UK and she changed from being conservative in the past to more tolerant of diversity. She attributed her change to the diversity she had observed in London. Being more tolerant was seen by her as the biggest change and she already became a different person.

> *'Concerning tolerance, I was rather conservative before going abroad. For now, I may tolerate everything. I think I am OK even if you have three eyes. For me, this is the biggest change.'*

Thus, by being informed of the cultural differences through engagement with people from other countries and cultures, students stepped aside from their bias and developed greater respect and tolerance. It is through this process they changed themselves from those who hold their own Chinese cultural bias to those who had the attitude to embrace diversity.

5.5 Expansion of Behaviours and Actions

Expansion of behaviours and actions meant developing new behaviours and actions while retaining some of the past. Overall, three themes were found to be relevant to the expansion of behaviours and actions. The first was the adoption

of eating, drinking and living habits, which explored the changes in students' eating, drinking and living habits by the time they left the UK. The second was improved social etiquette, which investigated further development of the students' public manner and politeness by the time they left. The third was maintained mobility and social networks across borders, which unravelled the movements and links between China and the UK during the students' stay in the UK. By thinking behind the superficial changes in the behaviours and actions, the researcher tried to understand their meaning in shaping the students' sense of belonging and identity.

5.5.1 Adoption of Eating, Drinking and Living Habits

Adoption of eating, drinking and living habits meant students acquiring new eating, drinking and living habits while maintaining some old ones. It was found that by the time students left the UK, most expanded these habits, without abandoning some of the past. In relation to identity, it was suggested by the participants that the adoption, selection and combination of multiple habits not only had behavioural implications, but also played a critical role in the shaping of the students' sense of belonging to a particular culture and society.

By the time students left the UK, most had a renewed sense of self by developing acceptance to western food, drink and living habits. Some students said that by trying something new, they felt themselves breaking through the past self and living a new life in a foreign country. These students all had no previous overseas study experience. Other students (Jessie, Ye, Xi) reflected that the newly adopted habits had already become part of them. These students were a younger age when they came to the UK (ranging from 15 to 19) and had a longer duration of stay (from four to 14.5 years). They reflected that their changed their eating, drinking and living habits were mainly influenced by their foreign friends and roommates. The ways in which newly adopted behaviours gave students a new sense of self was best illustrated by Ye, who came to the UK at 18 and stayed for seven years. Ye's change from objecting to new food and drinks to their adoption and even preference showed her further change of self.

> *'When I just arrived in the UK, I did not get used to their eating and drinking habits such as cold food and coffee very well... [For now] if I do not drink coffee for one day, I would be like a withering flower...these [habit]) have already become my way of life, rather than a simple modification in the early period [in the U]). This is who I am or where I came from. Wherever I am, and no matter how old I am, it's my way of living.'*

Meanwhile, it was reported that some of the students' past way of living was still well-maintained, which indicated their Chinese sense of identity. For example, while exploring and trying new food and drink, most said they still ate Chinese food more often and preferred to drink hot water. These students were varied in their age, gender and duration of stay in the UK. Many of them also reported cooking, eating, drinking and living with their Chinese friends. Some unchanged Chinese habits, as well clustering around Chinese friends, marked their Chinese sense of belonging and identity. From another perspective, all this can be seen as a form of transnational connection externally embodied but internally driven by the students' past sense of self.

It is shown from the above that students developed better acceptance to some new eating, drinking and living habits on top of some of their past habits formed in China. Food, drink and living habits were cultural-laden and as students developed better agreement towards them, they also developed a better sense of belonging and identity to the British culture and society. Together, the adoption of new eating, drinking, and living habits, together with the maintenance of some old habits, demonstrated students' more mixed conception of identity.

5.5.2 Improved Social Etiquette

The improved social etiquette refers to further development in public manners and politeness that are assumed to be expected in British society. Overall, it was found that living and studying in the UK further contributed to most students' already-formed public manner and politeness in China. In relation to identity, this section concerns how students presented themselves in the eyes of the

‘foreign others’ in British society, as well as how they developed a sense of belonging to British society by feeling more attached to the social etiquette in the UK.

Participants reported that by the time they left the UK, their presentation of self and better sense of belonging to the UK was expressed through their further enhanced public manner. These students were spread in their age, gender, degree and duration of stay. They reported improved manners in public, including queuing, speaking quietly in public, leaving the door for others, making an appointment with others before having a meeting, and honouring punctuality. Some manners such as queuing and honouring punctuality might also be the etiquette in China and these manners might have already been established when students were in China. However, in the opinion of these students, the British people paid more attention to their public manner, which cast an influence on their way of behaving. The enhanced public manners was best demonstrated by Jessie, who reflected on her gradual development regarding public manners by observing the other British people.

> *‘I remembered it was a rainy day, and there also happened to be a strike in London. There were three or four people waiting for the bus, including me. Then there was an old lady, who was also a passenger, directing us to stand in the queue and the rest of the passengers were very cooperative…there were some details that you would naturally follow.’*

Jessie’s quotation suggested that enhanced public manners might not only have had implications on the behavioural dimension of identity, but also the presentation of self in relation to the ‘foreign others’ in a different society. It might be possible that Jessie improved her public manners because she wanted to present a better image or look the same in the eyes of the ‘foreign others’.

In addition, five students’ (Guai, Jing, Ye, Xiao, Xila) presentation of self and better belonging to the UK was also shown in their further improvement in politeness. Their personal biography did not seem to have made a difference to this aspect of change. Comparing themselves as they were before studying in

the UK, these students said they said, ‘thank you’, ‘sorry’ and ‘excuse me’ more frequently. Improvement in this aspect did not mean that these students were impolite in China. Instead, they further developed and modified their politeness to fit in with the general behaviour of British society better. This was because they said they changed further, owing to the larger society, where most of the British people they met said ‘thank you’, ‘excuse me’ and ‘sorry’ very often. Gradually, they developed a better sense of belonging to British society by agreeing more with the British way of manners and politeness. This could be conversely demonstrated by two students (Guai, Xila) who felt their good manners were better suited to the British society. Guai noted the influence of manners and politeness to her sense of belonging.

> *‘For example, when I was in China, I saw my classmates spoke filthy language or jumped the queue. I always uphold politeness and manners, so I thought I was a heretic. Once I arrived in the UK, I realized that these (politeness and manners) were the basics. I thought my past life should be in the UK, as all these [etiquette] were part of me.’*

The quotation above suggested the interplay between the self and the otherness and its implication on social and cultural dimensions of identity. Before Guai studied in the UK, she felt she was the ‘other’, by differentiating between her good manners and the poor manners of some of her classmates. Once she came to the UK, she felt she was part of the British society, by feeling similar towards the use of good manners by the general public in British society.

Towards the end of the students’ life and study in the UK, they further developed their public manners and politeness. Changes in these aspects were marked with British socio-cultural norms and behaviours and were closely related to students’ social and cultural identity, as most students modified and learned from the British people, and developed a better sense of belonging to the British way of behaving in the public and with others.

5.5.3 Transnational Mobility and Social Networks

In this study, social networks refer to the sum of students' communication and connections at the social group level of structure. Overall, it was found that during the students' stay in the UK, most maintained communication and connections across the borders. In relation to identity, the maintained mobility to China, as well nested social networks with both the Chinese and the British societies, suggested students' complex sense of belonging and identity.

The students' sense of belonging and identity was firstly shown through mobility to China in both virtual and physical ways. Virtually, all the students frequently communicated with their parents and friends in China through the internet, mobile phones and popular Chinese social media platforms such as QQ and WeChat. Physically, most students, especially those who stayed in the UK for more than two years, visited their families and friends approximately once a year during their stays in the UK. For them, the main purpose was to share their nostalgic feeling, alleviate emotional burdens, show care and carry out responsibilities as sons and daughters. The emotional attachment shown by most students, and the filial piety (the respect for their parents and the responsibility of taking care of them) showed by some students suggested their Chinese sense of belonging and maintained Chinese values and attitudes. The Chinese sense of belonging and identity indicated in students' mobility was best illustrated by Allen, who stayed in the UK for seven years and did not engage very well in the UK, stating:

> *'I think I was more adapted to China, as friends and families can bring something different from the feeling of staying alone abroad. I felt excited every year I returned to China and had a headache every time I was on the plane back to the UK. Frankly, I did not feel like returning to the UK, and ten to twenty days of holiday in China was like a flash.'*

From the quotation above, family and friends in China served as emotional support for Allen and a major source of his sense of belonging in China. At the same time, a review of his UK study experience suggested his social networks

in the UK played a different function for Allen. Most of his friends in the UK were Chinese and he communicated with foreigners mainly when he did part-time jobs at a supermarket. For Allen, Chinese social networks in the UK continued to serve as emotional and peer support for him, while foreigners at work helped him grow and get a better understanding of British culture and society.

Continuing Allen's view on the function of his social networks in the UK, it was found that most students built their various social networks in the UK, through which their multiple senses of belonging was shaped. On the one hand, all the students had their Chinese social networks while studying in the UK. They regarded Chinese friends as helpers and listeners. Many students reflected on their experience of gaining life and emotional support, as well as celebrating traditional Chinese festivals with other Chinese students. On the other hand, most students also developed foreign social networks in the UK. These students were spread in their age, gender, degree and duration of stay in the UK but they all had relatively high English language competence and the motivation to embrace different people and cultures by the time they left. They said that foreign friends not only presented them with a different perspective, but also brought them into the foreign social networks and made them feel part of the 'foreign other'. The role and function of foreign social networks and influence on identity was best illustrated by Xi, who met her British boyfriend when she was 16 and stayed in the UK for fifteen years.

> *'Through my first British boyfriend I met one and a half years later, I almost left all the Chinese people. I knew some Chinese, but I did not develop a very close relationship with them…my boyfriend practised English with me and taught me some common sense in the UK…being with foreign friends makes you feel that I am part of them, I am British and my life should be just like this.'*

The quotation above demonstrated three things. First, Xi, as some other students, maintained both Chinese and foreign social networks, although the Chinese social networks were narrowed down. Second, the role and function of her

British boyfriend was to bring her into part of the British community by practising English with her, and helping her quickly adapt into the British way of living. Third, it also showed how Xi's sense of belonging and the way she saw herself was changed in relation to her changed social networks.

Overall, it can be seen from the evidence that most students maintained a connection with their parents and friends, both virtually and physically. Besides this, they also established a different nature of social networks while studying in the UK. The communication with China, together with the various UK embedded social networks, showed their sense of belonging characterised them as more mobile and connected than who they were before studying in the UK.

5.6 Summary

As the first findings chapter approaches the end, it is necessary to make a review of the four themes. Overall, the four themes were independent of each other as they represented the competence (language competence and intercultural competence), mind, consciousness and behavioural dimensions of identity. The first theme *the capacity to build connections between cultures* was considered as the foundation for students to engage with people of other countries and cultures. By the time the students left the UK, most improved their English language competence and embraced the British culture and society well. Such improvement changed students' way of thinking, their own perception of self and their image in the eyes of others. The second *diaspora consciousness* explored students' changes in consciousness. In particular, most students developed a better understanding of their identity through drawing boundaries and searching for connections between different nation-states, cultures and societies. The third *diaspora values and attitudes* was an extension of the diaspora consciousness, which further explored students' changes in mind and provided frames of reference for students to draw similarities and differences between themselves and others. The final *expansion of behaviours and actions* can be seen as further elucidation of the changes of mind and another frame of reference besides values and attitudes for students to identify themselves.

Overall, by the time students left the UK, all the students changed their identity in these four different dimensions. However, evidence in this findings chapter suggests that there were variations in students' changes in each theme sub-themes. All these variations demonstrated the complexity of identity and the possible meaning of transnational identity. Despite these variations, the researcher did not try to categorise students' identity at this phase. This was due to the consideration that evidence in this chapter was only based on the UK setting and two major time points between the period when students just arrived in the UK and by the time they left the UK. To conceptualise the meaning of transnational identity in a more time-wise manner, the researcher will form *three major identity clusters* by the second-round interviews, which will be presented in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter Six Finding Two: Renegotiating Transnational Identity in China

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how student returnees' various changes in identity were negotiated with their expectations and the actual context in which they were situated. The time frame of this chapter is set between student returnees' early return to China (the period when they first returned) and their 'current life in China' by the time of the fieldwork. In order to conceptualise the meaning of transnational identity across China and the UK, analysis presented in chapter five will also be taken into consideration. The researcher aims to view all the data being collected as a connected whole, just as how identity was unfolded as a story across different time and space (Giddens, 1991). This findings chapter will present data based on the second round of interviews. For this findings chapter, the researcher answers the second research question and sub-questions (for specific questions, please refer to Appendix H):

2. How has the transnational identity of Chinese student returnees changed over time?

1) Are there any variations in the outcomes of Chinese student returnees' identity negotiations?

2) What are the key factors shaping their construction and reconstruction of transnational identity?

3) How does Chinese student returnees' transnational identity influence their professional and personal lives, and vice versa?

This findings chapter is organised in two parts. The first part describes three identity clusters, their definition and major characteristics. The three identity clusters are home-seekers, foreign pilgrims and strategic decision-makers. In the following sections, each spider chart shows a particular participant who represents a particular identity cluster. This part focuses on the 'what' of student returnees' identity changes since their return to China. The second part

describes the process by which student returnees' various changes in identity was negotiated in China and in particular, how student returnees' identity was negotiated with the Chinese society, different working environment and various social groups.

To prevent painting too simplistic a picture of identity, student returnees' further identity changes since return were also analysed in connection with their changes before and during their studies in the UK. In relation to Chapter 5, each grouping in this chapter may only demonstrate students' changes in one possible dimension of identity. For example, a group of participants whose intercultural competence has improved only deepened our understanding of how students' capacity to build connections between cultures changed. However, in line with the argument on identity in 3.2.2, identity was preferred to be viewed as a whole, composed of various dimensions. Therefore, a person might fall into different groups in different identity dimensions, but people's identity was based on the composition of various dimensions as a whole. This may explain why there were only groupings but no identity clusters in the previous chapter. In addition, the researcher did not want to make hasty conclusions on the meaning of student returnees' transnational identity, before having a deeper and more comprehensive view of their identity changes in China.

With regard to how each spider chart was organised, guided by the four dimensions of identity established in the literature review chapter, and with reference to Chapter 5, four themes were identified, with each comprising different sub-themes. As seen in the spider chart below (Figure 6.1) in a clockwise direction, English language competence and intercultural competence were the sub-themes of the first main theme of the capacity to build connections between cultures identified in 5.2. *English language competence* refers to students' ability to communicate in English independently and smoothly. *Intercultural competence* refers to the capacity to search for connections between cultures, by shelving differences and seeking common ground.

Following these two, emotional attachment to the UK was part of the students' sense of belonging to the UK. In this study, *the emotional attachment to the UK*

was not emotional attachment to the UK as a country in particular. Instead, it was the emotional attachment to students' experiences of living and studying in the UK which led to their personal growth and identity changes. Running almost counter to the emotional attachment to the UK was the emotional attachment to China. Similarly, it referred to students' and student returnees' attachment to their personal experiences in China. Following emotional attachment to the UK was the adoption of new values and attitudes and the adoption of new behaviours. T*he adoption of new values and attitudes* reflected the main theme of 5.4 and referred to the values and attitudes that students adopted during their UK living and studying experiences. Counter to it, *the maintenance of traditional Chinese values and attitudes* referred to the maintenance of the established values and attitudes before students studied in the UK. *The adoption of new behaviours* was the reflection of the main theme of 5.5. It referred to the behaviours that students adopted while they were living and studying in the UK. Counter to it, *the maintenance of past behaviours* was referred to the maintenance of behaviours formed before students studied in the UK.

Diaspora consciousness was the second main theme of 5.3 but was more concerned with the sub-themes of the double awareness of being both here and there, in sections 5.3.1, 5.3.2 and 5.3.3. Following this, *transnational mobility and social networks* was one of the sub-themes of section 5.5 on the expansion of behaviours and actions. It referred to the transnational communication and connections students and student returnees maintained in their sojourn and homecoming experience. Here it should be noted again that social networks were different from social groups in this study. Social networks were considered as the sum of interactions of various social groups, while social groups related more to student returnees' interaction with the people nearby such as their parents, friends and colleagues.

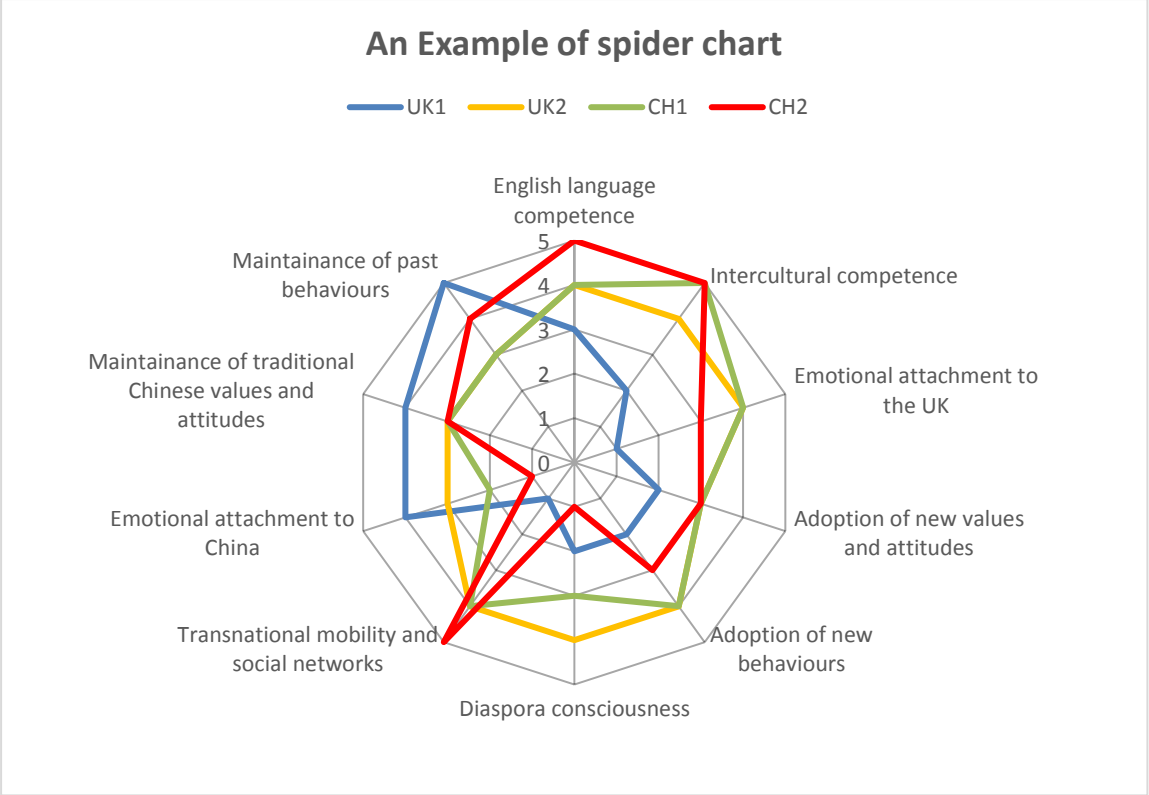


Figure 6.1 An example of spider chart[6]

6.2 The Three Identity Clusters and Their Major Characteristics

6.2.1 Home-seekers

Definition

'Home-seeker' generally referred to those student returnees who showed an enhanced Chinese sense of belonging and decreased foreign sense of belonging after living and studying in the UK. 'Home' described the place where student returnees could reclaim their socio-economic status and regain their social networks of support in China. 'Seeker' referred to the strong willingness to return to China and resistance to remain in the UK or go elsewhere anymore.

Based on the three rounds of interview data, three out of sixteen student returnees were identified as home-seekers. Although readers may also refer to

[6] This example spider chart does not represent any participant but was created to illustrate to the readers how each spider chart was organised in the analysis process and the findings chapters.

Appendix D, as stated in 4.4.2, for all the participants' demographic profiles, Table 6.1 was created for the readers' convenience to refer to information that is most relevant to this section. With this table, readers could have a better overview of all the characteristics of home-seekers, as well as make comparisons and contrasts between them and with other identity clusters. By introducing this table, the researcher wants to clarify that it was also relevant to the first round of interviews on which the previous chapter was based. As all the interviews were done when the participants returned to China; the information about the length of stay in the UK and all other information was relevant. In addition, the researcher only concluded the three identity clusters and reorganised all the participants in Appendix D into three different tables by the second round of interviews on which this current chapter is based.

The table suggests that their current age ranges from 31 to 40 (18 to 24 when they came to the UK). According to Erikson's (1950) human development theory, people aged between 31 and 40 were in the phase of love and care. This meant a phase when people start to find themselves in more complex social relationships, established careers and caring families. Data from the interviews corresponded to the theory, as all the home-seekers already had their established careers and own families at the time of the fieldwork. They showed satisfaction with life and no intention to settle down anywhere else.

In addition, their duration of stay in the UK ranged from two to seven years. All of them did a master's degree in the UK. Fi stayed seven years because he attended a language school, a foundation course and changed to a new university in his second year of undergraduate study. Allen stayed five years because he worked at a computer company in the UK soon after he completed his master's study. Although their years of stay in the UK varied, they all said they stayed long enough in the UK to the point they did not feel like staying there anymore. Finally, their return period to China ranged from five to thirteen years. They were all males and were all science student returnees. Their studies were funded by their parents, a possible indication of their sound family background. In the interviews, all the home-seekers mentioned that they were from well-off

families in China. No home-seeker mentioned having a financial burden while studying in the UK.

Name	Age when just arrived in the UK	Age now	Study major	Duration of stay in the UK	Return period	Frequency of return to China during stay in the UK	Frequency of return to the UK after settling in China	Economic and social status in China	Nature of Work
Fi	18	31	MA Civil Engineering	7 years	5 years	Once a year	None	Self-funded	Engineer at a transnational corporation
Allen	24	37	MA Computer Science	5 years	7 years	Once a year	None	Self-funded	Public civil servant at a local government
Wei	24	40	MA Advanced Manufacturing	2 years	13 years	Once a year	None	Self-funded	Financial investor at a local company

Table 6.1 Summary of demographic profiles of home-seekers

Major Characteristics

Generally, the home-seekers had three major characteristics since they returned to China: a decreased sense of belonging to the UK, reduced intercultural competence, and decreased transnational mobility and narrowed social networks. Visually, we will take Fi's spider chart as an example of home-seekers' pattern of changes in identity. Compared with Fi's identity in CH1 (green line of period when he first returned to China), the most outstanding feature of identity in CH2 (redline of current life in China) is that it is shaped more like an arrow, pointing to the sub-theme of sense of belonging to China on the left-hand side. Nearly opposite to this sub-theme, the chart shows his further decreased sense of belonging to the UK in CH2 on an already low level (the specific level is judged based on the demonstration of identity dimensions and values in spider charts in Appendix E) of that in UK2 (yellow line) and CH1 (green line). In addition, there is further reduced intercultural competence since his return when compared with that in UK1. In contrast, his English language competence increased further than that in CH1 since returning to China. Also, transnational mobility and social networks in CH2 decreased further compared with that in UK1, UK2 and CH1. Overall, Fi's identity in CH2 does not tilt towards either side. Additionally, compared with UK1, although there are further decreases in his diaspora consciousness, adoption of new behaviours, and sense of belonging to the UK, these dimensions never retreated to their original levels in UK1. All these added to the complexity of Fi's identity.

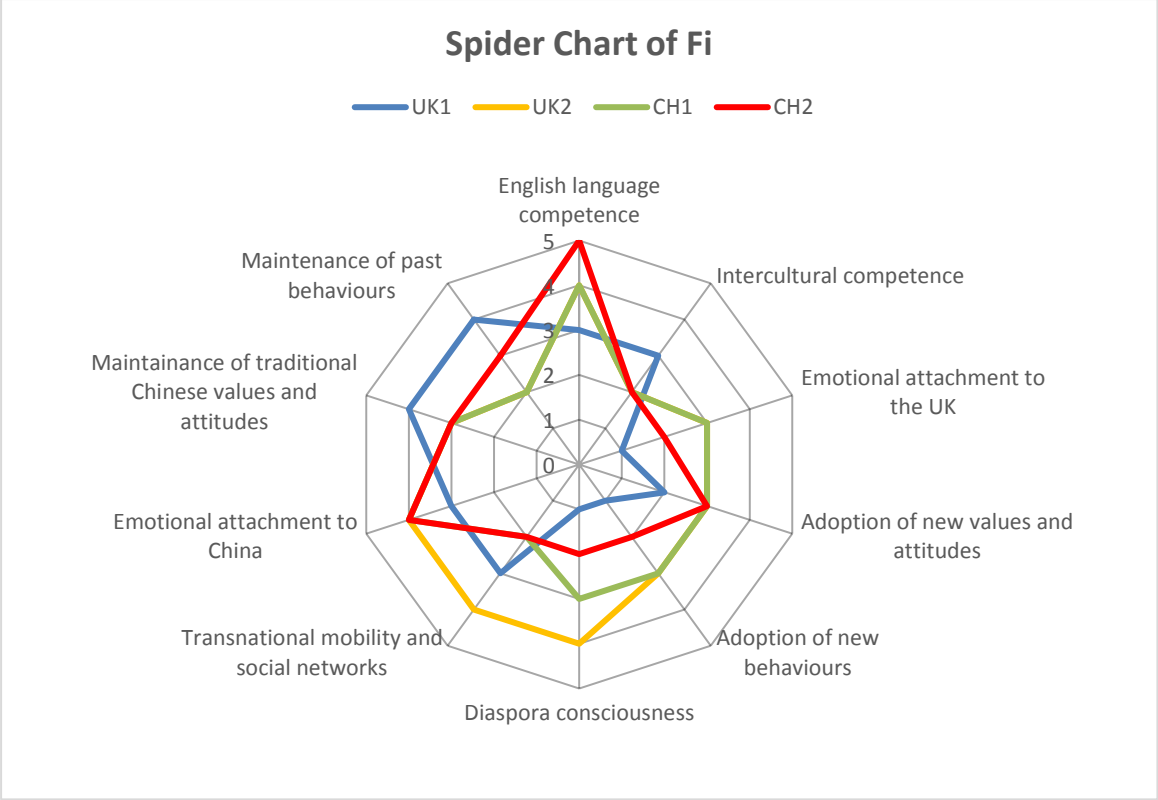


Figure 6.2 Spider chart of Fi

In the following sub-sections, more narrative account of home-seekers' identity changes will be provided.

Weak Sense of Belonging to the UK since Return

As established in 5.3.4 in Chapter 5, a sense of belonging comprised student returnees' emotional attachment and their agreement with the values, attitudes and behaviours of a society. Overall, home-seekers showed a further decreased sense of belonging to the UK since their return, compared with their already low sense of belonging to the UK in UK1 and UK2. In terms of emotional attachment to the UK in CH1, none of the home-seekers showed emotional attachment to the UK or expressed a willingness to return to the country. Allen and Wei said there was nothing in the UK they felt reluctant to part with. In CH2, they all felt that life in the UK became rather distant to them and they lacked interest in building communications and connections with the UK. The weak emotional attachment to the UK since returning could be illustrated by Fi, who returned to China for five years.

'I do not miss the UK, not at all…I never see the UK as my home, or where I can belong to…up until now, I am sniff about friends who shared something about the UK, as I don't see anything good in there…I don't like the UK, very much indeed. It's ok if you ask me to go back for travel but if you ask me to live there again, absolutely no.'

The decreased emotional attachment to the UK since their return was also illustrated through their limited changes in their behavioural dimension of identity (adoption of new behaviours in the spider chart). They all said they still had a Chinese stomach and preferred Chinese food. Both Allen and Fi reflected that ever since they returned to China, they rarely went to western restaurants or supermarkets of imported goods. In a deeper sense, the lack of interest in western food and products indicated their low level of agreement to the embedded behaviours in the British society. The low sense of belonging to the UK through living and eating habits was illustrated by Allen, who stayed in the UK for seven years.

'Since returning to China, I've seen someone cooking western food, but I had no interest. I was also not craving imported products such as peanut butter and pancakes at supermarkets, as they were very expensive as compared to that in the UK. I have already seen and tasted them before, so I was not curious about them.'

However, home-seekers' sense of belonging to China was not as simple as they initially suggested by their quite straightforward emotional attachment. In the interviews, they still indicated having developed strong agreement with certain values, attitudes and behaviours embedded in the British society (especially when compared to that in UK1). All mentioned valuing frugality and an independent educational approach for their children. These changed values and attitudes indicated their search for shared values and attitudes embodying their new sense of self. The complexity in home-seekers' identity was illustrated by Fi, who described the contrasts in his social etiquette and way of thinking with his old friends. These contrasts further demonstrated Fi's changes in identity, of

connecting to his new self through maintained social etiquette and different ways of thinking.

> *'Normally, I do not throw things away randomly. Sometimes I will but the frequency is less. I would hold a cigarette butt for five minutes before throwing it into the trash. My old friends would laugh at me and said I was changed. They said I was too girlish and faked. They did not understand and respect my way of thinking and behaviour like this.'*

As seen from the above, the home-seekers reported a decreased sense of belonging to the UK since their return. Their limited changes in the behavioural dimension of identity further demonstrated their decreased sense of belonging to the UK. Such a decreased sense of belonging may indicate their reduced willingness to communicate and build connections with people from other countries and cultures, for which evidence will be provided in the next section.

Reduced Intercultural Competence

Guided by Fi's spider chart, the second major characteristic of home-seekers' identity was their reduced intercultural competence since return. With reference to the definition of intercultural competence, it referred to whether student returnees could be able to build connections between different cultures. By the time the home-seekers left the UK, as judged by their own personal experience, they all concluded that there were still uncrossable boundaries between the British and Chinese cultures. They viewed that there were differences between China and the UK and they held strong views about their Chinese identity. Allen reflected that although he might be able to 'tolerate' these differences, he could not 'learn from them', as he was after all 'Chinese'.

Such intercultural competence before returning to China was associated with their personal biographies before and during their studies in the UK. A review of their demographic profiles suggested that they could not communicate independently in English as soon as they arrived in the UK. However, behind the low English language competence was their lack of agency to respond to British society. During studies in the UK, Fi said he became 'less motivated'

once he realized he could not 'integrate with' his home classmates. Allen and Wei said possibly they 'lacked interest in culture' and did not feel like engaging with the local community. Additionally, all of them acknowledged that they had more Chinese friends. In their eyes, only the Chinese people who shared the same cultural roots could understand them. In that sense, they rejected getting in touch with people from other countries and cultures based on their perceived differences between cultures.

Once they returned to China (in CH1 and CH2), their intercultural competence was reduced further. In CH2, they still expressed that they did not feel like communicating and connecting with people from other countries and cultures. On the surface, Allen and Wei expressed that they were 'not confident' enough to carry out projects in English any more. Looking deeply, such expressions showed their lack of mobilized capacity to sharpen their skills to continue to build connections between cultures. Although Fi expressed that he was 'very confident' about his English language competence and the skills in having a conversation 'in the western thinking', his resistance to making foreign friends may still demonstrate his relatively low capacity to build connections between cultures. According to Fi,

> *'For now I still don't like to make foreign friends. I still think there are differences in our languages and backgrounds. Although I went abroad at a relatively earlier age and there might be smaller differences between me and those 'foreigners', I still think there are differences.'*

It can be seen that Fi's lack of mobilization to make foreign friends was affected by his judgement on the differences between the Chinese people and the so called 'foreigners'. It was assumed that Fi's isolated living and studying experiences widened the difference between him and the 'foreign others', and formed an established bias which was even more difficult to change after he returned to China.

After living and studying in the UK, home-seekers intercultural competence was decreased, indicated in their prejudice over the differences between China

and the UK, as well as their lack of mobilization to build connections with other cultures. Since they returned to China, such low intercultural competence was reduced further and was indicated in their transnational mobility and social networks since return.

Decreased Transnational Mobility and Narrowed Social Networks since Return

The third major characteristic of home-seekers was their decreased transnational mobility and social networks since return. Although mobility and social networks seemed to have only demonstrated student returnees' behavioural dimension of identity, it was student returnees' willingness to build communication and connections across the borders that mattered.

As guided by Fi's spider chart, the home-seekers' transnational mobility and social networks before return was relatively dynamic in UK1 and UK2, which was mainly prompted by their sense of belonging to China but a physical presence in the UK. While they were studying in the UK, all said they returned to China every year for family visits. They used phrases such as 'desperate' and 'excited' to describe their willingness to return to China. When they returned to the UK for their studies, Allen used the expression of 'having a headache' to suggest his lack of willingness to return to the UK and low intercultural competence to engage with the British society.

Once the home-seekers returned to China, their transnational mobility and social networks in CH1 was suddenly decreased with the completion of their studies in the UK. For them, the original need to build connections with their families transnationally had disappeared. In CH2, transnational mobility and social networks were further decreased. They said they did not feel like returning to the UK or going to other countries. They all suggested that they did not remain in contact with anyone in the UK who was close to them. Aside from this further decreased physical transnational mobility, all of them said their attention to the UK was further decreased. Behind all the reduced transnational mobility and social networks was their further reduced sense of belonging to the

UK and reduced intercultural competence to build connections with other foreign countries and cultures.

In conclusion of the three characteristics, the home-seekers had a more Chinese oriented identity. Such identity was marked by their decreased sense of belonging to the UK, reduced intercultural competence and decreased transnational mobility and social networks since their return. Although their Chinese oriented identity was indicated in almost every dimension of their identity, they also seemed to have made changes in identity in certain values, attitudes and behaviours. That is to say, despite the home-seekers' more Chinese oriented identity, they still went through changes in their identity after living and studying in the UK which, in turn, complicated their identity.

6.2.2 Foreign Pilgrims

Definition

'Foreign pilgrim' describes those who showed an increased sense of belonging to the UK and a decreased sense of belonging to China as a result of living and studying in the UK. 'Foreign' means the feeling of isolation when returning to their families and friends in China. 'Pilgrim' means the belief of achieving a better sense of self in the foreign Chinese society. Overall, foreign pilgrims showed a desire to study, work or live abroad again. Their better sense of belonging to the UK was shown through their strong emotional attachment to the UK, as well as strong agreement with the values, attitudes and behaviours newly adopted from the British society.

At the time of the fieldwork, two student returnees were identified as this cluster. A summary table of their most relevant demographic profiles is given below (see Table 6.2). Compared with the first identity cluster, this group was relatively younger in this sample. The table suggests that their current age is 27 years old (22 when they first came to the UK). In terms of human development (Erikson, 1950), this group might be still in the phase of active exploration of their personal sense of identity. The interview data echoed such assumption in that both foreign pilgrims felt they wanted to accumulate more life and work

experiences in the UK. Regarding the duration of stay in the UK and return period to China, both stayed in the UK for one and a half years, in their eyes not long enough to engage more deeply with British society. Since their return, they have been back in China for no more than three years, which is less than the home-seekers. Both were females and studied social sciences in the UK. Similar to the home-seekers, they were also self-funded student returnees, a possible indication of their sound family background and relatively high socio-economic status in China.

Name	Age when first arrived in the UK	Age now	Study major	Duration of stay in the UK	Return period	Frequency of return to China before the final return	Frequency of return to the UK after settling in China	Economic and social status in China	Nature of work
Bai	22	27	MA Media Communications	1.5 years	2.5 years	One	One	Self-funded	Art editor at a local media company
Sophia	22	27	MA TESOL	1.5 years	2.5 years	One	One	Self-funded	English teacher at a transnational corporation

Table 6.2 Summary of demographic profiles of foreign pilgrims

Major Characteristics

There were three major characteristics of foreign pilgrims by the time they left the UK and since their return to China: increased sense of belonging to the UK, decreased intercultural competence, and growing intention to maintain transnational mobility and social networks. Visually, we will take Bai's identity chart as an example, and compared to UK1 and UK2, Bai's identity changes in CH1 and CH2 seemed to lean towards the right-hand side or to the dimensions of identity change in the UK. Compared to Fi from the home-seekers, ever since Bai returned to China, her emotional attachment to China was further decreased, whereas her emotional attachment to the UK was further increased. In terms of her intercultural competence, there was an increase in CH1 and then a decrease in CH2. Different from Bai's increased emotional attachment to the UK, her transnational mobility and social networks were further decreased upon the completion of her study in the UK and since returning to China. Bai's identity changes were complex in that there were also some positive changes in her English language competence, adoption of new values, adoption of new behaviours and diaspora consciousness. Meanwhile, the dimensions of identity formed before her study in the UK, on the left-hand side, were still kept despite certain decreases since her return.

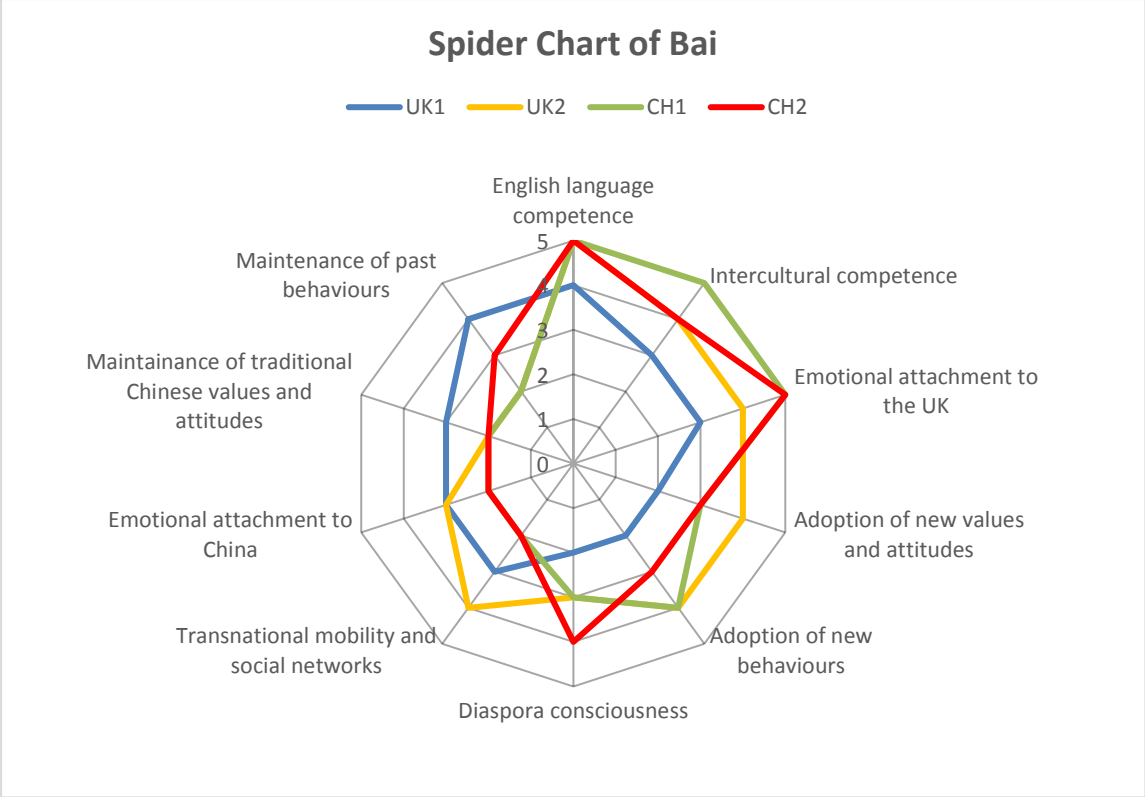


Figure 6.3 Spider chart of Bai

Increased Sense of Belonging to the UK since Return

Compared with the home-seekers, ever since their return, the foreign pilgrims still maintained a strong sense of belonging to the UK in CH1 and CH2, based on their already strong sense of belonging to the UK in UK2. The foreign pilgrims' strong sense of belonging to the UK was primarily indicated in their emotional attachment to the UK in CH1 and CH2. Here it should be noted that such emotional attachment to the UK was more precisely foreign pilgrims' emotional attachment to their UK personal experiences which might be either positive or negative, but would all relate to personal change and growth. In CH1, both said they missed their life in the UK and wanted to return to the country. In CH2, Sophia said although her nostalgic feeling was not as strong as when she just returned to China, she still missed the UK and wanted to return to the country, to further expand her horizon and accumulate more knowledge and work experience. For Bai, her nostalgic feeling for the UK grew even stronger.

'Even though I only stayed in the UK for such a short period of time, I felt not much adapted in China. I feel a little bit better now, but I always recall the days in the past. If I had a second chance, I would return to the UK, no matter in what ways, for I still miss the UK and I still like the country very much.'

Underneath the foreign pilgrims' emotional attachment to the UK was their strong agreement with the values, attitudes and behaviours in the UK. In terms of behavioural dimension of identity, as soon as they returned to China, both said they still maintained their newly adopted behaviours by shopping online on some British and foreign websites, using some British and foreign products, eating English breakfast and drinking afternoon tea. Although in CH2 both reflected that these habits were not as well-maintained as when they just returned to China, they still maintained most of them. All these well-maintained behaviours demonstrated their remained strong emotional attachment to the UK, or emotional attachment to their personal experiences relating to personal changes and growth in the UK. The emotional attachment to the UK indicated in the behavioural dimension of identity could be illustrated by Bai, who only stayed in the UK for one and a half years.

'There was a Mark & Spencer recently opened in Beijing. I would sometimes would go shopping there…I felt very emotional every time when I came across food and products from the UK.'

In terms of the values and attitudes dimension of identity, the two foreign pilgrims expressed strong agreement with independence and individualism since their return. Regarding independence, both Bai and Sophia viewed that they should be independent from their parents' interference with their life. Besides this, they viewed that owing to their study experiences in the UK, women did not necessarily have to follow the traditional life path of finding a boyfriend, getting married, and bearing and raising a child. Instead, they could choose to live a life that made them happy. Valuing independence was illustrated by Bai in the quotation below.

'My parents would kidnap me morally in the name of love. They did not accept differences and there was no so-called independence, as they had to obey the rules collectively.'

Apart from valuing independence, both foreign pilgrims also demonstrated their changes towards individualism. Both Bai and Sophia noted that ever since they studied abroad, they seldom communicated with their previous friends. After they returned to China, they felt that it was difficult for them to readapt to their previous social circles as they believed that there were no shared topics. Although both Bai and Sophia mentioned trying to conceal their overseas study experiences and pretended to act more like locals, they showed that it made them feel tired and they would rather spend more time alone. As the last quotation put more emphasis on independence rather than individualism, the following quotation from Sophia demonstrated her change towards individualism after living and studying in the UK.

'My parents wondered why I became so reclusive and unsocial…but I would rather spend time alone than going out with someone who did not have shared topics with me…maybe my value is not commonly accepted by Chinese society, but I would rather live my way as it is.'

It might be possible that the conflicts in values and attitudes mentioned above had already existed before Bai and Sophia studied abroad. However, the analysis of their interview data suggested that the UK study experience further instigated their reflection on these values and attitudes. Meanwhile, reporting foreign pilgrims changed values and attitudes did not mean that they completely abandoned the traditional Chinese values and attitudes. In the interviews, both said they still honoured filial piety (the respect for their parents and the responsibility of taking care of them as mentioned in Chapter 5) or had the responsibility of taking care of their parents. According to Sophia:

'These differences existed in your mind, or you could complain to your friends who also had overseas study experiences. But you could not change anything. She [China]

is still the way it is. It is not as good as you expected but it is still your home. Your family is still here, and you were born in Shenyang, not in the UK.'

Ever since the foreign pilgrims returned to China, they showed an increased sense of belonging to the UK, which was illustrated in their strong emotional attachment to the UK, and was further demonstrated by their agreement with the values, attitudes and behaviours embedded in British society. While acknowledging their increased sense of belonging to the UK, it is worth highlighting that their identity was also not always as foreign-oriented as they projected. They tried to readapt to Chinese society and still valued some traditional Chinese values and attitudes such as filial piety. Despite their increased sense of belonging to the UK since return, there were further changes in their capacity to build connections between different cultures, which will be addressed in the next section.

Decreased Intercultural Competence since Return

Different from the home-seekers, the foreign pilgrims reported decreased intercultural competence since their return. Being foreign pilgrims in this characteristic meant student returnees demonstrated the capacity and willingness to build connections with the foreign people and cultures but did not show the same level of capacity and willingness to respond to Chinese culture and society.

Once the foreign pilgrims returned to China, their capacity to build connections with foreign cultures as a reflection of their intercultural competence was further increased on the already high level in UK2. Regarding their personal biographies, both were only 24 years old by the time they left the UK. With reference to Erikson's (1950) theory on human development, these two foreign pilgrims might be still in the phase of actively exploring their sense of identity. According to the interview data, both said they wanted to 'experience more' to expand their horizons and accumulate knowledge and work experiences in the UK. In addition, they were still very interested in British art, music and drama, which made them more willing to build connections with the foreign people and

culture. Once they returned to China, both said they became more 'motivated' to communicate with 'foreigners'. Such increased capacity to connect with foreign culture was illustrated by Bai, who reported creating an English-speaking context on purpose for herself since return:

> *'Once you returned, magically, you would create an English context for yourself, whereas in Britain, you would take for granted by continuing to speak Chinese in your daily lives and make Chinese friends…I've become better now but when I just returned, I even looked forward to sitting beside a foreigner and having a few chats with him.'*

However, if the creation of an English context is viewed from another perspective, and the foreign pilgrims' physical situation in Chinese society is considered, building connections with the English culture in the Chinese society might be interpreted as their lack of willingness to respond to the local Chinese culture and society. Throughout the three rounds of interviews, they mentioned more than once the willingness to live in a more transnational context. They also expressed their willingness to return to the UK sometime in the future for their relatively low life satisfaction in China. In addition, seen in the last section of 6.2.2, the two foreign pilgrims demonstrated agreement with the value of independence and individualism. The lack of willingness and capacity to respond to the Chinese society and culture could be illustrated by Bai;

> *'Me and my friends both believed that we would return to the UK in the future. We hoped to catch up any opportunities to return to the UK either through study or work. Such a belief can be seen as a psychological comfort, or a runaway from my current life in China.'*

Although the foreign pilgrims were proactive in engaging with the British society before their return, they did not show the same level of capacity to respond to Chinese culture and society. The willingness to reconstruct an English-speaking environment showed their further improved intercultural competence to communicate with foreign cultures after living and studying in

the UK. However, such enhanced intercultural competence decreased once they showed a lack of mobilization and willingness to respond to Chinese culture and society.

Growing Intention to Maintain Transnational Mobility and Social Networks

The third characteristic of the foreign pilgrims was their growing intention to maintain transnational mobility and social networks. In relation to this characteristic, being foreign pilgrims meant the student returnees were willing to maintain transnational connection and communications.

The foreign pilgrims' growing intention to maintain transnational mobility and social networks did not change overnight. When they studied in the UK, they reflected that they still maintained contact with their parents, with a frequency of once a week on average. Different from the home-seekers who treated their families and other social networks in China as their emotional support, the foreign pilgrims regarded communication with their parents as a 'duty' to inform their parents about their safety and well-being in the UK. They both said they did not miss home very much during their stay in the UK. By the time they left the UK, both recalled their reluctance to return to China. All this reflected their less intense sense of belonging to China and dampened willingness to engage with the Chinese society.

From when they returned to China, their transnational mobility and social networks were suddenly cut off. As the home-seekers, the foreign pilgrims' high transnational mobility and social networks in the UK1 and UK2 were more associated with their stipulated course of study in the UK. Once they finished their studies, such transnational mobility and social networks were cut off abruptly. However, both expressed their intention to return to the UK with a different look, after accumulating more knowledge and experience in China. For Sophia, although the willingness of return was not as strong as when she just arrived, she still hoped to return when she had more money. For Bai, her willingness to return became so overwhelming that after this fieldwork was ended, she decided to return to the UK.

Looking deeply, by using ‘intention’ the researcher wanted to suggest that although they had the willingness to connect with the outside world, as judged by them, they did not really live lives that were transnational in nature. They only paid attention to the UK through social and foreign media such as Facebook and the BBC. Neither had they travelled abroad since their return. Their rather localized life was in sharp contrast to their high transnational mobility and social networks when studying in the UK, when they travelled to other European countries, visited as many places as possible and remained in contact with their families and friends in China. Again, it might be suggested that what the foreign pilgrims felt emotionally attached to might not be the UK as a country in general, but their personal experiences in the UK which were built on more transnational communication and connections. Such experiences might be what the foreign pilgrims treasured the most.

In conclusion of the foreign pilgrims’ three characteristics, their identity since return were more foreign-oriented, characterized by an increased sense of belonging to the UK, a decreased intercultural competence, and a growing intention to maintain transnational mobility and social networks. While arguing for foreign pilgrims’ more foreign-oriented identity, they also maintained some Chinese traditional values, attitudes and behaviours such as respect for the Chinese culture and responsibility to take care of their parents.

6.2.3 Strategic Decision-makers

Definition

‘Strategic decision-makers’ mainly referred to those who had a mixed sense of belonging owing to living and studying in the UK. As established in section 5.3.4 in Chapter 5, a mixed sense of belonging is comprised of emotional attachment to the life experiences to more than one country, as well as agreement with the values, attitudes and behaviours in various societies. In this study, being ‘strategic’ means student returnees negotiating in various values, attitudes, behaviours, emotional attachment and responding, accordingly, to the designated context and situation. Overall, eleven out of sixteen student returnees were identified as strategic decision-makers by the final round of interviews. A

summary table comprising their most relevant and basic demographic profiles is given below (see Table 3 below). These student returnees were spread in their age, gender, duration of stay in the UK and return period.

Name	Age when just arrived in the UK	Age now	Study Major	Duration of stay in the UK	Return period	Frequency of visit to China during stay in the UK	Frequency of visit to the UK/elsewhere after settling in China	Economic and social status	Nature of work
Jessie	17	34	Bachelor's in Childhood Education	5 years	11 years	Only once	Communicate with Australia and the UK for educational cooperation	Self-funded	English teacher at a self-owned local English school
Meng	26	35	PhD in Chemistry	3.5 years	4 years	Once a year	Visit Canada every year for his permanent residence permit from Canada	Government-funded scholarship	University lecturer at a local university
Xila	26	33	Master's in TESOL	2 years	4 years	None	Communicate with her friends and former lecturers on WeChat	Self-funded	University lecturer at a local university
Ye	19	37	Master's in Hospitality Management	7 years	10 years	Once a year	Go to USA frequently for job training	Self-funded	B2B officer at a transnational corporation

Table 6.3 Summary of demographic profiles of strategic decision-makers

Name	Age when just arrived in the UK	Age now	Study Major	Duration of stay in the UK	Return period	Frequency of visit to China during stay in the UK	Frequency of visit to the UK/elsewhere after settling in China	Economic and social status in China	Nature of work
Guai	23	35	Master's in Banking and Finance	3 years	8 years	None	Hold Hong Kong residence permit and travel abroad every year	Self-funded	Director at a local bank
Qi	23	27	Master's in Banking and Finance	1 year	2 years	None	Communicate with his American friends on Facebook	Self-funded	Staff at a local bank
Da	23	29	Master's in Banking and Finance	1 year	4 years	None	Visit the USA for travel last year	Self-funded	Staff at a local bank
Lv	25	32	Dual Master's in Computer Science	2 years	4 years	Once in a year	Visit USA and Europe every year to see the most advanced technologies	Scholarship	CEO at a self-founded local technology company

Table 6.3 Summary of demographic profiles of strategic decision-makers

Name	Age when just arrived in the UK	Age now	Study Major	Duration of stay in the UK	Return period	Frequency of visit to China during stay in the UK	Frequency of visit to the UK/elsewhere after settling in China	Economic and social status in China	Nature of work
Xi	15	35	Master's in Finance	14.5 years	5 years	Once a year on average	Had British passport and visited the UK every year to renew her Chinese working visa	Self-funded	Hostess at a local media company
Jing	22	29	Master's in Translating and Interpreting	1 year	4.5 years	None	Go to the USA every year to do business	Self-funded	Interpreter at a transnational corporation
Xiao	20	32	Master's in Banking and Finance	7 years	4 years	Once a year on average	Had just signed a business cooperation with the USA.	Self-funded	CEO at a family-inherited company

Table 6.3 Summary of demographic profiles of strategic decision-makers

Major Characteristics

Overall, there were three major characteristics of this identity cluster: mixed sense of belonging, increased intercultural competence, and well-maintained transnational mobility and social networks. Visually, we will take Ye's identity chart as a representation of this identity cluster (see Figure 6.4). Ye's identity chart seems to sit in the middle, without leaning towards either side. Generally, comparing Ye's identity in CH2 with that in UK1, there was an expansion of her identity in various dimensions. In particular, in terms of Ye's emotional attachment, it seems that she changed towards having an emotional attachment to both China and the UK in CH2. In addition, there was a further increase in her intercultural competence compared to CH1. Furthermore, her transnational mobility and social networks were relatively well-maintained after she returned to China. Looking through the four periods from UK1 to CH2, Ye was different from Fi and Bai in the first two identity clusters because she could respond to the changing Chinese and British society with changes in various dimensions of her identity. In UK2, Ye's identity seems to lean towards the right side of the identity dimensions, whereas in CH2 her identity seems to become more balanced among various identity dimensions. Such correspondence did not mean identity was highly selective. As shown from Ye's chart, there are still some delays in her identity changes, including in English language competence, emotional attachment to the UK, adoption of new values and attitudes, and adoption of new behaviours in UK1. These delays showed the process in which Ye' identity was negotiated since her return to China. Overall, Ye's identity changes in response to the changing British and Chinese society also corresponded with the others in this identity cluster.

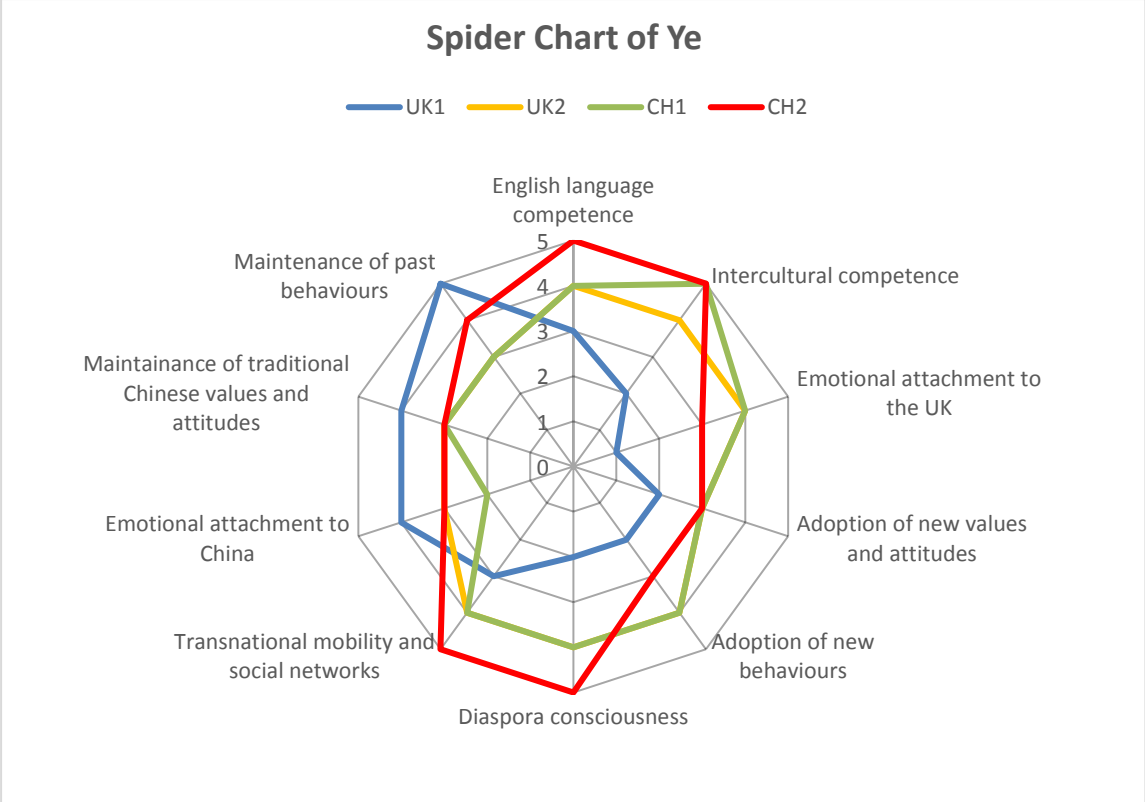


Figure 6.4 Spider chart of Ye

In the following paragraphs, and guided by Ye's spider chart, the three characteristics of strategic decision-makers will be explored further with more narrative interview data.

Mixed Sense of Belonging since Return

As established in section 5.3.4 in Chapter 5, and with reference to Figure 6.4 and all the relevant interview data, all the strategic decision-makers changed towards having a mixed sense of belonging to both China and the UK since returning to China. In relation to this characteristic, being strategic decision-makers means student returnees negotiated with themselves in different emotional attachments, values, attitudes and behaviours. When the strategic decision-makers negotiated a different emotional attachment, they chose between their citizenship responsibilities, family responsibilities and their personal expectations and experiences. In this study, citizenship responsibility was found to be related to personal sense of responsibility for a country; family responsibility meant personal sense of responsibility for taking care of families;

personal expectation and experiences meant the expectation of living in a particular country owing to personal experiences. Again, these personal experiences might be both positive and negative but would ultimately lead to personal change and growth. When the strategic decision-makers negotiated the various values, attitudes and behaviours, they adopted a combination of the newly adopted ones and the past ones. The way they negotiated with their emotional attachment, together with the way they dealt with various values, attitudes and behaviours, made them identified them as strategic decision-makers.

On the one hand, all the strategic decision-makers reported complex emotional attachment to both China and the UK ever since returning to China. In particular, they negotiated in citizenship responsibilities, family responsibilities and personal expectations and experiences. Some strategic decision-makers (Guai, Qi, Lv, Xila, Ye, Da, Xiao, Meng) showed their citizenship responsibility by saying that they loved their country. They were ready to protect their own country when necessary and they had a responsibility to make China stronger and competitive. However, what seemed to be contradictory was that almost all the strategic decision-makers noted that they did not miss China in general, but their family and friends in China. Da also noted that he would be happy to move to the UK if all his family and friends moved to the UK with him. The strategic decision-makers' emotional attachment to China was further compounded by their emotional attachment to the UK. Most strategic decision-makers explained that they felt emotionally attached to the UK because they spent the most precious time of their life there. They believed that the quality of life in the UK was better, but they also reported high satisfaction with life in China. Their negotiation among citizenship responsibility, family responsibility and personal expectation and experiences contributed to their complex emotional attachment. The strategic decision-makers' complex emotional attachment to both China and the UK could be illustrated by the contradictory statements from Xi throughout her three rounds of interviews,

> *'I love China very much. I think China is more important in my heart. If there is a war between China and the UK, I will*

protect China…the only thing I missed in China was my family…I went to the UK when I was 15 and lived there for almost fifteen years. I spent the most precious time of my life there...I feel UK is my home.'

As shown in Figure 6.4, complex emotional attachment was not developed overnight, as it was supposed that a person's emotional attachment would take time to develop and nourish. Most strategic decision-makers (except for Lv and Jing who studied and worked abroad before coming to the UK) reported relatively low emotional attachment to the UK as soon as they arrived there. They expressed their low emotional attachment to the UK through their feelings of expressions such as 'distant' and 'scared'. Gradually, their emotional attachment to the UK increased with their living and studying experiences there. They expressed that they 'had more friends', 'integrated into the tempo and way of life in the UK', and started to 'enjoy life in the UK'. Upon return to China, all the strategic decision-makers reported complex emotional attachment to both countries. They neither showed rejection nor preference for either country. In their eyes, every country had its own advantages and disadvantages for them to adapt to.

On the other hand, the strategic decision-makers' identity continued to be negotiated in various values, attitudes and behaviours combined from both the Chinese and the British societies. As guided by Ye's spider chart in Figure 6.4, all the strategic decision-makers reported adoption of some of new values and attitudes after return. In the interviews, some (Xiao, Qi, Da, Xi, Jing, Guai, Jessie) expressed strong agreement with the values and attitudes in British society such as recycling, donating, public manner and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. Others (Meng, Xila, Jessie, Xiao) expressed valuing independence and individualism more, with a preference for life partners of similar overseas study experience and a more independent educational approach for their (future) children. It was not necessary to say that all the strategic decision-makers adopted new values and attitudes because of their study experience in the UK, but they all recalled these changes in values and attitudes along with their UK living and studying experiences.

Meanwhile, after returning to China, all the strategic decision-makers also reported maintaining traditional Chinese values and attitudes such as respecting the elders, honouring filial piety and valuing the traditional Chinese culture. With the adoption of new values and attitudes from British society, and some well-maintained traditional Chinese values and attitudes, the strategic decision-makers seemed to only accept what they considered as right and gave a corresponding response. For example, the strategic decision-makers' change towards individualism and its negotiation with the traditional Chinese values and attitudes could be demonstrated by Meng, who tried to pursue his own way of life and shy away from his parents interference in his life.

> *'Another change in me was the pursuit of freedom. For example, I still have not got married. They [parents] would keep asking me why I have not got married yet. However, after living in their [British] way of life, you would change. Getting married or breaking up, it is entirely up to me. I think parents are parents, me is me. I can take care of you, but I have my life. Don't force your ideology upon me; I will not force you to accept my opinion either.'*

Meng's quotation demonstrated his value towards his personal feelings and ideas. However, being free in his own will did not mean that he discarded traditional Chinese values and attitudes. It is shown from the interview quotation that Meng still honoured filial piety by taking care of his parents. Meng's change was also echoed in most strategic decision-makers' interview data. Most admitted that the responsibility to take care of their parents was the main driving force for them to return home. However, they were different because while they honoured filial piety, they valued their own will and rejected living under the shadow of others.

Apart from agreement with various values and attitudes, the strategic decision-makers' mixed sense of belonging was also illustrated through their combination of behaviours, ranging from eating, drinking, living habits and social etiquette of both 'here' and 'there'. They were strategic in their behavioural dimension of identity because they could respond accordingly to

the changing British and Chinese society. When the strategic decision-makers just returned to China, most reflected that they maintained their behaviours adopted from the UK the most. As time went by, as shown by Ye's spider chart in CH2, they all noted that they re-modified their behaviours such as eating habits and public manners according to the Chinese society. Despite such change, all the strategic decision-makers still maintained their newly adopted behaviours along with their past behaviours relatively well. Behind the maintenance of various behaviours was their agreement with the values and attitudes embedded in these behaviours, treating them as part of their life and sense of self. According to Ye:

> *'In recent years, I started to try some Wontons or eat some Chinese noodles. However, more often than not, I would just have a piece of toast or fried eggs, with some non-Chinese salad dressing… It has already become my way of living, rather than simply modifying others in the early days of my life in the UK…whenever you live, no matter how old you are, you have already adopted that way of living because that's what you came from.'*

Evidence from the above suggests that the strategic decision-makers were strategic in this characteristic because they negotiated various emotional attachments, values, attitudes and behaviours. Their negotiation with citizenship responsibility, family responsibility, and personal expectations and experiences made their emotional attachment more complex. Meanwhile, their combination of various values, attitudes and behaviours further contributed to their mixed sense of belonging. Such a mixed sense of belonging also had implications for their increased intercultural competence since return, which will be elaborated in the next section.

Increased Intercultural Competence since Return

The second characteristic of the strategic decision-makers was their increased intercultural competence since returning to China. In relation to this characteristic, being strategic decision-makers meant the student returnees not

only had the capacity to build connections with the British society when they were in the UK, they could also rebuild connections with the Chinese society upon return to China. Being able to negotiate between both the Chinese and other cultures increased their intercultural competence further.

Once the strategic decision-makers returned to China, most reported their intercultural competence to bridge the gap with foreign people and cultures. Some (Xi, Qi, Jessie) reflected that one of the advantages of studying overseas was that they could help dispel misunderstandings between cultures. All three strategic decision-makers reflected on how they explained the British culture and society they had seen and experienced to their local Chinese colleagues. Others (Jing, Ye, Xi, Lv, Xiao, Jessie) reported using their own understanding and knowledge about cultures to break the ice with the 'foreign others' in business negotiations. This could be demonstrated by Ye, who reflected building connections between the Chinese and European cultures in her business negotiations.

> *'When I chat with my foreign clients, I will talk about beers, food, drinks from their countries or cultures. For example, I would say to them, "It is hard to find exquisite Guinness in China, and the taste is very different." They would say, "Yes, that is right!" and then tell me what the taste would be like in his hometown. By permeating these details into our business negotiations, they would feel close to you and know that you understand them, their countries and cultures.'*

In addition to their relatively well-maintained intercultural competence to bridge the gap between cultures, once the strategic decision-makers returned to China, they also had the capacity to rebuild connections with the Chinese people and culture. Most became more aware of the Chinese culture and behaviours in Chinese society. Some (Meng, Xi, Xila, Da, Jing, Xiao) strategic decision-makers reflected on the differences in communication between Chinese and foreign cultures. Others (Lv, Jessie, Xi, Meng, Xila, Guai, Da, Jing, Xiao, Qi) reflected on the differences in attitude towards personal privacy, time flexibility, personal relations and work ethics. However, faced with these differences, the

strategic decision-makers tried to learn and adapt to the Chinese culture and the established rules and behaviours. According to Xi:

> *'Since I coming back and working here, one thing I have learned is that you should play a double game when speaking to different people. Most Chinese do not always reveal their true feelings. They have two faces and some even have three faces.'*

In the end, the capacity of being strategic to build connections with different kinds of people and cultures increased their intercultural competence further. Most strategic decision-makers reflected that after living and studying in the UK, they believed that they could adapt to different kinds of environment. Their increased capacity was illustrated by Ye, whose return to China was almost ten years ago and she reflected on her sojourn and homecoming experience after return.

> *'Wherever I was, I could adapt to the environment very easily. My capacity to adapt to an environment was improved…this is a milestone in my life and will benefit the rest of my life.'*

The strategic decision-makers' further increased intercultural competence was also changed throughout four different periods of time (from UK1 to CH2). In UK1, most (except for Lv and Jing who had worked and studied abroad before) said they did not have 'confidence' to communicate with others from different countries and cultures. They attributed the reason mainly to a lack of engagement with 'foreigners' before studying in the UK. In UK2, all the strategic decision-makers expressed that they became more 'motivated' and 'confident' in intercultural communication with their further interaction with people from other countries and cultures. In CH1, they reflected on trying to learn and understand the differences between the Chinese cultures and the other cultures in various aspects. In CH2, all the strategic decision-makers reflected that they became more adapted to the Chinese culture and society. They became more aware of the differences between the Chinese culture and others and more confident in adapting to these differences.

As seen from the above, the strategic decision-makers were strategic in this characteristic because not only could they build connections with foreign people and cultures, but they could also respond to the Chinese culture and society. Taken together, the strategic decision-makers' mixed sense of belonging since return and their increased intercultural competence also cast influence on their mobility and social networks across borders, for which evidence will be provided in the next section.

Well-maintained Transnational Mobility and Social Networks

The third major characteristic was strategic decision-makers' relatively well-maintained transnational mobility and social networks since their return. In relation to this characteristic, being strategic decision-makers meant that the student returnees deliberately built transnational communication and connections to meet their intellectual, emotional and intercultural needs after living and studying in the UK. On the surface, all the strategic decision-makers continued to live in a transnational world, by maintaining communication and connections with people and countries outside China in some way or other. Looking deeply, it was a deliberate choice to negotiate their identity in a transnational world.

Once the strategic decision-makers returned to China, they all showed relatively well-maintained transnational communication and connections. As shown in Table 6.3, they maintained transnational communication and connections in both physical and virtual ways. Some established business and educational cooperation abroad, while others communicated with their friends across the borders on social media platforms. The transnational mobility to other countries since return was illustrated by Lv, who owned his own technological company in China:

> *'I go to the US and Europe every year. One reason is that I have to deal with some businesses with the suppliers there. Also, I want to have a look at the new technologies there so that we can borrow and put them into practice.'*

From the quotation above, it might be that Lv's transnational connections were only part of his work, or the result of Lv's intellectual and business demands. However, most strategic decision-makers showed their personal and emotional demands of living in a transnational world to support their mixed sense of belonging and increased intercultural competence. Some (Guai, Da, Qi, Ye, Jing, Lv, Xi) expressed that they did not want to be confined to one local place since their return, as overseas study experiences had shown them a bigger world. Others (Xila, Jessie, Qi, Da, Xiao, Xi, Meng) said they remained in contact with their friends outside China mainly because they were nostalgic about the beautiful memories from the past and did not want to be isolated from the outside world. Some (Ye, Jing, Guai) also mentioned that they deliberately searched for jobs at transnational companies because they believed they were fitted into a transnational context more. Jing, who stayed in Shenyang mainly to take care of her mother during the first two years of her return, said:

> *'As soon as I returned to China, I targeted finding jobs in Shanghai not Shenyang, for I think Shanghai was 70% similar to living abroad…the company I worked for is multi-cultural, but the mainstream is American culture…I saw many wonderful things at work. My job has opened a door for me.'*

The relatively well-maintained transnational mobility and social networks went through changes across four different periods of time. When strategic decision-makers just arrived in the UK, similar to the home-seekers, most went through a period of time when they sought emotional support from their families in China. At that period of time, they were transnational because they were physically situated in the UK but emotionally oriented toward China. Gradually, according to most of the strategic decision-makers, as they felt more adapted to their life in the UK, they communicated with their parents less. In the meantime, most reported making new friends from other countries and cultures in their latter stay in the UK.

In conclusion, the strategic decision-makers were strategic in that they demonstrated a mixed sense of belonging, increased intercultural competence, well-maintained transnational mobility and social networks. Towards the end of

the fieldwork, and taking the characteristics of the three identity clusters as a whole, one important observation was that the vast majority of student returnees were identified as this identity cluster. When connecting this to the existing literature established in section 3.4.2 in Chapter 3, this observation may shed some light on the relationship between transnationalism and identity. To recap, the changes in values, attitudes and behavioural dimensions of identity drove the student returnees to keep transnational mobility and social networks. On the other hand, their identity was further shaped and changed by continuing to live in a transnational world. In the next part, the process in which the three identity clusters negotiated their identity since return will be explored in greater detail.

6.3 Negotiating Identity at Different Levels of Interactions by the Three Identity Clusters

After setting the scene by clarifying the major characteristics of the three identity clusters throughout four different periods of time, the following section describes how the student returnees within the three identity clusters responded to Chinese society. To recap, the four different periods of time were UK1 (students' early sojourn in the UK), UK2 (students' later sojourn in the UK/by the time they left the UK), CH1 (student returnees' early return to China) and CH2 (student returnees late return to China). In particular, the researcher will unpack why there were variations in the three identity clusters, as well as how the student returnees responded to different levels of interactions in CH1 and CH2.

In this section, the researcher used 'interactions' at different levels to refer to the construction and reconstruction of the student returnees' identity. This was due to the consideration that identity changes involved more complex negotiation than simply deciding between cause and effect/consequence. When viewing the student returnees' identity changes from UK2 to CH1 and further to CH2, the researcher found identity was not changed permanently. Once the student returnees returned to China, they did not live in a vacuum but started to interact with the Chinese society, the working environment and the social groups. These different levels of interaction further contribute to the

construction and reconstruction of identity. In the following paragraphs, each section begins with a level of interaction, before considering three different responses by the three identity clusters.

6.3.1 Negotiating Identity with the Chinese Society

The first section explores how the three identity clusters interacted with the changing Chinese society at large. Overall, the student returnees' further changes in identity upon return were found to have been influenced by the Chinese society and their different responses to the change. Such interaction indicated the relationship between the individual expectation for the larger society and the actual society in which they were situated. In the following paragraphs, each identity cluster will be described in relation to key changes in Chinese society that made a difference, their changes in response and their feelings of response.

The home-seekers were the ones whose individual expectations converged with the Chinese society. For the home-seekers, returning to Chinese society facilitated their changes in response and feelings of response. Different from having difficulties in adapting to British society, they all felt satisfied with their personal and professional lives in China. In relation to the Chinese society, the key changes that made a difference to their changes in response and feelings of response were mainly two-fold. The first was change of social status in China. All the home-seekers felt that they returned to a relatively high social status in China. They reflected that once they returned to China, they became a 'more advantaged group' in Chinese society and their social status was different, whereas in the UK they were only 'Chinese people in the UK' and 'the disadvantaged group' who were 'not confident to claim rights in a foreign country'. The change in social status on the shaping of the home-seekers' sense of belonging could be showed by Allen:

> *'I did not feel confident to claim rights in a foreign country. I felt bad when children on the road whistled at me in the UK, whereas there were no similar situations happening in*

China…in China we have people on our side; you would not live in a state of anxiety.'

The second difference was change of life quality in China. All the home-seekers felt that they returned to a relatively high economic status and enjoyed a better quality of life in China. By better quality of life, they meant living their life was more 'fun', 'normal and stable' in China. As mentioned earlier, all the home-seekers were self-funded by their parents. Given the high tuition fees for international student returnees in the UK, being self-funded by parents might indicate their well-off family background and the associated economic status in China. Their interview data supported this assumption. They either said the UK was 'a remote and desolate place' (by Wei) which was incomparable to where they lived in China, or never expressed any concerns over their tuition fees and living expenses in the UK (though this factor applied to all the other groups). The change in socio-economic status on the shaping of the home-seekers' sense of belonging was illustrated by Allen, who did part-time jobs while studying in the UK.

'I always felt I was a wage earner, living relatively unstably in the UK, like I was working for a living in the UK temporarily, or I was drifting abroad…life in China is more normal…your social status, or your social status recognized by others is different…I now enjoy my family life and feel everything is prosper.'

The quotation above indicated how Allen's changes in response and feelings of response were shaped by the changing British and Chinese society. Allen's view was also echoed in the other two home-seekers. In light of Jenkins' (2008) argument on self-identification and categorisation, when the connection with the same social and economic status in China was not there, the home-seekers might feel themselves to be different in relation to the 'foreign others' in the British society. According to Jenkins, being labelled as different in the external identification process can have consequences on one's internal identity. In other words, Allen may feel he was different because he thought he was considered by the others as different. As a result, the home-seekers might respond by

internalizing their own interpretation of their external identity in their reflection on the 'foreign others'.

In contrast, the foreign pilgrims were the ones whose individual expectations diverged from the actual society in which they were situated. Returning to the Chinese society had the opposite effect on the foreign pilgrims' changes in response and feelings of response. Unlike the home-seekers, the foreign pilgrims reported more conflicts in their life once they returned to China, whereas they merely reported any difficulties when they were studying in the UK. For them, the first key change brought by the Chinese society was the change from Chinese people and culture in the minority in the UK to Chinese people and culture in the majority in China. In response, instead of proactively engaging with the Chinese people and culture in the majority, they felt more 'motivated' to communicate with 'foreigners' (see also section 6.2.2). Such a strong willingness to build connections with the 'foreign others' also showed the tensions between their changed sense of identity and the actual Chinese society in which they were situated. The second key change brought by the Chinese society was changing the values, attitudes and behaviours expected in the Chinese society. The quotation below did not suggest Sophia's 'silliness', but her process of change from a different social etiquette expected in British society to the one that was supposed to suit Chinese society better at the time of the fieldwork.

> *'When I was on the subway in London, even if it was very crowded, people would smile at each other, nicely, and said sorry if you pushed others accidentally. However, when I stood in the queue while others forced their ways through others, there was a man behind me and said "Keep forcing your way ahead! Why you stand still? Are you silly?"'*

Finally, the strategic decision-makers were the ones who could try to bridge the gap between their individual expectations and the society in which they were situated. Returning to Chinese society also had a different influence on the strategic decision-makers' changes in response and feelings of response. First, Chinese society with Chinese people and culture as the majority facilitated the

strategic decision-makers' capacity of responding to the opportunities in their personal and professional life. Most tried to make more foreign friends once they returned to China. From another perspective, they could be seen as constructing a transnational society for them to continue to live in. In addition, most strategic decision-makers felt more 'confident' when communicating with people from other countries and cultures. They believed that they were better-informed about Chinese society in both China and abroad than the local Chinese who had never been abroad. Among all the strategic decision-makers, Guai explained the role of changing Chinese society in influencing her intercultural competence.

> *'I would try to make foreign friends on purpose because I do not lack Chinese friends here! Also, I felt that I was much more secure because this is my territory! When you ask me something, I will tell you what it is but when I am abroad, you are isolated, and you are on other people's territory.'*

Guai's quotation was echoed in most strategic decision-makers' interview data. In light of Jenkins' 'collective identification of differences' (2008, p.94), the changing Chinese society boosted most strategic decision-makers' confidence in building connections with foreign countries and cultures because they regarded themselves as the 'collective Chinese us', whereas the 'foreign others' were the 'minority others' in the Chinese society. Meanwhile, they built connections with the foreign countries and cultures because they regarded there were some similarities between their changed identity and the 'foreign others', such as in language, values, attitudes and behaviours. The process of identification also showed their mixed sense of belonging upon return.

With such feelings of response, they acted proactively by continuing to build communication and connections with abroad. Similar to the home-seekers, they also encountered difficulties such as in English language competence in their early stay in the UK. However, what distinguished them from the home-seekers was their capacity to make changes to themselves. Once they returned to China, it was not necessary that they re-adapt themselves to Chinese society; they could find the best approach to make themselves feel at home. According to Lv:

> *'For most of the time, I see Shenyang or even China with a world perspective. If you see a backward society with a world perspective, you will see many embedded problems. Some would make complaints or objections, but you will hurt yourself in the end. Instead, you have to catch up on the opportunity, or mind the gap in people's awareness or policies and make use of the "time difference". As a result, you cannot only make money, but also push forward the social progress to a minor extent.'*

Seeing from the above, the change of Chinese society in China had different implications on the level of adaptation of the three identity clusters and their further identity changes. The way the three identity clusters interpreted the changing Chinese society in China affected their responses to the constraints and conveniences they encountered since their return. Looking deeply, the way of interpretation and response by the three identity clusters indicated the interplay between individual expectations and the actual larger society in which they were situated.

6.3.2 Negotiating Identity with Different Working Environment

This section explores student returnees' interaction with various kinds of working environment and their different responses to it. The various kinds of working environment were mainly concerned with whether the working environment was local or transnational. It was found that variations in the student returnees' identity changes by the time they left the UK influenced their different responses in choosing their working environment in CH1. Then the student returnees' further interaction with their working environment further contributed to their changes in identity in CH2. Overall, the interaction between the working environment and their different responses demonstrated the convergence and divergence between expectations of the environment and expectations of individuals.

The home-seekers were the student returnees whose individual expectations converged with the expectations of the working environment. By the time the

home-seekers left the UK, they showed no willingness to work in a transnational environment. Such changes in responses might explain why and how their identity shaped their working environment in China in CH1. Both Allen and Wei found jobs at local companies in Shenyang which, as stated by them, did not require them to liaise between different countries and cultures. They felt satisfied with their jobs and did not express any willingness to change their jobs into more transnational ones. Allen also said he loved his job because he only did some low-waged jobs such as being a 'delivery guy' in the UK. Fi was different from the other two home-seekers because he worked at a transnational company in Shenyang. He said he did not try to find jobs at transnational companies on purpose but every job he did since he returned was all at transnational companies. He felt he might not be able to adapt to working for a local company. He attributed the reason to his similar qualifications and experience with most of his colleagues at the transnational corporations. Fi's feelings of response by working at transnational companies from another perspective demonstrated his change of identity after living and studying in the UK.

Meanwhile, the local working environment which home-seekers negotiated since their return also cast influence on their further changes in identity in various dimensions in CH2. Starting with English language competence, for Allen and Wei, their English language competence further decreased from the already low level by the time they left the UK. They said they did not need to speak English at all at work. Different from them, Fi was the only one who said his English was more improved upon return. He joined the 'Toastmaster club' in Shenyang to improve his English further, as he had to use English at work. From another perspective, Fi's action indicated the possible relationship between the language competence dimension of identity and his job nature. Additionally, their nature of work also gave possible explanations for their decreased transnational mobility and social networks in China. Allen and Wei said their jobs did not involve business travel abroad or communication with people around the world. Fi said although his company was transnational, his job responsibility did not require him to go abroad or build connections abroad. Towards the end of the home-seekers' convergence of the expectations of the

environment and the expectations of the individuals, it was the home-seekers' responses in choosing their jobs and they nature of their working environment that mattered in their further changes in identity in CH1 and CH2.

In contrast, the foreign pilgrims were the student returnees whose individual expectations diverged from their expectations of the working environment. Both foreign pilgrims suggested that they hoped to work in a more diversified and transnational context, where they could connect with their subject knowledge and interest in British art and culture to the full extent. In addition, they regarded that their sharpened English language competence, improved understanding of foreign Chinese society, knowledge, experience and skills accumulated in the UK might be more applicable to transnational companies. The expectation for working in a more transnational environment could be illustrated by Sophia's narrative below.

> *R: What is your ideal job and life?*
>
> *P: I want to live a more international life.*
>
> *R: What do you mean by international? Can you be more specific?*
>
> *P: For example, if you offer me a job that requires frequent business travel to the UK, oh my god [in English], I would be hilarious. I would also be happy if my boss is British. I think we are on the same channel.*

However, their intention to work in a transnational context diverged with the local working environment in which they were situated. In terms of their job nature, as the home-seekers, the foreign pilgrims did not have too many opportunities of building transnational communication and connections at work since return. Although Sophia was an English teacher at a transnational English language institution, her actual duty of work was to teach local Chinese student returnees TOFEL[7] listening and speaking. All her colleagues were local

[7] Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is aimed to evaluate the English proficiency of non-English speakers.

Chinese and her use of English was limited to her teaching only. Bai worked at a local publishing company with not much use of English. At the time of the fieldwork, both expressed their disappointment with the limitations and boundaries they experienced with their jobs. Sophia reported the clash of ideas on the teaching approach with the company she worked at. She also reported differences in family backgrounds, experience, qualifications, interests and hobbies with her colleagues. Bai was frustrated because one book she translated at work could not be published due to strict censorship.

In the end, the divergence in their individual expectations explained why and how the foreign pilgrims' identity was further changed from CH1 to CH2. As reflected by them, all these disappointments further contributed to their willingness to change jobs to working in a more transnational context. This was an identity cluster that would like to work in transnational context; however, their expectations could not be met. The disjunction between their expectation and the reality in terms of what the environment could offer further contributed to their changes in identity.

Finally, the strategic decision-makers were those who tried to bridge the gap between their individual expectations and their expectations of the working environment. That is to say, although there might be divergence in their intention and the external reality, they had the capacity to continue to enjoy living in a transnational context. Evidence in this study suggests that they reconstructed the transnational working environment through various ways. Some (Meng, Jessie, Xiao, Xi) built educational cooperation with their former supervisors, and lecturers in research; some (Lv, Jessie) maintained business cooperation with the USA and other European countries, including the UK; others (Jing, Guai) had chosen to work in a transnational company since their return to China. The student returnees who worked at transnational companies considered their knowledge, skills and experience fit best within transnational corporations. In addition, according to these latter student returnees, their overseas study experience was better recognized by transnational corporations and foreign bosses compared with some local Chinese. The two-way

recognition was best demonstrated by Ye, who made it up to an executive position at a transnational corporation:

> *'Within the ten years' time since I returned to China, every turning point of my career has been relevant with 'foreigners'. I really felt very comfortable working with them… they were British, and my emotional attachment to the UK drove me to work with them…not only because I have received education in the UK but also due to the reason that they felt it was very convenient and [able to run] smoothly by working with me.'*

Meanwhile, negotiating in a foreign society further drove their identity changes from CH1 to CH2. From another perspective, the work environment provided opportunities that met their needs, which the second identity cluster of 'foreign pilgrims' did not have. In terms of English language competence, some student returnees mentioned that their English language competence continued to improve in China. They said this was attributable to terminologies they had to deal with at work. Regarding intercultural competence, some felt being more confident in building connections between cultures because they said they felt they were much needed by their foreign colleagues in China. In terms of transnational social networks, for the strategic decision-makers who had foreign friends, they either worked at transnational companies or did jobs which required them to get in touch with people from different countries and cultural backgrounds. In terms of the sense of belonging, the working context might affect student returnees' further sense of belonging to a place. The sharp contrast in Ye's feeling of working at a local company first and then a transnational corporation could best illustrate the relationship between people' sense of belonging and their nature of work.

> *'I felt I could be replaced by someone else. They gave me an impression that they positioned themselves as a local company and did not need someone who had overseas study experience. During the annual conference, I really wanted to help but I just felt [I was] being left out by them. I felt I had*

no common topics with them [colleagues], and we did not 'click'. I felt really down to the bottom.'

'I felt I was in paradise. I really did. All my clients were foreigners who were executives from many transnational companies. My feeling for that moment was, wow, so many foreigners in Shenyang [laugh]!'

Still, four student returnees (Meng, Xila, Guai, Lv) admitted that they could not break through local boundaries despite working in a relatively transnational environment. Guai said that although she once worked at a transnational bank in Shenyang given her intention to work at transnational context, she gradually realized that the 'local was the international'. She reflected that what the transnational corporations really wanted from her was not her overseas knowledge and experience, but her presumably better understanding of the local context in China to help them compete in the Chinese market. They suggested that they had to readapt the knowledge and concept from abroad to the Chinese society. Some strategic decision-makers reflected that they tried to learn to be more 'down to the earth' to be accepted by the 'local others'. In relation to identity, remodelling identity to fit into Chinese society again indicated the influence of structure on the shaping of agency. According to Xila:

'Seeking common ground while shelving differences. Wherever you are, you should have an expectation for yourself, and an expectation for the environment, and you should know what you want.'

Overall, the three identity clusters' interaction with different kinds of working environment indicated the convergence and divergence of individual expectations and the external reality. The student returnees' changed identity influenced their decisions on which nature of work they prefer. In turn, a different working environment might have an influence on student returnees' further construction of identity in different ways since returning to China. Regarding identity, when individual expectations align with the working environment, student returnees (the home-seekers) would respond more

proactively and reported more positive feelings of response; when individual expectations contradicted the working environment, student returnees (the foreign pilgrims) would not respond proactively and reported more negative feelings of response. The strategic decision-makers tried to bridge the gap between internal intention and the external reality, but they admitted that they worked in the influx of both transnational and local environments.

6.3.3. Negotiating Identity with Different Social Groups

This section investigates the student returnees' interaction with various social groups and their different responses to it. In this study, social groups refer to the people nearby that the student returnees interact with every day, whereas social networks refer to the structure in which various social groups interact with each other. The various social groups were mainly concerned with people nearby, including their parents, friends and colleagues. To be more specific, these various social groups can be further divided into the established social groups before studying in the UK and newly-formed social groups after the student returnees returned to China. Overall, it was found that the three identity clusters responded to various kinds of social groups differently. Again, their different responses reflected the convergence and divergence between the expectations of social groups and expectations of individuals.

Home-seekers were student returnees whose expectation of social groups converged with their individual expectations. The home-seekers adapted to various social groups without reporting major conflicts in their personal and professional life. In terms of home-seekers' changes in response and feelings of response to their social groups in China, they acted very proactively by getting along very well with their parents, their friends before studying in the UK, their new friends and current colleagues by the time of fieldwork. Their proactive engagement with the local social networks in China can be indicated in phrases such as 'having peace in their life', 'all things prosper' and 'surrounded by family and friends'. For the home-seekers, the reason for this was because they remained in contact with their established social groups in China while studying in the UK. They communicated more often with their families and friends in China. In addition, they all felt that they had merely no foreign friends. They

viewed them as having difficulty in 'integrating into the local community'. The home-seekers' fairly shallow adaptation to the local community in the UK can be best illustrated by Fi, who lived in the UK for seven years.

> *R: Why do you think you have not much feeling for the UK?*
>
> *P: I think the main reason is that me, a foreigner ['waiguoren'] could not integrate into the mainstream society.*
>
> *R: Why do you say so? What experience made you feel this way?*
>
> *P: Because I think even if I get the permanent residence permit in the UK, the fact that you have a yellow face, or an oriental look can never get you integrated into the local community. I always think that few Chinese people on overseas study can make foreign friends. We were just living with other Chinese people, eating Chinese food, speaking Chinese, and watching 'Fi Cheng Wei Rao' [A Chinese version of 'Take Me Out'].*

For the home-seekers, remaining in contact with their established friends did not mean that they had no change. For them, the established and new social groups worked together to support them in different ways. On the one hand, the home-seekers maintained communication and contact with their old friends. For them, such communication and connection mainly hinged upon their past growing-up experiences. Meanwhile, they also built new social groups with those who shared similar overseas study experience with them. Fi and Allen reflected that they could share more topics with other student returnees which, from another perspective, indicated their sense of belonging to the social groups who shared similar overseas study experiences with them. These similar overseas study experiences, either in positive or negative ways, indicated personal growth and change. The home-seekers' response to various social groups can be reflected in the following quotation by Fi:

> *'I now have two kinds of friends' circles. One is with my high school friends and the other is with those who returned from the UK. I felt totally different when chatting with these two friends' circles…I felt more free and comfortable when talking with student returnees who returned from the UK. For my old friends…I think the only reason of communicating with them was that they were my friends ten years ago.'*

In contrast, the foreign pilgrims were the ones whose personal expectation diverged from the actual social groups they interacted with. In terms of their individual expectations, foreign pilgrims said they enjoyed their life in the UK almost from beginning to end. By the time they left the UK, they suggested they did not engage with the locals as deeply as they imagined. The actual less deep engagement and the expectation for a better understanding of British society made the foreign pilgrims more interested in and curious about British society. Bai attributed her nostalgic feeling for the UK to 'distance makes heart grows fonder'. By distance, she meant that despite her strong willingness, her engagement with the locals was not deep enough for her and she still looked forward to the possibilities of staying there in the future.

In terms of their changes in response and feelings of response, by the time of the fieldwork, they were still coping with conflicting relationships with their family, colleagues and friends in China. Regarding their friendship circles, both said that their friendship circles became smaller than before. They showed a sense of rejection to their friends by saying that there was 'no shared topic' with them anymore. In the main, they did not attribute such change to their study experience in the UK, but they thought they were on different life paths from their old friends. Instead, they said most friends remaining in contact with them were those who had spent time together with them in the UK. Regarding relationships with their parents, they also showed resistance to their parents' values and attitudes, by becoming more independent and individualised in their way of thinking and behaving. For example, instead of taking a job offer from her parents' social relations, Bai rejected this and started to find jobs by herself. As for relationships with their colleagues, Sophia reported a perceived sense of

disorientation and jealousy from her colleagues. A review of both Bai and Sophia's biography also suggested that they all came from moderately well-off families. Both did a master's degree in the UK. Altogether, the foreign pilgrims' relatively negative response to their social groups when their expectation was not aligned was best illustrated by Sophia.

> *'I do not want them to know my life. My status on WeChat is not visible to my colleagues…what seemed to be a normal life [for me] turned out to be show-off in their eyes… for a while, I tried as much as possible to pretend I was the same with them, but it made me feel tired. Later on, I decided not to let them know more about me. Let us separate work from life.'*

From the quotation above, and in connection with both foreign pilgrims' returning experiences, they showed more resistance to the encountered conflicts with their social groups. The relatively negative response compared to the home-seekers further contributed to their sense of disorientation from the local Chinese society in which they were situated. Still, at the time of fieldwork, the foreign pilgrims showed their willingness to adapt to their social groups, as illustrated from the above quotation that Sophia tried to be the same with her colleagues. Therefore, it might be possible that they were still in the process of negotiating their changed identity with various social groups.

Finally, the strategic decision-makers were the ones who compromised contrasted values, attitudes and behaviours in their interaction with various social groups in China. While they were in the UK, most strategic decision-makers took the initiative to engage with the local community despite perceived differences. They held an open attitude towards differences as they said foreign friends could provide them with new perspectives of life and helped them engage with the local community.

Once the strategic decision-makers returned to China, although most reported conflicts with their parents, old friends and local colleagues as the foreign pilgrims, they learned to compromise these conflicts again. Regarding their friendship circles, most still remain in contact with their old friends, though

many said they had different life paths from their old friends. In the meantime, most strategic decision-makers also made new friends in China, sharing similar overseas study experience with them, as they saw they shared more common topics and a similar family background. In addition, they also remained in contact with their friends in the UK and abroad on social media. Some said they remained in contact with their old friends in the UK because they were nostalgic about the beautiful memory of the past and they did not want to cut themselves from the outside world. According to Ye,

> *'I still maintain my way of living, for I didn't want to hide something on purpose. For now, I felt even stronger that the more you want to hide something, the more tired you would feel...I am still who I was. I really enjoy this way of life and such attitude has become part of the enjoyable part of my life.'*

Regarding relationships with their colleagues, most strategic decision-makers said they generally got along well with their local colleagues. For those who worked with more local Chinese colleagues, they reflected that they would sometimes hide their overseas qualification and study experience to avoid envy and isolation. While managing interactions with their local Chinese colleagues, they also showed their modesty and sense of crisis in competition with their local colleagues. Some said their local Chinese colleagues were more familiar with the local Chinese society. At the same time, the student returnees who worked at transnational companies reported getting along well with their foreign colleagues. Compared with their foreign colleagues, these strategic decision-makers said they were ready to help their foreign colleagues with their better understanding of Chinese society and good handle of Chinese language.

With relationships with their parents and relatives, most strategic decision-makers also reported some conflicts with their parents, but they attributed these conflicts more to their growing maturity or problems existing before studying abroad. Instead, they tried to make a balance between different conflicting values and attitudes. This could be best demonstrated by Xiao, who inherited the family business and returned to China for four years after seven years of staying in the UK. The quotation described the inner struggle between Xiao's

work attitude formed in the west and the embedded family affiliations and influences in China. It also demonstrated that despite the difficulties, Xiao tried to make a compromise in interacting with different social networks and various values and attitudes. Xiao's attitude was echoed in other strategic decision-makers' responses to engaging with their surrounding social networks upon return.

> *'My family offered me a platform, a social role, and a born talent to let me shoulder more responsibility, not only to society but also to my company and family. You cannot show disregard to your relatives, but you cannot always raise them with money. Sometimes, the minute I made my decisions [to fire them] my mother's phone call came in. At work, I could carry on my duty with clear cut rules like in the west, but still, I have to compromise with cultural inheritance and responsibility.'*

Taken together, evidence in this study suggests that the home-seekers reacted to perceived differences with their old social circles by acceptance; the foreign pilgrims reported conflicts with their surrounding social networks and dealt with them by resistance; and the strategic decision-makers dealt with their surrounding social networks by reaching a compromise. The surrounding social networks and student returnees' different responses in negotiating with their surrounding networks were interrelated and further shaped their identity upon return.

6.4 Summary

Overall, there were three identity clusters and they were home-seekers, foreign pilgrims and strategic decision-makers. Their variations mainly lay in their different sense of belonging to the UK and China, intercultural competence, and transnational mobility and social networks. The home-seekers were more Chinese oriented; the foreign pilgrims were more foreign oriented; and the strategic decision-makers were in the middle of these two ends. The three identity clusters and their changes in these major characteristics throughout the

four periods added to the complex trajectory of identity. The complexity of identity also indicated that student returnees might have one identity with contrasting dimensions.

In the construction and reconstruction of identity, the student returnees were negotiating in different levels of interactions and these included the changing Chinese society, different working environments and various social groups. The three identity clusters responded to different levels of interactions differently, due to the interplay between the convergence and divergence of their individual expectations and actual context in which they were situated. The home-seekers adapted to the Chinese society without reporting any major difficulties. They were the ones whose individual expectations converged with the Chinese society, the working environment and the various social groups. The foreign pilgrims struggled with re-adapting to Chinese society. They were the ones whose individual expectations diverged with the context in which they were situated. At the time of the fieldwork, they were still coping with the encountered difficulties in their personal and professional lives. Finally, the strategic decision-makers were the ones who tried to bridge the gap between the convergence and divergence of their individual expectations and the actual context in which they were situated. Ever since their return, they chose to continue to live in a transnational context for their personal and professional lives. Again, identifying the strategic decision-makers as the majority group in this study confirmed the relationship between transnationalism and identity established in the literature review chapter. In the next chapter, the researcher will discuss the two findings chapters in relation to the existing literature and through a more conceptual lens.

Chapter Seven Discussion: Reconceptualising Transnational Identity of Chinese Student Returnees

7.1 Introduction

This discussion chapter makes links to previous chapters to suggest research significance, limitations and possible contribution to knowledge. Taken together, the two findings chapters suggested the following. First, in relation to the first findings chapter (Chapter 5), by the time students left the UK, most underwent changes in the following four major dimensions of identity including the capacity to build connections between cultures, diaspora consciousness, diaspora values and attitudes, and the expansion of behaviours and actions. Second, when looking at the four major dimensions of identity in detail, and with regard to the second findings chapter (Chapter 6), there were variations in students' identity changes and the variations could be demonstrated by the three major identity clusters, including home-seekers, foreign pilgrims and strategic decision-makers. These variations in identity, however, were not changes that happened overnight, but the result of students' construction and reconstruction of identity in their sojourn and homecoming experience. Third, in respect of Chapter 6, after the students returned to China, their identity was negotiated in different levels of interactions, including the larger society, the working environment and the social groups.

Based on these major findings, and in light of the theories regarding the relationship between agency and structure in the literature review chapter, the discussion chapter is organised in four interconnected sections. The first section explores students' identity changes over time which contributed to the shaping of the three identity clusters. To describe students' identity changes at different times, a model incorporating three transnational identity development pathways is presented. The model, together with the relevant findings in the current study, indicates that there were different ways in which students and student returnees constructed and reconstructed their identity. Students and student returnees' different responses further demonstrated the convergence and divergence between individual values and expectations and the structures in which they

were situated. Building on this argument, the second section then focuses on the interplay between agency and structures at different levels, including individual, social group, institutional, society and virtual levels. Here, it should be noted that as established in section 3.2.3.1 in the literature review chapter, the word 'agency' is used in single form as it refers to the capacity to respond to the designated context in the most recent literature (Tran, 2016; Tran & Vu, 2017). The word 'structure' is used in both single and plural forms. In single form, it refers to a particular structure ranging from social group level structure, institutional level structure to society level. In plural forms, it refers to structures combining more than one of the aforementioned structures.

Based on the relationship between identity, agency and structure in the first two sections, the third section aims to understand their relationship in a transnational context, by having a renewed thinking on 'culture shock' and 'reverse culture shock'. The section argues that by taking advantage of transnational identity, students as agents could adopt new strategies in facilitating their adaptation to British society and re-adaptation to the Chinese society. Finally, bringing together all the discussion sections, a tentative exploration into the meaning of transnational identity is proposed. That is, transnational identity in this current study is a *process,* involving not only horizontal changes from one society to another, but also vertical changes across different levels of interactions in identity.

7.2 Transnational Identity Development Pathways Based on the Three Identity Clusters

The results align with the relevant literature on the relationship between transnationalism and identity in the changing society, for example, Golbert (2001), Vertovec (2009), Dahinden (2009), King and Christou (2011), and Gu and Schweisfurth (2015). As Vertovec (2009) argues, transnationalism is grounded upon transnational social ties, affiliations and movements and takes in the forms of transnational social groups, the consciousness of being 'here' and 'there', and the flows of people and capitals across the borders.

However, in addition to the confirmation of the literature, the current study finds that student returnees' identity involved more complex changes over time. The three spider charts in Chapter 6 were demonstrations of the complexity of changes in students' identity over time. Looking deeply, the variations of changes in students' identity over time reflected the divergence and convergence between individual values and expectations and the structures in which they were situated. Such interplay further influenced the level of capacity the student returnees used in response to various kinds of structures. If we treat the three identity clusters as outcomes, each phase of change reflects the interplay between students and student returnees' individual values and expectations and the structures in which they were situated. It also showed the level of capacity they used to respond to both challenges and opportunities in the changing society. By referring the society as 'changing' society, the researcher suggests that against transnationalism, students and student returnees as agents responded to the structures in both the Chinese and British societies.

To illustrate the variations of changes in the three identity clusters over time, I propose the pyramid model below. The model comprises three transnational identity development pathways, leading to the formation of the three identity clusters. The purpose of this model is to show the students and student returnees' response as agency over time in a different society. At the bottom of this chart are the names of the three identity clusters highlighted in bold. The three arrows point to the pathways in which the three identity clusters followed. Phase one and two are phases when the students lived and studied in the UK. They correspond to UK1 and UK2 in the spider charts in Chapter 6. Similarly, phases three and four are concordant with CH1 and CH2 in the spider charts. As there are variations in the three identity clusters, the phases are accorded different names such as resistance, acceptance and defence. In the next three sub-sections, the three identity clusters will be discussed one by one, with explanations for the meaning of each phase. Each phase will be discussed in relation to the existing literature to see whether the findings support, contradict, or fill in the gaps in the current literature. The overall purpose is to explore the theoretical implications of the findings and add an appropriate impact to a larger picture of research on identity.

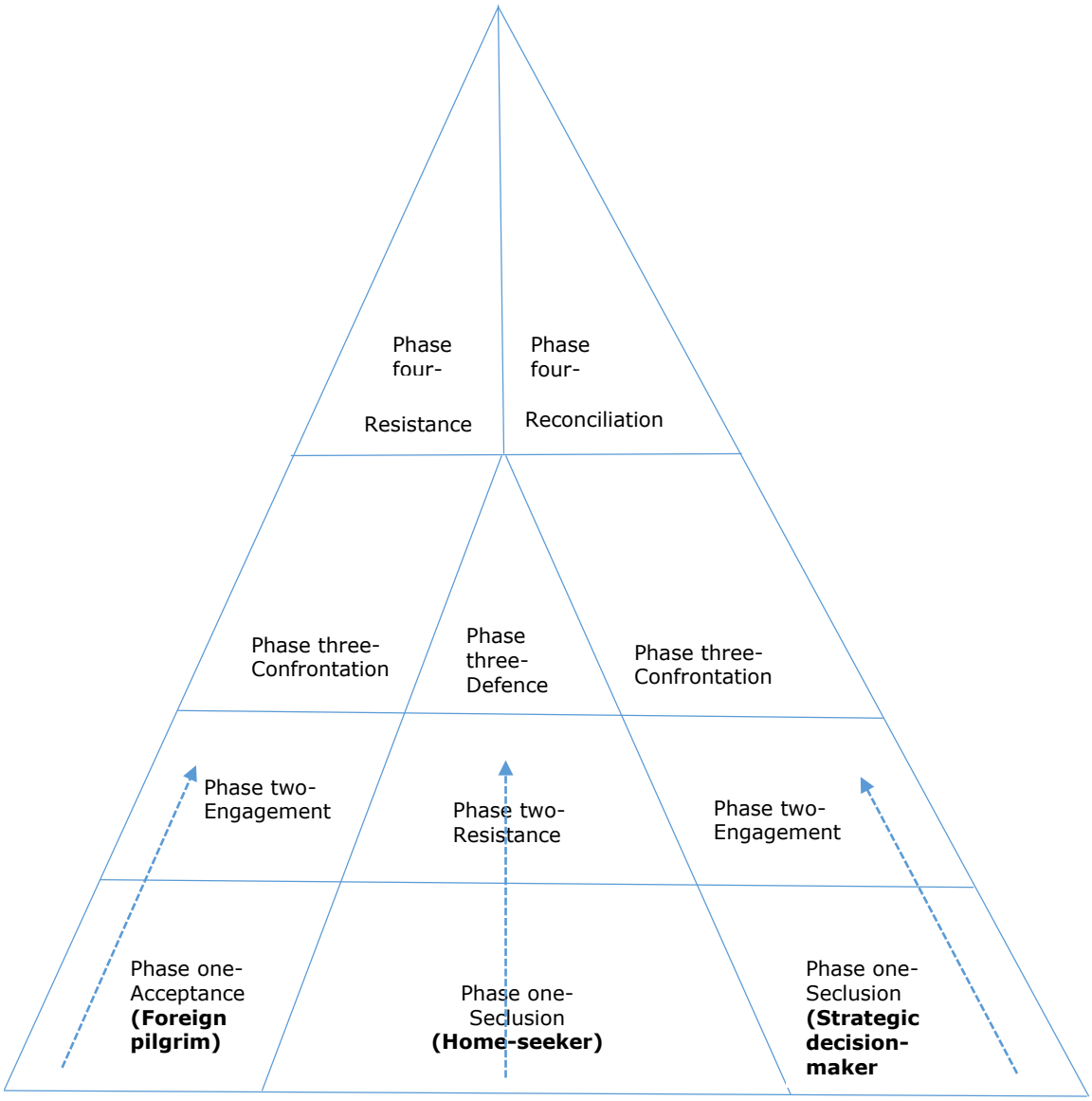


Figure 7.1 Transnational identity development pathways for the three identity clusters

7.2.1 Transnational Identity Development Pathway for Home-seekers: From Seclusion to Defence

This sub-section discusses the transnational identity development pathway for the home-seekers (three out of sixteen student returnees) in the middle of the pyramid. The home-seekers went through three phases of changes in their identity: seclusion, resistance and defence. Each phase is a demonstration of the relationship among identity, agency and the social structure. More deeply, it showed the convergence and divergence of the home-seekers' personal values

and expectations as reflections of identity, home-seekers' capacity of responding to the changing society, and the society in which they were situated. There was no phase four for home-seekers as evidence shows that they re-adapted to the Chinese society without reporting major difficulties in their personal and professional life in China.

The first phase is seclusion as soon as the home-seekers arrived in the UK. This phase reveals the divergence between their personal values and expectations and the British society. In the interviews, all of them reflected that life in the UK was not what they had expected. In response, they isolated themselves from British society. As the findings on the home-seekers in Chapter 6 established, the three home-seekers either reported communicating with their parents and families in China for emotional support, or clustering around other Chinese people in the UK for peer support. This phase echoes prior studies regarding individuals' expression of their identity through socially constructed groups across the borders (Anderson, 1991; Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Vertovec, 2009). However, different from these studies, the home-seekers in this phase did not have 'multiple identifications' (Vertovec, 2009, p.7). Instead, by remaining in the Chinese group networks, they continued to express their sense of belonging to China. From another perspective, they were transnational because they thought they were only 'home away from home' (Vertovec, 2009, p.7).

The second phase is living in resistance, which had happened in the interim and latter period of the home-seekers' stay in the UK. This phase further illustrated the divergence between the home-seekers' personal values and attitudes and British society. As established in sections 6.2.1 and 6.3, by encountering different values, attitudes and behaviours, they gradually realized that there were still differences between countries and cultures which they could not understand and accept. In addition, they regarded themselves as Chinese who were in the minority in British society. In response, they resisted British society by not proactively engaging with it. According to section 6.3 in Chapter Six, they continued to live in a Chinese way, eat Chinese food, speak Chinese and make Chinese friends. This phase supports some prior studies (Berry, 1997;

Berzonsky, 1989; Szabo & Ward, 2015) on people's negative response to a foreign society by turning backwards towards their traditional way of living.

However, the findings in the current study, along with other similar research findings (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Tran & Vu, 2017), indicated that agency and its response to a foreign society is more complex than the prior studies suggested. In this study, the home-seekers did not completely resist all changes and they were influenced by the British society in an unconscious way. For example, they improved their English by doing part-time jobs in the UK; they tried to meet more friends (though most were Chinese) by going to church. These can be seen as home-seekers' agency in terms of what Welzel and Inglehart (2010) stated as 'to strive for surviving' in challenges and difficulties. The home-seekers' response was largely driven by their need to respond to struggles (Tran & Vu, 2017).

More deeply, when the home-seekers' values and expectations diverged from British society, it was how much effort they would like to use their capacity to engage with the British society that mattered. However, as they were affected by personal values and expectations, they did not see to take full advantage of the challenges and opportunities embedded in British society. With the bias towards foreign people and culture in mind, the home-seekers isolated themselves and did not proactively engage with British society. Such response, in turn, affected their level of satisfaction with their life in the UK and they were desperate to go home. Therefore, it was not fair to judge the home-seekers as having low agency because they did not respond very proactively to British society. Instead, it might be that the divergence between personal values and expectations and British society did not facilitate their agency in the British society.

The third phase is living in defence, which happened from when the home-seekers returned to China. In this phase, they had a clearer idea of being Chinese after their studying and living experiences in the UK. The home-seekers' defence phase partly confirmed some studies (Berry, 1997; Sussman, 2002, 2012; Szabo & Ward, 2015) on the relationship between the high degree to which people maintained and confirmed their traditional identity and the high

life satisfaction after returning to their home country. This was the phase when the home-seekers' personal values and expectations converged with the Chinese society. Although some studies (Gaw, 2000; Gill, 2010; White, 2014) argue that people would have difficulty in re-adapting to the home country and culture after a sojourn experience, the home-seekers reported a different response. As established in section 6.2.1 and 6.3, they engaged with various social circles, established their own families and expressed satisfaction with life in China. From another perspective, the convergence between personal values and expectations and the Chinese society facilitated their agency to take full advantage of opportunities and challenges.

However, in this phase, the home-seekers continued to show the complexity of their changes in identity, by responding differently to Chinese society upon return. As established in section 6.2.1, they responded differently to their old friends. Additionally, there were changes in their certain values, attitudes and behaviours in the UK. To recap, they showed stronger agreement with a more independent educational approach for children, enhanced public awareness, and simplicity in life. In the final interviews, they also said that 'they were mainly Chinese but can think and act in a foreign way'. All these manifested the complexity of identity and agency in the socialisation process (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). In this phase, they were transnational in their way of thinking and living, as their values, attitudes and behaviours were outcomes of influences from a different society. In this sense, their way of being transnational was subtly yet profoundly different from their transnational behaviours in the first two phases in the UK.

Thus, different from prior studies on identity categories and transnationalism theories, this section discusses three phases of changes leading to the formation of home-seekers. Through the three phases of seclusion, resistance and defence, the study suggests that there is an interplay between agency and structure. The divergence and convergence between individual values and expectations and the social structure influenced the extent to which students and student returnees mobilized their agency. When personal values and expectations are converged, such convergence will facilitate home-seekers' agency; When personal values

and expectations are diverged, such convergence will prevent home-seekers' agency. In this situation, it is dependent on to what extent home-seekers would mobilize their capacity to respond to the social structure.

7.2.2 Transnational Identity Development Pathway for Foreign Pilgrims: From Acceptance to Resistance

This sub-section discusses transnational identity development pathway for the foreign pilgrims (two out of sixteen participants). As a reminder, 'foreign' is more a sense of alienation in one's home country. Similarly, 'pilgrim' means student returnees' belief of having a better life in their eyes in the host country. In this sense, the UK as a foreign country was not foreign any more. Although foreign pilgrims may be seen as 'pilgrims' in the UK, they feel at home and had the willingness to realize a new sense of self in the UK.

As shown on the left side of the pyramid model, there were four phases of changes leading to the formation of foreign pilgrims: acceptance, engagement, confrontation and resistance. Each phase is also a demonstration of the relationship among identity, agency and the social structure. More deeply, it showed the convergence and divergence of the foreign pilgrims' personal values and expectations, their capacity to respond to the changing society, and the society in which they were situated.

Different from the home-seekers, the first phase for the foreign pilgrims is living by acceptance. This phase happened as soon as the foreign pilgrims arrived in the UK. As noted in some studies (Szabo & Ward, 2015; Ward & Searle, 1991), there is a relationship between orientation towards the values and attitudes in the host country and a stronger acceptance of the host country. According to the sections on the foreign pilgrims' increased sense of belonging to the UK and intercultural competence in Chapter 6, they had already developed an interest in British music, art and culture before studying in the UK. In addition, both looked forward to studying in the UK and made many plans before this studying. Such interest and expectations, in a deeper sense, can be seen as the foreign pilgrims' positive attitude towards the UK and stronger acceptance of the embedded values and attitudes in British society.

The convergence of the foreign pilgrims' values and expectations facilitated their engagement with British society. By having a positive attitude towards the British society, they then entered the second phase of living by engagement. This phase means the foreign pilgrims tried to interact with British society. This phase supports prior studies on how agency responds positively to the changing society (Berry, 1997; Hopwood, 2010; Tran & Vu, 2017). Evidence from their intercultural competence in Chapter 6 suggested that they were proactive in engaging with British society. Bai reflected that she even had a phase where she 'engaged for the engagement practice'. She said that although she did not like to have parties, she still pushed herself to go to parties to meet more foreign friends and have more understanding of British society. In contrast to the home-seekers, the foreign pilgrims' proactive engagement indicated that they used their full capacity to catch more opportunities to make them 'thrive' (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010, p.44) in British society.

However, despite their active engagement with British society, the outcome was less-satisfying to them. Both admitted that speaking Chinese, eating Chinese food and making Chinese friends were still an indispensable part of their life in the UK. Such result demonstrates the influence of the larger society as social structure on the foreign pilgrims' agency and the shaping of their identity. That is, despite their orientation toward the values, attitudes and behaviours in the UK, and their endeavour to interact with British society, they may still be unable to engage as deeply as they wished. Their continued negotiation in the reconstructed Chinese society not only demonstrated their remained Chinese sense of belonging, but it also illustrated the inescapable transnational context as the founding structure in which agency in the late modernity lives (Giddens, 1991; Vertovec, 1999, 2001, 2006). Despite agency's engagement with the British society, the extent to which agency can respond to challenges and take opportunities is still bound by the social structure in which they were situated (Elias, 2004).

Following the second phase of engagement in the UK, the third phase is living in confrontation, which had happened once the foreign pilgrims returned to China. As established in the sections on the foreign pilgrims' decreased

intercultural competence and their identity negotiation at various levels, in this phase they encountered conflicts with Chinese society, the working environment and the social groups after returning to China. The foreign pilgrims' bumpy return journeys partly support some prior studies (Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Gill, 2010; Ma, 2010; Hao & Welch, 2012) on the challenges and difficulties encountered by returnees. These studies seemed to suggest that over-identification (Ward & Searle, 1991) with the values, attitudes and behaviours with the host country and culture would make returnees' homecoming experience conflicting. From another perspective, it might be that the foreign pilgrims' personal values and expectations diverged from the various structures in which they were situated.

Looking deeply, behind such divergence was the extent to which the foreign pilgrims used their capacity to re-adapt to Chinese society. When their personal values and expectations converged with the British society, such convergence would facilitate their agency in taking full advantage of the challenges and opportunities in personal growth and changes. When the foreign pilgrims' personal values and expectations diverged from the Chinese society, such divergence would prevent their agency in taking full advantage of the challenges and opportunities in personal growth and changes (Tran & vu, 2017). Sections 6.3.2 in Chapter 6 are supporting evidence of the interplay between the various structures in which the foreign pilgrims were situated and the extent to which they mobilized their agency in responding to these structures.

The final phase is resistance, which had happened in their later return to China. Findings from the foreign pilgrims' response to Chinese society in Chapter 6 suggested that they chose to adapt to Chinese society by developing a stronger sense of belonging to the UK, so as to run away from the reality. Here it should be noted that such a stronger sense of belonging to the UK was not the foreign pilgrims' emotional attachment to the UK as a country in general. Instead, it was their emotional attachment to their personal experiences and growth, as well as their strong agreement with the values, attitudes and behaviours in British society. As noted by Bai, her further increased sense of belonging to the UK was a 'comfort' to her conflicting life in China. Findings on foreign pilgrims

as an identity category partly support prior studies (Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Gaw, 2000; Ma, 2010) on the confrontation returnees experienced upon return to their home country. However, in line with other recent studies (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Tran, 2016), and from a transnational perspective, identity should be viewed in a dynamic manner in which multiple dimensions of identity interacted with each other. Evidence of the foreign pilgrims' sense of belonging indicates that although they had 'foreign hearts', they still adored Chinese art and culture. Additionally, although they became more independent and individualised, they still observed some traditional Chinese values such as taking care of parents as part of their responsibilities and valuing the Chinese culture.

It is important to note that emotional attachment did not indicate the foreign pilgrims' level of agency but could affect the extent to which they used their agency to respond to both challenges and opportunities. In addition, it could also indicate the convergence and divergence of personal values, attitudes and the social structure in which they were situated. The outcome of their identity negotiation in this phase brings to the fore the interaction between agency and structure (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984a). On the one hand, the foreign pilgrims' agency to create a transnational context for them to continue to develop was limited by the local Chinese society in which they were situated. On the other hand, despite discrepancies in their values, attitudes and behaviours with the Chinese society, they did not mobilize their full capacity to respond to the Chinese society.

Taken together, evidence in this study suggests that the foreign pilgrims went through four phases of changes in identity, including acceptance, engagement, confrontation and resistance. These phases formed a different transnational identity development pathway and a different response to the changing society. A closer examination of their identity negotiation in both Chinese and British societies suggested the interplay between agency and structure. When the social structure converges with individual values and expectation, it is easier for foreign pilgrims to respond to the situated society. However, when the social structure does not support agency's values and expectation, whether agency can

meet challenges and catch up opportunities depends on the extent to which foreign pilgrims mobilize their agency to respond to both challenges and opportunities in the society.

7.2.3 Transnational Identity Development Pathway for Strategic Decision-makers: From Seclusion to Reconciliation

This sub-section discusses the transnational identity development pathway for the strategic decision-makers (eleven out of sixteen participants). The transnational identity development pathway for strategic decision-makers is on the right-hand side of the pyramid model. There were four phases of changes leading to the formation of strategic decision-makers: seclusion, engagement, confrontation and reconciliation. These phases are also discussed in relation to their identity, agency and the social structure. The seclusion phase is the same with the seclusion phase of the home-seekers, while the engagement and confrontation phases are the same phases experienced by the foreign pilgrims. However, what led the strategic decision-makers to a different transnational identity development pathway was the extent to which they used their agency to respond to the changing society, even when their personal values and expectations were diverged from the society in which they were situated.

The first phase is seclusion, which had happened as soon as most strategic decision-makers arrived in the UK. Evidence from the strategic decision-makers' sense of belonging and intercultural competence in Chapter 6 suggests that most students encountered difficulties in their personal and study life when they were in the UK. The struggles experienced by them in the seclusion phase resonate with prior studies (Gill, 2007; Gu & Brooks, 2008; Li, 2012; Quan, He, & Sloan, 2016) on the challenges faced by Chinese students studying overseas. From a transnational perspective, the strategic decision-makers were transnational in that they were oriented toward their home in China but physically, they had to stay in the UK. As an alternative, they reconstructed a micro Chinese society within the larger British society (Vertovec, 2009) for the expression of their sense of belonging and identity (Guarnizo, 1997; Anderson, 1991; Kivisto, 2001; Dahinden, 2009). Looking deeply, the difficulties experienced by the strategic

decision-makers and their strategic tacit in constructing a micro Chinese society indicated the divergence of their personal values and expectations and the British society in which they were situated.

However, different from prior the studies, the strategic decision-makers were proactive in making changes to themselves to fit into British society. Such a proactive response led them to the second phase of engagement. In this phase, although they did not report the same level of agreement with the values, attitudes and behaviours in the UK, they still endeavoured to learn and fit into British society. From another perspective, their efforts indicated the important role of agency in conflicting situations (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). With reference to relevant findings, they tried to improve their English language competence, make foreign friends and accumulate work experiences to have more understanding of British society. The proactive role of agency can be supported by some recent studies (Marginson, 2014; Pham & Tran, 2015; Tran, 2011, 2016; Tran & Vu, 2017) on the relationship between identity, agency and structure. Marginson (2014, p.8) sees the relationship between agency and identity as a process of 'self-formation' in 'potentials and limits'. Tran and Vu (2017, p. 9) view agency as a process of 'becoming' through which students 'envisaging and proactively cultivating both their personal development and transformation of the context in which they engage'.

In light of these views, the strategic decision-makers' proactive engagement does not mean that they were adopting new values, attitudes and behaviours while discarding the ones before they came to the UK. Evidence suggested that they negotiated between different values, attitudes and behaviours. By the time they left the UK, they still maintained their sense of belonging to China, while developing a stronger sense of belonging to the UK. To recap, the student returnees' sense of belonging to the UK was composed of emotional attachment to the UK and agreement with values, attitudes and behaviours with British society. The emotional attachment and changes in values, attitudes and behaviours corresponded to important dimensions of identity. They agreed with independence and individualism but still honoured filial piety. Hence, taking the same position as some prior studies (Hall, 1996; Vertovec, 1999; Tran,

2011), the current study views that students' living and studying experiences in the UK may be underpinned by various values, attitudes and behaviours across the borders. The process of the strategic decision-makers' proactive engagement can be seen as their proactive endeavour to negotiate between different values, attitudes and behaviours, so as to find the best way for them to thrive.

After the strategic decision-makers returned to China, as the foreign pilgrims, their newly developed identity was in conflict with Chinese society and they entered the third phase of 'confrontation'. Evidence from the strategic decision-makers' identity negotiation at different levels suggested that they encountered some conflicts with Chinese society, the working environment and the social groups. Such findings partly confirmed prior studies (Butcher, 2002; Dustmann & Weiss, 2007; Gill, 2010; Hao & Welch, 2012) on the challenges and difficulties encountered by returnees. In this phase, most expressed a stronger sense of belonging to the UK through their emotional attachment to their personal experiences in the UK, as well as a strong agreement with the values, attitudes and behaviours adopted in the UK. From the transnational perspective (Golbert, 2001), they were transnational in that they were oriented towards other countries while they were physically situated in China.

However, and again, different from these prior studies exploring the struggles experienced by returnees, this current study focuses on the proactive role of agency in taking full advantage of both challenges and opportunities in the Chinese society. The strategic decision-makers' proactive agency brought them into the final phase of reconciliation. In this phase, they showed how they negotiated between individualism and independence. Most importantly, they endeavoured to construct a transnational context in which they lived and had fun. Relevant findings on the strategic decision-makers suggested that they built connections with foreign friends and counterparts in physical and virtual ways. The findings not only support studies (Sterling & Pang, 2013; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015) on the relationship between transnationalism and returnees, they also support studies on the proactive role of agency in meeting challenges and catching opportunities (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010; Tran & Vu, 2017).

Looking more deeply, and compared with home-seekers and foreign pilgrims, if we see agency as the outcome, what made strategic decision-makers more agentic than others was the extent to which they would like to put their efforts into mobilizing their agency. As established in sections 6.2.3 and 6.3 in Chapter 6, when the structures in which strategic decision-makers were situated did not facilitate their personal growth and identity changes, they made efforts in using their full capacity to face challenges and opportunities. Different responses and life satisfaction among the home-seekers, foreign pilgrims and strategic decision-makers demonstrated that despite divergence in personal values and expectations and the changing society, it was the extent to which the student returnees mobilized their efforts to take full advantage of both challenges and opportunities that mattered.

Compared with previous literature, in general, there are three explanations for the asymmetry in findings. The first is that this current study focuses on students' agency in responding to the changing society. Instead of seeing students as passive agents, this study views students as 'perceptive agents' (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010, p.47) in selecting the best model for their adaptation and re-adaptation to the changing society. To prevent being judgemental, instead of seeing the three identity clusters as having either low or high agency, this study only made differences between those who would like to put their efforts into mobilizing their agency and those who did not. The second is that this current study employs a new theoretical framework of transnationalism. Instead of seeing agency as completely limited by the structure in which they were situated, students as agents could live in social fields across borders to 'survive' or 'thrive' (Foner, 1997; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Welzel & Inglehart, 2010). Finally, under the transnationalism framework, data were collected based on different settings in the changing society. Given that the students' duration of stay and return period are varied in this study (see reference in Chapter 6), this study enabled the researcher to investigate students' identity changes throughout different phases of their lives in rather a short period of time of a doctoral study. By taking into account students' personal biographies, students' identity changes can be captured in a more dynamic and nuanced way.

As seen from the above, strategic decision-makers are shaped by four phases of identity changes, including selection, engagement, confrontation and reconciliation. Although there are some overlaps of phases with home-seekers and foreign pilgrims, the strategic decision-makers charted their life in a more positive way by trying to use their full capacity to respond to the changing society. Overall, the three transnational identity development pathways bring to the fore the possible phases of changes in identity students might go through in their transnational journeys. Although this study cannot claim representation of a larger population of student returnees, the findings on the phases of changes in identity leading up to different identity clusters may promote our focus on identity changes over time, rather than in a fixed and dogmatic way. It also draws attention to the interaction between agency and structure in changing society under transnationalism. Hopefully, this conceptual model can make its appropriate weight of contribution to knowledge.

7.3 Shaping Factors of Transnational Identity at Various Levels

As shown in 6.3, the student returnees negotiated their identity at three different levels of interaction including with the social groups, the working institutions and the changing society. These interactions are layered, ranging from the micro to macro level in a vertical way. This finding corresponds to Jenkins' (2008) argument that the human world is ordered (also see 3.2.3.1 in Chapter 3), with three major 'distinct' yet overlapped orders, including the individual, interactional and the institutional orders. Individual order refers to the consciousness aspect of individuals; interactional order is the social relations between individuals; and institutional order is the overarching established pattern and organisation. Jenkins' (2008) classification of orders sheds light on how the ordered human world can be understood in a more orderly fashion.

However, in the analysis of the current study, in addition to the three orders proposed by Jenkins, I also found other levels of interaction which might complement Jenkins' (2008) three orders of interaction in identity. Compared to Jenkins's three major layers, interactional order does not only involve interaction between people, but also interaction with the working institution and the society. Therefore, except for the individual order, I break down the

interactional order into group level, institutional level, society level and virtual level. It is worth noting that consistent with Jenkins (2008), these levels of interactions are not distinct but related to each other. Considering that the findings in Chapter 6 have already touched on some findings at various levels, to avoid repetition this discussion section will address some important issues in a more constructive manner.

7.3.1 Individual Level

This section focuses on the role of agency in the changing British and Chinese society. As discussed in the literature review chapter, 'agency' refers to 'a particularly "human"' capacity' (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010, p.44) to respond to a designated context. According to Welzel and Inglehart, in the face of the changing society, such human capacity is not only concerned with whether people can meet the challenges to 'survive', but it is also related to whether they can seize the opportunities to 'thrive' (2010, p.44). In the process of meeting the challenges and seizing the opportunities, identity is to be 'achieved' by agency's proactive interaction with the society (Biesta and Tedder, 2007). Overall, this current study suggests that in the changing society, the participants in the three identity clusters mobilized different levels of agency. This does not mean the student returnees had different levels of agency. For those who did not wish to change, it was not necessary that they had low agency. Instead, it might be possible that they did not use their agency fully to take advantage of both challenges and opportunities in the changing society. Therefore, more precisely, agency in this research means both the means and the outcomes. It was not only the ways in which student returnees addressed both challenges and opportunities, but also the reflection of the extent to which the student returnees used their capacity to respond to both challenges and opportunities.

Following this argument, and with reference to the evidence in this research, the extent to which student returnees used their agency was influenced by the following two factors: personal expectation and internal needs driven by personal values and attitudes. Personal expectation is concerned with whether students had a proper evaluation of themselves in relation to their expectation for the larger society. Internal needs driven by values and attitudes referred to

personal goals, interests and hopes which embodied one's own values and attitudes. Among these factors, the internal needs driven by personal values and attitudes were more fundamental in influencing the student returnees' different levels of agency.

To start with, the home-seekers did not fully use their agency to respond to the changing society. Regarding personal expectation, they said that they did not have very clear goals concerning achievement before studying in the UK. Upon arrival, both Fi and Wei expressed their disappointment with life in the UK. Such an emotional reaction might not have decided the home-seekers' agency but would affect the level of agency they used. However, behind the inappropriate personal expectation was their absence of internal needs driven by personal values and attitudes. A review of their UK study experience suggested that they seemed to meet the demands from the larger society, rather than being driven from the inside to make changes to themselves to fit into British society. To 'survive' the British society, they improved their English language competence and behaviour with reference to the social etiquette in the UK. However, echoing the characteristics of the home-seekers in the first part of this findings chapter, they still regarded that there were still big differences between different countries and cultures and they could be best understood by the Chinese people. These values and attitudes 'manipulated' their behaviours to stay in the Chinese circles, and made them continue to live and think mainly in a Chinese way. From another perspective, this could be seen as their strategy to 'survive' British society. Their strategy also indicated that they did not take many opportunities to 'thrive' through deeper engagement with the foreign society. Once they returned to China, they seemed to adapt smoothly, by surviving British society and running away from it. The evidence in the home-seekers' different levels of interaction in identity negotiation demonstrated their relatively smooth adaptation.

The foreign pilgrims had moderate agency in responding to the changing society. Compared to the home-seekers, they were well-prepared before studying in the UK. Looking deeply, it was their internal needs driven by personal values and attitudes that explained their strong agency when they studied in the UK. Both

Bai and Sophia had adored British society since they were young. They reported having great interest in British drama, music and art. Before coming to the UK, they both said they were very excited about their studies there and hoped to visit museums, theatres and many scenic spots. Bai said life in the UK can 'meet her spiritual needs'. From another perspective, different from the home-seekers, their inner drive also indicated that they had clearer purpose of studying in the UK, which the home-seekers lacked. It was suggested that the foreign pilgrims tried to make themselves 'thrive' in British society, by catching new opportunities through their proactive engagement with British society.

However, the reason for seeing them as having moderate agency is that they did not report the same level of agency after their return to China. Once they returned, when their internal needs driven by personal values and attitudes clashed with the external demands, they failed to respond to the changing society effectively. Evidence from their different levels of interaction in identity negotiation suggested that all the reported conflicts were rooted in their clash of ideas with others on independence and individualism, as well as in differences in interest, habits and social etiquettes, in which different values and attitudes were embedded. At the time of fieldwork, evidence from the three levels of interactions for the foreign pilgrims suggested that they were still coping with these conflicts.

While indicating that the foreign pilgrims did not report the same level of agency in China, evidence from their three levels of interaction also draws attention to the issue of how much agency would count as 'negative' context. By 'negative' here the researcher means the structure that was not preferred by student returnees. It might be that the foreign pilgrims' inner struggles were also the result of the rather localized Chinese society, the working environment, and the social groups they interact with. This possible reason reveals the interplay between agency and structure. On the one hand, the local Chinese society in which the foreign pilgrims were situated influenced or even limited the level of agency they could display and the 'opportunities' they could catch to prosper. On the other hand, the foreign pilgrims' negative response also explained why they continued to struggle in the reconstruction of their identity.

Finally, the strategic decision-makers reported mobilizing high levels of agency, by managing to adjust themselves to the changing society. Again, this does not mean that the strategic decision-makers had higher agency than the foreign pilgrims and home-seekers. Instead, it was that their efforts in mobilizing their agency in responding to the changing society mattered. Personal expectation seemed to have influenced some of their early experience in the UK and China. Those who felt frustrated and shocked (Jessie, Ye, Xiao, Xi) as soon as they arrived in the UK were those whose studies were arranged by parents. Compared with those who were well-prepared, they did not have proper self-evaluation. Those who felt frustrated (Ye, Xiao, Jessie) as soon as returned to China were also those who expressed their sense of disorientation before return. Compared with those who were well prepared before return, they did not have plans for their future and had improper expectation of the situation in China.

By taking a step further, it was their internal needs driven by personal values and attitudes which explained why the strategic decision-makers were not completely bound by their own capacity to respond to the changing society. From another perspective, they were more strategic about their actions to adapt. In the early stay in the UK, upon realizing the gap between their actual internal needs and external demands, most strategic decision-makers took a proactive approach to engage with the locals. In their values and attitudes, they either thought they were not many differences between China and the UK, or thought they could learn from other countries and cultures and embrace the differences. Upon return to China, the strategic decision-makers' newly developed values and also influenced the way they responded to Chinese society. Their maintained way of thinking and behaving in Chinese society indicated their agreement with some values, attitudes and behaviours embedded in the UK. For example, Jing reflected that although there were some poorly-mannered people in the public, she still behaved how she used to, according to her own belief. However, despite perceived differences and some encountered conflicts, they took their proactive approach again to fit themselves into the situated context. Their response to the changing society could be seen as managing the opportunities and challenges, making them 'thrive' in both contexts.

Thus, if the changing society could provide both challenges and opportunities, the extent to which agency could confront challenges and catch up opportunities plays an important role. When the meaning of agency was unpacked, the internal needs driven by personal values and attitudes seemed to have influenced different levels of agency by the three identity clusters. It rationalised the students' response to the changing society.

7.3.2 Social Group Level

This section discusses how identity is negotiated at group level. In this study, group level refers to students' interaction with various social groups and the social networks they build at large. In the following paragraphs, social groups mean the students' interaction with Chinese or foreign social circles, while social networks mean the larger social networks based on the interaction of these various social groups. In summary, it is found that the way the students saw themselves influenced which social groups they preferred to engage with. In turn, being engaged in various social groups also influenced how the students perceived themselves and their further identity changes. This finding supports Bourdieu's (1990) theory of social practice, as he argues that agents have social attributes. To perform the perceived roles and identity, agents have to build social relationships and meet the expectations for the presentation and operation of that role and identity. The finding also supports the 'social positioning' theory (Tran & Vu, 2017), as the theory argues that the way people position themselves may affect the way they behave. The following sections discuss the students' interaction with various social groups in a more construct manner, by focusing on how they positioned themselves in various social groups, as well as the role and function of various social groups.

For the students who identified more with the Chinese people, they were more oriented towards the Chinese social groups in both China and the UK. Evidence from the sections on transnational mobility and social networks in both Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 suggests that as soon as most students arrived in the UK, they communicated with their families and friends in China more frequently. Likewise, in most students' early stay in the UK, they also made more Chinese friends than foreign friends. By looking deeply into the students' interaction

with the Chinese social groups, their Chinese oriented identity was perceived. This finding takes the same position as Bochner (1981) in that international students tend to stay with students who share the same cultural roots. Identity is about making similarities and differences between people (Jenkins, 2008) and people tend to identify with the familiar to maintain a sense of security in identity (Maslow, 1943).

Staying with the Chinese social groups draws attention to the positive role and function of the Chinese social networks in the students' transnational journey. With reference to the evidence of the current study, Chinese social networks play three critical roles in the students' life abroad and in China. First, Chinese social groups in China are a bridge linking Chinese students abroad and the current situation in China. For example, some students mentioned being informed of the latest news in China over telephone calls with their parents. Second, Chinese social groups in China remind Chinese students abroad of their Chinese cultural roots, blood and origin. Most students reflected that it was their families that drove them back home. Third, Chinese social groups in both China and the UK serve as emotional support for Chinese students abroad, so as to facilitate their adaptation and re-adaptation process. Most students regarded Chinese friends in the UK as 'helpers' who gave them a hand when needed. They also thought that Chinese friends in China understood them well due to their similar cultural roots and similar family background. The positive role and function of Chinese social networks adds to some prior studies (Gu, 2009; Lim & Pham, 2016). According to Lim and Pham (2016), communication with families in the home country and co-nationals in the host country would enhance students' well-being and facilitate their adaptation. Bochner (1977) also defined co-nationals as 'insider', 'gatekeeper' and 'cultural broker' who could help international students ease their tension in cultural adjustment. The emotional bond and connection among students sharing the same cultural and national identity could be best illustrated by Anderson:

> The fellow members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of the

> communion...Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity or genuineness, but in the style in which they are imagined. (1983, p.15)

However, while acknowledging the positive role and function of Chinese social networks, there are also negative influences of staying with Chinese social groups in students' overseas study experience. Studying in the UK is not all about studying academic subjects, but more of a cultural journey. If students keep staying with the Chinese social groups in the UK, it would be not beneficial for them to communicate with other cultural groups in British society. Findings from the section on intercultural competence in Chapter 5 suggest that the students (Da, Fi) who had long been engaging with the Chinese social groups became less willing to engage with the foreign social groups. Da reflected on feeling happy about the close bond with his Chinese people in the UK. He attributed his lack of engagement with the foreign social groups partly to the convenience of staying with his Chinese social groups. The negative influence of remaining in the Chinese social groups adds to previous findings by Brown (2009). He argues that staying with co-nationals was not beneficial for students' foreign language competence and cultural knowledge. However, few people could break the friendship circle with people of the same nationality.

Those who identified with the foreign social groups also hoped to engage with the foreign social groups whenever they were in China and the UK. Evidence from the section on transnational mobility and social networks in China suggests that most students not only have Chinese social groups, but also foreign social groups such as friends, roommates, classmates and colleagues. These students all belong to the foreign pilgrim and strategic decision-maker identity clusters. The willingness to engage with foreign social groups indicates students' identity: they were open to alternatives and committed to explore a new possible sense of self in British society.

Engaging with the foreign social groups draws attention to the role and function of foreign social networks. With reference to the students' transnational mobility and social networks in Chapters 5 and 6, the role and function of host-nationals are three-fold. First, most students regarded host-nationals as able to

help them engage with the local community, and improve their understanding of different cultures and nationalities. By interacting with them, most students reflected that they started to examine their own bias and developed double perspectives. Second, foreign social groups helped students find meaning in their new sense of self. In this current study, the majority of students made friends with students who shared similar overseas study experience. Additionally, some students (Xi, Ye, Jing, Jessie) reflected that they did not have a very clear boundary between 'Chinese us' and 'foreign others' and saw the 'foreign others' as part of their own people. Finally, it was reported by some students (Ye, Jessie, Guai) that they could also get emotional support from their foreign friends as they did not worry about revealing their secrets to foreign friends. The finding on the important role of foreign social networks supports Chuah and Singh's (2016) study that host-nationals can also contribute to the well-being of international students by giving them emotional, practical, informational, and social companion support. Altogether, the engagement with the Chinese foreign nationals indicated students' foreign-oriented identity and the common collective identity built upon similar overseas study experience.

Overall, this sub-section discusses the interplay between students' identity and the nature of social groups they interact with. Those who identify more with the Chinese people tend to embed in Chinese social networks. The role and function of co-nationals is to facilitate these students' adaptation to Chinese society. However, clustering around co-nationals might not be beneficial for them to catch new opportunities for change. Meanwhile, there were also students who negotiated in foreign social networks. For them, the role and function of host-nationals was to help them engage more deeply in the local context and develop double perspectives.

7.3.3 Institutional Level

Institutional level is defined by Jenkins (2008, p.39) as 'the human world of pattern and organisation, of established-ways-of-doing-things', which influences the shaping of identity. Evidence in this study suggested that institutions of universities, churches, workplaces and other organisations play a critical role in shaping students' identity in a transnational space. The

importance of institutions adds to the argument made by some previous scholars. Biesta and Tedder (2007, p.137) argue that agency is 'achieved through a combination of efforts of "the interplay between individual efforts, available resources and contextual and structural factors"'. The institutional level impacts on individual changes (Edwards, 2011) and their intercultural experience (Tran & Vu, 2017). While taking the same position as some previous scholars on the importance of institutions in the social identification process, this current study can still fill in some missing information in the existing literature. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss these major institutions one by one, with connections to the findings and previous literature to reveal any missing information from the existing literature and show further theoretical implications.

As an institution, university is a place which influenced shaping the students' identity. On the one hand, students' value and attitude dimension of identity was influenced by getting in touch directly with the British educational approach. Evidence in this study suggests that almost all the student returnees said that the British higher education taught them to study independently. Such a different approach to study, fundamentally, is a different way of thinking, carried with different values and attitudes in British society. On the other hand, university is also a place where international students could have more possible direct engagement with the home students to change their social networks in a foreign country.

However, while acknowledging the positive role and influence of universities in shaping students' identity, most students in this current study reflected that the universities they attended were less proactive in enhancing students' intercultural experience. In their opinions, the less proactive approach was reflected in two ways. First, building on previous findings on the insufficient support of universities in enhancing students' intercultural experience (Li, 2012; Sheridan, 2011), seven students in this research mentioned the unbalanced composition of nationalities in their class or major, and their difficulties in getting in touch with UK home students. These students all studied in the UK after 2010, which corresponded with the continued increasing numbers of

Chinese students in the UK after 2010 (Wang & Miao, 2013b). They all said there were many Chinese students and there was rare chance to communicate with 'foreign' (non-Chinese) students. One student majoring in Banking and Finance even mentioned that his class comprised 90% of Chinese students and no British students. Although some students (Guai, Bai, Sophia) showed really strong agency to enhance their intercultural experience, they all expressed their powerlessness in the face of the unexpected numbers of Chinese. For example, Bai reflected on her disappointment at the significant numbers of Chinese students in her major.

> *'I was kidding to my Chinese classmates that maybe only 'waiguoren' [home students] would think that they were in a foreign country.'*

Second, some students (Jing, Da, Xi) also indicated that a gap between Chinese students' needs and university support. These students were all strategic decision-makers. Referring to the identity development pathways for strategic decision-makers, they were all exploratory and committed to change themselves in the changing society. Despite that, their level of engagement with the local community varied. While reflecting on their depth of engagement with British society, they all reflected that they did not get enough support from the university in enhancing their intercultural experience. Jing said although she tried to engage with the local community by registering with the 'host family' and 'host friend' programme, she was missed from the register list twice for no known reason.

> *'I tried to engage in the local community but what was ironic is, and this happened twice, do you know 'host family', or 'host friend'? I registered twice and every time I was missed from the list. I tried but failed.'*

In contrast, for most participants, churches, with their religious beliefs, values and attitudes as institutions, took a more proactive approach towards international students than universities. This finding is consistent with the findings on the more influential role of churches on changing the values,

attitudes and belief of Chinese postgraduate students when compared with universities (Li, 2012). For this research, many students mentioned that church was a place where they could improve their English language competence, meet more friends, engage with the local community and have more understanding about the local culture and society. They reflected that the Christians were very warm-hearted. They encouraged them to speak English and organised both religious and cultural events for them to learn about British society and share their feelings with others. For those who went to church more often, their changes in their values, attitudes and belief were life-changing. For Xiao, although she did not acknowledge that she converted to Christianity, she recognized the existence of God and the influence on her action and behaviours.

> *'I believe that there was someone watching your actions. You felt that God is looking at you somewhere. In fact, when you believe in God, you will have self-restraints for your own mind and actions. You will have self-discipline whatever you do...The Bible is a spiritual support for me. I still keep a Bible with me, in the original English version. I will take out and read it when I am not in the good mood.'*

With regard to the different responses towards universities and churches by most students in this study, possible explanations are as follows. First, in terms of the external factor, it is likely that most British universities are more oriented towards recruiting Chinese students, driven by political, academic, economic and social/cultural considerations (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011). Second, for the internal factor, different responses towards both kinds of institutions may be due to the different expectations from students themselves. The British universities prefer independent and student-centred learning, whereas Chinese schools and universities adopt authoritative and teacher-centred learning (Wei, 2015). Such independent educational approaches may confuse some Chinese students in that they thought it was the universities' responsibility to help them enhance their intercultural experience rather than themselves.

Working institutions have their unique working culture, values and ethics. In summary of the relevant findings on the interaction between students' identity

changes and their nature of work in this study, the students changed identity by the time they left the UK and as soon as they arrived in China, this impacted upon their job preferences. In turn, the nature of their work continued to influence the student returnees' further identity changes in three major ways. First, it influenced their capacity to build connections between cultures. In particular, their English language competence, as well as their willingness to build connections with other countries and cultures, is a good illustration of the importance the working institution had on the students' identity. Second, different working institutions in which the students negotiated showed the tension between the local and the transnational. Additionally, the values and attitudes in which students worked also cast an influence on the way they think and act. For example, Jing said openness and competitiveness was one of the traits she learned from the American company she had been working for.

> *'I worked with the Americans and the American culture has had a great influence on me, one of which is openness. The Americans would like to accept any possibilities. Second is Americans never feared of outshining others. They would feel ashamed if they cannot do things well.'*

Towards the end of this section, it is also worth mentioning the role and function of Chinese and foreign clubs, unions and organisations, and their influence on the students' level of transformation in identity. Evidence in this study suggests that Chinese unions, clubs and organisations helped with students' adaptation in the UK, and served as a mouthpiece for political and cultural purposes. Foreign unions, clubs and organisations functioned as a venue for Chinese students to meet foreign friends, and learn about western culture and society. The ones mentioned in the interviews were 'student unions' and 'Oxfam'. Once the students returned, unions, clubs and organisations for returnees continued to display a positive impact, in establishing social networks with other overseas student returnees, and empowering and representing the image of student returnees from overseas. The interviews suggested that 'Shenyang Student Returnees Association' and the 'Financial and Technological Association for Student Returnees' were established for student returnees. It was also observed

that some special western festivals such as Valentine's Day, Halloween and Christmas were organised, an expression of their changes in identity.

In most students' eyes, they did not get enough support from the universities in enhancing their intercultural experience. In comparison, churches were more proactive in engaging with international students and helped them adapt to the foreign society. As the students returned to China, working institutions and other organisations continued to play with the institutional context in which students' identity was negotiated.

7.3.4 Society Level

This section discusses the relationship between students' identity changes and the larger society in which they were situated. As prior studies on the relationship between agency and structure in the literature review chapter established, the world is underpinned by various human relationships and is beyond individuals' control (Durkheim, 1982; Max, 1978). Both Durkheim and Max view that there were inevitable social forces which individuals could not resist. Regarding the findings on the society level of interaction with identity, the external socio-cultural structure serves as the larger society in which students' identity is negotiated. While the students were studying in the UK, their identity was changed in relation to the values, attitudes and behaviours that are expected from British society. Once students returned to China, they had to re-adapt to Chinese society, in which different language, behavioural behaviours, and values and attitudes were embedded.

However, the findings from this current study also indicate the role of agency in shaping the society as structure. As noted by Welzel and Inglehart (2010), human agents were not completely bound by society, but could select the way they live. In relation to this study, when the home-seekers lived and studied in the UK, they still socialised with the Chinese people, ate Chinese food, shopped at Chinese supermarkets, and watched Chinese shows online. Looking deeply, they constructed a Chinese society within the larger British society. Similarly, after the foreign pilgrims and strategic decision-makers returned to China, they hoped to continue to work and live in a transnational context. Most importantly,

there were some students (Xiao, Jing, Ye, Xi, Lv) who mentioned making an impact on the larger society by bringing the values, attitudes and behaviours back to Chinese society. The role of agency and its implication for the structure was best illustrated by Xiao, who owned her family-inherited business in China:

> *'When I just entered the People's Political Consultative Conference in our district, I made a proposal of borrowing the charity framework of Oxfam to China. I also put forward the proposal about disabled people and it was quite sensational at that time. Later on, it became a leading concept of our party as we aim to provide more systematic service and care for the disabled people. It's nice to see that nowadays, people have become more aware of this.'*

These findings not only give empirical support for the theories of 'reconstruction of place and locality' and 'mode of cultural reproduction' proposed by Vertovec (2009), but also demonstrate the role of agency in shaping the society as established in the literature review chapter. To recap, symbolic interactionists (Blummer, 1969; Goffman et al., 1989; Mead, 1934) view the society as being subjectively processed by different individuals in a different society, and people's response depends on the way they interpret the world around them. Unger (2004, p.17) proposed 'false necessity' and argued that 'we can understand ourselves and our history without imagining ourselves to be the objects of a law-giving fate'. Hence, taking the position with Giddens (1984a) and Bourdieu (1990), students as agency and society as structure are not at opposite ends but relate to each other. The larger society provided the student returnees with a society in which their identity was negotiated. Their response varied, depending on the society in which they were situated. When there is a convergence between student returnees' personal values and expectations, the society would facilitate the student returnees in using their agency to respond to both challenges and opportunities; when there is a divergence between student returnees' personal values and expectations, and the society, it was the extent to which the student returnees would like to use their agency that mattered.

The current study found that a close relationship between the student returnees' identity changes and the larger society in which they were situated. The findings suggested that not only did society have an impact on the shaping of student returnees' identity, student returnees themselves as agents could also have an impact on the changing society with their changed identity. The divergence and convergence between personal values and attitudes and the larger society again showed the relationship among identity, agency and the social structure.

7.3.5 Virtual Level

In this study, virtual level of identity negotiation concerns how identity is expressed through communication technology. Prior studies suggest that technology casts influence on how identity is expressed (Francisco, 2015; Lingel, Naaman, & Boyd, 2014; Son, 2015). For example, Francisco (2015) describes how the development of social media such as Skype and Facebook helps maintain family ties and closeness across borders. Lingel et al. (2014, p.1502) show how people 'perform' their identity through social media online. As technology is a driving factor for building networks across borders (Castells, 1996; Vertovec, 2009), this section discusses the relationship between identity and technology under transnationalism. Retrospective of section 2.1.1. in Chapter 2, the world is becoming flat, owing to the development of technology.

To begin with, in line with the aforementioned prior studies, evidence from this current study suggests that technology enabled or limited the expression of students' identity across the borders. As soon as the students arrived in the UK, some reflected that virtual communication tools such as the internet and social media reduced their loneliness and nostalgic feeling for China. A review of these students' biographies showed that they all came to the UK after 2005. In their eyes, they were living in an information age where it was much more convenient to communicate with their families in China. In contrast, some students also reflected on the difficulties of communicating with their families and friends in China. These students all went to the UK in the early 2000s. For them, the internet at that time was not as developed as today. They had to communicate with their parents by expensive telephone calls. The following two quotations describe how the expression of students' identity was influenced

by the development of communication technology. The first quotation is from Fi, who described his unforgettable experience on his first return to China. He went to the UK in 2004 and said he communicated with his family by telephone only, as there was no camera on his computer at that time. The second quotation is from Guai, who went to the UK in 2005 and reflected that the internet shortened the distance between her and her family.

> *'As soon as I passed through the security check, I left behind all my luggage and rushed to my parents in tears. I then hugged my sister, who was standing beside a man I did not know…it was only until he called me 'brother' that I realized he was my younger cousin, who was only 13 years old when I left China.'*

> *'I can communicate with my family at any time, through mobile phones and QQ [a Chinese version of WhatsApp]. I can see them every night through videos…I said to my father "you and I are just within the distance of a turnaround".'*

Looking deeply, the Chinese students expressing their Chinese sense of belonging across the borders demonstrated that their Chinese nationalism remained. Here nationalism refers not only to political ideologies, but a collective sense of identity based on shared culture, religion and society. Therefore, different from prior studies (Castells, 1996; Castells, 2000; Son, 2015) which tend to argue for dismissing border frontiers, this study sees that student returnees' nationalism still existed and was showed through communication technology. This view confirms the view of previous studies (Kivisto, 2001; Guarnizo, Portes, & Haller, 2003; Van Den Bos & Nell, 2006) that people's sense of belonging will not be dismissed under transnationalism. For example, Kivisto (2001, p.571) notes that 'even in transnational social spaces, place continues to count.' Vertovec (2009) argues that transnationalism driven by information technology will boost existing social networks.

While acknowledging the influence of technology, it is worth highlighting the role of students' identity in building communication and connections across

borders, especially after students return to China. In relation to this study, regarding the section on transnational mobility and social networks, most strategic decision-makers were still in contact with their friends across the borders. Their maintained connections indicated their mixed sense of belonging or a transnational context in which they continued to work and live after return. For the foreign pilgrims, although they could not fully build a transnational context, they expressed their foreign-oriented identity through watching English television shows, dramas and books. Hence, in line with Giddens' (1984a) view on the interrelation between agency and structure, this sub-section argues that while acknowledging the influence of the development of communication technology, it is the individuals' agency that influences the extent to which they are influenced by technologies. The interplay between agency and structure indicated in the development of technology was demonstrated by Castells in his work *The Rise of the Network Society*. As he said, it is the capacity of societies that influences the use and potential of technology.

> Technology (or the lack of it) embodies the capacity of societies to transform themselves, as well as the uses to which societies, always in a conflictive process, decide to put their technological potential. (1996, p.7)

Identity and the development of information technology are closely related. On the one hand, people express their identity through the development of virtual communication tools such as the internet and social media. The level of development of technology enables or limits individuals' capacity to express their identity. On the other hand, communication and connections across borders at a virtual level are driven by individuals' identity. In light of the interplay between agency and structure, it is the extent to which individuals mobilized their capacity to use technology that shaped the changing identity in the virtual world.

7.4 Rethinking ‘Culture Shock’ and ‘Reverse Culture Shock’ in Light of Transnational Identity

This section brings to the fore the theoretical implication of the first two sections regarding ‘culture shock’ and ‘reverse culture shock’. With reference to section 3.3 in the literature review chapter, ‘culture shock’ refers to the negative feelings when individuals encounter a different culture (Oberg, 1960). Similarly, ‘reverse culture shock’ is also associated with negative feelings upon individuals’ return home (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). In relation to this current study, some students reported negative feelings as soon as they arrived in the UK and upon their return to China. Their negative feelings, conflicts and struggles may partly confirm some prior studies on ‘culture shock’ and ‘reverse culture shock’ (Lewthwaite, 1996; Moore, Jones, & Austin, 1989; Gaw, 2000; Gill, 2010). However, there are still asymmetries in the level and nature of the ‘culture shock’ and ‘reverse culture shock’ students experienced with these prior studies. In line with some recent findings (Nonini & Ong, 1997; Vertovec, 2001; Golbert, 2001; Louie, 2006; De Fina & Perrino, 2013) on the relationship between identity and transnationalism, this sub-section aims to have a renewed understanding of students’ sojourn and homecoming experience. It argues that transnational identity plays a critical role in facilitating students’ adaptation to the British society and re-adaptation to the Chinese society.

7.4.1 Culture Shock and Transnational Identity

This sub-section discusses students’ living and studying experiences in the context of ‘culture shock’ and transnationalism. Based on the relevant findings in this study, this sub-section questions the level and nature of the challenges and difficulties students encountered in British society. It argues that transnational identity serves as an alternative to ‘culture shock’ to interpret students’ response to a foreign society.

Under the assumption of ‘culture shock’ (Oberg, 1960), the negative feelings associated with the challenges and difficulties students faced in the UK were supposed to be ‘shock’. Regarding the term ‘shock’, Berry (1997) argues that there are three different levels of difficulty individuals experience in direct

contact with a foreign culture. The first level are difficulties that can be easily conquered, through changing one's behaviours in the new society. The second are difficulties causing the widely accepted 'culture shock'. Berry regards these difficulties as moderate and should be termed 'stress' rather than 'shock'. The third are difficulties that cause mental illness which requires appropriate treatment. In relation to this study, although some students (Fi, Allen, Wei, Jessie, Xiao, Ye) reported negative feelings while living and studying in the UK, many admitted that these negative feelings were within what they could handle and did not affect their UK life and study in general. The exception was Fi, who suffered from depression during his 3-year stay in the UK through having no friends. The remaining students said they enjoyed their life and study almost throughout their UK stay. Therefore, most students only experienced small difficulties when adapting to British society which, from another perspective, may not be termed as 'shock'.

In addition, in terms of the nature of 'shock', it is suggested that not all the difficulties students encountered were culture-related. Some were more related to their experiences rather than culture. With regard to the sections on improved English language competence, the reason why some students reported difficulties in this competence was because they were not familiar with the subject-related terminologies. Such finding adds to the prior study by Gu and Maley (2008) on the 'learning shock' students experienced over their study in the UK. Gu and Maley interpret 'learning shock' as learners' negative feelings of response to the challenges associated with the interaction of a new learning environment. Taking a step further, a different interpretation of 'culture shock' questions the role of culture in students' intercultural experience (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008; Grimshaw, 2010; Gu & Maley, 2008). Grimshaw and Sears (2008) argues that the cultural essentialist view of Chinese students in the UK may have a danger of them being seen as homogenous. Identity is not only about how students view themselves, but also how they are perceived in the eyes of others (Jenkins, 2009). Given that every student may react differently in the British society because of their different identity (Gu & Maley, 2008), it is suggested that Chinese students should not be seen as collectively the same with cultural stereotypes.

Considering the level and nature of the difficulties students experienced in this study, it is worth rethinking the appropriateness of using 'culture shock' to describe students' negative feelings of interaction with a foreign society. As an alternative, and guided by the relationship between transnationalism and identity (Vertovec, 2001), the current findings suggested that transnational identity played a critical role in easing the negative feelings of encountering British society by some. For example, to make life more comfortable, the home-seekers and strategic decision-makers in the seclusion phase communicated with their parents and friends in China, as well as established their Chinese social groups in the UK. In this way, they constructed a Chinese society within the larger British society to respond to challenges and difficulties such as low English language competence and nostalgia for home in China.

The findings on the relationship between identity and transnationalism resonate with some previous findings on how migrants facilitated their adaptation to a foreign society by staying with co-nationals and living in the old ways. Sussman (2010) describes how some Hong Kong immigrants made themselves feel more comfortable by staying with other Hong Kong social groups, eating Hong Kong cuisine, going to Chinese supermarkets, and watching Chinese television programmes. Van Oudenhoven and Benet-Martínez (2015) also argue that migrants could compare and switch between different values, attitudes and behaviours across countries and cultures. In this way, they did not have to abandon their cultural heritage and bonds, but achieved a new sense of identity in a foreign society at the same time. For Tian and Lowe (2014), the negative feelings associated with adaptation to a foreign society can be resolved and may not lead to the severity of 'shock'.

Most importantly, the discussion on the implication of transnational identity also promotes the role of agency in students' identity negotiation. As argued by Adler (1975, p.14), despite the negative feelings related to culture shock, culture shock can be also seen as 'an important aspect of cultural learning, self-development and personal growth'. With regard to the three transnational identity development pathways, whether students would benefit most from their living and studying experiences in the UK depends on the extent to which they

endeavoured to respond to the challenges and opportunities in British society. As argued by Welzel and Inglehart (2010, p.47), human beings are 'perceptive agents' and would find the 'models' most appropriate for them to face new challenges and opportunities. Although home-seekers and strategic decision-makers felt they had struggled in the seclusion phase of adapting to British society, they could continue to enjoy living in the Chinese society within the larger British society. Again, the only difference between home-seekers and strategic decision-makers was their different agency in responding to the changing society. In the later phase, the strategic decision-makers changed their strategy to mobilize their full efforts to engage with the British society. The foreign pilgrims were not the focus here, as they said they enjoyed their life and study in the UK in general.

Overall, a new perspective of transnational identity is proposed to understand students' adaptation to British society. It argues that transnational identity may facilitate students' adaptation in a foreign society and reduce the level of difficulty and associated negative feelings. In the adaptation process, it is students' agency that plays the critical role in influencing which transnational identity development pathways they will go through.

7.4.2 Reverse Culture Shock and Transnational Identity

This sub-section discusses students' homecoming experience in the context of 'reverse culture shock' and transnationalism. Similar to the last sub-section, this one also questions the appropriateness of using 'reverse culture shock' to describe the conflicts and struggles student returnees experienced in China. Instead, transnational identity is used to interpret student returnees' response when re-engaging with Chinese society.

'Reverse culture shock' is associated with the negative feelings of re-entry (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). Previous findings on student returnees' homecoming experience suggest that most student returnees would experience 'reverse culture shock' upon their return to China (Gaw, 2000; Gill, 2010; Ma, 2010). However, different from these previous studies, this current study suggests there were differences in terms of the level and nature of difficulties

student returnees experienced. First, most students did not report the level of difficulties which can be termed as 'shock' (Berry, 1997). Although most students said they missed the UK in the period when they first returned to China, they thought that such emotional attachment to the UK did not affect their personal and professional life in China in general. Both home-seekers and strategic decision-makers were satisfied with their life in China. Although the strategic decision-makers reported some conflicts in the period when they first returned to China, they had already passed that phase of identity negotiation and started to accept the coexistence of different values, attitudes and behaviours.

In addition, most student returnees hesitated to relate the conflicts they experienced to their study experience in the UK. They said some conflicts may be related to their overseas study experience, but some may be due to the lack of knowledge and experience in the particular jobs they did. Such finding can be partially explained by the human development theory (Erikson, 1956; Marcia, 1966). Both theorists view that adolescents will enter into a phase of life whereby they have to reconcile their childhood identity with their commitment to new ideology and occupation in the future. Such identity negotiation will lead to identity crisis, or what Erikson regards as an active self-exploration in trust and mistrust (1956). Given that most student returnees in my research were adults on their return to China, it is likely that some conflicts students experienced were common to all young people changing to professional roles in society and not specific to Chinese students returning from abroad.

The discussion on the relationship between students' overseas study experience and their encountered conflicts upon return also promotes focus on Chinese student returnees' public image in the view of others in Chinese society. Prior studies tend to assume that Chinese returnees were elites in Chinese society (Cao, 2007; Gross & Connor, 2007; Cheung & Xu, 2015; Lv, 2017). For example, Lv (2017) points out that student returnees' low level of adjustment is the result of their sense of superiority over the local Chinese. However, different from these prior studies, this current study suggests that students do not feel superior to the local Chinese because of their overseas study experience. Although they admitted improvement in their English language competence and

changes in values, attitudes and behaviours, they also expressed the local Chinese as being very competitive. They think the local Chinese were more familiar with Chinese society and were good at dealing with the interpersonal relations in China. The difference in finding with the prior studies reveals the possible bias from the general public on the collective image of the Chinese student returnees in Chinese society. From another perspective, it may not be that Chinese students felt superior to the local Chinese. Rather, it is likely that the way the Chinese students were perceived in the eyes of the local Chinese made the difference. This echoes Jenkins' (2009) view on the implication of categorizing people as collectively the same.

> Categorising people is always potentially an intervention in their lives, and often more. Although they may not be aware of their categorisation, that they have been categorised is always at least immanently consequential for a category's members. (Jenkins, 2008, p.84)

Given the asymmetries in findings with the prior studies, transnational identity as an alternative explanation for students' response to the challenges and difficulties upon return is proposed. In relation to this study, transnational identity plays an important part in mitigating the negative feelings of return. For example, in this study, Bai, a foreign pilgrim, expressed her nostalgic feeling for the UK as a runaway from her current life in China. Jing, a strategic decision-maker, chose to work at a transnational corporation on purpose as she said she might not be able to adapt to the local Chinese society. The relationship between transnational identity and students' re-adaptation to Chinese society in China confirms prior findings by Carling and Erdal (2014). Both Carling and Erdal argue that transnationalism prepares migrants for return. In particular, it helps return migrants to readjust their sense of belonging, maintain transnational ties and re-engage with the local social groups before return. In re-adaptation to Chinese society, agency plays a crucial role in shaping students' transnational identity development pathways. Most strategic decision-makers struggled in the period when they first returned to China. To deal with the tensions and struggles, they chose to continue to work and live in a transnational context under the

larger Chinese society. The foreign pilgrims still felt as though they were struggling as their intention to work and live in a transnational context was not matched with the local Chinese society in which they were situated. The home-seekers were not the focus here as they readapted to Chinese society without major conflicts.

Last but not least, the different levels of transnational identity also bring to the fore the relationship between assimilation, integration and transnationalism. Berry (1997) defines both assimilation and integration as strategies in the process of acculturation. Assimilation is interpreted as migrants abandoning the original values, attitudes and behaviours to fit into the new society, while integration is the maintenance of both traditional and new values, attitudes and behaviours (1997). With reference to this research, findings on the group level of interaction in Chapter 6 suggest that no student can be fully assimilated. On the one hand, the students could not be fully assimilated because they still maintained some of the traditional Chinese values, attitudes and behaviours. On the other, they could not be fully assimilated into Chinese society because there were also changes in their values, attitudes and behaviours when they studied in the UK. Such phenomenon can be explained by the relationship between integration and transnationalism (Jørgen Carling & Pettersen, 2014; White, 2014). According to White (2014), integration and transnationalism are closely related. Transnationalism provides the context for migrants' integration, while integration is carried through transnational behaviours across borders.

For student returnees' homecoming experiences in China, transnational identity was proposed to understand their re-adaptation process. It argues that transnational identity helps students quickly readapt to Chinese society. Likewise, agency again plays a critical role in influencing which transnational identity development pathways students will continue to go through. The relationship between identity and transnationalism also reveals how integration, assimilation and transnationalism interact to mark migrants' living in this new era of globalisation.

7.5 Transnational Identity as a Process

Based on the previous three discussion sections, this section is a tentative exploration into the meaning of transnational identity. As identity, transnational identity has been widely used but not clearly defined. Towards the end of this research, the researcher realized that searching for the meaning of transnational identity was a journey of self-discovery, through which previous personal bias and limitation in understanding was exposed and reviewed. Before the research was conducted, transnational identity was simply seen by the researcher as an expansion of identity from both 'here' and 'there' under the framework of transnationalism (Vertovec, 2001). As the research approached the end, the researcher understood transnational identity as a complex process involving both horizontal and vertical changes. Horizontally, transnational identity refers to identity changing in the process of socialisation and acculturation in a different society. Vertically, transnational identity involves different depths of changes in identity in relation to the society in which people are situated. Although these two read the same, the former has an emphasis on time in a different society and the latter on space across various structures. In the following sub-sections, both the horizontal and vertical process of transnational identity will be illustrated.

7.5.1 Horizontal Changes through a Different Society

Horizontally, transnational identity is viewed as a dynamic process in acculturation and socialisation in a different society. Acculturation means the interaction with a culture of different values, attitudes and behaviours (Berry, 1997). In relation to this study, acculturation refers to how Chinese students interacted with the British culture and re-engaged with the Chinese culture. Socialisation means the social process of learning values, attitudes and behaviours that are generally expected from a society (Searle & Ward, 1991; Welzel & Inglehart, 2010). In the context of this study, socialisation involves how students learned to think and live in a way that is generally accepted by British society and then Chinese society. In a transnational context underpinned by globalisation (Dahinden, 2009; Vertovec, 2009; Zhang & Guo, 2015),

socialisation and acculturation are involved in a more complex and overlapping society (Tran, 2016; Welzel & Inglehart, 2010; Wood, 2013).

Under the transnational context, and in line with some prior studies (Giddens, 1991, 1994; Holliday, 2013; Eteläpelto et al. 2013; Tran, 2016), this study sees transnational identity as a lifetime process of engaging with different society. Tran (2016, p.1269) interprets international students as undergoing profound changes in their identity by adapting to new conditions and creating new possibilities in the 'spatial movement'. The transnational context brings new light to Giddens' argument on identity in the late modernity that identity is about how to make sense of self by finding connections in life.

> A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor- important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in *the capacity to keep a particular narrative going*. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the *ongoing 'story' about the self.* (Giddens, 1991, p.54)

In the context of this study, the students underwent socialisation and acculturation in both the British and Chinese societies. The following flowchart demonstrates the process in which students negotiated their identity in acculturation and socialisation in both these societies. Starting from the left-hand side of the flowchart, all the students developed their own sense of identity in the acculturation and socialisation process before studying in the UK. As argued by Holliday (2013), everyone had his or her 'small culture' in upbringing. Then the middle chart demonstrates how students developed a new sense of identity in the socialisation and acculturation process in the UK. In interaction with people from different countries and cultures, students started to reflect on their own identity and that of the others. The right-hand side of the flowchart maps to the socialisation and acculturation process when student returnees returned to China, they had to re-engage with the Chinese society with their identity that developed in the British society. Therefore, it is suggested that

students were constantly negotiating their identity in an overlapping and complex society.

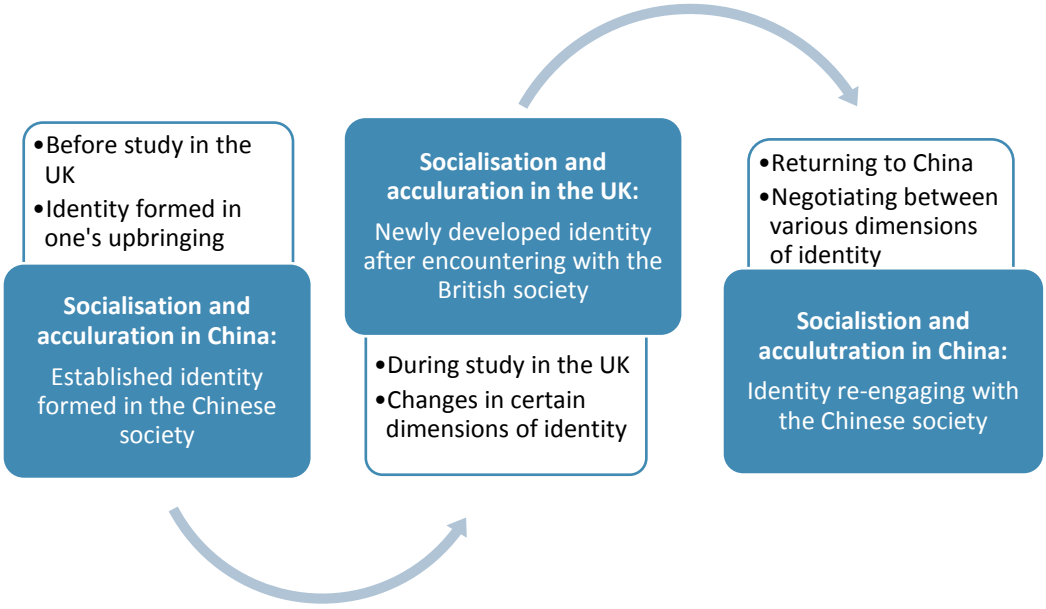


Figure 7.2 Transnational identity as a horizontal process of change

Seeing students' transnational identity in a constant socialisation and acculturation process, I argue that identity can only be judged over time, in connection with one's situated society, social relations, and personal biographies. That is to say, an exploration into someone's identity could not be separated from the society in which he or she was negotiated and the associated social networks. According to Bourdieu (1986), agents are not independent from 'capital' and its effects. 'Capitals' are interpreted by Bourdieu as a process of supporting agents' capacity in realizing what seems to be possible and impossible. The complex identity socialisation and acculturation process also echoed the relationship between transnationalism, habitus and identity (Bourdieu, 1990; Tran, 2016). Habitus lays the foundation for different forms of capital influence coming together (Kelly & Lusis, 2006). It casts influence on identity, yet is constituted by the negotiation of individual identity (2006). As a result, their identity should be analysed in a more complex and dynamic manner alongside their situated overlapping society, social groups and personal biographies.

In the spatial changing process, it should be noted that students' agency plays the most important part in managing the lifetime project of identity changes. Such view resonates with prior studies (Giddens, 1994; Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Marginson, 2014; Tran & Vu, 2017) on the proactive role of agency in challenges and opportunities. For example, Giddens (1994, p.14) uses the notion of 'life politics' to suggest that human beings have a certain level of freedom to choose their own 'life style' in the face difficulties and challenges. Eteläpelto et al. (2013) proposed the concept of 'life course' to suggest that individuals' life is shaped by their own choices and endeavours. The three identity clusters in finding two further suggested that the extent to which students and student returnees mobilized their agency played a critical role in shaping their identity development trajectories. It was not fair to judge students and student returnees' agency as low and high. Instead, it might be that a certain society was more suitable for some students and student returnees to take full advantage of both opportunities and challenges.

In this study, transnational identity was seen as a horizontal process involving both socialisation and acculturation in the changing society. Under transnationalism, the socialisation and acculturation process became increasingly overlapped and complex. While identity was seen as negotiating at different levels of interactions, it was the extent to which students and student returnees mobilized their agency that influenced students and student returnees' personal change and growth.

7.5.2 Vertical Changes across Different Levels of Transnational Identity

Although all the students in this research negotiated their identity in the changing society, the students' agency varied in that some showed really strong human agency to fit into the situated context, while others did not. The variations in agency then explain why students take different transnational identity development pathways. When putting students' various agency in the wider context of transnationalism, the data showed different a structure, nature and function of transnational identity in a vertical order.

The following hierarchical chart (Figure 7.3) shows three different levels of transnational identity. These three levels are arranged in a bottom-up manner and are grounded in the findings of the current study. Transnational identity at the bottom is transnational identity within the host country. In this study, the host country refers to the UK. Transnational identity in the middle refers to transnational identity within the home country. By 'home country', the researcher means China in this study. The third level is transnational identity in transcendence, which means changing towards a mixed conception of identity. There was no difference between 'high' and 'low' at these three levels. That is to say, transnational identity at the bottom does not mean that it is the lowest level of transnational identity. Although there was no difference in terms of 'high' and 'low' level of transnational identity, these levels are different and are mapping to different periods of time chronologically in the student returnees' journey from the UK to China.

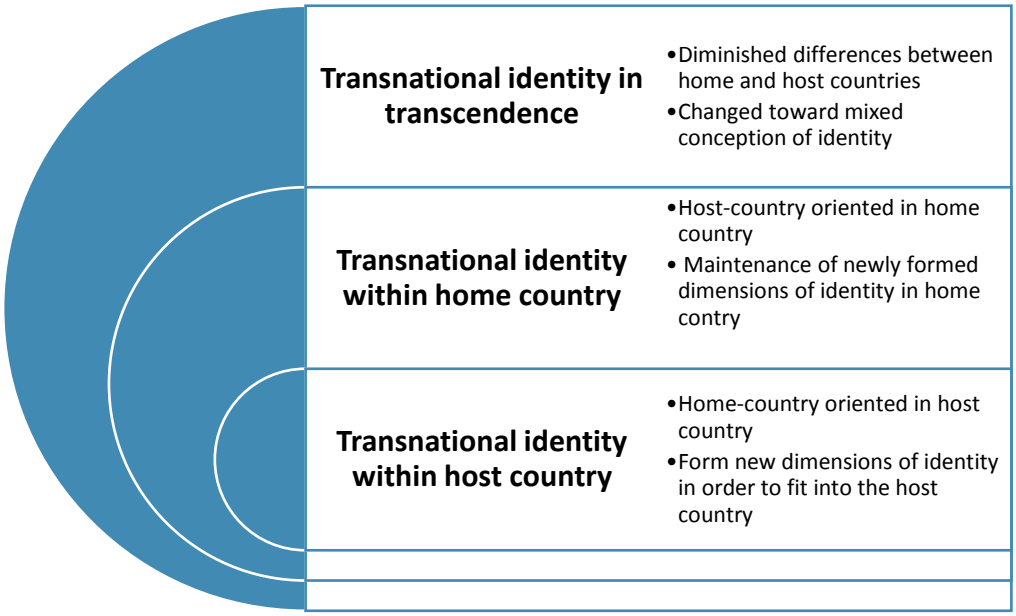


Figure 7.3 Transnational identity as a vertical process of change

As shown in the chart, the first level of transnational identity in the bottom is transnational identity within host country. This type of transnational identity carries two meanings. First, identity is transnational in that some students were oriented towards their home country when they were physically situated in the host country. The findings on the seclusion phase of home-seekers and strategic

decision-makers explained this meaning of transnational identity. In the seclusion phase, both home-seekers and strategic decision-makers dismissed the territorial boundaries to connect with those who shared the same socio-cultural roots with them. Second, identity is transnational in that students adopt new values, attitudes and behaviours as new dimensions of identity to fit into the host country. The engagement phase of the foreign pilgrims and strategic decision-makers supports this meaning of transnational identity.

The two meanings of transnational identity support prior studies on migrants' transnationalism (Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Guarnizo, 1997; Cohen, 2008). These previous studies promote a focus on the relationship between migration and transnationalism in this new era of globalisation. For example, Glick Schiller et al. (1992) provided a transnational perspective into migration and questioned the territorially bound notion of nation, race and social groups. However, for students in this study, transnational identity developed within the host country is considered as natural. In light of Coleman (1990) and Welzel and Inglehart (2010), struggles and suppression may drive people to make changes to themselves according to the society. When students encountered British society, they had to find a way to adapt to the new society. To facilitate their adaptation to British society, students either build a connection with people sharing the same socio-cultural roots as them, or adopt new values, attitudes and behaviours as new dimensions of identity to fit into the UK. Hence, the function of this level of transnational identity is to face both the challenges and opportunities in a foreign society under resistance (Tran & Vu, 2017).

The second level of transnational identity in the middle of Figure 7.3 is transnational identity within home country. This level of transnational identity also carries two meanings. First, identity is transnational in that students were oriented towards the host country (i.e. UK in this research) when they were physically situated in home country (i.e. China). The confrontation and resistance phases of the foreign pilgrims, as well as the confrontation phase of the strategic decision-makers were illustration of this meaning of transnational identity. Second, identity is transnational in that students still maintained upon return the values, attitudes and behaviours adopted when studying in the UK.

The resistance phase of foreign pilgrims and the reconciliation phase of strategic decision-makers demonstrated this meaning of transnational identity.

This type of transnational identity is different from the first level. It is often assumed that transnational identity is often expressed by migrants from abroad, yet little or insufficient attention has been given to transnationalism among return migrants (King & Christou, 2011; Vertovec, 2009). The transnational identity within the home country in the current study supports many previous scholars (Chen, 2008; Golbert, 2001; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Ip, 2006a; King & Christou, 2011; Potter, 2005), as these previous studies all reported transnationalism within the home country. Some literature addresses different levels of transnational social connections of Chinese returnees in the brain circulation (Chen, 2008); others touch on the socio-cultural dimension of transnationalism such as 'transnational orientation from home' (Golbert, 2001, p.713). Transnationalism among return migrants has been best argued by Golbert in the following.

> It should be noted that a study of transnational orientations from home does not necessarily contradict studies of transnationalism focusing on the experiences and behaviours of transmigrants. On the contrary, transnational experiences, behaviours and outlooks rooted locally, among those who have not left home and among those who have returned home from an extended transnational stay, bringing their cross-cultural expertise with them, complement studies of transnationalism from abroad. (2001, p.715)

The third level of transnational identity is transnational identity in transcendence. In this current study, this level of transnational identity refers to those students who changed towards a perplexed view of identity, without having a clear distinction between 'here' and 'there', 'us' and 'others', and 'home' and 'foreign' in terms of values, attitudes and behaviours. Findings from the identity changes of strategic decision-makers suggest that differences in countries and cultures in their eyes have been diminished, as a result of their experience of living and working abroad. The diminishing of boundaries in

different social, cultural and economic contexts echoes prior studies (Castles, 2002; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Zhang & Guo, 2015) on the interconnectedness between countries and cultures. For example, Castles (2002, p.1143) notes the 'blurring of boundaries' between migrants. Csordas (2009, p.266) sees the 'intersubjectivity' in consciousness across different social, cultural and economic contexts as 'transnational transcendence'. All acknowledge the connection between countries and cultures under the transnational context.

The diminishing of boundaries between different countries and cultures brings to the fore two important points. The first is the importance of analysing identity in a different society, structures, social groups and personal biographies. This is due to the consideration that everyone is supposed to have his or her own 'small culture' (Holliday, 2013) when engaging with a different society. Such view is supported by prior scholars on the reconsideration of migrants, identity and agency in a more complex and dynamic manner (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Castles, 2002; Tran, 2016). With regard to this study, students' identity changes are considered in the context of various levels of interactions, and along with their agency and personal biographies. Second, taking the same position as Castles (2002), more attention should be paid to the critical role of human agency. In relation to this study, it is the role of agency that shaped different transnational identity development pathways.

As seen from the above, identity is undergoing changes at the level of being transnational. Vertically, there are three different levels of transnational identity: transnational identity within host country, transnational identity within home country, and transnational identity in transcendence. These different levels not only indicate the possible process of changes identity goes through in a different society, but also how identity should be analysed contextually, structurally, socially and individually.

7.6 Summary

This chapter tries to conceptualise the meaning of transnational identity and looks beyond evidence presented in the findings chapter. The chapter begins by

introducing a model of transnational identity development pathways. In detail, transnational identity development pathways for home-seekers, foreign pilgrims and strategic decision-makers were discussed. The three different transnational identity development pathways confirmed previous arguments that identity was developed over time. Following this, shaping factors of transnational identity at various levels were discussed. Apart from the individual level, social group level, institutional level and society level, there was one virtual level which gradually emerged from the data in this research. In addition, the variations of changes in transnational identity promote the role of agency with multiple levels of interactions. Moving beyond the shaping factors of transnational identity, this study also discusses the role of transnational identity in interpreting 'culture shock' and 'reverse culture shock'. Until now, studies on the relationship between culture shock, reverse culture shock and transnational identity were limited, and this study transcends the mere discussions on psychological and society (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001) to examine culture shock and reverse culture shock under transnationalism. Towards the end of the discussion chapter, the researcher seeks to conceptualise transnational identity as a process, both horizontally and vertically. What seems certain is the era of globalisation has a far-reaching impact on the way students speak, think and act and thus, on their identity. Threading through different personal identity trajectories seems to observe the divergences between different people in engaging, resisting, controlling and embracing their life paths. The exploration into the shaping of transnational identity, in a fascinating way, may help us understand the best way to meld our lives into the one we hope to achieve.

Chapter Eight Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

As all other theses, this thesis must come to an end, an end that may be not as beautiful as a fairy tale, but one which hopes to recap the arguments and provoke some 'food for thought' in readers. As a review, this research explores the meaning of transnational identity of Chinese student returnees from the UK. With this main conceptual focus in mind, and in the context of globalisation and internationalisation of higher education, this study adopts a qualitative methodology, interviewing sixteen participants for three rounds. All the students were interviewed after they returned to China, but the interviews were conducted in different settings in the UK and China. Regarding the original contribution to knowledge, although transnationalism theory is not new, this study understands students' identity changes under transnationalism and serves identity as a basis for conceptualising the meaning of transnational identity.

This chapter is organised in three major sections. The first section begins by revisiting all the research questions and sub-questions. The aim of this section is to review all the findings or answers to the research questions, show links across findings and chapters, and explain why and how all the chapters were arranged in this thesis. The second section reminds the readers of the significance of this study, especially the theories of transnationalism and students' sojourn and homecoming experience. The final section concludes by exploring implications for future research. The researcher would like to know what else could be explored on the basis of this current understanding.

8.2 A Review of Research Questions

To show links between key ideas spread across chapters, it is important to revisit all the research questions and use research questions as a 'road map' for this chapter. Altogether, there were two main research questions, with each having some sub-questions:

1. How do we understand transnational identity? What is the nature of Chinese student returnees' transnational identity?

1) To what extent has Chinese student returnees' identity changed?

2) If it has changed, what are the key characteristics of their changes in identity?

2. How has the transnational identity of Chinese student returnees changed over time?

1) Are there any variations in the outcomes of Chinese student returnees' identity negotiations?

2) What are the key factors shaping their construction and reconstruction of transnational identity?

3) How does Chinese student returnees' transnational identity influence their professional and personal lives, and vice versa?

8.2.1 The Nature of Chinese Student Returnees' Transnational Identity

Regarding the first research question, the first main finding is that all the student returnees reported changes in their identity by the time they left the UK. As established in the literature review chapter, there were four possible dimensions of identity relevant to this research. These dimensions include English language competence and intercultural competence, consciousness, values and attitudes, behaviours and actions. Based on these possible dimensions, a conceptual framework (Figure 3.1 in 3.4.2) was proposed to understand the meaning of transnational identity. The researcher did not completely rely on the framework but used it to compare, evaluate and seek a new understanding of transnational identity.

In the first findings chapter, four major characteristics of transnational identity was found to be developed by the time students left the UK. The first was the capacity to build connections between cultures. Such capacity was related to

students' English language competence and intercultural competence. By improving English language competence, most students broke the language barrier of communicating with people from other countries and cultures. They also changed the way they saw themselves in the reflection of the others. In addition, by improving their ability to engage with people from other countries and cultures, they narrowed the gap between countries and cultures in their hearts.

The second was diaspora consciousness, which was a reflection of students' changes in their consciousness. It comprised an understanding towards 'national us' and 'foreign others', heightened awareness of multi-locality, reconstruction of place and locality, and a multiple sense of belonging. By gradually realizing the difference between 'national us' and 'foreign others', and being more aware of 'here' and 'there', students developed a multiple sense of belonging. By the time students left the UK, most regarded their sense of belonging to China as predominant, and their sense of belonging to the UK and elsewhere as supplementary. Here, the multiple sense of belonging was not only the sense of belonging to more than one country, but also the sense of belonging to personal experiences that are associated with personal growth and changes.

The third characteristic was diaspora values and attitudes, which reflects students' way of thinking. Some newly adopted values and attitudes by student returnees include becoming independent, value of individualism and greater respect and tolerance for diversity. Among these newly adopted values, most students still maintained filial piety by showing respect and honour for their parents and elders. Taken together, these values and attitudes reflected the complexity in students' way of thinking and consciousness. The interaction of both the established and the newly developed values and attitudes influenced the shaping of students' identity.

The final characteristic was expansion of behaviours and actions, which was found to be expression of students' way of thinking and sense of self. Within this major characteristic, the student returnees reported changes in their living habits, improved social etiquette and their communication and connections across the borders. Changes in students' living habits and social etiquette not

only implicated behavioural changes, but also changes in students' sense of belonging. It also concerned how students presented themselves in the eyes of the foreign others. Changes in communication and connections across borders also illustrated students' changes in identity by seeing them as more mobile and connected in the era of globalisation.

Taken together, these four dimensions were the main findings in Chapter 5. It also answers to the first main research question and sub-questions. In terms of how the findings chapters were linked and organised, Chapter 5 found four possible dimensions of identity being developed which might have implications for the conceptualisation of transnational identity. Although there were different groupings in each dimension, the researcher did not attempt to form identity cluster by the time students left the UK. The researcher believed that transnational identity should be viewed in a changing process. Such a view also highlights the importance of exploring the variations and shaping factors in the construction and reconstruction of student returnees' transnational identity in Chapter 6.

8.2.2 The Key Factors Shaping the Construction and Reconstruction of Student Returnees' Transnational Identity

In relation to the second research question, the second main finding is that there were three different types of student returnees, grouped as the three identity clusters. The first identity cluster was home-seekers. This type of identity cluster reported a weak sense of belonging to the UK since return, reduced intercultural competence, and decreased transnational mobility and narrowed social networks since return. The second identity cluster was foreign pilgrims. They reported an increased sense of belonging since return, decreased intercultural competence since return, and a growing intention to maintain transnational mobility and social networks. The third identity cluster was the strategic decision-makers. They had mixed sense of belonging since return, increased intercultural competence since return, and well-maintained transnational mobility and social networks.

Despite the variations in identity, as visualized by the three spider charts in Chapter 6, various dimensions of identity were not 'zero-sum game' but interlinked to each other. That is to say, although the home-seekers reported a weak sense of belonging to the UK since return, it did not mean that they did not undergo any changes in their values, attitudes and behaviours. Similarly, although the foreign pilgrims reported more foreign-oriented identity, they also reported maintaining some traditional Chinese values and attitudes. This evidence and contradictions demonstrated the complexity of student returnees' identity. The numbers of strategic decision-makers, being the majority, indicated another perspective of the complexity of identity. This also explained how identity was influenced and shaped by the trend of transnationalism in this new era of globalisation.

The key factors shaping the construction and reconstruction of student returnees' identity demonstrated the relationship between agency and structure. On the one hand, with reference to sections 6.3 in Chapter 6 and 7.3 in Chapter 7, the student returnees negotiated their identity with various levels of structures, including the society, institutional, and social group levels. There was also one additional level: the virtual level of structure, whereby student returnees expressed their sense of identity through virtual communication and connections. This level is what demonstrates the excitement of an inductive qualitative approach to research. It was during the fieldwork that the researcher gradually realized how students expressed their sense of identity through technology, such as maintaining social networks across borders through social media or improving their language competence by watching TV programmes. Taken together, these structures provided the context in which the student returnees expressed and negotiated their identity.

On the other hand, retrospective of sections 7.2 and 7.3.1 in Chapter 7, the student returnees were not negative agents, but they were constantly shaped by and re-shaping their sense of identity at different . In the interaction with various levels of structures, agency played a critical role in shaping student returnees' sense of self. In particular, it was the extent to which the student returnees used their agency that mattered. Towards the end of the discussion chapter, it was not

fair to judge student returnees' level of agency as either low or high. Instead, there was no difference between low and high agency. For example, home-seekers reported having difficulties in adapting to British society. However, this did not mean that home-seekers had a low level of agency. Evidence in section 6.2.1 in Chapter 6 suggested that it might be because that the British society did not provide the context for the home-seekers to take full advantage of both challenges and opportunities for their personal growth and change. Similarly, for the foreign pilgrims, Chinese society did not provide the context for them to prosper in their personal and professional life in China. Their evidence suggested the interplay between agency and the larger context in which agency was situated.

Looking more deeply, the factors influencing the level of agency being mobilized by the three identity clusters were two-fold. First, according to sections 6.2.1, 6.2.2 and 6.2.3 in Chapter 6, the convergence and divergence of personal values and expectations and the society in which student returnees were situated played a critical role. Second, when comparing foreign pilgrims and strategic decision-makers, the difference between them was the extent to which they used their capacity to readapt to Chinese society. Relevant evidence suggested that for strategic decision-makers who just returned to China, although there was a difference between their personal values and expectations and the Chinese society, they still strived to take full advantage of both challenges and opportunities.

In terms of the relationship between identity and student returnees' personal and professional life, with reference to sections 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 in Chapter 6, the living and studying experiences in the UK instigated student returnees' greater reflection on their sense of self in their homecoming experience in China. In particular, with reference to Chapter 5, the students reflected on their sense of self from the following four major themes, including the capacity to build connections between cultures, diaspora consciousness, diaspora values and attitudes, and expansion of behaviours and actions. It was found how students perceived their sense of self in relation to British and Chinese societies played a critical role in shaping their level of satisfaction with life in China. Home-

seekers were satisfied with their life, as they could fully mobilize their agency because of the convergence between their personal values and expectations and the Chinese society. Foreign pilgrims struggled with their personal and professional life in China, as they could not fully use their agency due to the divergence between personal values and expectations and the Chinese society. Finally, strategic decision-makers were generally satisfied with their life, as they could fully use their agency to respond to both challenges and opportunities, despite divergence between personal values and expectations and the Chinese society.

However, it should be noted that the student returnees' personal and professional life in China might not be directly related to their living and studying experiences in the UK. Throughout the three rounds of interviews, some student returnees suggested that their changes in identity might not be their sojourn experiences but the result of their human phase of development identified by Erikson (1960). For example, some student returnees viewed that without studying abroad, they might still have conflicts with their parents in values, attitudes and behaviours as they became more mature. Therefore, as a researcher, careful consideration should be given to the relationship between sojourn experiences and homecoming experience.

Overall, the role of Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 answers the second research question and sub-questions. Based on the different groups in Chapter 5 by the time students left the UK, Chapter 6 further explores student returnees' further changes in identity upon their arrival in China. The variations of identity as well as the key shaping factors of identity were explored, before conceptualising the meaning of transnational identity. Applying transnationalism to understand the meaning of identity and conceptualising transnational identity is where the original contribution of this research lies.

8.3 Significance of the Study

8.3.1 Nuancing Theories of Transnational Identity

Towards the end of this research, it is important to review the original contribution of the study. Overall, this study tries to understand the meaning of transnational identity. Based on the evidence of this research, the final conceptualised framework of transnational identity is presented in Figure 8.1 below. In terms of the meaning of transnational identity, it can be understood in four major dimensions of identity, and at four levels of interactions across borders. In the era of globalisation, individual identity is not self-reliant but constantly negotiated with various levels of structures across different times and space.

Here, firstly, it is important to revisit the initial, hypothetical framework proposed in 3.4.2 and clarify the extent to which it differed from the final framework. By the time the research was finished, the empirical data from this research suggested that the four-shared concepts of transnational identity mapped onto the four major dimensions of identity in 3.4.2. As reviewed in 8.2.1 in this chapter, students reported changes in several aspects, including the capacity to build connections between cultures, diaspora consciousness, diaspora values and attitudes, and expansion of behaviours and actions. These aspects were not independent but interacted with each to make each individual identity more individualised and complete as a whole.

Except for the four shared characteristics of transnational identity, identity was developed at different levels of interactions, including group level, institutional level, society level and virtual level. When unpacking these different levels of interactions, student returnees not only negotiated their identity in one place and at one time, but also in overlapping cultures and societies across the borders. Compared to Figure 3.1, this conceptual framework adds one virtual level of structure to highlight how individual identity is expressed through and changed by communication technology under transnational movements, affiliations and social connections (Vertovec, 2009).

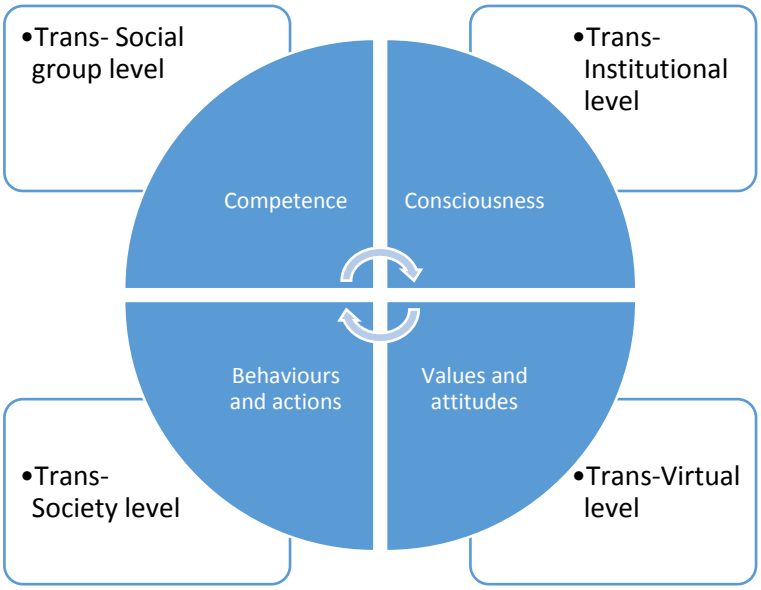


Figure 8.1 The final research-informed conceptual framework of transnational identity

Coupled with the spider chart presented in Chapter 6, it can be seen that transnational identity was a dynamic process. It not only involved a horizontal process of changing from one society to another but also a vertical process of negotiating identity at various levels of structures. The horizontal process focused on time and the vertical process focused on space. Horizontally, student returnees negotiated their identity in the changing society. Vertically, there were different levels of transnational identity. The first level of transnational identity was transnational identity within the host country; the second level was transnational identity within the home country; the third level was transnational identity in transcendence. There was no discrimination against the three levels of transnational identity. Finding transnational identity among the majority of student returnees again demonstrated the relationship between transnationalism and identity. In particular, it indicated how individual identity was shaped and influenced by the larger context of transnationalism.

Aside from the deepened meaning of transnational identity, this study also expands the scope of transnationalism. The variations in the three identity clusters in Chapter 6 expand the scope of transnationalism. Retrospective of Vertovec's (2006) view on transnationalism presented in 3.4.2, there were

different forms of transnationalism, including political, economic and socio-cultural transnationalism. On the basis of Vertovec's (2006) argument, this study adds a new form of transnationalism at a virtual level. It can be seen from this research that students expressed their multiple sense of belonging in different ways. Some changed their lives by becoming more mobile across the globe, while others expressed their feelings and willingness through virtual networks. Communicating through the internet and the social media was a virtual form of transnationalism. Thus, transnationalism can be seen as both physical and virtual. All these taken together expanded the scope of our understanding of transnationalism.

8.3.2 Enriching Understanding of Chinese Student Returnees' Homecoming Experience

The findings of this study not only enrich our understanding of Chinese students' living and studying experiences in the UK, but also their homecoming experience in China. In particular, this study noted how Chinese student returnees lived, worked and re-adapted to Chinese society. Overall, it was found that most Chinese student returnees in this study re-adapted to Chinese society without encountering major difficulties in their personal and professional life in China. As a result, the findings provided a new perspective of looking into culture shock and reverse culture shock, indicating that in the context of transnationalism, few Chinese students experienced culture shock and few student returnees experienced reverse culture shock.

However, there were still differences in terms of how students and student returnees adapted to the changing society. For those whose personal values and expectations converged with the situated society, they could respond to both challenges and opportunities by fully mobilizing their agency. For those whose personal values and expectations diverged from the situated society, they could not fully take advantage of both challenges and opportunities with their agency. Still, the majority of student returnees (strategic decision-makers) reported fully using their capacity to make them prosper in the changing society, although

there were gaps between their personal values and expectations and the society in which they were situated.

A more important contribution to knowledge is the application of transnationalism in students' experiences. In the past, students' sojourn experiences and student returnees' homecoming experiences were often analysed from a cultural perspective, whereas transnationalism was often used in migration studies. However, in the era of globalisation, students' identity changes may not be only understood from a single cultural perspective. Transnational identity endows the researcher with a new perspective of looking into students' sojourn and student returnees' homecoming experiences. Again, in the era of globalisation, nothing and nobody is independent from each other.

This contribution to knowledge is also related to the phenomenon of 'culture shock' and 'reverse culture shock'. In this study, it was found that transnational identity plays a key role in mitigating the impact of culture shock and reverse culture shock.

Before wrapping up this thesis, in line with the three major issues concerning the internationalisation of higher education identified in Chapter 2, three suggestions were made: more equal education for all, better quality education through enhanced intercultural experience, and a combined commitment to improve internationalisation of higher education at various levels. First, attention should be given to issues regarding equality and equity in the internationalisation of higher education. There should be an awareness that overseas study remains a source of inequality. This was especially the case for the Chinese participants in this study. The opportunity to pursue overseas study was still limited to those who enjoyed better social and economic status in Chinese society. As evidenced by this study, most student returnees were from well-off families and they did not have financial burdens while studying in the UK. Such a situation calls for policy makers of relevant bodies to address the issue of equality. Although internationalisation of higher education seemed to become more market-oriented, it was suggested that education should be provided for all, irrespective of their economic and social status. In addition, more attention should be given to the issues of equity in Chinese students' living

and studying experiences in the UK. As Chinese students studying in British society, more support should be given to their English language competence and intercultural experiences. These related to the quality of education in the next paragraph.

Second, it is necessary to address the issue of quality education. With reference to students' living and studying experiences in the UK in Chapter 5 and section 7.3 in Chapter 7, it was concluded that most students did not get enough support in enhancing their intercultural experiences. Students were found to have difficulty in making foreign friends, due to the disproportionate numbers of Chinese students on campus and in their university accommodation, as well as a lack of information and support from universities when compared with churches and other student groups and organisations. Therefore, more diversified groups of students were suggested, with a balanced ration of Chinese students, home students and students from other countries and cultures. The purpose was to enhance intercultural experiences for both home and Chinese students. At the same time, it was also suggested that university should give more support in enhancing Chinese students' intercultural experiences.

Third, this research calls for a combined effort at various levels to enhance students' intercultural experiences. On the one hand, students themselves have a responsibility to use their agency fully to respond to both challenges and opportunities, enrich their intercultural experiences, and achieve personal change and growth. On the other hand, universities, institutions and social groups in both the British and Chinese societies could create the context by which students' and student returnees' agency could be fully mobilized. In particular, British universities should consider the level of application of knowledge gained from the UK in Chinese society. Meanwhile, Chinese society at large at the government level should consider how to attract student returnees to return to China better through favourable conditions such as in their job-seeking experiences. Employers and working institutions should consider how to utilize student returnees' qualifications and skills obtained from the UK better.

8.4 Implications for Future Research

As noted above, this study contributed some original knowledge to the relevant field of study by nuancing theories of identity and transnational identity, as well as enriching the understanding of Chinese student returnees' homecoming experience. The findings and implications direct us to three future research orientations for student returnees.

First, as established in section 4.9 in Chapter 4, data were collected based on student returnees' memory or their interpretations of the memories. Despite both strengths and weaknesses being discussed with regard to memory (Shamir & Eilam, 2005; Simmons, 2002), it might be helpful to get more in-time feedback on students and student returnees' experiences. Hence, in the future, the researcher hopes to interview more student returnees at the exact time of UK1, UK2, CH1, and CH2 in a longitudinal study.

Second, it was argued in section 4.9 in Chapter 4 that this study can only claim representation on a small group of student returnees and make appropriate contribution to knowledge. By acknowledging the limitation in the representation of the study, the researcher hopes to extend the investigation into a wider population of student returnees. To achieve this, the researcher hopes to combine quantitative surveys into qualitative-oriented study. It should be noted that future research on the identity changes of student returnees is still qualitative-driven so as to have a more nuanced and narrative understanding of student returnees. A quantitative study is mainly to improve the representativeness of future research.

Third, based on the findings in this study, it was not fair to simply judge students and student returnees' agency as low, medium and high. Instead, the relevant findings suggested that it was the extent to which students and student returnees mobilized their agency that shaped their personal experiences and growth in the changing society. Hence, although this study informed our understanding of the relationship between agency and structure, it is beneficial to have a further exploration of the various factors shaping the extent to which students would mobilize their level of agency. Based on Chapters 5 and 6, one of the shaping factors was the divergence and convergence of personal values and expectations and the society in which they were situated. The researcher had to admit that

understanding the factors shaping students and student returnees' agency will never come to an end. Therefore, the researcher noted that the various factors shaping students and student returnees' mobilized agency needs to be further explored.

Finally, although this thesis comes to an end, my personal story, together with all other Chinese student returnees' personal stories, never come to an end. Our life was changed, lightened and glorified, by the time we stamped our life on this beautiful land across the globe. Transnationalism is what shaped us, but we are also the ones who defined the meaning of transnationalism in the new era.

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Appendix A



A Brief Statement of Research Aims

Researcher's Name: Suyang Wang

Researcher's ID Number: 4219415

Course of Study: Nottingham-Beijing PhD in Education

Title of Research Project: An Exploration into the Transnational Identity of Chinese Student Returnees

This study aims to examine the identity changes of Chinese student returnees after living and studying in the UK. According to the aim of this research, the research questions are listed as follows:

1. To what extent has Chinese student returnees' identity changed?

2. If it has, what are the key characteristics of their changes in identity?

3. Are there any variations in the outcomes of student returnees' identity negotiations?

4. What are the key factors shaping their construction and reconstruction of identity?

5. How does Chinese student returnees' identity influence their professional and personal lives, and vice versa?

6. What are the research implications for the internationalisation of higher education?

Appendix B



Information Sheet

Project Title：Transformation for some? An exploration into the Transnational Identity of Chinese Overseas Student Returnees

Researcher's Name: Suyang Wang

Supervisor's Name: Professor Gu Qing & Assistant Professor Jane Evison

This information sheet aims to provide participants with relevant information. In particular, it describes the nature of this research and the participants' involvement in it. Participants have the rights to be informed of any potential risks associated with participation. At all times the welfare of the participants is observed by the researcher and the personal privacy of the individual is recognized and respected.

The Aims of the Project

The aim of the research is to understand the changes of student returnees owing to overseas study and how such changes may impact upon their professional and personal lives when returned to China. In particular, this research helps student returnees better understand themselves (their attitudes, behaviours, roles and so on) when they engage with different social and cultural contexts. In addition, it aims to show policy implications for overseas education quality and the flow of talents against the backdrop of internationalisation of higher education.

What the Participants Should Do

Participants will be invited for three audio-taped interviews throughout the year in 2015. Initially, each participant will be invited to one-hour interview with the researcher. During the interview, each participant will be encouraged to answer questions elicited by the researcher. These questions relate to their study life in

the UK. Following the initial interviews, participants will be invited to have another one-hour interview with the researcher, answering questions about their personal and professional lives in China. About three months later the researcher will conduct a third round of interviews by providing interview transcripts to participants to check for accuracy of their meaning and content. In addition, a summary of research findings will be provided to participants to fully acknowledge their participation and rights. This round of interviews also aims to capture any changes to student returnees after the first two interviews. All the interviews will be carried out within reasonable times to avoid inconveniences for participants. .

Confidentiality and Security of Information

Data generated by the research, including hard and electronic copies of data, will be used for research and other academic purposes only (including dissemination of findings). They will be held securely and confidentially by the researcher, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Both written and electronic transcripts will be kept in a safe and secure password-protected location (office/personal computer). Data access is restricted and no-one other than supervisors, examiners as well as research participants will have access to any of the data collected. Research participants will have the right to access their own data.

By signing the participant consent form, the researcher will be granted with the permission to use personal data pertinent to this research during and after the research is completed. Interview transcripts will be given to the participants to check and verify their meaning and intention. The result of the study will be anonymously. The personal background of each participant will be as generic as possible so that it cannot be potentially identifiable in any published materials.

In accordance with the fifth principle of the Data Protection Act 1998, personal data held for research purposes may be kept indefinitely after the research is completed as long as it does not affect any individuals, or in a way that is likely to cause any serious damage to participants. According to the University of Nottingham Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics, data must be

retained intact for a period of at least seven years from the date of any publication which is based upon them. In a situation where personal data does not necessarily need to be retained through periodical content review, the researcher should ensure the data are deleted irretrievably and the deletion does not reveal any information that is identifiable to any participants.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in the research is completely voluntary. Participants are free to withdraw at any time if they are unwilling to participate in the research any more. Non-participation will not affect individuals' eligible rights.

Potential Influence of Participation

The research will try to minimize any potential negative impact on participants. Regarding the nature of this study, it is trying to understand participants' experiences and changes in the UK and China. It will help students recapture and reorganize their experiences, and help them better see themselves through this journey.

This research does not involve any sensitive data in nature, and the researcher will not ask any sensitive questions on purpose. However, under circumstances when sensitive data regarding religious beliefs and political opinions (Data Protection Act 1998) are elicited by the participants themselves during data collection and in situation where these data, as reflection of student returnees' changed attitudes and mindsets in the analysis, might be contributing to the study on the transnational identity of Chinese student returnees from the UK, the researcher will negotiate with the participant and the research office in a positive manner to check if it is ethical and permitted to present the information. The researcher will ensure data access is restricted and identities of participants will not be showed in any publications. However, if there are any risks and harms envisaged by the participants, they can contact the investigator and the research office for help. The contact details are as follows:

Principle Investigator: Suyang Wang (ttxsw53@nottingham.ac.uk)

Supervisor: Professor Gu Qing (qinggu@nottingham.ac.uk)

Assistant professor Jane Evison (jane.evison@nottingham.ac.uk)

School of Education Research Ethics

Coordinator: educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix C



Participation Consent Form

Project Title: Transformation for some? An exploration into the Transnational Identity of Chinese Overseas Student Returnees

Researcher's Name: Suyang Wang

Supervisor's Name: Professor Gu Qing & Assistant Professor Jane Evison

- 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 am at liberty to withdraw at any time if I am willing to drop off without prejudice or negative consequences. Non-participation will not affect my individual eligible rights and my status now or in the future.
- I understand that I will be audio-taped during the interview.
- I understand that data generated by the research will be used purely for research purposes (including dissemination of findings).
- I understand that data generated by the research, including hard and electronic copies of data, will be kept in a safe and secure password protected (office/personal computer) location.
- I understand that data access is restricted and no-one other than the supervisors, examiners as well as research participants will have access to any of the data collected. Research participants will have the right of access to any data kept on them.

- I understand that by signing this form I will grant permission to the researcher to use my personal data pertinent to this research during and after the research is completed. Interview transcripts will be given to me to check and verify the accuracy of their meaning and intent before any results are presented.

- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified, and my personal results will remain confidential. The result of the study will be anonymously. The personal background of me will be as generic as possible so that it cannot be potentially identifiable in any published materials.

- I understand that my data may be kept indefinitely after the research is completed for future research and publication purposes, as long as it does not affect me as an individual, or in a way that is likely to cause damages or distress. Data will be retained intact for a period of at least seven years from the date of any publication which is based upon them. In situation where personal data does not necessarily need to be retained after periodical content review, the data will be deleted irretrievably by the researcher and the deletion does not reveal any information that is identifiable to me.

- 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…….
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Appendix D Demographic Profiles of All the Participants (Order Alphabetical)

Name	Age when just arrived in the UK	Age now	Study major	Duration of stay in the UK	Return period	Frequency of visit to China during stay in the UK	Frequency of visit to the UK/elsewhere after settling in China	Economic and social status in China	Nature of Work
Allen	24	37	MA Computer Science	5 years	7 years	Once a year	None	Self-funded	Public civil servant for local government
Bai	22	27	MA Media Communications	1.5 years	2.5 years	One	One	Self-funded	Art editor at a local media company
Da	23	29	Master's in Banking and Finance	1 year	4 years	None	Visit the USA for travel last year	Self-funded	Staff at a local bank
Fi	18	31	MA Civil Engineering	7 years	5 years	Once a year	None	Self-funded	Engineer at a transnational

Name	Age when just arrived in the UK	Age now	Study major	Duration of stay in the UK	Return period	Frequency of visit to China during stay in the UK	Frequency of visit to the UK/elsewhere after settling in China	Economic and social status in China	Nature of Work
Guai	23	35	Master's in Banking and Finance	3 years	8 years	None	Holds Hong Kong residence permit and travels abroad every year	Self-funded	Director at a local bank
Jessie	17	34	Bachelor's in Childhood Education	5 years	11 years	Only once	Communicates with Australia and the UK for educational cooperation	Self-funded	English teacher at a self-owned local English school
Jing	22	29	Master's in Translating and Interpreting	1 year	4.5 years	None	Goes to the USA every year to do business	Self-funded	Interpreter at a transnational corporation
Lv	25	32	Dual Master's in Computer Science	2 years	4 years	Once a year	Visits USA and Europe every year to see the most advanced technologies	Scholarship	CEO at a self-founded local technology company

Name	Age when just arrived in the UK	Age now	Study major	Duration of stay in the UK	Return period	Frequency of visit to China during stay in the UK	Frequency of visit to the UK/elsewhere after settling in China	Economic and social status in China	Nature of Work
Meng	26	35	PhD in Chemistry	3.5 years	4 years	Once a year	Visits Canada every year for his permanent residence permit from Canada	Government-funded scholarship	University lecturer at a local university
Qi	23	27	Master's in Banking and Finance	1 year	2 years	None	Communicates with his American friends on Facebook	Self-funded	Staff at a local bank
Sophia	22	27	MA TESOL	1.5 years	2.5 years	One	One	Self-funded	English teacher at a transnational corporation
Wei	24	40	MA Advanced Manufacturing	2 years	13 years	Once a year	None	Self-funded	Financial investor at a local company

Name	Age when just arrived in the UK	Age now	Study major	Duration of stay in the UK	Return period	Frequency of visit to China during stay in the UK	Frequency of visit to the UK/elsewhere after settling in China	Economic and social status in China	Nature of Work
Xiao	20	32	Master's in Banking and Finance	7 years	4 years	Once a year on average	Had just signed a business cooperation with the USA.	Self-funded	CEO at a family-inherited company
Xila	26	33	MA TESOL	2 years	4 years	None	Communicates with her friends and former lecturers on WeChat	Self-funded	University lecturer at a local university
Xi	15	35	Master's in Finance	14.5 years	5 years	Once a year on average	Had British passport and visited the UK every year to renew her Chinese working visa	Self-funded	Hostess at a local media company
Ye	19	37	Master's in Hospitality Management	7 years	10 years	Once a year	Goes to USA frequently for job training	Self-funded	B2B officer at a transnational corporation

Appendix E Demonstration of Identity Dimensions and Values in Spider Charts

Demonstration of identity dimensions and values in spider charts						
		Level-1	**Level-2**	**Level-3**	**Level-4**	**Level-5**
The capacity to build connections between cultures	English language competence	Unable to communicate in English except for a few isolated English alphabets, words and sentences (e.g., 'All I could say were ABCDEFG, hello and how do you do...')	Have great obstacle in grasping the meaning in spoken and written English (e.g., 'When I passed the UK Border Agency, I was shocked that I could not understand anything at all.')	Able to understand simple spoken and written English/frequent breakdowns and mistakes may occur (e.g., 'I tried to communicate with the taxi driver with one or two sentences...when I lost my luggage, it was the taxi driver who communicated for me with the staff at the airport.')	Have effective communication in written and spoken English though with some difficulty in following local accent, speed and professional terminologies (e.g., 'I felt very comfortable to communicate in English in my daily life...but I felt struggled with my study life because there were a lot of subject-related terminologies in banking and finance.')	Able to understand, speak, read, write in accurate, coherent and appropriate manner (e.g., 'For me, English can be seen as my first or second language. It does not have to be seen as my mother tongue but maybe a kind of necessity. I think I have two official languages.')
	Intercultural competence	Reject/lack of interest to build communication and connections between cultures (e.g., 'I really don't like to make foreign friends, for I think there are differences in our languages and backgrounds.')	Lack of confidence in intercultural communication (e.g., 'When they say hello to me, I would rather cover my face in my hands.')	Willing to build communication and connections with foreign cultures (e.g., 'There was a period when I tried to engage just for the engagement practice.')	Have the capacity to build communication and connections with foreign cultures (e.g., 'I just signed a contract with a U.S. company...this is the capacity to communicate between cultures and it is not limited to English language competence only.')	Have the capacity to respond to the changing cultures (e.g., 'No matter who I was and what I had been through, I could adapt to a new environment very quickly and treat everywhere like home.')

Demonstration of identity dimensions and values in spider charts						
		Level-1	**Level-2**	**Level-3**	**Level-4**	**Level-5**
Diaspora consciousness	Emotional attachment to the UK	Feeling strange and alienated from the British people and the society (e.g., 'I did not dare to talk, I felt everywhere was strange to me, I did not dare to go outside...')	Feeling not adapted to the British society due to lack of interaction with the people and the society (e.g., 'Although I came to the UK as I wish, I still felt it was distant to me.')	Adapt very well and agree with the values, attitude and behaviours in the British society but still had emotional attachment toward China (e.g., 'I had physically integrated into the British society but not emotionally.')	Enjoy living in the UK with relatively high agreement with the values, attitudes and behaviours in the British society (e.g., 'I can adapt very well to the life in the UK, I really like the public manner in the	Had high emotional attachment and agreement with the values, attitudes and behaviours in the British society/feeling being part of the society (e.g., 'Being with foreign friends make you feel that you are part of them, you are a British and your life should be just like this.')
	Emotional attachment to China	Feeling strange and alienated from the Chinese people and the society (e.g., 'I don't know why but I think they all look foreign to me.')	Feeling not adapted to the Chinese society due to lack of interaction with the people and the society (e.g., 'We hoped to return to the UK. Such a belief can be seen as a psychological comfort, or a runaway from my current life in China.'')	Adapt very well and agree with the values, attitude and behaviours in the Chinese society but still had emotional attachment toward the UK (e.g., 'It's impossible for me to resettle in the UK because I have a life in China, but I still miss Edinburgh.')	Enjoy living in the China with relatively high agreement with the values, attitudes and behaviours in the Chinese society (e.g., 'I am more of a Chinese but I can act and think in a foreign way.')	Had high emotional attachment and agreement with the values, attitudes and behaviours in the Chinese society/feeling being part of the society (e.g., 'I don't like the UK, very much indeed)
	Diaspora consciousness	Not aware of the socio-cultural context in the UK and elsewhere (e.g., 'I only knew the UK form movies and books, I did not know what the UK really looked like.')	Enhanced Chinese nationalism/compared the Chinese society with the British society while in the UK (e.g., 'I didn't know I could have such strong national awareness before going abroad.')	Compared the British society with the Chinese society since return (e.g., 'I always compare, compare between the natural environment, the social security, social care and public manner very frequently.')	Develop double perspective of viewing things (e.g., 'I was shocked, and then I wonder if I have to reflect on my standpoint.')	Differences in consciousness between China and the UK were dismissed (e.g., 'As I looked back, there are many similarities between my life abroad and life in China. I did not treat that experiences as an overseas study experience. I just went to a place far away from here.')

Demonstration of identity dimensions and values in spider charts						
		Level-1	**Level-2**	**Level-3**	**Level-4**	**Level-5**
Diaspora values and attitudes	Maintenance of traditional Chinese values and attitudes	Disagreement with the Chinese values and attitudes (e.g., 'I think I am different from the local Chinese people because I am very open and extrovert...I dare to wear Bikini on the streets!')	Deeply affected by the British values and attitudes and have little agreement with the Chinese ones (e.g., 'My parents think that all the women should find a partner, get married and give birth to a child, but from what I observed in the UK, there were many life partners living happily without getting married.')	Agreement with Chinese values and attitudes but affected by some British values and attitudes (e.g., 'I can take care of you, but I have my life. Don t force your ideology upon me; I will not force you to accept my opinion too.')	Strong agreement with the Chinese values and attitudes but adopt some British values and attitudes (e.g., 'I think I am more of a Chinese, but I can think and act in a foreign way...for me, the best virtue of the Chinese people is family bond.')	Stronger agreement with the Chinese values and attitudes (e.g., 'I did not have any bad influence from abroad...we are after all Chinese people.')
	Adoption of new values and attitudes	Disagreement with the British values and attitudes (e.g., 'I could not understand why they behave like this.')	No major change in values and attitudes because the traditional Chinese values and attitudes were established (e.g., 'There were not many changes in my values and attitudes as my worldview was almost established when I studied in the UK.')	An expansion of values and attitudes both here and there (e.g., 'I was rather conservative before going abroad. For now, I may tolerate everything. I think I am OK even if you have three eyes.')	Strong agreement with the British values and attitudes but still observe some Chinese values and attitudes (e.g., 'They did not accept differences and there was no so-called independence, as they had to obey the rules collectively.')	Stronger agreement with the British values and attitudes (e.g., 'I don't know why but I think the appearances, style of conversation, way of thinking and the way they are dressed are all foreign to me.')

Demonstration of identity dimensions and values in spider charts						
		Level-1	**Level-2**	**Level-3**	**Level-4**	**Level-5**
Expansion of behaviours and actions	Maintenance of past behaviours	Disagreement with the past behaviours (e.g., 'when I stood in the queue while others forced their ways through others, there was a man behind me and said "Keep forcing your way ahead! Why you stand still? Are you silly?'')	Maintain few past behaviours and showed strong preference for the newly adopted behaviours (e.g., 'I prefer western breakfast, but I can accept some Chinese breakfast.')	Seeking compromise between the past and the newly adopted behaviours (e.g., 'Sometimes I will throw things randomly but the frequency is less.')	Adopt new behaviours but could react according to circumstances (e.g., 'For now I knew how to jump the queue because I realized that I could not get onto the bus if I did not jump the queue.')	Maintain most past behaviours (e.g., 'We were just live with other Chinese people, eat Chinese food, speak Chinese language, and watch 'Fi Cheng Wei Rao' (A Chinese version of ''Take Me Out.''')
	Adoption of new behaviours	Disagreement with the new behaviours (e.g., 'When I just arrived in the UK, I did not get used to their eating and drinking habits such as cold food and coffee very well...')	Simple modification of new behaviours (e.g., 'I started to get used to cold food and liked kebab...when I see others grabbing a good while walking, I did the same.')	Seeking compromise between the past and the newly adopted behaviours but still showed preference for the past behaviours (e.g., 'I can accept western food, but I think I still have a Chinese stomach.')	Strong agreement with the new behaviours (e.g., 'I realized that these (politeness and manner) were the basic. I thought my past life should be in the UK, as all these (etiquette) were part of me.')	Treat the newly adopted behaviours as part of life (e.g., 'These (habits) have already become my way of life, rather than a simple modification in the early period in the UK.')
	Transnational mobility and social networks	No communication and connections across the borders and no intention to build such communication and connections (e.g., 'Ever since I returned to China, I did not go abroad any more...I reject to making foreign friends.')	Merely no communication and connections across the borders but with strong willingness to build such communication and connections (e.g., 'I still want to go back to the UK for I still miss it very much.')	Few communication and connections across the borders mainly through social media and the internet (e.g., 'I still remain contact with my former lecturers on WeChat.')	Some communication and connections across the borders through travels and businesses (e.g., 'I go to the U.S. and Europe every year...I have to deal with some businesses with the suppliers there...')	Some communication and connections across the borders because of identity change (e.g., 'I returned to the UK to renew my Chinese visa every year and visit my family there.')

Appendix F

Example of Coding for Each Student

	Xi's improved English language competence		
Linguistic skills	Listening	Improved Listening comprehension	'I can understand them without having to pay special attention to what they say. Besides, I can sense that when they talk to me, they speak very fluid and don't have to slow down their pace and speak word by word to make me understood.'
	Speaking	Acquisition of Bradford Accent	'I can only say I have very strong local accent from Bradford. As long as I open my mouth, they will ask me if I come from Bradford.'
		The use of slang	'I did not make improvement in my written English or professional English, but I can speak very good slug language like 'what's up man' or very informal spoken English.'
		Fluidity in English communication	'I can speak better English than Chinese and since I speak English too often, my tongue even becomes warped when I'm speaking Chinese and can't recognize the flat and cacuminal pronunciations.'

Function of improved English language competence	Use of English at work	‘I did interpreting jobs in London sometime and worked at KFC, Burger Kind, McDonalds, and also Chinese restaurants but I started to work at Chinese restaurants until my English was improved. This is because I can’t practice English at a Chinese restaurant.
	Open wider access to the locals	‘The words they use are those they would use when they talk to their own nationals, rather than some very formal or standard words. It’s more like how we North easterners talk to each other in the local dialect. I think they see me as part of them and then I know my English has been improved.’
Change in attitude with the improved English language competence	Confidence in English speaking	‘I can speak better English than Chinese and since I speak English too often, my tongue even becomes warped when I’m speaking Chinese and can’t recognize the flat and cacuminal pronunciations.’
	Preference for English entertainment (TV/shows)	‘I came back to China every year and at that time all the movies I have seen were foreign movies.’

Appendix G

Interview Schedule of Students' Sojourn Experiences

Layer of analysis	Interview Questions	Probes	Theoretical underpinning
At individual level: - dual-orientations - Diaspora consciousness - Transnational competence	1. How did you feel when you just arrived in the UK? Has that feeling been changed overtime? How did you feel by the time you left the UK? Can you give me some examples and tell me why?	- At what point do you think it has been changed? Can you give me an example? - Why do you think it has been changed at this point?	Dual orientations (Vertovec, 2009); Jenkins' social identity theory suggests that 'identity is constructed in transactions at and across the boundary in this very process of change (Jenkins, 2008, p. 22).
	2. How did you feel about China when you just arrived in the UK? Has the feeling been changed during your stay there? Can you give me some examples and illustrate why?	- If they say miss, ask: 'Was there anything back in China that you missed very much? What and who were they?' - Did you follow what was happening in China when you were in the UK? In what ways? - Do you normally compare your experiences in the UK with that in China?	Dual orientations (Vertovec, 2009); 'Diaspora consciousness' or the awareness of being 'here and there' (Vertovec, 2009)

	3. How was your English when you just arrived in the UK? Has your English ability been improved over time during your study? Can you give me some examples and tell me why?		Transnational competency-Language skills (Koehn & Rosenau, 2002);
	4. Did you know the UK culture well when you just arrived in the UK? Did you get better understanding about the UK culture by the time you left? Can you give me some examples and tell me why?	• Do you think you get better understanding about other different cultures? • Do you think you get better understanding about your own culture?	Transnational competency-Cultural competency (Koehn & Rosenau, 2002);
	5. Some people say overseas study is a 'thought-provoking experience'. What is your opinion? What made you say so? Can you give me some examples?	• Have you reflected on the unfamiliar values and attitudes in the UK? • Have you reflected on your own values and behaviours? • How these values and attitudes impact upon you?	There is 'a positive correlation between the transnationalisation of life worlds and the cosmopolitanisation of attitudes and values' (Mau, Mewes, & Zimmerman, 2008, p.16-17)
	6. What do you think was the biggest achievement you have made in your personal life (not study life) in the UK? Can you give me some examples and tell me why?	• What in your view has changed in your personal lives? • What in your view has not changed?	Aspect on managing personal lives

At social group level - Communication and connections with families and friends across boundaries - Function (influence) of these relations across boundaries on individual identity	7. Did you have very close friends in the UK? If so, were there any unforgettable stories between you and them? Can you share with me some? If not, can you tell me why?	- How important they are to your study and student life? - Has that situation been changed over time?	Social morphology-structures or systems of relationships best described as networks (Vertovec, 2009); Role/function of close friends on identity
	8. Did you have any foreign friends in the UK at the very beginning? Was your foreign friends' circle changed overtime in the UK? Why? Can you give me some examples?	- Did you try to establish relationships at the very beginning? - How important do you think they were to your study and student lives? - How and why have these changed or not changed over time?	Social morphology-structures or systems of relationships best described as networks (Vertovec, 2009); Role/function of close friends on identity
	9. Have your friends (both foreign and Chinese friends) had any influence (such as in culture, language, mindset, behaviours, the way you look, your consumption behaviours and so on) on you? Have you had any influence on them? If yes, can you give me some examples? If not, why?	- What did you learn from your closest friends? - What did you learn from your foreign friends? - Can you just be yourself in front of them? Or do you have to create a public image in front of them?	Dense and highly active networks spanning vast spaces are transforming many kinds of social, cultural, economic and political relationships (Vertovec, 2009);

	10. How did you see the people around you who had different nationalities and had different cultural backgrounds with you when you just arrived in the UK? Has the opinion changed over time? Can you give me examples and tell me why?	• How do you think you were perceived by these people when you just arrived? Has the feeling been changed over time?	Group identification and categorisation (Jenkins, 2008);
	11. How was your connection with your parents when you just arrived in the UK? Has that connection been changed over time? Can you give me an example and illustrate why?	• How often did you contact your parents in China? • For what purpose? • What did you normally talk about? • What role did they play at the beginning and during your study in the UK? Any changes?	Frequency-regularity of contact within a social network; strength of ties-the 'relative frequency, duration, emotional intensity, reciprocal exchange' (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1998, p. 1448-1449)
	12. Did you maintain contact with your best friends in China during you study in the UK? Why? Can you give me an example?	• Did the ways in which you were in touch with your friends in China change over time? Why?	Social morphology-structures or systems of relationships best described as networks (Vertovec, 2009);

At institutional level: • Function (influence) of institution on individual identity • the relationship between agency (individual identity) and structure (institution)	13. What did you think of the education (such as the way of learning, teaching ethos, diversity of people and so on) you received in your university at the beginning of your course? How did you evaluate it by the time you ended the course? Can you give me some examples?	• Was that similar to the education you received before you went abroad? • Do you think you have benefited from the education you received in your university? In what aspects? • What influences do you think Chinese students may have brought to the University?	Institutions are among the more important contexts within which identification becomes consequential (Jenkins, 2008). The value of thousands of mobile students can add up to 'a social process of significant economic and social impact for communities' of which they are part (Portes, 2003, p. 877).
	14. How did you see the relationship between teachers and students, between students and students in your university at the beginning of your course study? Has the opinion changed over the course? Can you give me some examples and tell me why?	• Was that different from that in China? • How and why have these changed or not over time? • What role did they play in your study life? • What did you learn from these relationships?	Group identification and categorisation (Jenkins, 2008); Identity is bound up with classification. Identity is constructed in transactions between international group identification and external categorisation (Jenkins, 2008).

	15. What do you think was the biggest achievement you have made in you study life? Can you give me examples and tell me why?	• If they say problems, I will ask them to expand on what kind of problems there were. • How did you cope with it? • Has that been changed over time?	Managing professional academic study
	16. Did you join any activities/clubs/organisations during your study in the UK? What roles did these activities/organisations/clubs play in their study and student lives over time?	• Were there any activities different from those in China? • What did you learn from these activities? • Do you still have connections with your university? If so, in what ways and why? If not, why?	'Organisations are organized and task-oriented collectivities: they are groups. They are also constituted as networks of differentiated membership positions which bestow specific individual identities upon their incumbents' (Jenkins, 2008).

At society level - Culture shock - Agency and structure	17. Did you think about your life in the UK before going abroad? If you had, was the real situation different from what you had expected upon your arrival? Have you developed a new understanding over the course of your study?	- What preparations (study, life, psychology) did you make before going abroad?	According to Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), the main difference between culture shock and reverse culture shock lies in expectation.
	18. Did you feel well-adapted to the UK life when you just arrived there? Has that feeling changed over time? Can you give me some examples and tell me why?	- How did you get adapted to UK life?	Furnham (2004, p.17)'s observation that 'foreign students face several difficulties, some exclusive to them (as opposed to native students)'. Culture shock;
	19. What do you think you have learned from the UK society and culture?	- Was there anything similar? - Was there anything different? - Was there anything you cannot find in China?	Hall (1976) wrote about the 'hidden controls' of human behaviour patterns and habitual responses which, although 'usually experienced as though they were innate' (1976, p. 42), are learned and acquired.

	20. What influences do you think Chinese students may have on the UK culture and society?		The value of thousands of mobile students can add up to ‘a social process of significant economic and social impact for communities’ of which they are part (Portes, 2003, p. 877)

Appendix H

Interview Schedule of Student Returnees' Homecoming Experience

Layer of analysis	Interview Questions	Probes	Theoretical underpinning
At individual level: - dual-orientations - Diaspora consciousness - Transnational competence	1. How did you feel when you just arrived in China? Has that feeling changed over time? Can you give me examples and tell me why?	- At what point do you think it was changed? Can you give me an example? - Why do you think it changed at this point? - If they say miss, ask 'Was there anything back in China/UK that you missed very much? What and who were they?'	Reverse culture shock (Oberg, 1960); Dual orientations (Vertovec, 2009); Jenkins' social identity theory suggests that 'identity is constructed in transactions at and across the boundary in this very process of change (Jenkins, 2008, p. 22).
	2. How did you feel about the UK when you just arrived in China? Has that feeling changed over time? Can you give me examples and tell me why?	- Do you still follow what is happening in the UK? In what ways? Has the attention been changed from during your stay there? - What/who made you miss the most? - Do you normally compare your experiences in China with the situation in the UK?	Dual orientations (Vertovec, 2009); 'Diaspora consciousness'-the awareness of being 'here and there' (Vertovec, 2009); 'dual frame of reference' (Guarnizo, 1997)

	3. Do you feel confident when communicating with foreigners, especially with people who speak English since you returned to China? What made you say so? Can you give me some examples?	- Where does the confidence come from? - Are there any communication skills you have learnt from them?	Language skills
	4. In what ways do you think your understanding of culture (both your own culture and others) has influenced you? Can you give me some examples and tell me why?		Cultural competency (Koehn & Rosenau, 2002);
	5. What do you think was the biggest change in your personal life upon your immediate return? Why? Can you give me some examples?		Aspect on managing personal lives
	6. Do you think your overseas study experience continues to influence who you are and who you want to be after your return？ Why? Can you give me some examples?	- What do you think was the biggest change in your personal life upon your immediate return? Has that changed over time?	Kim (2008) proposed the concept of intercultural personhood to indicate students' changed identity as part of their intercultural learning experiences.

At social group level - Networks and intensity of relations with families and friends across boundaries - Function (influence) of these relations across boundaries on individual identity	7. How was your relationship with your parents upon your immediate return? Has there any change over time? Why? Can you give me some examples?	- Have your parents made any comments aboutr you upon your immediate return? Has that changed? - Did you parents have any expectation for you upon your immediate return? Has that changed? - What about your views of your parents upon your immediate return? Any changes? - Do you think you influence your parents in some ways?	People identify themselves in external and internal interaction of identity (Jenkins, 2008)
	8. How was your relationship with your best friends in China after your immediate return? Has that changed over time? Why? Can you give me some examples?	- What role do they play in your personal and professional life since your return? Are there any changes? - Have they made any comments about you after your immediate return? Have these opinions changed over time? - What about any comments for your friends upon your immediate return? Any changes?	Frequency-regularity of contact within a social network; strength of ties-the 'relative frequency, duration, emotional intensity, reciprocal exchange (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994, p.1448-9); Identity is never unilateral. People identify themselves in then internal-external dialectic between self-image and public image (Jenkins, 2008)

		• Do you think you have any influences on them since your return?	
	9. Do you still have any contacts or communication with the UK upon your immediate return? Has the connection or communication changed over time? Have you made new foreign friends since your return? Why? Can you give me some examples?	• What role do they play in your personal and professional life? • Do you think they continue to have influence on you after you return to China? • Have you had any influence on them?	Frequency-regularity of contact within a social network; strength of ties-the 'relative frequency, duration, emotional intensity, reciprocal exchange (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994, p.1448-9)
At institutional level • Function (influence) of institution on individual identity • the relationship between agency	10. What do you do now? Was this job the same one you did after your immediate return? Can you give me some examples and tell me why?	• To what extent do you think your overseas study experiences affect your job character? • According to your work experiences, do you think you have benefited from your overseas study experiences?	Changes in identity may also influence personal and professional life trajectory.

(individual identity) and structure (institution)	11. Can you share with me your job-seeking experience since your return?	• What did you learn from these job-seeking experiences? Can you give me some examples?	Challenges inherent in this respect include gloomy job-seeking experiences (the returns and length of time in finding a job) (Hao & Welch, 2012)
	12. How was your relationship with your colleagues when you started the job? Has that changed over time? Can you give me some examples and tell me why?	• Are there any obstacles in dealing with these relationships? • Do you think you are different from your colleagues because of your overseas study experience? • If different, what made you different between you and your colleagues? • How would you deal with these differences?	It is reported that certain levels of frustration experienced by returnees' in dealing with Guan Xi (social networks), aggression towards student returnees from working counterparts (Cao, 2007).
	13. Can you get a sense of satisfaction in your work? Why?	• Ever since your return, have you had any major difficulties in your professional life? If you had, would you like to share with me the experiences and feelings during that particular time?	Together with low working efficiency and the absence of communication with international counterparts (Cao, 2007);

	14. Up until now, what do you think was the biggest achievements in your work? What was the biggest lesson you have learnt from your work?		Managing professional academic study
	15. Have you joined any organisations, societies or clubs since you return? Why? What did you learn from them? Can you give me some examples?	• Were there any activities similar with that in the UK? • What did you learn from these activities? • Do you still have connection with your university? If so, in what ways and why? If not, why?	'Organisations are organized and task-oriented collectivities: they are groups. They are also constituted as networks of differentiated membership positions which bestow specific individual identities upon their incumbents' (Jenkins, 2008).
At society level • Agency and structure • Reverse culture-shock • Re-adapting to	16. Were you homecoming experiences different from what you expected? If different, what are the aspects and if not, why?	• What preparations (study, life, psychology) did you make before going abroad?	According to Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), the main difference between culture shock and reverse culture shock lies in expectation, as returnees may expect less or no re-entry difficulties on an already changed home culture environment (Gaw, 2000).

the Chinese social context	17. Did you feel well-adapted when you just returned from the UK? If yes, why? If not, did made you feel the most difficult to adapt to? How strong was such a feeling? Has that situation changed over the course?		Re-entry experiences often report certain level of helplessness, loneliness and alienation imposed by work and everyday lives, and these are found nearly in every student's homecoming experience (Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Butcher, 2002; Gaw, 2000).
	18. Do you enjoy your life in China? Can you be your true self in this environment? How about in the UK?		Hall (1976) wrote about the 'hidden controls' of human behaviour patterns and habitual responses which, although 'usually experienced as though they were innate' (1976, p. 42), are learned and acquired. Jenkins argues that during these transactions, 'a balance is struck between (internal) group identification and (external) categorisation by others' (Jenkins, 2008, p. 22).
	19. Do you wish to go back to the UK? If you do, what do you think it would be like? If you don't, why?	Have you any regrets about going back to China? Why?	Double return migrants (White, 2014); Failed integration lead to double return to receiving countries (White, 2014)