

Comparing and Contrasting Student Identity Change in Different Educational Settings

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Abstract

This thesis explores the nature and change of student identity in two universities with different educational settings in China. The thesis also focuses on whether and how two different institutional contexts influence university students' identity change. The universities in the study are Zhejiang University, which is a Chinese university, and the university of Nottingham Ningbo China, a transnational university (British university campus) in China. The theoretical framework of the study draws from sociological and social psychological theories of identities, and in particular Burke and Set's (2009) identity theory. Burke and Stets' (2009) model proposed three dimensions when analysing identities: role identity, group identity and personal identity. This study uses this model to investigate students' identity change in the afore-mentioned universities.

This study used a qualitative methodology that included documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews with six final year students from each of the two universities. The main findings provide empirical evidence for Burke and Stets' (2009) theoretical model, and identify three transitional phases for university students' identity change. The findings suggest that students' identity change is a process involving rich interactions among students' role, group and personal identity. The findings reveal that students' identity changes derive from interactions between students' individual contexts, institutional contexts and the wider social context in China. The findings support existing literature which characterises student identity as multi-dimensional, complex and dynamic but also contribute to the literature by providing empirical evidence in the context of China which is different from the context of existing identity theories. Similarities and differences are identified between the participants from the two universities and the role of each university is analysed. The evidence from this study has important implications for both universities, and adds to the discussion on the internationalisation of higher education in China.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This research aims to investigate students' identity change in universities in China. By comparing and contrasting students from two different universities, I intended to gain insights into students' identity change during their university years and to explore whether and how the educational settings influence students' identity change. The universities in the study were ZheJiang University (ZJU), a Chinese university, and the university of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNC), a British university campus in China. This study intends to provide empirical evidence to characterise students' identity change as multi-dimensional, complex and dynamic. In this chapter I will describe the journey that brought me to research this topic, to which I hope to make an intellectual contribution. I will first outline the rational- why I was inspired to conduct this research, followed by presenting the research questions and providing an introduction to the structure of this study.

Rationale for the Study

It is my own educational experience that has inspired me to investigate students' identities in universities. I studied at the University of Nottingham China campus for my undergraduate degree for four years. Before that, I followed the steps which the Chinese education system set for students and successfully graduated from primary and secondary schools in China. Compared to my secondary school friends who chose to go to traditional Chinese universities, I recognised that we had quite different educational experiences in terms of our perceptions of learning, our worldviews and how we see ourselves in social interactions. Such differences have inspired me to investigate the relationships between higher education settings, students' experiences and the change and development in students' identities in greater depth.

From my own educational experiences, I took an interest in transnational universities in China and noticed the acceleration of the internationalisation process of higher education in China. According to statistics, there are 28 branch campuses of foreign universities in mainland China (Cross-Border Education Research Team, 2015). Meanwhile, the Chinese government ordered states to promote the internationalisation of higher education in China and claimed that the main aim of it is to introduce high-quality education (Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools, 2003). It means that not only transitional universities in China but traditional Chinese universities have been engaged in the worldwide educational context of internationalisation. Therefore, I believed it is timely and necessary to examine students who are the primary objects of education and the most important participants in this process. Moreover, it is significant to provide an insight for educators in China on how different educational settings can influence students, in order to raise further discussions on internationalisation in China and provide better/more responsive support for students' development. In order to gain in-depth understanding of students in both a transnational university and a Chinese university, I decided to use identity as the analytic lens for the study. The reason for this, apart from my own experiences of identity changes in UNNC, was that identity is flexible and rich in concept which can help to connect various elements in students' development (the reasons will be explained in more detail in Chapter Two).

Numerous conceptual frameworks have been provided by researchers in defining "identity" (Stryker & Burke, 2000). In terms of student identity in higher education, the concept of identity has always been given a lot of attention in sociological and psychological research (e.g. Gee, 2001; Brennan & Patel, 2008; Burke & Stets, 2009; Torres, et al., 2009). However, existing identity theories and related empirical studies were not constructed or conducted in Chinese context. Due to the diversity of traditions, cultures, conditions and practices, the transference of theory and empirical evidence from one culture to the other may not be appropriate (Schwartz, et al., 2005; Arnett, 2000). Thus, in this study, while taking into account the existing

identity theory and international identity literature, I set out to research questions that explore the Chinese context.

Research Questions

1. Are there any similarities and/or differences of students' identity change in the University of Nottingham (Ningbo, China campus) and the Zhejiang University in terms of students' 1) role identity; 2) group identity; 3) personal identity in their social and academic experiences? If there are, what are they and why? If there are not, why not?
2. Within these three dimensions of students' identities: What are the contributing contextual factors to the change/or maintaining in students' perceptions of their identities overtime?
    1) Are there any differences and/or similarities between the two university settings? What are their influences on students?
    2) To what extent have the different levels of contexts have influenced students' identities over time?
3. What are the implications for offering student support for both universities?

Structure of the Thesis

There are eight chapters in this thesis. Chapter One is the introduction, which outlines the rational of the study, research questions and the structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two locates the context of this study. It first introduces the research context- the two universities where I conducted my study. It then presents the higher educational system in China and discusses the influences of the world-

wide context – the trend of internationalisation in Chinese universities after defining the concept of internationalisation in higher education. It then relates this to the analytical lens of the study –the concept of identity.

Chapter Three critically discusses different approaches in conceptualising identity and identity change. It reviews existing literature about students' identity change in universities.

Chapter Four presents the methodological framework of the research. It starts by presenting the ontology and epistemology of this study, and explains why a qualitative methodology is appropriate. It moves on to introduce the participants. The ethical issues are discussed after the method of this study adopted and fieldwork experiences are described. Finally, it illustrates the comparative framework and the stages of data analysis, and present how trustworthiness is established.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven present the findings in terms of students' role, group and personal identity changes. A discussion is also provided in each chapter in relating to the findings in each dimension.

Chapter Eight begins by connecting the findings which present in Chapter Five, Six and Seven and provides a conceptualisation of students' three dimensions of identity change. It explores the contribution of this study to identity theory and understanding of students' identity change within multi-layered contexts. It also illustrates how this conceptualisation contributes to existing identity theories. It moved on to highlight the main findings in relation to the research questions and the implications of the findings. Finally, it concludes the thesis with the limitations of this study and implications for further research.

Chapter Two: Different Levels of Context and Rationale for Using Identity as an Analytical Lens

In this chapter, I will first introduce the context in which I carried out my research: Zhejiang University (ZJU) and the University of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNC). Both universities are located in Zhejiang Province, China, but a key difference is that ZJU is a Chinese university, while UNNC is a transnational university (UK university in China). In order to understand the worldwide context of the two universities, especially the UNNC, I will look into the development of the internationalisation of higher education and transnational universities to provide the macro level context. I will then move onto the national context of higher education in China (the People's Republic of China since 1949) which is key to understanding the Chinese university's background. After a brief history, I will explore the reforms and policies in recent decades in the global trend of internationalisation, since ZJU has been engaged in these government programmes. Regarding the large number of studies of Chinese students, I will then explore how previous literature has interpreted Chinese students' perceptions and experiences in the changing context. Finally, I will explain why this study decides to use the concept of identity as a lens in order to gain understanding of Chinese university students who are studying in two different educational settings- one offshore British university and one Chinese university, and to investigate how the multilevel-contexts influence them.

In order to have a profound understanding of the context in this research, a range of formal documents and informal documents, including governmental reports, universities' handbooks and course handouts, information on universities' websites, related newspaper articles and academic papers, have been used. Documentary data is frequently used by qualitative researchers as a starting point to find out "underlying themes". Written documents which organisations (in my case universities) have created can provide an overall picture of the goal, projects and procedures of their work, especially providing

significant contextual information to researchers (Bryman, 2008; Atkinson, et al., 2004). The documents in relation to my research provided me a background to the context including the international and national policy regarding transnational universities, national policy about higher education, and information about the two universities in terms of their educational settings. Through analysing these documents, I was able to find more information which contributed to my decisions about the appropriate methods for my data collection and the design and content of the interview questions.

The Research Context: the Two Universities

ZheJiang University (ZJU)

Zhejiang University, which locates in the capital city Hangzhou of Zhejiang province, is a public university with a history of more than a hundred years. It is one of China's top-ranked higher educational institutions, and was involved in both the '211' and '985' Projects (and C9 League as a part of Project 985, will be explained in later section). "Seeking the Truth and Pioneering New Trails" is ZJU's motto which is interpreted today by the university as a spirit of being committed to train talents with excellence, to serve social development, to promote culture and advance science and technology. According to ZJU's website, it has turned out many outstanding talents in its history of which more than 160 alumni have been elected as members of Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chinese Academy of Engineering. In the trend of internationalisation of higher education, Zhejiang University is a comprehensive research university with 12 schools, covering philosophy, economics, law, education, literature, history, art, science, engineering, agriculture, medicine, and management. ZJU now has 112 undergraduate programs within these schools and there were a total of 23,633 full-time undergraduate students enrolled as of December 2014. Since 2010, ZJU has developed a new undergraduate education model, inspired by the US system, which was named as 3M (multi-specification, multi-channel, modularity) and

"KAQ" (knowledge, ability and quality), in order to create "a research-oriented undergraduate curricular system" (ZJU official website). This model has two phases. In the first phase, it has divided 112 undergraduate programmes into several platforms such as "Humanity and Social Science", "Business and Management", "Science" and so on. Students are required to have general education with interdisciplinary courses within their own platforms. After completing the first phase, students will be enrolled into different subjects based on their application and academic performance in the first phase. The latter phase is designed for specialise education. However, judging by the information the researcher collected during fieldwork, the aims which this model claimed are still more a goal than what it has achieved currently.

In pursuing a "world-class" status, apart from changing the curriculum, ZJU is planning to establish a new international campus in China with English as its working language. It will focus on building the university's strength in selected key subject areas. It aims to attract high-achieving students and to "recruit international quality staff to do research there", forming a "small, high-quality version of Zhejiang University, within Zhejiang University" (Morgan, 2013). ZJU is also building substantial links with Imperial College London and they will open a "campus" at Imperial's new site in White City in West London. Its website refers to the two institutions "co-investing in a future R&D facility".

Despite the ambition of building top 'world-class' Chinese universities, academics within these universities, especially those who have professional experiences in both Western and Chinese higher educational contexts, raised their concerns on the tension between this ambition and the changes that need to be made in regard to academic freedom and culture (Morgan, 2013). Among these academics, Song Yonghua, University of Zhejiang's executive vice-president, who used to hold Pro-Vice Chancellorship and Professorship of Electrical Engineering at the University of Liverpool, called for a series of educational reforms in China's higher educational section and indicated that it requires the educational leaders to take an international perspective, in order to get universities such as ZJU to be closer to become a world-class university (Morgan, 2013). However, Morgan (2013) in his article raised doubts about

Song's speak of 'academic freedom' as it may refer to greater autonomy of government but not the liberty of academics without regarding to political sensitives.

The University of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNC)

The University of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNC) was established in Zhejiang province in 2004, which is one of the campuses of the University of Nottingham (The University of Nottingham China Website). As the first Sino-foreign University in China, UNNC has a unique governance structure with the approval of the Minister of Education. It is run by both the University of Nottingham UK and Zhejiang's Wanli Education Group with balanced representation. It adopts a British educational model in which the University of Nottingham takes control of curriculum. The infrastructure and facilities of the China campus were built by the Chinese partner. At the beginning of establishing the UNNC, the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor of the university pronounced several main aims of the new campus in order to develop the university's engagement with China (Ennew & Yang, 2009, p. 30):

1. To bring together the best of UK and Chinese educational values and practices

2. To educate generations of students as truly international citizens, rooted in their own cultures but aware of, and sympathetic towards, other cultures.

3. To encourage international research, not by 'staying home' but by working in a host country and concentrating upon subjects that are mutually beneficial to Nottingham researchers and Chinese society.

UNNC offers its students UK accredited degrees from the University of Nottingham, and uses English as the teaching and learning language. The university emphasises that the degrees UNNC offers are have the same quality as those which are offered by the home campus in the UK and guarantees students with experiencing of a British university in China. According to UNNC's website, in order to build a student community with rich and rewarding international education experience and a global outlook, it welcomes students from various cultural backgrounds and offers students with study aboard opportunities and exchange programmes. Currently, there are students

from more than 55 countries studying in China's campus but the main student population is Chinese. For domestic students, the entry requirement for undergraduate degree programmes is based on their performance in China's annual university entrance exams (Gaokao). Students need to achieve the highest grades (First Division, level for key universities) in Gaokao with a minimum score of 115(out of 150) for English to enrol for a position in the undergraduate degree programme. UNNC now has seven schools including International Studies, International Business, International Communications Studies, Engineering, Computer Science, Sustainable Technology, and English Language and Literature (Feng, 2013). Domestic students are required to take the Year One Programme which aims to prepare them with academic English and thinking skills for further subject-related study. Apart from the Year One programme, which is designed especially for the overseas campus, the rest of the curricula in UNNC are directly taken from the home campus.

After just over than ten years since UNNC was established, the university announced proudly that it delivers as fully a British educational experience as is possible in China. The university's website quoted the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education- an independent body which safeguards the quality of UK universities and colleges, that the academic standards and quality of the student learning experience at UNNC are equivalent to those of The University of Nottingham UK. Professor Nick Miles, Provost at The University of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNC), said: "This review confirms UNNC's position as a leading provider of top-quality British education in China."

It showed that the university is keen to guarantee Chinese students and their parents the quality and experience of a British university and regard it as the prior objective of building and running the campus in China. When the university is convinced that it offers the same quality of education in China as in the UK, it will bring up the question whether it is beneficial enough for students studying in this campus. Or more importantly, what is yet to be achieved for students? In order to answer these questions, there is a necessity for students' voices to be heard. Thus, this study aims to learn from Chinese

students' attitudes and perceptions about their 'British experiences' and whether (and how) the experiences make any difference to them or their attitudes.

The internationalisation of Higher Education and Transnational Universities in China

The internationalisation of higher education provides the context for investigating of UNNC students' identity within their own cultural context but also as it may be influenced by the Westernised context and values. Since Chinese universities, such as ZJU, nowadays are also involved in this worldwide trend, there is a necessary to understand the research context within the international context. Thus, this section will give a background introduction and an understanding towards the internationalisation in terms of its conception and development.

The Internationalisation of Higher Education

Development of the Internationalisation of Higher Education

Internationalisation is not a new phenomenon, but has increasingly become a focus in higher education (Knight, 2008). The term has been used by political leaders and academics for decades, but before the mid-1980s, activities described as internationalisation were rather unrelated and the favoured terms at the time were international education and international cooperation (Knight, 2009; Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011). The changes that took place in the late 1980s and 1990s were that internationalisation in education were discussed in more depth and dimension by using terms like comparative education, global education and multi-cultural education and its importance was increased (Knight, 2009; Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011).

“Internationalisation” replaced “globalisation” and has been maintained as a focus in debates on higher education in recent years, because of the efforts that have been made by academics to identify different meaning for these two terms to avoid them being using interchangeably (Teichler, 2004). In fact, higher education in the worldwide context is experiencing a revolution which is driven by globalisation together with technological transformation and the unprecedented expansion of international activity and communication in scale and pace (Otten, 2003; Rizvi, 2008). Though globalisation is different from internationalisation in concept, it provides the context in recent decades which reflects the realities of economic and academic trends, and influences internationalisation (Altbach, et al., 2009, Knight, 2008). It is claimed by many academics that internationalisation is different from globalisation as it refers to the policies and practices that are used in response to the global academic environment by individuals, academic institutions and systems (Altbach, et al., 2009; de Wit & Knight, 1999). Internationalisation is considered by many as “good”, because it concentrates on the core value of quality and excellence, which is the “last stand for humanistic ideas to against the world of pure economic benefits allegedly represented by the term globalisation” (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011, p. 16).

However, as higher education has become both an economic and political actor regionally and globally, it is arguable that the activities involved higher education as a tradable commodity are closer to the conception of “globalisation”, meaning that now parts of these values are now in the internationalisation agenda (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011). The commercialisation of higher education as an increasing phenomenon has been discussed at the conferences of NASFA (Association of International Educators, the Asia Pacific Association for International Education, and the European Association for International Education), and has been put on the agenda for future development in the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) (Knight, 2006, 2011; Fisher, 2009). The traditional view on higher education as a public good and a social responsibility faces challenges from the international trade agreement which indicates it as internationally tradable service (Knight, 2011). However, internationalisation in higher education is not

only about more exchange, larger scale of mobility and greater recruitment of students (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011). To access to intercultural and international competencies is also a necessary in internationalisation of higher education (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011).

The existence of the University of Nottingham Ningbo China to some extent reflects the innovation of internationalisation of higher education worldwide. Today, innovations occur and new components are put into the body of internationalisation. The traditional focus of internationalisation in higher education is on the academic mobility of students and teachers, in the form of international activities such as collaboration in teaching and research, international partnerships and research projects (Altabch, et al., 2009). Today internationalisation has changed higher education in terms that national borders no longer limit the flow of students, academics, knowledge and innovation (Ennew & Yang, 2009; Gu, et al., 2010). The discussion on internationalisation uses terms like cross-border, transnational, borderless and international modes of education which broaden and complicate the meaning of internationalisation (Knight, 2011). As such, Harman (2005, p.120) suggests that the definition of internationalisation can be broadened and can be seen as one of more of the following activities:

> *international movement of students between countries; international movement of academic staff and researchers; internationalise curricula in order to achieve better understandings about other people and cultures, and competence in foreign language; international links between nation states through open learning programs and new technologies; bi-lateral links between government and HEI's in different countries for collaboration in research, curriculum development, student and staff exchange and other international activities; multi-national collaborations such as via international organisations or through consortia such as Universities Global; and finally the export education where education services are offered on a commercial basis in other countries, with students either in their home country or in the country of the provider.*

The range of responses of educational institutions to internationalisation in practice reflects this broad definition: some universities, such as the university of Nottingham in this study, and organisations in their home countries provide distance and online learning (e.g. the Open University in the UK, U21 Global); many universities have international offices and recruit students internationally to study in their home countries; some universities create overseas campus such as the University of Nottingham which has established campus in both Malaysia and China; other institutions may collaborate with local universities and deliver agreed services such as exchange programmes (e.g. MBA programmes between Maastricht and Peking University).

So far, by reviewing these different perspectives of internationalisation of higher education, it enabled me to look into the role of universities in my study in more depth.

Multi-levels' Contexts of Internationalisation

In order to understand the place for university and students in the process of internationalisation of higher education, it is necessary to regard the different levels of contexts of internationalisation. Researchers have developed their understandings of it over time. Knight (2004, 2008) emphasised three levels – national, sector and institutional, in order to broaden the interpretation of internationalisation in its breadth and depth. The increasing diversity in the rationales, providers, stakeholders and activities of internationalisation makes it important to understand this issue at national, sector and institutional levels, in order to ensure it can reflect today's reality (Knight, 2008). Therefore, she conceptualises internationalisation in higher education as 'the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-second education (Knight, 2003, p2.).' Knight's (2004, 2008) framework of internationalisation is criticised by Sanderson (2008) in that it fails to capture the political, economic and organisational

context of higher education institutions. Sanderson (2008) further developed the dimension of Knight's framework and suggests that as internationalisation is a dynamic process, there are four more levels that should be considered: global, regional, faculty/department and individual - two of them are supranational and the others are which are supranational and which are within-institutional. He also argues that 'if this depth dimension is all about reciprocally acting forces that reflect, reinforce, express and create internationalisation outcomes in a dynamic fashion, then the four additional levels also need to be included in the depth dimension to truly express these internationalisation outcomes in their entirety (Sanderson, 2008, p.279).'

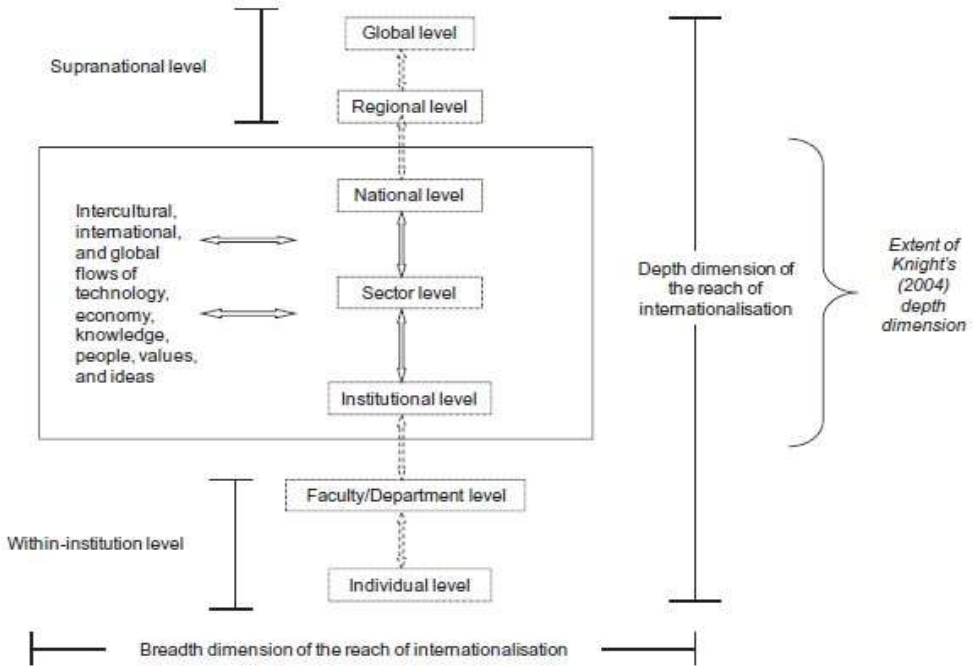


Figure 2-1 The actual extent of the depth and breadth dimensions of the reach of internationalisation (Sanderson, 2008, p. 280).

The interactions of different levels of internationalisation are reflected in this study. Both universities researched are located in China and are influenced by both the global trend of internationalisation of higher education and related policies in China. Through the two institutions, the combined contexts of the international and national levels that influence on individual students will be studied.

China and the UK: in the Internationalisation of Higher Education

Both China and the UK have been engaged in the extension of internationalisation globally. The UK is one of the countries that pioneered the internationalisation of education (Elkin, et al., 2005). Internationalisation has been steadily put into education agenda of the country, and many British universities pursue internationalisation strategies from growing recruitment of international students and staff to building partnerships with institutions abroad (Dandridge, 2010; Elkin, et al., 2005). From a market perspective, the internationalisation of higher education increases revenue for British universities by recruiting international students (UKCOSA, 2004). Moreover, international staff and students constitute an important proportion of staff and research students' population and their work significantly contributes to academic communities in universities (Ennew & Yang, 2009). The UK is also the leading country involved in the development of transnational education programmes (Altbach, 2004a). These programmes allow students located in a different country to that of the awarding institution to learn and/or to earn a degree (Altbach, 2004a). Western countries such as the UK are not alone in the trend, as they are accompanied by developing countries such as China in starting to internationalise their academic strategy internationalisation. Along with its rapid economic growth, China has become one of the most significant international markets in the past two decades that provides sources of mobile international students for western universities (Elkin, et al., 2005; Ennew & Yang, 2009). China has also become one of the host countries for transnational provision of higher education which witnesses the emergence of the delivery of programmes in China by foreign universities and research partnerships between Chinese and foreign institutions (Garrett, 2003). The growing needs for Chinese higher education to improve the quality of teaching and learning stimulate the desire of universities and the government to learn from the higher education system in the West. In a general sense, there are commercial and academic motives, as well as cultural and political rationales, behind the internationalisation of higher education in both areas.

Since both parties have been involved in this trend, researchers have raised concern in relation to international power and dominance. Teichler (1996, in Enders and Fulton, 2002) suspected that the powerful actors would praise

internationalisation without any conditions, meanwhile ignoring the anxieties of less powerful actors. As such, the role of developing countries has been concentrated on, as those countries have to face great challenges in the process of internationalisation while national transformations are taking place. Ender and Fulton (2002) mention three pressures confronted by developing countries in internationalisation: first, to sustain and develop the nationalisation of their own educational system; second, to re-examine the role and situation of education associating with the local context; third, to deal with the global forces such as the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) agreements and the World Trade Organization (WTO) treatment of higher education.

From an institutional perspective, it suggests that the development of internationalisation in western universities comes with costs along with benefits (Fazackerly, et al., 2007). One of the concerns is that the changes of culture within universities. In responding to the diverse of student population, universities have to face the change of moving towards a commodity based education approach and the challenge of cultural shift (White, 2006; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Smith, 2000). For both administrative and academic staff in universities, the students with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds require them to adjust teaching and managing styles which many of the staff feel hard to handle (Fazackerly, et al., 2007). The reasons for this difficulty are as concluded by the Higher Education Academy (2005) as a lack of understanding of diverse culture and perspectives, a lack of short term incentives and a shortage of time to learn about the way of thinking and learning of people from other cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the challenges of internationalisation for some universities are also reflected on the financial barrier and the difficulty in conducting international research (Delucchi & Korgen, 2002, Smith, 2000). In this study, the cultural perspective in the internationalisation which was revealed by the literature has been taken into consideration in analysing students' identity change in UNNC.

Transnational Higher Education in China

In order to understand the research context- the context of UNNC in the national context, transnational higher education in China including needs to be looked into. Along with the economic and educational reforms in China and the opening up of Chinese higher education, transnational higher education is seen by the Chinese authorities as an approach to learning from the West (Ennew & Yang, 2009). The Chinese government has started to welcome collaborations between Chinese and foreign universities in order to encourage exchange of expertise in research and teaching, to improve Chinese universities' understanding of Western pedagogies, quality assurance system and curriculum development (Ennew & Yang, 2009). Transnational education is seen by the authorities as an opportunity to encourage Chinese universities to have a more international outlook (Huang, 2007). Thus, numerous forms of transnational education have flourished in China since the mid-1980s, especially during the latter half of the 1990s (Huang, 2003a).

"Transnational education" is generally understood as "all types of higher education study programmes, or sets of courses of study, or educational service (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based. Such programmes may belong to the education system of a State different from the State in which it operates, or may operate independently of any national education system." (UNESCO & Council of Europe, 2001, p.2). In higher education, there are many forms of transnational higher education, including branch campuses, cooperate programmes, online learning and distance education, study abroad programs and so on (Huang, 2007). Transnational education has been called *Zhongwai Hezuo Banxue* by the Chinese government which literally means "cooperation between China and foreign partners in the operation or management of higher education institution" (Huang, 2007, p. 194). This name implies the unique characteristics of transnational education in China. Unlike some other countries (e.g. Japan, Singapore, Malaysia) where foreign educational institutions to set up and run a programme or campus by

their own are permitted, China's Ministry of Education has set a series of rules and regulations to ensure that transnational higher education must be jointly delivered by both Chinese and foreign partners (Fang , 2012; Huang, 2003b, 2007). It is essential for an educational provision, even if it does not provide foreign degrees, to have investment (e.g. capital, land, curriculum, management system and so on) from both Chinese and foreign sides to be considered as transnational education in China (Fang, 2012; Feng, 2013).

Branch campuses of foreign universities, as one form of transnational education in China, have increased rapidly recently. According to the Cross-Border Education Research Team's data in May 2015, there are 28 branch campuses of foreign universities in China (mainland) among which 11 from the US and 8 from the UK. In this study, one of the universities which the researcher focusses on- the University of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNC) - is an example of a branch campus. Branch campuses refer to "campuses set up by an institution in another country to provide its educational or training programmes to foreign students." In UNNC's case, University of Nottingham as a UK university sets one of their campuses in China.

There are a few studies of foreign universities in China as the new form of internationalisation of higher education has existed China only since the recent decade. From the perspective of the home institutions, the Agora report released in 2007 edited by Fazackerley and Worthington provided a comprehensive analysis on the relationship between British and Chinese higher educational institutions. They illustrated a wide range of challenges that the British universities face in integrating with their Chinese partners, including legal and policy difficulties, cultural and logistical differences, and diverse management styles. From the perspective of the host country, in this case China, Huang (2003) raised concerns about the quality assurance and control of transnational education. He feared that the restrictive regulations and policies in China may limit academic aspects, for example, the delivery of teaching in humanities and social science subjects concerning Western ideology and religion may be limited or forbidden. He suggested the Chinese government first make clear definition of transnational education in Chinese educational

system, and to seek a balance between good quality transnational education and the interests of the nation (Huang, 2007). Huang's concern echoes other literature (e.g. Heffernan & Poole, 2005; Dunn, et al., 2006; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007) on branch campuses over whether the transnational education could deliver the same quality education into the host countries as in the home countries. Although transnational higher education is acknowledged as an increasing trend in China, as in other parts of the world, the literature on it is limited. Particularly, a great part of the existing literature on branch campuses focusses on either presenting a general picture of their development, and the rationales behind it at the international, regional, and national levels, or concerning the quality assurance at the institutional level. Research done on the micro level which refers to teachers and students within those institutions is limited. This study aims to provide an insight into transnational higher education by looking into students' development within one of such campuses.

Higher Education in China and within the Trend of Internationalisation

Situating higher education against this historical and political backdrop in China is essential as policies have an impact on the nature and role of higher education, which in turn influence students' perceptions, experiences, and interactions with universities. Meanwhile, the higher education in China provides the national background for ZJU in my study. Therefore, I will give a brief introduction of China's higher education. In response to the current trend of internationalisation of higher education globally, the Chinese authorities and universities had made changes within the higher education section. The settings of ZJU nowadays are influenced by the circumstances of the changing national context. As a result, the new trend and the reflection on it will be discussed here.

Some Brief History

At the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China adopted the Soviet model of the higher education system which emphasising on professionals and specialists training rather than liberal education (Cai, 2004). By 1953, all Chinese higher educational institutions became public under a central planning system (Cai, 2004). The system was centralised in terms of which educational resources were allocated, how graduates' jobs were assigned and the enrolment numbers for each university were determined by the government. The system stopped functioning by the Culture Revolution during which universities were closed down. The end of the Cultural Revolution in 1977 brought a new beginning of higher education in which university entrance examinations have been restored. Since the economic reforms started in 1978, a number of policies have been put into practice in decentralizing finance and management in higher education in China (Li, 2010; Cai, 2004; Yang, 2008). The government has made great efforts to build up links between higher education and the market. The major mechanisms include: abandoning the job assigning systems, transformed free higher education into a tuition-based system, less administrative interference, and beginning to allow private higher educational institutions (Cai, 2004; Li, 2010).

Building "World-Class" Universities

As it has been mentioned in the research context of ZJU, the university is involved in the process of "building world-class universities" and both "211" and "985" Projects. This section will introduce the process as well as the two projects.

Since higher education worldwide has been reshaped by the trend of internationalisation, the educational reforms undergone in China are also in response to the international contexts. Along with changes of the educational system, several programs were launched by the Chinese government in order to achieve the aim of "building world-class universities". The two major

programs are the “211 Project” and the “985 Project”. Zhejiang University (ZJU) - has been involved in both the 211 Project and the 985 Project. The 211 Project is a program of National Key Universities which was designed with the intention of improving high-level Chinese universities (116 universities) in terms of their teaching, research and infrastructure (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China Website, 2014). In order to be included in the Project, universities have to achieve requirements in terms of scientific, technical, and human resources, as well as provide students with different levels of degree programs. “211 Project” universities received financial resources from the government which to the amount of 36,826,000,000 RMB (about 3,730,433,660 GBP) between the year 1995 and 2005 (Zanten & Darchy-Koechlin, 2015). According to the Report of the 211 Project Developments from 1995 to 2005 (The 211 Project Working Group, 2007), the financial support enabled these universities to develop their academic performance and to improve their international reputation. Project 985 was first announced in 1998 and launched in 2004 and was seen as the second step of enhancing the quality of higher education in China (Li, et al., 2011). It also claimed by the government as aiming to help the top Chinese universities to become world-class universities (Zanten & Darchy-Koechlin, 2015). There are 39 universities sponsored by the project. Both central and local governments have contributed huge amounts of funding to the project universities in order to support academic researches, attract leading scholars in the world and establish research facilities, and buildings (Zanten & Darchy-Koechlin, 2015). It is noticeable that both the 211 and the 985 Project universities are unevenly distributed throughout the nation – 67 out of 116 universities in the 221 Project and 24 out of 39 universities in the 985 Projects are located in the more economically developed coastal region.

In 2009, the C9 League was formally established as a part of the 985 Project, in which nine universities were selected as members. Zhejiang University is one of them. The Chinese education ministry announced its support towards the league and put it into the position parallel to the “Ivy League” in the US. Analysis conducted by Thomson Reuters was quoted by the Times Higher Education (2011) that the C9 League which accounts for 3 per cent of the

country's research, has about 10 per cent of national research expenditures. Chiang and his colleagues (2015) noticed that the uneven allocation of educational resources reinforced the gap between the coastal region and the western region in terms of both economic and cultural reproduction (Chiang, et al., 2015). Even though the 211 project and the 985 project made a success of building top universities by offering them exclusive privileges, they limited the possibility for rural students to access to these elite universities as a result of the uneven geographic distribution of educational resources (Chiang, et al., 2015). Despite the public debate on whether the existence of these two projects will truly benefit China's Higher Education in a general sense, the Minister of Education made a statement that these projects would not be abolished as they are still significant in helping Chinese universities to become 'world-class' universities (Xinhua News Agency, 2014).

Critical Reflection on "Building World-Class Universities"

One of the universities in this study, ZJU, has been involved in several of China's higher educational programmes of "building world-class universities". As has already been mentioned, it has changed the curriculum for undergraduate programme based on the US system and tried to establish a new international campus as part of its plan of pursuing "world-class" status. In order to have an in-depth understanding of ZJU as the research context, a critical reflection on the trend of "building world-class universities" is provided in this section.

Previous quantitative data showed that Chinese higher education had rapidly developed since the educational transformation in the 1990s in terms of areas such as university enrolment ratio and research funding (Li, et al., 2011). However, as reminded by Altbach and Salmi (2011), the establishment of "world-class universities" needs long-term effort which cannot be built too ambitiously for quick results, and requires substantial investment and even significant changes in the educational system. Researchers have critically reflected on China's intention in building world-class universities from the following main aspects:

Frist of all, the definition of a "world-class" university is questioned by researchers. Deem and his colleagues (2008) noticed that the meaning of "world-class" higher education is either does not exist or could simply be as vague as being "international". They explained further that the international (mainly US and European) criteria for academic excellence determines the significance of publishing in English-language journals and too much attention on this criteria neglects the local context for universities in other parts of the world. Altbach (2004b) shared the same opinion that Western ideology and values, especially those from the US and European countries, direct the standards in defining of "world-class" universities. There is a danger on focussing on achieving these standards too much. In non-Western countries, the universities and the academic system may set up unrealistic aims and divert too many resources into research institutions, which as a result may harm faculty morale and performance (Altbach, 2004b). Li and Chen (2011) criticised China's intention of building world-class universities in that it is only being imitative in following the West, rather than being creative. In relating ZJU to this point, ZJU made changes in term of its undergraduate programmes (especially its general education programme) by following the model in the US, from this study it might be able to partly reveal whether the changes have been beneficial to students' development.

Another important problem needing consideration are the strategies taken by Chinese authorities and universities. Since the Chinese government takes strict control of universities politically, financially and administratively, there is a limitation in term of universities' academic freedom and autonomy (Ngok & Guo, 2008; Li, et al., 2011). Researchers pointed out the paradox that the strong intervention of the government may actually hinder the progress of building world-class universities: the central government entitles the list of elite universities by launching projects such as 211 and 985, rather than encouraging a mechanism for open competition among diverse higher educational institutions (Ngok & Guo, 2008; Li, et al., 2011). Moreover,

paying too much attention to making themselves 'world-class', many universities tended to create a culture of demanding quick results and allocate resources exclusively into aspects such as better facilities, buildings, publications, research findings, famous professors (Salmi, 2009; Li, et al., 2011). The reality is that world-class universities need more than buildings, research facilities or more journal publications, requiring the intellectual atmosphere which has developed in Western elite universities for centuries (Mohrman, 2005). In this sense, there is a long way for Chinese universities such as ZJU to go to achieve their ambitious goal of being "world-class".

In addition, the cultural contradiction is regarded as another problem in building "world-class universities". Cai (2004) pointed out the tension as there is a cultural conflict between China and the West. He argued that the ideas of traditional Confucianism and Maoism which echo the political culture in China such as "centralisation of state power" and "moralisation of politics", are fundamentally contradictory to Western ideology (Zheng & Liu, 2002, in Cai, 2004, p. 168). Chinese higher education has to face western philosophies and academic values as the internationalisation of higher education grows in China. According to Cai (2004), Chinese universities currently are not coping with the cultural contradictions well, as a result, it is dangerous to either promote a full-scale Westernisation or to fully deny Western values. It is significant for Chinese higher education to deal with the tensions between the interests of the country and the West with appropriate approaches (Cai, 2004). However, considering recent news about the authorities' attitudes toward Western ideology in Chinese higher education, to achieve a good balance would be more difficult for Chinese educators. According to Xinhua News Agency in China, China's education minister Mr. Yuan urged universities to take control of their political integrity and "never let textbooks promoting western values appear in our classes" at a forum on improving ideological work in universities and colleges. He also warned the universities and teachers to firmly maintain the "political, legal and moral bottom line", remarked "that slander of the leadership of the Communist Party of China, smears of socialism or violations

of the country's constitution and laws must never appear or be promoted in college classrooms."

Chinese Students in the Changing Context

In this section, I intend to gain an understanding of Chinese students based on the existing literature, before looking into the Chinese university students in my study. There has been increased interest in exploring the characteristics of Chinese learners at home and overseas since the late 20th century. Early studies in the West displayed an image of Chinese students of being superficial learners for decades and a set of characteristics had been used to describe "Chinese learners": rote memorisation of knowledge without understanding, the lack of critical thinking, lack of leaning autonomy, lack of learning strategies and being passive recipient of knowledge (e.g. Bradley & Bradley, 1984; Samuelowicz, 1987; Chow, 1995).

These stereotypical perceptions of Chinese students have been criticised by later researchers (e.g. Li, 2002; Watkins & Biggs, 1996; Lam & Wong, 2007; Strokes, 2001; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006). They argued that it would be naive to see Chinese learners as superficial learners, and argued that Chinese students adopt a deeper approach to learning than their Westerners. Marton Dall'Alba, and Tse's (1996) study showed that Chinese learners can integrate memorisation and understanding in their learning, though they were seen by the Westerners as a separated learning approach. Biggs (1996) argued that the strategies Chinese students used in their learning are effective as those strategies assist them to handle the pressure placed by the education systems they are in. Moreover, the learning of Chinese students can be improved by new pedagogical approaches. For example, studies showed that by making approaches such as problem- based learning (Chan, 2001; Lam & Wong, 2007; Strokes, 2001) and the use of learning portfolios (Bigg, 1996), Chinese students' learning and understanding can be benefited. Yet, as pointed out by

Gu and Schweisfurth (2006) in examining Chinese students' learning in the UK, not enough attention had been paid by the Western universities to accommodate the international students.

Some researchers noticed that a new approach needs to be applied in examining Chinese students in the changing educational context today. It is insufficient to use concepts developed in the Western context to examine Chinese students (Li, 2002). It is argued that even though the internationalisation of education nowadays is intensified by the flow of students and teachers between Western countries and China, Western perceptions of Chinese students are still essentially based on these outdated stereotypes (Ryan, 2010; Law, et al., 2010). Grimshaw (2007) in reviewing literature about 'the Chinese learner' indicated that there is a tendency to suggest individual Chinese student's or teacher's perceptions and behaviours are determined by supposed features in the Chinese national or ethnic culture. Indeed, in Hofstede's (2001) book, Eastern Asian and Chinese culture is featured as being 'collectivist'. Cortazzi and Jin (2001) emphasised the differences of the learning culture between China and the West. In other studies concerning specific learning skills such as critical thinking and argumentation, researchers also attribute the lack of these skills of Chinese and Eastern Asian students to the features of large power distance, low individualism and high uncertainty avoidance in East Asian culture (e.g Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1995; and Bond, 1996). Clark and Gieve (2006, p. 54) who identify these studies used the "large culture" approach which "entails … a notion of historicity only in the sense that cultures are determined by a historical heritage rather than emerging through history and thus dynamically evolving". Grimshaw (2007) and Ryan (2010) added that the term "Chinese learner" is misused. The words usually refer to students from different regions such as mainland China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan, which have diverse educational systems. Not only could students' learning and social lives from different regions be significantly different, but also even in the same country/region, students' study can be very different, for example, comparing a relatively developed area and a poor area (Rayn, 2010). Holliday (1999, 2005,

p. 82) shared the same insight with these researchers and raised the concern of seeing non-Western students as 'reduced others' who are contrasted with the "enlightened self" of the English native speakers. He suggested researchers focus on "small culture" in examining students, which "all the processes, happenings, or activities in which a given set of several sets of people habitually engage' needs to be taken in consideration" (Holliday, 1999, p. 248).

Taking this viewpoint, rather than only emphasizing cultural beliefs and inherent characteristics, more researchers nowadays look into the nature of Chinese students by taking account of individual students' attitudes and learnings in the changing contexts. Ryan (2010) noted that along with the growth of China's economic and political impact globally, it is significant for educators who work with Chinese students to have an in-depth and contemporary understanding of them in both Chinese and Western contexts. By achieving such goals, he further suggested to build a genuine dialogue between the Chinese and Western educational systems, and to look into the influences of both systems and values on individuals, in order to explore the reality about Chinese students (Ryan, 2010). This is consistent with the intention of this study which is to gain understanding of Chinese students and the contextual influences by examining individual students from universities of both the Chinese and Western educational systems. In order to gain more in-depth understanding about university students in China, this study uses the identity as analytic lens to look into students. In the next section, I will explain the rationale of choosing identity as the angle of exploring students.

Rationale for Using Identity as Analytic Lens for the Study

This section illustrates the reasons that the researcher uses identity as the lens for the study. The concept of identity is increasingly employed in research in social science. Some argued that it has been overused to the point where it is contradictory and needs to be replaced by concept less confusing (see Brubaker

& Cooper, 2000; and Anthias, 2002). Others took a different position suggested that given its "vagueness and fuzziness" (Lichtwarck-Aschoff, et al., 2008. p. 321), the concept of identity is flexible and could provide rich insights into social researches (see Yuval-Davis, 2010, Flum & Kaplan, 2012). Educational researchers also saw identity as an important analytic tool for understanding schools and society (Gee, 2000; see also Flum & Kaplan, 2012, Lannegrand-Willems & Bosma, 2006; Nystrom, 2009 and so on). This study agrees with the later position as identity provides a theoretical rationale to understand students' academic and social experiences in schools and universities.

In educational research, there were alternative analytical frameworks which have been used in investigating students' actions in learning and the mechanism underlying their actions. The conceptual framework of culture, for example, is one focus for understanding students' learning (e.g. Strang, 2010; Sfard & Prusak, 2005). As discussed in the previous section, the cultural perspective has also been used by researchers in analysing Asian students' learning in order to make the connection between the Asian culture and students' learning style. For example, both Kennedy's (2002) and Campbell and Li's (2007) studies indicated that: for the Asian students in one Australian and one New Zealand university in their studies, cultural differences hindered their learning satisfaction in the universities. However, as argued in the previous section, accessing students' learning from only the cultural perspective may raise the possibility that a focus on students as distinctive individuals in the learning process will be ignored. Moreover, the definition of culture is problematic and I will discuss this in more detail later in the section - "Identity and Culture". For these two reasons, the analytical framework of culture was not chosen for this study.

Students' personalities and personal traits have also been the focus of some educational researchers in analysing students' learning (such as Duff, et al., 2004; Komarraju, et al., 2009; Caprara, et al., 2011). Duff and his colleagues (2004) pointed out that students' personality partially determined their

perceptions about learning and their ways of learning. They believed that there is a strong link between ones' personality and learning orientations. Komarraju and his colleagues (2009) added to this argument, suggesting that students' personality plays important role in deciding their learning styles which affects their academic performance. However, notions of personality, personality traits or characteristics overemphasise the influences of biology on individuals. In doing so, they ignore or minimise the relationship between individuals' learning and the sociocultural context; and the mainly quantitative methods that these and other similar studies use in measuring the influences of students' biology on their learning limit their ability to take more holistic, contextualised perspectives. In contrast, the concept of identity is perfect in making the link between learning and the context. Analysing ones' identity in context enables the complex story of individuals' learning and how individuals change in social interactions to be revealed (Gee, 2001; Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

Regarding this specific study, the following four justifications are used to explain why identity within the contexts of different influencing cultures is the proper tool in investigating Chinese university students and to gain understandings on how educational settings influence them.

Internationalisation and Identity

First, students' identity change is an important factor in the internationalisation of higher educational literature. The internationalisation of higher education is a place for individuals to respond to the educational context by constructing and reconstructing identity. Identity, nowadays, is not "something that is just given but has to be understood as something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual" (Giddens, 1991, p. 52). Identity constructions are processes with constant forming, negotiating, strengthening or revising within various social interactions. The internationalisation of higher education in China complicates the social

interactions by adding or transforming elements such as culture, curriculum, teaching and learning approaches to the long-existing history of education (Slethaug, 2007). Change at the structural level drives researches to make efforts to re-examine and refresh our understandings of Chinese students today. Using identity as an analytical lens enables researchers to explore the dynamic nature of students in the narration of their own identity and how they posit themselves.

By investing in individuals' identity changes, one can gain a better insight of the micro level responses to internationalisation, and to develop the multi-layered and complex notion of identity (Kohonen, 2005). It would also add to the existing research which made strong efforts to complete discourses around internationalisation of higher education by avoiding seeing students as homogeneous groups.

Identity and Culture

There is strong connection between culture and identity which allows researchers to look into the influence of culture on people without ignoring individuals' personal attitudes and perceptions. As it has been mentioned in earlier sections, research concerning Chinese students tended to see culture as an intellectual device in recent studies. Many researchers have criticised the "big cultural" approach because it makes assumptions that Chinese students are a hegemonic group. 'The small culture' was brought up by researchers to draw more attention on contexts at the micro level. The reason this study chooses the lens of identity, rather than culture, to examine university students is mainly based on the problems of defining culture as an analytic framework. Many researchers have pointed out that culture is a difficult general framework for analysing higher educational research, as it has to include numerous elements such as ecological characteristics, history, and/or traditions of the institutions (e.g. Välimaa, 1998; Atkinson, 1999). Indeed, culture is a complex notion as an

instrument of research, and also there is a risk of overgeneralizing features of a group of people. According to Atkinson (1999, p. 627), cultures are "homogenous and all-encompassing entities". Zimmerman (2006) built on Atkinson's attitude toward cultures that they should not be seen as power which can unify individuals. Since the notion of culture has increasingly become problematic for scholars in humanities and social sciences, more educational researchers started to apply concepts such as identity to study the comprehensive relationships between individuals and the social context (Slethaug, 2007; Atkinson, 1999). For example, Wang (2010, p.154) emphasised the importance of examining students as individuals who have "complex ties of identity to their larger social context", rather than overly affiliating students with a uniformed culture.

As Atkinson (1999) pointed out, it is dangerous if researchers ignore the social and cultural surroundings of individuals. This study argues with this argument and suggests that the concept of identity instead is able to take into account the personal, collective features of individuals, the social and cultural contexts. Identity is diverse, dynamic and responding to different cultural contexts (Baumeiste & Muraven, 1996). As English-Lueck wrote, "Identity is one piece of culture. Identity refers less to what we do – our behaviour – than to who we believe ourselves to be. Identity is reflexive, reflecting several dimensions; it is how we categorise ourselves to ourselves. Identity is theatre; it is how we present ourselves to others. Finally, one aspect of identity is passive; it is how others classify us" (2002, p.117). The notion of identity demonstrated its use in examining "issues of power and of personal and collective responsibilities for individual lives" in sociological and cultural research (Strad & Prusak, 2005, p. 15). In other words, identity gave a conceptual bridge between individual students' study and its broader sociocultural context.

Age and Identity Change

Identity change plays a prominent role in university students' development. Schwartz, Côté and Arnett (2005, p.201, also in Arnett, 2000) labelled the age period of the late teens and the early twenties as emerging adulthood (university students' age in this study), for the reason that "the transition to adulthood has become increasingly prolonged in virtually every post-industrial society". This age period constitutes a distinct developmental period demographically, and also in terms of identity change, especially in the university context (Schwartz, et al., 2008, Arnett, 2000). Their argument has been supported by research which indicated the importance of emerging adulthood and the university context in particular for identity change (e.g. Luyckx, et al., 2006; Syed & Azmitia, 2008). Nowadays, young people face the expansion of available life choices, for instance career orientations, romantic attachment and world views, however, they may also felt they have less collective support for identity development since everyone may have different choices (Côté & Levine, 2002). For example, some of them may find it difficult without external guidance or help, and others may seize the opportunity to develop their identity beyond the level of their previous education and family background. This unstructured nature of this age period and the vast array potential of potential identity choices made investigating into young university students' identity interesting, as researchers could unpick the influences of different levels of contexts from how students make their choices.

The Effect of Formal Education upon Identity

It is believed by educational researchers that there is a close connection between identity and education in various aspects (e.g. Flum & Kaplan, 2009, 2012; Gee, 2000; Lannegrand-Willems & Bosma; 2006). The relationship between learning and identity was noticed by Lave and Wenger (1991), who asserted that learning contributes to one's identity construction while identity development engages learning. Later researchers contributed to this argument with empirical studies. Some researchers argued that Students' identities which based on for example race, ethnicity or gender, have an impact on their

motivation or performance in academic learning (e.g. Oyserman, et al., 2006 ; Quaye & Harper, 2014; Legewie & DiPrete; 2012). Some indicated the learning experiences and students' life in the learning context may shape students' identity (e.g. Kasworm, 2010; Gu, et al., 2010). Others focussed on revealing the interwork between identity and students' learning in various disciplines such as motivation and performance, and the educational context showed its significance in the interlink (e.g. Faircloth, 2012; Woodin, 2011). Indeed, scholars emphasised that identity and learning are connected especially within school contexts. It is believed by Flum and Kaplan (2012) that school works as a social community with interpersonal connections and as a web of relations that generates meanings. They noted that students' active involvement in school activities helps learning and their learning is especially encouraged when school activities link between a matter relevant to their identity and to how they construct meaning in the community (Flum & Kaplan, 2012). By examining students' identity, empirical studies on schools revealed a number of contextual factors which can either assist or hinder learning. For example, based on their investigation in three schools, Lannegrand-Willems and Bosma (2006) suggested that the context of school was significant in students' identity change and their academic achievement, meanwhile, not only the image of their school, but students' predominant attitudes of learning can influence their motivation and engagement in learning. The concept of identity is a perfect candidate for linking students' learning to the institutional context they are studying in. This is even though a lot of literature concerning students' identity change rather than focussing on the general picture of students' academic and social experiences, showed a stronger focus on aspects such as race, class and gender, but as Gee (2001, p.1) argued:

> *"A focus on the contextually specific ways in which people act our and recognise identities allows a more dynamic approach than the sometimes overly general and static trio of "race, class, and gender."*

Moreover, since doctorate level research requires an original contribution to the existing knowledge (Hart, 1998) and the gap in the existing literature on internationalisation of higher education, students' identity change and culture

make this study original in nature. The existing literature on educational context and students' identity indicated a significant relationship between the two, yet it is argued by researchers that this relationship is under researched (Lannegrand-Willems & Bosma, 2006; Flum & Kaplan, 2012). This study aims to add on the knowledge by exploring the role university and educational settings play on students' identity change. Moreover, Sfard and Prusak (2005) criticised educational literature that some researchers use the word identity as a self-evident notion to readers without providing enough explanation. They gave the example of Lave and Wenger's well-known book in which no conceptualisation of identity was given but identity is seen as one of their key ideas (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). As a result, this study would like to build a contextual framework of students' identity change in universities. The following chapter aims to provide the notion of identity with an operational definition in order to make it useful as an analytical tool in this study.

Chapter Three: Identity Theories and Student Identity Change

Identity has been used as an umbrella term that attracts and continuously attracts considerable attention within social science (Holmes & Day, 1995). In recent years, it has been given a great deal of attention in sociological and psychological literature (e.g. Gee, 2001; Brennan & Patel, 2008; Burke & Stets, 2009; Torres, et al., 2009). Both its conceptual meanings and theoretical role in the usage of the term 'identity' is variable (Stryker & Burke, 2000). In terms of student identity in higher education, researchers have developed conceptions from identity theories. As the focus of this study is to understand student identity change in Higher Education, it is important to examine these.

In this chapter, I will identify and discuss key psychological, sociological and social psychological perspectives of identity in order to make clear the theoretical basis for my research. The chapter will then conclude that sociological and social psychological perspectives of identity cannot be separated. Embracing Burke's theoretical model of identity change, I will explain the three dimensions of identity - role identity, group identity and personal identity within the theoretical framework and explore how researchers conceptualise them. I will then discuss the dynamic feature of identity and the contextual influences on students' identity change will be provided. Finally, I shall analyse existing empirical studies on student identity change from their academic and social experiences.

Identity Theories: an Overview

Psychological Perspective

Psychological interpretations of identity relate to the understanding of self or personal identity. There is much literature concerning university students' identity change, which uses psychological approaches rather than sociological ones, especially in the decades between the 70s and the 90s (e.g., Waterman, et al., 1974; Adams & Fitch, 1983; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; also in Feldman & Kaufman, 2004). The psychological studies cannot be ignored as they provided some understandings of students' personal and emotional aspects of university lives. More recent studies based on psychological theories, moreover, reintegrated context and culture into research (Schachter, 2005). They added more background to this study in terms of the contextual influences on identity and these studies will be mentioned in later sections. As such, I will briefly discuss the theoretical basis of these studies.

Erikson was one of the earliest psychologists who contributed to the understanding of the term "identity", and his focus on the cognitive and moral development and crisis in identity change are influential in the field (Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005). He identified identity as a stage of ego growth, and emphasised the psychological, social and personal dimensions of identity which laid the ground of a multi-dimensional theoretical framework of identity change (Erikson, 1959, 1994). He built a framework of stages of identity change within a life-course in which he explains crises such as intimacy, generativity and integrity that individuals have when they face tasks in growing up (Erikson, 1994). The stages presented by Erikson are crises and challenges which can have positive and/or negative influences on identity development, and the completion of one stage leads to the next stage (Erikson, 1994). Erikson (1994) also argued that the direction and timing of people's development is dominated by the combination of genetic and environmental influences.

Erikson's ego perspective was adopted by Chickering (1979, in Chickering & Reisser, 1993), who viewed identity as a central construct in the higher educational context. He elaborated this thinking in terms of student identities.

Seven stages of individual development were proposed within Erikson's stages of identity crisis, which are: developing competence; managing emotions; motivating through autonomy toward interdependence; developing mature interpersonal relationships; establishing identity; developing purpose and developing integrity (Chickering, 1979). Students intend to resolve a specific developmental task in each stage. This, according to Chickering (1979), allows students to re-examine how their activities relate in each stage. The stages maybe built on and can interact with each other (Chickering, 1979, in Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Chickering (1979, in Chickering & Reisser, 1993) expanded further on Erikson's points in addressing on different dimensions of identity, including gender, race and so forth, along with the changes of student population in higher education in the United States. These changes in the student body in modern societies represent challenges to psychologists in analysing student identity, and this stimulates others to bring subjects such as gender and racial identity into the field (Torres, et al., 2009). In order to keep the psychological tradition, the theories of identity developed from these subjects are still based on the understanding of personal/individual sense of self (Torres, et al., 2009).

Erikson's life-stage framework of identity and the development of his work by other psychologists are not without criticism. Social psychologists, such as Côté and Levine (1987) saw Erikson's work as being Eurocentric, androcentric, and classist. However, they claimed that some elements of his identity theory remain important theoretical resources in the sense that, they will disregard a rich theoretical base if Erikson's had been ignored. For them, however, Erikson's framework was not a multidimensional theory of identity.

This study, however, agrees with sociological theorists who posited the social context as a key factor in analysing identities, and criticised psychologist approaches for ignoring its importance. It is undeniable that Erikson's writings on identity inspired many sociologists for further discussion by giving the social science community "reasonably value-neutral and interdisciplinary terms"

(Weigert, 1986 , p.29) . Nevertheless, as Feldman and Kaufman (2004) argued, psychological researchers ignore the underlying constitutive forces of the social environment. Although some partly take concern of the social context and forces for student identity change, their focus is on psychological dynamics of change and consider social influence as secondary in facilitating or hindering of one's personality development (Feldman & Kaufman, 2004). Since this study believes the significance of social contexts in identity change, it brings up the necessity in discussing identity theories from sociological and social psychological perspectives.

Sociological and Social Psychological Perspectives

Sociological and social psychological theories contribute to conceptions of identity from their own dimensions of perspective as well in of associating with each other's theories. In this part, I compare and contrast mainly two approaches of identity theories: symbolic interactionist theories exemplifying a sociological approach and social identity (self-categorisation) theory, a social psychological approach.

Sociological Approach

The fundamental ontological assumption of symbolic interactionism is that social reality is continually constructed by people through the symbols they attach to things when communicating with each other. Identities are created and modified through these on-going processes (Heise & MacKinnon, 2010). This study agrees to consider identities, under this ontological assumption, as being unstable and in need of continual management. The development of sociological identity theory will be discussed as follow, though this study argues that the existing sociological models may not be sufficient in seeing identity.

Followed by many symbolic interactionists later, George Herbert Mead (1934) provided a theoretical framework for the comprehensive categorisation of identity analysis from three levels: personality (mind), interaction (self), and social structure (society). Mead viewed the self as integrated because the self is "microcosm" of the larger society. "The unity and structure of the complete self reflects the unity and structure of the social process as a whole; and each of the elementary selves of which it is composed reflects the unity individual is implicated" (Mead, 1934, p.144). It implied that the stability of individual selves is a function of the stability of society itself (Heise & MacKinnon, 2010). Mead (1934) emphasised the significance of social conflict and the evolutionary nature of social change, as well as importance of social conflict and social change in identity change. Mead indicated that individuals can reflect the behaviour patterns within the organisational or societal structure, thus social change is consistent with individual change. It has been criticized, however, by Mackinnon and Heise (2010) and this is agreed with by the researcher as they ignored the inherent contradiction between individual agency and autonomy and institutionalised power and constraint.

Later researchers, such as Goffman, emphasised the interrelationship between the individual and others in the society. In Goffman's (1959) interpretation of identity, individuals attempt to impress others in order to achieve their goals and they may join or scheme with others to create collaborative performances in doing so. Individual's behaviours have both 'front-stage' and 'back-stage' facets. The 'front-stage' refers to individual's behaviour in social gathering, which tend to manifest themselves in the kind of people they want to be liked by, while in 'back-stage' facet, they are more honest to themselves (Goffman, 1959). Though Goffman tended to take in consideration the social context in people's identity change, the "front-stage" and "back-stage" theories highly simplified the complexity of individuals' behaviours within social interactions.

Jenkins (2004) built on Mead's symbolic interactionist framework as well as Goffman's "front- and back-stage" theory, and defined the change of identity as a continuous and reflective process, a synthesis of the internal and external definitions of oneself. Jenkins (2004, p.19) stated that where identity is concerned ". . . the individually unique and the collectively shared can be understood as similar (if not exactly the same) in important respects . . . and the processes by which they are produced, reproduced and changed are analogous." According to Jenkins (2004), individual identities are linked with collective identities. He developed the definition offered by Mead, and described how individual identities are entangled with group shared identities. Jenkins (2004) argued that the connection that Mead emphasised between the "I" and the "me" presents conceptual separation of the social context and the person is useful in analysing identity but insufficient to fully understand how identity is formed, maintained and changed. Based on Mead's theory, Jenkins (2004, p. 20) suggested that the "self" is an on-going and, in practice simultaneous, synthesis of internal self-definition and the external definitions of oneself offered by others. Jenkins (2004) also argued that Mead's ideas might be taken further by articulating the processes that synthesise identity from the raw material of internal and external definitions of the organisation. Indeed, Jenkins provided a model in representing the change of both individual and collective identities which linked personal identity change with organisational contexts. However, this model is rather basic, since Jenkins failed to identify the influences of the different levels of context and referred to it only by the internal and external organisational contexts.

In order to reflect individuals' identity within complex social context and social interactions, McCall and Simmons (1978) raised the concept of role identity. They stated that it is "the character and the role that an individual devises for himself as an occupant of a particular social position… his imaginative view of himself…as an occupant of that position" (1978, p.65). They placed the origins and functions of the social self and personal identity in the context of a person's enactment of social roles (McCall & Simmons, 1978). Role identity provides a basis for interpreting identities to allow vicarious

performances of a role before committing to overt action. On one hand, role identities of a person to some extent reflect his/her own criteria for assessing thoughts and behaviour (Heise & MacKinnon, 2010). On the other hand, it is perhaps not surprising that people may have many distinct roles, so decisions have to be made among different roles by people based on which ones are more important than others. McCall and Simmons' theory intended to understand and predict which roles a person will enact (Côté & Levine, 2002). They explained their answer through "prominence hierarchies": the maintenance of such hierarchies and the differences between these hierarchies and situational demands help people enact their roles in social interactions (Côté & Levine, 2002). Notions of "commitment (to role)" and "(identity) salience" were also proposed by role identity theory to explain how people integrate and stabilise of their identities among different roles (Stryker & Serpe, 1982; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Researchers argued that people's commitment to role and identity salience influences them from behavioural and affective aspects, as well as their perceptions and evaluations of others (Stryker & Burke, 2000). They intended to interpret change of identities as: the higher the salience of a particular identity, the more time and effort one will invest in enactment, the more one will attempt to perform well, the more one's self-esteem will depend on that identity and the more one's identity performance will reflect generally shared values and norms (Stryker & Burke, 2000, Côté & Levine, 2002). However, it is arguable that their "salience of identity" failed to explain the change within one role as change does not only occur in comparing different roles but within one specific role as well.

Social Psychological Approach

Another important approach in discussing identity is the social psychological approach. Originating in social psychological traditions, the 'social identity theory' intends to explain group processes and intergroup relations (Hogg, et al., 1995). Social psychologists suggest that social identity includes a relationship between individual psychological functioning and the wider social

processes theoretically and empirically (Tajfel, 1981). Individuals become aware of group/collective membership and their preference for particular groups which the structure of the society is reflected in the structure of the self as category memberships are internalised (Tajfel, 1981). As a consequence, in-group and out-group perception becomes stereotypic, and intergroup behaviour becomes competitive and discriminatory (Hogg, et, al., 1995).

Turner and his colleagues (1987), on the other hand, focussed on "the explanation not of a specific kind of group behaviour but on how individuals are able to act as a group at all. *"The basic hypothesis is a cognitive (or social-cognitive) elaboration of the nature of social identity as a higher order level of abstraction in the perception of self and others"* (Turner, et al. 1987, p. 42). The self-categorisation concept emphasised the cognitive processes of social comparisons, categorisation, and identification within a group to explain intergroup behaviour, complementing social identity theory's cognitive-motivational explanation of intergroup behaviour (the need for in-group distinctiveness and the enhancement of self-esteem).

However, it is arguable that the social-psychological theory in interpreting identity made an assumption that people have a clear understanding of which group they belong to and have out-group members to compare to in terms of values and behaviours. The theory might not be able to explain people's group identity within a homogenous society (maybe a group, or community) where people share great similarities such as a common language, ethnicity and culture. The cognitive process of self-categorisation might not happen as people see great similarities with one another. Nevertheless, people's group identity can be shaped by the culture of a society. Moreover, even in a homogenous society, people are engaged in different institutions such as schools, universities, and work places. These institutions may reinforce their norms and values to people and shape their group identity. In other words, the social psychological approach of interpretation emphasised individuals' psychology but ignored the contextual influences on one's group identity.

Linking the Two Approaches

As it has been shown in the earlier discussion, the social psychological identity theories of Turner (1985) differed from the sociological identity theories of Stryker, McCall and Simmons, and Burke in a number of distinctive ways. However, my study agrees with researchers who argued that the sociological and social psychological perspective of identity theory cannot be separated. Researchers (such as Burke & Stets, 2000, Deaux & Martin, 2003; Oyserman, et al., 2012) who attempted to link sociological identity theories to the social psychological identity theory suggested that both perspectives of theories have a common premise: the basis that the social context affects the relationship among individuals and social groups through the processes of identification. They both stress the social nature of self as constituted by society, and treat identities as multi-dimensional and changing.

There are three areas that essentially link the sociological and social psychological perspectives of identity (Burke & Stets, 2009; Oyserman, et al., 2012). First, although social identity theory is based on categories and/or groups while identity theory is focussed on roles, personal identity is their connection. In social identity theory, personal identity is the lowest level of self-categorisation and in identity theory there is an issue for people in balancing role identity and personal identity. Agreeing with Stets and Burke (2009), Deaux and Martin (2003) argued that a person's feelings and values can be expressed although the features of social identities are consensually and normatively based. Secondly, both theories used the activation of identities and the concept of salience (Burke & Stets, 2000, Deaux & Martin, 2003). Although being used in different ways, as has been argued, the concept in the two theories may complement each other. Identity theory stresses the links among individuals and the social settings while social identity theory stresses the features of the situation when the identity may be activated. Both theories value an individual's purpose and stress the significance of activation in terms of identity. Thus, it can be argued that by merging the two theories, researchers

may be able to locate a person's identity into the social situation. Thirdly, the core processes identified in each theory are very similar (Burke & Stets, 2000, Deaux & Martin, 2003). Both theories specified a process that individuals compromise their personal identities with the group or collective identities which showed the relationship between individuals and any social group. The process indicates individuals' identification within a group and individuals' behaviour that associates with the group. Both theories recognise that individuals live in society as well as being influenced by society. In this sense, it is possible to merge the two theories.

Integrating sociological and social psychological theories can provides this study with a broader perspective in looking at students' identity in university experiences. Therefore, this study embraces the framework suggested by Burke and Stets (2000, 2009, and 2014) who combined the two approaches of the theories in analysing individuals' identity. In the following section, I will explain the framework in more detail.

Theoretical Framework: Role, Group and Person in Identity Change

> *"Identities are the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles and social group memberships that define who one is" (Oyserman, et al, 2012, p.69).*

Stets and Burke (2000) combined sociological identity theory with social identity theory and proposed three different dimensions in analysing identities: role identities refer to an individual undertaking certain roles which are defined by career, family responsibilities and so on; group identities which explain people being members of groups; personal identities which are based on individuals' distinctive biological attributes or values. In this model, personal identity is the agency that individuals make decisions independently under their own wills, while the group identities and role identities are structural which are aware of and responsive to social settings such as expectations and hierarchies

(Heise & MacKinnon, 2010). This model provided a wider perspective of identity, comparing it to previous sociological and social psychological theories. *"Such a theory would address behaviours and perceptions as central aspects of the self. It also would provide a stronger integration of the concepts of the group, the role, and the person"* (Burke & Stets, 2000, p.234). This study embraces the model that integrates the role, group and personal dimensions in investigating students' identity change in universities.

Role Identity

From a symbolic interactionist basis, role identity develops when people take roles in social interactions (Thoits & Virshu, 1997). Role identity guides people's perceptions and behaviour by providing structure and meaning to individuals and to situations (Burke & Stets, 2009). In terms of people's role, expectation is one important element. There are one or more expectations related to one's social position which could lead people's perspectives and even behaviour. Expectations could be general and flexible, for instance, a mother is expected to be nurturing but there are different ways of showing nurturing (Burke & Stets, 2009). On the other hand, expectations could be held to have specific performances in a role, for example, a doctor would be expected to take care of his patients. Expectations would also be set when there are certain goals or aims relating to a role, but the way of achieving the goal or in what extent the goal should be achieved is not specified (Burke & Stets, 2009). Thus, people's perspectives about themselves in role identity could be based on the level of their achievement. Moreover, expectations could be applied in a large part or a very small part of one's social interactions within different contexts such as being at school, at work, with family, and with friends (Burke & Stets, 2009). For example, in being a best friend of another person, the expectations of this role would only be applicable to the specific person, which is within a small range of interaction.

Another important element within role identity as Burk and Stets (2009) suggested is the meaning of a role. They believed that once a role has been taken, people adapt the meaning that is "socially agreed". Individuals would then apply the meaning to themselves. For example, a teacher's role identity may involve the meaning of educating students, the performance of which should match the meaning by teaching classes, marking students' homework, testing students at certain points. However, I argue that the so-called "socially agreed" meaning of one role actually varies in different contexts such as in different countries, institutions and even in different families.

Rather, the meaning of role is learnt by the individual in social reactions where they learnt from how other people interpret and act under the meaning of this role. Individuals internalise what they have learnt and it guides their own behaviours which in their understanding would be appropriate to the role (Burke & Stets, 2009). Therefore, it should be noticed that some meanings of a role are unique to an individual and may not apply to others. Individuals may add their own understanding to the meaning of a role. For instance, some teachers would like to be 'friends' with their students, but this meaning may not be a necessity in terms of a teacher's role (Burke & Stets, 2009). As it is highly possible for an individual to learn the meanings of a role from different people in different contexts, people may have different understanding for the same role identity. One may negotiate his/her understanding with others who do not share the same role identity meaning, and eventually individuals may have to settle on a compromise in order to claim the role identity meaning and behave correspondingly to the meaning (McCall & Simmons, 1978).

Furthermore, Burke and Stets (2009) argued that interactions between two people are led by the principle of role reciprocity as they are relating to each other by specific roles. They argued that the existence of counter-roles is inevitable as a role would lose its meaning without other relevant roles. For instance, the role of a mother would have no meaning if there was not such a role as child. Burke continued to argue that if roles are related to counter-roles,

then identities are related to counter-identities (2004). In my study, nevertheless, the concept of counter-roles is not applicable. By Burke and Stets' definition, students' counter-role is their teachers. My study only focusses on students' perspectives of their own identity, and no teacher has been involved. Moreover, the definition of counter-role is questionable. By Burke and Stets' (2009) definition, it might be identifiable in the cases such as "students' counter-role is teachers", "doctor's counter-role is patient", but it would be difficult for other researchers to identify what is the counter role for roles like physicists, aircraft pilots, or firefighters.

Conceptualising Role Identity

Although the construct of role identity is now widely used in social psychology and sociology, empirical research with the concept from a qualitative perspective has been quite limited. Role identity is multidimensional and rich in content, thus the constructs researchers yielded from analysing students' role identity varies. In a quantitative study in exploring college students' role identity, Burk and Reitzs (1980) indicated four meanings of student role identity: academic responsibility, intellectual curiosity, sociability and personal assertiveness. At the centre of their conceptualisation are the hypothesis that the meaning of a role-identity exists only in relation to relevant counter-identities (e.g. doctor's counter-identity might be a nurse or patient). Researchers anticipated the meanings of role-identity and selected adjectives for the role. Participants were asked to rate the adjectives researchers selected such as "As a student I am. . . (adjective1, ajective2, ajective3…)", and researchers then can pick the adjective which participants believed can describe themselves the best as a part of their role identity. As has been discussed in the literature review, Burk and his colleagues' conceptualising of role identity were criticised by later studies (e.g., Callero, 1992; Collier, 2000). These studies argued that apart from the practical difficulties of implementation, there is a problem in identifying counter-identities in the first place, and participants may find it hard to rate the adjectives researchers selected as they may mean nothing to participants. Thus, Collier (2000) modified the conceptualisation of

role identity by comparing what students perceptions to a university –promoted version of student role identity should be like. In other words, Collier (2000) intended to find out how closely individuals match the role conception of the university's standard and then he proposed four key dimensions of a student's role: critical thinking (being able to identify alternative ways of solving a problem), group skills (facilitating communication within the group), social action/volunteerism (being better informed on local political issues) and media resource skills (using the internet). However, in both Burk and Reitzs' and Collier's studies, subjects were proposed either by researchers or by the university, and meanings of students' role were assessed through a comparison with students in general. It means that in both studies, students' intuitive perspectives and the uniquely meaningful aspects of the university student role to individual students were neglected.

Group Identity

In Burke and Stets' framework of identity, the definition of group identity originated from social psychological theory - "social identity theory". In this framework, it is first argued that there are two main motivations for people joining groups: self-enhancement and uncertainty reduction (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2009). By self-enhancement, it is meant that when people engage themselves in groups, they see the group they are in are better than others which would generate positive information about themselves (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2009). The other important reason for an individual to join a group is that there is a need to reduce uncertainty about individual's perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and his/her position in the social world (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2009).

In this framework, social groups are created through a process of social comparison and by society for stratification purposes, and ascribed tenets such as one's gender, race and ethnicity (Burke & Stets, 2009). Theorists suggested

that through a categorisation process, the status of groups of people in social structures would be clearer to others (Stets & Serpe, 2013). They also believed that group identity emerges within interactions with a set of individuals who share the perspective that they are involved in the same social category (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Members of the same social group share similar perspectives and attempt to fulfil the expectations of behaving with one and another, and taking part in group activities together (Hogg, et al., 2006; Hogg, et al., 1995). Interactions of the individual from a group could be predicted in this sense (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Individuals are labelled as belong to certain groups, statuses and categories, and their behaviours are based on the definitions outlined by group membership (Stets & Serpe, 2013).

In social identities, social-psychologists raised the idea of a prototype in referring to when people represent the specifying and stereotypical characteristics of groups cognitively (Hogg & Terry, 2000). The Stets of characteristics including perceptions, attitudes, emotions, and behaviours, differentiate ingroup members from people out of the group (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2009). Prototypes within groups describe and prescribe guidelines for group members' perceptions and behaviours which enable individuals to have confidence in how to behave and what to expect (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2009). By being a group member, individuals have the capability of control and being an effective agent in their environment (Burke & Stets, 2009). Prototypes are highly context-dependent, where they are formed, maintained and changed in people's minds by the short-term or long-term social interactive context (Burke & Stets, 2009). Enduring changes in prototypes and, therefore, self-conception, can arise if the relevant comparison towards outgroups changes over time. The criticism of prototypes is that they emphasise similarities within groups and differences between groups heavily, and as a result, they do not represent an average group member rather they "describe ideal, often hypothetical, ingroup members" (Hogg, 2005, p.139; Hogg & Terry, 2000). Moreover, it is also arguable that an individual can have different levels of acceptance in terms of the characteristics of the group, thus "prototypes" can only describe the situation when a member fully

agrees with all group characteristics. This study agrees with the criticism of "prototypes" in group identity, especially when the aim of this study is not looking into a "typical" or "ideal" group member but whether and how students changed their identity within different groups.

Social-psychologists also argue that depersonalisation happens when people see themselves as representing a prototype of a group (Hogg, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2009). They believe people are no longer unique individuals in their own point of view, but poses typical features of group members (Burke & Stets, 2009). For instance, when people are involved in a fan group of an author, they put back their characteristics as individuals such as being open-minded, friendly, or intelligent individuals, and see themselves as people who share great passion about the author and his works. Nevertheless, it does not indicate that people drop their perspective of who they are during depersonalisation, but they become involved in a particular group and gain a group identity (Burke & Stets, 2009). When a group identity has been taken by the members, they would have consistency in viewing things, behaving and evaluating themselves and others. They would have positive attitudes towards people and their behaviour ingroup and give negative comments towards people and their behaviour outside of the group (Hogg, 2005). The implication of this aspect on my study is: if depersonalisation occurs in the changing of students' group identity, it might refer to students' losing their own will and voice in group activities. This aspect has been taken into consideration in exploring students' group identity in this study.

Finally, it is noticeable that in group-based identity theory, theorists are referring to "social identity" (identity of a social category) rather than group identity. However, the social category does describe people gathering together for the purpose of common interests. I would like to argue that in using 'social identity' it is easy to confuse it with 'role identity', for example, 'student' is a role as well as a social category. Therefore, there will be overlaps in analysing these two identities. Moreover, as this study is interested in exploring students'

identities within groups such as study groups, student societies, there will be more focus on “groups” than “social categorisation”. Therefore, in this study, I will use the term “group identity” rather than “social identity”.

Conceptualising Group Identity

Although there is no consensus of the most important dimensions of group identity, numerous investigators have argued against unidimensional conceptualisations of group identity and provided empirical support for their arguments positing multidimensionality. This study agrees with previous studies in supporting the multidimensional conceptualisation of and fluctuations in group identity (e.g. Ashmore, et al., 2001; Ashmore, et al., 2004; Deaux, 1996). Conceptual frameworks of group identities provided by researchers were on the basis that the group boundaries were able to be clearly delineated and usually required individuals to categorise themselves into certain groups in empirical studies. For example, Ashmore and his colleagues (2004) proposed a comprehensive conceptualisation of group identities incorporating the following elements: 1) self-categorisation, 2) Public evaluation; 3) private evaluation, 4) importance, 5) attachment- interconnection to self, 6) attachment – sense of interdependence, 7) social embeddedness, 8) behavioural involvement and 9) awareness and knowledge of content and meaning.

This study agrees with the multidimensional feature of group identity. However, the conceptualisation provided by Ashmore and his colleagues (2004) has overlaps among some of the elements, especially under the circumstance when individuals were indecisive in self-categorisation. Moreover, these researchers’ attitudinal view of identity focuses on the emotional connection of an individual towards a group or organisation. They, as other recent studies concerning group identity, regarded it as a psychological term for referring to a person’s membership to the group rather than the sharing of features of the group. In my qualitative study, the dimensions suggested by Ashmore are not

applicable, for the reason that I am trying to compare and contrast the sharing features of the two university groups in terms of students' identity.

Personal Identity

In Buk and Stets' framework of identity, they merged the definition of personal identity from both perspectives of identity theory. Sociologists emphasised that personal identity is a set of meanings about the individual person rather than his/her roles or how he/she is as a group member. Personal identity in early sociologists' eyes is not how people feel about their inner essence, but the "biography"- certain signs and marks that identify people and distinguish them from others (Goffman, 1963). It is a complex on-going process of profiling oneself in relation to society that makes one as an individual (Goffman, 1963). Later sociological theorists, on the other hand, by using the term 'person identity', explained that the meanings within it are characteristics of the person such as how feminine, masculine or moral which are culturally shared in the society (e.g. in Stets & Serpe, 2013). As such, others will draw upon these same meanings to identify the individual and thus facilitate the verification process (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Social psychologists, on the other hand, suggested that personal identity is how people see themselves as a unique and distinct individual, different from others (Hogg, 2004). Hogg (2006, p.115) described personal identity as "idiosyncratic personality attributes that are not shared with other people".

Although Burk and Stets' (2009) had adopted the definition of personal identity from both perspectives, they argued that the concept has never been successfully incorporated into social and social psychology theories of identity. Thus, they explained personal identity through the verification of identity. Because personal identities consist of meanings that constitute a person as an individual, the verification of personal identities leads to increased feelings of authenticity (Burke & Stets, 2000). The idea of authenticity in personal identity

is the feeling that an individual is being his/her true self (Burke & Stets, 2009). Theorists discussed this feeling by giving the example that people may feel they could not be themselves in doing their job, such as a waitress has to be polite to customers even though she is in a bad mood. It reflects individual's willingness to find meanings, coherence and significance in life (Gecas, 1991; Burke & Stets, 2009, 2014). By assessing what is real and what is false about themselves and experiencing themselves in life as meaningful, individuals usually strive for congruence between their perceptions about self and their behaviour (Burke & Stets, 2009, 2014). On the other hand, not feeling authenticity is a negative state. It is not the same as feeling confidence or rising self-worthy, but has to do with what might be called the core self: who one is as a person across situations, across time, across relationships (Burke & Stets, 2009). Therefore, "*as verification of role identities fosters self-competence and the verification of group identities fosters self-worth, the verification of person identities foster self-authenticity*" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 135).

Hitlin (2003) agreed with Burke and Stets' argument in term that there is no explicit interpretation for personal identity that had been given by both social and social psychology theories of identity. He then added that values represent 'the core of self' which is the essence of personal identity. Values are from, "socialisation and learning experiences, the social roles people play, the expectations and sanctions people encounter, and the abilities people develop" (Schwartz , 2006, p. 960). For example, a student may learn from a teacher that hard work and honest effort are essential parts to being a student. Gecas (2000) argued that values play a significant part in forming unique identities, and value-identities are important aspects of socially shared identifications that become internalised at the individual level. Internalised values become important to the person and its salience rank increased among an individual's various identities, which means value is more likely to be carried across situations (Hitlin, 2003).

Conceptualising Personal Identity

Unlike analysing role and group identity, the literature providing conceptualisation for personal identity is limited. Burke and Stets' (2009) model of identity failed to provide conceptualisation for personal identity, Hitlin (2003) though suggested using "value" to explore personal identity. He gave the reason that: a person's values which are personal though influenced by social interactions and communications are crucial in interpreting one's personal identity (Hitlin, 2003). The value approach can make it possible to access to empirical data and to make the link between self and social structure (Hitlin, 2003). In his study, the participants were asked to rank the values listed by the researcher from "against my principles" to "a guiding principle in my life" (Hitlin, 2003). He can then map out the value structure of an individual, which it is possible for future researchers to make sense of the coherence within the self. However, firstly it is arguable that personal identity is more than values, even though values play a great role in shaping one's personal identity. Moreover, the quantitative method again ignored individuals' voice in interpreting their own sense of values.

Other studies which studied into one's biography (which in sociologists' eyes is referring to one's personal identity), argued that by using biographical narratives, one's identity can be explored as a construction (e.g. Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2005; Littleton and Taylor, 2006). The stories of each individual can shape the retrospective constructions of individuals' identity. By using narratives as a starting premise, each individual's personal identity can be analysed accordingly and in a more individual sense. This study agrees with the significance of biographical narratives. Though there is a limit in terms of time and length in this study, I analysed students' personal identity based on a brief story of each participant in this study and generalised the themes from their narratives.

The Relationship among the Three Dimensions

Researchers who drew their attention on the three dimensions of identity noticed the overlaps, interactions, contradictions and hierarchies among role, group and personal identity. They argued form the following aspects.

Firstly, the three dimensions of identity are interconnected. In relating personal identity with group identity, researchers argued that personal identity and social identity work in concert with one another (Hitlin, 2003; Schwartz, 2006). They believed that people internalise some meanings and expectations from their role and group identity as part of their personal identity while possessing personal agency in guiding their personal choices to negotiate for resources and positions with the social settings (Hitlin, 2003; Bosma & Kunnen, 2001; Côté & Levine, 2014). In relating role identity with personal identity, researchers argued that role identity connects to personal identity through the same set of meanings (Burke & Stets, 2000; Stets & Serpe, 2013). For example, a hard-working student (role identity) can also be a hard-working person (personal identity). In this sense, this person's role identity linked with his/her personal identity through the shared meaning of dedication. Contradiction also happens, as researchers indicated when the meanings and expectations conflict between one's role identity and personal identity (Burke & Stets, 2000; Stets & Serpe, 2013).

Secondly, since the person is the container of the three dimensions of identity, the different dimensions all play a part in one person. How these three dimensions interact with each other determines what identities the person has. Thus, individual differences should be noticed. Stets and Serpe (2013) argued that individuals played different roles in different groups and they perform their roles differently by putting their personal identity standards into the roles they are playing. They gave the example of an individual who has the role identity of a student, and he goes to a particular school which he is a member

of the group (school). They reminded researchers as they may ignored individual differences. For example, some students might be leaders in the group more than others as they might be class president or football captain, and some students might have a more aggressive personal identity than others. "*Thus, we need to be sensitive to the simultaneous activation of the different bases of identities in interaction*" (Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 16).

Thirdly, among the three dimensions of identity, Burke and Stets (2009) argued that personal identities are constantly activated and very high in significance in the hierarchy of identities, thus, it operates like a master identity. The meanings in the personal identity would influence the meanings held in one's role and group identities more than the other way round (Burke & Stets, 2009). For example, if one sees himself as high on the moral dimension, as in being ethical, principled, caring, and honest, he may be more likely to choose roles that reflect these characteristics. Nevertheless, personal identities' influence on role and group identities is based on the assumption that an individual is living in an open society when he/she has choices of taking certain roles and being members of groups (Burke & Stets, 2009). As Burke and Stets (2009) argued in less open society when people have little opportunity to choose roles and groups, the person identity would be largely affected by the roles and groups. Even though in an open society, people have relatively more choices, personal identity could still be influenced by roles and groups as people cannot change situations such as the family they are born in, and schools they can go to (Burke & Stets, 2009).

However, even though researchers such as Burke and Stets (2009) and Hitlin (2003) argued that the three dimensions of identity are interlinked, no clear explanation has been given to other researchers in terms of how the three dimensions connect together. Moreover, no empirical study has been done in analysing students' identity using the framework which combined the three dimensions of identity. This study intends to bring all three dimensions of

university students' identity together and to provide insight on this aspect after analysing the data in the three dimensions.

Identity Change

This study agrees with the assertion in recent literature concerning identity theories that identity is not a fixed entity, but is conceived as being fluid and continually constructed and reconstructed over time (in Jenkins, 2004; Holmes & Day, 1995; Castells, 2010; Lave & Wenger, 1998; Marcia , 2002). Researchers who support this view suggested that identity development is not necessarily a linear process and an identity state is not rigid or stable (in Marcia, 2002). The tasks within identity development could be solved in any order rather than by stages, and identity status also allows reflecting and revisiting in order to reconstruct (Marcia, 2002). During the process of identity construction and reconstruction, the dynamic relationship between an individual's personal self and his/her social origins to a great extent decides the particular identity in terms of its criteria for being ascribed (Holmes & Day, 1995; Marcia, 2002). The important point through this social constructionist lens is that identity is 'negotiated experience' (Lave & Wenger, 1998) which is determined by both an individual's personal choice of self and social recognitions. Therefore, in this study, rather than students' "identity change" which implies that certain identities will be formed in the end of university experiences, I will look into students' identity change as identity development is an ongoing process.

From a socio-historical perspective, there is an increasing possibility and even a requirement for the forging of new identities and the dropping of old ones in the changing world. Modern Western society witnesses an immense loosening of societal restrictions and pressures which allows people much greater scope to adapt their identities. Giddens (1991) suggested that modern/post –modern identities are changing as they are now more closely connected with "achieved social status" rather than "ascribed status". He used the word 'ascribed' to

describe the concept of group/social identity which refers to individuals as being members of social categories such as national, class, and/or ethical identity (Giddens, 1991). In modern society, along with the increasing lifestyle choices, people have greater possibilities to gain "achieved status" such as occupational identity and political identity (Giddens, 1991; Castells, 2010). As such, as strong relationships exist between group/social identity and personal identity, modern/post-modern identities reflect not only narratives of selves but also the fragmentation of selves (Giddens, 1991; Castells, 2010). However, it has been argued by Gee (2000) that although in post-modern society people no longer rely on traditional authority and institutions to underwrite their identity, they still need others' to recognise the identity they create or recruit.

Researchers such as Giddens (1991), and Alvesson and Willmott (2002) raised the concept of "identity work" to explain identity change, as it reveals the fluid and temporal nature of the identity construction of individuals. It refers to the processes of "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that is productive of a sense of coherence and instinctive" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p.626). The active participation of individuals during an encounter with others and perceptions of others is valued, as identity work can be conscious and narrated by individuals (Giddens, 1991). The construction of identity, both socially and culturally, encompasses the 'plurality, fluidity and complexity', and identity should always open to change (Ivanic, 1997, p. 11). As has been suggested by 'identity work', individuals are dynamic and complex, identities are constructed continuously by social interactions between the self and others (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Individuals therefore show agency for change when constructing, reconstructing their identities.

Burke and Stets (2009), on the other hand, intended to explain identity change though the lens of social power: identity change occurs, when congruence between identity standards and situational self-perceptions cannot be achieved by changing behaviours and situational self-perceptions. They explained that

change occurs when there is a mismatch between identity standards and situational self-perceptions (Burke & Stets, 2014). The conditions for identity to change can be either some highly disruptive situations (e.g. going to war or prison); or people having mismatched identity standards and situational self-perception for some time (e.g. being parents, mid-life crisis); or when the significance of one or more identities in one's hierarchy of identities changed (Burke & Stets, 2014). Their model was criticised by Berezin (2010) for the reason that in this model change only occurs once an "identity standard" can be verified. He suggested that this model neglected individuals' agency, rather emphasising that one's ability to change is restricted by the social structure. Moreover, Burke and Stets' (2009) model of identity change focussed only on individual psychology and thus failed to provide a social mechanism to connect identity change with social structures (Berezin, 2010). From a macrosociologist perspective, Berezin (2010) suggested that institutions should been seen as the link between individuals and social structures. Indeed, Burke and Stets' (2009) model ignored the role of institutions in identity change. Identity change has to be analysed in multiple-levels of contexts. Therefore, in this study, the influences of the two universities, as well as the impact of multilevel contexts will be looked into in students' identity changes. In the following section, I will discuss identity change within multi-levels of context.

Identity Change in Different levels of Context

The process of identity change has been influenced by different levels of contexts. Both sociological and social psychological literature provided various models in understanding the contextual influences on identity change. In these models, different dimensions of context set the parameters for identity change. In this section, I will first review their models and then propose the model which this study uses in analysing students' identity change.

Multi-Dimensions of Contextual Influences: Different Models

From a social psychological perspective, Côté (1996) provided a framework which is the 'culture-identity link' to demonstrate the relationship between contextual change and identity change which recognises the dynamic feature of both identity and context. He argues that the social behaviour of human beings within each context shall be analysed from the levels of social structure, social interaction and individuals' personality. From the perspective of social-structural stability/change, Côté (1996) pointed out that Western societies have been portrayed by three social-structural periods: pre-modern, which refers to the agrarian and folk society before the 19th Century; early-modern, which production and consumption had become a significant feature of social relations and identity; and post-modern, in which technology has taken the place of labour. The constructs of the three social-structural periods associated with peoples' interaction produces three corresponding cultures: postfigurative, in which the younger generation primarily learn from older; cofigurative, in which each generation learn within their groups; prefigurative, in which the older generation learn from their offspring (Côté, 1996). Finally, some types of characteristics in ones' personality are fostered by cultures. The three characteristics types are: tradition-directed which individuals have minimum individualised characteristics; inner-directed, in which individuals are self-governing but the main pattern of acceptable behaviour is decided by older generations; other-directed, in which 'others' opinions and approval is highly important to individuals. Côté (1996) took the angle of multi-dimensions of culture within societies to explain the interrelationship between context and identity change. Within this social- cultural framework, Côté (1996) interpreted people's social identity as individual's positions in a social structure, while personal identity refers to the more stable factors of individual experience originated from interactions where culture and the individual meet. Côté's framework is coherent with Giddens' arguments in societies' link with identity which has been discussed previously regarding dentity change. It explores the relationship between identity change and context in a social historical manner, which helps the researcher understand the context's influence on identity in a

vertical sense. However, there is no place in Côté's framework for institutions such as universities which my study looks into specifically.

From a psychosocial perspective, Gee suggested that "all people have multiple identities connected not to their "*internal states' but to their performances in society*" (2000, p.99). His work 'Identity as an Analytic Lens for Research for Research in Education', presents a model of four ways to view identity, which he delineates as: nature-identity, a state developed from forces in nature; institution-identity, a position authorised by authorities within institutions; discourse-identity, an individual trait recognised in the discourse/dialogue of/with rational individuals; and affinity-identity, shared in the practice of affinity groups (Gee, 2000). For instance, a person who is thin and tall (nature-identity), is a software engineer in a computer company (institution-identity), is a charming person (discourse-identity), and a member in a comedy club (affinity-identity). These four dimensions of this person's identity are interacted comprehensively without being separated. Gee's (2000, p.101) model offered "four ways to formulate questions about how identity is functioning for a specific person… in a given context or across a set of different contexts". However, from the dynamic perception of identity, Gee failed to explain identity change within the four dimensions. There is a lack of connection and interaction among the four dimensions of a person's identity.

The multi-dimensional influences of context on people's development are reflected more comprehensively in Bronfenbenner's (1979) ecological system of human development. At the centre of this system is the microsystem. It represents the immediate and direct environments that children embedded, including family, school, peer group, church, and neighbourhood. The person's biology might be considered as part of the microsystem. The interactions among these microsystems, for instance, the nature of the connections between a child's home and school, school and church, family and peers, are a mesosystem which also influence the child. The exosysterm refers to external environmental setting which indirectly affect the child. It involves connections

between a social setting and the individual's immediate context, for example, a child's experience would be influenced by parents' job promotion. The macrosystem is the larger cultural context such as the economic and political systems and cultural beliefs. Members of the same cultural group share similar identities, values and heritage. There is also change involving in the marcosystem which each successive generation may change it and develop a new marcosystem. Finally, the chronosystem reflects the patterning of environmental events and transitions over the life span as well as sociohistorical circumstances. For example, the severe economic crisis might have a positive or negative influence on children's development throughout their lifespan, depending on how much the child's family suffered from the crisis (Bronfenbenner, 1979).

As a self-reflective theorist, Bronfenbrenner continuously developed his theory. He took the changing perspective in contributing to his ecological theory. His work in 1979 concentrated almost exclusively on the contexts in which development occurred, paying little attention to the aspects of the developing individual and leaving chronosystem effects quite implicit. He later criticised his own work as discounting the role of person plays in s person's own development and for focussing too much on context (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). He still focussed on person-context interrelatedness and in 1994 he refers to the theory of the Process-Person-Context-Time model (PPCT). Within the PPCT model, *process* is conceptualises as the interlinked and dynamic relation between the person and the context. The *person* is defined as a person's characteristics including biology, cognition, emotion and behaviours. The *context* refers to the ecology system where the individual development happens. *Time* means micro, meso, and macro levels of temporality (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

This bioecological model highlighted the significance of understanding individuals' development within dynamic ecological systems and indicated that the person and contexts interact with each other. In relating to this study,

Bronfenbrenner's model has an application for my research in analysing identity as it can attend to the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels of contexts and the interaction between individuals and contexts, as well as emphasising the dynamic future of identity construction. At the macro level of context in my study, I will look into the national context which refers mainly to the culture and social settings. At the meso-level, the institutional context will be discussed including the university and disciplinary settings. At the micro-level which in my study refers to one's individual context which involves one's different aspects of personal characteristics. The next section will demonstrate each level of contexts in my study. This study also pays attention to *process* and *time* in analysing students' identity: students interact with the multi-levels of contexts; students' changes also linked to the different time and year in the four year's university experiences. The next section will demonstrate each level of contexts in my study.

Different Levels of Context Relates To This Study

In order to bring the different dimensions of context together for student identity change in Higher Education, I will look into the following levels: national, institutional and individual.

National Level of Context

The national level of context, as it has been mentioned by Côté (1996), focuses on the cultural values and traditions of people within their countries. The awareness of one's roots in a particular cultural, historical, and social context is needed in order to locate individual in context, and to see one's identity change by analysing how he/she makes the choice in adopting or departing from some values and traditions (Chickering, 1993). It has been noticed by some scholars that Chinese students have been primarily influenced by Asian cultures that

rooted in collectivism and interdependence in the identity change (Berman, et al., 2011, Li, 2002; Watkins & Biggs, 1996, 2001). It is very likely for Chinese students to emphasise accepting and embracing one's social and familial roles (Berman, et al., 2011). On the other hand, the globalisation process and internationalisation of education complicated the identity development of students in China. There are both risks and opportunities for Chinese young adults in identity change during the globalisation process when thoughts, products, information flow across national boundaries. The themes, such as self and autonomy which were rooted deeply in the individualistic culture of Western society, have been accepted and applied by Chinese youths (Li & Chen, 2011). Young people are facing confusions in their identity development process when traditional culture met Westernised values and global culture (Li & Chen, 2011). This interesting phenomenon can influence students' attitudes and perceptions towards their own study and other students' situations. This part of national context could be taken into a larger context which internationalisation is embedded in as has been discussed in Chapter Two. In this sense, Chinese students may share certain identifiable features in their learning and social life in universities, some of which may be related to Chinese culture. However, it should be noticed that identity change is a complex and multi-dimensional process that identity could be influenced by different levels of context and also personal choices.

Institutional Level of Context

To understand the relationship between student identity change and the context in institutional level (which contains an informal and a formal level of institutional communities), I intend to draw on Lave and Wenger's (1998) concept of 'community of practice'. It explains the ways that the practices of the communities which individuals encounter influence individuals' learning and their position as a member. The structures, rules and expectations in each community within the institution might push students' identities into different directions when students are trying to maintain membership within those

communities. Lave & Wenger's (1998) concept of 'community of practice' explains the ways that the practices of the communities which individuals encounter influence individuals' learning and their position as a member. Each of these various communities will have their own structures, rules and expectations and membership in each might push students into different directions in terms of identity change.

The concept of community of practice is "a set of relations among person, activity and the world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.98). The theory intends to describe how newcomers become members of their working communities through participation that socially shared and constructed (Lave & Wenger, 1998). Learning is in the centre of communities of practice. Wenger and Lave (1991) focussed on the situational nature of learning, and they believe the knowledge is constructed through the practices of individuals and communities. Learning is also seen as a process in communities that is closely related to identity, membership and relationships among individuals (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Wenger and Lave (1991) emphasised the role of communities in newcomer's identity change and their relationship with old-timers. There are three characteristics of communities of practice: the domain that refers to a sharing of interests; a community which is built on the relationships of members; and the practice, which members as practitioners develop a shared repertoire of resources including stories, experiences, and tools (Lave & Wenger, 1998). As such, communities of practice are formed by members with shared interests and though a process of collective learning.

Within academic institutions, formal support networks are limited by academic disciplines and subjects that have relatively formal interactions among members. There is are student groups in academic institutions, where interests are a key point for understanding and give more chances for peer interactions to take place. Formal groups embrace interactions between students and the university and between students and the wider context, such as government

policy and internationalisation in education. These are communities that are deliberately created by universities or teachers such as class, department, and administrative groups. In this study, formal groups emphasise the formal support from the academic system and teachers in the university, including the educational settings and hierarchical structure. Students' groups, on the other hand, represent the informal support networks that are outside of academic activities. Student groups are seen by this study as peer interactions. Student groups are created by individual students and students are gathered together for different reasons such as common interests, similar life experiences, and desires for friendship, and so forth. These informal communities can be considered as students turn to these social networks to make sense of their knowledge and experiences at university. All these groups are located in the interactions among students and the individual's choice of participation shows how they see themselves. It was noticed by the author that these communities are connected and cannot be separated.

Wenger (1998) introduced the theory of legitimate peripheral participation, which is the process of a newcomer being part of a community of practice and changing participation and identity change. 'Peripherality' and 'legitimacy', as Wenger (1998) pointed out, are two types of modification that make actual participation happen. On one hand, 'Peripherality' is an approximation of full participation when students are exposed to actual practice, for instancemutual engaging with other members and involving themselves in actions, negotiations, and reflections to make an impact on their organisation (Lave & Wenger, 1998). 'Peripherality' is with lessened intensity, risk and provided with special assistance and close supervision, but implies full participation in the future. However, full participants can be lost in peripherality when some paths have not been taken or some connections have been overlooked by students. How students participate in a community involving their acts and sense of belonging, shapes not only what they do but who they are (Lave & Wenger, 1998). Different participants may posit themselves in different places while gaining a unique identity which will in the future be integrated and defined in the process of engagement (Lave & Wenger, 1998). New identity will be forged from new

knowledge learnt though new experiences along with the change of students' role in the organisation (Lave & Wenger, 1998). According to this theory, students are newcomers but who have their own characteristics, past experiences, aspirations and beliefs have alternatives in participating in communities. During the processes of interacting with senior students, teachers and other staff and learning in the university, they construct, negotiate and evaluate their new knowledge with their previous experience in order to make choices about their identity construction. Some students might fully participate in activities within the community, while others hold different opinions with the disciplines of the community though still being a member. On the other hand, newcomers can have opportunities for learning only with enough legitimacy to be treated as potential members (Lave & Wenger, 1998). It should be admitted by the community that even peripheral members can change the regime of competence and create new knowledge, and not consider it as a personal deficit when one not knowing something (Lave & Wenger, 1998). As such, for new students, although they are offered the opportunities to learn and to participate, it is possible to feel not be engaged by communities.

As Lave & Wenger (1998) argued, peripherally and legitimacy are achievements engaging both the community and its newcomers without presuming that no conflicts happen when these two encounter. He believes that the encounter is a process of negotiation where practice evolves (Lave & Wenger, 1998). He also proposed that because the concept of identity focuses on the individual but from a social perspective, design for education should put student identity as a central concern and to provide space for students in organisations to think who they are (Lave & Wenger, 1998). As such, the relationship between community and student identity is dynamic, as it depends on the role of students and the pattern of their participation in community.

Lave & Wenger's theory of community of practice has been applied in many pieces concerning student identity (e.g. in Henkel, 2005; Chapman & Pyvis, 2005), mainly as the setting of relationship between community and individual.

There are also researchers, such as Burke and Jackson (2007), who raised criticism of this theory. They argued in their research that Wenger takes little account of power structure, as in their research they found out that students can lose their personal identity or even be forced to leave their social identities behind to participate in the communities (Burke & Stets, 2009). As such, in my models of contextual influences on student identity change, I addressed the power of different groups and social structure on individuals, as well as the agency of individuals on his/her own identity change.

Within formal groups in universities, the literature also argued that individual students construct and reconstruct their disciplinary identities within educational institutions. The institution such as a university can introduce students into a disciplinary community and its norms, values and ways of interpreting the world (Brennan & Patel, 2008). When students read for their degree, they are automatically part of their disciplinary communities, such as Sociology, Engineering, or Law. For a period of three or four years, disciplinary groups provide students with a context of internalising certain ways of thinking, speaking and behaving which contribute to identity construction (Henkel, 2005). Membership of a disciplinary context generates "self-identities that may be more powerful than those of mate, lover and family protector, or those that come from community, political party, church and fraternal order" (Clark, 1983, in Brennan & Patel, 2008, p. 19). Students construct their collective identities as well as their self-identity in the disciplinary context during the years in university (Brennan & Patel, 2008). The influences of the disciplinary context could be for long term which disciplines are ways of people being in the world (Geertz, 1983, in Brennan & Patel, 2008). A physicist and a historian, argued by Henkel (2000, p, 18), "inhabit the worlds they imagine" in their own way. However, it should be noted that students develop academic identity in disciplinary community with the sources of "academic tribe" or "intellectual field" which does not mean that they will not be distracted by other communities as the family and political party (Brennan & Patel, 2008). In my study, the disciplinary groups' influences cannot be ignored but they are not the main focus. I see disciplinary groups as

part of formal groups within universities in investigating students' identity change.

Individual Level of Context

At the individual level, from the perspective of social and social psychology, identity development is the process of the interaction of one's behaviour in social structure and self-verification that is grounded through one's personal experience. An individual's identity is bound up with not only his/her behaviour and interaction with others in social context, but the biography he/she offered and his/her capability of keeping narratives going (Giddens, 1991). Many researchers have pointed out the inseparability of narratives and individuals' identity, as narratives originate from experience and simultaneously shape one's experience (in Giddens, 1991, Ochs & Capps, 1996, Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2005; Abes, et al., 2007). The biography of an individual to a great extent objectively exists when he/she keeps regular interaction with other social members in everyday life, and integrates his/her experience in daily life into the self (Giddens, 1991). Giddens (1991, p.54) also suggested that, self-identity is both fragile and robust: "Fragile, because the biography the individual reflexively holds in mind is only one story among many other potential stories that could be told about her development as a self; robust, because a sense of self-identity is often securely enough held to weather major tensions or transitions in the social environments within which the person moves." In a general sense, biographic contexts and narratives associate the individual with the social (Giddens, 1991; Ochs & Capps, 1996). This study acknowledged the importance of individuals' narratives in understanding students' identity. However, within the limited time available for this study, it focusses more on students' experiences in universities rather than their life stories. The individual context in this study, therefore, mainly refers to their personal stories which can relate to their academic and social experiences in the university such as previous educational experiences, and their relationship with their parents.

Contributory Factors to Students' Identity Change: What Empirical Studies Have Found

Even though there was existing literature which provided empirical evidence for students' identity construction and change using Burke and Stets' model, numerous studies had been conducted in exploring different aspects of students' identity within higher educational contexts. These studies had contributed to the understanding of students' identities to this study in several ways.

First, in the literature on university students' identity change, there were researchers who tended to focus on students transition from secondary schools to universities. These studies reminded me to pay attention to this transition as it may affect students' identity change. In Briggs and his colleagues' (2012) study exploring students' transition and change of university learner identity in the first year's university study, they developed a model for the learner identity change. They indicated that the learner identity development of students in universities is crucial to their achievement and support from both secondary and university sites could assist the change (Briggs, et al., 2012). They suggested the higher educational institutions to build an integrated system of transition with other educational parties (Briggs, et al., 2012).

The study "A real rollercoaster of confidence and emotions: learning to be a university student" suggested that it is an emotional process for students to become university students as they can have the feelings of alienation and exclusion, and the same time excitement and exhilaration (Christie, et al., 2007). The entering university experience is going from a feeling of loss and dislocation and to learn the practice of the new institutional context. The development of students' learner identity as university leaners, then, depends on their emotional commitment to the identity as well as their emotional connections towards the university (Christie, et al., 2007). Scanlon and his colleagues (2007) also saw the transition to university of students as a "loss"

experience as they encountered a gap in their student identity from secondary schools to universities. The first challenge in terms of identity stability, as researchers suggested, was that their past knowledge of learning context could not helped to develop their university learner identity. Instead, university learners' identity of students was constructed within situated interactions with teachers and peer students in the university context.

Secondly, in terms of students' identity change in universities, existing studies provided different perspectives. Brennan and Patel (2008) focussed on the academic identity which students developed during university. They indicated that the university level is just one stage after many constructed students' disciplinary values as well as academic identity. The difference between their research context which was in the UK and my research context in China is that in China it is less likely for students to have a process of disciplinary socialisation before university. Students in my study (and most Chinese students), had not had any courses directly related to their subject in universities when they were studying in secondary schools. Though academic identity construction can occur at very different stages in the life course as these researchers suggested, compared to students in the UK, the Chinese students in my study share a lot of similar experiences with each other in their previous education. It could be possible for some students that the moment at which academic identity construction occurs might be similar.

Feldman and Kaufmanterms' (2004) argued that through interactions inside and outside of the classroom, universities encouraged students to interpret the world from a broader base of knowledge and in a more critical manner. In living in a different region or even country, researchers suggest that students were developing local ways of belonging, through classroom cooperation and collaboration, to the broader university and educational community (Feldman & Kaufman, 2004). They sought to maintain an intellectual independence with regard to their assignments and examinations. After entering university, students seek new relationships by joining organisations. On one hand, they

changed in certain ways to be a member of certain groups; on the other hand, the groups they chose in the first place allowed opportunities to behave in accord with highly salient identities held before entrance. When they found their self-perceived most significant identities could be successfully remained, their identity was stable (Feldman & Kaufman, 2004).

These studies had implications for my study: on one hand, for many young students living away from home for the first time, the experience in university draws them from home to start a relatively independent life which makes them more mature individuals (Brennan & Patel, 2008); on the other, students' identity change in the university can be influenced by various factors and support is needed to facilitate their changes.

Thirdly, in discussing university students' identity change, there are studies which offered cultural perspectives. Chapman and Pyvis's (2005) study on Hong Kong students' identity in transnational higher education provided interesting insights on Asian students. The most significant 'dilemma' pointed out by the researchers is the sense of belonging. Students from Hong Kong had a clear preference for collaborative approaches to learning in the classes, apart from discussing their own research project, but individualistic approaches outside the classes. Chapman and Pyvis indicated that there was an Asian cultural impact behind the stability of Hong Kong students' academic identity. The importance language's role in international students' identity change in universities has been raised in some studies. They suggested that international students experienced the struggle between comfort and discomfort and between felling like themselves and feeling like someone else (Chapman & Pyvis, 2005). Osbone (2012) in his study on international students' self-identity in English in a second language classroom agreed with the challenge international students faced in developing their identity in an unfamiliar cultural context. He also added that it is also a challenge for educators and faculty to support students to develop their new identity in the new learning context.

Combining those studies which were discussed in Chapter Two, there were a lot studies had been done in exploring international students' learner identity. All these studies which took a cultural perspective in analysing students' identity reminded me to pay attention to the cultural influences on students' identity, especially UNNC students' role identity as university learners in the transnational university.

In addition, the existing literature also provided my study an understanding of students' identity change from the angle of their biographies. Littleton and Taylor (2006) in their study examines how the students' versions of their life stories support their claims to an identity of creative person and how understandings within wider society facilitate or constrain such identity work. The findings of their research provides evidence for the continuity of students' biographies in constructing identity work, and challenges the over emphasis of the discursive approach to identity work on its instability, variability, and incoherence (Littleton and Taylor, 2006). As demonstrated by the influences of biography on identity, the researchers suggested paying more attention on cultural resources in local areas, for example, the local culture of family, as it laid the ground for the construction of students' biographies (Littleton and Taylor, 2006). Taylor conducted the study in 2005 that studied university students on the element of 'place' in one's narratives, in order to analyse women's identity change. The researcher argues that a new residential narrative can offer an alternative for students who are not living at home – outside the 'born-and-bred' narrative in constructing their identities (Taylor, 2005). The choice students made on the place of living reflects the self they chose and identity they wanted to present to others and the society (Taylor, 2005). The new residential identity gained by these female students may be temporary, but the new identity does not erase old ones but contends with them as the "born and bred" narrative still has strong impact (Taylor, 2005).

Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2005) did qualitative research on 50 PhD students in 25 higher educational institutions, in order to examine the biographic change and how they construct, maintain and modify their identity

in pursuing doctorates. It has been noticed by the researchers that the single research technology approach limits their study as it cannot engage individual and group change over a certain time span longitudinally, but the interview transcripts could provide rich information for shaping students' biographical changes in detail (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2005). While providing empirical evidence for the role of biography in connecting individuals with society, they also emphasised that the narratives of a person closely linked to the cultural resources he/she possesses which the cultural resources are greatly deriving from students' biographies as creators (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2005). Adopting the perspective that biographic context relates to individual, society and culture in identity change, though not as a main focus, it is concerned in designing interview questions and analysing data of my study, especially in terms of students' personal identity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored identity theories generated from psychological and sociological/social psychological perspectives and I endorse the position of integrating sociological and psychological theories in understanding students' identity. I have embraced the theoretical framework proposed by Burke and Stets (2009) and discussed the three dimensions of identity in this framework- role, group and personal identity. I have taken the position which believes that identify is fluid and continually constructed and reconstructed over time, and I have discussed the different model of identity change proposed by researchers. I proposed three levels of contexts- national, institutional and individual, to analyse students' identity in order to understand the relationship between identity change and students' personal self and social structure. By reviewing existing empirical studies on students' identity and their identity change, I have identified several aspects which my study can look into: students' transition from secondary school to university and the challenge of learner identity development they experienced in university; the cultural influences on students'

identity change and the relationship between students' biography and identity in university.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This chapter introduces and explains the philosophical and methodological perspectives that I have guided the study. In order to compare and contrast students' experiences and their perceptions of the change and development of their identities in the two universities, I will reflect here upon the relationship between my research purpose and research design. First, the philosophical stance of this research, which contains subjectivist ontology and constructivist epistemology, is elaborated. In the following section, the paradigm of qualitative methodology will be discussed. This chapter will then introduce the research participants. A discussion on ethical issues will also be provided after I explain the research method and my data collection experiences. The comparative framework and the stages of data analysis will be represented and followed by how I establish trustworthiness.

Philosophical Position

The philosophical stance of a piece, including its ontological and epistemological positions, is a very important issue to be worked out by the researchers before carrying out their studies. It shows how the researcher understands the world, and their relationships. It lays the philosophical ground for researchers to choose from a qualitative or quantitative perspective in (Guba & Lincoln., 1985). It is not an optional addition, but a necessity for researchers to identify the grounding philosophy and research paradigm. These are significant and must be dealt with before the questions of method and used as guiding principles for the research design (Guba & Lincoln., 1994). Literature concerning research design and research methodology provides us a framework for research and broad implications for how the researcher understands, views and describes the world reflectively (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

According to Henning, Van Rensburg, and Smit (2004), a paradigm is a theory or hypothesis where belief and theory are built to ground how a researcher views the world, decide perspectives and understand the relationships among things around him/her. Scholars suggest three principles to define research paradigms and summarise the basic beliefs as: ontology (the nature of existence and reality); epistemology (what means to know is and what is the relationship between the known and knower); methodology (how we gain knowledge) (Guba & Lincoln., 1994, Henning, et al., 2004).

Ontology

The justification of researchers in choosing specific methodology for their study depends on their assumptions and understanding of reality (Grix, 2004). Ontology answers the question of "what" with the nature of existence. It not only focuses on what we know and can do, but also considers who we are (Bryman, 2008). The primary confrontation in the different orientations of ontology is on the point of social entities: whether they are objective entities and there is a reality external to social actors, or they are subjective entities that constructed by social actors' perceptions and actions (Bryman, 2008).

The ontological position usually taken by natural scientists, suggests that the things exist as independent entities with meanings which are beyond people's consciousness and experiences (Guba & Lincoln., 2005). It implies that truth and realities exist as objects and meaningful reality is external facts that cannot be affected by people (Bryman, 2008). Under this ontological position, the purpose of research is to predict nature and to demonstrate the rules in the world (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

However, I reject the view that reality is objective and there is a single truth. The truth and meaning is constructed and is the consequence of human consciousness and cannot exist without it (Sarantakos, 2005). Reality is a result of human experiences, and the construction of reality is shaped and defined by the tools of social life, such as language and culture (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). It has multiple facets which are based on social, experiential issues, and constructed and reconstructed by local and specific (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Reality is essentially constructed by interpretations of individuals about the world and their personal experiences. The purpose of social research as such is to make the study comprehensible to those involved in and to the public, which is not value free (Preissle, 2006).

I take the ontological position that defines reality as multiple and is constructed subjectively by people's understanding and interpretation of the world. Since the aim of my research is to examine students' identity in two different universities based on students' perceptions and experiences, this ontological position allowed participants to interpret and make their own meaning of events which are distinctive and cannot be generalised. The multiple perspectives on one event are also conceivable as the personal reality created in a person's mind.

Epistemology

Epistemology in research is the relationship between what we know and what we see, the researcher and what is being researched (Bernal, 2002, Guba & Lincoln, 2005, Creswell, 1994). Epistemology considers questions about what can we know about reality and how we know it. It is 'the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology' (Crotty, 1998, p.3). It provides a philosophical basis for researchers' decision making about using knowledge and its adequacy and legitimacy in research (Maynard, 1994).

In natural science, the so-called ‘standard view’ on epistemology is the philosophical approach known as ‘positivism’ (Robson, 2002). Under the doctrine of positivism, the way that knowledge is received is through the gathering of facts, and the aim of theory is to test hypotheses and access the explanation of laws (Bryman, 2008). The research purpose of the positivists is to search for the external “truths” by researchers’ objective observation without involving their beliefs and values (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Positivists consider that it is not necessary for researchers to interact with who or what they study, while scientific rigor rather than its influence on society is the most valuable (Merriam, 2009). In conducting research of human behaviour, the positivist approach shows its weakness because it is challenged by the complexity of human nature and elusive and changing social phenomena (Cohen, et al., 2011).

Contrasting with positivist epistemology, constructivism provides an appropriate approach to recognising human beings’ experience and constructed knowledge in real world research (Guba & Lincoln., 1994). It is based on the notion that the subject matters in social science, and is fundamentally apart from the objectivist view of the natural sciences (Bryman, 2008). Constructivist epistemology assumes that knowledge and reality is constructed by people, and thus people cannot separate it from what they know. Its emphasis is that all knowledge is situated and can change as the knower is influenced by elements such as culture, and personal positions (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Therefore, “the investigator and the object of investigation are linked such that who we are and how we understand the world is central part of how we understand ourselves, others, and the world” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p.107).

The aim of my research is to gain an understanding of students’ identities in two different educational settings based on their conceptions about themselves in their experiences. It means that information is obtained from participants’ interpretations, and their personal experiences in daily life. Based on my ontological position of reality, this study adopts a constructivist epistemology. This position follows the overall humanistic nature of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), also focussing on the understanding of the

perspectives of the participants, which matches the intentions of my research purpose.

Qualitative Methodology

Research design is directed by the philosophical stance of researchers, as well as the purposes of the research (Cohen, et al., 2011). It requires researchers to make a series of decisions in order to enable them to collect data that answers their research questions (Cohen, et al., 2011). It is arguable that both quantitative and qualitative methodologies can be applied in the same study, but their purposes and emphasises are distinct (Sarantakos, 2005). In the sense of data representation, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000; Denzin, 2003), quantitative research usually generates statistical data while qualitative research represents the world by data collection methods such as field diaries, interviews, photographs, recordings and so forth.

More importantly, they have "different assumptions about the world" and they are "two different ways of addressing different aspects of reality" (Sarantakos, 2005, p.47). A key assumption in qualitative research is that realities are constructed by individuals during their social interactions and human beings are creators of the world (Creswell, 1994, Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative research aims to understand social phenomenon and represent people's experiences and perceptions within the natural situation which people encounter, engage or live in (Merriam, 1998). On the other hand, quantitative methodology holds the perception that there are universal laws in governing the world and the reality is 'out there' to be 'found' (Sarantakos, 2005, p.42). Quantitative research is based on deductive enquires that originate from theories and concepts and aim to find specific indicators through measurements (Bryman, 2008). Human beings are considered as rational individuals who have to follow external laws with no free will, and the context and the carrying out of the research are considered distinct (Sarantakos, 2005, Bryman, 2008).

The philosophical stance of the researcher means that it is not suitable to use quantitative approach as research methodology. Moreover, a quantitative methodology cannot reflect the purposes of my research, because it lacks concern for contexts and narratives which are essential to investigate identities of students in different educational settings. A qualitative approach, on the other hand, is interested in the participants' experiences, narratives, and sensitivities towards contexts which research strategies might be used to adjust to changing circumstances (Denzin, 2003). It allows the researcher to have a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives about how they see themselves, in order to retell and rebuild the formation and reformation processes of students' identities. In choosing a qualitative methodology, researchers have to bear in mind that their roles in conducting research are not neutral (Cohen, et al., 2011). They have to reflect upon how they influence the research, including their own values, beliefs, biases, and interpretation of the world, as well as act as the primary instrument in data collection and analysis (Preissle, 2006; Merriam, 1998). Therefore, in adopting a qualitative methodology, my experiences both under the Chinese educational system and the University of Nottingham China campus provided predispositions and biases. They had been to be taken into account into the process of reporting the research results.

The Participants

The data collection was conducted on students from two universities: Zhejiang University and the University of Nottingham, China. The research participants were undergraduate students in these two universities. There were two phases of data collection: the first phase was from December 2011 to July 2012, the second phase was in June 2014. The student interviewees involved in the two phases were different.

One important criterion in both phases of fieldwork to select the interviewees in my study was their subjects. All student interviewees I selected were from subjects in the departments of Humanities and Social Sciences. It allowed me to have a better understanding of the interviewees' accounts since I have studied these areas myself. Also, I did not involve any students from science departments. On one hand, it was because I have limited understanding of science subjects. On the other hand, it is highly possible for students from Humanities and Social Sciences departments and those from science departments to have distinct identities related to their academic study. It was important for me to limit the diversity of disciplinary characteristics among students in order to fit my research purpose which is to compare and contrast students' identity and the influences of two different educational settings.

The selection of participants adopted purposive sampling and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling was used for the reason that I was aiming to select first and final year undergraduate students from Humanities and Social Science departments. In selecting both male and female students I intended to take gender into consideration in the issue of identity. However, analysis of data revealed that gender differences were not a main influencing factor in students' identity change in their academic and social lives.

In the first phase of fieldwork, convenience sampling was used as the participants selected are the easiest to reach. They were picked and contacted by people working in these two universities who are members of my personal social network. In the second phase, I first used convenience sampling. Four student interviewees were initially contacted as help had been provided by staff within the two universities with whom I had personal contact from the first phase of fieldwork. A snowballing sampling was then adopted through which I asked the four students to invite other students to participate in my research.

During the first phase of the fieldwork, twenty-four students were chosen to participate, including twelve from the Zhejiang University and twelve from the University of Nottingham, China. Of the twelve students involved from each university, six were first-year students and six final-year students. At the time, the first-year students were useful for the research as they were likely to have seen their identity change during the transformation from secondary schools to the universities. I believed that the final-year students had experienced their identities changes in the university such that the influences of the educational settings and context could be revealed. Within the six students from each year, they were three male students and three female students. All twenty-four students were from subjects within Humanities, or Social Sciences. Two rounds of interviews were conducted with each of the twenty-four students (the participants and the time schedule for the two rounds of interviews are illustrated in Appendix A.).

The second phase data were collected through online communication tools (i.e. Skype, QQ and WeChat). In this phase I selected six final-year (Year 4) students from each university. There were three male and three female students in each university group. All twelve student participants were from Humanities and Social Sciences. Reflected from the analysis of first phase's data, I realised it was overly complicated to compare and contrast students identity changes and contextual influences between the two universities as well as the two year-groups horizontally and vertically. Thus, in the second phase, I restricted the participant group to final year students only, in the belief that this would enable me to explore the identity change of students during the whole four years of university experiences. The participants and their subjects are presented in the following Table 4-1 and Table 4-2. In terms of participants' socio-economic background, since the social hierarchy in the context of China is complicated and elusive, it is difficult to list which "class" different participants belong to. Instead, the occupations of participants' parents have been listed in the tables as indicators in order to reflect participants' socio-economic backgrounds. It is difficult to indicate that UNNC participants were from more privileged family background. However, the difference between the tuition fees each year for the

two universities is large - for UNNC is 80000rmb (approximately 8000GBP) while for ZJU is 4800rmb (approximately 480GBP). Moreover, parental expectations which were mentioned frequently by the UNNC participants were not mentioned much by ZJU participants.

University	Name	Gender	Subject	Socio-economic Background
University of Nottingham Ningbo China **(UNNC)**	Sun	Male	International Business	Father runs his own business, and mother works as a financial consultant in a big company. Both parents expected him to study abroad after university.
	Yu	Male	International Studies	Father is an engineer; mother is a secondary school teacher. They expected him to continue his study after graduating from the university.
	Chen	Male	International Studies	Parents are businessmen who run their family business. They would like him to take over family business after finishing his Business-related Master's degree abroad.
	Cai	Female	International Business with Spanish	Both parents have management-level jobs in banks. They supported her decision to study abroad after graduation.
	Xia	Female	International Communication	Parents are businessmen who run their family business. Parents supported her decision to study in the UK for her Master's degree.
	Dong	Female	International Communication	Father works as a local government official and mother works as an accountant in a big company.

Table 4-1 Participants from UNNC

University	Name	Gender	Subject	Socio-economic Background
ZheJiang University **(ZJU)**	Z-Pan	Male	Law	Parents work in a state-owned oil company. They expected him to be a lawyer after graduating from the university.
	Z-Hu	Male	Management School: Information Management	Father has a small clothing factory; mother is a full-time mum.
	Z-Ke	Male	Finance	Father teaches in the primary school in their village; mother works as an accountant in the same school.
	Z-Le	Female	Public Policy: Labour and Social Security	Father works in a bank; mother is a primary school teacher. They asked her to make her own decision on whether to do a PhD in ZJU or not.
	Z-Shen	Female	Public Policy: Labour and Social Security	Father works in a steel mill as skilled worker; mother is a nurse.
	Z-Qi	Female	Public Management	Father works as a manager in a trading company; mother works in sales for a shopping centre.

Table 4-2 Participants from ZJU

In addition to the information listed in the two tables, all 12 student interviewees studied in "key" secondary schools before university. Since both universities followed the rules for student recruitment in China's university entry examination system[1], students require a certain score (the score for "key" universities) in order to apply to them. The universities can then select students from the highest scored until they reached the planed number of students. In this sense, all 12 students were high achieving students who experienced the same Chinese educational system before university. However, before

[1] However, there is an alternative way of recruitment for both universities, in which students can apply before the national entry university examination. The universities set writing tests and interviews for selecting students, but the number of students who can be recruited through this alternative is quite limited. For example, in 2011, 50 students entered the University of Nottingham China through this alternative way, compared to 1286 through the university examination. In addition, students applying to the University of Nottingham China have to get115 out of 150 or higher in the English language test in the entry examination (For majors in English department, the required score is 120 or higher).

university as the entering scores for ZJU was higher than for UNNC in China's university entrance examinations (Gaokao), and this may indicate that the participants from ZJU were stronger academically than UNNC students.

Data Collection: Method and the Two Phases of Fieldwork

Data Collation Method: Semi-Structured Interviews

I used interviews as my research method for this study as they provided chances to explore and to understand the unobservable aspect in terms of what and how students think. I will discuss this method in detail in this section.

Interviews are an appropriate approach for this study, because that are done on the basis that knowledge is constructed though interactions and conversations between researchers and participants, which is consistent with the philosophical stance of the researcher. Cohen and his colleagues (2011) consider interviews as conversations that take place between two people, though they are initiated by the interviewer for data collection purposes. The primary aim of interviews in research is to gather specific kinds of information and to explore what is in and on participants'' minds (Merriam, 2009). For researchers, interviews are necessary when they cannot observe behaviour, emotions and how people see the world (Patton, 2002). Since the purpose of this research is to understand students' academic and social experiences in two different educational settings through the lens of identity , students' "thoughts", "values", "prejudices", "perceptions", "views", "feelings" and "perspectives" needed to be explored (Wellington, 2000, p.71). Therefore, this was a suitable approach for my study, especially when observation was not possible.

I used semi-structured interviews among various types of interviews. Semi-structured interviews are a common approach in collecting qualitative data in research which retain a certain degree of flexibility to allow respondents to direct the conversation whilst being guided by a general topic or loosely

defined questions (Rowbotham, 2004). There were two reasons for me to select semi-structured interviews. First, they not only allowed participants to express their perceptions and reveal their experiences, but also gave both the researcher and participants the ability to clarify their meaning. My concern was that on one hand, some academic terms the researcher used regarding the research can lead to misunderstanding by the students. On the other hand, young students in the universities may use their own type of language to describe their thoughts and feelings and possibly require much further explanation. Secondly, the purpose of my research meant that this was required data from students' recalling of their experiences. Semi-structured interviews are ideal for such in-depth probing of perspectives, attitudes and experiences (Legard, et al., 2003). The semi-structure interviews offered me opportunities to give the students some probing questions in order to encourage them to answer the questions by digging into their experiences.

As an interviewer, collecting data was a process of trying to be "a sponge; a sounding board; a prober; a listener; a counsellor; a challenger; a sharer" and combinations of the above (Ribbins, 2007, p.208). Interviews with students were interactions rather than exchanges of questions and answers. Although the flexibility in interviews created possibilities of providing only partial knowledge or even inaccurate information (Cohen, et al., 2007), social research in nature is complicated and being constructed by partial knowledge (Creswell, 2008).

In the next two sections, the experience of conducting the two phases' fieldwork will be presented.

First Phase's Fieldwork

In the first phase's Fieldwork, two rounds of interviews were conducted on 12 UNNC students and 12 ZJU students. The first round of interviews aimed to gather and probe students' biographies and current academic and social experiences in universities (December 2011 – February 2012). The main

purpose of the second round of interviews was to gain understandings of students' changes during the period in their universities (May 2012 – July 2012). The interview schedule in the first fieldwork for each student in the two universities is presented in Appendix A. The two rounds of interview data were transcribed, translated and analysed. Appendix B shows the process of data analysis for the first phase's fieldwork and an example of comparative tale between the two universities' students is provided in Appendix D.

When I was analysing the first fieldwork's transcribed interview data, however, I experienced great difficulty in answering my research questions based on the findings of the first fieldwork. As a result, I went back to the literature to gain a better understanding of students' identity. After accessing more literature on identity theories and students' identity changes, I realised that firstly the interview questions I designed had not followed my conceptual framework by themes. The interview data I gained from the students thus could not be linked to the conceptual framework. Moreover, another main issue was the lack of previous interview experience which meant that additional information was not probed for when students made their statements. It was not possible to collect more interview data from the same group of students because the final year students had already left their universities at the time. After discussion with my supervisors, it was decided to conduct a new set of fieldwork. Therefore, reflecting on this experience, a second set of interviews was carried out in 2014. The second phase data more fully reflected the three dimensions of students' identity changes. As a result, the findings and discussions in this thesis (see Chapter Five, Six, Seven, and Eight) are presented on the basis of the second phase's fieldwork. Nevertheless, the first phase data had great importance in this study on the following aspects:

Firstly, the first phase's fieldwork laid the foundation for the second phase data collection. For example, having gone through the process of applying for and receiving official permission to conduct research in both universities, returning for second phase research was unproblematic. Also, the respondents from the

first phase recommended potential participants for the second phase's fieldwork.

Secondly, analysing the data from my first phase's fieldwork was essential for selecting and developing new interview questions for use for the second phase's data collection. They were refined providing an interview guide (see the refined interview questions in Appendix E.). Interview questions were changed which students found difficult to answer and more questions were added to better reflect students' identities.

Thirdly, the first phase of fieldwork played a significant role in the development of the comparative framework. The initial comparative framework was designed on the basis of the existing literature of student identity change. According to the analysis of the first phase's data, changes were made to the comparative framework: new elements were added to it and elements which were irrelevant were removed. For example, the aspect of students' transformation phases appeared to be a vital element in students' identity change. Changes were also made as a result of returning to the literature after the first phase's data analysis. The refined comparative framework which I will explain in more detail (see "The Comparative Framework") assisted the data analysis process of the second phase's fieldwork.

Finally, the experience of my first phase's fieldwork made me to reflect on my role as a novice researcher. I realised from this experience that my lack of interview skills were likely to hinder the quality of my study. Thus, I developed interview techniques for the main study by taking short courses for researchers' interview skills and practicing more.

Second Phase's Fieldwork

In the second phase fieldwork, internet-based in-depth interviews were used in data collection. The use of online communication tools in the interviews can be justified as follows:

Primarily, since these tools allow real-time information exchanges, they can provide a synchronous communicating environment which enables the interviewer and interviewees to have a similar experience through face-to-face interactions (Berg, 2007). Especially when video chats through the communication tools are available, they highly mimic face-to-face interactions because interviewee's gestures and facial expressions are visible to the interviewer.

Using online tools in conducting interviews to university students is not a new approach of communication, but a common way for them to interact with others and to express their opinions. Since this generation's university students spend a lot of their time online, they have fewer problems in presenting themselves through online communication tools than their predecessors (Sullivan, 2013). All 12 interviewees in my study stated that they accessed their online social network and communication tools a few times every day to communicate with their friends and family.

Researchers also indicate that online interactions may help some participants to express themselves better than face-to-face interviews (Ellison, et al., 2006; Berg, 2007). Online interviews, for example, allow interviewees to choose the environment they are familiar with for the communication; for some interviewees using online communication tools create a "safe distance" between them and the interviewer which make them feel more relaxed to express themselves (Ellison, et al., 2006; Berg, 2007). In my study, having the interviewees online with me gave the participants an impression that they could

open about their perceptions since I was far away from their lives and social circles. It potentially made the information I collected from interviews more accurate in terms that they might present themselves in an authentic way.

However, when online communication tools have been used for interviewing, there are ethical concerns (Berg, 2007). These are addressed in this study (see "Ethical Issues"). Additionally, although the technology about online communication tools has improved dramatically over the last decade, the technical problems which associate with the use of these tools are undeniable. Thus, I took in consideration of this limitation and reflected it in my role as a researcher.

Before I went onto conducting the second phase's fieldwork, I undertook a pilot study in both universities (one student from each university). It allowed me to ensure that the interviews could function well. By piloting the interview schedule, I had the chance to practice my interview skills, refine some of the interview questions to fit better into my research purpose based on interviewees' responses, and gain confidence for my main study. Based on my conceptual framework, I identified questions into three categories which were about role, group and personal identity to fit the research purposes. By focussing on information which may link to the conceptual framework of the study and research questions, I could have possible patterns in mind during the data collection process and was in a better position to probe in more depth during the interviews.

Ethical Issues

There were mainly four ethical issues considered by the researcher. The first ethical issue concerned was access and acceptance. Researchers cannot access a school or university without demonstrating their role as researcher to keep on

investigating (Cohen, et al., 2011). At the initial point, I exchanged emails with the research offices of both universities to illustrate my research purpose and main methods in order to gain official permission to do the research in these two universities. In the later stage of the research, I contacted significance figures who are responsible for research in their organisation in order to achieve good cooperation with them.

Secondly, informed consent was emphasised. It is a research procedure necessity that enables individuals to choose whether to participate after being informed by about purposes of the research (Diener, 1978, in Cohen, et al., 2011). The participants were informed of the aims of my study, the methods for data collection, time required, and the elements that would be likely to influence them. They were given free choice for taking part in the research or not in any stage of the research, and I made sure they understand the procedure of the research and the potential harm it may cause. The written consent forms were provided for the participants to assure them that the data will be used only for the research purpose (See Appendix F.).

The third point considered participants' privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. In respecting participants' privacy, the researcher did not probe on sensitive questions and private affairs in the interviews. Anonymity was promised. Pseudonyms were used in storing the files (including the records of interviews, interview transcripts, and the matrixes which the research drew from the data), and the real name of participants does not appear in the final piece. The files containing research data are password protected, and stored in my personal computer drive which can only be accessed by me. Furthermore, I have also ensured that the public cannot relate the information in the data to a particular participant in order to keep the study confidential. Personal information which might lead to the identification of the participant was deleted from interview transcripts and does not appear in the final thesis.

Although I agree that anonymity is an ethical issue (Cohen, et al., 2011; Homan, 1991), I also support the argument that areflexive strategy needs to be adopted (Baez, 2002; Nespor, 2000; Clark, 2006). In terms of my study, I chose to not anonymise the university name since anonymising universities' names in this study might lead to decontextualisation and thus would limit the scope for my analysis. If the two universities in this study are separated off from the local contexts including educational policies, culture and so forth, the data about the two institutions would be more as descriptive fragments. It would not fit my research purpose. Moreover, since the body of students is so large in the two universities, it is highly unlikely for the public to relate the participants' information in this study with any particular student.

Finally, as the second phase of fieldwork was conducted online, this study also took in consideration of ethical issues concerning internet-mediated research. Doing research online allows for more research possibilities as well as raises certain challenges in relation to the principles of research ethics (Markham, 2008). However, the circumstances which may raise ethical issues in doing online research, such as participants' age which is difficult to verify, some online discussion sites can be highly transient, and some participants may have a writing style which are identifiable by others in their online discussion sites (see in Sullivan, 2012; Markham, 2008), are not applicable in my research. The participants in my second fieldwork are real students in the two universities, and the use of online communication tools such as Skype, QQ and Wechat is strictly between the researcher and the participant (one-to-one) during interviews.

In this study, the relevant ethical issues of using online communication tools concerns informed consent and participants' privacy and anonymity. Doing research online could make it difficult for researchers to have informed consent of the actual participant in writing, especially when the participant desires anonymity (Markeham, 2008). This issue was addressed in my study: all participants in my second fieldwork signed the consent forms electronically

after I sent them the forms through online communication tools (Skype, QQ, Wechat). In terms of participants' privacy and anonymity, Sullivan (2012) has warned researchers who collect their data though skype that companies like skype have the right to record and share the information customers provide while using the tool. As such, it could be a problematic issue in concerning participants' privacy and anonymity when the research project is about sensitive topic. Since the topic of this study is not as sensitive as it might attract attention of those companies, participants' privacy and anonymity might not be an issue in this case. Moreover, no personal or private affairs had been mentioned during the online interviews which make an intrusion of participants' privacy less likely to happen.

The Comparative Framework

Before explaining the procedure of data analysis for the second phase's fieldwork, I would like to summarise the comparative approach adopted in this study. The comparative framework was developed from the existing theories of identities and the literature on student identity changes. The comparative framework about students' identities detailed different aspects which I should examine in comparing and contrasting the two universities' students.

The comparative framework was selected inductively in my research rather than decided beforehand. It was initially developed from the theoretical framework of identities which I conceptualised from literature (See Appendix C). After the first data collection and analysis, my attention had been directed to some key aspects of students' identities. Meanwhile, the first data collection and analysis help me to see some aspects which had been overlooked in the initial design of comparative framework. It took me some time to combine the findings in the first fieldwork with the conceptualisation of identity thesis which later led to the development of the comparative framework which I used in the analysis of my second phase of fieldwork data. In the comparative

framework, there are ***three main dimensions***: **students' role, group and personal identity change** in students' identity change. In the following pages, I will illustrate three tables (Table 4-3, Table 4-4, and Table 4-5) to show the analytical categories within the three dimensions of the comparative framework. The use of the comparative framework will be explained in the next section about data analysis (in the third stage).

Transitional Phases of Students' Role Identity	Expectation of Being a Student	Meaning of Being a Student	Contextual Influences (National, Institutional and Individual level)
Phase 1			
Phase 2			
…			
Phase n			

Table 4-3 Comparative Framework: Analytical Categories in Role Identity

Transitional Phases of Students' Group Identity	Group Norms/Values	Sense of Belonging towards the Group	Contextual Influences (National, Institutional and Individual level)
Phase 1			
Phase 2			
…			
Phase n			

Table 4-4 Comparative Framework: Analytical Categories in Group Identity

Transitional Phases of Students' Personal Identity	Biological Narratives and Personal Traits	Personal Values and Beliefs	Contextual Influences (National, Institutional and Individual level)
Phase 1			
Phase 2			
…			
Phase n			

Table 4-5 Comparative Framework: Analytical Categories in Personal Identity

Data Analysis

In this section, I will explain the distinctive but also interconnected stages in the process of data analysis and interpretation of my second fieldworks' data. I will present the stages in a structured form in order to make it clear despite the messiness and complexity of the process of data analysis. There were mainly six stages which data analysis in this study had been undertaken and I will discuss each stage below.

The first stage of data analysis went on throughout data collection. After each interview I transcribed, translated and read through the analysed interview transcripts and made notes about key points, contradictions and questions raised. It has to be pointed here that a few steps had been done to control losing meaning through translation. Most of transcripts were able to be translated. However, in order to achieve accuracy of the translation and participant validation, I showed the participants their transcripts in both Chinese and English and sought confirmation that what I had translated in English was what they had said in Chinese and had meant to say. This did not lead to any significant changes but provided an opportunity to validate and probe further for meaning. For example, I used the opportunity to ask one student what she meant by *"独立思考 (independent thinking)"* and what was the difference to her between independent thinking and critical thinking.

There was "repetitive interplay between the collection and analysis of data" (Bryman, 2008, p.539), and the on-going data analysis of transcripts informed subsequent data collection (see Miles & Huberman, 1994). For example, in one student's interview he mentioned the supplementary courses were not good. When another student mentioned it, I probed further why to see if the reasons given were the same.

The second stage was about how I handle the raw data. I read through the 12 students' transcripts to familiarise myself with the data as a whole. I took 2 transcripts from the ZJU group and 2 from UNNC group. I chose these four students' transcriptions because they broadly reflected the issues discussed by other members in their university groups, and particularly provided rich data and thick descriptions. I then coded these four participants' transcripts with keywords that highlighting patterns, opposing points, and irregularities (See Atkinson & Coffey, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 2004) in each individual transcript. The code emerged inductively from the data.

In the third stage, the codes were grouped into themes. I did this by putting the codes from the 2 ZJU students by side and creating groups of codes. I did this for the 2 UNNC students' codes as well. I then constructed themes from the coded groups that I felt can mostly reveal the data (Bryman, 2008). Their themes were not the exact terms interviewees used but my interpretation of what the four students said. These themes were organised under the pre-existing categories in the comparative framework. In this sense, the comparative framework had a deductive influence on the analysis of data (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003).

In the fourth stage, I applied the themes relating to each category to the 12 transcripts and I put segments and quotations of data into each of the relevant theme. In order to avoid what Goffey and Atkinson (2004) call fragmentation of data, I included two more lines of our conversations in front of and behind the quotation (in italic font to differentiate with the quotation) when I put the quotations into the themes. As such, it enabled me make sure the information had been themed appropriately also reminded me to be sensitive to quotations' situated context in my process of writing up.

In the fifth stage, within each theme, what each individual student had said was summarised in written words and characterised by diagrams. Within the

diagrams, UNNC students and ZJU students were put separately by their university groups but side by side for comparing and contrasting. The summaries indicated key analytical points from the data for individual students, within university groups, between the two university groups and overall.

In the final stage, I read and reread the summaries and referred back to the raw data, the literature and made new diagrams to characterise the data as a whole. This did not lead to change of analytical categories, but led to refining themes under each category. For example, under the category of student role change the theme of "becoming independent learner" emerged to a better characterisation of what I previously called "possessing academic responsibility".

The Role of the Researcher

My previous educational experiences under the Chinese secondary educational system and in UNNC allowed me to access in-depth contextual information both formally and informally. Especially, it was easy to develop trustworthiness with interviewees. Students felt comfortable and happy to answer my questions and discuss with me after my introduction and the necessary explanations, as they saw me as someone who shared a similar educational experience.

However, I also felt challenged as a novice researcher to move beyond my identity with pre-existing beliefs and biases about the two educational systems (Chinese and British) as well as student identity change (since I had in mind my personal identity change in the university). Meanwhile, during the interviews in my first fieldwork, students assumed that some of their statements were self-evident to me. At the time, I did neither probe further when students made such statements nor asked for reasons. Reflecting on my

first phase of fieldwork, in the second phase, I kept encouraging interviewees to give more in detailed explanations to their statements by asking “Could you tell me more about it?”, “Could you explain it more?”, “Where did you get that idea from?”.

I paid extra attention in terms of how I posited myself as being included and/or excluded in the data analysis process. I took in consideration of possible bias because of my background, personality in influencing the research process and how I analysed the students' identity changes. I reminded myself that the interpretation of data might be different in other researchers’ eyes. Thus it was significant to present the data which can reflect a reality, and make analysis of data deeply rely on the research process.

It is necessary for me to acknowledge the limitations of this study as a researcher. Limited by time and finances, I scheduled interviews for the second phase of fieldwork through video-chats (using online tools, i.e. Skype, QQ, Wechat). The limitation of not being able to have face-to-face interviews was undeniable. Sometimes interviews had been interrupted by technical problems which hindered their fluidity. However, communicating with participants online had a positive side. All university participants were being quite active on these online social networks, thus I was able to contact them after the interviews. I was able to always get their response if I left them a message or asked a question, which provided benefits for participant validation.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Regarding research trustworthiness, the criteria for judging are discussed widely by researchers in the literature about both quantitative and qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln., 1985; Hammersley, 1992, Finlay, 2006). The focus of the discussion is on whether the criteria of trustworthiness on quantitative

research could apply to qualitative research. Validity (referring to accuracy of the result) and generalisability (i.e. external validity, refers to how applicable the findings of the study to others) are two core norms in judging the trustworthiness of quantitative research (Swanborn, 1996). Qualitative researchers have different criteria, and they argue that the ultimate judge of trustworthiness is on how far a convincing story could be told (Dunne, et al., 2005). Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria to access it: credibility (deals with to what extent the findings match reality); transferability (refers to applicability of the findings other research); dependability (addresses the question of consistency); and confirmability (refers to the neutrality of the study). The credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of this qualitative study are addressed below.

Credibility

The credibility of this study is underpinned by the triangulation of methods and perspectives Credibility deals with the question of whether the findings match reality given the data presented. A set of techniques have been suggested to enhance credibility such as triangulation and participant validation (Cohen, et al., 2011; Patton, 2002). In my study, the findings from interview data were cross-referenced with documentary data. Though the triangulation of data though cannot add up to the whole story of students' identity change in universities (Silveman, 2005; Cohen et al., 2011), it did provide me with a more complex, multi-layered angle in analysing the data. Participant validation (Guba & Lincoln., 1985) had also been used as a technique to ensure credibility. I have kept in contact with all six interviewees from UNNC and all six interviewees from ZJU by email and online social networks (i.e. WeChat, Skype, QQ). I also showed all students' their transcripts in both Chinese and English to validate what they said during interviews.

Transferability

Qualitative researchers are usually criticised by positivists that their interpretive results are subjective assertions which cannot generalised (Ballinger 2006). Therefore, qualitative researchers have to pay attention to the criterion of transferability to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, as it refers to the applicability of one study's findings to others. I agree with Lincon and Guba (1985) who argued that the level of transferability was highly dependent on the context of the study. In other words, although each qualitative case is unique, if other researchers believe their research context is similar to what has been described in mine they can link my study to theirs'. Thus, in order to enhance the level of transferability, I provided thick descriptions to the institutional contexts (Bryman, 2008), as well as the two university groups of students. In addition, I linked my findings to identity theories rather than focussing on generalising the findings (Bryman, 2008), which I believed was more essential in qualitative research.

Dependability

In order to establish dependability, I need to present all phases of the research process honestly and clearly (Bryaman, 2008). I presented how the participants were chosen and how access to both universities was gained. I explained the two experiences of data collection. I justified the reasons why I decided to use the second set of interview data as the research data for this study, and explained how the data had been analysed. I also reflected on the methodological limitations while explaining the data collection. As such, as Wellington (2000) suggested, this qualitative study can be open to criticism and the quality of this study can be judged based on the full account of information which was given.

Confirmability

Patton (2002) noted that in qualitative research to ensure real objectivity is difficult, since researchers' bias always has an impact on designing and conducting research. The subjectivity, as I reflected on my own study, is undeniable. However, I intended to acknowledge the subjectivity and constantly reflect on it in my data analysis. During the process of analysing the data and writing up, I was open to different interpretations to the data and seeking for different opinions. I made the process an on-going critical reflection, by discussing with my critical friends and going back to the raw data and literature to gain a richer understanding.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided methodology and methods for exploring, comparing and contrasting students' identity changes in two universities with different educational settings. I first explained how I posit myself philosophically and then presented the research design I adopted. I also explained methodological decisions I made during the data collection, and presented the data analysis process. I finally considered ways to establish trustworthiness of the study.

In the next three chapters, I will present the analysis of the data and provide discussions of the findings in each chapter. In Chapter Five and Six, I will interpret and discuss students' role and group identity changes reflected from the data and explore the similarities and differences from the two universities. In Chapter Seven, the findings and discussions about students' personal identity will be presented. I will again compare and contrast the two universities. Finally, I will try to link students' role, group and personal identity in Chapter Eight.

Chapter Five: Students' Role Identity Change as University Learners

Among the different role identities students possessed, their role identity as university learners was predominantly showed in this study. It was because the design of this study focussed on students' experiences in universities, and also participants' university lives in the four years was around academic learning and being academic learners. By analysing of students' role identity, as university learners, the main direction of students' role identity change showed in the data was to be independent learners.

It emerged from the data that there were three phases of student role identity change within the four years' university experiences for both universities' students. The first phase was students' transition from being secondary school learners to university/independent learners. This phase had taken place in the first year's programme for UNNC students and in the General education programme (one or two years) for ZJU students. The second phase was a settling phase, in which students were making efforts to achieve as university learners. The data suggests in this phase they pursued their development in three aspects including academic performance, generic skills and autonomy in learning. The third phase was the transition from university learner identity to future professional identity. In the period they had to face the leaving university learners' role and make decisions about their future. The starting points of the third phase varied among individual students.

Thus, the three phases of students' role identity change as university learners and the contextual influences in each phase will be presented in this chapter. A discussion on the findings of the three phases will be provided afterwards.

First Phase of Student Role Identity: Transition from Secondary School Learners to University Learners

In the first phase of role identity change, the data of this study showed the transition of students' perceptions about themselves as learners from secondary schools to universities. The first theme revealed from the data in this phase of identity change was that students expected themselves to be independent and self-responsible learners. To differentiate themselves from being secondary school learners, entering universities was seen by students a transition point, though difficulties were encountered by both universities' students to make changes. The second theme appeared was that students from both universities, as reflected in the previous educational experiences, expected themselves to be "good learners" with great academic performance and would work hard to achieve this.

Developing Self-responsibility and Finding New Aims

The transition of students' perceptions about themselves as learners from secondary schools to universities was revealed by the data. Distinguishing themselves from their student role identity in secondary schools, students from both contexts tended to view themselves as "adults" and more independent learners in universities. All students identified themselves by using the words "independent", "adult" or "grown up" when discussing their learning in the university. As positioning themselves of being "independent learner" and/or "adult learner", students from both universities (UNNC: Chen, Yu, Cai, Sunand Dong; ZJU: Pan, Qi, Shen, Le) expected that they would and should be accountable for their academic successes and failure and take more responsibility for their own future through learning and not rely on teachers and/or parents' instructions. For example:

> *Dong (UNNC): As a university student, learning is still the most important thing and this is also why we go to universities. The difference*

between now and in the secondary school is that I need to take more control of my learning rather than waiting for teachers or parents tell me what to do.

Pan (ZJU): After all, I became an adult when I entered the university. I have to be accountable and responsible for my own studies in the university. I think that is different from being a secondary school student.

Despite students' good intention of being "independent learners" who are responsible for their own learning, it was not easy for them implement this idea immediately after entering the university. There were participants from both universities who stated that they had experienced a period of confusion and lacking of motivation in learning since they first entered universities (UNNC: U-Sun, Cai, Yu, Chen; ZJU: Shen, Qi, Le). Cai (UNNC) and Shen (ZJU) explained that because they no longer felt the pressure from Gaokao, the priority in their life which used to be study now can have much more appealing choices. For example:

Shen (ZJU): Because I used to have the pressure from Gaokao, most of my life was about study. There is no such pressure in the university, so I can have a much more social life than before which is way more interesting than study.

UNNC students Cai, Chen, Dong, Sunand Yu suggested that they also needed time to get used to the transition. It was a challenge for them to be more self-disciplined, and to face the consequence of their own behaviour without the guidance of teachers and/or the pressure from parents. All UNNC participants believed that possessing learning autonomy and self-management skills is the requirement of being learners in a British university, though their perceptions may not be accurate since ZJU students also need to face the transition.

Yu (UNNC): I think an important element in British way of teaching and learning is: an emphasis on self-study. Teachers would assume that we

can learn our text books by ourselves. However, as students who used to be told by teachers what to do in previous education, in the first two years we normally didn't really read those books or material…But of course then I couldn't get high marks in exams because I didn't read…It took time for me to find a new way in managing my learning...For example, how to plan what to read and when to finish reading.

All UNNC students in this study tended to be positive in seeing their transition as they had noticed their changes gradually and developed their learning abilities at the end of the first stage's study. As Dong mentioned:

Dong (UNNC): First, I just studied as I used to do in secondary school – to do whatever my teachers told me to…which was not the right way… then, I have learnt how to plan my own study in the first year's programme- to think about what to learn and how to learn it. I developed my learning abilities…as a more independent learner.

Compared to UNNC students in this study, ZJU students expressed more negative feelings about the transition. All six students noted that they felt confused and aimless when they first entered the university due to the lack of information and formal support, and had to follow what peer students and/or older students did. For example:

Qi (ZJU): All of a sudden, we didn't know what to do (when first entered the university). We didn't have any fixed classes. No one told us what we should do and there is no one such as my head teacher in the secondary school to guide me. For a long time, I just followed whatever my roommates did… Then, we had older students who could give us advice about learning and student life in the university, which helped a lot.

Le (ZJU): It was like…following what others had been doing. I worked hard in the first year simply because others were working hard. In fact, I was confused and didn't quite know what I was aiming to achieve…

In the first phase of student identity change, participants from both universities had expectations of transitioning into independent and self-responsible learners. When looking back their experiences in this transition, participants from UNNC in this study focussed on the skills and abilities they learnt in managing it while ZJU participants emphasised in their frustrations. It is believed that the contextual factors which refer to both universities' settings in the first year had contributed to the difference and they will be discussed later in this section.

Becoming "Good Learners": Academic Performance and Effort

The data of this study showed that student participants from both universities tended to compare their role identity as learners in the university with their previous educational experiences. Similar to when they were secondary school learners, they saw "working hard (*努力，用功*)" as an important criterion for them to identify themselves as 'good' students or not. They gained their previous perceptions about how to 'work hard' as a student and internalised the conception as their criteria for the study in the university. However, the two universities' participants' experiences and self-perceptions in this study differed in their transition from secondary schools to universities, since participants from the two universities had different views about themselves as learners in secondary schools.

Even though participants from both universities performed well academically before university as they all graduated from key secondary schools and entered key universities, there was a difference in terms of the entering mark for the two universities. ZJU had relatively higher entering marks compared to UNNC. The data indicated that students from the two contexts had different perceptions about themselves in terms of being a 'good student', or not, in secondary schools. In UNNC students' eyes, as indicated by Yu and Chen, they were not as 'good' as students who went into top universities in China in terms

of their academic performance in the secondary schools. As Yu put it: *"We (UNNC students) don't need to pretend that we used to be as good as those students who now in the top universities in China… if someone did that well in Gaokao, he/she will probably go to somewhere like Qinghua University, or Zhejiang University, rather than come here. I have to say I didn't work as hard as those top students in my secondary school."* All six students they believed they made a bold decision to study in the transnational university, but at the same time they had another chance to be "good students" in this new platform from a different education system.

> *Chen (UNNC): Here no one cares how you did in secondary school. It feels like it is a new opportunity for me to prove to myself that I can also be a good student. I can start afresh. So I have to study hard. And also to prove I made a good decision to come to study in this university.*

Thus, five out of six students (Chen, Yu, U-Xia, Dong, and Cai) stated that they had to work harder in the university than before to reach their expectation of being "good students".

ZJU students (Pan, Hu, Le, Shen, and Qi), in contrast, had encountered shocks when they first entered the university as the pressure of being "good students" among peers in the university was high. Their previous learning experiences and excellent academic performance in the secondary schools made them to have similar expectations of themselves in their university studies. They believed that their input into learning could lead to a positive learning result. Taking Le (ZJU) as an example, who claimed that *"I know what I am capable of from previous learning experiences in schools. As long as I work hard, I could achieve. That's why I expect to do the same in the university."* Nevertheless, as their peer students in ZJU were all from strong academic backgrounds, five out of six students (Pan, Hu, Shen, Qi, and Le) felt their perceptions about themselves as "good learners" had been challenged when they realised there were other students whose performances were even better. The pressure of being "good students" among peers in some cases could be too intense to cope with. Pan, Shen and Qi found out that they had lost motivation in competing with others

when the competition was too intense. They saw it as *"you can never win"* or *"it is frustrating since there is not such a thing as you are good at it, because there is always someone better."* It was also the reason for students such as Pan and Shen that saw them losing confidence in learning.

> *Pan (ZJU): I have not been confident about my learning in the university.*
>
> *Researcher: Why not?*
>
> *Pan: I think during the four years, I have found more and more things that I don't know about while my vision has been broadened. Rather, I found myself being overconfident in the secondary school as I was top of my class. Here, there are so many students better than me. I abandoned the arrogant attitude I used to have, but meanwhile lost confidence.*

All ZJU students in this study stated that they worked extremely hard in their previous studies and described being a student in secondary school as working extremely long hours, and having no social life at all. Thus, they set high standards in measuring the time and energy they put into study in the university. They were critical towards the effort they put into university and stated that they should work harder. Even though they had been working hard, they tended to be modest in describing their effort.

> *Researcher: Do you think you have worked hard in the university?*
>
> *Hu (ZJU): Not really.*
>
> *Researcher: Why do you think so?*
>
> *Hu: Comparing to my secondary school, the time I spent in studying was not as extremely long. I used to study for the whole day, from early morning till night.*

Contextual Influences

Individual Level

For all students in this study, entering university was the first time to they had to live independently and manage their finances by themselves. As Yu, Chen, Dong from UNNC and Shen, Qi, Le from ZJU mentioned, since they had to live on campus and far away from their family, they had to develop self-reliance to balance between academic learning and other aspects of university life. For example:

> *Le (ZJU): I could behave like a child at home when I was still in secondary school. But now, I am far away from home and I have no one to rely on but myself. I need to behave independently- not only to take care of myself but to be more conscious in learning. If I do not be responsible to myself, then nobody will.*

Thus, the change of personal contexts had not only contributed to their identities of being "independent learners" but also "independent" individuals.

In this study, the perceptions of the two universities' students of being university learners were highly related to their previous educational experience. On one hand, entering university was the most dramatic transition in students' university lives as it challenged their previous understanding of how to be a student. As Marton, Wen and Wong (2005) mentioned in their study that what students say about academic experience in university is usually by contrasting their experience in secondary schools. Since being learners in university is different from in students' previous education, they need to reconstruct understanding and behaviours around role, for instance, being more self-disciplined. On the other hand, as previous education experiences impacted considerably on students' attitudes and behaviours as being students (Ninnes, et al., 1999), participants from both universities in the study retained some aspects of how to be students from previous experiences. Both universities'

interviewees still believed that they should be good learners who can perform well academically by putting good effort into learning.

Disciplinary and Institutional Level

Both universities provide programmes for students to adjust themselves to fitting into the universities' environment. The Preliminary Year Programme in UNNC is designed to prepare Chinese students with academic English language, study and thinking skills in order to meet the requirements to progress to subject learning. Moreover, prior to subject learning, though they had picked their subject when they entered the university, students in UNNC had opportunities in the first year to decide if they want to stay in the subject or transfer to another(by achieving a good academic performance in the first year and apply for the transfer). In contrast, ZJU intends to provide enough information and knowledge before students decide their specific subject by letting them receive one year of general education within their department. Students were required to have general education with interdisciplinary courses within their own platforms in the first (or first two) years as the first phase of university study. After that, students had to apply for several preference subjects at the end of the first phase and then were enrolled by their department into different subjects according to their academic results' ranking of the first year. Once they had been enrolled, it was unlikely for them to transfer to a different subject.

Looking back at the first year programme in the university, Yu, Chen, U-Xia, Dong and Cai from UNNC claimed that it benefited their learning as while preparing them for their subject study in the next three years, as the programme assisted them to transition to be independent learners. Unlike in their previous educational experiences, were teachers were authoritarian and students were required to follow teachers' instruction in learning, these UNNC students

claimed that they started to become concerned about how to manage what to learn, when to learn, where to learn, and how to learn. As Chen mentioned:

> *Chen (UNNC): During the first year's programme I found it is lovely for me to study here because learning is totally up to you… Unlike some other Chinese universities which have so-called "self-study classes", here you can choose what you want to learn and how and where. But, how much you work, how much mark you will get…First year was easy but it made me to think about how can I control and manage my study by myself.*

Agreeing with Chen, UNNC students Yu, U-Xia, Dong and Cai also reported that they enjoyed the ability to control their own learning which they developed in the first stage of study in UNNC. It enabled them to dedicate more time and energy into learning and they worked even harder in the university than in the secondary school. For example:

> *Yu (UNNC): I had never worked hard before university, even for Gaokao. I didn't like secondary school, as the only thing everyone cared about was your academic results. But in the university, I sometimes work till very late and tried very hard to read as much as possible.*
>
> *Researcher: What made you change?*
>
> *Yu: I think I enjoy the learning environment here- nobody forces me to do anything and I can work on what I am interested in. I had this negative mentality thing- if you pushed me too hard I would just ignore you. Here they only tell me that I have to be responsible for the consequences if I fail exams or don't finish my assignment. I like it this way…to be treated like an adult.*

It showed from the data that UNNC's learning environment, which encouraged self-management and self-responsibility, fulfilled students' expectations of being independent and responsible learners. However, rather than only providing opportunities and encouraging students to manage their own

academic learning, all UNNC interviewees noted that support had been given by UNNC at both university and departmental level in order to help students to make correct personal decisions. As Dong mentioned:

> *Dong (UNNC): "I think it is the relatively loose learning environment: teachers and university provide us quite a lot of opportunities to find out what we really like. For example, we can transfer to another subject…It seems that they (university and department) haven't done much, but actually their supportive attitudes towards our choices are helpful. Thus, we would really think about why we learn and what we really like to learn."*

All ZJU interviewees pointed out that they heavily focussed on academic learning in the first year because there was the subject choosing procedure. They had to get high marks in order to have better opportunities to choose a "good" subject or a subject they were interested in. It forced them to put more effort in their first year's leaning. However, looking back at the first stage's study in ZJU, Le, Shen and Qi had come to a sense of feeling lost and left behind due to the problem that university failed to provide enough information. These students indicated that they did not understand in the first place why they need to learn the courses in their general education. The university had not made a clear connection to students between their learning in general education and subject learning.

> *Le (ZJU): I felt I always knew after what I should do when it was too late: I knew what I should do in the first year when I was in the second yeas… Although I think it is a good idea to have general education, our university does not try hard enough to make students understand its importance. So a lot of students complained about general education as having no significance. The university should do something to lead students. For example, I realised in the third year why I should try harder in learning Calculus in the first year. I didn't know there is a connection between my subject and this course when I was learning it.*

All ZJU interviewees mentioned that they noticed that the learning in the university requires self-management and autonomy as they were no longer pushed by teachers. However, when asked what help they had received from the university and department, Ke, Pan, Shen and Qi stated that they didn't get enough support and encouragement from the university in order to learn how to manage their learning. Instead, they were still coping with their learning in the university with the learning approaches they had in secondary schools. In comparing to UNNC participants who mentioned how the learning in the university encouraged them to take initiatives and develop their own thinking, they still mainly focussed on how to make better notes and how to memorise better. For example:

> *Researcher: So in university when you found out that you need to manage your own learning, what approaches do you use to cope with it?*
>
> *Pan (ZJU): I am still using the approaches that I have picked up since secondary school. For example, how to make notes and how to memorise things better… Apart from that, I don't think I learnt any new approaches in the university.*
>
> *Researcher: Have you received any support or help from the university in terms of learning approaches? Teachers?"*
>
> *Pan: Not really. They kind of sent the message that learning is your own business.*

The finding echoes the study conducted by Briggs, Clark and Hall (2012). They emphasised the fundamental influences of organisational context on helping students to bridge the transition from secondary school to universities. Participants from both contexts showed similarities in noticing their changes because efforts had been made and time had been given by both universities in helping students to fit into the role of university student. However, in relating to the institutional contexts, student participants' different perceptions between the two universities were based on the different settings of the first stage's study in the two universities. UNNC provided an encouraging learning environment which enabled students to make the transfer to becoming

independent learners. ZJU, in contrast, though intended to make students independent learners, had not given enough support and information as perceived by students in this study from the university and teachers. It was arguable that the large number of undergraduate students ZJU has may require huge amount of resources in order to provide enough support for students, yet, support for new students from the institutional level are essential.

Second Phase of Student Role Identity: Being University Learners

In analysing the data, it showed that students' role identity change in the second phase was developed on the basis of the first phase, but had more specific expectations of being university learners. In this phase, students in this study expected themselves to achieve as university learners and there were three aspects which they focussed on: academic performance, generic (cross-subject) skills and learner autonomy.

Having Good Academic Performance

As university learners, the first dimension that emerged from the data which concerned by the students was their academic performance. All students in this study acknowledged that getting good academic results and/or academic rewards such as scholarships and exchange opportunities was significant to them as being university learners and by achieving it, they could to some extent gain academic confidence.

Good Academic Result & Reward

Since academic results and rewards are the most obvious aspect for students to reflect themselves as learners, it is no surprise that all students in this study had seen having good academic result as an important dimension in their learner identity. In a general sense, both universities' participants made good effort in pursing good academic results, and their attitudes towards how academic results could affect their academic confidence are quite similar, but it was interesting to notice the differences between the two groups.

Participants from the two universities showed differences in how they changed the amount of effort they put in over time: UNNC participants see the effort they made as having increased during their university years while ZJU participants stated the opposite. Chen, Yu, Cai and Xiafrom UNNC suggested that they saw the development in their effort input in academic learning increased during the four years. As the final year's academic credits account for the largest percentage of the four years', all UNNC interviewees claimed that they had worked the hardest in the final year. For example:

> *Chen (UNNC): I do work very hard in my final year. I think learning in this university is one step after another: getting harder and harder. I was pretty confident about my learning before and had never got nervous before exams. But now, maybe because the final year matters too much, I spent more and more time in my study and care much more about my marks in exams.*

In contrast, ZJU students Pan, Ke, Shen and Qi claimed that there was a decrease of time and energy input into learning in the second stage of their study since they learnt the techniques to gain higher marks in exams and assignments. For example, Ke described his behaviours as:

Ke (ZJU): I worked pretty hard in the first year to get into a good subject. And then I realised how our university works. Gradually, since the second year, I have not been working as hard.

Researcher: Could you explain a bit more about that?

Ke: I mean…It's not only me, I am pretty sure we all feel the same. I can still get good marks if I don't go to class, because in our classes some teachers just read out the material, therefore the class is pointless to go …Once you know the trick to deal with exams, you don't really need to work hard. In terms of assignments…Once you found out those professors in your school always copy other's work, you may feel like: 'why should you bother to work so hard to write original pieces?'

They believed that there was no connection between effort input and good academic results in the university setting, thus they were reluctant to put more effort into learning overtime. Moreover, from the descriptions of Ke and also Pan, Shen and Qi, it appeared that the institutional context which including the settings of each years' courses and teachers' attitudes towards academic works had influenced students' perception as well as their behaviours in learning.

Regarding students' academic confidence about their performance, academic results seemed to have the most direct influence on student participants' feeling of being confident of being university learners. However, in this study, looking into each point when students felt their academic confidence was enhanced, it was not only the academic results but the combination of various influential elements. Students' own good marks, other's approval of their dedication and learning capability, their interest in the courses, and even the teaching approaches of one teacher, can lead to their feeling of confidence.

Xiafrom UNNC and Hu from ZJU believed that winning scholarships and academic competitions made them feel confident, due to others' approval of their effort.

Xia(UNNC): You cannot suddenly be confident about yourself. For me, it was usually because I did well in my subject and got a scholarship. It made me feel confident about my learning. It was like my hard work had been approved by others.

Hu (ZJU): I think winning an academic competition made me feel confident about my study. It was an approval to the effort I put in. It usually encourages me to face more academic challenges.

Yu, Chen and Cai from UNNC and Le from ZJU pointed out that their interests in certain courses and sometimes good teaching could boost their confidence and lead to good academic achievement. The good results could make them feel more confident as learners. However, this kind of academic confidence could not maintain or extend to other courses they may not be interested in. For example:

Le (ZJU): It (academic confidence) is dependent on my performance in specific courses. I mean, if the classes are interesting and I worked hard and I have done well in one course, I would feel confident about my learning; if I haven't done well, I would not be confident.

Cai (UNNC): I had this great teacher which made me very interested in Spanish. She was really responsible and had great communication with us. I was confidence since I always paid a lot of attention in her class and I was the top of my class at the end of the year… But in the next year, the Spanish teacher changed to someone else. The class is no longer fun and I stopped working as hard as before, so my confidence in the course dropped.

In-depth Understanding of Subject Knowledge

There was an acknowledgement among both universities' participants that the in-depth understanding of their subject knowledge contributed more on their self-perceived achievement of being university learners than good academic results (UNNC: Cai, Yu, Chen; ZJU: Pan, Hu, Shen, Le, Qi). As such, good academic results sometimes were not necessarily a booster of their academic confidence. Rather, they believed that to possess in-depth of understanding was significant in enhancing or maintaining their academic confidence. As UNNC student Cai mentioned:

> *Cai (UNNC): Although through all these years, my academic results were good and I got scholarship and exchange opportunity, I still feel unsatisfied with my learning. I would be more confident about myself if I dig deeper into what I have learnt. For example, I may able to get high marks to remember one theory, but if I dig deeper I would know how this theory comes from and how can we use it into real-life cases. Then, I would feel more confident about my learning.*

Similar in ZJU participants' cases, gaining in-depth understanding of knowledge meant more than good academic results for them.

> *Pan (ZJU): I think I have achieved a good quality understanding of my subject which is more important than good marks.*
>
> *Researcher: What do you mean by good quality?*
>
> *Pan: I have quite good memories, but for a Law student it is far away from enough. When I realised it, I started to understand that it is more important to really understand the knowledge I learnt rather than just memorise it.*

During their experiences of trying to gain in-depth understanding of their subject knowledge, both universities' students encountered difficulties. UNNC students in this study found it was difficult to cope with when they lacked the general picture of the knowledge related to their courses. It had been pointed

out by interviewees from UNNC (Yu, Chen, U-Xia, Dong) that the knowledge they learnt from the university, regardless of subjects, was based on "Western theories". The inherent difficulties were not only concerning language problems. When students were required to explore information deeply, they felt it increased their difficulties as they were lacking background knowledge of British culture and history. For example, Xiawho was learning International Communication mentioned:

> *(When I was reading) I may understand every word of the book, but I could not have a good understanding for the reason that there is always more background information I need to know before I read the book. It may require more cultural and historical knowledge of the West.*

She explained it by giving the example of a problem she encountered in learning the subject knowledge:

> *For example, if it is talking about one painting, I need to know its historical background and how it denotes the meaning of it… The subject requires more knowledge than we thought, so it may be better if we had that kind of knowledge before university. But it is kind of impossible for Chinese students to have that amount of knowledge of Western culture and history.*

Yu, Chen and Dong also mentioned this concern, as they felt the necessity of having a general knowledge structure in terms of background knowledge before having in-depth understanding and having discussion on specific questions. Yu also added on the statement that: *"I feel it will save us a lot of time if teachers could give us systematic introductions toward these Western theories in the first place…It was quite hard for me to gasp the whole picture without guidance."* It was noticeable here that UNNC students tended to see "the West" as a homogenous group by definition in the interviews. I would like to point out that it is arbitrary to use the term "the West" since it can generalise the features of different countries with different cultures, languages and histories. I believe when students were mentioning "the West", they were referring to the British culture they had encountered within UNNC.

In ZJU's case, Ke, Pan, Shen and Qi noted that one important factor which affected their in-depth understanding in their subject knowledge learning was that the arrangement of courses in the subject had not reached their expectation. For example:

> *Qi: I would at least expect some depth of the subject I am learning.*
>
> *Researcher: What do you mean?*
>
> *Qi: For example, I expected to learn the method and angle that we look at things from the subject point of view. Unfortunately, I haven't learnt it from the subject learning. But, I think I learnt it from communicating with other students: discussing, even debating. The classes were all given by teachers, and were not as helpful. Some teachers simply read the slides out in class which sometimes makes me think: why do I even bother to come?*

From these ZJU students' statements, it indicated that students felt unengaged in the teacher-centred classes which stopped them from gaining they deeper understanding they desired.

Pan and Shen also pointed out that their enthusiasm for being deep learners was hindered, because they felt neglected in pursing the originality in doing their assignments in the university environment. Especially when they were doing their dissertations in the final year, they felt teachers and previous students had not taken their dissertations seriously, as plagiarism commonly happened in others' work.

> *Shen (ZJU): In the final year, I spent most of my time in finding a job….There are not many academic tasks. We only have to submit the dissertation. To be honest, what we did the most is 'copy and paste'. I really wanted to take it seriously, but even those professors' journal articles and previous students' dissertation examples I could find did all kinds of 'copy and pasting'. I was quite disappointed by the fact. It seems like no one is treating academia seriously.*

Students from both universities emphasised the importance of having good academic performance for being university learners. However, recognising the importance of academic performance in their role identity as university learners did not imply that students were having simply extrinsic (learning solely to achieve material rewards) motivation for learning. The data showed that the actual marks they got from assessments only played a part in building these students' academic confidence. Participants from both institutions were more concerned about whether they had gained an in-depth understanding of knowledge. Though students in this study have similar attitudes towards the influences of academic performance on their academic confidence, in comparing their changes of confidence in terms of academic performance during the years, the two universities' students varied. UNNC students (Yu, Chen, Dong, U-Xia, Cai) believed that their confidence on academic performance as university learners had increased gradually. In ZJU, only Hu acknowledged their confidence boosted as their studies progressed during the years. Other five ZJU students noted that they could not feel their confidence change. Pan and Shen even found their confidence decreased due to the intense competition among students. The differences in the change of their confidence on academic performance between the two universities' students related to various contextual elements within the institutions which will be explored later.

Developing Generic (Cross-subjects) Skills

Generic skills were the second dimension which appeared in the data that contributed to these two universities' students' identity change as university learners. By generic skills, they were referring to the skills they learnt in the university which they could apply across subjects, for example, language skills, communication and presentation skills, and the ability of accessing and analysing information.

UNNC students (Yu, Chen, U-Xia, Dong) identified the generic skills they learnt in the university as significant achievements of being learners. The development of these skills had boosted their academic confidence generally during their four years at the university. For example, Xiamentioned the generic skills she learnt in UNNC built a firm foundation for her further study.

> *Xia(UNNC): I think the capabilities, such as my communication and presentation skills, I developed in the university gradually in the four years made me confident in pursuing a higher education… I think the requirements of learning capabilities for Masters' studies are similar, no matter which subject you have learnt in the undergraduate level.*

Alongside the above skills UNNC students had developed during the years, language skills, as all UNNC interviewees mentioned, were especially important in terms of boosting their academic confidence. Within the English-based learning environment, the improvement of English language skills enabled students to gain confidence in academic activities such as group discussion, essay writing, and presentation. More importantly, they felt it could allow them access to more information as well as to learn different cultures.

> *Yu (UNNC): I think English skills are vital for us in this university. I feel I am more and more confident in class discussion and presentation when my English is getting better. Also, I feel much better in communicating with foreign teachers. I know English is just a tool, but good language skills really open doors for me and enable me to get in touch with … the outside world…For example, to read English materials without difficulty, to learn different cultures.*

However, there were also students from UNNC (Dong, U-Xia, Cai) who indicated that the improvement in English was not great enough to raise the confidence as they were lacking an in-depth understanding of British culture.

> *Dong (UNNC): I still don't feel confident about my English even though it has been improved a lot. I think it is because I don't understand the*

Western culture well enough. For example, when I was doing group work with British students I felt like we have very different ways of thinking. It was hard to make us understand each other well as we don't have a good understanding of each other's culture.

ZJU students Hu, Shen, Le, and Qi also recognised their development in generic skills as being university learners. Le also added that neither academic results nor the effort she made in could be the measurement of how she was as a learner. Rather, the capability of applying knowledge into real-life cases (or in other words, her future career) was the prior standard for her to measure her learner identity.

Le (ZJU): I am definitely not as good as I was in the secondary school in terms of the skills for only getting better marks and in the university it is not how much you work how much you get… I mean you need to understand knowledge in order to transform them and apply them into real-life cases. That is more important than marks. And it is also important to make connections among different knowledge which can make you have a better understanding.

However, their confidence had not increased because of the development of generic skills. Qi's explanation to why their confidence remained unaffected could be vital to this phenomenon.

Qi (ZJU): I feel like we figure out the importance of these skills too late. Looking back on the four years, we focussed on marks too much in the first two years. I think I could feel much better about my learning if I had been given some instructions from the university in the first place…

Researcher: What kind of instructions?

Qi: To let us know earlier that learning is not only about mark …(we would) struggle less about marks less but focus on learning skills more. These skills are more important after all.

Qi's statement showed that the settings of the university had a major influence on this matter. The intense competition in the first phase of ZJU students' study highly emphasised the significance of excellent academic results and students felt that they realised that learning generic skills were more important too late.

Possessing Autonomy in Learning

From analysing the data, it shows that ZJU students (Ke, Hu, Le and Pan) and UNNC students (Yu, Chen, Xiaand Dong) took autonomy in learning as another important aspect of being university learners. In the second phase of identity change, as in the first phase, paticipants from both universities retained their expectations of being independent and self-responsible learners and they reflected their own behaviour during this period of time on the basis of these expectations.

The interviewees from UNNC: Yu, Chen, Xiaand Dong stated that the achievement of having learning autonomy and taking control of their own learning had made them feel confident about their learning. As Dong from UNNC mentioned:

> *Dong (UNNC): When I first entered the university, all the learning tasks were above me- like they were in control of my learning…But later, comparing to others, my academic results may not seem very impressive, but I am definitely more confident about my learning. I feel like I am no longer driven by tasks given by teachers or my courses, but I am taking control of my own learning. I can take the initiative to make sense of knowledge and make connections of different theories that I leant.*

Similarly, in ZJU's case, Pan, Hu and Ke expressed that they felt proud of themselves being able to gain autonomy in learning. Pan, and Hu emphasised the significance of making learning plans in their own learning which assisted

them to gain autonomy in learning. Ke believed autonomy in learning was an achievement which may has more long-term benefits for him than the knowledge he learnt in the university.

> *Ke (ZJU): I think one achievement of my studies in the university is that I have gained autonomy in learning. There is a big difference between when you are being pushed to learn and when you like to learn. After all, you can only learn knowledge or methods from your teacher. The autonomy of learning is always from you.*

Not all participants believed that they had gained enough autonomy as university learners, but the data showed that that it was a significant aspect in terms of students' perceived achievement. There were students from both universities (UNNC: Cai; ZU: Shen) that felt that their self-perceived learning efficiency was not as high as it was in their secondary school. For Cai, her self-efficiency in learning was not as productive as she expected. For Shen, on the other hand, it was a factor made her feel not confident enough academically. The main reason for them to feel less efficient was that, comparing to secondary school when they had almost no time to have a social life, their learning in universities was distracted by social life in the universities.

> *Shen (ZJU): I don't think my academic confidence has increased in the university. It is not because of my academic results. They are fine. It is because... to me, I am not as efficient as I was in the secondary school in learning. I haven't concentrated enough as I have always been distracted by other things. For example, social activities, and spent time taking care of myself.*

Once again, academic results seemed not to be the main measurement of students' feelings about their own learning. Rather, students' self-perceived autonomy in learning may have had a stronger impact on their confidence in learning.

By and large, it is revealed from the data that there were great similarities between the two universities in participants' perceptions about their achievement, as they had primarily focussed on three aspects: academic performance, generic skills, and autonomy in learning. Though students' from the two universities showed similarities in recognizing the three aspects as their achievement in learning, there were differences of feeling regarding confidence between the two contexts. Generally, comparing the two groups of students in this study, UNNC students were more likely to feel confident than ZJU's about their learning when they had achieved in the three aspects. Their feelings of confidence in learning were dynamic and they were affected not only by their recognition of self-achievement as university learners but also by the contextual elements within the different universities.

Contextual Influences

Personal Academic Interests vs. University Settings

The settings of the universities in the first year, especially the subject choosing/changing procedure, had a great and continuous impact on students' role identity change. The influences were more obvious on ZJU participants. As has been mentioned before, since the subject choosing procedure in ZJU was based on students' academic results in the first year, it was not certain that every ZJU student would study his/her favourite subject in the second phase of study. Therefore, different scenarios occurred among the six ZJU students.

Hu, and Pan, both of whom successfully made into the subject they would like to study in the first place, developed their passion for a particular subject from the beginning of their learning process. Since their expectations had been achieved, their interests in the subject developed.

Hu (ZJU): My attitude towards the subject has changed gradually. Because I didn't quite understand what it is about when I started to learn, I only felt the name of the subject sounds great. I gradually realised how useful it is in real life and that makes me more passionate about it.

Qi and Shen failed to reach the mark which their preferred subjects required, and therefore were enrolled into subjects they were not interested in. Shen pushed herself hard to be more interested in the subject but failed. She claimed: *"I tried to like the subject, because after all I had to learn it. But after a while, I still felt that I was not so interested in it. I kind of gave up on it… as long as I can pass my exams and get my degree."* She finally succeeded in getting a job offer within IT, which was irrelevant to her subject- Public Policy. Qi claimed that she could not develop any interest in her current subject thus decided to do a different subject for her master's degree.

The third scenario was in Ke and Shen's case, where both of them felt confused in the first year in deciding their subjects. Ke went on to study Finance- the subject which was considered by others as a "good subject", but he later realised it did not fit his personal interests and values. Ke claimed that he was determined to work in local government after graduating. He believed as a government officer he could help other people, rather than in the field of Finance where financial benefit has always been seen as the priority. Le made the decision of doing her current subject because it was the best choice she could made based on her marks and teachers and parents' suggestions. She stated that she felt she was not very interested in her subject but was still going to do her PhD in it. She explained the reasons:

Le (ZJU): I think it is an important subject but I am not that interested in it, because I think labour and social security cannot solve China's problems today if we do not have any political and economic reform.

Researcher: But why do you still want to do a PhD?

Le: First, my supervisor is a young teacher who is really enthusiastic in doing his research and I was encouraged by him to do it… when I made this decision, I felt not ready to work since I do not have a very good

knowledge base in terms of the subject. But I was frustrated at that time: On one hand, I had never thought of doing a PhD in this subject and I planned to go to work after graduation; On the other hand, I was not ready for that and I didn't think the subject I learnt in the university makes me competitive enough in the job market…Apart from the reasons I mentioned before, I picked a direction that I like. I think what I am going to do is more related to core social problems today.

Since this interview, I have kept in contact with Le. In the year after our interview, she has talked to me constantly about her uncertainty in terms of her decision. Her major concern was that the area she chose to do her PhD in was not her primary interest. She finally decided to take a gap year as she would like to take some time to figure out her real interests and to reconsider her own future. For Ke and Le, their perceptions of a "good subject" were based on the required marks of the subject, rather than their own academic desires, and this may lead Le to be confused about her academic interests later.

The findings of this study suggest that in ZJU, there was not enough room in the subject choosing procedure for these students to choose their subject based on their own interests. Neither was there any room in the second phase's study for students to explore and develop their academic interests outside of their subjects. Unlike in UNNC, so-called "supplementary courses" in ZJU for each subject were still compulsory for students to take. It meant that there was a possibility for students to study in the subject they have no interest in, and at the same time have limited opportunity to learn the courses they would like to study outside of the subject. Moreover, supplementary courses were complained about by all six interviewees as they were seen as lacking of richness and as a waste of students' time. For example:

Hu (ZJU): Some courses were quite 'watery'.

Researcher: Can you give me an example?

Hu (ZJU): Let me see… We have to learn some so-called "supplementary" courses which were quite pointless to me. I am not interested in those courses, so they are useless. And those supplementary

courses' teachers weren't good at teaching. Their teaching had no depth… But I still need to pass these courses as they were actually "compulsory". It was a waste of my time.

Moreover, ZJU interviewees also added that when looking back, the aim of the general education was unclear to them: there was not enough connection between their general education and subject learning; plus, it limited the time for their subject learning. Le, Shen, and Qi noted that in their department the general education lasted longer than one year, and usually they needed to learn many courses that not directly related to their own subjects. The consequences of this were that they felt that they did not have enough time to learn their subject and it was not possible to receive enough information on the courses that mattered the most to them.

Le (ZJU): Also, in the first two years in our university, we had to take a lot of courses not related to our subject. It was quite hard to learn everything at the same time. In the third year, the courses were more specific, and it was easier for me to focus…. Some courses were really important to our subject but we did not have much time for that, while we still need to spend time to some courses which were useless to us.

Researcher: Could you give me an example?

Le: For example, I don't understand why we need to learn advanced mathematics (for my subject: Public Policy- Labour and Social Security) but we still need to get a pass in general education. We could totally use the time to learn what's important to us.

In UNNC's case, five out of the six (Yu, Chen, U-Xia, Dong, Cai) indicated that they were content to be offered various opportunities in both the first and second phase of study to explore and grow their academic interests in different subject areas. Not only because they could transfer to the subject they preferred during the first year's programme, but also as they could take supplementary courses in the second year in developing their personal academic interests. By

taking supplementary courses, they were able to take control of their learning at the university. Yu, Chen and Dong also mentioned the knowledge they learnt in supplementary courses helped them to gain fundamental knowledge of some other subjects. In Chen's case, to have such understanding opened a door for him to apply for further education in the subject.

> *Chen (UNNC): I also feel the idea of doing supplementary courses is great, because I felt I knew very little about other subjects. I was curious and I thought I might find them interesting. The fact is I have done Business-related supplementary courses since the second year and I think it is also interesting…It also enables me to apply for Business-related subject for my Master's degree because I have some fundamental understanding about Business.*

However, the individual differences could not be ignored. Sunfrom UNNC had a more difficult time than other UNNC interviewees in making the transition to become a university learner. Reflecting on his experiences, he thought that even though like other UNNC interviewees he would like to become an independent and self-responsible learner, he did not put enough effort in the first and second year. He explained that since his parents always made his decisions for him, he didn't realise what his academic interests really were in the first two years. He had experienced a hard learning curve in adjusting himself into the role identity. The turning point for him was when he failed to pass the second year's exams which made him very close to being expelled from the university. He was finally given another opportunity to repeat the second year and realised his responsibilities since then.

> *Sun(UNNC): There are two clear stages for me: before and after the incident (of failing the second year). Before the incident, my motivation would basically be: my parents wanted me to study. They told me what subject to learn. But in the university, when nobody was actually pushing me every day as it was in the secondary school, I didn't feel motivated at all. I had no goal. After the incident, I thought I had to be responsible for myself and my own future. It was a dramatic change for me… to really be an independent learner.*

In repeating his second year, he was given another chance by the university to decide whether he would like to study in the same subject. Sunfinally made the decision of staying because he realised he was interested into the subject when he spent enough time on it. U-Sun's case in this study shows that different individuals react to changes differently. It supports Briggs and his colleagues' argument (2012) that the development of students can be affected positively or negatively by various factors such as their relationship with peers and teachers, the information they have access to, one's personality and in this case also the relationship with parents. Individuality has to be taken into consideration in the process of university learner's identity change, since it still down to each individual student in coping with their own transition.

Peer Competition

Another explanation given by students in this study is peer competition. Yu, Xiaand Dong indicated that the academic achievement of the students around them had created a competitive environment which pushed them to enhance their performances by putting more effort into learning. For example:

> *Xia(UNNC): I worked very hard in these four years. The main reason for that was peer pressure – my roommates (who studied the same subject) were quite competitive in studying. If someone was ahead in writing an essay, for example, others would feel nervous about it and want to catch up. We are all from the same subject, so… it was easy to compare our progress with each other. We all liked it and three of four girls in our dorm got scholarships…I also felt that if I studied in the library or study rooms, all the students were all working hard.*

The peer competitions among ZJU students were seen differently by the ZJU interviewees. Among the six students, Qi, Shen, and Pan noted that they could not feel confident academically as there were other students who did better than them, even though they had good results themselves. For example:

Qi (ZJU): I might be happy and satisfied for a second because my exam results looked good, but then I compared mine with my classmates and it was no longer great… I just cannot see my confidence in learning grow in that way.

As it has been mentioned before, ZJU students were in a highly competitive learning environment ZJU has more than twenty-thousand full-time undergraduate students, and all students were academically strong in their previous education. The opportunity for each individual student to be rewarded for their academic achievements was limited and the peer pressure was intense in performing well academically. In a learning environment with fierce academic competition such as in ZJU, it is possible for students to lose confidence in learning and underestimate their intellectual ability if students perceived they did not get enough support from the university.

Relationships with Teachers

Teachers' support had been considered by UNNC interviewees as a significant factor in helping them in building up their role identity as university learners. It was mentioned by UNNC student Yu that teachers in the university engaged them in the teaching and learning process by encouraging them to present and discuss their own ideas, so that they could take the initiative and develop their own thinking.

Yu (UNNC): The teachers would give us a lot of opportunities to be creative and take the initiative in learning. It is not to say that they didn't care about us, or leave us alone. They would be supportive during the learning process. They were always very willing to answer our questions and give advice if necessary.

Yu's statement is broadly similar to five other UNNC participants. They also agreed that teachers made the communication with them accessible. They had been informed by the teachers about tutorial times and questions after classes were welcomed.

It appeared in U-Sun's case that the teachers' support was extremely important when individual students encountered difficulties in dealing with their role identity change. In U-Sun's words, he emphasised that he was offered "choices" by teachers and the university which facilitated his change and enabled him to rethink his position in making self-decisions. More importantly, the support from the teachers made the transition towards an independent university learner possible.

> *Sun(UNNC): "…The teachers were a great influence. When I was about to be sent home since I didn't pass my second year's exam, one professor in our department talked with me for about an hour, and then he sent an email to our dean to say that he believed that I could do better in the future if the department could give me another chance. I think what he did actually change my life. Another teacher also talked to me and tried to find out the reason why I failed. I explained to him with loads of excuses. I could still remember that he said to me 'It was your choice.' I felt a bit angry when I heard him saying that. But now, I look back and I think what he said was correct. I did make the wrong choices before and I had to face the consequences… They even offered me another chance to choose my subject again. I gave it careful thought and decided to stay in Business… Now I think I am quite thankful to all those teachers for giving me support and teaching me how to be self- responsible."*

Though all six UNNC students appeared to acknowledge the availability and importance of teachers' support, it was indicated by Xiaand Chen that most students were reluctant to seek help from or discuss with teachers as they felt too shy to talk to teachers. They believed that since they had always been studying in teacher-centred learning environments before university, Chinese students always possess the learning habit of always listening to the teachers rather than taking the initiative in teacher-students interactions. As Xiastated:

> *Xia(UNNC): … Even though the university and teachers showed us that they could offer their help, as Chinese students who are usually shy to talk to teachers, we tend to solve our problems by ourselves or ask help*

from other students. This long-existence habit could not be changed easily.

Giving the fact that four out of six ZJU interviewees (Pan, Ke, Shen, Qi) claimed that they had very little contact with their teachers when asked about their relationship with teachers, the teaching and learning approaches they had experienced had been described as highly teacher-centred. Teachers seemed as not easily approachable to ZJU students. For example:

Shen (ZJU): Our teachers do not seem to care about us that much. Maybe because there are too many students in one class, teachers just stand there and talk… no communication in class or after class. They don't know anyone's name unless you are very keen to talk to them. They usually leave quickly after each lecture and don't really seem want to be asked any questions by students.

Nevertheless, Hu from ZJU was against the idea that teachers are not approachable in terms of helping students learning, rather, many students were reluctant to communicate actively.

Hu (ZJU): I am the one who always asks question on behalf of my friends. I feel that sometimes it is not teachers don't want to help you, but because you never go and ask for it. I understand that since there are so many students in a class, teachers must be very busy and could not pay attention to each of us. But every time I ask them questions by email or sometimes face-to-face, they are willing to help. Sometimes, I think other students are just too shy to ask.

In comparison to UNNC, it was similar to an extent that there were students in this study who felt too shy to ask teachers in both contexts. However, there was much more positive thinking about their achievements as university leaners in UNNC participants' reflections compared to ZJU's. The difference indicated that it is significant to build an encouraging learning environment with supportive teachers in terms of helping university students to be independent university learners.

Third Phase of Student Role Identity: Facing Transition

In the final phase of student role identity change, participants from both contexts mainly expressed their struggles and anxieties since they started to face the transition from the role identity of university learners to a new role identity. The main reason for their struggles was that they had to face the making decisions about their future which was another step in order to be more independent individuals. Although the new role for each student might be different according to each individual's own decision for the future, the uncertainty about the future role was similar among students from both universities. All interviewees intended make a bridge between being university learners with future roles by connecting the knowledge they learnt from their subject to future jobs, but the struggles of students were also noticeable.

Connecting Leaner Identity with the Future

There were participants from both universities who expressed their anxiety to face the transition of roles from being university learners to their new ones in the future, but differences were found between the two contexts. Generally, all six UNNC students suggested that they were not ready to leave their role as students. The focus of UNNC participants were still on the academic learning in the final stage of their university lives since they had a large amount of academic tasks in the final year. All six UNNC interviewees stated that they were not prepared to enter China's job market, because their university experiences largely revolved around academic learning and they did not have enough social practice outside of the university. Moreover, UNNC students Yu, Chen, U-Sun, Cai, and Xiarecognised that to some extent what they had learnt from their subjects was 'too theoretical', which made them concerned whether it was applicable in real life jobs. They believed that the enhancement of subject knowledge did little in making them confident enough in China's job market to compete with graduates from other key universities.

> *Xia(UNNC): My classmates and I all think that what we have learnt in this subject that these theories are too far away from real life. We could not figure out how we could use them or would have a chance of using them… (My subject) could be used everywhere, but when you start to find a job, you will find that you are lack of specific or professional skills. We don't have any advantage to compete with students from other universities in terms of professional skills. We may need to win more rewards to show recruiters that we were just as good as other key university students, but it is highly possible that they would prefer those students other than us.*

Xiaadded when talking about her internship:

> *After several years' study in Media and Communication, I still did not know how to edit news when I was doing an internship in a TV station. All I know is lots of theories.*

UNNC participants worried that the subject knowledge they obtained at university may not be enough for them to apply a good job in the area. Additionally, UNNC students Cai and Sunbelieved that the knowledge they had learnt from their subject may not be useful for them immediately after graduation and as a new employee in the subject-related area.

> *Cai (UNNC): I think the courses in my subject are quite theoretical, so at my age there is not so much use for me, particularly without much working experience. But the knowledge we learnt now might be useful one day when I become a manager in a financial institution. The knowledge I learnt here is more for managers, not for entering levels' jobs.*

Thus, all these students decided to see undergraduate study as a theoretical base for more specific learning at the Master's level. They believed further study could give them more in-depth knowledge and professional skills.

All six ZJU interviewees also found the transition difficult as they were uncertain about their future but had to make decision by themselves. As Qi mentioned:

> *Qi (ZJU): I sometimes tried to avoid thinking about it as they seem to me as difficult tasks. I didn't realise I should make such plans, so in the third year I was a little panicking a little because I felt confused about my future. I should have started working hard on this earlier.*

The shift of focus from academic learning to concerns about their future careers made ZJU students (Ke, Shen, and Pan) reflect on their knowledge from their social experience such as internships. These students indicated that there was a gap between the subject knowledge they learnt in the university and in real-life. The knowledge and information they could access in the university was out of date. As Ke explained:

> *Ke (ZJU): I did my internship in the final year. It made me to realise that what teachers have taught me in the university may not closely related to what I could use in my job in the future. The materials, books and what the teachers taught us in the classes are behind what is happening now. They cannot provide me up-to-date information.*
>
> *……*
>
> *Researcher: What do you think your university or department or tutors could have done better to help you?*
>
> *Ke: I wish my teachers could tell me earlier that there is a gap between what we learnt in the university and the knowledge we are going to need in our future careers. Then I can plan early enough for my future. I can pay more attention to knowledge or courses which are more important to me in the future. Not only learn to pass exams.*

Individual differences can be seen also in this phase of identity transition. Among all the ZJU students, Pan, who was determined in pursuing a career related to his subject after graduation, had adapted to the transition better than others. Comparing to other students in this study, he was more committed in

developing social skills for career during the university years as he had clear aims and plans for his future.

> *Pan (ZJU): I spent more time on my social life than studying as I knew I would directly go to work after graduation. …In the final year, I put more effort in socialising with other people rather than just meeting with my friends. I think it is because I need to prepare myself for finding a job… Before, I lacked experience of communicating with people. I think communication skills are quite crucial for me to become a lawyer after graduation.*

Contextual Influences

It is noticeable that all six UNNC students in this study planned to continue their studies after graduation. Five UNNC interviewees planned to study abroad after graduation for their Master's degrees and the rest one would continue her study in UNNC. Regarding the struggle of UNNC participants, as has been mentioned in the previous section, the decision making of these students reflected the combined influences of the university and the national context, which mainly refer to the job market in China. First, as has been mentioned in the previous section, the undergraduate courses in UNNC provided them with theoretical knowledge and ways of thinking, rather than professional skills. In China's current job market, they felt unconfident in competing with graduates from other key Chinese universities. Second, unlike other Chinese universities which have not so many academic courses in the final year but focus on gaining students compulsory part-time jobs and/or internships (*实习*: literally "practical training"), UNNC students usually spend more time in the final year than before on learning as the learning tasks in that year are vital. Even though students such as Xiaand Cai did internships, they felt they were not ready psychologically to go directly to work since for them learning is still the priority in their lives.

It has also been noticed that in all seven students from both contexts (UNNC: Yu, Chen, U-Sun, Cai, U-Xia; ZJU: Qi) who planned to continue their studies outside of mainland China, UNNC students Yu, Chen, U-Sun, Cai and ZJU student Qi stated that they were going to study in Business related subjects for further study. Among these five students, Yu and Chen from UNNC and Qi from ZJU decided to switch their undergraduate subject to Business. One reason that was indicated by students that they had applied (or had already received offers) for Business-related subject for their further education in consideration of future careers (UNNC: Yu, Chen, U-Xia; ZJU: Qi). For example, Chen from international studies decided to do a Master's degree in Business in Australia. When asked where did he had this impression from, he explained that to his knowledge, most of the previous graduates from the same subject tended to study abroad in some other subjects like Business after graduation, since there were hardly any subject-related jobs in China.

> *Researcher: "Why do you change your subject to Business for your master's study?"*
>
> *Chen (UNNC):"Because in my current subject, it is not easy for me to find a job. People would assume that graduates from our subject would go on to be a government official, but I don't want to be."*
>
> *Researcher: Where did you get this information?*
>
> *Chen: "Because... I haven't seen any company or anywhere which is recruiting people like us. And most of the previous graduates from our subject chose to continue study. So…"*

Smith and Zhou's paper (2009) interpreted this phenomenon as Chinese students tend to study in economics related subject in universities abroad and indicated that the reasons for Chinese students' choice were highly related to the job market in China. There is hardly any space for Chinese students to develop their personal interests due to the intense competition in the job market, thus students usually link their study with "prospects for well-paid career" in the future. Business related subjects fit this need for the students in this study.

Given that both universities' students struggled in the third phase, I asked all interviewees whether they had been offered help by the universities. It seemed that both universities had provided supportive programmes such as job fairs and a career centre for students, however, no student in this study found them helpful. All students explained similar reasons to Shen from ZJU: *"those kinds of things (job fairs and career centre)…maybe you can ask for general questions, like 'how to write CV' or 'how to apply' but they can't really help you with your own things, more specific and personal decisions."* However, all students agreed that they believed universities had been doing enough for them as they had to face their own transition into a more independent individual and make their own decisions.

Summary: Similarities and Differences between the Two Universities

In order to provide a discussion in relation to the findings presented in this chapter, summary tables (Table 5-1and Table 5-2) are drawn here to illustrate the main similarities and differences between the two universities' students in this study.

Similarities between UNNC and ZJU students
Experienced three phases of transitions: **Phase 1.** from secondary school learners to university leaners; **Phase 2** being university learners; and **Phase 3** transition from university learner identity to the professional identity Share main trend of role identity change: to become Independent learns; Share perspectives of how to become independent leaners: • *Having good academic performance (good result and in-depth understanding of knowledge)* • *Possessing generic (cross-subject) skills* • *Being self-responsible and autonomic in learning*
Both universities provided first year programmes helping students to make the transition from secondary schools to universities.
Both universities participants had struggles in transitions to professional identity, and the supportive programmes for future careers provided by university were not helpful.

Table 5-1 Summary of the Similarities in Student Role Identity Change between UNNC and ZJU

Differences between UNNC and ZJU students				
Sub-Themes	**UNNC Students**		**ZJU Students**	
	Identity Changes	*Institutional Context*	*Identity Changes*	*Institutional Context*
Transition to become university/independent learners *(in Phase 1)*	Positive about the transition	First Year Programme: prepared students for subject learning; Teachers' help	More struggles and confusion	General education programme: aim of each course was not clear, not well connected with subject learning; Lack of communication with teachers
Working hard to achieve *(in Phase 1 and 2)*	Worked hard and there was an increase of motivation	Offered opportunities for students to develop their academic interests: subject transfer opportunity, complementary courses; Well-connected courses from one year to the next	Worked hard, but there was a decrease of motivation	Subject choosing procedure-highly competitive, some could not choose the subject they liked; No clear connection made between one year's courses to the next
Academic confidence *(in Phase 2)*	Increased	Encouraging learning environment: teachers' help, collaborative learning approaches in class	Not as much as UNNC students	Highly competitive learning environment; Lack of formal support but seek help from peers
Transition from university learners' role to the future professional role *(in Phase 3)*	Not well-prepared, and felt need further education to prepare for the job market	Important learning tasks in the final year; Undergraduate courses provided with theoretical knowledge and ways of thinking, not professional skills	Anxious (but not emphasised as much as UNNC students)	Some subject knowledge provided by the university was out-of-date

Table 5-2 Summary of the Differences in Student Role Identity Change between UNNC and ZJU

Discussion

Conceptualizing University Student Role Identity

As has been mentioned in Chapter Three, most studies on student role identity are based on quantitative data and there is no conceptual framework of role identity is offered by the present literature using qualitative approaches. In order to propose a model of student role identity from qualitative data, this study used existing role identity theories in the form of constructs rather than variables to synergise the qualitative approach of this study to the theory. It allowed me to discover aspects of students' role identity from the interviewees' answers, which may not be mentioned in the theory and/or did not appear in previous quantitative studies.

Through analysis of the research data, this study has identified three phases of students' role identity change and fundamental contextual influences that contribute to the forming of said identity: their personal context, institutional context national, and the national context. Drawn from the findings of this study, the model included different dimensions in forming students' student role identities, demonstrated by Figure 5-1.

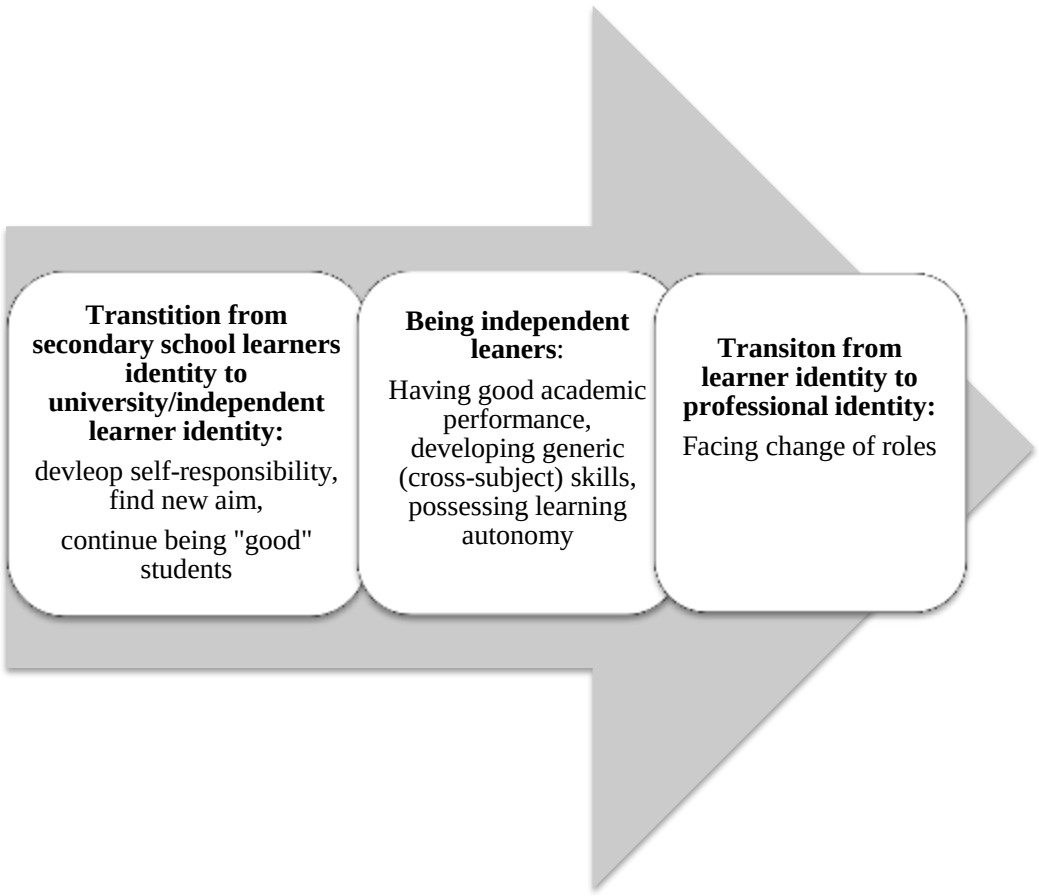


Figure 5-1 Student Role Identity Change as University Learners

Figure 5-1 draws together the analyses of data to the model the change of student role identity and to indicate the changes of identity during university. It shows that students' role identity is an on-going and dynamic process. In the first phase, students made the transfer from being secondary school learners to university learners by being more self-responsible in learning after they entered universities. In the second phase, student tended to becoming independent leaners by having good academic performance, developing generic (cross-subject) skills and possessing learning autonomy. In the final phase which students were experiencing the transition from their learner identity to future professional identity, they started to reflect on their identity in previous phases and how to connect it with their future career.

The Three Phases of Students Role Identity Change

The main finding of this study showed the change of students' role identity change as university learners. The dynamic nature of identity as time went by was shown by the three phases of students' role identity: learning to be university learners, becoming university learners, and leaving the role of university learners. In discussion of students' role identity as university learners, it is clear that neither that the different phases in student role identity are not linear, nor are the three phases fixed in terms of time. Rather, the process of role identity change is dynamic and it is possible to have individual differences in each student's own identity.

Students' role identity in the first phase in universities was the transition from their learner identity of being secondary school students towards gaining the identity of university students. The transition was not simple for individual students, as the process of identity change is difficult in nature and people usually tend to keep their identity in order to have stability and consistency in their lives (Burke & Stets, 2009). Uncertainties and challenges about their learner identity in new learning environments were evident when they were learning the new meanings and importance of everyday practices in their new university settings (Christie, et al., 2008). In the first stage, students started to adjust themselves to making connections between previous educational experiences and university experiences and to recognise the importance of being independent and self-responsible as learners as well as individuals. Establishing their role identity as university learners in this phase is significant, because the findings of this study show that students tend to keep this identity for the rest of their student life. In this sense, if students can have a positive learner identity in the first phase, it may persist and help them to succeed as university learners in later phases. The findings of this study show that there is no easy solution to help students to bridge the gap as the transferring from one learner identity to another from one setting to another is complex. In the initial stage of their studies in the university, students adjust themselves faster and

can form their learner identity autonomously if they learn how university works and fit into the environment (Harvey, et al., 2006; Briggs, et al., 2012; Scanlon, et al., 2007). Studies on first year university students suggested that the gap between their previous educational experiences and the university one has to be bridged, in order to avoid students in feeling disoriented and confused about their learner identity (Briggs, et al., 2012; Scanlon, et al., 2007).

On the basis of the first phase, the second phase of student identity change was a process of development towards students' more specific expectations and the significance of being university learners. Students in this study emphasised good academic performance as being university learners, but the findings also suggest that students from both contexts pursued in-depth learning, rather than only striving to achieve good academic results. It is true that they expected themselves to perform well academically, but more importantly, to develop a combination of learning autonomy and generic skills (including communication skills, social skills, the capability of analysing information and decision making) as their university learners' identity. As it has been mentioned in the literature review chapter, the quantitative conceptualisation which proposed by social-psychological researchers (e.g. Reitzes & Burke, 1980; Callero, 1992; Collier, 2000) neglected students' own perspectives in yielding dimensions of university students' role identity. This study, however, provides students' own perceptions their own understandings of being university learners and indicates what they would like to achieve in their role of being university learners.

Student role identity as university learners in the third phase was another transition for individual students as they were still university learners but they started to view their learning in the university from the perspective of future jobs. The learning in the university for them in this phase had a more practical purpose rather than simply the orientation of being achieving learners. The career orientation distinguished their student role identity from previous phases. The findings of this study showed that as university students, students'

role identity as learners was significant to them as they were living in the university where their social connections and relations were quite limited. Their reflection on their students' role identity at this phase showed that students had recognised this limitation, thus they had struggles and were confused about their identity change as they had to face more complex roles in their future lives.

However, it should be noted that the interviews in this study were conducted when they were still in the third phase of their university study. It is natural for students to doubt their identity as university learners when their future was uncertain. Combined with the findings in the second phase, the more important indication is that students have acknowledged their achievements of being university learners and these achievements had continuous meanings to them, even though they felt they struggled in the third phase. The data also showed that the support from university in both institutions was indicated by students as unhelpful. It is understandable in this phase because unlike in the first phase, students' decision making and choices for their future roles were highly personal. In fact, there is very limited literature which focusses on the last phase of identity change of students as university learners. The findings of this study provide an insight of students' transition in this phase's university study.

Concerning the National Context

From the cultural perspective at the national level, the existing literature concerning "Chinese learners" intended to explain Chinese students' perceptions about themselves as learners heavily influenced by their Chinese cultural background. Li (2002, p. 250) indicated Chinese learners' attitudes to learning a shaving in mind a model of ideal learner which was called "heart and mind for wanting to learn". Li (2002) and some other researchers (Cortazzi & Jin, 2001) believed that largely consistent with Confucian tradition, Chinese students' perceived ideal learners emphasise the moral purpose of perfecting

themselves in learning and should be determined, diligent, cultivate self-desire for learning, and committed to lifelong learning. The findings of this study partly agreed with how students viewed learning in their university life, as a large part of their student role identity closely linked to learning and dedication in learning and part of their motivation for learning was self-perfection and self-development. However, it can be argued that not only Chinese culture values learning highly, but most cultures place great importance on learning. Moreover, the similarities of these two universities' students with respect to the cognition of learning could be attributed to their similar previous educational backgrounds and the fact that both universities highly value academic learning. It is possible to see a strong diversity of perceptions about learning when Chinese students who have significantly different educational experiences are compared.

This cultural explanation, together with earlier studies which described "Chinese learners" as modest, diligent, respect to teachers, but at the same time silent and passive in learning (e.g., Bradley & Bradley, 1984; Samuelowicz' 1987; Chow, 1995) were criticised by recent studies as being stereotypical (e.g. Li, 2002; Watkins & Biggs, 1996, 2001; Lam & Wong, 2007; Strokes, 2001; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006). Stereotyping students, negatively or even positively, can cause harm to individual students as they may reduce individuals to "inadequately understood group characteristics, approach racial stereotyping" (Clark & Gieve, 2006, p.69). Moreover, stereotypes of Chinese students as learners have overlooked culture's dynamic and changing feature, especially as China is now witnessing dramatic and profound social and cultural transformations (Ryan, 2010; Biggs et al., 2001). By analysing students' role identity, this study argues that there is no simple conclusion regarding so-called "Chinese learners", especially when cultural influences, contextual impact and individual diversity usually mingle together in their learning process. This study agrees with the argument that making the assumption about the influences of a homogeneous national culture on students as learners is inaccurate and incomplete. The cultural perspective is not the only explanation towards students' perceptions about themselves as learners.

Moreover, the institutional context, including students' relationships with teachers and their learning environments, had a much greater impact than the set of fixed culture constructs on their academic learning (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006).

Through analysing students' role identity, the study argues that the diversity of students in different institutional contexts, as well as the fact that students are distinct individual learners, means they cannot be seen them as a homogenous group of learners based on their cultural background. Students' role identity change as university learners in this study was shaped by the combination of Chinese culture, universities' settings and students' individual context including previous educational experiences, personal interest, and their personal aspirations for future career. Thus, the findings of this study provide insights into a more coherent and comprehensive account of university students and their role identity as university learners.

Concerning the Two Universities

Understanding students' perceptions of themselves as university learners is important, not least because it can prevent teachers from being in the position Laurillard (2013) describes, of being uncertain of their students' starting positions in the educational process:

> *The lecturer must guide this collection of individuals through territory the students are unfamiliar with, towards a meeting point, but without knowing where they are starting from.*

Also, with a better knowledge of students by understanding their expectations of teaching and learning, a learning environment can be created that will engage them, and move them forward in their personal development. Therefore, the findings of this study not only provided understanding of students, but also lead to implications for the two universities.

Discussion and Implications for both Universities

Specific findings from this study indicate that university students see their student role identity differently from their previous education as they are independent and self-responsible learners who need to be treated as independent individuals. After experiencing transformation from their previous education to university, students gradually developed meanings and expectations for their student role as university learners. The similar perspective of being "independent learners" along with the differences showed in the study between the two university students' attitudes towards their learning lead to implications for both universities.

The findings show that students can benefit from the opportunities universities provide in terms of managing their own learning, thus it is important for universities to give enough space for students to develop their academic interests in one or more field. In comparing and contrasting the two universities' students, UNNC students in this study developed their interests of learning in a more positive way. In ZJU's case, it showed that the pressure of fighting for the limited opportunities may hinder students' interest in learning. In addition, it is less possible for students (even though they acknowledge their own achievements) to gain academic confidence within a learning environment which is overly competitive, as they may pay too much attention on comparing themselves to others whilst overlooking their own improvement.

With an insightful understanding of the students' role identity from the two universities, in part by understanding students' expectations of their achievements as university learners, this study suggests that universities give students space to develop their learning interests. However, this study could neither answer the questions regarding how much space the universities should

give students nor suggest specific strategies for the universities in this sense. Thus, there is a need for further research in order to answer these questions.

Even though both universities in this study intended to urge students to be independent and self-responsible learners, the differences between the two contexts indicated that it could not be achieved without the support of universities in helping students make the transition. An encouraging learning environment is crucial in enabling students to identify their own strategies for their development and to find their own meanings and expectations of being a university student. Within educational organisations such as universities, an encouraging learning environment could be achieved by having support systems including help from teachers, their department and the wider university, whilst also making clear connections between each year's goals of study. In the two contexts, as participants suggested, teachers in UNNC supported students by providing tutorial hours, encouraging students to raise questions in class, while in ZJU's case there was not as much help provided by teachers. The encouraging approaches can promote teacher-student communication, which can be beneficial for students to adjust their learning approaches for university studies.

The findings agree with the growing literature on establishing a learning community for students in supporting their study. The existing literature argues that by integrating courses and promoting academic interactions among students, teachers and faculties can motivate students' learning intrinsically and extrinsically (Kember, 2001; Stefanou & Salisbury-Glennon, 2002; Osterman, 2000). Meanwhile, creating a supportive learning community can help students to gain self-autonomy, take control of their learning, and reduce students' anxiety and pressures in facing learning and testing tasks (Kember, 2001; Stefanou & Salisbury-Glennon, 2002; Osterman, 2000). The findings of this study supported this argument as UNNC participants who had received more support from teachers and their learning environment compared to ZJU participants adopted the independent learner identity in a more positive way

and showed greater enhancement in their academic confidence. Therefore, this study also implies that there is a necessity for universities to create an encouraging and supportive learning community which engages and motivates students while encouraging them to be independent learners.

One phenomenon in ZJU shown by the data caught my attention as there was a contradiction between ZJU participants' desire to achieve the aim of being independent learners and their behaviours. It appeared that regardless of their high expectations on themselves and good intention in working hard, ZJU students in this study showed a drop of motivation in terms of working hard academically over time. ZJU students in this study started the university with the maintained enthusiasm of dedication for learning from secondary schools, but their enthusiasm faded during the years in the university, especially in the final year, as academic learning was no longer emphasised by the university. The data from ZJU reflected the phenomenon which has already caught the attention of media in recent years that graduating from Chinese universities is "too easy" (See Fish, 2013). Chinese students' dropout rate, which according the Ministry of Education in China was only three percent in 2011, is significantly lower comparing to OECD reported rates in the USA (54%) and in the UK (32%) (Fish, 2013). Nin-depth qualitative study has been conducted on this matter so far. However, an article from the Economic Observer, an English edition of the Weekly Chinese Newspaper, doubted the quality of Chinese university education and pointed out that there were serious problems of students cheating and plagiarism even in top Chinese universities. They also suggested that there is a danger for "unqualified" degree-holders to join the already overflowing pool of graduates in China's job market and this will cause the unemployment rate to rise. The findings of this study to an extent provide an insight of this phenomenon by exploring students' perceptions in experiencing this Chinese undergraduate model. For Chinese top universities such as ZJU who are pursuing the goal of achieving "world-class" status, it might be necessary to reflect on the quality of education it offers to students at the undergraduate level.

Implications for UNNC as a Transnational University: Culture Matters

Challenges were evident in the findings of this study as UNNC students stated that they had encountered the difficulties in adopt new approaches of learning in the British university. As has been discussed previously, for instance, interviewees from UNNC stated that they preferred to grasp the whole picture of knowledge and then look into specifics profoundly and critically later. They felt lost and confused when they were asked to focus on a deep and critical approach in learning without being giving the whole picture. As Watkins (2000) pointed out, the influences of culture on teaching and learning is complicated since individual differences and cultural factors are interrelated in teaching and learning process. Since there is an inherent balance in the power relationships between teachers and students, teachers' deficit views on students' learning approaches and cultures can be harmful to students (Louie, 2005). As a result, this study supported the argument that even the most commonly agreed educational approaches and concepts by educators from home universities need to be reflected upon again in the Chinese context (Watkins, 2000).

The findings of this study also showed that students may encounter difficulties during the learning process when cultural differences are involved. Although Chinese students in transnational universities do not need to face the unfamiliar culture of a different country, they may still find the transition to universities challenging as they need to accustom to an English language-based learning environment, British academic conventions and academic theories. One prime difficulty UNNC students stated in their learning was the lack of knowledge of British culture which was also believed by students as hindering their ability to gain an in-depth understanding of their particular subject. In a transnational campus, local students may not encounter as many problems as being 'international students' in other countries in terms of the little knowledge they have about that country. However, British universities and teachers, in trying to

maintain the same quality education as in the home campus, tend to adopt the same curriculum as in the home country and ignore Chinese students' lack of a British knowledge background. The implication from the findings of this study may echo Osborn's (2012) argument that teaching and learning approaches adopted by teachers from the home universities, though well-grounded and well-meant in theory, may be perceived by students negatively due to their different cultural and educational background. In designing curriculums for transnational campuses, transnational universities may need to take consideration of students' cultural background and introduce the new (home country's) culture to students in the first place.

It implies that transnational universities may need to assist students to make links between the students' own culture and the culture of the country where the university is originally from. Differing from the form of internationalisation of higher education which Chinese students go study abroad, transnational education in China may require educators to have an even better understanding of Chinese culture and Chinese students. It is also significant for the universities to work with teachers from different cultural and social backgrounds to understand the local culture and to learn how to help students to make connections between their previous and current learning. Teachers need to develop sensitivities to the differences of cultural beliefs and perspectives (Ryan, 2010). Changes may need to be taken at the institutional level to make both students and teachers in transnational universities understand cross-cultural differences and to make intercultural communication more effective.

Furthermore, it has emerged in this study that students believed there were mismatches of what they learnt in the transnational university and requirements of the Chinese job market for graduates. All UNNC students in this study (from Humanities and Social Sciences subjects) believed that there was a gap between the knowledge they learnt from the British educational model and the needs of the job market in China. In fact, according to the statistics from

UNNC's website, in 2013, 80 percent of graduates chose to continue their study and 70 percent among these students went into world's top 100 universities. By providing an insight into how students construct their student role identity in a transnational university, this study may rise the question that whether there is a gap between what transnational universities offer which based on the home university's educational perspective and the needs of Chinese students for their future careers.

This study indicates that students' perceptions of being university learners tend to be personal and instrumental, while the purposes of an undergraduate programme in transitional university, as described by students, tended towards ideal purposes based on the academic doctrines of the home universities. According to the findings of this study, what students expected to achieve as university learners is to develop academic interests, enhance knowledge, learn generic skills, and then through developing the above elements to gain competence in the job market and prepare themselves for their future careers. So far, Chinese students in transnational education in this study felt they could not compete with other top Chinese university graduates, for the reason that they failed to make the connection between the knowledge they learnt at university and the requirements of the Chinese job market. It is ironic and unexpected as these students could have been benefited from their unique perspectives based on the combination of academic knowledge and local experiences and awareness of Chinese society and culture. Literature on transnational education in China has mentioned that it must be culturally appropriate. Even though GATE (1999) advised transnational education to adjust learning resources and curriculum to be appropriate for local students culturally, researchers (such as Luke, 2005; Yang, 2008) pointed out that current transnational higher education programmes are promoting a generic product of a "global template" which lacks local features and/or understanding. Indeed, there is a danger for Chinese students to feel a negative impact when transnational education isolates itself from China's society and culture. Therefore, it can be suggested that transnational universities need to provide higher education by reforming the existing curricula to ensure it is cultural

appropriately and reflects the demands and attributes of local students (Dunn, et al., 2004; Yang, 2008).

Chapter Six: Students' Group Identity

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate students' group identity by assessing group identity as a multi-dimensional construct. Formal group identity and informal group identity will be explored separately. The reason for choosing broadly defined groups- formal (academic) and informal (student) groups- was that: students tended to refer to these two groups when asked which groups they belonged to. 1) Academic groups such as the university, department and class (formal), 2) Students' groups such as student clubs, student associations, and friendship circles (Informal). This study focussed on students' formal (academic) and informal (student) groups in order to investigate how students' group identities were shaped by their academic and social experiences within the university.

The analysis of the data on group identity will begin by placing students' group identity within formal groups: university and academic disciplinary groups. The main direction of students' formal group identity change showed from the data of both universities was to become active members who access and adopt central norms and values of their academic groups. Three phases appeared in the data concerning students' formal group identity change. I will discuss the three phases of identity change, combined with the influences of the institutional contexts.

Different from formal groups, informal groups such as students' friendship circles, students' clubs and associations within academic institutions are constituted on the basis of their interests and peer interactions and were easier for members to encounter change within. Students' group identity change in informal groups showed difference from in the formal groups, though there were also three phases appeared from the data in a general sense. I will discuss the three phases and the contextual influences afterwards.

In the discussion section, I will first develop an empirically grounded framework for understanding students' group identity change in universities. A discussion will be provided concerning findings which confirm and add to the existing knowledge of the relationship between the influences of the two universities on the cultural perspectives of the students and their group identity and similarities/differences of group identity between the two universities.

Formal Group Identity Change

There were two phases that appeared from the interview data in students' group identity change in formal groups. The first phase of formal identity change was based on students' sense of belonging towards their university and disciplinary groups. In this study, the data showed that all interviewees from both universities acknowledged the importance of feeling a sense of belonging within their university. Once students had been engaged in formal groups, in the second phase, they adopted group norms and values and internalised them as part of their group identity. In the third phase, students were facing the fact that they were about to leave their formal groups. They showed their struggles and anxieties as they started to reflect and compare the values they adopted from the groups and the outside world. The three phases of students' formal identity change showed the dynamic nature of group identity. It has to be acknowledged that there were overlaps and interconnections between the three phases and individual differences existed among the twelve interviewees.

Frist Phase of Formal Group Identity Change: Develop a Sense of Belonging

In the first phase, the data showed that students developed their initial sense of belonging from being involved in their formal groups. A sense of belonging to a particular group provides a community that fosters individuals'

group identity, feelings of acceptance, and validation of one's identity (Hagerty, et al., 2002). In this study, students' sense of belong to their university groups first started by comparing their university group to their previous school groups. The reputations of their universities also played a role in contributing to students' sense of belonging to university groups. Finally, UNNC participants also developed a sense of belonging to their disciplinary groups in this phase.

Accustomed to Universities and Comparing to Secondary Schools

In the first phase of students' identity change in formal groups, the participants' sense of belonging towards their universities began by comparing it to their experiences in schools. Comparing to the previous education institution they studied in, the openness in the university environment towards various values and information made them feel that they are valued and respected as part of the university group.

Chen, Yu, Dong and Cai from UNNC and Ke, Hu, Shen, Le and Qi from ZJU mainly claimed that in comparing to their previous experiences before university, their universities provided them with a larger platform than before *'to see a much bigger world'*. The university enabled them to communicate with people from various backgrounds and to access to new information from both academic study and social life.

> *Dong (UNNC): I came from a small city and I think the subjects have helped me to see a much bigger world… I think I used to live in a small bubble. I only cared about my marks… didn't even care about what was going on in the world. I feel I like to be a member of my university since it allows me to see and think more.*

> *Ke (ZJU): The university helped me to see much more about the world: to have more information, to know people from different backgrounds… Before entering the university, it was quite narrow… I mean, I don't have much choice about what to see what to believe. I feel I have more sense of belonging in my university than my old school because of the openness.*

Compared with students' previous educational experiences, the ability to have more opportunities to communicate with others and exchange ideas in universities facilitated a sense of belonging. Meanwhile, participants (UNNC: Yu, Chen, Cai, U-Xia, Dong; ZJU: Ke, Pan, Hu, Le, Shen, Qi) saw entering university as a turning point in the sense that they felt they had more opportunities to make decisions in terms of what to believe and what to value in universities.

> Cai (UNNC): The value change was dramatic… Sometimes I even think that I did not even have any values or beliefs before university. In the university, I started to think about those, and try to put myself into some kind of category… a group which shares the same values as me.

> *Qi (ZJU): I think since I entered university, I changed greatly in terms of my values. I am no longer the girl who lived in her small bubble in school who only cares about my study and my marks. Being a member of the university made me much more open-minded and I paid more attention about what my values are.*

For both universities' participants, in a general sense, getting involved in a formal group of the university was very important in terms of students defining themselves. The data from both contexts suggested that for individual students, universities offered them more opportunity and provided a more open environment to adopt new norms, especially compared to their secondary school experiences. Although from the perspective of an outsider, universities could still be small "bubbles", in which students have very limited contact with

the world outside the university. However, in both contexts' students' eyes, the influences of university on them individually was seen as strongly positive, for the reason that it bridged the smaller bubble students lived in in the previous education with the real world they were going to face. The findings drew a similar picture to previous studies on students' evaluation of being involved in the university that most students in universities gave positive evaluation of the university environment (e.g. Scanlon, et al., 2007; Hillman, 2005).

Reputation of the Universities and Shared of Experiences

The findings indicated that the two universities' participants' sense of belonging towards their universities was influenced by the reputation of the university, but the data revealed differences between the two contexts. In the ZJU's context, the positive public regard of the university greatly contributed to students' sense of belonging. All ZJU participants indicated that they felt proud of being a student of the university because of its considerable reputation. As ZJU is one of the oldest universities in China, being founded in 1897, it has an excellent reputation for teaching and research among the public in China. The positive public opinion aroused a strong feeling of being proud of being a student of the university. For example:

> *Le: It is a great university in terms of its reputation, teachers, and history. And, as 'ZJUers', we are really proud of that. I mean when people see us they may have the expectations of us of being intelligent and good students. I think it makes me feel a sense of belonging here.*

It had been emphasised, especially by ZJU students Ke and Hu, that their experiences in this *"top comprehensive university"* broadened their horizons in the sense that it provided a platform for them to get to know other outstanding peers.

> *Ke (ZJU): I have very strong sense of belonging here. I am moved every time I hear our university anthem because I have a very good relationship with other students here. It is a very good university with a*

great environment and excellent students. But on the other hand, the university is like a beautiful bubble. We accept each other and share similar values. Once I left, I might not know how to work or get along with other people outside the university.

In Ke and Hu's minds, the reputation and entry requirements of the university assured that peer students would be strong academically. They were even concerned that they might not be able to be work with a similar group of people in the future.

In UNNC's case, there was also a connection shown between participants' sense of belonging and the reputation of the university. Since the China campus of the university, which founded in 2004, was relatively new to the public of China and not as well-known as ZJU, UNNC's case was a very different story. As UNNC has some settings which are different from other Chinese universities, UNNC students Yu, Chen, Xiamotioned that they heard many doubts and criticisms about the university. However, these students' commitment towards the university had been strengthened by the misunderstanding. These students expressed similar feelings that they felt more sense of belonging through mutual understandings among their '*own kinds'*. For example:

Yu (UNNC): I always asked by my old school friends or my relatives: Why do you have so many holidays? How could you work hard if you have so much free time? Are students in your university spoiled rich kids?... I am tired of explaining everything. Sometimes people's questions make me angry. It is just…they don't get us if they haven't studied here. They can't understand the values we learn, which are really great to us. Sometimes I feel I only belong to the circle within the university. Only they know what I am talking about and share the same values or interests with me.

The misunderstandings from outsiders had little impact on these students' opinions of their university, instead, the shared experiences and the shared group norms made these UNNC students feel a stronger sense of belonging.

The findings of this study provide empirical support to Ashmore, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe's (2004) framework of group identity in the sense that students' formal group identity at the university level is associated with broad public opinion of the university. Positive public opinion could contribute to students' sense of belonging to the university, which is one reason for universities attempting to gain a good outward reputation. Additionally, AhnAllen and his colleagues (2006) raised their doubts if meanings of belonging were more focussed on shared experiences, and level of comfort. They suspected that one's sense of belonging could be maintained without specific social gestures, as long as the group does not explicitly exclude them. The findings of this study partly supported this view for the reason that students were highly committed to their own university on the basis of their common experiences among peers. However, the findings also suggested that group norms were as crucial as shared experiences in university students' sense of belonging towards the university. When formal group values are cherished among students, their sense of belonging to the university can overcome negative public opinion of the university.

Sense of Belonging at the Disciplinary Level

At the disciplinary level, ZJU participants' evaluation and sense of belonging were relatively diverse comparing to UNNCs'. The basis for ZJU participants holding different perceptions about their disciplinary groups was their interest in the subject. UNNC participants, on the other hand, mainly positively evaluated their subjects and showed a greater sense of belonging.

The data suggested that the sense of belonging to their disciplinary groups among ZJU students in this study showed great consistency with their role identity in terms of academic interests. ZJU students Shen and Qi did not express much sense of belonging towards their subjects/department. As it has been discussed before that the subject for some ZJU students was to some

extent assigned based on their academic performance in the first year, they lack of interests in participating in subject-related activities.

> *Shen (ZJU): I did not feel much sense of belonging in our subject. It was a reluctant choice for me, I didn't get marks high enough to study the subject that I liked and this one didn't seem so bad, so I did it. Students in this subject were just like me, so basically, we all didn't care that much about this subject, and didn't hang out much.*

Shen's experience and perception was shared by Qi who also was allocated into a subject she had no interest in in the first place. Ke and Le from ZJU also felt a lack of a sense of belonging. Though these two had not been allocated into the subjects they wanted, they picked subjects which in others' eyes were "good ones", rather than on the basis of their own interests.

As it was mentioned in the chapter about students' role identity, Hu, Pan were the two students from ZJU who studied the subjects they were interested in. Unsurprisingly, these two students felt much stronger sense of belonging to their disciplinary group than other ZJU interviewees.

> *Hu (ZJU): The more I learn about my subject, the more I feel I attached to it.*
>
> *Researcher: Is your subject your first choice?*
>
> *Hu: Yes. Now I feel like I am more committed to it than before. The creative part of it, especially, I really enjoy.*

In contrast to ZJU's case, UNNC students in this study shared more similarities among themselves in showing deep commitment towards their subjects. They all tended to compare their own subjects towards the others' and claimed that they were proud of their subjects. For example:

> *Chen (UNNC, studied International Studies): We have read much more than those students from International Business, and we do more presentations than them. I mean no offense, but I do think we do more in-depth thinking than them in doing our discussion or essays.*

The findings echo Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk's (1999) study. They indicated that the sense of belonging is stronger within self-selected (or achieved) groups than in those assigned groups. The findings in this study supported it in the sense that UNNC students in this study, who had more opportunities to select their own subject group than ZJUs', developed a stronger sense of belonging at the disciplinary level.

In summary, in the first phase, participants in both universities developed a sense of belonging to formal groups as the initial stage of their formal identity change. A sense of belonging towards their formal groups was significant to students, as they developed a positive sense of who they are, and felt that they were valued and respected as part of their university and disciplinary groups. In connecting to the second phase of group identity change, the sense of belonging towards the disciplinary groups seemed to have stronger influence on students' levels of adopting group norms. The reason for this is that the group norms of the university were usually delivered by classes and day to day interactions among teachers and students within the disciplinary groups. The sense of belonging towards the university could be based on the fact that students share a lot of common academic and social experiences within the same campus. The sense of belonging towards the disciplinary groups, on the other hand, was more related to students' recognition of the group norms and values at both university and disciplinary levels.

Second Phase of Formal Group Identity Change: Being Active Members

At the second stage of students' formal group identity change, students tended to become "active" members (Lave & Wenger, 1991) within their university groups as they adopted group (academic) norms and internalised these norms as their formal group identity. As discussed in the literature review, the adoption of group values and beliefs played an important part in the process of

constructing group identity. When similar values and beliefs are shared within members of the same group, it leads them to take part in group activities (Hogg, 2006; Hogg, et al., 2012). However, this may not be the case in every individual's group identity change, as the findings of this study pointed out. In this study, not all students adopted the formal group fully, and there are noticeable differences between the two universities.

Despite differences between the two universities' contexts, all participants stated that they learnt the norms and beliefs promoted by universities during the four years. They had in their mind of a model student in their university who fully adopted these norms and beliefs, and then compared themselves to the model. The level of adoption in terms of each individual student, however, differed. In a general sense, there were three aspects of students' formal group identity: being critical thinkers, possessing the sense of agency, and being collaborative members in their formal groups. The reasons to discuss the three aspects is that there were not only similarities and differences that appeared in comparing the two groups of universities' students, but there were also differences in the relationships between the individuals and groups. The three aspects were a means to achieve an understanding of students' formal group identity, as well as the defining characteristics of being typical member of the group.

Being "Critical Thinkers"

Within the formal groups, both universities' participants (UNNC: Yu, Chen, Cai, U-Xia, Dong; ZJU: Pan, Hu, Le, Shen) mentioned they had adopted the norm of being "critical thinkers" as a part of their formal group identity. In a general sense, the key features of being critical thinkers as identified by students were people who are able to interpret different perceptions through questioning ideas and assumptions. However, there were noticeable differences between the perceptions of students from the two universities. UNNC students

in this study placed relatively more emphasis upon the importance of being critical thinkers within their university than ZJU students.

It was not only because five out of six students mentioned it, but some students (UNNC: Chen, Cai, U-Xia, Dong) saw critical thinking as the most important value they had adopted. They believed that it was the main norm within the university and they could benefit from being critical thinkers in academic study. For Xiafrom UNNC, she believed that she could even carry this group identity on even after she left the university.

> *Chen (UNNC): At the end of the day, I may not be able to remember what I have learnt in the university exactly, but the skill of thinking…By that, I mean critical thinking, is valuable for the rest of my life. This is the purpose of Higher Education for me.*

> *Xia(UNNC): (Being a critical thinker)… will be quite helpful in terms of my future study and even work maybe. As a critical thinker, I would not be easily misled by information and I can make my own judgements.*

In Cai and Dong's cases, being "critical thinkers" in academic groups had a personal meaning to them as it made them become more independent individuals. As such, being "critical thinkers" as part of their group identity also constructed on their personal identity. As they mentioned:

> *Cai (UNNC): I think now I am an independent person who is capable of critical thinking after four years' study and I am proud of that.*

> *Dong (UNNC): I think the university made me become a 'thinker' who is capable of critical and free thinking. I think it is a valuable thing that I have adopted from my university learning… Now, I will not stop thinking about the information and knowledge that I have encountered in my daily*

life. To me, it is significant progress personally which enables me to be more independent as a person.

The significance of being a critical thinker as a part of formal group identity was not emphasised as much by ZJU participants as by UNNC participants, although the term or some other concepts which could be seen as part of critical thinking were mentioned by four out of six students. ZJU students in this study spoke about it only when they were asked by the researcher about formal group values, rather than referring back to it while discussing other questions (E.g. changes in the university, and personal values), in contrast to UNNC students. Moreover, no statements were made about how this norm transformed them into 'thinkers' or more independent people with critical thinking skills.

Students' interpretations of this norm differed from the two universities. All UNNC students in this study preferred to use the English term in describing the norm as they learnt the word from the British university and they found it difficult to use a Chinese word to express the identical meaning. The definition of 'critical thinking' given by UNNC students Yu, Chen, and Xiawas: interpreting various perspectives they learnt from lectures, books and discussions through questioning views and challenging theories. For example:

Xia(UNNC): … (It is) the capability of finding out the problem, access information, analyse information and finally give my own opinion about the problem and support my argument with evidence.

UNNC students Cai, U-Xia, Dong, and Yu also used other terms such as 'free thinking', 'independent thinking' in contributing their understandings of being 'critical thinkers'. By using those terms they were referring to what they had learnt in the university, especially in academic learning: there is no right or wrong way of thinking in discussions with a genuine openness to different views. They believed that in adopting the critical way of thinking they changed

in the sense that they started trying to look underneath the things they take for granted, to think about causes and/or consequences. For example:

> *Researcher: What do you mean by "free thinking" exactly?*
>
> *Yu: I mean… There is no right or wrong answer as long as you can support your ideas with evidence. It is just exciting for me to be participating in the discussions in class. We can debate and then still be friends after that. No hard feelings. These kind of discussions made me spend time thinking about what do I really believed in and why.*

In ZJU's case, the understanding of being "critical thinkers" was not as sophisticated as UNNC students. Only one student, Hu, actually used the term 'critical thinking' in English. He believed it refers to "*not trust other's sayings so easily*" and "*think more thoroughly rather than believing things immediately"*. Le from ZJU, who used the Chinese term *"pi pan xing 批判性"* for critical thinking, also explained it as they would no longer easily agree with others' opinions and to acknowledge there are multiple angles of seeing things. She also added on when asked by the researcher:

> *Researcher: So to you, 'critical thinking' is having different angles in seeing things, is it right?*
>
> *Le: Yes, partly and also accept the fact that there are various value systems. It is to be more logical and not judgmental.*

Similarly, Shen, who studied Public Policy at ZJU, pointed out that mainly because of the subject knowledge she learnt, she had become more tolerant and less judgmental towards other people and towards what happened around them.

> *Shen (ZJU): Since my subject is about public policy, I think I have a different opinion about our government than I did before. Before, when there was some governmental policy I used to criticise it superficially. But now, I would give it more thinking. I have learnt from my subject knowledge that policy making is a very complicated process and there are a lot of aspects that need to be considered as our teachers said. I*

would not give unthoughtful comments, and have become more tolerant towards people and things.

Pan, a Law student from ZJU, suggested that subject learning made him: *"more rational in doing things. I would not easily be affected by emotion in seeing things."* He believed that these kinds of values and change of beliefs had benefited him, especially in his future career, that he could become more objective in decision making and could take flexible approaches to problems.

Both Shen and Pan were unaware when discussing the group norm that they had adopted from their subject study is also part of Critical thinking in literature (logical and rational thinking, see Paul & Elder, 1999, 2003). In the Chinese literature on critical thinking, Chinese academics recently acknowledged and raised the significance of critical thinking skills in higher education though no empirical work had been conducted by them (E.g., Zheng & Li, 2010; Wang, 2004; Zhang, 2007). The website of ZJU showed that it made efforts to encourage teachers to engage in critical thinking in teaching by inviting them to related workshops. However, the findings of this study revealed the gap between the intention of the Chinese university in promoting critical thinking skills in students' learning and students' lack of understanding. As it has been mentioned earlier, difficulties arise in bridging the gap between critical thinking and teacher-centred teaching and learning methods still largely dominant in Chinese universities.

It has been shown by the data that though both universities' students considered 'critical thinking' as a norm they adopted from their learning experience in the university, UNNC students in this study had a more comprehensive understanding of it than ZJU students. ZJU students in this study emphasised more acknowledging the perspective differences without being judgmental, being realistic and logical, rather than discussing, debating or challenging others' ideas as UNNC students suggested. The reason for this difference between the two universities' students was embedded fundamentally

in the different learning contexts promoted by the two universities. All UNNC participants pointed out that critical thinking was the value emphasised by the university in different occasions, such as public speeches given by the chancellor of the university, lectures given by teachers, and discussion in classes. They noticed that the university environment was essential in encouraging them to participate in academic discussion and in constructing knowledge. They claimed that the university provided a space for ideas to be explored.

> *Chen (UNNC): It emphasised the value of being critical in our learning. Since Year 1, we were always been asked 'what do you think?', 'do you believe in it', 'why?' or 'why not?' in class if there is an argument somewhere. In my subject, especially, we are always being encouraged by teachers to think more deeply and to be more critical.*

UK universities have been considered of having Western-style deductive, critical debate as academic norm (Durkin, 2008). Critical thinking has been suggested by the university as an important skill for studying in the University of Nottingham (including its China campus). It also provides guidelines and support groups for all students in developing critical thinking skills in academic writing (e.g. University of Nottingham Website). Moreover, as critical thinking is often considered self-explanatory in a British academic context but may not be familiar to Chinese students, UNNC made strong efforts to make the norm more explicit to the students. In the first academic year's learning in UNNC, apart from English language learning, it provides modules such as 'Introduction to Analytical Thought[2]' and 'Media and Texts: Society[3]' in order to develop students' critical thinking and reasoning skills.

[2] "*Description of the module: This module introduces the fundamental components of analytical thought which underpin study in British higher education institutions and provides practice in their application within Arts and Social Sciences academic disciplines. In particular, it develops skills in analytical thinking and reasoning. It focusses on the abilities to problem solve and to present, evaluate, support and defend an academic argument or viewpoint. It supports participants in developing confidence in their own reasoning, tolerance of ambiguity, and flexibility and fairness in considering different viewpoints."*

[3] "*This module provides an introduction to the academic study of media and society. In trying to consider some of the consequences of digital technologies and the Internet, it will take the opportunity to address the historical context and how the press, cinema, radio and television have each in their own ways had impact and effect on media and society. The course will also strike a balance between using, as appropriate, media texts and examples from Asia and also European/western case studies and research to help students develop their critical thinking skills by enabling them to reflect upon their own patterns and experience of media consumption."*

ZJU, on the other hand, failed to give students the impression of promoting 'critical thinking' as an important norm in teaching and learning. In order to understand the role of the formal groups in delivering this norm, the researcher probed further with Le from ZJU who mentioned critical thinking as one formal group norm she adopted.

> *Researcher: Do you think 'critical thinking' is an important value delivered by your university?*
>
> *Le (ZJU): Not really. It totally depends on if you are lucky enough to meet some teacher who has such a value.*
>
> *Researcher: What about yourself?*
>
> *Le (ZJU): I was lucky enough to meet a teacher like that and it makes me to think from different angles. Actually, I learnt it more from day to day life rather than from class – talking to the teacher after class and so on. I would prefer to be taught it in class because it would be clearer to me what it really is.*
>
> *Researcher: So you don't think there is enough information about 'critical thinking' delivered in class?*
>
> *Le (ZJU): No, I don't think so.*

No related modules or classes have been provided by ZJU as a method of introducing and developing students' critical thinking skills. It has been pointed out by Tian (2011) that critical thinking has been avoided by teachers in their teaching in Chinese universities as it was not been valued highly in exams, even though teachers were aware the significance of it. In Chinese universities, the teacher-dominated style and large lectures could not offer students enough space to build up advanced thinking skills (Xie, 2008; Tian 2011).

Possessing the Sense of Agency

The data of this study suggests that to possess agency appeared to be another formal group identity of students in both universities. Agency refers to the ability of individuals to take rational actions intentionally to shape the world around them (Emirbyer and Mische; 1998, Shanahan, 2009). There were two different levels of agency revealed in this study: firstly, students from both universities showed personal agency in terms of their personal development; the second level concerns social change, in which UNNC participants were more passionate about making changes than ZJU participants.

Firstly, the data revealed that students consider possessing personal agency as a significant identity they adopt since they entered universities. Personal agency is when an individual acts intentionally and controls directly (Bandura, 2008). It has to be pointed out that though possessing the sense of personal agency relates to individuals' personal value, however, in this study it was a common value shared by students within their university groups. Students' personal agency here is consistent with their student role identities in which they developed their learning autonomy and became more self-responsible. On one hand, as discussed in the previous chapter, personal agency was represented in terms of self-autonomy in being learners, though there were differences among individuals. UNNC students Cai, Chen, Yu, Dong, Xiaand ZJU students Ke, Hu, Qi, Le believed in the significance of great diligence and hard work. On the other hand, UNNC students U-Sun, Yu, Chen, U-Xia, Dong and ZJU students Ke, Hu, Le, Shen, Qi believed that being involved in their university groups made them realise that they should be motivated to improve themselves in terms of their personal development. For example:

> *Yu (UNNC): This university makes me feel that it is important to be more motivated all the time to develop myself. That is a very important value I learnt.*
>
> *Researcher: What do you mean?*

Yu: Other students in our university are always doing something to improve themselves. For example, they won't waste the summer holiday, but attend language courses, do charity work or do internships. These are all activities to improve ourselves, so I tend to do the same.

Student participants felt obliged to take initiatives to improve themselves and the university experiences enabled them to be more capable of doing so. The similarity between two universities' students in terms of possessing personal agency as a formal group identity was because both universities' environment encouraged students' autonomy in their learning and self-development; and the peer competition within the two universities facilitated the specific identity.

The second level of agency found in this study concerning social change was only mentioned by UNNC students in this study, not by ZJU students. UNNC students Yu, Chen and Dong also stated that they believed in the possibility that they were able to make social changes as individuals, step by step, by using the skills and knowledge they developed in the university. For these students, the possibility of making social change was new. They attributed this possibility to the university context. As Chen mentioned during the interview:

Chen (UNNC): It makes me feel like I can make a difference to the world, maybe it is because I am studying Politics. It may sound unrealistic, but… one of our teachers used to ask what we would like to do in the future and he later said he would like to see some of us working in the United Nations one day – to make a change in the world. I had never had these kind of thoughts, but I do now…they become a belief.

This statement was agreed with by two other UNNC students: Yu and Dong. Given that they believed in the possibility that their actions could transform society, they saw awareness and knowledge as an important change as the first step to other changes. Critical engagement with information in the university was related to their confidence in making changes.

Yu (UNNC): It is a privilege to study in this university. Not only because it is quite expensive, but mainly that we have the opportunity to access information and to be encouraged to think about the reasons, sometimes

even solutions for problems such as poverty, democracy, social inequality, and so on. These kind of privileges make me want to…or feel like I could make a change one day.

In the interviews, when I probed further regarding how the students thought they could make change the world, they indicated that they had no specific plan for doing so. However, they commented that even though it was difficult to make fundamental changes to transform society, it could be achieved through a gradual build-up of small changes in making the world a better place. Chen and Dong also mentioned that they were even more inspired by the experience of previous students in making or in trying to make social changes.

Chen (UNNC): Yes, I do believe I could a make contribution to social change one day… In one way, maybe not huge, but… For example, one previous student from our department now is running his own business quite successfully. At the same time, I heard he is also doing well in some charity work which helps poor people in western China. Maybe one day, I could just do the same.

Dong (UNNC): I have heard previous students started to make social changes, well, maybe not changes but they are to that direction. For example, I know a girl who used to study in our university. She is working in OECD in Paris and making her effort to help children's education in developing countries. To me, this is very inspirational.

These findings may reflect how the UNNC offered its students relatively more opportunities to think about their goals and their capabilities in the future.

The data from this study indicates that both universities' participants' showed personal agency academically and also in terms of their personal development. The issue of agency for social change as a group norm, on the other hand, was raised only by UNNC students in this study. This difference between the two contexts was considerably influenced by the differences of institutional contexts.

Being Collaborative in Formal Groups

Being collaborative in their formal group did not tend to feature in ZJU participants' formal group identity in this study, but was very prominent among UNNC participants. UNNC students in this study developed this group identity through learning, organising and finishing tasks with peers, from both successful and unsuccessful experiences of team projects. The differences between students from the two contexts to some extent reflected the different teaching and learning approaches: ZJU's approaches are highly teacher-centred while UNNC tended to use student-centred approaches.

Four UNNC students Shen, U-Sun, Cai and Dong among pointed out that being collaborative members was important in the university group. These students believed that in collaborative group environments they could make steps to synthesize key ideas from group discussions. Teamwork, thus, could be more efficient than individual work, especially in learning. For example:

> *U-Sun: The most important thing I have learnt in the four years is how to work in a team. I learnt how to use the power of a group not an individual to finish a task more efficiently and how to take your responsibility in a team.*
>
> *Researcher: Can you explain how you learnt that?*
>
> *U-Sun: In numerous courses during the four years, we were required to work in small groups- four or five people usually- to finish some projects and write a report after that. And after so many different projects, I think I have learnt how to work with people, and work efficiently as a team. After all, you can just do this much, and sometimes you need to understand work as a team could make things much easier.*

It was emphasised by all UNNC interviewees that being collaborative within formal groups was significantly encouraged by their academic study in UNNC. Students had been involved in various projects which required them to work

with their course mates. They claimed that collaborative activities provided opportunities for them to communicate with other students (especially students from the same subject) and to work through ideas with others and then work out the best way to solve problems. For example:

> *Dong (UNNC): In some courses, teachers gave us tasks that I had never encountered in my previous education. For example, they asked a group of us to make a film. It requires a lot of skills such as organising the project, communicating with team members and planning each step of the project. Learning to me is not simply reading, writing and memorising. All of us have to learn how we shall work as a team- to find out our aims, to consider as many opinions, and make the best decisions.*

It was added on by U-Xia, Dong and Cai that being collaborative members in formal groups allow them to increase a sense of belonging towards the disciplinary groups.

> *Xia(UNNC, studied International Communication): We probably learnt much more theories than students from Business and those really make you think deeply. We have the nicest group members in our subject I think. We turned out to be very good friends. Plus, we did all kinds of projects together, like film making, drama performing… Team work makes me feel an even stronger sense of belonging to the group.*

Both good and bad experiences of collaborative activities promoted communication and learning. Cai and Dong emphasised that even unsuccessful collaborative activities such as inefficiency and misunderstanding could be an important part in learning, as they learnt from them and found solutions to the problems and even developed leadership skills.

> *Cai (UNNC): I now understand the importance of a good team. Of course, I had experiences in bad teams which were neither efficient nor cooperative. But both good and bad experiences in working in a team made me learn how to work with a team and even how to be a leader in a*

team. I think I am much better in leading a team and making teamwork more efficient… like how to deal with disagreements and be decisive.

Dong added that the difficulty in being a collaborative member in UNNC could include cultural barriers through which misunderstandings and misinterpretations happened in team work. However, Dong developed her skills in working with students from other cultural backgrounds through experiences of such work.

Dong (UNNC): Sometimes in our teamwork, we have to work with students from other cultures. I found we have very different ways of thinking. At the beginning, I could not quite understand their ways of thinking and was not comfortable working with them. But after a while and a few projects, I started to learn how to work with them as a team and tried to take their perspectives on board.

These findings support the argument made by Webb (1982) and more recently Alavi and his colleagues (2002) in their studies that learning could be enhanced by peer collaboration through specific mechanisms. The mechanisms here were conflicts and disagreements in team discussion. They could also be new knowledge or cultural perspectives provided by other group members as well as the necessity for individual students to explain themselves, which may facilitate their own understanding.

Being collaborative was not been mentioned by ZJU students as a part of their group identity within university or disciplinary groups, though they showed they desired having collaborative academic groups. Unlike in UNNC where there was the combination of lectures with large groups and seminars with small groups, there was very little opportunity for ZJU students to experience peer collaboration in formal learning. This was mainly because all the classes they had were organised as large group lectures. It did not mean that ZJU students had no collaborative behaviours in their studies, but being

collaborative had no chance to feature in their formal group identity. Peer support experiences existed among ZJU students. Qi and Le, among the six students, mentioned that they were helped by other students in their learning. Both of them expressed confusions, frustrations and struggles which resulted from not being involved in smaller formal groups. Seeking help informally from peer students had been vital in their learning. For example:

> *Qi (ZJU): All of a sudden, we didn't know what to do (when she first entered the university). We didn't have any fixed classes. No one told us what to do and there is no one such as my head teacher in the secondary school to guide me. For a long time, I just followed whatever my roommate did… Then, we had previous students who could give us advice about learning and student life in the university, which helped a lot.*

Since no collaborative courses were designed for students in ZJU, students were expected to work on their own. Although informal communications among students could take place, it was neither encouraged nor necessary. In general, UNNC students who had collaborative courses experienced higher levels of learner–learner communication than ZJU students.

The difference between the two universities' students reflected different teaching and learning approaches in the two contexts: in ZJU teacher-centred approaches dominated teaching and learning, while in UNNC tended to favour student-centred approaches. From the perspective of individual students' development, student-centred approaches encourage students to set their own goals for learning, and design their academic activities which are meaningful to them in working towards their own goals (Jonassen, 2000). Researchers such as Hansen and Stephens (2000), and Gregory (1997) had their doubts in the efficiency of student-centred learning in the educational climate nowadays. They illustrate the resistance of students to intellectual student-centred work and argue that there is evidence which shows students are more receptive to traditional approaches of teaching and learning. However, their perspective could be challenged. In the changing global environment and internationalisation of higher education, which emphasises the integration of

sciences and cultures, it may be argued that collaborative skills in organisations and institutions are more needed than before. Student-centred approaches do, however, assume a great deal of student interaction which is more in keeping with collaborative learning. Students could take in control of interactions, make decisions about with whom they work, and how. As students negotiate their relationships with each other, they must articulate their ideas, and engage in a disciplined social process of inquiry to be successful (Bruffee, 1995). These activities are in keeping with constructivist principles and the goals of student-centred learning. It could be argued that in this century, the role of university should resemble that of the facilitator to engage students in a collaborative learning environment as well as developing their collaborative skills.

In conclusion, in this phase of students' formal group identity change, students adopted the norms and values from their academic groups and internalised as a part of their own identity. Three aspects of students' formal group identity revealed in this phase: being critical thinkers, possessing the sense of agency, and being collaborative members in their formal groups. The three aspects which have been discussed here were not the only norms, but the most important that appeared in the data. In comparing the two contexts, UNNC participants had a clearer and more comprehensive understanding in conceptualizing formal group norms than ZJU participants. The findings showed that norms generally are enforced among students when those are viewed as important by the university and most group members. Norms developed through explicit statements of teachers, departments and university, and/or senior students' behaviours. The differences between the two universities' students on their understandings of these formal group norms reflected the educational settings.

Third Phase of Formal Group Identity Change: Transition from University Groups to the Social Settings Encountering

In the third phase, the data showed that participants from both universities had their struggles because that they felt the gap of norms/values in and outside the formal groups. All students in this study were final year students and had already developed a strong sense of belonging towards their university and adopted group norms as their group identity. When they were facing leaving the university, especially when working part-time and/or interning, they started to revaluate their formal groups. Their anxiety increased once they realised that people from outside of university could expect different things from them.

In the context of ZJU, part-time work and/or internship experiences in the final year made participants realise that they had to work with people with different values. Ke and Hu mentioned that they had the feeling that work colleagues in their internship were different from their peer students in terms of their thinking habits. It was emphasised further by Shen who claimed that the value differences intimidated her and led to the consequence that she refused to find a job that relate to her internship/part-time job. She pointed out that the experience made her realise that she needed to find a future job within a better environment where her co-workers shared similar values and beliefs.

> *Shen (ZJU): It was not a very pleasant experience for me because I realised how different people's ways of thinking could be. As a ZJU student, just like other students, I would like to know, for example, what I am doing, why and how it works. Those people, they just didn't care at all. Sometimes, I felt it was very hard to communicate with them. You see… So, I would make sure that in the future, I am going to work in a place with people who share the same way of thinking.*

Compared to ZJU students, UNNC students in this study showed more concerns about meeting the outside world. The most important aspect that was

addressed was the concern of bridging the group norms they adopted in the university with the Chinese society that they needed to face after graduation. Students who had internships or part-time jobs had already noticed the problem that the gap would cause them emotional to deal with (UNNC: U-Xia, U-Sun, Cai).

> *Xia(UNNC): However, after my internship and part-time job in the final year, I don't think this way of living (in the university) could fit our society. There is a big gap between our university and the society. It seems to me that our students are too naive. In the workplace, they just didn't value our skills such as critical thinking and being creative. They just wanted someone who listens to them all the time.*

It seems that UNNC participants more than only concerned about facing people and their values outside the group, but also anxious about that value and cultural differences between within the university and in the social setting in China. This was also reflected from the descriptions of other students who did not do work experience whilst at university. The other three UNNC students: Yu, Chen, Dong, expressed their concerns about how they were going to fit in a society which they believed had core values and beliefs that were deeply imbedded in national culture and tradition. They doubted if they would be accepted by others well in the society of China, as the values they adopted in the university was originated from Western (British) culture. For example:

> *Dong (UNNC): I may am a bit too optimistic: I always think there will be more opportunities for me- too ambitious if you would like to say. I am afraid I will be hit by reality one day.*
>
> *Researcher: In what way?*
>
> *Dong: For example, people would say: you are a girl, why do you need to be so ambitious? Or…stop being aggressive, nobody likes a bossy girl… You know, different from the so-called Western values of being equal, free thinking and so on…*

The fear of entering Chinese society made many students consider further academic education. Yu and Cai indicated that they were not ready to face the different values if they went to work immediately after graduation. Moreover, Yu and Chen who were studying International Studies and Xiawho was doing International Communication chose different subjects for their master's degree for the reason that could not see how their current subjects would be popular among recruiters in China.

Informal Group Identity Change

The informal group identity coexisted with the formal group identities. Unlike formal groups, in which group norms were introduced from top down, informal groups of students were formed spontaneously on the basis of shared interests and perspectives. In this study, unlike some studies (e.g. Phelps, et al., 2001; Cinnirella, 1997; and Tomlinson & Fassinger, 2003), students showed no interest in categorising themselves by their political views, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or by sub-cultural groups in terms of informal groups. Rather, the findings of this study showed that the main direction which their informal group identity changed into were forming close friendship circles and become good friend within their friendship circles.

It has to be noticed that since each student in this study was involved in different friendship circles and it was difficult to identify each of their informal group identities. However, in a general sense, the changes of students' friendship circles followed the three phases of transitions: in first phase students got to know other students within the university and started to form friendship circles and experienced the process of getting better self-understanding; in the second phase, students had settled in their friendship circle; the third phase was when students had to start facing their leaving of their friendship circle in their universities.

First Phase of Informal Identity Change: Forming Friendship Circles

The first phase started with students' getting to know others within the university and then gradually being certain about who they would like to be friends with. Fluidity is a key feature of peer groups and the forming of this kind of informal groups enabled students to develop self-understanding (Cairns, et al., 1998).

All students in the study had experienced a period of being uncertain at the beginning, and then were settled in a relatively small friendship circle after this phase. UNNC students Yu, Chen, U-Sun, Cai, Xiaand ZJU students Ke, Pan, Hu, Le stated that they made a lot of so-called "friends" in the first year and two. However, they started to feel most of them they had not much communication with and shared no common interests. UNNC student Dong and ZJU students Shen and Qi stated that they were also uncertain in the first place, though they were too shy to know many people in the first year. The data showed that sharing, discussing, and exchanging ideas were significant in building students' identity in informal groups. For example:

> *Pan (ZJU): It was normal to be friend with everyone in the beginning, because you didn't know them well and they didn't know you well. We were still confused what do us really want back then…But after a while, I can tell who share the same interests as me and I would be more close to these people.*

> *Cai (UNNC): People may get along well in the first place, but after several months or even maybe a year, you then see someone's true colours. Some people just turned out to have different interests or values to the rest of us. Then they leave after some time. This mainly caused changes in my friendship circle.*

The process of narrowing down their friendship circle was actually the process of students to have better understanding about their own ideas and perspectives.

Second Phase of Informal Identity Change: Sharing Similar Values and Being "Good Friends"

In the second phase, students were settled into their closer and more stabled friendship circle. The data showed that the most significant elements in bonding the members within their friendship group together were sharing same values (including cultural values) and being encouraging and supportive friends.

Sharing Values

All participants stated that they gradually got along with some other students better and finally stayed within their small circle of friends. The perception/value similarities and difference among peers was an important cause to the transition of narrowing down their friendship circles. UNNC students Yu, Chen, U-Xia, Cai and ZJU students Pan, Le, Q believed that since they had better understanding of themselves and their own values, they saw changes within their friendship circle as part of getting more mature. For example:

> *Chen (UNNC): Changes are good in the way that I realised this is how life is like. It is a sign of getting mature: you cannot be friends with everyone forever. I am much clearer about what I want and what I value, so it is natural for me to choose people who share the same values as me to be my friends.*

In UNNC students Yu, Chen, and U-Xia's cases, there was a fundamental difference in terms of cultural values which caused difficulties in communicating with foreign students. Chen had been to the UK for his exchange year, and he mentioned: *"I just could not have in-depth conversations with them, or even casual conversation. For example, football culture in England. I don't understand that, so when they were talking about it I didn't know what to say."* On one hand students felt frustrated as the four year's British education could not provide them enough knowledge about British culture. On the other hand, the feeling of belonging towards their own friendship group was enhanced by the realisation of difference between groups. As Xiaexplained:

> *Xia(UNNC): Although it seems that four years in the university would be enough for us to understand Western culture, I would probably think that if we need to understand other countries' culture we have to start before that, maybe from secondary school or even primary school… it might be not that hard if we could at least have a basic understanding about different cultures…I think that is the point which I realise I am a Chinese person, and I will always belong to my Chinese friends.*

The findings agree with the argument that students tended to settle with peers who share their perspectives, and maintain and/or change groups to support their developing sense of self (Cairns et al., 1998; Faircloth & Hamm, 2011). By establishing and settling within their own friendship circles, students felt some sense of control and felt less uncertain about their own values (Raffo & Reeves, 2000).

Being Good Friends

The significance role of friendship was highlighted by both universities' students in interacting with other members of informal groups. All students in this study, from both contexts, indicated that they highly valued the importance of being good friends in their small friendship circle. Peer friendships were safe places for students to explore their identity, and healthy friendships

provided them with support for realising their expectation of self-improvement in universities.

Every student in this study mentioned that their friendship circles were inspirational for their self-improvement. For example, Ke from ZJU described how his engagement in informal groups had initiated his self-reflection on his communication and organisational skills which facilitated self-improvement.

> *Ke (ZJU): I think through participating in activities in students' clubs and knowing a group of friends, I started to learn much more about myself. Because when I did something with others, for example, organising an event, others would tell me about how I did. Then I can improve myself if I had not done so well.*

Hu from ZJU added that by witnessing other students' behaviour in social interactions and reflecting on themselves, motivated him to enhance himself.

> *Hu (ZJU): There are some excellent people in my friendship circle. Hanging out with them, for the first time made me realise that you could do great academically and also have a colourful life- I mean, that is what they do. I started to reflect it on myself and finally it worked for me as long as I planned everything well.*

Similarly, UNNC students U-Xia, Chen, Yu, and Dong mentioned that they had benefited from socialising with other students within their friendship circle in various aspects: their friends helped them in academic learning, were emotionally supportive and inspirational. Turner and his colleagues (1994) wrote that group identity is a redefinition or changed perception of the self. By reflecting on themselves within social interactions, students in both universities had developed understanding towards themselves. Realising they could gain self-improvement from the peer groups, students preferred to stay in the group for further development.

However, students in this study also mentioned the negative side of being "good friends" with other members in their friendship circles. Because of the

high priority of friendship among students, there was a sign of depersonalisation among both contexts where students were seeking the acceptance of peer members and avoiding being *'the odd one out'* (UNNC: Chen, Cai; ZJU: Qi, Ke). For example, Qi mentioned that she was trying to avoid studying too hard in front of her peer students even if she would like to do so in order to not be seen as being different. She explained:

> *If I word too hard, other students might say 'look, how hard she works, but her results are not as impressive' or 'such a nerd'. I could not handle that. I always think those who study hard and ignore what other people might say are quite brave.*

Similarly, Ke from ZJU also mentioned that he usually consumed more alcohol than he should have. He felt if he behaved differently from his friends it would hurt their feelings and jeopardise his friendship with them. He explained:

> *I won't turn my friends down if they persuade me to drink. I always put friendship in front of my own health even though I have stomach trouble. I cannot be the only one who does not drink among my friends. It would be weird and my friends would not be happy.*

In UNNC's case, Cai gave the example which she felt obliged to participate in group activities and behave as other members did even though it was against her own desire.

> *Cai (UNNC): Sometimes I have to socialise with people I am not familiar or even I don't like in some group activities or parties held by my friends which made me uncomfortable. But, it feels like I am obliged to participate in these kinds of activities just to fit in.*

Her perception was supported by Chen's, even though group activities could be time-consuming when he had no time to waste:

> *Chen (UNNC): Sometimes you have to follow what your friends do. This could be exhausting. Sometimes I have to go to some activities, such as dinner parties, or to Karaoke, but actually I still have a lot of study I need to do. I usually still go because I don't want to lose my friends.*

Social psychologists argued that the process of depersonalisation happens during self-categorisation that people see themselves less of unique individuals with distinguish characteristics but as representatives of a group under conditions of social salience. (Hogg, 2005; Burke & Stets, 2009). The data partly agreed with the argument that depersonalisation happened when students place a high level of priority on friendship groups. Students from both universities felt there is a necessity to behave the same way as other group members in order to fit into the friendship circle. It could also be interpreted that students' uncertainty about how to behave in social activities made following their peers as the most appropriate thing to do.

Apart from seeking acceptance within the groups, the one-child policy in China could also be a contributing factor for students to highly value the significance of friendship. Pan from ZJU and Chen and Yu from UNNC had mentioned that being the only child at home made them treasure friendships, but at the same time, they needed to make extra efforts to keep their friendship as friends were not like family. As Pan explained:

> *Researcher: Why do you think you value friendship so much?*
>
> *Pan (ZJU): Because our generation are all the only child at home, to us friends are really important. But I think friendship is not like the relationship between family members. Your parents may love you no matter what. You still need to take care of friendship. But since we don't have siblings, I do treasure my friendship with my good friends… some friends come and some go… gradually, I know more and more about how to take care of my friendship circle.*

The one-child policy in this sense could be one of the contributing factors that influence the change of their informal group identities in terms of students' friendship pattern. No study has yet been conducted about the policy's influence on students' identity, but the findings of this study indicate that the relationship between the two elements could potentially be interesting to explore.

Third Phase of Informal Group Identity Change: Leaving Friendship Circles in University

In the final phase, both universities' interviewees narrowed their friendship circle down and developed their sense of belonging to a closer friendship circle at the end of their university year. The shared experiences within the university made them greatly value university friends which in some students' cases caused them to feel struggled.

Questioning how they dealt with leaving their friendship circles in their university, students (UNNC: Yu, Chen, U-Sun, Cai, U-Xia; ZJU students Ke, Pan, Hu, Le) mentioned that they felt sad about leaving but they also stated that they saw being able to face such changes as a sign of getting more mature. For example:

> *Yu (UNNC): It is sad, I mean, I really treasure my friendship with my university friends. We spent the whole four years together and did a lot of interesting things. I wish we could stay together, but that leaving is also a part of our lives. I think I need to learn to face that.*

For those students (UNNC: Dong; ZJU: Shen, Qi) who were shy to make friends in the first phase, especially, the friendship circles they formed later were very important to them. In this phase, it was more difficult for them to deal with the fact they were going to be apart from their university friends because of graduation. For example, Shen from ZJU mentioned that she was not so keen in making a lot of friends in the first two years, but later became good friends with her roommates as they were very kind and nice to her. As a student in the last a few months in the university, she was anxious about leaving her friends because:

Shen (ZJU): I am quite satisfied with my friend circle now, so I am afraid of change. And also, it is less possible for me to make new friends… I mean I cannot meet people as good as my roommates.

Moreover, UNNC students Yu, U-Sun, Cai and ZJU students Shen, Le and Qi, claimed that after four years studying in the university and being friends with university friends, it was difficult for them fit in to their old friendship circle before university. They had never realised how much they belonged to the current friendship group before they got the chance to talk to their old friends. For example:

Le (ZJU): One summer vacation I went back to my hometown and met my friends from secondary school… It turned out that our communication was not as smooth as I expected and we seemed to have developed different interests after a few years. I just didn't know what to say to them and their conversation made me so bored, and at that point I missed my university friends so much. It also made me realise now I belong to the friendship circle in the university.

The data showed that participants' attitudes towards leaving informal groups were depend on each student's personality and his/her own social patterns. However, all participants recognised that it was a process of getting more mature and growing up which can relate to their personal identity development.

Contextual Influences

Universality Settings

Participants from both contexts experienced changes in participating in student clubs and groups. Sharing similar interests was the main reason for all UNNC participants to be involved in student clubs/ associations. Sunand Chen mentioned that they were encouraged by the university to form their own

students' clubs under certain university regulations and rules. They joined those groups on the basis of their own interests and felt inspired to share their common interests with other members. For example:

> *Chen (UNNC): We had many choices (of student groups) in the first year, and our university even allowed us to start our own group if we would like to… I just feel I am more interested to join these groups...*

For UNNC students U-Sun, Cai, Yu, Chen, Dong, Xiaand ZJU students Ke, Hu, Le, Shen, Qi), the most common reason for leaving the group was that they chose to spare more time on study rather than social activities. For example:

> *Xia(UNNC): ...I just don't have the time to participate in any kind of student clubs. You see, in the last two years, we have so many assignments and exams. Also, in the final year, I went to do an internship and also applied for my master's. After all, these are more important than student clubs.*

There was a difference in terms of ZJU students on this matter, though they stated that they first participated in students' clubs and groups for interest. Le, Pan, Qi described that a student union/club is more or less like a mini "real world society" to them and they left those groups for the reason that they felt it conflicted with their personal values. They pointed out that students' clubs/associations they joined were semi-formal which means students' role and/or performance in those groups could relate to the credit they have to earn in the university and awards the university provided. It was quite common for other members of the group to seek power in order to get reward from the university and eventually benefit their job hunting or application for further education. For instance, Pan mentioned that he left the student union because he found out that some other students were always being struggling for power within the group. He was disagree with those students behaviours and their values thus he chose to leave. As he explained:

As much as I like to help other students, which is also why I joined in students' union in the first place, this kind of power struggle made me uncomfortable. This experience made me know more about my own value: the fact is that I don't like pursing this kind of power.

In terms of friendship circles, all six interviewees from UNNC pointed out that since they started to study their subject in the second year, they made many friends within the department for the reason that they shared a lot of common interests- mostly subject related, and could have in-depth discussion with each other. For example:

Sun(UNNC): I made a lot of friends in the first year. But in the second year, I found I preferred to make friends who studied the same subject. And I was not so close with year 1 friends since then, because with friends within my subject, we could talk about subject related things and we are all interested in them. It is always better to have in-depth conversation with friends rather than just hang out.

ZJU students Ke, Pan, Shen, Le, Qi, in contrast, they tended to make friends outside the department. As it has been discussed before, since ZJU students in this study felt less sense of belonging than UNNC students at the disciplinary level, they made friends mainly with other students living in the same dormitory with them and those they met in social activities such as student groups/associations.

The reason for this difference was that in UNNC a lot of group discussions, presentations and other tasks took place which fostered communications among students in the same subjects. According to my ZJU interviewees, most classes they had attended in the university were lectures with one teacher and more than a hundred students. There was very little opportunity for them to get to know other students well, especially when those lectures were teacher-

centred with no chance of discussing or doing projects together with other students. As Qi mentioned:

> *Qi (ZJU): I don't really hang out with my course mates. We only meet when there are classes which are about an hour and then go back to do whatever we need to do. The class is so big- more than 100 students. There was no chance of getting to know each other well. In contrast, I spend most of my time with my roommates, so we are much closer – even closer than my parents.*

The differences in the patterns of friendship circles between the two universities echoed the findings in students' formal group identities. The teaching and learning patterns in the universities which had an effect on students' formal group norms also influenced their patterns of making friends.

Youth Culture

Compared to students' group norms within formal groups, the group norms of students in informal groups showed much more similarities between the two contexts. The youth culture among Chinese students, to a large extent, was an explanation for the similarities in their informal group identities. For instance, students from both contexts used similar online social networks to contact their friends, and to share information with each other. Students from both contexts tended to use similar languages, and more importantly, use those platforms to share information and perceptions.

> *Yu (UNNC): We all use Weibo and Renren. It is just easy to get in touch with other students, to share our thoughts, and to get information.*

> *Qi (ZJU): I mean, now we all have online social network like Renren, Weibo, and QQ. Before university, I didn't have much time to be on it. But now, I am on it almost every day, every hour. I learn news, and information from them. To be honest, the most important influence is that*

I feel it is harder for the government to fool us now. We can always learn the other side of the story online.

The shared information and culture among young people across university boundaries led to the similarities of students from both contexts in their perceptions. A good example would be that students from both universities shared similar attitudes towards one's political position. Students tended to avoid showing interests in taking a political position as a Communist party member for the reason that in the peer culture it is an *'old-fashioned'* behaviour. Ke from ZJU, who indicated his political position as a Communist Party member, mentioned that a Communist Party member should be expected to 'lead the rest' in a conventional sense and used to be seen as a reward towards the most excellent students in the university. However, he claimed that he did not felt proud of being a member, and explained:

Ke (ZJU): Other students just laughed at me and made a joke of me being a party member…Well, you see, it is no longer a popular thing to do. Clearly, students like us no longer believe in any kind of government propaganda. I only joined the party because I was the class leader.

Yu and Chen from UNNC and Qi from ZJU, when talking about political positons, stated that since they could access much more information than previous generations, they preferred to take their own perspectives towards politics rather than simply believe in what they had been told. They also added that among the young students of their generation, it was popular to see pursuing a membership within the Communist Party as a desire for quick success in job hunting since some positions, especially those in government, give priority to party members.

Summary Table: Similarities and Differences between the Two Universities

Before I move on to the discussion of the findings in students' group identity changes, the following table has been used for illustrate and summarise the similarities and differences between the two universities. By presenting the result of comparing and contrasting, it can lay the basis for discussion.

Similarities between UNNC and ZJU students
<u>Formal group Identity:</u> Experienced ***three phases of transitions***: **Phase 1**. Developing a sense of belonging to university groups; **Phase 2** becoming "Active" member who adopt group norms; and **Phase 3** transition from university groups to the social settings Share main trend of formal group identity change: to become active members; Share perspectives of what groups norms to adopt and how to internalising norms: • *Being critical thinker;* • *Possessing sense of agency;* • *Being collaborative member academically*
<u>Informal group Identity:</u> Experienced ***three phases of transitions***: **Phase 1.** Forming friendship circles; **Phase 2** sharing similar values and becoming good (supporting and encouraging) friends; and **Phase 3** leaving friendship circles in university

Table 6-1 Summary of the Similarities in Student Group Identity Change between UNNC and ZJU

Sub-Themes	**UNNC Students**		**ZJU Students**	
	Identity Changes	*Institutional Context*	*Identity Changes*	*Institutional Context*
Sense of belonging – disciplinary groups *(in Phase 1)*	Positively evaluated subjects and showed greater sense of belonging to subject groups; Being friends mainly with classmates	Opportunity to transfer subject; Opportunity to choose complementary courses	Not much sense of belonging at the disciplinary level; Not being friends with classmates but with roommates/members from student clubs	Subject choosing procedure: some could not choose the subject they liked; Complementary courses are compulsory No communication in class: teacher-centred teaching and learning approach
Being Critical thinkers *(in Phase 2)*	More emphasis upon the importance; More comprehensive understanding of "critical thinking"	Emphasised by the university in different occasions: public speeches, lectures and discussion in classes.	not emphasised as much as by UNNC students Less sophisticated in defining "critical thinking"	No related modules or classes have been provided to introduce or develop students' critical thinking skills
Possessing sense of agency in terms of social change *(in Phase 2)*	More passionate about making changes in social change: believed in the possibility to make social changes by using the skills and knowledge learnt in the university.	Encouraged students to think about more possibilities in the future	Not mentioned	
Being collaborative members within formal groups *(in Phase 2)*	Organising and finishing tasks with peers; Learn from team projects	Academic projects required students to work with course mates	Peer help not in formal groups but in informal groups	Not much communication with classmates: big class, teacher-centred teaching and learning approach; Lack of formal support
Group Value Conflict between with and out of the university *(in Phase 3)*	More concerns about meeting the outside world: concern of bridging the group norms in the university with the Chinese society.	Not enough opportunity offered for students to encounter the social settings	Acknowledged that had to work with people with different values	

Table 6-2 Summary of the Differences in Student Group Identity Change between UNNC and ZJU

Discussion

This chapter discussed the main findings of the study on students' group identity in formal and informal groups. The findings add to the currently limited group identity literature research and create a framework for further research into university students' identity change. A number of themes emerged from the data analysis which confirm the international research literature and at the same time go beyond it in particularising the influence of context upon students' group identity change. In this section, I will first discuss the limitation of existing conceptualisation of group identities, and then propose a framework drew from the findings of this study. I will then discuss the findings in relation to the context of the two universities.

Limitations of Existing Models in Relating to the Findings

Even though theorists (e.g. Burke & Stets, 2000; Hogg & Terry, 2000) argued that individuals have to categorise themselves and this automatic process of self-categorisation is a precondition of group identity, researchers such as Huddy (2001), Mohr and Fassinger (2000) and Ashmore, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004) suggested that self-categorisation could be ambiguous to individuals under certain circumstances when: group boundaries are not clear; people who categorise themselves in one group vary wildly; or people are subjectively uncertain on issues of identity. Indeed, this was shown in my study. In some other literature concerning group identity, participants had been able to categorise themselves into ethnic groups, language groups, or gender groups (e.g. Phelps, et al., 2001; Cinnirella, 1997; & Tomlinson & Fassinger, 2003). However, in my study, none of those groups were mentioned by students (though many mention they are not "Western"), the only groups students could categorise themselves in were their formal groups (university and disciplinary) and informal groups (friendship circles and student clubs).

One main reason for this phenomenon was that students from the two universities shared great similarities as they were from the same ethnic[4] and language group. Besides, students from these two universities shared a lot of similar experiences in their previous education and the academic and social experiences within universities were relatively alike among individuals. As suggested by much literature, universities create a bubble in which students' share similar learning and living experiences (e.g. Brennan & Patel, 2008; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006). They were living away from home and resident on the university campus and nearby accommodation, shared with other students, and sometimes from the same course. Universities can be seen as 'total institutions'. The main characteristic of a total institution is described by Goffman as an absence of barriers separating different spheres of life (Goffman, 1991). All aspects of life are conducted in a single place, under the same authority and in the company of the same group of people who are expected to do roughly the same things in the same kind of way as each other (Goffman, 1991). It is arguable that Goffman's argument is only partly true in this study as both the differences between the two universities' students and individual differences existed. However, the differences in this study were not about how students categorise themselves, but to what extent students adopt the universities' norms or they felt a sense of belonging to their university.

I am not arguing here that a collectivist culture dominates the group identity of the university students in my study. However, it is undeniable that the automatic self-categorisation process did not happen to the students in this study as the existing theory suggested, and the model which based on the self-categorisation theory built by previous researchers cannot be applied to my study. Therefore, based on the data of this study, it is necessary for me to propose an alternative framework of group identities than previous studies.

[4] By same ethnic group, here I see "Chinese" as an ethnic group (there are many ethnic groups within the Chinese, such as Han, She, Dai and so on).

Conceptualising Students' Group Identity Change in Universities

The findings of this study support those of previous studies (e.g. Ashmore, Jussim Wilder, & Heppen, 2001, 2004; Deaux, 1996) which indicated the multi-dimensional features of group identity, and argue that there is no exclusive framework in conceptualising university students' group identities. The findings also suggest that student group identity change is partially defined by the institutional arrangements and partially constructed and reconstructed by students. Therefore, it would be helpful to build a new model by looking into to students' formal (institutionally arranged: university, disciplinary) groups and informal (voluntary: students clubs, friendship circles) groups separately rather than groups with specific names, for example, a lesbian group (as in Abes & Jones, 2004), Latino groups (as in Torres, 2003). The new model allows a researcher to investigate individuals' group identities among people who share great similarities especially ethnicity and national culture.

University Students' Group Identity Change in Formal and Informal Groups

The findings of this study argue that the forming of students' group identity in formal groups is largely different from in informal groups. Thus, the existing knowledge about group identity change needs to be reframed and refined in relating to the nature of groups. It emerged in the analysis presented in this chapter that students' group identities had been formed in formal groups in universities by three interconnected phases (Figure 6.1):

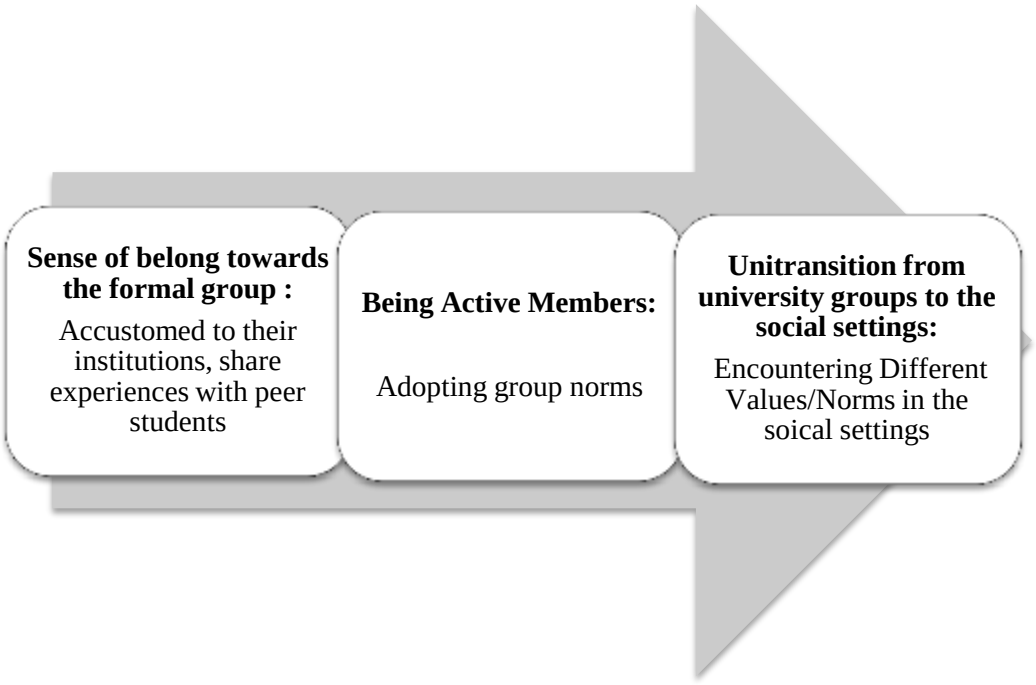


Figure 6-1 A model for understanding students' formal group identity change in university

As has been shown in the figure, students' formal identity change is also an on-going process. Students first developed a sense of belonging towards the group they are involved in by sharing similar experiences in their university lives with their peer students. In the second phase, during their learning and living experiences, students adopted group norms. In the final phase, as they were about the leave university, they had struggles and anxieties when they encountered values different from what they have adopted within their universities.

The identity change in informal groups is different from formal groups, though there were also three phases of changes appeared from the data. It could be showed by the Figure 6-2:

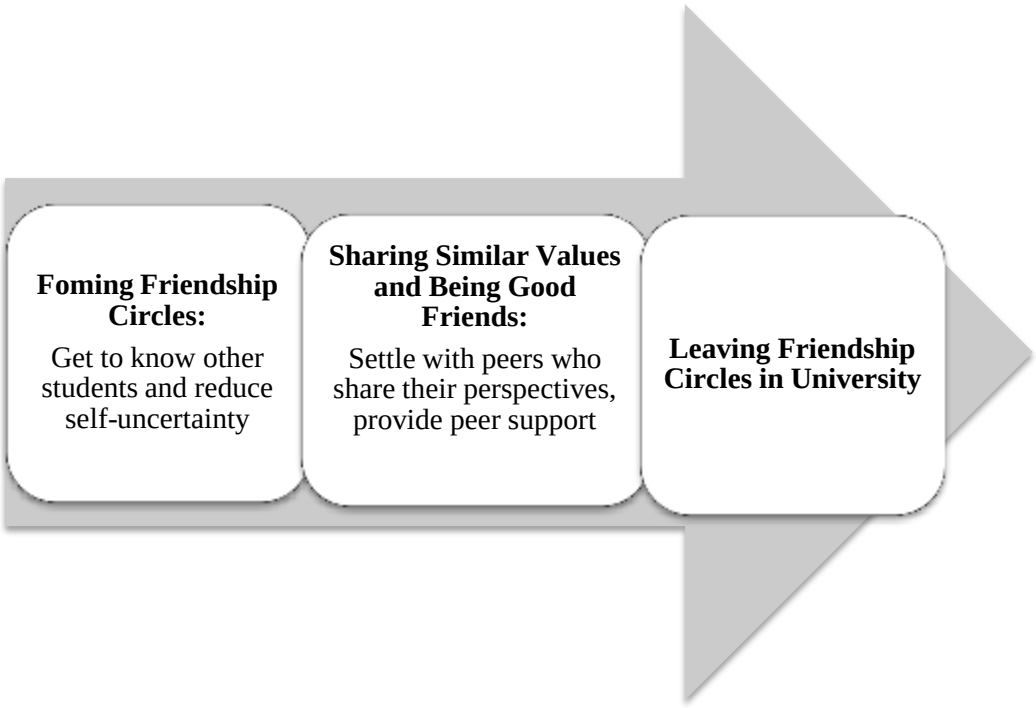


Figure 6-2 A model for understanding students' informal group identity change in university

Within informal groups, though the forming of students' friendship circles had more flexibility than in formal groups, there were also three phases revealed from the data in terms of students' identity change. In the first phase, students first got to know their peers and then gradually narrowed their friendship circles down to be with who shared their interests and values. It was a process students to gain more self-understanding (which in a way related to their personal identity). In the second phase, students were settled with their friendship circles and valued the importance being good friends who were supportive and encouraging. The final phase happen when students had to leave their university friend groups. Students were feeling sad about leaving the groups, though recognised the change as a part of growing up.

The next section will discuss the conceptualisations of students' formal and informal group identity in relation to the existing theories and demonstrate how they contribute to the theories.

Contributing to Group Identity Theory

In social psychological theories of group identity (especially in Stets and Burk's model of identity change), researchers argued that group identity emerges when similar features are shared by a set of individuals who are involved in the same community, category, practice or institution (e.g., Stets et al., 2013; Ashmore et al., 2004). They argue that norms and values within groups describe and prescribe guidelines for group members' perceptions and behaviours which enable individuals to have the confidence in how to behave and what to expect (Burke & Stets, 2009; Ashmore et al., 2004). They also believe that when a group identity has been taken by the members, they would have consistency in viewing things, behaving and evaluating themselves and others (Burke & Stets, 2009; Ashmore et al., 2004). The cognitive process of self-categorisation leads to individuals' proud feeling of joining a particular group and also generates a sense of belonging during the process that individuals go through in identifying themselves with group norms (Deaux, 1996; Ashmore, et al., 2004, Gecas, 2000; Hewitt, 2003).

However, the findings of this study suggested otherwise. This study agrees with the argument that group identity change is the result of either negotiation of relationships or may be, in some instances, the result of imposition of norms by more influential or powerful members (Hogg & Terry, 2000). To be more specific, students' formal identity change in universities is the result of the imposition of universities' norms. The findings of this study in students' formal group identity resonate with Lave and Wenger's (1991, 2002) notion of "legitimate peripheral participation" and "community of practice". The process of being a member in a university group starts with students' participation in their communities where members become accustomed to their institutions in terms of day-to-day practice and principles. Students developed a sense of belonging as they shared similar experiences with other members within their academic groups. Gradually, as new students become old students, they have accessed more central values of the groups which in this study's case adopted

formal groups' norms. Individual differences exist here as members of formal groups. As Wenger and Lave (2002) argued, individual students act as active participants in formal groups and construct their own group identity by interacting with other members. However, unlike in Wenger and Lave's (1991) model, students had no choice of staying in the formal groups within universities after four years. Thus, the final phase of formal group identity change is inevitable regardless students' own wishes, which students in this study showed their struggles and anxieties in facing the social settings outside of their university groups.

The findings in students' informal identity change, on the other hand, suggest that students' participation friendship circles may not be described by the concept of legitimate peripheral participation or community of practice. As the data of this study suggested, students formed their informal groups through sharing common ideas and interests and comparing themselves to members outside of their groups. Finding links and keeping common interests with other members in the group was vital in sustaining their peer-groups. Establishing a friendship network which can support, discuss and clarify their perspectives and ideas played a significant part in the processes of students' informal identity change in universities. Even though the data of this study showed that students were pursuing independence in their university experiences, they were "not blind to the existence of powerful claims of interdependence" (Furlong & Cartmel, 2006, p. 114). The common ideas and interests with other group members supported and verified their informal group identity.

Moreover, the informal group identity change of university students in this study was influenced by their desire for self-development. In the literature, social identity theorists predict that people tend to identify themselves by the groups they joined within a context that they feel uncertain and/or they have the need for self-enhancement (Hogg, 2004; Hogg, et al., 2012). Social psychologists, such as Hogg and Terry (2000), Hogg (2004, and 2005), conducted a serious of studies to support the prediction. The findings of this

study support Hogg's argument. They added to the theories that students' need for self-improvement and uncertainty reduction are not only motivation to join informal groups but also reasons for students to stay in those groups. Students, in developing their informal group identity, were influenced by the positive characteristics of other members within their circle. Students' friendship circles provide them with positive support despite the negative connotations. In these two universities, informal groups such as friendship circles were essential for students in terms of their self-development.

Unlike in students' formal groups, where group norms are relatively clear to students, in informal groups, no clear group norms had been mentioned; rather than "norms", there were shared features and interests among paticipants. The findings of students' informal group identities agreed with Postmes and his colleagues (2005) who argued that group identities in interactive groups could be contributed to by pre-existing group features as well as by group members' characteristics. In this sense, it demonstrated the necessity for studies on students' group identities to look into the formal groups separately from the informal ones.

Concerning the Two Universities

Students' Adoption of Formal Group Norms as Group Identity: "Small culture" Matters

The findings of students' formal group identity in UNNC show that students may, in particular university contexts, adopt formal group identities which are characterised and promoted by the university. The data shows that, as a result of academic learning experiences in the university, UNNC participants embraced the formal group norms of critical thinking in academic learning, believed in the possibility of affecting social change and valued collaboration

as they applied it into informal group activities. This study empirically builds up on the argument that large culture discourse is insufficient for the purpose of examining students' university experiences.

As it has been mentioned in chapter two, there have been many studies carried out in recent years that have explored Chinese or Eastern Asian students' identities in studying abroad. Researchers, such as Hofstede (2001), Triandis (1995), and Bond (1996), argued that the cross cultural differences between the West and East may cause difficulties in learning for Eastern Asian students in Western universities, especially in terms of adopting Western values such as critical thinking and argumentation. They argued that Eastern Asian cultures have large power distance, low individualism and high uncertainty avoidance, which may hider learners ways of thinking and learning in Western context. This argument has been criticised by more recent researchers as they had overlooked the impact of the large culture (e.g., Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006, Durkin, 2008, Clark & Gieve, 2006). They argued that "large culture" discourse needs to be interrogated by an alternative approach which tries to understand, interpret and represent the actual learners whose learning who is influenced by context. For example, Gu and Schweinfurt (2006) conducted a comparative study on Chinese students' learning experiences in the UK and in British programmes in China and indicated that the large culture is not the only element in characterising Chinese students and their leaning and behaviours could be largely affected by specific contexts.

The findings of this study suggest the significance of small culture in students' formal group identity change. "Small culture" which is defined by Holliday (1999, p. 248) as "the sum total of all the processes, happenings, or activities in which a given set of several sets of people habitually engage" needs to be taken in consideration. Thus, this study preserves the specificity of locally contextualised data as well as looking into the data in the large culture framework: The two universities' students shared similar educational experiences before entering the universities, but they showed different levels of

understanding of the norms such as in the different educational settings. UNNC participants had more sophisticated and comprehensive interpretations of formal group norms which were delivered by the university, and those were the values that guided their group identity. Since the norms occupy a central place in the work of universities, it is important to construct a small culture within the university and/or the classroom through which the group identity, such as being critical thinkers, possessing self-agency and being collaborative members, is encouraged.

The findings of this study add empirical evidence to current literature that there is a necessity for institutions such as universities to clarify their academic norms and embed them into daily teaching and learning. It has been argued by Kote (2007) rather than hoping that individual group members internalise group norms and values by themselves informally at some point, organisations need to critically reflect on their own norms and train their members directly addressing the underlying assumptions, beliefs and values of the group because it would be more efficient and clear for group members to learn. The findings from this study supported this argument in the sense that UNNC participants had a more explicit understanding of formal group norms such as critical thinking and collaboration because the university (and their subjects) were more explicit in their values/norms and more direct by delivering the messages in daily teaching. ZJU, on the other hand, to an extent, delivered the academic norms with less success even though it showed the intention to do so.

Implications for the Two Universities

Firstly, there is a necessity for Chinese universities to pay more attention to the fact that students feel challenged to face the value/norm differences in and out of the university. Giving that using a "large culture" approach is inadequate in exploring students' identity in universities, students' group identities are largely shaped by the university context. Universities are still 'total

institutions' in Goffman's term (1991), in which most spheres of students' life are conducted within a single place. Students appreciated the academic norms and developed a great sense of belonging in the university, and then started to fear facing the world outside of the university as they noticed there could be a value gap. To enable this kind of transformation for students, university undergraduate programmes have to be planned to provide opportunities for students to not only to produce and use the skills they learnt in university, but how to apply them in their future career.

Secondly, the institutional settings also have an impact on students' informal group identity change. Even though students from the two universities showed great similarities in terms of their informal group identity change, UNNC students in this study tended to be more involved into friendship circles which were formed by peer students from their academic groups. The reason for the difference was highly related to the settings of universities and the formal group identities of students. Participants from UNNC were encouraged to be more collaborative in their academic groups while students were not engaged in any academic group activities in ZJU. Since the peer groups had great benefit in supporting and encouraging students in terms of their self-improvement, the friendship circles formed by academic group members may have more positive influence for students academically.

Furthermore, the findings in this study address the concerns regarding the internationalisation higher education. In previous literature on transnational universities (e.g. Heffernan & Poole, 2005; Dunn, et al., 2006; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007), as it has been discussed in the context chapter, a lot of attention had been paid to the possibility of transnational education in making host countries face great challenges, and also on how to a foreign university could deliver the same quality of education in a host country. In China's context, however, as the data suggested, the local context and culture has a great impact on students, although internationalisation of their higher education took its major form from the one-way process of importing Western ideas, academic

norms, and standards (Huang, 2007). There was evidence that more in-depth study needs to be conducted, as employers in China may not be ready to manage the cultural adaptation. Some employers might believe students who had Western higher educational background have a feisty attitude which would not make them compliant employee for the company (Melik, 2012).

The findings of this study add to the literature of internationalisation that from the perspective of students' development and offers an insight into transnational education from the perspective of students' identity changes. As more Western universities seek to establish offshore campuses, the issues related to students' group identities raised in this research will become increasingly relevant and require more investigation. No longer should transnational education focus only on the quality assurance of education. Instead, it should pay more attention on how they could merge university's academic norms with the local context in order to assist students' development and prepare them for the local job market after graduation. Thus, new educational settings need to be developed specifically for the context of offshore campuses, rather than simply importing them from the home campus.

Chapter Seven: Students' Personal Identity Change

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse students' personal identity. I will start with their personal attributes, since being unique individuals is the most significant feature of one's personal identity (Hogg, 2005; Burke & Stets, 2009). The construction of students' personal attributes was an on-going process: individual students reflect their personal attributes in social interactions, make changes, and also maintain some of their attributes.

I will then analyse students' personal identity change in the universities. The main findings shown in this study is that both universities' students expected themselves that they would be more independent and mature individuals at the end of their university lives than they were at the beginning. Three phases in students' personal identity change were identified: in the first phase, students had learnt to live a more independent life in which they started to manage their personal affairs and finance, as well as to develop a more equal relationship with their parents; in the second phase, students had become able to make academic choices and deal with disagreement in social interactions; in the third phase when they started to face leaving universities and pursing jobs, they learnt to be able to make career decisions in terms of having more "practical" career aims and direction.

In the following section, I will provide a discussion which aims to conceptualise students' personal identity change and then link the findings of this study to existing theories.

Personal Identity from the Past: Self-Perceptions about Personal Attributes

Theories suggest that what is special about personal identity is the uniqueness and distinctiveness of each individual in seeing himself/herself (Hogg, 2005).

Individuals' have certain characteristics and/or behaviours which they feel cause them to be different from others (Hogg, 2005). Individuals' current self-view about their personal attributes is affected by their memories of their personal past lives (biographies) (Wilson & Ross, 2003). People begin to think about their own identities by 'locating themselves in the past', which includes their biography and previous personal experiences (Abes, et al., 2007). Though this study focusses on students' personal identities in university, students' current personal identities can be traced back to their past. This section will discuss how students in this study locate them from the past in reflecting on their personal attributes.

The Unique Personal Attributes of Self: Reflecting and Making Changes

Individuals' own sets of distinctive attributes are usually discussed in order to distinguish their persona from others in their life experiences. In order to investigate this phenomenon of personal identity, interviewees in this study were asked to describe their feelings of being unique from others by telling a story of their previous life experiences. The intention of the question was to investigate the influence of biography and past experience on students' cognition of personal identity within the limited interview time. Analysing the stories of individual students, it emerged that the sense of 'being different' in students' self-perception was dynamic and highly related to the situated contexts. Moreover, these feelings could have a series of positive and negative influences on students and may lead to changes in their behaviour. I would like to recount two illustrative stories to show the dynamic feature of the feelings and its influences on students' behaviours.

Excerpt I:

> *Ke (Male, Year 4, ZJU): When I was first in the (junior) secondary school, I was not doing well in my learning. At the end of the first year, I had been allocated into a class with poorly performing students. I felt I was humiliated by being different from my old classmates, so I worked*

extremely hard in the second year. I woke up at 5 am to study and after classes I studied until 12 pm every day. At the end of the second year, I was in the top three in my grade. This experience made me realise that I can be different in a very good way: I can work harder than anyone else and be one of the best.

Researcher: Do you think the experience has had any positive or negative influences on you afterwards?

Ke: (ZJU): The positive side is that I have the confidence of doing things well as long as I work hard. The negative side is sometimes I feel I am a little bit arrogant.

Researcher: Arrogant in which way?

Ke (ZJU): I sometimes despise those who don't perform well in their learning. I know it is bad, but I can't help it.

In Ke's case, the sense of "being different" had aroused negative emotions for him of being a 'poorly performing student' which pushed him to reflect on his previous behaviour and eventually made him initiate change. He modified his behaviour into 'working very hard' in achieving his change. His success evoked another feeling of "being different" which he believed that he could do better than anyone else because he could manage to work the hardest. The series of behaviour and perception changes enabled him to have further self-reflection which led to his self-approval as well as self-doubt.

Excerpt II:

Xia(Female, Year 4, UNNC): Before secondary school, I always thought I was perfect which made me unique: all the people around me like me, and I was doing very well in my learning. Basically, I was spoiled. Until secondary school, I realised that I was no longer unique, because other kids around me could do just the same or even better. It took me a long time to deal with the psychosocial gap. But I generally leaned how to deal with my mediocrity and I abandoned the self-centred me. It was good for me in the way that I know even though I am not that special, I can always work hard to achieve.

Researcher: Do you think the experience has any positive or negative influence on you afterwards?

Xia(UNNC): Yes, the positive side is I am a humble person now. I did work very hard to get my academic awards in the university. What I have achieved so far is not because I am different or special but because I worked hard. The negative side might be I always suspect if I am over-confident and sometimes I doubt myself too much.

In U-Xia's story, she had the feeling of "being different" in a positive way in the first place as a model student. The feeling was suppressed once she entered a new context with similar or even better students around her, which caused negative emotions but also behaviour and perception changes. Xiaacknowledged the change as a positive factor in facilitating her self-understanding as well as having a humble attitude in doing things. However, the negative influence was inevitable as she was less self-confident.

Other students' stories also support the dynamic relations between one's feeling of difference and the situated contexts. Contexts were extremely important in triggering students' feeling of being different.

There were students from both universities pointed out that their feeling of "being different" in one context does not mean they can feel the same in another. Yu from UNNC and Pan from ZJU, used their stories to explain the change of context can affect their feelings of being different and unique.

Yu (UNNC): I have to say that it is a feeling which you may feel at the moment and in that situation. It can change when your situation changed…I was an odd kid in my secondary school, because I was very into philosophy and obsessed with topics such as life and death. I can say I was very different from my classmates back at the time. However, I don't feel that anymore. Since I entered university, I met other people who have the same kind of interests as me and we can talk about philosophical things together…Basically, that feeling can change according to where you are.

Pan (ZJU): Sometimes I think my feeling of being different is an illusion. For example, I felt I was special and unique because I got full marks in my entering university exam (Gaokao) in Maths. But when I reflect on it, I realise I was never the best student in Maths, and it was because at that moment I was lucky enough. If I take another exam, I may not be able to get that and to feel I am different.

Even though the stories told by each student were unique and different, the feeling of 'being different' affected students' emotional change as well as encouraged them in altering their behaviours. The feelings of being different could have positive and/or negative influences on students and these positive and negative influences were transformative.

The findings support the argument that unlike role and group identities, personal identity experiences by individuals as being unique and distinctive to themselves which emphasise personal wishes and choices rather than communal characteristics (Hitlin, 2003). However, students' personal identities were not only about having "different" or "unique" personal attributes, but also how they reflect on them in contexts and make corresponding changes or maintain their "differences" or "uniqueness".

Personal Attributes: Resistant to Change

Not all personal attributes of individuals change, as it emerged from students' stories there were certain attributes or values of themselves which were resistant to change or had been kept.

Personal Attributes which cannot be Changed

Students stated there were some personal attributes they were resistant to change. Some of these attributes were related to students' family upbringing. Students such as Cai, U-Sun, Chen from UNNC and Pan, Hu and Shen from

ZJU believed that they had learnt from their parents when they were growing up in terms of values and beliefs as well as their attitudes in social interactions. These attributes were resistant to change within the transition of contexts. For example, as Chen mentioned:

> *Chen (UNNC): I think I am imperceptibly influenced by them (parents), including my personality and the way I deal with things. Sometimes I think I am just a younger version of my dad or my mum. Even though sometimes they do not agree with me in doing something, but I think they would do the same at my age and in my position. I don't think this part of me can be changed.*

Moreover, UNNC students U-Sun, Yu, Dong and ZJU students Le, Pan, and Qi also mentioned kept attributes which they believed were embedded in their personality. They considered these personal attributes were either as neutral or even as negative, but they felt they were not able to change. For example:

> *Dong (UNNC): I think I am sometimes quite passive. It is not necessarily a bad thing. But I feel like if I could be more ambitious, I could do more, finish things better. I can't see it will happen to me ever. I think there is always some part of you that can't change.*

> *Qi (ZJU): I am not sociable at all. I feel nervous among people all the time, especially when there are a lot of people around. It is my personality but I don't really like it. I think it will be better for me if I could be more sociable, know how to talk better and be less awkward around people. But, that is something I can never be able to be.*

<u>Keeping Positive Personal Attributes</u>

There were also personal attributes students kept because they felt proud of them. From their past experiences of social interactions, students made the judgement that some of their personal attributes were positive and worth keeping. Two types of positive personal attributes were mentioned by students from both universities in this study: one type was perceived by students as

being beneficial for their self-development, and the other type was seen by students as being helpful towards other people in social interactions. Both types of positive personal attributes, as these students emphasised, had not altered along with the change of time or context.

In terms of the first type of positive personal attributes, students (UNNC: U-Xia, Chen, Yu; ZJU: Shen, Le, Qi) kept these attributes as they enable them to achieve or assist them to be able to encounter challenges. For example:

> *Xia(UNNC): One thing I am proud of about myself is that I find it easy to adjust myself into a tough living environment. I mean, normally, I am not picky and I won't complain much about the living environment even if it is horrible.*
>
> *Researcher: Since when did you realise that?*
>
> *U-Xia: When I was traveling with my friends, compared to them I am really capable of adjusting myself to any environment. I think it is a good side of me, because I feel I can survive anywhere.*

Even though these positive personal attributes were connected to students' personal development, it is interesting to notice that Xiamentioned she valued this attribute of hers as in comparison to others. It was similar in Shen's case. She saw her personal characteristic as being determined as a positive attribute in comparing to her friends.

> *Shen (ZJU): I am proud that, compared to some of my friends, I am a very determined person. If I want to achieve something, I will do my best to get it. Sometimes even people who work with me quit, I still would not give up, but to try again, again, and again.*

The second type of positive personal attributes were decided by students (UNNC: Cai, U-Sun, Dong; ZJU: Pan, Hu, Ke) to kept as they were helpful in social relationships with others. For example:

> *Cai (UNNC): I'm proud that I am always very ethical… I mean, I won't do anything to harm others in order to make my own life easier and I would do my best to help people around me. I think I will keep it this way because I don't want to lose the good side of me as time goes on.*

Pan (ZJU): I am always a happy person which I think is very good. I am very sociable and quite good at easing embarrassing situations when necessary. I think to keep optimistic is important because it can make people around to feel happy. I like my personality as optimistic and I won't change it for anything.

In the literature, sociologists such as Jenkins (2004), Jones and McEwen (2000, p. 408) argued that there is a core sense of self in one's personal identity which integrates "valued personal attributes and characteristics". They indicated that the core sense of self, which is contrasted with outside identities, is much more important to individuals and less susceptible to contextual influences (Jones & McEwen, 2000). The findings partly support this argument as students in this study had in mind core personal attributes which they valued the most and would like to keep. However, this study also argues that not only "valued personal attributes" are kept but also attributes which students perceived as neutral or negative.

Moreover, self-valued personal attributes can be influenced by social context. Individuals seek to identify their positive personal attributes in social interactions with others and derive much of their self-valued attributes from positive feedback from others. Thus, the findings add to the knowledge that the uniqueness of each individual's personal identity is not only about their personal attributes but how they reflect, keep, and/or make change of their personal attributes within social interaction during the years.

Personal Identity Change in the University: Being Mature and Independent Individuals

The data showed that for both universities' students in this study, the prime direction of their personal identity change was to be more mature and independent individuals. The age period of these undergraduate students in

universities was defined by researchers as "emerging adulthood" which is referring to a period that constitutes a distinct identity development toward being mature and independent adults (Schwartz, et al, 2008; Arnett, 2000). According to the data of this study, there were three phases that emerged in students' personal identity transition: from secondary schools to universities; a stable phase which students had adapted university lives; and from being university students to facing future career choices. This section will discuss each phase respectively.

First Phase: Transition from Secondary Schools to Universities

Similar to students' role and formal group identity changes, the transition from secondary school to universities also had significant influences on students' personal identity change. In a general sense, participants from both universities stated that they had become more independent and mature individuals since they first entered the university as they started to live a relatively more independent life.

Learning to Live an Independent Life

All twelve students in this study indicated that since entered the universities, they had to take care of their own personal live and manage their finances (though all of them were financially supported by their parents). The experiences of living alone on campus reminded them the direction of their personal identity development which was to be more independent and mature individuals. For example:

> *Qi (ZJU): It was pretty hard at the beginning. I never realised how many things my family had done for me before I went into the university. I had to do everything by myself, just to live…*
>
> *Researcher: Things like what?*
>
> *Qi: Do laundry, keep my room tidy and clean, and make plans in terms of money… though my parents support me financially, I have a budget now*

and can't spend over that…it definitely made me feel more independent, but also difficulty at the beginning since I was always been taken care of by my family.

Change in Relationship with Parents

A noticeable change of being more independent and mature individuals for students was that their relationship with their parents had changed since they entered the university. The communication pattern changed in students' relationship with their parents. Students (UNNC: Yu, Chen, U-Xia, Dong; ZJU: Hu, Zhong, Shen, Qi) claimed that since they entered universities the communication with their parents engaged more other topics rather than only about their academic study. Although all students in the study had to live on campus away from home, they had more communication with parents. Students (UNNC: Yu, Chen, U-Xia, Dong; ZJU: Ke, Hu, Shen, Le, Qi) mentioned that they had been able to express their own views in discussions with their parents, meanwhile, their parents showed a supportive attitude even towards some of their decisions even though they did not agree with them all.

Shen (ZJU): Before the university, the communication pattern with my parents was more like they teach me what to do and usually it was about my study. Since I entered the university, our communications have been more equal. It is not only that I listen to them, but also they listen to my advice.

Moreover, in getting more mature, students no longer see themselves at the ones who should be taken care of all the time by their parents. Rather, they expressed their willingness to take care of their parents, make them happy while live up to their expectations.

Second Phase: Developing Personal Identity as more Mature and Independent Individuals

In the stable phase, in which the students had already adapted to university life, their perception of how to be more mature and independent individuals was focussed on: being able to make self-decisions academically, and being capable of dealing with conflicts and disagreements in social interactions in universities.

Being Able to Make Academic Decisions

Being able to make decisions was considered by students (UNNC: U-Sun, Yu, Chen, Dong, U-Xia, Cai; ZJU: Ke, Hu, Qi, Shen) in this study as an important part of being mature and independent individuals. The decisions students were referring to in the data included academic decisions during their study such as what subject to learn and/or what courses to pick, as well as life decisions such as their career orientations in the future.

There were interviewees from both contexts (UNNC: U-Sun, Chen, Yu, Cai, Dong; ZJU: Ke, Hu, Qi) who stated that changes occurred during the years in decision making in study. This feature has an overlap with students role identity as independent learners, though in personal identity it emphasised on students' self-understanding in the decision making process. Due to their lack of self-understanding in the beginning of their study in the university, they followed others' suggestions as they had no clear picture of their interests and/or aims. The learning in university enabled students to enrich their self-understanding and subject knowledge, and thus they were able to be more independent in terms of decision making in their learning. For example:

> *Yu (UNNC): Of course I am a more mature and independent person now, comparing to the first and second year of my studies. I still listen to teachers', parents' and friends' suggestions, but I make my own decisions. For example, I know how to make decisions about my learning: what courses to choose, which direction I am going with, and*

what topic I am going to pick for my dissertation…and it benefited my learning.

Hu (ZJU): I think I am a more independent person as I am becoming more and more capable of making decisions by myself in the university. Especially when I have to decide which course is more important to me and which I can pay less attention to, because I have learnt during the years how to gather information and how to make my own judgements.

It showed from students' statements that since they developed the ability of making academic decisions by themselves, their academic learning benefited from it.

Dealing with Disagreements

The data suggested that the second aspect which was significant to students in constructing their personal identity of being mature and independent individuals was the capability of dealing with disagreements within social interactions. All interviewees from both universities stated that they were more mature in terms of they could deal with disagreements better since they were less impulsive and more calm in dealing with different opinions in their interactions with others in the university. However, the data showed that the understanding of how to handle disagreements in interpersonal interactions maturely and the approaches they used greatly differed between the two universities' students. In interacting with their peers, all ZJU interviewees in this study indicated that they believed that they would hide their own feelings to avoid contradictions in their social interactions with other students. For example:

Pan (ZJU): For example, when I was in the drama club, I would not fight for the role I wanted to play if someone else said he also wanted to play that role. I would pick other role to do even though I really wanted that role.

Researcher: Why didn't you fight for it?

Pan: I just wanted to make everyone happy even though I ended up to be the unhappy one. I don't want to disappoint anyone or to be disliked. I don't like to be one of those in other people's eyes who would like to argue with others a lot.

It has been noticed by ZJU students Ke, Hu, Pan, Le and Shen that it usually happened within student clubs rather than within their friendship circles. As it has been mentioned in the previous chapter, compared to those clubs in UNNC, ZJUs' were relatively formal and hierarchical as some were organised by the university or department, although were participated in by students voluntarily. Students' performance within those clubs could relate to awards, scholarships and sometimes recommendation letters from teachers who led them. Therefore, ZJU students in this study believed it was important to them to present a humble, moderate 'self' within those clubs rather than showing others who they really were.

Another reason for ZJU students to hide their feelings in interactions with peers was that they were afraid of "losing face". When asked whether they would express themselves if they had another chance in dealing with disagreement, all students from ZJU stated that they would not.

Researcher: Would you express your own opinion if you had another chance?

Shen (ZJU): No, I probably won't. I will feel so awkward if the disagreement leads to some kind of argument. I don't want to lose face and it is better not to say anything.

However, by saying no to the interview question, ZJU students Hu, Pan, Le and Qi pointed out that they were not feeling happy in doing so. For example, Pan put it as *"a reluctant choice". Le even stated that: "Sometimes I feel like hiding all my feelings can really drive me crazy. I am afraid one day it will explode in one way or another. "*

In dealing with disagreements with teachers, all ZJU participants tended to hide their feelings when they had different opinions. In this sense, they experienced

negotiations between their own self and the self they would like to present in front of their teachers. It could be linked to their meaning of the student role in which to their understanding it is not appropriate to have disagreements with teachers in order to not be seen as a 'bad student'.

> *Le (ZJU): When we were having a disagreement, my supervisor would say things like: "I am only thinking for your good. You would agree with me when you were my age." I very much wanted to say to him: "But I am my age now. Why do I need to agree with you now?" But I didn't say anything and did what he asked me to do.*
>
> *Researcher: Why didn't you say anything?*
>
> *Le: Well, I didn't want to offend him or let him have a bad impression of me. After all, I am going to have my PhD supervised by him. But I don't feel good about saying nothing. I am afraid one day this kind of feeling would eat me up and cause an emotional collapse in some way.*

Other than avoiding being seen as a "bad student", ZJU students Shen, Le and Qi also added that they view hiding feelings from authority as a way of being mature. The reason for them was that they need to prepare themselves in the social settings in their future workplace.

> *Shen (ZJU): It is a part of growing up, I think, you have to hide your feelings. Otherwise, I don't think I can live well in the real world outside of the university. Because when you are working, no boss would like someone who always disagrees with him/her.*

In reflecting on their interactions with teachers, ZJU students Hu and Qi expressed their willingness to make their voices to be heard by their teachers if they had another chance. They claimed that they may be able to express themselves better if they could facilitate communication with teachers during the years in order to minimise misunderstanding.

> *Hu (ZJU): I think I didn't have enough communication with my teacher and was not brave enough to tell him what I was thinking. If I communicated with him more, he would understand why I was thinking that way when we have a disagreement. He would be able to see things from my point of view.*

Ke, on the other hand, stated that he learnt how to deal with disagreements in a diplomatic way when both teacher and students were involved in. He believed that it was a mature and sophisticated way in mediating different parties, even though he was not feeling proud of it.

> *Ke (ZJU): I feel I am more and more sophisticated in dealing with others, especially when there is a disagreement. In other words, more cunning in dealing with others (hui lai shier, 会来事儿). Do you know what I mean?*
>
> *Researcher: Yes, but why do you think this way?*
>
> *Ke (ZJU): I think I learnt that from dealing with people in the student union. You know, when you are in the middle between university leaders and other students, you need to learn certain techniques to look good in front of both of them and to work things out. You can't offend any of them. I am not proud of doing so because sometimes I have to lie a bit…it is sleek… but it is the only way.*

In the context of UNNC in this study, students showed different approaches in dealing with disagreements. In interacting with peers, UNNC students (Yu, Chen, U-Sun, U-Xia, and Dong) emphasised that they were being true to themselves in social interactions with other students, even though there was a difference of opinion.

> *Dong (UNNC): Of course there are situations when I have disagreements with other students in the university, but I never held back my thoughts. If we have a disagreement, we discuss it and give our evidence to support our sayings. Even if we can't achieve agreement at the end, we just 'agree to disagree'. It is like in our seminars when students discuss. Sometimes I have to make compromises but I always say what I think first. There is no need to hide my feelings.*

It was their belief that hiding their own feelings was not the method in handling disagreements and they preferred to discuss the ideas presented by each other. The way how they handle disagreement with peer students was consistent with what they had learnt from academic discussion in class.

In dealing with disagreements with teachers, all UNNC participants claimed that they were encouraged to express their perceptions both in class and after class. As Sunmentioned:

> *Sun(UNNC): I think in our university it is OK to have different opinion with our teachers and to have our own ways of seeing things. My teachers encourage us to express different opinions in class all the time. They seem to be very happy to discuss with students who had different views even after class.*

Yu supported U-Sun's statement and added that he learnt after the four years' study the ways of communication in sharing different viewpoints with teachers.

> *Yu (UNNC): I think we sometimes still a little afraid of express our own opinions in front of teachers, even though they strongly encourage us to do so. We never had this way of communication with teachers before university because we were told teachers were always right…I personally am braver after the four years' study in terms of sharing my point of view with my teachers.*

However, UNNC students Chen, Cai, Sunand Xiahad their worries since they had noticed the differences between their university context and the social settings. They felt they had used to the ways of dealing with disagreement in the university which they might not be acceptable to others outside of their university.

> *Chen (UNNC): The impact of the university experience on me personally is massive. I think I am much more mature and independent…I can express my own opinion in a calm way without fighting with others. You know, to have a discussion, equally, with respect… But somehow I can only do it in the university… I'm afraid I might offend others… maybe my boss or superiors in the future.*
>
> *Researcher: What do you mean? Why did you get that feeling?*
>
> *Chen: I don't think people in our society like to be disagreed with. Sometimes when I was talking to people who are older than me outside of our university, I always had the feeling that they didn't like me because I expressed my own opinions rather than agreed with them. They might think I'm impolite or …maybe too aggressive in their eyes?*

The difference between the two universities' students was in the cultural perspective. Some researchers have indicated that Eastern culture tends to see the goal of communication as to retain harmony among individuals (e.g. Gao, et al., 1998; Briggs, et al., 2012). These researchers suggested that Chinese society is highly authority-centred in which role and status differences are reinforced. Their argument is to some extent supported by the findings in ZJU, where students tended to avoid loss of face and not challenge their teachers. Students believed that following this mentality is a sign of getting more mature as it prepared them to get into the social settings. However, the data showed that ZJU students in this study were not happy about their way of dealing with disagreements in social interactions. The understanding of UNNC participants on this matter was different from ZJU's which reflected the impact of university settings.

Third Phase: Facing Social Settings Outside of Universities

Making Decisions about Future Career Paths

Making decisions about their future career orientation, though more difficult, was also seen by students as an aspect in becoming more mature and independent individuals. In the final year, all students' from both universities stated that the decision-making for their future career was the biggest challenge they faced in their lives so far. It is understandable that it was not as difficult as other interviewees who have no clear vision about their future career, but all students claimed that since they had better understanding about themselves they were more capable of making decisions and being independent. Ke, Pan and Hu from ZJU and Dong, and Cai from UNNC also pointed out that they were clearer about their personal values which was helpful in deciding their future career direction. For example, Ke from ZJU claimed that the disciplinary values conflicted with his personal values. Therefore, in making decisions about his future career plans, he tended to follow the direction of his own

personal values in choosing his future career rather than fully following his parents' wishes.

> *Ke (ZJU): I think I am more independent in the way that I can make my own decisions. For example, after I have learnt Finance, I found the value in financial business which is mainly profit-driven is very different from mine. I would like to help others. So I decided to give up Finance, but to be a government official after graduation – not any government official, but one of those who could really help ordinary people.*
>
> *Researcher: Did you make that decision all by yourself? Have you asked your parents for suggestions?*
>
> *Ke: Actually they didn't agree with my choice in the first place, and they would like me to do finance related jobs. But I convinced them. I think now I know myself better than my parents know about me.*

There are individual differences among the twelve students in terms of how difficult it was for them to make decisions independently. For instance, ZJU student Pan who was determined to be a lawyer since the second year of his university study, had not as many difficulties as other interviewees in making decision about his future. He had prepared during the years in terms of taking courses which would benefit his future career.

Moreover, comparing the two universities, there was a difference between the two universities' students in the sense that comparing the two contexts, UNNC participants valued their parents and family's concerns and opinions more than ZJU's. For UNNC students in this study, parents' expectations seemed to be a vital factor that influenced their decision making. One reason was that comparing to other universities in China, the tuition fee in UNNC is exceedingly high (e.g. UNNC: 80000rmb/year; ZJU: 4800rmb/year for normal subjects). The data showed that students Chen, U-Xia, U-Sun, and Yu from UNNC to a certain extent felt obliged to fulfil their parents' expectations in order to pay their educational investment back. Family's expectations had great impact on their decision makings such as choosing subjects for postgraduate study and career direction. For example, in Chen's case:

Chen (UNNC): My parents support me both financially and mentally. I mean, you have to admit that it was a brave call for them to support me to study in this university…this is not a conventional university and the tuition fee is about ten times of other universities. I have to live up to their expectations. Otherwise…It would not be worth it… I really like to study History, but I am going to do a Business degree for my Master's… my parents would like me to take over the family business and also want me to learn how to do business. I need business skills for that.

U-Xia's statements also supported that some UNNC students felt they were obliged to pay back their parents' "investment" in their education. They could sacrifice their personal interests and do whatever their parents expected them to do if their parents insisted.

Xia(UNNC): Now I think I want to live more for my family.

Researcher: What do you mean?

U-Xia: I think my parents are more important than my own interests. I used to think I can't do a job I don't like so I have to get the job I am going to enjoy even if my parents do not like it. But now, I think it is more important to have a stable life. The measurement for happiness is complex, and at this point I think if my family is happy then I am happy.

Researcher: Why have you changed then?

U-Xia: Because of the process of growing up I think…And also, I feel they had invested too much on me, not only financially but also emotionally. I can't afford to break their hearts.

The acceptance from family was extremely important for UNNC participants, for the reason that they believed their parents had invested much more than their friends who went to normal Chinese universities into their higher education. In Figerman and his colleagues' study (2014) concerning parental involvement in students' university experiences, they pointed out that Asian students sometimes see parental support as an investment which they feel responsible to return to their family, but students nowadays may ask for more

parental support since the concepts of filial piety are changing in Asia. In this study, however, the findings showed that UNNC students in this study still showed a sense of filial piety when they noticed the investment of their parents into their higher education was larger than their peers in other Chinese universities. They were more likely to internalise their parents' expectations as part of their own expectations on the student role.

Open to Career Options and Being "Practical"

Another aspect in interviewees' perceptions of being mature and independent individuals was being more practical. As final year students, interviewees (UNNC: Chen, Yu, and U-Xia; ZJU: Shen, Le, Pan, Ke, Qi) stated that their personal aspirations had changed since they first entered the universities, for the reason that they had more practical aims for their future lives. Students were more open to other choices for their future career and lives. They saw the change of being more "practical" as a sign of getting closer to be mature and independent individuals.

For students such as Yu and Cai from UNNC and Pan and Hu from ZJU, they combined their personal aspirations with the knowledge and information they learnt in university and had new aspirations. For example:

> *Pan (ZJU, Law): My dream when I first entered the university was to be a crime writer. My subject in Law would certainly help me in achieving that. But during the years studying in the university, I noticed that our country is not doing well at all in protecting writers' intellectual property rights. If I am going to be a writer, I may not be able to live on the money I earned. I am now looking for a job as a lawyer and I think I can be a very good lawyer.*
>
> *Researcher: Do you think this change is good for you?*
>
> *Pan: Yes, I think that means I am more mature because I am more down to earth.*

It has also appeared in the data that students were trying to find new and more practical directions for their future career when their personal aspirations and

dreams were challenged. There were cases from both universities which students indicated that they were confused about their position in the society for the reason that their aspirations had changed (UNNC: Chen, U-Xia; ZJU: Shen, Qi). For example, Xiafelt lost for a while as she found the knowledge she learnt from her subject could not assist her in pursing her dream in working in Media.

> *Xia(UNNC, International Communication): My aspiration was to work in Media but my learning experience did not enable me to do that.*
>
> *Researcher: Why not?*
>
> *U-Xia: Well, my subject did not provide me enough professional skills. Instead, I learnt quite a lot of theories. For example, I don't know how to write news report.*

However, Xiaas well as Chen, Shen and Qi, all agreed that they were open to change when they realised it was not possible for them to achieve what they expected for their personal development.

> *Xia(UNNC): I was a bit lost for a while. I didn't know what I can do. I finally decided to study in Education for my Master's degree after doing a lot of research. Now it is not about" what I want to do" or "what I like to do", but "what is the best for me". It is a big step for me as it is not easy to make grown-up decision like this.*

It has also pointed by ZJU students Shen, Pan and UNNC students Dong, and Yu that changing their aspirations did not mean that they had given up their dreams. They believed that being more practical was a mature way of coping with their dreams when it was unrealistic for them right now. As Shen from ZJU mentioned:

> *Shen (ZJU): I had the dream of opening my own book shop, but now I am going to work in IT business. I don't think my choice betrayed my dream. It is just more realistic and more practical this way. I might one day go back to open my book shop, but I think it is more mature for me to put the "dream" aside for now and do my best in the real-world.*

It was common for students to make changes in their aspirations as they became older and gained more knowledge and information than they first

entered the university. However, in this study students from both universities perceived the change of their aspirations and setting practical aims for their future career were significant in helping them to become mature and independent individuals.

Struggles and Anxiety

It was shown by students' statements that though they felt they had regarded themselves as more mature and independent individuals in universities, they felt they had be seen only as students or kids when they were doing their internship and part-time jobs. In the final year, there were students from both universities (UNNC: U-Xia, Cai; ZJU: Ke, Pan, Hu, Le, Shen, Qi) who started internships or part-time jobs. They reflected on their experiences of them in dealing with people outside of universities and realised the gap between the image of themselves being mature and independent and how people in their workplace saw them.

On one hand, students (UNNC: Cai, U-Xia; ZJU: Ke, Hu, Shen, and Qi) were disappointed when they were still treated as students and kids in working as interns: there were senior colleagues to train them and guide them; they had been allocated with the simplest job in the company. For example, as ZJU student Qi who worked as an intern in an accounting firm put it:

> *Qi (ZJU): I felt like in that company I am even more like a kid than in the university, because in the university the teacher would not tell me what to do and how to do it. In my intern, my 'master' would give me very clear instructions- one step after another. As interns, they don't trust you to do anything more than basic jobs. I was a bit upset to be treated like a kid.*

On the other hand, students felt challenged in behaving as self-regulated "adults" in workplaces and to obey rules. There were interviewees who had internships/part-time jobs (UNNC: Cai, U-Xia; ZJU: Ke, Hu, Shen, and Qi) and noticed that there were differences between being a student and working as they had less control of time-management and needed to follow more rules. They pointed out that they took time to get used to the working schedule. For

example, Hu found it difficult to get up early every morning to go to his internship.

> *Hu (ZJU): To be honest, the biggest challenge for me during my internship is not the work I had to do, but to get up early every morning, five days a week…I know it sounds childish, but it is really hard. I think being university students I don't really have to do that. I could be more relaxed. Even if I don't go to class I won't be in too much trouble. It is very different in the workplace.*

In Cai's case, she did not feel comfortable in following the workplace's regulations, in which she had to wear certain types of clothes in a bank. She admitted that she enjoyed the freedom of being a student and was not yet ready to go to work.

> *Cai (UNNC): I had my internship in a bank. Actually, it helped me decide that I would never work in a bank in the future.*
>
> *Researcher: Could you explain the reason why?*
>
> *Cai: The job was not what I thought would be like. It might be a good job, but it is not the job I can see myself do in the future. To wear a boring white shirt and black skirt everyday…I need more freedom…or maybe I am just not ready to go to work yet. At least for now, I enjoy the freedom of my student life.*

In addition, it was brought up by UNNC students Cai and Xiathat during their internships, they realised the conflict between the values within UNNC and in their internships. They mentioned that they had been inspired by teachers not only academically, but also by their value and behaviours of being professionals. They noticed that they had been influenced by teachers' values and behaviours and they started to hold the same values as their teachers and behave just like their teachers. They internalised these values as part of their personal values. For example:

> *Xia(UNNC): Foreign teachers in our university are all very kind: they show they really care about students, are very patient, polite to others and would like to listen to our opinions and discuss things with us. They*

are setting a very good model for me in terms of respecting other people… It influenced me subtly but gradually I find myself behave just like them.

However, she later indicated that she felt in her internship, it was not possible for her to deliver the same value she adapted from the university to her work place.

Xia(UNNC): It was very different when I was working as an intern. People in the television station (where Xiaworked as an intern), who were senior tome were not like my teachers in the university. They didn't really care what I thought…they had a quite hierarchical structure-always listen to the senior ones or the leaders…I tried my best to respect them, and treat people equally, but I don't feel I was respected by them. I wish in the future I can work in a place where people share the professional values of my teachers in the university.

Cai who also had similar experiences, and both of them indicated that they believe the "Western" values they learnt from the university could not be applied to social settings in China. As such, they felt they were not well prepared to face the job market and working environment in China.

Nevertheless, though Xiaand Cai from UNNC (who were the only two students in this study who went to have an internship) felt the value gap between within the university and the social settings, it may not be only related to the university settings of UNNC. It is natural for university students to feel the gap in terms of value and belief within the university and in workplaces. It seemed from the data that because UNNC students had no other experiences than their own, they tended to impute their difficulty and anxiety to the gap between the university settings of UNNC and the social settings in China.

Summary Table: Similarities and Differences between the Two Universities

In the two tables in the following two pages (Table 7-1 and Table 7-2), I summarise the findings revealed in comparing and contrasting students' personal identity change in the two universities. By providing this table, the findings are illustrated in a systemic manner which can lead to the discussion in the next section.

Similarities between UNNC and ZJU students
Experienced three phases of transitions: **Phase 1**. Become more independent and mature individuals in their transition from secondary schools to universities ; **Phase 2** Developing personal identity as more mature and independent individuals; **Phase 3**: Realised the gap between the image of themselves being mature and independent and how people in those workplace saw them. Share main trend of personal identity change: to become more mature and independent individuals Share mains perspectives of how to become more mature and independent individuals • *Capable of making self-decisions: better self-understanding & more independent in decision making* • *Being able to deal with disagreement;* • *Open to career options and having practical aims for future*

Table 7-1 Summary of the Similarities in Student Personal Identity Change between UNNC and ZJU

Differences between UNNC and ZJU students				
Sub-Themes	**UNNC Students**		**ZJU Students**	
	Identity Changes	*Institutional Context*	*Identity Changes*	*Institutional Context*
Dealing with disagreement *(in Phase 2)*	Dealing with disagreement by discussing and "agree to disagree"; However, worries may not fit into the social settings	Encouraged by teachers in class to openly express and discuss opinions	Hide feelings from teachers; Hide own opinions in student clubs	Lack of communication with teachers Students' clubs were relatively formal and hierarchical which were considered as close to the social settings.
Deciding future career *(in Phase 3)*	Do what their parents expected: felt obliged to pay back parents' investment on their education	High tuition fee	Not mentioned	
Personal Value conflict with the social settings *(in Phase 3)*	Realised about the differences of personal values and co-workers in the internship	Teachers inspired students by their value and behaviours of being professionals; Impression that UNNC is a "Western" university	Not mentioned	

Table 7-2 Summary of the Differences in Student Personal Identity Change between UNNC and ZJU

Discussion

Conceptualising Personal Identity of University Students: A Model for University Students' Personal Identity Change

As it has been discussed in the literature review chapter (Chapter Three), Burke and Stets (2009) have not yet provided a conceptual model for personal identity even though it was seen by them as one of the three main dimensions of identity. Moreover, not enough studies have been done in conceptualising students' personal identity change by using Buke and Stets' identity model. Although social psychologist Hitlin (2003) intended to use value identity to explain personal identity, the quantitative method he used in his study showed its limitations as it neglected participants' own interpretations of themselves. Therefore, the existing model in understanding individuals' personal identity cannot characterise the change of student personal identity in this study.

The findings of this study revealed two aspects of students' personal identity change. One was the construction and development of students' personal attibutes which originated from the students' biography and past experiences. It was an on-going process in which students' personal attributes were reflected, changed and/or mantained over time. This echoes the existing study which concentrated on individuals' biogaphy (e.g. Abes, et al., 2007; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2005; Littleton and Taylor, 2006). The other one was students personal identity within universities' pathways. It related to students' university experiences in which they devloped their personal identity towards becoming more mature and independent indiviudals. In orderto capture the overpathing featue of the two aspects as well as to show students' personal identity change as a whole, I present here the conceptual model (Figure 7-1):

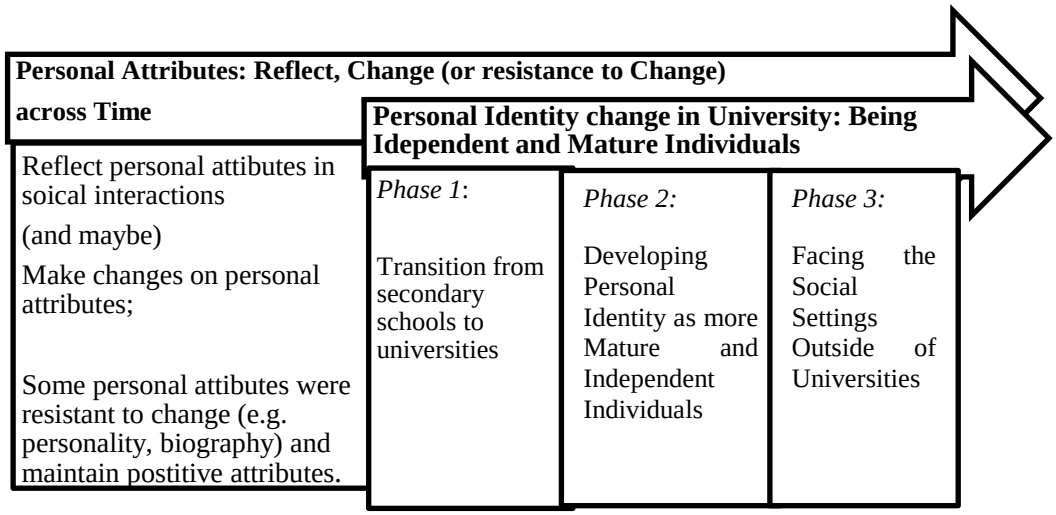


Figure 7-1 A Model of students' personal identity change in university

Figure 7-1 demonstrates students' personal identity change in university. The arrows in the model show that personal identity change is an on-going and dynamic process. The personal attributes of individuals as shown in the figure develop from the past, present and in the future. Personal attributes can be reflected by individuals in social interactions, and they can decide to change and/or resistant to change. In terms of students' university experiences, the main direction of personal identity change was to become more mature and independent individuals.

There were three phases of students' personal identity in university showed in this study: in the first phase in which students experienced the transition from secondary school to university, they started to manage their personal lives by themselves. They also developed a more equal communication pattern with their parents. They were able to discuss issues with their parents on a similar level rather than always following their parents' instructions. The second phase refers to the period of time when students got used to the relatively independent living style in the university and developed their personal identity of being more mature and independent. They realised they were able to make academic self-decisions by themselves as their understanding of learning

developed. In their social lives, they also developed their capability of dealing with disagreements which mean they believed they were able to make communicate socially more smoothly. In the third phase, in which students had to face the social settings outside of their universities, they started to consider their future careers more. In this phase, being able to make decisions for future employment and being open to career options were considered as key elements of being more mature and independent. The three phases, again, were in role and group identity, overlapped and the timeline for the three phases differed for individuals.

In general, the findings of this study showed that personal attributes as part of students' personal identity were constructed and reconstructed as time went by. In terms of their personal identity change within universities, their personal identity as mature and independent individuals developed through purposeful consideration and negotiations within social interactions. In the next section, I will discuss the findings of this study relation to the theories of personal identity.

Relating the findings to Theories of Personal Identity

The Uniqueness and Distinctiveness of Self

In Burke and Stets' (2009) model and also in some other studies (e.g. Gecas & Burke, 1995; Deaux & Martin, 2003; Hogg, 2005; Burke, 2004; Abes, et al., 2007), personal identity was seen as one's uniqueness and distinctiveness and as the core of self which a person could identify himself/herself across situations, time and relationships. Personal identity in their work had been interpreted as the inner self constructing by unique and distinctive personal attributes and is contrasted with the outer and more dynamic self (Gecas & Burke, 1995; Abes, et al., 2007; Hogg, 2005). However, this study argues that this interpretation of personal identity failed to put personal identity in a changing context, in which the dynamic feature of personal identity had been

ignored. Instead, the findings of this study pointed out that individual student's personal identity showed the uniqueness and distinctiveness of self not because individual possess distinctive personal attributes, but because of the construction of personal identity during changing contexts. In other words, students can feel they have different and unique personal characteristics at certain moments and in certain contexts, but how they reflect on the feeling and what decisions they made to keep or change their personal characteristics contributed to their personal identity change. For example: Ke felt he was different from others in the secondary school because he worked hard. This was his personal attribute at the time, but it may not make Ke unique because there were other students who also worked hard. However, Ke's own reflections and perceptions about this personal attribute (which he believed it had positive side but sometimes made him arrogant as he would despise people who do not work hard) and what he decided to do about this attribute (which he could not abandon but tried to be less arrogant) contributed to Ke's personal identity and made the process largely personal and unique.

Moreover, the findings show that though some individual students' personal attributes were considered by students as resistant to change which may relate to the psychological side of themselves as what previous researchers called "inner self", others were influenced by the social contexts and could be changed. Moreover, some personal attributes were resistant to change could because of the positive feedback students got from social interactions. Therefore, the findings argue that the existing theories of personal identity emphasise the psychological side of personal identity too heavily, thus they had not to take in consideration the influences of social interaction and change on individuals' personal identity.

Context Matters: the Gap between the research context and the context of personal identity theory

The findings of this study echo Schwartz, Zamboanga and Weisskirch's (2008) argument that the existing theories on individuals' personal identity are based on how personal identity changes in post-industrial social and cultural contexts such as in the US. In such contexts, personal identity functions as being essentially individualistic, in which individual autonomy is prior to family and social responsibilities (Schwartz, et al., 2008). In other cultures, especially in collectivist-oriented cultures, the model in which individual choices dominate one's personal identity may not be adaptable (Schwartz, et al., 2008). Indeed, since the research context of this study differed from the context where the theories were embedded, the findings raised questions to the existing theories of personal identity. It was mainly on two aspects: one aspect concerns the concept of "self-authenticity" (in e.g. Burke & Stets, 2009; Vannini & Franzese 2008; Gecas, 2000); and the other relates to the statement which personal identity works as a master identity among role, group and personal dimensions of identity (Burke & Stets, 2009).

In theories of personal identity, one focus which researchers raised was the concept of "self-authenticity". They believed that self-authenticity, which refers to feelings of being one's true self, had a significant role in constructing individuals' personal identities (Burke and Stets, 2009). It has been argued by researchers that people have the side of being true to themselves as well as the side of being untrue in social interactions (Gecas & Burke, 1995; Burke & Stets, 2009; Jenkins, 2004). There were studies illustrated the importance of self-authenticity for individuals to posit their self-concept and make self-meaning (Gecas, 1991; Erickson 1994; O'Connor 2006; Anton 2001; Vannini & Franzese, 2008). These studies suggested that authenticity is closely linked to one's identity for the reason that it affects individuals' perceptions of selves. Moreover, it was pointed out by some researchers that authenticity may not be easily achieved in daily life, thus there is a need for individuals to negotiate the meanings of their true self in social interactions (Gecas, 1991; Vannini & Franzese, 2008).

In this study, however, the findings showed a more complex picture than a binary "true" and/or "untrue" identity of students towards themselves. Rather, for students in this study, it was more significant for them to be accepted by others. Being able to hide their own feelings in a situated context was considered by them as a sign of being more mature. It was difficult to use what identity theorists' suggested to distinguish whether students in this study had been authentic to themselves or not, as they made the decision to make themselves appealing to others in the social setting in China. Although recent literature concerning Chinese culture and society suggested that new cultural features such as individualisation has emerged in Chinese society (e.g. in Liu, 2004; Yan, 2010), the findings of in this study showed that students' personal identity change in university were influenced by some cultural aspects which have featured in the social settings in China for a long time: "face" (mianzi) still played a great part in constructing students' personal identity since in social interactions they neither wanted to lose face in front of others, nor embarrass others to make them lose face; respecting authority was also important to students. UNNC students were even afraid that they may offend authority figures in social settings after university as they had got used to the relatively equal relationship they had in university with their teachers.

One focus in the literature concerning personal identities is that it ranks high in the hierarchy of all three dimensions of identities and works as a master identity (Burke & Stets, 2009; Côté & Levine, 2002). By master identity, theorists were referring to one's personal identity which individuals have an agentic and consistent sense of self which they are able to negotiate with the social structure and to achieve their personal goals and values regardless of the situated context (Burke & Stets, 2009; Côté & Levine, 2014; Côté & Levine, 2002). In this sense, they argued that personal identity enabled individuals to possess agency to maintain the consistency of values, meanings, expectations and goals in role and group identity change. Again, the argument was proposed in post-industrial social and cultural context, in which individuals' choice is highly emphasised. The findings of this study argue that researchers such as Burke and Stets (2009) and Côté and Levine (2014), overly emphasised the

internal consistency of one's identity, while the possibility of having contradiction and conflict within personal identity as well as among role, group and personal identity had been overlooked. The main contradiction and conflict that occurs within students' personal identity was between their personal agency and social structure. To be more specific, students in this study were determined to be mature and independent individuals who could be able to make their own decisions, but one way they believed to achieve it was to change their aspirations to set more "practical" aims in terms of finding a job. The personal identity change of students in this study echoes Hitlin's (2003) argument that individuals' personal identity change can be understood as a process which is highly personal but also one's values, beliefs, goals and expectations are patterned and communicated within social interactions. As such, the connection between self and social structure has been made. The contradiction and conflicts among role, group and personal identity will be discussed in the next section in connecting the three dimensions of students' identity changes.

In general, the findings argue that there was a gap between the context of this study and existing theory. Therefore, the existing personal identity theory, which emphasised the individualisation of people, could not be adapted to this study. This study provided an angle for further research to look into university students' personal identity in contexts where group ideals and social structures played an important role.

Concerning the University Settings

In literature, researchers argued that that students' personal identity change in their emerging adulthood had a link with the institutional level context (Luyckx, et al, 2006; Syed & Azmitia, 2008). The findings of this study, in comparing and contrasting students' personal identity change in the two universities, added to this argument that the influences of the universities should also be seen within the broader context related to the social settings in the country as well as related to the nature of emerging adulthood of students.

In the findings, there seemed to be a contradiction between UNNC students' expectations of themselves to be mature and independent individuals and their feeling of obligation to do what their parents expected them to do. The reason behind the contradiction was complex, which not only related to the institutional context but also to the cultural aspect within the national context. The concepts of filial piety still played a part in students' feeling of responsibility to return their parents' "investment" in their education, and the high tuition fees of UNNC articulated such feelings. In this sense, it was not that UNNC students had failed to become more mature and independent. On the contrary, they believed it was a mature attitude and behaviour to could pay back what their parents had been invested on their education.

Moreover, as has been shown in the findings, compared to ZJU students, UNNC students expressed more struggles and anxieties in terms of the value gap between the university and the social setting. UNNC students were concerned that the "Western" values and patterns of communication they adopted and internalised from the university experience may not be applicable to real-life jobs in China. It was an interesting phenomenon in the sense that they generated this feeling from seeing how the British university system had provided a "different" education for them. However, the struggle was not unique to UNNC students. In fact, ZJU students were also concerned about their transition from university to real-world jobs. The literature also suggested that during emerging adulthood it was common for university students to face challenges in the transition from university to their future career because of the feeling of uncertainty for their future (Murphy, et al., 2010; Schwartz, et al., 2008; Arnett, 2000). It may suggest to UNNC that the impression given by the university to students as offering "different" and "Western" education may potentially affect students' transition to social settings in a negative way. Although this study could not provide evidence to answer whether UNNC had prepared students for facing the job market in China, it appeared in the data that it was embedded in students minds that they may encounter more difficulties than other Chinese graduates because they had a "different" university education.

Chapter Eight: Connecting the Three Identities and Conclusion

In Chapter Five and Six and the previous sections of this chapter, I analysed students' identity changes through the dimensions of role, group and personal identity. I explored their own perceptions about who they were as being learners, group members as well as individuals. I also looked at the way they make sense and negotiate between their self-perceptions and the perceptions they had gain during the transitions of contexts - from secondary school to university, within university, and from university to the social settings. To look into the three dimensions of identity change was crucial, as it enabled me to investigate the multi-layered and complexity nature of student identity. This chapter will begin with a discussion connecting the three interacting dimensions of students' identity based on the findings and discussions presented in the previous three chapters. I will then move on to provide a conclusion to this study.

Further Discussion: Connecting Students' Role, Group and Personal Identity

This section aims to bring the three dimensions together by providing links among them. It will firstly argue that in the students' role (as university learners), group and personal identity changes connected by the three phases of transition of students: from secondary school to university, within university and from university to face social settings. The three dimensions are also connected by the themes under each dimension about which this section will also provide a discussion of. Finally, an interpretation will be given in exploring the similarities of student identity change in the two universities with different educational settings.

Connecting by the Three Phases of Transition in Universities

The findings of this study suggest that students' role, group and personal identity changes were connected through sharing similar phases of transition. All students' identity experienced the three phases of transition which were: 1) the transition from secondary schools to universities, 2) being university students and 3) the transition from university to future career. It needs to be noticed that the three phases, as it has been argued in analysing the three dimensions of identity changes, were generalised from the trend in students' identity changes. It means that there is no clear or definite boundary between one phase and the next and individual differences existed among students. Detailed explanations of the three phases are below:

- *First phase: transition from secondary school to university*

In role identity change, this was a period of time for students to familiarise themselves with their new institutional setting, and to get used to the educational settings which differed from their previous education. In group identity change, students developed a sense of belonging towards the formal group (university groups; UNNC students also developed a sense of belonging to their disciplinary groups) as well as getting to know other students within the university before they started to form friendship circles with some of them. In students' personal identity change, they started living on campus away from home which they developed a relatively independent life style.

- *Second phase: being university students*

The second phase was a period of time where students had already become familiar with how the university worked, knew the main norms and values their university promoted and communicated with their peers, and got used to their lifestyle on campus. As such, this period of students' identity change was once in which they aiming to be what was expected of them as university learners, being group members and being individuals. In this phase, students developed more specific meanings and expectations of role, group and personal identity. They used these specific meanings and expectations to judge and value how

they were being university learners, group members and individuals. The main themes and subthemes that appeared in their meanings and expectations will be discussed later in this section.

- *Third phase: transition from university to future career paths*

The third phase in this study was once in which the students witnessed a lot of anxiety and struggles in all three dimensions of their identity changes. The transition from education to the labour market is usually seen as difficult for most young students as the social settings are unpredictable for them (Biggart, et al., 2006). Indeed, in this study, the universities provided a bubble for students since their prime role is being university leaners/students within the institutions, and the boundary for formal (university) groups had been settled. It was natural for students to express their worries, when they were about to face the social settings, about what their roles were going to be, what kind of groups they were going to be involved in, as well as what kind of person they were going to be.

Three phases suggest that students' identity change is highly related to the trails led by students' educational transitions. However, although the three phases' transitions were presented in a linear way, they are interlinked, overlapped and connected to individual and contextual diversity. Therefore, from the angle of identity change, this study echoes Fuller (2007, p.219) who argued that *"focussing on an educational transition… helps to illuminate the (increasingly) reflexive relationship between institutionally mapped pathways, individual life-course trajectories and broader social change."*

Connecting Themes within Each Dimension of Student Identity

Another method of connecting the three dimensions of students' identity changes were by the themes that appeared in this study. In order to present the

connection by themes and subthemes, I first outline the main themes and subthemes within each dimension of student in the following table (Table 7-2):

Dimensions of Identity Change	**Role (as university learners) Identify**	**Group Identity**		**Personal Identity**
		Formal Group	**Informal Group**	
Main Theme: trend of identity changes	***Independent Learners***	***Active member***	***Good Friends***	***Mature and Independent Individuals***
Subthemes	Having good academic performance (good results and in-depth understanding of knowledge); Possessing generic (cross-subject) skills Being self-responsible and autonomous in learning	Sense of Belonging: *Formal support* Internalised group norms: *Being critical thinkers; Possessing sense of agency; Being collaborative members academically*	Being good (supportive and encouraging) friends	Being able to live independently (manage time and finances); Capable of making self-decisions: better self-understanding & more independent in decision making Being able to deal with disagreements; Open to career options and having practical aims for future

Table 8-1 Summary of main themes in the three dimensions of university students' identity changes

As is shown in Table 7-2, in the three dimensions of students' identity change, the directions where they had been changed into were: independent learners (role identity); active members of formal groups and good friends in informal groups (group identity); and mature and independent individuals (personal identity). The relationships among the themes and subthemes in the three dimensions were diverse. There were relationships which were consistent, and supporting, as well as relationships which had contradictions and tensions.

Consistency: Being Independent Learners and Being Independent Individuals

The table shows that the key consistency among role, person and group identity change emerged between role and personal identity changes. The main direction of students' identity change in terms of role identity as university learners showed the consistency with the changing direction of personal identity: students were developing themselves to become independent learners as well as being independent individuals. The consistency between students' role identity as university learners and their personal identity echoes previous research which argued that role identity links with personal identity through a similar set of meanings (Burke & Stets, 2000; Stets & Serpe, 2013).

To be more specific, in this study, there were mainly three sets of relationships among the themes under students' role identity and under their personal identity which revealed consistency. Firstly, in role identity change students developed their autonomy of learning and the ability to be self-responsible which paralleled their capability of living independently and making self-decisions in their personal identity change. In other words, students were responsible for their academic studies as well as for their personal lives. Secondly, students' expectation of performing well and gaining in-depth subject knowledge as university leaners (role identity) interrelated with their personal identity in terms of their ability to make academic self-decisions. On one hand, having in-depth subject knowledge assisted them to understand their academic capabilities in order to make further decisions about their future studies. On the other hand, once they were able to make their own academic decisions, their learning benefited. Thirdly, the theme of possessing generic skills in students' role identity change enabled their personal identity change to be more open to career options. Students saw generic (cross-subject) skills as an important achievement in being independent learners. The generic (cross subject) skills they possessed made it possible for them to be open to more career (or further study) options.

In this work, students' personal identity developed alongside their role identity as university learners. The findings revealed a relationship between the type of learner and the type of individual students tended to be as they were parallel to each other.

Group Identity Functions as Support to Role and Personal Identity Change

The themes shown in the findings indicated that group identity functions as a foster for students to become independent learners as well as independent individuals. Within the process of developing group identity students gained group support both formally and informally: the formal group supports were mainly from university and the group norms which were delivered by their universities; the informal supports refer to the support students gained from their friendship circle.

In formal groups such as university groups and discipline groups, a sense of belonging towards their formal groups (group identity) was beneficial to students, as they had a positive sense of who they were, and felt that they were valued and respected as individuals (personal identity). In formal groups, students internalised the group norms and developed their identity as being critical thinkers, possessing a sense of agency and being collaborative members in academic groups. The adoption of these group norms (group identity) facilitated students' good academic performance and autonomy in learning (role identity), as well as supporting students' ability of self-decision making (personal identity). Within informal groups, the process of university students constructing their own friendship circles (group identity) enabled them to have better self-understanding and reduced their feelings of uncertainty about themselves(personal identity). Being good friends with each other within students' friendship circles (group identity) provided them peer supports and encouragement in performing well academically (role identity).

The findings partly supported some previous studies which argued that personal identity is interrelated with group identity for the reason that group memberships provided certain meanings for personal identity (e.g., Jones & McEwen, 2000; Deaux, 1996). In this study, the formal and informal groups which students belonged to assisted their personal identity change by providing shared norms and values. It is common for human beings to look to groups to help them to achieve individual aims and ambitions, however what seemed to be interesting here is that the group norms and values students' adopted from their group facilitated their change to become independent learners and independent individuals. In this sense, students' group identity functioned as a form of collective agency in students' identity change. Collective agency is exercised in groups and refers to an interdependence of human functioning when people who share similar values act collectively (Bandura, 2008). This finding adds to the literature concerning young people's identity in their emerging adulthood (e.g. Schwartz, et al., 2005; Arnett, 2000). The existing literature suggested that in American and Western European societies, emerging adults' personal agency takes control of their life choice and negotiations social resources and maintains the consistency of different dimensions of their identity (Schwartz, et al., 2005; Arnett, 2000). However, they also raised doubts about whether this is still the case in other societies with different cultural contexts. This study added to their argument in the sense that in the social settings of this study where Chinese culture is still influential, collective agency rather than personal agency plays a more important role in students' identity change.

Tension and Contradiction

In this study, regarding students' identity change, there were not only sets of relationships among the themes of the three dimensions which showed consistency and support, but also tensions and contradictions. The tensions and contradictions in this study reflected identity theory in the sense that the change of identity was through a process of negotiation among different values

people encounter in certain contexts and social settings (Hitlin, 2003). There were mainly three sets of tensions and contradictions revealed by the findings.

Firstly, while students highly valued good academic performance including good results and in-depth subject knowledge in their student role, they did not feel academic achievement could be beneficial them in terms of preparing them for real-world jobs. Students tended to make the priority towards their future career when it came to subject-choosing for their Master's-level education. Part of the reason was that the job market in China is highly competitive, in which the opportunities for students to find well-paid and subject-related jobs were limited. However, it still raised the question for both universities as to whether they had prepared the students well enough for their career paths when they is appreciated that society is different from that in university.

Secondly, students from both universities developed their group identities from their university experiences of being critical learners, yet in social interactions they believed the maturity of dealing with disagreement was to hide their true opinions and feelings. The cultural aspects within the national context, such as respecting authority, and saving face for one's self and for others, were still influential in students' personal identity construction. ZJU students tended to learn communication and negotiation skills within students' clubs as in students eyes they were close to the "social settings" outside of the university. UNNC students on the other hand, though, although they developed communication patterns by which they were able to deal with disagreement through open discussion, were afraid such patterns may not enable them to fit into the social settings.

Thirdly, it was shown in UNNC students' case that the norms such as critical thinking and the sense of agency students adopted in constructing their formal group identity could not be reflected in their personal choices. As it has been discussed in Chapter Six, UNNC students had a clearer picture of the norms of their university groups than ZJU students, however they were more likely than ZJU students to follow the career direction which their parents picked for them. The reasons behind the phenomenon may be diverse, depending on each

student's individual context but one of them related to the high tuition fees their parents paid for them. It is worth asking whether UNNC has fulfilled its educational aims, in terms of delivering the values related to the essence of higher education when students felt such a burden paying their parents back.

The tensions and contradictions demonstrated in this study could be viewed as the conflict between the values of being university students and the values in their social settings. From a cultural perspective, institutions were only a part of the multi-layered contexts which had an impact on students, and the tension between the values within universities and the cultural values held by society caused tension in students' identity change. From the perspective of students' transition, being a high achieving student in the university could not guarantee a smooth transition for students from university to their future personal and professional lives. There was previous study conducted by Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig, & Platt's (2010) which indicated that the difficulty students encountered in the transition from university to future career could not be overcome by positive development and well-being in university. Their study then raised the significance of social support including in making students' transition from universities to career smooth (Murphy, et al., 2010). It was beyond the scope of my study to provide such implications, but the tensions and contradictions shown in this study bring to light the struggles students experienced in their transition from university to their social settings. Further research is needed in order to suggest more support for students during this period of identity transition. More importantly, the tensions and contradictions shown in this study indicated that they were also important elements in students' identity changes in universities, and should not be ignored in conducting further research.

Students' Identity Change in Different Educational Settings: An Interpretation to the Similarities

Despite the differences which Chapter Five, Six and Seven showed between the two universities' participants in terms of their role, group and personal identity, the main trends of students' identity change between the two contexts were similar. One primary assumption underlying the research questions of this study was that the influences of different educational settings have different impacts on university students' identity change. In this sense, the similarities of the two universities students' identity change challenged this assumption. Nevertheless, the similarity between the two contexts could not simply lead to the conclusion that educational settings of institutions having nothing to do with students' identity change. Rather, it demonstrated that students' identity change is a complex process which is influenced by multi-layered contexts and the institutional context is only one of the component elements. Therefore, the similarities of the two universities students' identity change can be interpreted by the following points.

Firstly, the similarity of university students' identity development between the two contexts in this study was highly related to the fact that they were in the age group, which is identified by researchers as emerging adulthood. Identity changes in emerging adulthood were described by researchers as narrowing down from numerous life possibilities to certain life decisions (Schwartz, et al., 2005; Arnett, 2000). Students' identity change in this study generally matched this route. Moreover, the similar developmental stages (year 1, 2, 3, 4) set by higher educational institutions made the process more systematic and also made the similar phases of students' identity change more visible.

Secondly, institutional context is not the only context which had its impact on students identity change. The findings of this study echoes Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (1998) model in relating human development with multi-layered contextual influences so that both universities' students identity change were

influenced by contexts at macro, meso- and micro-level. At the macro level, students' identity change in both universities was shaped by Chinese culture, social settings and the labour market in China. At the micro-level, participants from both universities were academically well performing students in their previous education and had the strong intentions of self-improvement. In this sense, the similar individual contexts of students contributed to their similarities in identity change. Although the universities had an impact on students' identity change, at meso-level, they only played part of the role in the process.

Thirdly, as has been discussed earlier, group identity functioned as collective agency in students' identity changes. In comparing the two contexts, although ZJU participants seemed to have less support from their university, department and teachers than those from UNNC, it developed a university culture in ZJU in terms of peer help and for senior students to be role models for younger students. ZJU students may not seem as "collaborative" in their classes and/or disciplinary groups, but informal help from peer groups filled in the gap of lack of formal support.

Summary

The connections among the three dimensions of identity reflect existing identity theories (e.g. in Burke & Stets, 2009; Hitlin, 2003; Bosma & Kunnen, 2001; Côté & Levine, 2014) that the construction of people's identity is dynamic, multi-dimensional, and influenced by multi-level contexts. This section also provides a model in explaining how the three dimensions of students' identity were changed over time, interacted, supported and contradicted. In this study, students' role identity as university learners shared the similar meanings with their personal identity as students tended to be independent learners as well as independent individuals. Group identity functioned as a type of collective agency in supporting the development of

students' role and personal identity. Moreover, in connecting the three dimensions of students' identity changes, contextual influences were also found to be important mediators suggesting that in students' identity changes, educational settings of the institutions were influential alongside students' individual context and the national context including culture and social settings.

Conclusion

Though summary to the findings in each dimension's identity change has been presented in tables (Table 5-1, Table 6-1, and Table 7-1) in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, this section provides a conclusion of the findings in the three dimensions. The key findings will be outlined in relation to the research questions, and limitations of this study will be pointed out. Attentions also will be paid to the implication of this study for future research.

Summary of the key findings

Similarities and Differences in Students' Identity Changes

This section summarises the findings in responding to the first research question: Are there any similarities and/or differences in students' identity change in the University of Nottingham (Ningbo, China campus) and Zhejiang University in terms of students' 1) role identity; 2) group identity; 3) personal identity in their social and academic experiences?

One main similarity in students' identity change in the two universities was that student interviewees shared the three phases of transition: from secondary schools to universities, being university students and from university to future career. They also shared similar trends in their identity transition in the three dimensions – role, group and personal identity. It has become clear from this study that students' transitions in universities need to be acknowledged and

respected as these transitions highlighted the developmental stages of students academically, socially and emotionally. Moreover, as it has been illustrated in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, the two universities' participants tended share the trend of identity changes towards the adults they were becoming: independent leaners (role identity); active members in formal groups and good friends in informal groups (group identity); and mature and independent individuals (personal identity).

Differences between participants from the two contexts were also revealed by the findings and the reasons for the differences were closely connected to the institutional context. The contextual influences of the two universities will be summarised and presented in answering the second research question in the next section.

- *Role Identity Change*

In students' role identity change in becoming independent leaners, both universities' participants shared some perspectives in terms of how they could develop. Participants saw having good academic performance, which not only included achieving good academic results and rewards, but also gaining in-depth understanding of knowledge, as one aspect. Possessing generic skills which could be applied across subjects was also significant to students in becoming independent learners. Finally, having autonomy in learning was also essential for students to distinguish themselves as independent learners in universities in transitioning from secondary school learners.

The differences between the two universities' participants in their role identity change were shown first in students' transition as learners from secondary school to universities. UNNC participants were more positive than ZJU participants in this transition as more support was provided by the university and teachers. Although both universities' students worked hard during their university years, UNNC participants had an increase in motivation while ZJU participants showed a decrease of enthusiasm in working hard academically. The same situation happened in students' academic confidence, in which UNNC students in this study became more confident than ZJU students in the

process of developing themselves to be independent learners. In the transition from being university learners to future professional roles, UNNC students in this study expressed more anxiety than ZJU students as they felt they were not well-prepared with professional skills by their study in university.

- *Group Identity Change*

In students' formal group identity change, both sets experienced similar trends of formal group identity change: becoming active members. The two universities' students also shared perspectives of what academic norms to adopt in university groups. By becoming critical thinkers, possessing a sense of agency and being collaborative members academically, participants from both universities internalised formal group norms. Students' informal group identity change in the two universities showed great similarities. Students in this study gathered together by common interests and saw being good friends as the most important value in maintaining their friendship circles.

Differences between the two universities' participants existed mainly in the process of formal group identity change. The sense of belonging towards the students' disciplinary level was not seen as much in the ZJU participants' case. In adopting academic norms for participants in this study, UNNC emphasised more than ZJU being a "critical thinker", and UNNC participants had more comprehensive understanding of how to achieve this. Moreover, though both university students adopted the norm of having a sense of agency, UNNC participants mentioned the agency of social change which ZJU participants did not. The numerous collaborative academic tasks and projects made UNNC participants develop the academic norm of collaboration in groups. ZJU participants paid less attention to being collaborative in formal groups, as they did not feel a sense of belonging in disciplinary groups. Peer help existed, though, usually from senior students. In the transition from university groups to social settings, UNNC participants were more concerned than ZJU participants in joining the outside world. Although ZJU students in this study also worried about the value gap between their university group and future workplace, UNNC participants were more afraid that the norms they developed in a British university were not applicable in Chinese society.

- *Personal Identity Change*

Although personal identity change relied more on students' individual context than role and group identity, the findings showed a similar trend of transition among all students in this study: to become more mature and independent individuals. Students also shared the main perspectives of how to become more mature and independent individuals. They were: being able to make independent academic and career decisions; being able to deal with disagreements; and being open to career options and having practical aims for future.

The differences between the two universities' students mainly showed firstly in the way they believed in their maturely in dealing with disagreements. UNNC participants believed that they were more capable of keeping calm and discussing with others when there was a conflict of opinions. ZJU students, by contrast, believed that being able to hide their feelings in front of others was the way of achieving maturity in dealing with disagreement. Moreover, UNNC students in this study emphasised their parents' expectations more than ZJU students when they were planning their future career according. In addition, UNNC participants also mentioned that they internalised their teachers' values as their personal values of being professionals in the future. However, when they realised the professional values were different in their internships, they doubted that the "Western" values they adopted were applicable in the social settings in China.

The Influences of Contexts

This part of summary is relates to the second research question: What are the contributing contextual factors to the change/or maintaining in students' perceptions of their identities overtime?

It was revealed by the findings of this study that the picture of the contextual influences on students' identity change is complex. This study demonstrated the interlinked features of students' individual context, the institutional (university) context and the national context with cultural and social aspects in contributing to students' identity changes. Through the multi-layered model in looking into students' identity change, it deepened the understanding in how university students adjusted, self-perceived and resolved in the three phases of transitions during the university years. I summarise each level's contextual influences as follow:

Individual Context

The contextual influences at the individual level in this study were mainly participants' previous educational and social experiences, their personal/academic interests, and their relationships with parents. Students in this study compared their university experiences against their previous educational experiences, especially in the first phase of their identity change, to reflect their university learners' identity. Their previous social experiences contributed to the construction of students' personal attributes as part of their personal identity. Students' academic interests played a role alongside with the university settings in affecting students' role identity in terms of their motivation in subject learning. Their personal interests, in addition, laid the basis for them to form friendship circles. From the change of their relationship with their parents during the university years, students believed they were more mature and independent individuals.

National Context

At the national level, traditional values and cultures within social settings were the main contextual influence. The findings indicate that a large power distance between students and authority figures (teachers), a low sense of individualism (comparing to which in the American and/or Western European cultures), and the sense of filial piety within Chinese culture to certain extent had an impact

on students' perception in identifying themselves. This is reflected in the literature about the internationalisation of higher education that the national cultural background of students within transitional universities needs to be taken in consideration in the university's educational approaches (Fazackerly, et al., 2007).

Within the changing social context in China nowadays, the new youth culture interacted among students in this study with traditional values and culture. Some themes emerged from the data, for example, the sense of agency and autonomy which are rooted in the individualistic culture of Western society (Li & Chen, 2011), have been accepted and applied by students in this study. However, when contradiction occurred between traditional culture, Westernised values and their youth culture, students had a struggle and confusion in their identity development process. The findings echo the literature of internationalisation of higher education that universities which have been involved in this global trend have to face the challenges of cultural contradictions (White, 2006; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Smith, 2000).

Moreover, the intense competition in the current job market in China made students link their study with "prospects for a well-paid career" in the future, which affecting students' identity change in the sense that they had to negotiate their personal interests with market demand.

Institutional Context

It should be noted that since internationalisation of higher education provides the context for the two institutions, the influences of internationalisation on students' identity changes were also revealed on the institutional level's contexts. This is where the differences in students' identity change took place. I present the summaries in relation to the three phases of students' identity changes.

In the first phase, both universities offered a first year programmes to assist students' transition from secondary schools to university. The first year's programme in ZJU which was referred as "General Education" was inspired by the US system. The "General Education" programme was one of ZJU's strategies in getting involved in the worldwide trend of internationalisation of higher education. However, the findings of this study suggest that the impact of such strategies on students' learning is more complicated than what it had been claimed by ZJU. The different designs of the programme in the two universities caused different perceptions by students about such programme.

Specifically, the first year programme of UNNC was intended to prepare students for their subject study in the next three years, while the general education of ZJU provided students with interdisciplinary courses and after the first year students had to compete to get into specific subject. In this sense, UNNC provided more formal support by offering teachers' support and relevant foundation courses for students' further subject learning which students found more positive in the transition to be university learners. The opportunities given by the university for students to transfer their subject enabled them to develop their academic interests. It also assisted students to gain a sense of belonging towards their disciplinary groups as students shared the same academic interests with their course-mates. ZJU, in contrast, created a highly competitive learning environment in the first year without providing enough formal support, so that students experienced more struggles and confusions. Students who could not get into the subjects they liked also felt their motivation in learning and enthusiasm for their subjects were hindered.

In the second phase, UNNC connected each year's courses well which made students in this study more motivated in learning when they can see their academic development step-by-step. In ZJU, every year's course showed no connection to students in this study and the academic learning was less and less emphasised by the university, so that students' motivation in working hard on their study was hindered. Moreover, the continuing formal support offered by

UNNC as well as the student-centred teaching and learning approach created an encouraging learning environment and helped to boost their academic confidence. UNNC participants developed generic (cross-subject) skills by practicing in class which also made them able to handle disagreement with others more maturely. ZJU participants were not as positive as UNNC participants in viewing their academic confidence for the reason that the learning environment was highly competitive. Meanwhile, they were not able to practice their academic skills and discuss with other students in class, for the reason that they had big class size and the teaching approaches used in classes were highly teacher-centred. As such, ZJU participants tended to hide their feelings from teachers when they had different opinions, since they was a lack of communication with teachers and they were afraid of causing misunderstandings. In terms of delivering academic norms, UNNC delivered norms such as critical thinking, agency and collaboration directly by introducing and emphasising them in lectures and class discussion. ZJU participants, however, mainly "guessed" the implications of these norms during their learning process as they were not introduced properly by the university. Although both universities and the government state that they intend to improve the quality of teaching and learning by learning from the higher educational system in the West (Ennew & Yang, 2009), building "world-class" Chines universities should not simply about launching teaching/learning programmes inspired by the western system. It needs long-term effort and requires substantial changes in some aspects of the educational system (Altbach and Salmi, 2011), for example, the teacher-centred teaching and learning mode.

In the third phase, although both universities provided support to help students in terms of their future career, students found them unhelpful as their feeling of anxiety and struggling in this phase of transition were natural. Since the undergraduate courses in UNNC provided students with mainly theoretical knowledge and ways of thinking, students felt they were not well prepared for the job market as they lacked practical, professional skills. The final year in UNNC significantly emphasised academic learning and thus there were not

many opportunities for students to encounter real-world situations. Moreover, the impression UNNC made in students' minds of being "different", may potentially isolate them from their social settings as students assumed the values they adopted in the university would not be accepted by Chinese society. The challenge UNNC students faced in this phase to some extent suggested that transnational universities may face challenges of balancing the focus of education provision and the interest of the local students. ZJU, on the other hand, required students to do internships in their final year. During the internship, ZJU students were able to reflect on what they had learnt in the university and made further decisions about their future career.

Implications for both universities

This section illustrates the key findings above to respond to the third research question: What are the implications for offering student support for both universities?

For ZheJiang University, the findings of this study imply that it is essential for the institutions to give enough space for students to develop their academic interests in one or more field, as it benefited them in becoming independent learners with self-control of their learning. The general education programme including the subject-choosing procedure in ZJU, even though it was designed with good intentions, challenged students' role identity transition towards becoming more independent learners. The overly intense competition within the procedure may hinder students' academic motivation. Therefore, the findings imply that an encouraging and supportive learning environment which engages and motivates students is required while students are offered opportunities to develop their academic interests. An encouraging learning environment could be achieved by having support systems including help from teachers, their department and the wider university, whilst also making clear connections between each year's goals of study. It also raises questions on ZJU's intension of becoming "world-class" university in the trend of

internationalisation of higher education that: whether General education, as a part of ZJU's plan of achieving the "world-class" status and designed based on the US model, can truly benefit ZJU students' development. Moreover, the findings suggest students tended to internalise academic norms and values as part of their formal group identity. Thus, the university needs to address and deliver academic norms and values directly and explicitly, as it will be more efficient than letting students "guess" the underlying meanings.

For the University of Nottingham Ningbo, the primary implication from this study is that there is a need to realise and respect the challenges and difficulties Chinese students encountered in the British university, especially regarding cultural differences are involved. Rather than only paying attention to delivering the same quality of education in the campus in China, UNNC should take more consideration of the cultural differences between the UK and China, and Chinese students' lack of a British background, in designing curriculums. It might need to introduce the new (home country's) culture to students in the first place before delivering academic norms and values in a more profound manner. Moreover, it is significant for the university to consider adapting the academic norms and values of the university with the local context, by which students could be better prepared for the job market in China. Furthermore, the concept of a "British and different university in China" had given UNNC students the impression of being different from students in other Chinese universities. On one hand, it fostered their sense of belonging to the university group as part of their group identity. On the other hand, it made them feel more anxious about their future as they were worried about the "different" and "Western" values they adopted from the university experiences would potentially affect their opportunity in fitting into the social settings in China. The findings suggest that UNNC participants' worries in this sense were aggravated due to their lack of knowledge of how other universities' students experienced and felt. Thus, communication among students across different universities may be worth considering by UNNC in order to assist students' transition from university to the social settings.

Both universities need to pay attention to the struggles and anxieties students had in their transition from university to social settings. This study showed student participants' realisation of the gap between the academic values in university settings and what is valued in the real-world outside of their universities. To enable a smoother transformation for students to their lives after graduation, university undergraduate programmes have to be planned to provide more support in order to enable students to apply the skills they learnt in university to their future careers.

Limitations of the Study

As it has been mentioned before, Burke and Stets' (2009) model of identity change which focuses on one's role, group and personal identity has provided a useful theoretical framework for this study. By focussing on students' experiences within universities, the investigation of students' identity change in this study may overlook the multi-dimensional feature of role identity in students. Identity theories emphasise the different roles people hold in daily life, such as husband/wife, parent/child, or student/teacher and acknowledged that each individual has multiple roles in their social life and all these different roles relate to different role identities. In this study, as the research design focussed on the students' experiences within the universities and aimed to reflect the influences of university settings, students' role identity revealed from the data was primarily about their role as university learners. The other roles students might take in their lives, such as being a son/daughter, boyfriend/girlfriend, were not analysed in this study. However, it helps to overcome this limitation as this study used a multidimensional approach in exploring students' identity and a multi-layered perspective in accessing to the context.

In this research, the behaviour of students had not been explored as no observation was conducted. It would be insightful for further research on

students' group identities to engage observations of students' behaviours in universities. As individuals may not always say what they really think or behave in ways that reflect their underlying attitudes (Hogg, et al., 2006), it is arguable that inferring underlying attitudes from students' expressed attitudes may be unreliable. Smith and her colleagues (Smith, et al., 2008) suggested that people are more likely to express their underlying attitudes in behaviour, and people's perspectives are more reliable when researchers can see the relationship between people's attitudes and behaviour. This study could not provide such reliability from comparing students' attitudes to their behaviours. Additionally, as the interviewees of this study were final year students, it is possible for them to forget changes they experienced in their student role identity during earlier years.

Additionally, the data in this study was analysed manually rather than using data analysis software for qualitative data. I do not believe the findings in the thesis were affected by the traditional method. Though I acknowledge the advantage of computer-assisted software in organising data, I agree with Bryman (2001) that it is always better to rely on the researchers rather than software in making decisions in coding the qualitative data and interpreting the findings.

Future research

This study highlights some paths which may interest further research. A longitudinal and comparative study is needed to develop a fuller picture of how students' identity change and what are the contributing factors, in order to compare and contrast within two universities having similar contexts to my study. It could follow students from year one to the final year. Periodic interviews with students are needed. Observations of students' behaviours in their academic and social life in university would be helpful in order to validate the information collected from interviews. Such a study can help to gain more

substantial understanding in terms of the transitions students experienced as well as the differences and similarities between contexts in the same country.

Furthermore, this study is the first empirical study to use Burke and Stets' (2009) theoretical framework to analyse university students' identity in China from role, group and personal dimensions. More research embracing this theoretical framework is needed to find out how effective it is in addressing students' identity change in universities.

In addition, follow-up studies may also be needed in order to explore in which ways students' identity continues to change after they graduate from the university and what role the university experiences play in the change. A holistic approach is required in investigating the connection between students' identity changes within university and after graduation.

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Appendix A. Interview Schedule in the First Fieldwork

	UNNC			ZJU		
	Name	**Frist Interview**	**Second Interview**	**Name**	**Frist Interview**	**Second Interview**
Year 1 (Female)	Xiao	January 2012	June 2012	Zhou	January 2012	June 2012
	Meng	January 2012	June 2012	Chan	January 2012	June 2012
	Lan	January 2012	June 2012	Fan	January 2012	June 2012
Year 1 (Male)	Feng	January 2012	June 2012	Liu	December 2011	June 2012
	Sheng	February 2012	July 2012	Yang	January 2012	June 2012
	Li	January 2012	June 2012	He	February 2012	June 2012
Year 4 (Female)	Xiao	January 2012	June 2012	Shuang	January 2012	June 2012
	Yue	January 2012	July 2012	Xin	January 2012	June 2012
	Qian	January 2012	July 2012	Su	February 2012	July 2012
Year 4 (Male)	Kong	December 2011	June 2012	Sun	January 2012	June 2012
	Shi	January 2012	June 2012	Chen	December 2011	July 2012
	Wei	December 2011	May 2012	Gao	December 2011	July 2012

Appendix B. Steps of Data Analysis for the First Fieldwork

Step One: I read the transcripts of the interviews without making any notes several times. I became familiar with the data as well as the similarities and differences within and between the groups of student participants.

Step Two: I coded two students' transcripts from each university (one Year 1 and one Year 4) with keywords and made general notes highlighting patterns or recurring topics, silences and important areas of contrast, contradiction and irregularity. The coding process was almost entirely inductive.

Step Three: I constructed themes from coded groups that I felt were "most revealing about the data" (Bryman, 2008, p.552). These thematic headings were not participants' actual words but my interpretation of their answers. The themes emerged within each category of student identity changes (as showed in Appendix C.).

Step Four: The themes in each category of identity change were applied across all 24 transcripts and I cut segments of data from each interview transcript and pasted them under the relevant theme.

Step Five: Within each theme, what groups of participants said was summarised in comparison tables (Appendix D.) that characterised the data and highlighted key analytical points.

Appendix C. Comparative Framework of First Data Collection (December 2011 - July 2012)

Category: Role Identity Change

Theme A. Degree of academic responsibility

Theme B. Intellectualism

Theme C. Academic confidence

Category: Group Identity Change

Theme A. Adoption of formal group value/belief

Theme B. Self-enhancement in formal groups

Theme C. Forming of informal groups (friendship circle/student groups)

Theme D. Depersonalisation in informal groups

Category: Personal Identity Change

Theme A. Parents' influences (socially and academically)

Theme B. Previous educational experiences

Theme C. Self-authenticity (Truth to self or not)

Theme D. Personal value change in the university

Example of Thematic Analysis will be showed in Appendix D.

Appendix D. Example Comparative Tables (First Phase): Theme A in Category Role Identity Change

	Theme A: Degree of academic responsibility		
Sub-themes	*Work hard/Important factors in learning*	*Motivation for learning*	*Time management (balancing social activities with learning)*
UNNC **Year1**	Change: **Different from secondary school**: English language skills played important part; need more self-disciplined, but worked hard in general Contextual influence: the **first year's programme** helped (language, how to write academic essays); **teachers are helpful** in learning	Changes: no longer learn for parents/teachers, **more autonomy** in learning; transition was difficult- need time to find new motivation for learning rather than Gaokao. Contextual influence: change from secondary school to university; students need to take control of their own learning.	Change: joined a lot of students societies in the beginning, generally realised it needs to be balanced with learning; difficult to find the balance. Contextual influence: **peer pressure**
ZJU **Year1**	Change: worked very hard for subject choosing procedure. (Two students worked harder than in the secondary school, one mentioned not worked as hard.); **Different from secondary school:** need more self-disciplined Contextual influence: general education in the first year and subject choosing procedure; **not enough support** from the university	Changes: no longer learn for parents/teachers, **more autonomy** in learning; transition was difficult- need time to find new motivation for learning rather than Gaokao. Contextual influence: change from secondary school to university; students need to take control of their own learning.	Change: joined a lot of students' societies; wanted to be leaders in the future; difficult to find the balance between social activities with learning. Contextual influence: **peer pressure, university's requirement on credit of social activities**

	Theme A: Degree of academic responsibility		
Sub-themes	*Work hard/Important factors in learning*	*Motivation for learning*	*Time management (balancing social activities with learning)*
UNNC **Year 4**	Change: worked very hard in the fourth year for dissertation and exams; there was **an increasing of hard working** in learning. Contextual influence: final year's dissertation and final year counts 60% of final result.	Change: from learning for better marks to **learning for better understanding of the subject** Contextual influence: more in-depth subject learning; encouraged by teachers to gain more in-depth subject knowledge	Change: first two years participated in a lot of social activities, but in the final year mainly focused on learning. Contextual influence: final year's academic tasks
ZJU **Year4**	Change: worked hardest in the first year; paid less and **less time on learning** in the final year; paid a lot of time on internships and job hunting. Contextual influence: not much academic tasks in the final year; internship is required by the university	Change: from learning for better marks to no longer think better marks can guarantee a good job; should learn for more important things **for future jobs** Contextual influence: previous students who had good jobs	Change: in the final year, paid little attention to learning, but spent more time in social activities (job-related and with friends) Contextual influence: not much academic task in the final year

Appendix E. Interview Design for the Main Study

Role Identity Each individual has multiple roles as well as multiple role identities. University students could have roles such as student, daughter/son, sister/brother, and boyfriend/girlfriend. All these different roles relate to different role identities. Since this study aims to investigate students' academic and social experiences in the university, it would focus on the student role of university students.				*(Contextual Filter- Individual/Disciplinary/ Institutional: depending on individual students' experiences) (Jones, 2009)*
Identities shaped by university student's role	Academic Commitment: (the sum of the forces that maintain congruity between one's identity and the implications for one's identity of the interactions and behaviours in the interactive settings)	Degree of academic responsibility: the primary dimension of meaning that college students use to identify themselves (Reitzes and Burke 1982) Exploring attitudes and performances in terms of academic responsibility	1. Do you think you have worked hard in the university? Why/why not? Examples.*你觉得你在大学的学习努力吗? 为什么? 请举例。* Has this changed over time? If so, how and why? Example. If not, why not? *这些年有什么改变，是怎样变的? 为什么?*	Prompt: ➢ Individual factor: e.g., laziness, self-control; ➢ Disciplinary factor: : e.g., difficulty of the subject, pass rate, pressure of tutors; ➢ Institutional factor: e.g., peer pressure (or influence from senior students), tight timetable ➢ *(Note: if not working hard: would you worry about having a bad result? Why/why not?)*

			2. What has been the most important motivation for your learning in the university? Example. Why? *请问在大学期间，你最重要的学习动力是什么？举例。为什么？* Has this changed over time? If so, how and why? Example. If not, why not? *这些年有什么改变，是怎样变的？为什么？*	Prompt: ➢ Individual factor: e.g., parents' expectations, personal dreams; ➢ Disciplinary factor: : e.g., interests in the subject, peer/ teachers influence; ➢ Institutional factor: e.g., peer pressure (competitive in learning), awards for academic excellency
			3. Have your academic experiences inspired you to make the plan after graduation relates to your academic knowledge? E.g., continue study, work in the related area…*大学的学习经历有促使你的毕业规划与所学相关吗？比如：选择继续深造，在相关领域工作* If so, how and why? If not, why not? *请解释原因。*	Prompt: ➢ Individual factor: e.g., parents' expectations, personal dream, interests; ➢ Disciplinary factor: : e.g., applicable of the subject knowledge, peer/ teachers influence; ➢ Institutional factor: e.g., support system- job fair, career advice; school tradition – senior students' experiences.
			4. How have you managed your time in terms of your study and other activities? *你是怎样安排学习和社交生活的时间的？* Has it changed over the years? If so, how and why? Positive/negative influence? If not, why not? *这些年有什么改变，是怎样变的？为什么？对你有什么正面或负面影响么，是什么？*	Prompt: ➢ Individual factor: e.g., personal interests, value (which is more important); ➢ Disciplinary factor: : e.g., difficulty of the courses, timetable, pressure from teachers; ➢ Institutional factor: e.g., structure and culture of social

				activities, extra-curricular activities, incentives provided by the university to encourage students to become involved
		Intellectualism(Reitzes and Burke 1982):	5. How do you like your subject? Explain. *你对自己的专业怎么看（有热情，喜欢，一般，不喜欢）？为什么，请具体解释。* Looking back, has your attitude towards your subject changed over year? If so, how and why? If not, why not? *这些年有什么改变，是怎样变的？为什么？*	Prompt: ➢ Individual factor: e.g., personal interests, aspiration; ➢ Disciplinary factor: : e.g., difficulty of courses, course teachers, assignment and exams; ➢ Institutional factor: accessibility to learning resources
			6. What have contributed to your knowledge of your subject? What have hindered it? *在学习专业知识时，有哪些辅助的有利的因素？哪些不利因素妨碍了学习？* Is there anything that your university/department/tutors could have done better to help you? What about yourself? *如果重来一次，你觉得学院，学校或者老师还可以做什么来帮助你学习？你自己呢？*	Prompt: ➢ Individual factor: e.g., hard-working, interests; ➢ Disciplinary factor: : e.g., course contents, help from teachers, students in the same subject ➢ Institutional factor: guest lectures, senior students' experiences.

			7. Have you had any strengths and weaknesses in learning your subject during the year? *大学期间在学习这个专业时，你觉得自己有什么优缺点？* Have they changed over the years? If so, how and why? If not, why not? *这些年有什么改变，是怎样变的？为什么？*	Prompt: ➢ Individual level: e.g., creativity, detail oriented, dedicated, language skills; ➢ Disciplinary level : e.g., capability of working in groups Reason for change: ➢ Individual level: Parents/ friends' help ➢ Disciplinary level: teachers'/peer students' help ➢ University level: supporting programme (language programme, senior students act as mentors…)
		Gaining academic confidence: (Briggs, Clark, Hall, 2012; Burke and Reitzes, 1982) Awareness of the individual within learning progress Self-worth Self- reflection	8. Have the advantages and/or disadvantages influenced your confidence in studying your subject? *你的这些优缺点对于你学习的信心有什么影响吗？* If so, how and why? Example. If not, why not? *这些年有什么改变，是怎样变的？为什么？*	Prompt: ➢ *What would you usually do when you are feeling unconfident about your learning?* ➢ *What are the supportive factors? E.g., family member/friends/teachers/department/ university*
			9. Have you improved your learning (learning outcomes/results/ approach/strategies) during the years? If so, how and why? If not, why not? *这些年你的学习（成绩，成果，方法，技巧）有进步吗？具体解释及原因。*	Prompt: ➢ Individual factor: e.g., time management, autonomous in learning, language skills; ➢ Disciplinary factor: : e.g., help from teachers/students in the

			What have been the main contribution factors? *什么是最主要的影响因素?*	same subject ➢ Institutional factor: 'friendly' and supportive leaning environment – Encouragement/access to resources /experienced advice /structured process
			10. What are your attitudes towards your academic performance in the university during the years? *你对自己大学期间的学业表现怎么看?* Have they changed? How and why? *看法有过变化吗，怎样变，为何变?* What do you wish to do better and how would you do it? Is there anything that your university (and/or department/teachers) could have done better to support you? *你觉得你本该怎样做的更好? 你期待从学校学院或者老师处得到那些帮助?*	Prompt: Reason for change: e.g., parents' encouragement, teacher/peer students/friends' influence, value change (other things are more important than academic performance); To do better: ➢ Individual level: e.g., boost self-confidence, autonomous in learning, better organised learning plan; ➢ Departmental level e.g., more communication with teachers, better organised courses. ➢ University level: e.g., access to more learning resources
			11. Looking back, how do you feel about the benefits and/or drawbacks of your attendance at this university? Academically, social? *这所大学带给你的好处和弊端各是什么? 学业上，生活上?*	Prompt: ➢ Academic: e.g., language capability, communication/presentation skill, team spirit, intellectualist; ➢ Social: e.g., friendship, meet people from different backgrounds, value changes.

	Interactions with main counter-roles: The existence of counterroles is inevitable as a role would lose its meaning without other relevant roles and role identities are related to counteridentities (Burke, 1980, 2004).	Relationship with teachers (relationship with other counterroles, such as classmates and university friends will be investigated in students' group identities)	12. Have any teachers in the university had great influence on you (academically or/and socially)? What and how? Has this changed over time? How and why? *大学期间有哪些位老师在学术上或者你的生活上有较大影响的吗？是怎样的影响？这些年有变化吗，怎样变，为何变？* Do you think teachers in the university have given you enough support both academically and socially? If so, could you give me an example? If not, how could it be differently? *你觉得大学老师给予了你在学习生活上足够的支持和帮助了吗？如果是，请举例。如果没有，你觉得怎样改变才能更好？*	Prompt: ➢ *Any teacher you had better relationship than others? Why?* ➢ *Roles that teachers have played your learning: important or not? Why?*
Leaving the student role		Students started to take a different angle to reflect on their student role identity (Last interviews)	13. Have you done any working experience? *大学期间你有过工作经验吗？* If so, has it had any influence on you? What and how? (How did it different from being a student?) *如有，对你的影响是什么？与作为学生有何不同？*	Prompt: ➢ Relating academic life with work: e.g., capability of applying academic knowledge into work; ➢ Emotion: e.g., confusion/ anxiety/excitement ➢ Comparing to student role: e.g., time-management, communication with others; ➢ *Any conflict? Fit in?*

Group Identity				
Identities shaped by formal groups:	*subject/university*	Adoption of group value/belief	14. Have you noticed any change in your values since you started learning your subject? If so, If so, how and why? If not, why not? *自从开始学习这个专业，你察觉到自己的价值观或者信仰有什么变化吗？是什么，为什么？* Have these changes had any positive/negative influence on you? What and why? *对你有什么正面或负面影响吗？是什么，为什么？*	Prompt: Value and belief change: e.g., ways of thinking: open-minded, logical, critical, using of language *(subject related terms)* Reason for change: ➢ Disciplinary factor: : e.g., course content, language used in the subject, influenced by teachers/students; ➢ Institutional factor: e.g., alumni, senior students.
		Depersonalisation	15. What shocked you the most in your student life in the university? How and why? How did you deal with it? *进入大学以来最令你感到震撼的事是什么？为什么？你是怎么应对的？* Have you noticed any value change after that? What and why? Have they had any positive/negative influences on you? What and why? *你的价值观有因此改变吗？对你有什么*	Prompt: Positive: more confidence/open-minded/more mature Negative: e.g. confusion/anxiety/lost self-confidence

			正面或负面影响吗? 是什么, 原因。	
		Self-enhancement	16. Have your self-confidence boosted since you entered the university? If so, how and why? If not, how and why not? *大学四年间, 你有变得更自信吗? 具体解释原因。*	Prompt: *Contributing factors: University/departmental/class/ study group influences.*
Identities shaped by informal groups	*Friendship circle/ student club*	Adoption of group value/belief ; Self-enhancement	17. Have you changed your attitudes towards your friendship circle in the university over time? If so, what? Why? *大学期间你对自己的朋友圈的看法改变了么? 具体是怎样变的, 为什么?* What are the main contribution factors (any incident)? *有哪些因素促使了这些变化 (有什么事件发生吗)?* Positive/negative influences. *对你有什么正面或负面影响吗?*	Prompt: Reasons for changes: e.g., communication, value/interests, maturity Contributing factors: ➢ Individual factor: e.g. boyfriend/girlfriend, ➢ Disciplinary factor: : e.g., changes in class/study group; ➢ Institutional factor: e.g., changes in accommodation, internship, exchange programme
			18. Have you joined any student club/associations? How do you feel about your experiences within student clubs? *你参加学生社团吗? 对社团经历有什么想法吗?*	Prompt: *What role have you played in the club, and how do you like it?* Positive: e.g., boost self-confidence, made

			Has it had any positive/negative influences on you? *对你造成哪些正面或负面的影响?*	friends, build sense of belonging; Negative: have confusion (different value/belief with other member), not enough time for study.
			19. Have you failed to fit in any kind of student groups/friendship circle? Why? *请问你有过无法融入某个学生团体或者朋友圈的经历么，是什么，为什么?* Any influence on you? How would you do it if you had another chance? *对你造成怎样的影响? 如果再有一次机会你会怎么做?*	Prompt: E.g., Accommodation/ study group/ sport group/student union Influence: emotion (depression), self-confidence, opinion about self.
		Depersonalisation	20. Have you given up any hobby/value/belief since you entered the university? *进入大学后, 你放弃过什么爱好、习惯、价值观或者信仰吗?* If so, what and why? Have you regretted it and why? *如果有，是什么，为什么? 你后悔吗，为什么?*	Prompt: *Is it because of any value you adopted from any group since you entered the university? If so, why?*

Personal Identity				
Biography: certain signs and marks that identify people and distinguish them from others (Goffman, 1963)	People begin to think about who the question "Who Am I?" and to think about their own identities, and have developed as individuals by locating themselves in the past – where and how they grow up. People cannot talk about who they are without taking a look back to see where they were. (Abes, Jones, and McEwen, 2007)	Personal history	21. Is there any experience about you when you are growing up which made you feel that you are different from others? *在你成长过程中，有什么经历使你觉得自己和别人不同呢？请具体描述一个例子。* Has it had any positive/negative influence on you? *对你造成哪些正面或负面影响？*	Prompt: *Tell a story*
		Parental influences:	22. How strong have your parents influenced your academic and social life in the university? Example. *请问上大学后，你父母对你的学习和社交生活有多大影响影响？举例。* Has it changed over time? If so, If so, how and why? If not, why not? *这些年有什么改变么，是怎样变的？为什么？*	Prompt: ➢ *Have you done anything against their will? What and why? How do you feel about that?* ➢ *Have you done anything against your own will to make them happy? Why and how do you feel about that*?
Self-authenticity: the feelings that an individual is being his/her true self (Burke and Stets, 2009).	It reflects individual's willing to find for meanings, coherence and significance in life (Gecas and Burke, 1995). By assessing to what is real and what is false about themselves are and experiencing themselves in life as meaningful, individuals usually strive for congruence between their perceptions about self and their behaviour (Gecas and Burke, 1995).	Self-authenticity relates to students' self-esteem, life satisfaction, lower depression, happiness (Wood et al., 2008)	23. Looking back, have you done anything in the university that against your own will to make people around you happy or have you ever try to hide your opinion? Example. Why? *大学生活中，你曾经为了使周围人高兴而做过些违背自己意愿的事，或者隐藏自己的真实看法吗？请举例，为何这么做？* Has there been anything you would like to do it differently? *如果重头来过，你会做哪些改动？*	Prompt: *How has this incident influence you? E.g., Self-esteem /Self-confidence/Emotion*

			24. What are the key pressures and stress factors in your student life? *在大学你感受到的最大的压力来自哪?* Have they changed over year? If so, how and why? If not, why not? What are the key supportive factors? *这些年有什么改变，是怎样变的? 为什么? 你得到过哪些（来自学校、学院、家庭或者朋友的）帮助?*	Prompt: ➢ Individual factor: e.g. parents/family member; ➢ Disciplinary factor: : e.g., learning difficulty, exam/assignment, peer pressure; ➢ Institutional factor: e.g., accessing to information, getting help.
Values:	Values play a significant part in forming unique identities, and value-identities are important aspects of socially shared identifications that become internalised at the individual level. Internalized values become important to the person and its salience rank increased among an individual's various identities, which means value is more likely to be carried across situations (Hilton, 2003).	Openness to change	25. What is the biggest change in your beliefs and values in your life so far? Explain. What are the main influential factors (anything to do with the university life)? *迄今为止你人生最大的价值和信仰的改变是什么? 请解释。其中最主要的影响因素是什么（大学的经历对此改变有影响吗）?* How are these changes reflected in your behaviour and decision making? *这些改变是怎样影响你的行为和决定的?*	Prompt: Value/belief changes: e.g., attitudes towards cultural differences; openness to different religion/sexual orientation ➢ Individual factor: e.g., parental influence, friends' influence, relationship; ➢ Institutional factor: e.g., exchange programme- encountering different cultures, volunteer/charity activities.
		Self-enhancement: success; ambition; power of controlling	26. What were your aspirations when you came to the university? *你最初进入大学的理想和抱负是什么?* Have they changed? If so, how and why? If not, why not? *这些年有什么改变，是怎样变*	Prompt : Reason for change: ➢ Individual level: e.g., parents' expectations, personal dreams; ➢ Disciplinary level: e.g., inspirational teachers, peer influence; ➢ Institutional level: e.g., supporting

			的？为什么？	system (career services, job fair…), university activities (charity work, exchange programme…)
			27. What are the hardest/biggest decisions you have made since you enter the university? How did you make them? 进入大学后你做过的最艰难最重大的决定是什么？请描述当时的经过。 Have you changed the way of making decisions over time? If so, how and why? If not, why not? 对于自己做决定，这些年有什么改变，是怎样变的？为什么？	Prompt: Reason for change: ➢ Individual factor: e.g., more mature and independent; ➢ Disciplinary factor: e.g., inspirational teachers, peer influence; ➢ Institutional factor: e.g., supporting system (career services, job fair…), university activities (charity work, exchange programme…)Maturity, independence
		Conservation:	28. Is there anything about you that you feel the most proud of? Why? 你对于自己最自豪的一点是什么（性格，习惯，能力，价值，信仰），为什么？ Has it changed over year? If so, how and why? 这些年有什么改变，是怎样变的？为什么？	Prompt: e.g., personality (forgiveness, warm-hearted), personal dreams, value/belief; Influential factors: Parents/family member/ previous educational experience; University/disciplinary.

Appendix F. Letter and Participant Information Sheet

Dear Sir/Madam:

The title of this research is “Compare and Contrast Student Identity Change in Different Educational Settings in China”. This research aims to investigate students’ identity change in universities. By comparing and contrasting student identities in two different universities – one Chinese university and one overseas university in China, the researcher will explore whether and how the educational settings may influence students’ identity formation. With the acceleration of the internationalisation process of higher education in China, it is timely and necessary to examine students who have been involved in this process. As the primary objects of education, students are the most important participants in this process. As such, it is significant to provide new evidence on how different educational settings can influence students in terms of their changes and development, in order to raise further discussion on internationalisation development in China and provide better /more responsive support for students’ learning and development.

If you are interested in taking part in this research, and after having confirmed this through your written consent, you will be required to participate in interviews (video-chat by the use of online communication tools, e.g. Skype, QQ, WeChat) which will be audio taped.

This study is purely for research and academic purpose. Information gathered will be treated with strict confidence and will only be reported in anonymous form. Findings from the research may be published, but your identity will remain confidential.

You have the right to contact me for any further information about the research and you may withdraw from this research at any stage. Attached herewith is a consent form explaining your rights as research participant. Please read and provide your signature to indicate your willingness to participate in this research (a copy of the consent form will be given to you).

I look forward to working with you.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

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